



# Talking Leaves: Volume 3, Issue 2

## Summer Solstice 2014

### 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 mystery school for visionary contrarians and a forest retreat for souls seeking to reinvent themselves, 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.

This newsletter is our way of staying in touch with our extended family of friends and supporters. Please feel free to share this issue of Talking Leaves with anyone who feel might be interested in what we are doing. You can now also learn more about Yggdrasil through our website at [yggdrasilretreat.com](http://yggdrasilretreat.com).



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## Welcome to Our New Talking Council Member – Carmen Tracey

Shortly after the launch of our website in March of this year, we were pleased to welcome our newest Talking Council member, Carmen Tracey into our circle. Carmen received a message that she would soon be hearing from Freyja – the powerful Norse goddess of love, sexuality, beauty, fertility, gold, war, and death – on the same day she received notice of Yggdrasil's website launch. She and we took that to be a sign that she was meant to join us. With her contagious can-do enthusiasm, her deep spiritual practice and her many talents, she has already made a significant difference to our process.



About herself, Carmen says:

*I am the Owner, Teacher and primary Energy Therapist at Carmen's Holistic Healing in Wauwatosa WI. I am a Reiki Master Teacher and a Core Shamanic Practitioner. My most profound healing has come through honoring and healing work with my ancestors. It is through healing my wounds that I find my gifts for holding sacred space for my clients to find healing for themselves. My current Shamanic Mentor, Kathleen Rude, has helped me design an energy therapy practice around my background in intention setting practices and my gift for compassionate communication.*

*I believe that by healing ourselves we can help heal the earth for the future ones by re-weaving the tapestry with new healing stories. My personal spiritual path follows the path of the elders deeply rooted in spiritual ecology and intention setting practices. I have deep personal relationships with many guides and allies in the world of spirit. I have a deep connection to animals and consider communication with nature as fundamental to our spiritual growth as a species. I consider spirituality as fundamental to our health.*

For more information about me please visit me at [Carmen's Holistic Healing](#) and my blog [Holistic Healing, Reiki and Advanced Energy Therapies](#).

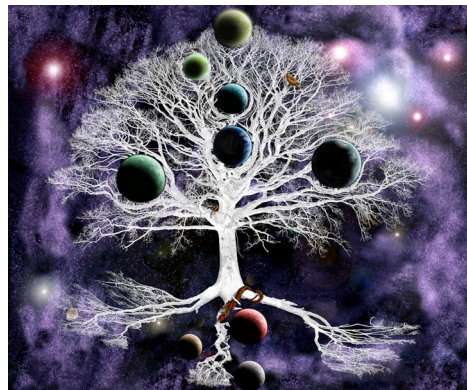
If you'd like to join Carmen and [the rest of us on the Talking Council](#), let us know. We'd love to hear from you.

## From the Website – Calling All Dreamers

In our last issue of **Talking Leaves**, we offered you a look at our new website: [yggdrasilretreat.com](http://yggdrasilretreat.com), which we launched on March 8. Since then many of you have been inspired by what we have done so far to subscribe to this newsletter you are reading now.

On April 8, I posted the first installment of our first blog series, entitled *Calling All Dreamers* – which you may or may not have seen, but which I reproduce here as an enticement to the rest of the series.

At Yggdrasil, we believe that giving birth to a vision is not just a matter of human enterprise, but of cooperation with unseen agencies who also want to see creative ideas born of Spirit given birth on the physical plane. World mythology is filled with stories of gods and goddesses guiding, inspiring, and helping humans to perform superhuman feats that would not be possible without divine intervention. On a personal level, dreams have likewise been a portal to cooperation with divine inspiration, and history is filled with examples of creative individuals having breakthrough experiences precipitated by their dreams. At Yggdrasil, we want to evoke this assistance as a conscious act of ritual empowerment for the benefit of both our own enterprise and the world we hope it will serve. *Calling All Dreamers* is a beginning exploration of that possibility.



*Part One*  
*Crossing the Bridge Between Waking State and Dreamtime*

Having recently returned from a [Soulcentric Dreamwork Intensive](#) in Colorado, sponsored by the [Animas Valley Institute](#), I am inspired to want to write about the creative power of dreams. Yggdrasil itself is a dream we on the Talking Council are working collectively to manifest. This awareness can be understood as a metaphor for bringing something into form that doesn't yet physically exist. But it can also be understood in a more literal way, as a deepening awareness about the nature of physical existence itself. It is to this second possibility that I want to speak in this blog series.

To the intensive, I brought two dozen of my most recent dreams, thinking that I would pick and choose among them for those that seemed most relevant to the process of the moment, and perhaps get some insight into several of them. I was surprised instead to find myself working with the same dream – and particularly with one character in the same dream – for all four days of the intensive. It hadn't occurred to me to this point just how much there was in the tiniest corner of my dream world to explore. But what I discovered as I did is changing my life as well as my understanding of dreams.

The dream I chose to work with was one I had on my first night at the intensive. I call this dream “The Triangle Movement Against the Seedy Rug Merchant.”

*I am buying carpet in a used carpet store. A seedy looking character asks me not to look too closely at the carpet I am thinking about buying. A woman with me is urging me not to buy it, as another would-be carpet seller in the store is trying to convince his potential customer that a few frayed ends are normal.*

*In the next scene, I am back in the store, returning the carpet. The seedy rug merchant is there, selling another carpet. The woman I am with rushes over to confront him, showing him a triangular mark on her hand that is part of a new movement warning people not to buy carpets from him. He looks horrified and says, "No, don't do that. I'll be ruined."*

My process began in a dialogue with the seedy rug merchant, whom I named Ralph. By assuming Ralph's posture and movement – a kind of flinching hunchback gait with the hint of a limp – and accent – something Eastern European, with a faintly Jewish feel – Ralph began to assume a life of his own. Suddenly, this character – whom I initially didn't like much – turned out to be someone with a life very different from mine, but with which I could empathize. It turns out that Ralph was working very hard to care for his sick mother, and a mentally retarded son, and was basically an honest man, but found it necessary to cut a few corners once in a while, in order to survive.

In empathizing with Ralph, I was able to make what Dutch Jungian psychologist Robert Boznak calls a transit – an experience of a dream from the point of view of another character in the dream.

Making such a transit not only opens up an opportunity for seeing the world – or any situation in it – from another point of view. It also raises the possibility that aside from being a point of entry into the depths of an individual psyche, a dream in which transits are possible – any dream, really – is a portal to another dimension that exists independently of the individual psyche. To realize that Ralph had a history independent of mine – one I could not have conjured had I set my mind to the task – suggested that the world in which he lived was different than mine. Perhaps, then, the dream world itself is in some sense that has yet to be defined – as real as this one.

Additional posts in this series include:

[Entering the Imaginal Realm](#)

[The Dual Reality of Dream Characters](#)

[The Intertwining of Dream and Waking Lives](#)

[The Possibility of Liberation in Non-Linear Dreamtime](#)

[The Dreaming World](#)

[The Urgency of Our Conversation Across the Dreamtime Boundary](#)

[An Invitation to Yggdrasil's Dream Council](#)

You can subscribe to future blog series and receive each new post directly in your email box or through your favorite web-based news reader by going [here](#) and following the prompts.



## Talking Council Update

In our last meeting, we explored the idea that our Talking Council might be able to build a bridge between the dream world and this one, and to inform our decisions by input from the imaginal realm in which dreams are rooted. This, of course, is not a new idea, and has provided a spiritual basis for many indigenous cultures around the world, among them the Senoi Indians of Malaysia, the Achuar of Ecuador and Peru, and the Iroquois of upper New York. These tribes would meet regularly in Dream Councils and share their dreams, out of which would come an intention and a sense of focus for the day, as well as a more long-term sense of direction for the evolution of the culture as a whole. At Yggdrasil, we aspire to follow in these mythopoetic footsteps.

More specifically, in our Talking Council we have set ourselves the task of entering into the dreamscape together in order to explore the territory known as Yggdrasil.

Aside from being a representation of the World Tree, Yggdrasil is a map showing how this world, called Midgard – or Middle Garden – is related to eight other worlds with which it is in relationship in the imaginal realm. In some of these worlds are giants, in others dwarves, in still others elves, in others fire beings.



Yggdrasil, the World Tree is built upon three roots. Under one root is Mimir's Well – where wisdom and understanding are stored in our collective stories. According to the myth, Odin traded one of his eyes for a drink from this well. Under another root is the Well of Urd, where the gods themselves go for their guidance and instruction. Under the third root are the Norns, who like the Greek Morai, weave fate, shape our lives, and mete out justice.

There are also serpents that gnaw at the roots of Yggdrasil; eagles, ravens and hawks that live in its branches; wolves that prowl around it through the other realms; and the gods and goddesses of Norse mythology. There are also passageways between the realms. Lots to explore.

On one hand, the mythology of Yggdrasil can be understood as any mythology might be – a collection of mythopoetic stories with lessons for parents to teach their children about who we are, where we come from, what our place is within the larger scheme of things, and where we are going. On the other hand, the mythology of Yggdrasil evolved from an oral shamanic culture, where the stories originally came from actual experiences, rather than a belief system. Through Yggdrasil, we have a portal not just to stories, but to our own immersion in the stories.

Yggdrasil was not a mere literary invention, but an actual place in the imaginal realm where one



could go, look around, have an experience, and then come back with tales to tell. Those who did passed on the stories, along with experiential knowledge about how to access Yggdrasil directly. This knowledge was eventually lost to all but a very few, while the stories were written down as the Norse mythology we remember today.

The stories were first written down by Snorri Sturluson – a poet and a politician – in Iceland in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. What Snorri compiled is generally referred to as the Younger Edda or Prose Edda. Later, an earlier work of enigmatic poetry called the Elder Edda was discovered, which in turn was part of a larger body of work called the Codex Regius believed to have been put together by Saemundr the Learned, a 12<sup>th</sup> century Icelandic priest. The Codex itself was believed to be a commentary on a much more ancient oral culture that was known to the Vikings and other indigenous peoples of northern Europe. Edda means “poem,” but it also sometimes translated as “great grandmother” – referring perhaps to the keeper of the stories of pre-literate Viking culture.

J. R. R. Tolkien drew upon the Eddas in his crafting of *The Lord of the Rings*, as did Richard Wagner in his musical composition of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, as well as additional artists as diverse as August Strindberg, Ezra Pound, and Jorge Luis Borges. In more recent times, Peter Jackson has brought the same story – as adapted by Tolkien – to a contemporary audience with The Lord of the Rings movie series.

All of these artistic works are interpretations. Just as we might interpret a dream – these “mappings” are not necessarily the territory itself. More important to our purposes on the Talking Council that the work of previous mapmakers, is the idea that Yggdrasil is an actual place within the imaginal realm that we can also explore and map in our own way.

Together we will go into this place, see what is there, and bring the essence of it back into this world – to create a bridge between the mythopoetic realm of Yggdrasil and Midgard or Middle Earth. We want to do this, not necessarily in the same way that has been done before, but instead to re-create the myth for a new era. Out of this experiment can also come additional insight into how we want to set up Yggdrasil the Mystery School/Retreat Center and Community.

In late April, we had our first Dream Council, invoking dreams about Yggdrasil, then together re-entering the dreams of two of our Talking Council members. In our dream re-entry, we were able to corroborate each other’s experience, and in some cases, fill in the missing pieces. It was an intriguing process at the very beginning of a trail that will lead we know not where.

Want to [join us](#)? We have room on the Talking Council for three more members. Let us know your interest and we can make a place for you on our mapping expedition.

*It is not just you who are dreaming, the world itself is also dreaming . . . As we explore the dreamscape, we discover that the World’s Dream is the fundamental ground of dreaming . . . If our dreams arise from the World Dream, then we can perhaps glimpse what the World Itself desires. And knowing this, we can then act in the world, on behalf of the World.* – Stephen Aizenstat, **Dreaming Tending: Awakening to the Healing Power of Dreams.**



## Where in the World is Yggdrasil?

by Graywolf

Yggdrasil is, of course, not the only map of the imaginal realm in existence. Pagan, shamanic and magical cultures throughout the world have long had access to other realms, out of which has come a rich repository of mythology, folklore, and fairy tales. Henry Corbin, the Sufi scholar spoke of his *mundus imaginalis* not as a concept, but as an actual experience of inner space that underlies the similar cosmologies of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In his new book, *Cave and Cosmos*, Michael Harner describes his MONOR (Mapping of Nonordinary Reality) project, which documents the experiences of hundreds of students over the course of a quarter century, traveling to the Upper World and Lower World of shamanic lore.

What is interesting to note about all of these approaches to the exploration of the imaginal realm is that they are very much rooted in relation to actual places in this world. In giving minimal instruction to his students, so as not to influence their experiences, Harner recommends that each student start from a place in this world with which she is familiar – a cave, a mountain peak, a waterfall – which then serves as a portal to the Upper or Lower Worlds she wishes to enter.

Similarly, many of the myths, legends and stories of other realms shared as part of the oral culture of indigenous peoples around the world refer to actual places in this world. For the aboriginal peoples of Australia, the dreamscape was intimately connected to the landscape, and to the stories of the ancestors, who dreamed the world – including the natural features of the landscape – into being. The ancient Phaeacians, on whose shoreline the Greek hero Odysseus washed up after his long voyage through the dreamscape of Homer's myth considered their wild and rocky coast to be a liminal space between dreaming and waking. My experience of ayuhuasca in Ecuador in the early 1990s opened a portal to an otherworldly dimension that seemed paradoxically bound to the vibrant chaotic profusion of the rainforest in which the plants themselves were rooted.

Since our interest in Yggdrasil extends beyond the imaginal realm into this one, where we hope to build an actual “brick and mortar” retreat center, this curious connection between inner and outer place seems central to our quest. Aside from exploring the dream world, new Talking Council member Carmen Tracey and I have begun to develop a more detailed business plan, building on the work that Co-Founder Sara Firman and I started two years ago. With our website and social media presence in place, this seems like the next practical step in our immediate goal of attracting Co-Owner Investors in the Retreat Center – visionary contrarians, teachers and healers like

ourselves who both resonate with our vision, and have the resources (time, energy, and money) to invest in the Middle World project called Yggdrasil.

To fill in the actual numbers that make the plan more than just a theoretical exercise, we find ourselves wondering out the starting gate, “Where in the world will Yggdrasil be located?” In a chicken-and-egg style conundrum, we would anticipate that those who will be investing their money in this venture would necessarily be the ones to address this question. We anticipate that some clues might emerge through our Dream Council process – especially if this intriguing connection between the imaginal realm and Middle Earth holds true. In the meantime, I have also resorted to some distinctly left-brain research, based on documented facts and figures – drawing some preliminary conclusions that are equally intriguing. In the hope that some of you might be inspired by emerging possibilities, I want to share the bare bones of that research here.

Assuming for the moment that Yggdrasil could theoretically be anywhere on the planet, my initial thought in conducting this research was that we would start by casting the broadest possible net, and then begin to narrow it down. Although we live in the United States, and in many ways, it would be easy and convenient to locate Yggdrasil somewhere within its boundaries, our primary concern is to find a place where our vision can root itself in fertile soil that nourishes it and encourages it to grow.

Increasingly these days, I feel that the soulless corporate/consumer culture that dominates the United States is ill suited to the development a community whose intent is to align itself with *animus mundi* – the soul of the world. In recent decades, the United States has fallen behind many other countries in the world on objective measures of everything from democratic freedom, to sustainability of environmental policies, to quality of education and health care, to social justice and income equality, to human rights and tolerance of human differences. In addition, the United States has increasingly become a destabilizing agent within the world – promoting military solutions to diplomatic problems, sacrificing ecological balance to profit, and lowering standards of human decency through policies that include mass surveillance, torture, and a willingness to trample basic human rights in perpetual wars against terrorism on both foreign and domestic fronts.

While we labor under no illusion that anywhere in the world is completely free from these and other difficult issues, it does not seem in general that the US is moving in the right direction. Nor does it seem that housing Yggdrasil here would serve our vision in the best possible way. Although I haven’t yet ruled this possibility out completely, my intuitive feelings were confirmed by the research, which places the United States 27<sup>th</sup> on the list – below Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece.

The list was compiled by combining data from 6 major indices:

[The Happy Planet Index](#) – measuring “the extent to which 151 countries across the globe produce long, happy and sustainable lives for the people that live in them.” The HPI is an index created by the New Economic Forum – measuring wellbeing, life expectancy, carbon footprint, population density, government, and GDP per capita.



**The Environmental Performance Index** – a method of quantifying and numerically benchmarking the environmental performance of a country's policies developed by Yale and Columbia Universities.

**The Human Development Index** – a bi-annual report put out by the UN, measuring life expectancy, literacy, education, and standards of living.

**The Democracy Index** – a measure of democratic freedom developed by the Economic Group (publishers of The Economist) using five different categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation and political culture.

**The Global Peace Index** – an annual report put out by the Institute for Economics and Peace with data from the International Institute of Strategic Studies, The World Bank, various UN Agencies, peace institutes and the Economist Intelligence Unit. It measures not just the absence of war, but also other factors contributing to peace, such as “human rights, gender equality, democratic participation, tolerant solidarity, open communication and international security.”

**Numbeo Cost of Living Index** – a database developed by a Serbian software engineer to help cope with the rapid fluctuation in worldwide property markets after the World Economic Crisis of 2007-2009. There are other economic indexes out there. This one is meant to be as flexible and adaptable to the needs of the individual user as possible, and claims to be independent of any government agency.

Of the 196 countries in the world, I studied 46 of them – all countries that landed in the top 10 for any of the first 5 indices used in this study (excluding the Numbeo Cost of Living Index). In addition, I included a number of countries determined by the **Global Forest Resources Assessment** (compiled by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization) “to have relatively abundant, healthy, biologically diverse forest, where government forest management policies are oriented toward sustainability and conservation of primary forest.” Since Yggdrasil is a forest-based culture, and ours will be a forest-based Retreat, this is an important consideration. Although the GFRA does not rank countries, and forest criteria were not included in the overall score, they will be an important factor as we continue to narrow down the list.

To score the 46 countries I included in the study, I gave 1 point for a #1 listing in any index; 2 points for a #2 listing; 3 points for a #3 listing, etc. I then added the score from all 6 indices to arrive at a composite score. The country achieving the lowest scores had the highest ranking; the country with the highest score had the lowest ranking. Without going into more detail here – because of space limitations – the top 10 countries on the list were as follows:

- 1      Norway
- 2      Switzerland

- 3 New Zealand
- 4 Germany
- 5 Austria
- 6 Sweden
- 7 Chile
- 8 Japan
- 9 Netherlands
- 10 Canada

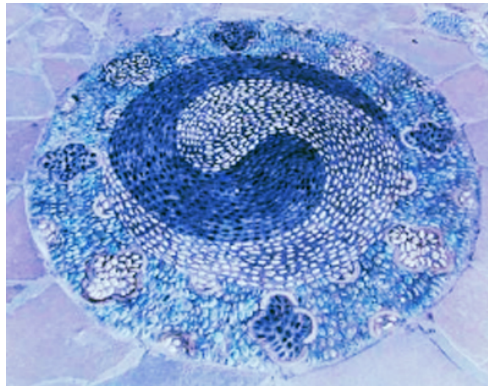
There is much more to say about this, and obviously much more detail to be fleshed out. But what strikes me as particularly significant is that 5 of the top 6 countries on this list are countries in which the mythology of Yggdrasil would have been dominant when the Codex Regius was discovered. This would seem to bode well for rooting Yggdrasil in a place in Middle Earth that was an appropriate portal to its counterpart in the imaginal realm. At the very least, an exploratory trip to this part of the world seems warranted, possible as early as 2015. As a subscriber to this newsletter, you will be among the first to know, if and when such a trip is being planned.



## Upcoming Workshops

### *Returning the Inner Masculine and Feminine to Sacred Balance*

September 26 – 29, 2014 at [River Spirit Retreat](#) near Parthenon, Arkansas



We live in a culture dominated by the wounded masculine psyche. The wounded masculine is obsessed with competition, achievement, money and power, and has lost a deeper sense of calling to serve community and planet. The wounded feminine is obsessed with appearance, superficial connectivity, and security, and has lost an intuitive Earth-based wisdom and a capacity for compassion and caring. Together we have created a culture torn by war, genocide, ecocide, exploitation, addiction, denial, and out-of-balance behaviors that harm us all.

The purpose of this workshop will be to explore and begin to heal our sacred wounds as men and as women, 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 experiential workshop led by Talking Council Members [Nia Kallhof](#) and [Joe Landwehr](#). The weekend will include ritual, ceremony, shamanic journeying, authentic movement, and solo time in nature, as well as deep sharing in same sex and mixed gender groups.

One participant called last year's workshop “**an opportunity for deep self-discovery from the inside out while being held in an open safe loving container with very revealing experiential activities.**”

Read more and/or register [here](#).

Shortly after you receive this newsletter, we will be beginning a new blog series exploring the concept of Sacred Balance. If you wish to receive notice of these (and future) posts, you can subscribe [here](#).

### *Tracking the Soul*

November 14 – 18, 2014 at [Hearthaven Women's Retreat](#) near Willow Springs, Missouri



Based on Talking Council member Joe Landwehr's book of the same name – [Tracking the Soul With An Astrology of Consciousness](#), Tracking the Soul is an experiential workshop, integrating the exquisite spiritual psychology of the seven chakras with the intimately personal, image-based approach to astrology called astropoetics. The workshop brings the provocative theory of the astro-chakra system into real-life application in relation to core issues brought by participants.

Beginning with a timeline of significant events in your life, and then mapping your astrological cycles to it, we will work toward a story of the particular thread of your soul's journey you are inspired to track. The story then becomes a launching pad for insight and meaningful changes.

Included with this workshop are 3 preparatory lessons, designed to teach the basic astrology necessary to get the most value from the 3-day workshop itself. Each lesson will be customized for you, based on your current level of familiarity with astrology and the chakra system. Each will

include a homework assignment, and a follow-up 90-minute Skype consultation.

The workshop itself will be our opportunity to share these soul stories, and learn from them and from each other. To supplement our group work, there will be an opportunity for bodywork, individual sessions, and daily yoga classes.

About last year's workshop, one participant said, "Another 2013 participant said, **"I would say that it was life altering. I feel that strongly and I don't say that lightly, perhaps because I've done some personal growth work before. I was ready to heal and I'm extremely grateful for this past weekend."**

Read more and/or register [here](#).

## Our Standing Invitation to You

Perhaps ours is a grand adventure you would like to join, and a vision you would like to help us manifest. If after reading this newsletter and spending some time on our website, you feel the call, we would be delighted to consider [making a space for you on the Talking Council](#).

The Talking Council is an evolving mix of diverse individuals each of whom brings something unique to the whole, and all of whom together work from a wide range of backgrounds and worldviews to feel their way into consensus. Beginning this summer, the Talking Council will also begin functioning – as noted in this newsletter – as a Dream Council, oriented toward exploring and mapping Yggdrasil in the imaginal realm.

We meet once a month by Skype during the New Moon, and often between meetings to work out the details of a workshop or a project. It is both a rewarding and at times a challenging involvement. We ask for a minimum one-year commitment.

Or, if you just want to stay in touch, you can easily subscribe to [our blog feed](#), like us on [Facebook](#), make a [donation](#), and/or attend a [workshop](#).

Whatever your level of interest, we look forward to getting to know you at the perfect juncture down the road. Thanks for being part of our extended community and for helping us hold a space for the vision we carry.

**Yggdrasil is a mystery school for visionary contrarians and a forest retreat for souls reinventing themselves, housed within a self-sustaining eco-village community, now being formed.**

Keep an eye out for the next *Talking Leaves* – Autumn Equinox 2014  
Contributions in the spirit of Yggdrasil are welcome by September 16.

