



Talking Leaves: Volume 1, Issue 4

Winter Solstice 2012

Welcome to Yggdrasil

Yggdrasil is a collaborative venture begun by Joe Landwehr and Sara Firman- the culmination of our life experiences; our work as healers, teachers and writers; our soul journeys; our dreams and our quests in nature. We envision Yggdrasil to be a school for visionary contrarians, integrated with a spa retreat for the evolving soul, set within a self-sustaining forest garden community. We are now in the formative stages of this project, working with a small group of dedicated souls to refine and elaborate our vision, and root it in fertile soil.

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Talking Council Update

In the first issue of our newsletter, we introduced you to our Talking Council – the circle of souls that will guide Yggdrasil through the early stages of its manifestation process. Our work continues through a series of monthly meetings, scheduled around the New Moon to take advantage of the momentum toward manifestation that is generally available at that point in the lunar cycle.

Since the last issue of *Talking Leaves*, our efforts have revolved primarily around preparing for our first official event – a **Tracking the Soul** workshop, based on Joe’s book, [Tracking the Soul With an Astrology of Consciousness](#). See the full report below. Through the process of preparing for the workshop, and later in evaluating it, the four of us who live in this area were able to meet in person. In doing so, we were reminded just how powerful and co-creative this kind of face-to-face interaction can be, and recognized a desire to work this way more often.

In particular, as Yggdrasil develops other workshop ideas, we will strive to bring more local talent into the planning process in order to complement the ongoing work of the broader Talking Council. With one member on the West Coast and another on the East Coast, we are blessed to have a full complement of wings with which to lift this fledgling and now increasingly local project off the ground. As Council member Sara Firman put it, having bi-coastal representation will keep us Ozark folk from becoming too “parochial.”

Besides our workshop, the other major event of this past season was an unplanned trip for Joe’s birthday to a retreat center in Arkansas that happened to be for sale – a trip that has stirred our mythopoetic imagination in a major way. See the full report later in this newsletter. At our last Talking Council meeting – a week ago – we discussed the exciting possibilities inherent in having an actual physical venue of our own. Aside from a workshop space in which to present our own homegrown offerings, a living retreat center would afford us the opportunity to invite those wisdom teachers we respect, whose work is in line with our vision, to allow us to host them. We could build a warm pool, where Sara can do her aquatic bodywork (see her article later in this issue). We could begin recruiting co-owner investors, community members, interns and volunteers to help turn our vision into a tangible reality beneath our feet.

Whether or not this particular opportunity works out (and at this juncture, we have no reason to believe it won’t), on the agenda for 2013 is the quest for a suitable physical location for Yggdrasil, the development of a viable business plan for creating a cooperative spa retreat business, another modified Tracking the Soul workshop, and the development of additional workshop offerings. In particular, Council member Nia Kallhof would like to create a workshop bringing men and women together in a marriage of the divine Masculine and the divine Feminine. We also have great interest in eco-activist Starhawk’s work with social permaculture – an approach to healthy community process, and would hope to send one of our members to her next workshop for further training. Stay tuned for more information in future newsletters as our plans unfold.



Tracking the Soul Workshop

From November 2 – 8, 2012, 6 people met at Hearthaven Retreat (here in the Ozarks) for the first Yggdrasil workshop, based on Joe's book [Tracking the Soul With an Astrology of Consciousness](#).

The **Tracking the Soul** workshop teaches participants how to identify sacred wounds, become more acutely aware of efforts to tend those wounds over a lifetime of experience, and develop conscious strategies for transmuting them into a source of strength, compassion and wisdom. Joe's approach to this task integrates the spiritual psychology of the seven chakras with the astrological birthchart. For more information, please go to Joe's web site at www.astropoetics.com.

In addition to Joe's work, the event was a collaborative effort, incorporating daily yoga and movement classes taught by Sara; Talking Council member Nia Kalhoff's expertise with crystal healing, and a closing sweat lodge led by Talking Council member John Staniloiu. About the workshop, Sara gives the following account:

Soul Tracking

by Sara Firman

It's always good when a workshop that is all about finding synchronistically intriguing and wonder-evoking meaning in our everyday lives begins with just that. You can't plan for this, although you might begin to expect it after a while.

At the recent six-day experiential where we discovered how to 'track our souls', we were plunged right into great mystery when one of our participants arrived, understandably flustered, with a beautiful dead bird found en route to the venue. It seemed clear that before our opening circle could begin, in keeping with ancient earth-centered tradition, we must bless and bury this winged one. The sweat lodge site, nestled into trees just above a bright creek, was the obvious spot. We'd planned to end our week together in a ceremonial sweat. Standing there at the beginning, sage smoke in the air and fresh earth on our hands, praying for the feathered creature and the losses it reminded us of, a circle of time was drawn. Looking around, I felt that the eager group that had come together was exactly right. We included the unseen spirits that accompanied each of us, as well as the spirits of the old Ozark land. The intangible elements of healing had come forward.

The workshop continued that way, shaping itself softly around the well-prepared plan our guide Joe had for us. After a warming welcome supper, we gathered in the octagonal building, windows to the trees and sky, that was to be our sunlit cocoon. Nia introduced us to HeartHaven Retreat, and then led us in activating a crystal grid for the space that would safely contain our journey. Before we slept, Joe spoke about 'soul', the subject of his book [The Seven Gates of Soul](#):

[Reclaiming the Poetry of Everyday Life](#). Joe has integrated the spiritual psychology of the chakras and koshas with his image-based approach to astrology. At this workshop he would 'bring the provocative theory of the astrochakra system into real-life application to core issues' for each of us.

Every morning began with a moving meditation, including music inspired by the chakras, to bring us into our bodies. This was my contribution. Walking in late autumn sunshine, or soaking in the hot tub while listening to the tinkling seed pods on the tree above, were meditations too.

These peaceful activities, along with wholesome vegetarian food prepared by our hosts, sustained us as we began to translate fascinating theory into personal application. There was a warm camaraderie in our group that made it easy to share and learn from each other's process.

Much of what we learned about the theory behind the astrochakra system and its practical value in understanding our life's issues, then seeking to make conscious changes, is presented in another of Joe's books [Tracking the Soul with an Astrology of Consciousness](#).

Still, it's a daunting task to actually do such work, and the class was designed to make the concepts in Joe's book more accessible. It did. Over the first two days, we took a crash course in astrology and how it links with the chakra system. That blew our minds right open.

Even as we soon realized that understanding it all might be beyond us, we also began to notice how these esoteric patterns did indeed show up in each of our life paths. We had decades-long rolls of white paper on which we tentatively lay out our lives using color felt-tip pens.

A personalized purple folder contained all the complex information we'd need to track all those planetary movements over our lifetimes (our 'cheat sheets' as Joe called them). Then came the challenge of applying that to our lives by marking it on our 'timelines' (those white rolls).

Long-forgotten memories kept popping up as Joe spoke or as we sat chatting around the meal table - "Write that down on your timeline!" he'd say. Eventually we would focus in on just one of the astrochakra patterns that was being triggered in our birthchart right at the time of the workshop.

To make the whole thing come alive for us, Joe led us deftly towards a current challenge in our life that he anticipated would be highlighted by the astrochakra pattern we'd begun to see working itself out along our timeline. How far did we want to go, how honestly could we see ourselves?

At the end of the theory days, we did a meditation to help us decide which of the currently active astrochakra patterns we would explore and learn to navigate better. Then we each began 'telling our story' to an attentive and supportive audience. Here, Joe's skills truly came to the fore.

He helped us all to see just how unique and valuable our life experiences, as illustrated by our chosen pattern, had been to our souls. Despite the suffering our stories revealed, I think we all felt acknowledged, and even honored, in the sharing of them. We gained clues to shifting old patterns.

The room was now a scatter of colorful cushions and blankets, favorite soft toys and special sacred objects we'd each brought from home settled among them. Timeline scrolls were held down by select crystal allies from Nia's healing collection. It had all become a soulful work of art.

The last afternoon was a time to relax, let go, integrate. Some took massage or a crystal healing session. Others helped prepare the sweat lodge for the evening ceremony led by John. It was perfect to sit in the warmed dark, on the earth under the stars, speaking our last truths into the aromatic air.

Dance shaman Gabrielle Roth who taught many how to 'sweat their prayers', and who passed away only weeks before our workshop, was in my thoughts at the end. The whole experience had felt to me like a 'wave', like the 5-Rhythms dance wave I had led us in one evening in the middle of it all.

My own astrochakra study this time round concerned a fearful first chakra pattern (safety and sustenance). I saw that both the earth and the dance provide a strong spiritual substrate for a sense of belonging in my life - could I dare dive deeper into that, and not, after all, be eaten by 'the alligator in the water trough'?

If this intrigues you, I encourage you to join us in 'tracking your soul' next time around. We plan to make this workshop an annual event at Hearthaven, and can also bring it to a venue near you.

Feedback from another participant: *The concept is brilliant: Working on your core issues in a beautiful and powerful setting. Eating vegetarian food. Bringing in exercise and meditation to complement it. I really enjoyed the time line. It was the first time that I really sat down and thought of my life in that way and it was helpful . . . I got plenty of information to help me look at what my next step is . . . Coming to Hearthaven was so perfect for me. I want to thank you for that. KW*



In Search of Fertile Soil in Which to Root a Vision

by Graywolf

Over the past year, we have been meeting across the miles via Skype in order to birth a vision of a retreat center and school - a place where brave souls can come together to heal and gestate a deeper sense of mythopoetic calling to meaningful service to each other, to the more-than-human world, and to the planetary culture. The times in which we live demand the best of each of us, and this is our response. More than just another idea floating through cyberspace, our vision of Yggdrasil - the Norse name for the World Tree - requires fertile soil in which to plant itself. In full awareness that everything has its own timing, our quest for a place has begun.

One of our basic premises at Yggdrasil is that meaningful doing springs not from having a rational plan, but from connecting more deeply with the roots of being. You can know that you have made

such a connection when life is filled with what psychologist Carl Jung called synchronistic moments - moments in which the apparent gap between inner and outer is bridged by some numinous event that partakes of both and sparks the imagination. Such was the moment in which our quest for fertile soil in which to root Yggdrasil was born.

On my birthday - astrologically speaking, a potential annual return to the deeper sources of being - Sara and I went on a short mid-week holiday to a retreat center in Arkansas, about 3 or 4 hours from where we live, that happened to be for sale. We weren't consciously thinking of buying the place, although we were curious what an Ozarks retreat center might look and feel like. We expected a relaxed getaway. We did not expect to fall in love with the place and feel a strong bond of connection with its owner. Because we are in the very early stages of negotiating a mutually beneficial marriage of dreams and visions, I won't reveal any details of location or mention any names here. But I do want to share a few mythopoetic moments that converge to suggest that our quest for Yggdrasil's home base has begun.

Aside from an immediate sense of resonance with the land and the surrounding area, the first of three signals that we had arrived somewhere with mythopoetic significance was the discovery of a book lying on a table in the main lodge - *The Teachings of Yogi Bhajan*. Yogi Bhajan was one of my first teachers in this life, and the primary source of my understanding about the chakras as taught in my recent workshop (see article above). When I asked the owner about the book, I found out that she, too, had been an early student of Yogi Bhajan. Although Yogi Bhajan had touched thousands of people all over the world, the odds of finding one on this trip on this land with which we resonated seemed rather significant.

A second synchronistic moment came upon entering the master bedroom. Here on the wall was a painting by Santa Fe artist, Daniel (D. L.) Valdes - who opened his gallery *Father Sky Mother Earth Gallery & Espresso Bar* the year I left Yogi Bhajan's ashram. I discovered D. L. Valdes, while living in Santa Fe in the late 1980s, shortly after taking on the medicine name Redwolf in a ceremonial gathering in the desert country near Chaco Canyon. In his gallery was a black and white painting of a wolf resting beneath a Full Moon. On the back of the wolf was a mountain trail, along which a pilgrimage of indigenous peoples made their way. While in Santa Fe, I stopped often to gaze at this painting, too poor at the time to buy it. But here it was, hanging on the wall of the main lodge in this retreat center where Sara and I had been drawn.

The third synchronistic moment came on a walk with the owner toward a round ceremonial space, constructed in a series of workshops for people wanting to learn cob-house construction. A primary modality we hope to incorporate into Yggdrasil's curriculum, as well as into the concept of retreat we are developing, is dreamwork. In particular, at the time of this trip, I had been reading a book - suggested to me by Sara - called *The Practice of Dream Healing: Bringing Ancient Greek Mysteries into Modern Medicine* by New York psychotherapist Edward Tick. Tick spent a great deal of time in Greece, studying the ancient dream incubation techniques of divine healer Asklepios, central to all medicine from 1300 BCE to about 600 CE. Among the animals sacred to Asklepios were dogs (originally domesticated versions of wolves) and snakes. Accompanied on this walk not just by the owner, but also by her lovely dog, we next encountered two large snakes worked into

the design of this ceremonial hut around the door. Sara and I looked at each other with some incredulity, for here before us was a modern-day Asklepiian *abaton* or dream chamber, complete with built-in dreaming platform, established by the owner for that purpose.

Whatever becomes of our negotiations for this particular piece of property, the appearance of these three mythopoetic signs on our first foray toward a place for Yggdrasil lets me know that the journey has begun.



Aquatic Bodywork and the Four Soul Tasks

by Sara Firman

Among the healing modalities we plan to offer at Yggdrasil as part of the spa, is aquatic bodywork – in which the giver floats and gently moves the receiver in a warm-water pool. Here, Sara describes how this fits with the four soul tasks that give our proposed curriculum at Yggdrasil its structure.

Water covers more than 70 percent of our planet and constitutes about the same percentage of our bodies. This parallel is significant to me; it hints at how intricately I am connected with my surroundings. Each cell in my body is like a microcosm of the earth and both are dependent for life upon water.

Whether on land or in water, our cells are immersed in this constantly moving and vibrating fluid. Reconnecting with water through aquatic bodywork (immersion and passive movement in warm water) helps me to think differently about myself and my relationship to this water-dependent world.

My water journey began at a natural hot springs resort in northern California. The [springs at Harbin](#) were once a place of healing for indigenous Indians and some of the present residents say their spirits guard the spot. For several years, I devoted myself to training in various aquatic bodywork modalities.

More than anything, I was following a path of self-discovery. I found myself drawing on shamanism, dreamwork and art/creativity, and moving away from didactic therapeutics. A biological scientist by training, this prompted a radical shift in my thinking and approach to life.

More recently, I have been excited to realize that along this path, I could identify all four of the soul tasks Joe outlined for Yggdrasil. I have thought of the spa at Yggdrasil as being a retreat space where we help people to slow down and begin listening to their own body stories or body memories, and feel safe enough to open to the reality of their own woundedness. In this way, what I am broadly calling 'spa services' (bodywork sessions and movement classes in a peaceful space) would mainly address the first soul task of 'tending the sacred wound'.

In the context of the school, this might assist in making the process of revealing and cleansing (so

to speak) our soul wounds a great deal gentler than otherwise.

That said, in my own experience of aquatic bodywork in particular, the initial relaxing, revealing and surrendering process, can also be taken further. It can lead us into constructive levels of experience where a person actively participates – rather as with practice we may learn to move from ordinary night dreaming to lucid dreaming.

In other words, people might come to the water to enter an 'altered state' in which they are supported, so that they can travel deeper into their unconscious and into the knowledge that they have hidden from themselves (hidden most likely as a survival strategy). Support and a means to process the information brought back are essential.

I see the spa as a supportive service for people exploring different themes or tasks through the main teaching curriculum at Yggdrasil. It would focus on developing body intelligence, by which I mean an ability to listen to the messages coming from our bodies, and to work with those messages constructively.

So, a person might bring a question or challenge or puzzlement that has arisen in their other work at the school to the sanctuary of the spa where they can work with their body's response actively (movement sessions) or passively (massage sessions). They might also bring simply an open listening heart and see what their body tells them.

What attracts me to Yggdrasil is that there will be a variety of ways to process whatever is revealed through the altered state – say through aquatic bodywork. In most other contexts in which people receive aquatic bodywork, this ongoing means of working with what is 'washed up' is missing.

Below, I have collected together some notes from a blog post I wrote called [A Water Dream: My Aquatic Journey](#) that I think illustrates how this support for each of the four soul tasks arises.

Task 1: Tending the Sacred Wound

The body is a vehicle, a means of transportation. With eyes closed and ears immersed beneath the water's surface you enter a world of *heightened sensory awareness*. All around you the water presses in so imperceptibly that you are not just immersed in it, but saturated with it.

When you are willing to surrender to the water, you may find yourself *bearing witness* to the feelings and images that arise. There may be a physical unwinding, an emotional releasing, or a spiritual epiphany. Whatever *cleansing* is needed washes over you.

The movements and sensations experienced during bodywork in water allow you to open to the messages of your *unconscious*; it is a moving meditation. The experience can resemble a shamanic journey.

The boundaries between you and the outside world dissolve and, in this blending, you have the

opportunity of surrendering, of dying to your old self.

Which leads us into the second soul task ...

Task 2: Cultivating Visionary Calling

My immersion in aquatic bodywork back in 1998 led to a big shift:

... at a point of transition in my life, a point when I felt able to take on the responsibility of owning my deeper nature. I heard the sirens' song and decided to slip off the ship. We all have a deeper nature, or as the aborigines have called it, a song-line.

When working with others:

I endeavor to map the territory for a water journeyer on their inward adventure. I encourage people to dive down deep and retrieve the sunken treasures for themselves.

So, this is referencing the way in which certain practices (aquatic bodywork in this case) can bring us back to ourselves or the path that is most suited to our life's purpose.

Task 3: Inviting Dialogue Among Diverse Intelligences

Here the intelligence I focus on is water, which the ancients recognized as a living thing and which we have learned to treat as a mere utility, hardly sacred and certainly not alive.

Whether on land or in water, our cells are immersed in this constantly moving and vibrating fluid. Reconnecting with water through aquatic bodywork helps me to think differently about myself and my relationship to this water-dependent world.

In the work of Emilie Conrad (and others such as Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen and Liz Koch), we can also find connection through our bodies to other animals in the evolutionary chain. For example, elbows contain the memory of wings or fins.

Task 4: Courting the Mysteries of the Mythopoetic Realm

The movements and sensations experienced during bodywork in water allow me to open to the messages of my unconscious; it is a moving meditation. The experience can resemble a shamanic journey. I often have the sense of leaving "this world" reality to enter "other world" while in a state of ecstasy. For more on shamanic aspects, see my article, "Dancing in Healing Waters," *Shamans' Drum Magazine* ([Issue 62, 2002, pp. 17-27](#)). In [A Water Dream](#), I wrote:

In mythology, water has been associated with the unconscious. A warm-water pool has been for me the portal to my unconscious or to dreamtime.

Arnold Mindell's description of the [dreambody](#) hovering somewhere between body sensation and mythical visualization comes close to what I experience in the water.

There are so many associations of water with dream states and dream states with the mythopoetic realm. In my experience, aquatic bodywork can give us direct access to that - if it is presented with such an intention.

I've begun to call my own practice *aquapoetics* - an aquatic art form designed to encourage creative inspiration and individual transformation. It draws on *Watsu* (water shiatsu) and its derivatives, and focuses on encouraging each person to dance the body poetic, to listen to their own body's poetry. Aquapoetics will be a central modality at Yggdrasil for addressing all four of its soul tasks. See our full vision statement (available on request) for more information.

For PDF copies of previous Talking Leaves, please contact us at the email addresses below.

Our Invitation to You

If you want to be part of this exciting venture, let us know. We'd love to hear from you at whatever level of involvement you are inspired to want to participate. You can:

- 1) Request and read the 2-page vision summary.
- 2) Share this newsletter or the 2-page vision statement with select friends or acquaintances you sincerely believe will be interested. If you do, please copy your email to us at joelandwehr@socket.net and/or sara.firman@yahoo.com.
- 3) Read the more comprehensive vision statement (39 pages) and share with us your feedback. We ask that you not share the more comprehensive vision statement, but instead refer your friends to the 2-page statement, and let them contact us for more.
- 4) Join the Talking Council. If you resonate at a deep enough level with what we are trying to do, this could be your opportunity to dig more deeply into your own mythopoetic roots, even as you help steward the fruiting of the vine. We meet once a month by Skype for 2 hours each session, and would love to have you join us. We do ask for a one-year commitment.

Yggdrasil is a school for visionary contrarians, integrated with a spa retreat for the evolving soul, set within a self-sustaining forest garden community.

Keep an eye out for the next *Talking Leaves* - Spring Equinox 2013
Contributions in the spirit of Yggdrasil are welcome by March 13.

