



Talking Leaves: Volume 2, Issue 1

Spring Equinox 2013

Welcome to Yggdrasil

Yggdrasil is a collaborative venture of a small circle of co-creative friends - 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 and a forest retreat for souls in transition, housed within a self-sustaining eco-village community. We are now in the formative stages of this project, working together to refine and elaborate our vision, and root it in fertile soil.

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Welcome to Our New Talking Council Member – Genevieve Vierling

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*, we have added a new member to our Council. About herself Genevieve says:



First and foremost, I consider myself a 'Dreamer.' My earliest memories starting at the age of 3 or 4 were of all the hidden, secret realms surrounding me that my conscious waking state mind could not access. In college, I studied education and psychology, originally training to become a school psychologist. But later the intuitive realm opened through a series of personal shock waves and four years of formal study in psychic development in Berkeley in the early '70s. Simultaneously I was introduced to astrology by my husband, and became so intrigued that I devoured every book I could get my hands on, eventually studying with a teacher four blocks from my home in San Francisco. These two great paths of interest and passion have been my journey and core profession now for 40 years. I have a thriving practice in California, and have taught astrology workshops in France, Italy, and Ireland, as well as the US.

I have also taught many dream workshops and classes, and am presently involved in an on-going group of therapists, who work with the Dream Tending work of Stephen Aizenstat. I am a Flower Essence practitioner, having trained with both the California Flower Essence Society and the Alaskan Flower Essence teachers, Steve Johnson and Jane Bell. And I currently write a blog sharing my knowledge and insights with clients, students and friends at www.bluelightlady.com.

In addition to my healing work, I have been a solid householder with a large family that has kept me learning the art of loving unconditionally for more than 40 years. I am blessed to have a true and loyal partner in my husband, Jim, with whom I live on 30 acres of pristine wilderness in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Together, we have six wonderful creative children and seven grandchildren.



“There is no use in trying,” said Alice, “one can’t believe impossible things.” “I dare say you haven’t had much practice,” said the Queen. “When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day: Why sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.” – Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland.

Talking Council Update

Often here at Yggdrasil Central, it feels like we are engaged in the business of imagining impossible things. We are consoled by the keen sense that imagining impossible things is exciting sacred work – undertaken by a brave lineage of visionary pioneers, who have changed the world in countless ways for which we can all be grateful. On the other hand, we often feel overwhelmed by the impossible nature of the thing we are trying to do. Alas – as Oglala Sioux medicine man Black Elk once pointed out, “It is hard to follow one great vision in this world of darkness and of many changing shadows. Among those men get lost.” So we walk the line bravely between our co-creative joy in imagining impossible things, and our great sadness at having to live in a world where such impossible things are so sorely needed. As we lean into these impossible things, we also feel ourselves gently expand and gasp in trembling awe at the fathomless expanse before us.

Retreat Center House Party Invitation

In our last newsletter, I wrote about our synchronistic discovery of a possible venue for Yggdrasil – a beautiful 28-acre retreat center in the Arkansas Ozarks for sale by someone with whom we felt an immediate resonance and would love to have as our neighbor. Since then, we have been in negotiation with the owner to find a way to make a purchase possible. As of this writing, it seems an impossible stretch beyond our means, although we continue to explore creative ideas.

Is there anyone out there interested in becoming a co-owner of a mystery school / forest retreat / eco-village community?

We are looking for rare souls who not only have a modest amount of money to invest (details to be spelled out soon in a cogent business plan), but also a deep sense of mythopoetic connection to our vision (complete vision statement available on request), practical and professional skills to contribute to the manifestation of the dream, and enough wild imagination and mad energy to invest in the sacred task of breathing life into impossible things.

If you think we might be talking to you, please let us know, and we will invite you to an onsite weekend house party, where together we can imagine magical impossibilities into being.

Our 2nd Annual Tracking the Soul Workshop

Last November, I taught my first annual Tracking the Soul workshop, based on my 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. My approach to this task integrates the spiritual psychology of the seven chakras with the astrological birthchart.

Said one participant about the workshop, *“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 . . .”*

After last year’s workshop, my co-presenters and I spent 3 hours evaluating the experience. As a result of this meeting, I’ve decided to do this year’s workshop a bit differently. In order to allow more time at the workshop itself for the processing of individual charts and life experiences, participation in this year’s event will involve a series of 4 preparatory lessons.

Each lesson will present a concept that is key to understanding how various patterns related to the chakras show up in your birthchart. They will be basic enough for those with little prior knowledge of astrology, but include material that more seasoned astrologers are not likely to have been exposed to - unless of course, you’ve read my book.

In any case, each lesson will come with a homework assignment - to which I will respond, and after which we will have a 90-minute follow-up phone conversation. After the completion of these 4 preparatory lessons, you will be ready to participate in the workshop with a solid conceptual understanding of the astro-chakra system.

At the workshop itself, we will focus on tracking chakra patterns, listening to stories, and learning from each other how the soul’s journey is reflected in the birthchart. If you think you’d like to join us this year, please let me know. For more info, go to my web site at www.astropoetics.com.

Other Workshops in the Imagination Phase

In addition to Tracking the Soul, the Talking Council has been working together to cultivate a number of ideas for imagined workshops in various stages of embodiment:

Returning the Wounded Masculine and Feminine to Sacred Balance

Primary Facilitator: Nia Kallhof

“We are living in a time when the Divine Feminine is re-emerging after centuries of being over-powered and submerged in a culture dominated by men and masculine ideology. Our human psyches and our human culture need to return to a healthy and sacred balance of feminine and masculine energies.

Both our masculine and feminine selves have been gravely wounded by being so out of balance. The wounded masculine is obsessed with competition, personal achievement, possessions, and power. And has lost touch with using his strength and intellect to co-create with and protect the feminine. The wounded feminine is obsessed with appearance and security. And has lost touch

with her intuition and intimate knowledge of her body and the body of her Earth Mother as well as her natural ability to create community. In our woundedness, we have allowed our personal lives and culture to be permeated by rape, abuse and exploitation as well as all types of addictive, out of balance behaviors.

The purpose of this workshop will be to explore and begin to heal our individual sacred wounds as men and as women, identify and connect with our inner male (if a woman) or inner female (if a man), and to come together to create dialogue and cooperation towards re-balancing the masculine and feminine in ourselves and our culture.

This will be a co-ed workshop with a balanced number of male and female participants whether coming as couples or singles. Emphasis will be on creating a safe environment for deep introspection and sharing. We will start in separate same-sex groups before joining together. We will return to same-sex groups and/or dyads as needed to facilitate processing.

Facilitators will use a variety of experiential modalities including: sound, movement, journaling, visual arts, guided imagery and role-playing.”

Dream Tending Playshop
Primary Facilitator: Genevieve Vierling

“Wouldn't it be wonderful to immerse ourselves for 5-6 days in our dream world and gather in a circle to share and get feedback from kindred souls about the wondrous realm that we enter into every single night when we lie in bed unconscious? Just think how much time we spend in that other dimension!!

I will act as a guide and facilitator to help you to remember your dreams, bring them full on into your conscious mind and then play with them in such a way that they enliven and enrich your life with more meaning and magic. Dreams can bring solutions to perplexing problems, feedback on what you are really feeling about someone or something that eludes you, more information and energy to heal all the wounds in your life, including physical ailments, and a well-spring of creative juice that empowers you to express more fully all aspects of your multi-dimensional Self. Dreams are powerful spiritual guides. Like angels, they wait in the wings until summoned! Once you invoke them into your consciousness they reward you again and again as long as you pay attention and are willing to enter fully into their wondrous realm.

A ‘playshop’ implies utilizing all sorts of enjoyable ways of accessing dreams including writing, telling, drawing, painting, sculpting, dialoguing, dramatizing, even dancing them into life. The basic approach with which I will be working is taken from Stephen Aizenstat's [Dream-Tending](#).”

Stay tuned for additional workshops in early and more fragile stages of imagining. Meanwhile, if any of these offerings speak to you, please feel free to contact us for details.



Reclaiming the Voices of the Wells: Healing the Three Wounds

by Sara Firman

The fourth soul task envisioned for Yggdrasil is: courting the mysteries of the mythopoetic realm. Here is a myth that I especially like since it includes water, wilderness, and also speaks to the wounded masculine and feminine. Here we can find insight and guidance for both personal and collective development.



The Grail Legend is a living legend capable of touching both imagination and spirit. It's a complex and rich story full of archetypal dream images of the ultimate quest for all and everything. *Le Conte del Graal*, written by Cretien de Troyes around the 13th century, described the realm of Logres, a paradise on earth. The original Celtic Logres was seen as the inner soul of the earthly Britain. The story takes place in an enchanted otherworld, and simultaneously at real locations around the end of the 5th century.

Throughout the mythic and poetical land of Logres, maidens lived by sacred grottoes, wells and springs. To the Celtic mind the everyday world and the otherworld were twin universes running parallel to each other. It was at such sacred places as wells and springs that the two worlds were believed to come so near to one another that you could perhaps bridge the gap and cross over to the other side. I love this idea and have come close to experiencing it here in the Ozarks.

The Maidens of the Sacred Wells would feed wanderers and travelers from golden bowls and cups. Britain had hundreds of sacred wells and the Romans reverently maintained the ancient traditions of the occupied land, often building shrines around such waters. The maidens served all wayfarers and the realm was at peace and fertile until one day an evil King Amangons ravished one of the maidens, held her in captivity and stole her sacred bowl.

Amangons' male retainers enthusiastically followed their king's example with disastrous consequences and soon there were no maidens serving at the wells. From that time onwards the Realm of Logres changed into a barren wasteland – the wells and the waters dried up; animals became infertile; trees no longer bore fruit or leaf; flowers withered and the people left. The land of Logres, like much of modern culture, had “lost the Voices of the Wells.”

The barren wasteland in this story is supposed to signify a loss of contact with the otherworld. In [Holy Grail](#), Malcolm Godwin suggests that “the Grail hero[ine], the one who is eventually to ‘free the waters’ has to discover the meeting place between worlds where he or she can re-establish the precious links between the female sovereignty and the kingship of the realm.” The Grail legend shows us three wounds: the *Wasteland* (nature), the *Wounded individual* (soul/spirit), and *Women* (also the feminine aspect in men).

The story of Demeter and her mourning for her daughter Persephone (abducted by Hades) – which turns the Earth into a wasteland – can be seen as the Greek equivalent of the Grail legend, and also offers a feminine account. The myth also more permanently links this world with the

Underworld, as Persephone becomes the weaver of the seasons, moving back and forth between them. The Roman equivalent of Demeter is Ceres. As Joe wrote in the latest lesson of his astro-poetics correspondence course on Ceres:

Ceres is associated with the grieving process over what has been lost, as well as that mysterious force within individual souls, communities, civilizations, and ecosystems that allow them to gestate new life in times of death, and be reborn out of the ashes of that which has been shattered by destruction and catastrophe.

At Yggdrasil we hope to provide a container for tending our personal and collective wounds and then look for ways to return life to both inner and outer landscapes.



Ceres and the New Age of Perpetual Catastrophe

by Graywolf

I have always found it curious to witness how catastrophe brings out the best – and the worst – in people. I remember living in a nearby town 30 years ago, when a tornado ripped through and destroyed 600 homes. I volunteered to chain saw through 100-year old trees tossed like matchsticks onto cars and houses, while others brought food, blankets and makeshift comfort to those unfortunate souls who had lost their homes, their businesses, and their loved ones. Meanwhile, several species of questionable contractor wandered door to door, hoping to scavenge some of the disaster relief money they smelled, as looters carried off TV sets and other booty from local businesses. The same tragic event brought forth compassion in some, and callous cunning in others. “How could that be?” I wondered – and still do.

This question – along with many others – becomes even more poignant in a world increasingly plagued by the consequences of climate change and human hubris. In this world, catastrophe piles upon catastrophe like cars screeching to a battered halt in a multiple-car freeway accident.

In 2012 Hurricane Sandy became the largest Atlantic hurricane on record, devastating the northeastern seaboard with damages second only to Katrina in 2005, from which the New Orleans area has yet to fully recover. In 2010 a 7.0 earthquake in Haiti left over 300,000 people dead and 10 times that many displaced; in 2004 another earthquake – at 9.3, the most intense ever recorded – unleashed a tsunami in the Indian Ocean, killing over 230,000 people in 14 countries.

Here in our own quiet little corner of the world, a 2009 derecho with winds up to 106 mph spawned 39 tornadoes across Missouri, Kansas and Illinois, knocking down hundreds of trees and power lines in the forest where we live. In 2011, the deadliest tornado in 65 years killed over 1,000 people and caused \$3 billion of damages in Joplin, MO – about 3 hours from here.

According to a 2012 UN report on environmental emergencies:

If it seems like some of these events are occurring with greater intensity, it is because they are. While studies are ongoing, the trends of climate-related events have been linked to changes in the “frequency, intensity, spatial extent, duration and timing of extreme weather and climate events” including tropical cyclones, heavy precipitation events, and flooding – in addition to sea level rise, extreme heat, drought, and subsidence. The growing trend in climate-linked disasters poses worrying questions . . .

Natural disasters like this become increasingly worrying when they are linked to acts of human stupidity or carelessness. Another earthquake and tsunami in 2011 caused equipment failure, meltdown and release of radioactive materials at the Fukushima I Nuclear Power plant near Tokyo, Japan. An explosion in 2010 ruptured BP’s Deepwater Horizon oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico, releasing nearly 5 million gallons of oil and causing extensive damage to marine wildlife habitats and the fishing and tourism industries. In China, the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River – the world’s largest power station, nearly 100 years in the making, completed and fully functional in 2012 – displaced some 1.3 million people; destroyed 90% of the forest cover in the area; pushed over 3,000 endangered species of plants closer to the brink; and caused an alarming increase in erosion, mudslides and siltation of the river. Some believe the dam – which sits on a seismic fault – is implicated in a 2008 earthquake in Sichuan (less than 4 miles away) that killed 80,000 people.

Catastrophes like these happen year after year after year. However we might choose to consider them, taken together – and more importantly, taken to heart – it is nearly impossible not to feel overwhelmed by a sense of foreboding about the fate of our world. Aside from the deadly combination of climate change and the doubled-edged sword of human ingenuity, it appears humans are becoming increasingly cruel to each other, callously indifferent to the wellbeing of other species, and more frequently held hostage to the immense economic and political power of large corporations unable or unwilling to see past their own bottom-line. Human greed; the perpetuation of violence – particularly against women and ethnic minorities; war; genocide; religious and racial bigotry; the loss of species and ecosystem resilience; the pollution of air, soil, and water; and in general, the cumulative degradation of the quality of life in the human and the more-than-human worlds seems to show no signs of abating or changing course any time soon.

Coupled with accelerating population growth, it would appear that we are headed for a perfect storm with catastrophic consequences – unless something fundamental changes yesterday. Given our long-standing collective history of willful ignorance, it may that no matter what we do now, or how diligently we do it, it will be too little, too late.

It is a common belief today that we create our own reality. The corollary to this belief – which is rarely acknowledged – is that the reality we have collectively created over several millennia of human insistence on progress at any cost has its own momentum and inertia which is not that easily changed. Like the Titanic heading for that fateful iceberg, it may be too late to turn the huge ship of unrelenting human enterprise around in time to avoid a collision – especially given our extraordinary capacity as a species for ongoing denial, magical thinking and self-justification.

From an astrological perspective, I would speculate that this sad state of affairs is mirrored by the promotion of asteroid Ceres to the status of dwarf planet in 2006. It is an astrological truism that as our awareness of the solar system shifts – through new astronomical discoveries – the constellation of archetypes and metaphors by which humans navigate the world also shifts. It is not unlikely then that this addition of Ceres to the planetary pantheon parallels an important sea change in the nature of who we are and what we are doing here on this physical planet of limits and consequences.

Until the invention of the telescope in the early 17th century, our knowledge of the solar system – and its parallel reflection in the human psyche – was limited to the Sun, Moon and five visible planets. The discovery of Uranus in 1781 roughly coincided with the rise of the Industrial Revolution, which made possible the rape, pillage and plunder of the planet on a large scale that we wring our hands about today, as well as the rise of capitalism as a way of organizing and directing the course of industrial prowess. The discovery of Neptune in 1846 roughly paralleled the rise of socialism and communism as a counterforce to capitalism, and the transcendentalist movement of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau as a precursor to the modern environmental ethic that battles corporate malfeasance today. Lastly, shortly after Pluto was discovered in 1930, we experienced the Great Depression signaling the sordid downside of capitalism run amok, and the rise of fascism culminating in the Holocaust of World War II.

In 2006, as Ceres was being promoted to dwarf planet, Pluto was demoted to the same status. Although there are many possible interpretations of this shift, my take on it is this: In the intervening years between the discovery of Pluto and this latest astronomical changing of the guard, we have had ample time as a species to wake up and smell the burning bodies. In this 75 year – or 3-generation – stretch of our history, there was a very real opportunity to turn the Titanic around. By and large, we have failed to take advantage, and now – as we enter this new cosmic age – we must instead turn our attention to dealing with the consequences of this failure.

As mentioned earlier, Ceres is associated with the grieving process over what has been lost, as well as that mysterious force within individual souls, communities, civilizations, and ecosystems that allow them to gestate new life in times of death, destruction and catastrophe. Pluto brings death and destruction. Ceres sifts and sorts through the rubble for broken shards of hope.

What this means is that as we enter the age of Ceres, nothing we do can save us. The damage has been done. For all our human ingenuity, we can't fix a set of problems that can no longer be fixed. The sacred bowl has been stolen, shattered to a thousand pieces, and nothing we do can bring it back. We are now in a state of perpetual, ongoing catastrophe. We have been to see the Fisher King and the final diagnosis is in – we have less than 6 months, or a year, or who knows how long to live. As a planetary culture, we are leaving the cancer ward and entering hospice.

Supposing you were given this diagnosis. What would you do? That is the horrible question before each and every one of us now, whether or not we want to face it. Miracles do happen. But if you knew you had 6 months left to live, what would you do? How would you respond? If you knew the entire planet had 6 months or a year or a generation left, how would you choose to live?

This is the question we are asking at Yggdrasil. It reverberates at the heart of everything else we do – not as a morbid resignation or defeat, but as a potent source of empowerment in the midst of our grief for a dying planet.

After Demeter (Ceres' Greek counterpart) successfully bargained with Hades for the return of her daughter – something no one else, mortal or deity, had ever done before – she established the first mystery school at Eleusis, where she taught the secrets of immortality and self-regeneration. She literally taught her disciples how to return from the dead. While we do not claim this knowledge at Yggdrasil, we at least want to start from the premise that like the symbol for the Tau – in which a little seed of yin exists at the heart of yang, and vice versa – at the heart of death are seeds of life, which, watered and cared for properly, can perhaps one day bloom into a regenerated World Tree.

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 humbling adventure in imagination, 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.

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Keep an eye out for the next *Talking Leaves* – Summer Solstice 2013
Contributions in the spirit of Yggdrasil are welcome by June 14.

