



# Talking Leaves: Volume 2, Issue 2

## Summer Solstice 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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## Talking Council Update – Our Challenging Questions

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 beginning of this year, our process on the Council has taken a somewhat inward and self-reflective turn. Our vision statement begins by saying, “Yggdrasil will be a sanctuary enabling us – its residents and guests – to feel our way into a deeper sense of being, out of which more meaningful doing might arise.” We do not yet have an actual sanctuary, a physical retreat center, or a place on Earth in which to root the vision we are cultivating. But the Talking Council itself is becoming a virtual circle for creating a simulated experience of all these things. We are together creating a safe space in which it is possible to explore some very challenging questions, and to feel where we stand in relation to our own deepest truths. This has been rewarding.

In the past few months, we have explored an essay called “[Dark Ecology](#),” by [Paul Kingsnorth](#), founder of the [Dark Mountain Project](#) – “a network of writers, artists and thinkers who have stopped believing the stories our civilization tells itself;” the non-interpretive approach to dreams developed by [Stephen Aizenstadt](#), founder of [Pacifica Graduate Institute](#), in his book, [Dream Tending](#); a poem called “[All the True Vows](#)” by British poet [David Whyte](#); the concept of anti-conventional thinking presented by artist/business consultant [Jeffrey Paul Baumgartner](#); and another provocative essay by psychiatrist [Michael Sperber](#) called “[Journey of the Traumatized Hero: Kerouac's On the Road and Gandhi's Railroad Ride](#).”

All of these pieces speak to some aspect of our vision, and have served as a catalyst to a deeper understanding of what it is we are doing and why.

Paul Kingsnorth raises a challenging question about where our technological culture is leading us and discusses a conundrum he calls the “progress trap” – in which for every step we take toward solving some problem with a technological solution, we create new more complex problems that generally don’t surface until our solution to the previous problem becomes institutionalized. On the path of the wounded masculine, this creates a vicious cycle that can only be broken to the extent we are willing to stop what we are doing, breathe and intentionally choose – wherever possible – the simplest, least technical, most humane solution possible. This may not look like progress the way our culture has defined it, but on this contrarian path, less may be more, backward may be forward, and slower may get us to a place of balanced resolution faster than fast (more about this later in this issue).

The poetry of David Whyte raises other challenging questions – that, like Zen koans, have no easy

answer, but can potentially inform a deepening of being as we carry them in our secret medicine pouches. On the Talking Council, we explored the question posed in his poem “All the True Vows” – What is the secret vow that you speak to yourself in the silence that it would kill you to break? Other of his questions, waiting for future council meetings to explore include: “Where is the temple of your adult loneliness?” and “How can I drink from the deep well of things as they are?” To paraphrase another favorite poet – [Maria Ranier Rilke](#) – these are questions to love, out of which we can gradually, over the course of a lifetime, live into the answer.

*“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”*

Another challenging question that currently beats at the heart of our Talking Council process is the one posed by Michael Sperber in his article "Journey of the Traumatized Hero: Kerouac's On the Road and Gandhi's Railroad Ride." “What is it,” he asks, “that allows a soul like Gandhi to transmute his personal pain and suffering into a powerful force for changing the world, but leaves another soul like Kerouac crushed by his?”

The second of four primary soul tasks at Yggdrasil is to transmute the sacred wound – experienced in some fashion by everyone alive in a body – into a deep source of visionary calling. I believe we are all capable of this, but it may require a certain fortitude of soul that cannot be taught. I also believe that it is as we reach for this level of fortitude within ourselves – in response to all of these challenging questions that cut to the core of our being– that Yggdrasil will be born, not just in virtual reality, but in flesh and bone, root and feather.



## Upcoming Workshops

*Returning the Wounded Masculine and Feminine to Sacred Balance*  
September 27 – 30, 2013 in 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 to include meditation, ritual, ceremony, shamanic journeying, dreamwork, mask-making, authentic movement, and solo time in nature, as well as deep sharing in same sex and mixed gender groups.

The workshop is **FREE** to the first 8 participants. There will be a modest fee for food and lodging.

For more information, contact Nia Kallhoff at [niakallhof@yahoo.com](mailto:niakallhof@yahoo.com).

*Our 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Tracking the Soul Workshop  
November 15 – 18, 2013 in Willow Springs, Missouri*



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 . . ."*

In preparation for this year's workshop, there will be 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. 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 at [jlandwehr@astropoetics.com](mailto:jlandwehr@astropoetics.com).

To listen to an audio interview or watch a video interview with me about the workshop, go to:

<http://www.astropoetics.com/audio/>



## The Art of Tending the World Dream

Aside from asking each other challenging questions, we have spent some time on the Talking Council exploring our dreams – particularly of late, in relation to the ideas presented by Stephen Aizenstat in his book *Dream Tending: Awakening to the Healing Power of Dreams*. Aizenstat is the founder of Pacifica Graduate Institute, which began essentially as Yggdrasil is beginning – as a circle of dreamers, exploring the living reality of a dream yet to take shape in the material world.

Aizenstat is also one of a growing number of pioneers in the world of dreamers, who seek a non-interpretive relationship to the mythopoetic realm, in which dreams are not just veiled references to something in everyday life that the conscious mind can decode, but portals to other dimensions of being every bit as real as this one. In the 1980s, Berkeley psychotherapist [Strephon Kaplan Williams](#) (author of [The Jungian-Senoi Dreamwork Manual](#)) wrote about actualizing dreams as the Senoi people of Malaya did – through making them solid within the world of waking-state reality. In the 1990s, [Robert Moss](#) wrote about dreams (in [Conscious Dreaming: A Spiritual Path for Everyday Life](#)) as a shamanic path for finding meaning in dreams within the dreamscape itself, where reality is somewhat different than the conscious mind thinks it is. In the early 2000s, New York psychotherapist [Edward Tick](#) (author of [The Practice of Dream Healing: Bringing Ancient Greek Mysteries into Modern Medicine](#)) seeks to revive the Asclepian dream tradition for contemporary seekers, not a source of information, but as a methodology for evoking an actual experiential encounter with the healing power of the gods. All of these authors – whom I have personally found enlightening – assume that the dream is not just a cloudy reflection of the world as we think we know it, but a deepening of the world into unknown dimensions of possibility.

In *Dream Tending* (published in 2011), Aizenstat extends this basic idea – integrating the wisdom of his teachers James Hillman, Robert Bly and Marion Woodman with his own explorations to form a startling and revolutionary understanding of dreams. His basic conclusion – which is not new

with him, but in fact, forms the basis for many indigenous cultures around the world in which dreaming plays a central role – is that it is not just we who are dreaming, but the entire world is dreaming what he calls a World Dream.

What if the dreams you had at night were in fact windows into another dimension of this world? What if this world were but a dream? What if your dreams were not just the rumblings of your own unconscious mind? What if your dreams were the World trying to communicate with you? It is this possibility – which Stephen Aizenstat has experienced being real in countless dream sessions with countless clients – that he calls the World Dream.

Aizenstat also speaks about something that he calls Archetypal Activism, through which listening to the inner voices, and the voice of the World Dream, can lead to a more complete way of being in the world, out of which a more useful sort of doing can arise:

*Archetypal activism is not something that I created, but something that presented itself to me over time. I noticed that whenever people began to see dream images as speaking on behalf of everything in the world, often their relationship to the world transformed into something radically new. By consistently asking the fundamental Dream Tending questions (“Who is visiting now?” and “What is going on here?”), at a certain point they heard the voices of other creatures and inanimate beings around them, and having heard these dream voices, they felt compelled to make a response. They felt the need to not only interpret dreams, but also to take action on behalf of dreams in the world. It is as if the ‘world behind the world’ has a voice that asks to be heard and acted upon.*

At Yggdrasil, we want to ask and listen to what the world behind the world wants from us, before we seek to impose our vision on the world. The world is filled with people seeking to assert their will within the world – or to get their needs met at the world’s expense. For these people, the world is just the arena in which they fight for what they believe is rightfully theirs, or for what they can manage to steal from the world.

Even among well-intentioned people, who want to make a positive contribution to the wellbeing of the world – there are too many, whose ideas about what the world needs comes not through their relationship to “the world behind the world,” but from their own need to be useful or important or justified in their self-righteousness. As visionary contrarians, we at Yggdrasil want to allow the “world behind the world” – or in our language, the World Tree, the soul of the World – to guide us. This requires a great deal of listening, and a willingness to hear what the “world behind the world” is saying to us. In this challenging soul task – which runs contrary to what we are taught about how to be in the world – the Art of Tending the World Dream will be a central practice.

To read more about the art of dreaming by Talking Council member, Sara Firman, go [here](#):



This next piece was originally written in 1988 (25 years ago) for a magazine column I was writing at



the time. By some unnerving stroke of synchronicity, I happened upon it looking for something else as I was preparing to put this issue of *Talking Leaves* together. I was stunned to re-read it and find it as relevant today as it was then, and could not ignore the call to reprint it here – for a new audience – as an old but timeless dream, re-emerging in a new context.

## View From Redwolf Mesa

About a year and a half ago now, I had a frightening dream. I dreamt that I was walking home, and was followed by a wolf with burning red eyes. I managed to enter my house safely, and bolt the door behind me. As I went around my house, fastening window latches and making sure there was no way the wolf could get in, however, my house collapsed around me. I was exposed and vulnerable, and could sense it was only a matter of time before I would have to confront the wolf.

Out of that dream came the name, Redwolf, a name which somehow seemed to be mine, but which to this day, has not fit comfortably. Out of this dream, is also gradually evolving a perspective which likewise does not fit comfortably, but which I am beginning to see belongs to these tumultuous times in which we live. [Redwolf has since morphed into Graywolf – the elder version of my earlier incarnation.]

The other day, reading an article in the Utne Reader about the homeless, I was struck by the following quote: "The fact is many of the homeless are not hapless victims, but voluntary exiles, 'domestic refugees,' people who have turned not against life itself, but against *us*, our life, American life . . . We must learn to accept that there may indeed be people . . . who have seen so much of our world, or seen it so clearly, that to live in it becomes impossible." ("How We Help and Harm the Homeless," Peter Marin, Harper's Magazine, quoted in Utne Reader, No. 25). Granted, the vast majority of homeless people are not in the streets by conscious choice, but rather find themselves victims of misplaced social priorities, budget cuts, and perhaps their own weary expectations of defeat. Still, the thought that such an extreme way of life could possibly be a choice was somehow unnerving, and strangely reminiscent of my dream.

I hold contradictory images of the wolf. One image is of a lean and hungry beast, forever skulking around the edges of the civilized world, waiting for a momentary lapse of attention to attack its prey, and then return unscathed to the safety of the fringe. The other is of a strangely joyous animal that delights in the unbound freedom of its primal connection to the wild. Perhaps both are unrealistic fantasies born of old myths that refuse to die. It does not matter, for my wolf is an amalgam of my imagination, a phantasmogoric invitation to transformation and release.

All my life I have lived on the fringe, could never accept the American dream, could not muster the blind enthusiasm if would take to climb a corporate ladder, was embarrassed to learn of the effect that the greed and endless consumption perpetuated by this country in the name of democracy and economic progress was having on the rest of the world. Like the homeless in this country, I have straddled the thin line between being rejected by the system, and rejecting it myself. For the better part of my twenty years as an adult, I have lived without a regular job, yet I am not homeless, nor hungry, nor without anything I truly need. I have learned to live by my

creativity and my wit. I have gradually learned to take increasing joy in my freedom. I have slowly shifted my perspective from feeling victimized by a system into which I simply did not fit, to feeling empowered by making my own place outside the system. This has not been an easy shift for me to make. Even now, I slip back and forth across that line. Although I do not expect to find myself suddenly disempowered by a system I have learned to do without, I realize it could happen any time . . . not only to me, but to any of us.

A few years back, I was living in a tipi, living out a long-standing dream of mine. I loved listening to the wind at night, feeling connected to everything that moved around me. I loved the dance of moonlight shadows across my canvas walls. I never ceased taking delight in the fact that I could stay warm and cozy and content in such a minimal dwelling, even in the middle of an Ozark winter. Psychologically and emotionally, it was one of the most satisfying homes I have ever had.

One day, however, Christmas Eve to be exact, it was horribly cold – easily ten below. I had just returned from cutting wood, and stoked my woodstove as high as it would go. Although I had never had any trouble with my stove before, on this day, as it happened, a lonely spark nestled into the place at the top of my tipi where pole, rope, and canvas came together, and caught everything on fire. After indulging a momentary state of shock, I grabbed my ladder and a fire extinguisher, and nearly put the fire out. You see, I was well prepared . . . or so I thought. Unfortunately, one tiny ember survived just long enough for the wind to befriend it. The remainder of my water was frozen, and the community well was a good half-mile away. I had no choice but to watch my beloved home burn down. By the time a friend arrived with help, I had managed to move most of my valued possessions – my books and notebooks, my portable typewriter, my saxophone, a few photos – to safety, but was suddenly homeless. One lonely stuffed armchair smoldered for days. The rest was as still as death.

As it happened, I moved in with my lover in a cabin down the road, and began a whole new chapter of my life, but that is another story. This was by no means something that I had planned. Sometimes, it seems life has its own agenda. We are propelled along, in directions that ultimately prove to be in our best interest, but at the time seem catastrophic. Gurdjieff called this quirky side of life Universal Hazard, implying that despite the power we have to create our own reality, we are often swept along in the movement of some larger plan we do not understand. Regardless of how cozily the home fires burn, the wolf is never far from our door. The walls of protection within which we define our security are often thinner than we suspect. The gap between the extreme of homelessness and the bounty of the well-fed American mainstream yuppie is not as wide as we would like to believe.

Although the choices I have made take me closer to that netherland fringe than most people would choose to go, I believe the red eyes of the wolf can reflect what lies beneath the surface of all our lives. As was perhaps made more evident in Black Monday's stock market crash last October, the American dream is built on a rather shaky foundation. The walls of this Disneyland fantasy castle of ours could crumble any time. There is any number of tiny embers waiting to lodge in our crown. How close we actually are to the realization of this frightening scenario is anybody's guess, and I do not mean to imply in these worlds that I expect doom and gloom to descend upon us. I



only suggest that we do not always know what we are doing, either as individuals or as a culture. Because this is so, we can expect a few unexpected intrusions of Universal Hazard along the way.

Don Juan talks about living as though death were our advisor, speaking to us over our left shoulder. I find these words to be excellent advice. For creatures always only partially conscious of the process through which we move, it seems wise to expect anything at any time, to be minimally attached, to have our bags packed. I realize that these words make many of you uncomfortable, and yet they are words that must be said. As I stated at the beginning of this article, they make me feel uncomfortable as well.

Yet, it is not as though in this state of readiness to die, we cannot live lives that are rich and full. I am finding that quite the contrary is true. Because I am gradually freeing myself from the illusion of a future, I am also learning to be all that I am in this moment. It is inevitable, an innate paradox that the closer we live to the possibility of death, the more alive we become, the sharper our instincts, the more poignant our connections. If I know that this may be my last meal, I will prepare it with loving creativity, invite all my friends, and savor every bite. If I know that this sunset will be all I have, I will relish every magical shift of hue. If I know that this action may be the one by which I am remembered, I will make it one of compassion, awareness, and integrity.

After I received the gift of my Redwolf dream, I went out into the desert and cried. I cried not only for myself, for the difficulties in my own life, but for all the suffering in the world, for all the homeless people that are not where they are by choice, for all of those being poisoned by the toxic waste that cavalier consumption is wont to breed, for all those who have fought and died in wars that made no sense to anyone but the weapons manufacturers that supplied both sides, for all those who expected tomorrow to bring redemption only to have the dream collapse around them as they stood incredulous and exposed.

We have all been duped by the myth of limitless dreaming. We are all Rip Van Winkles rubbing our sleepy eyes in disbelief. All of a sudden, we live in a world that is badly in need of healing. The cardboard house we have been hiding within has turned soggy in the rain. The hard reality of postponed consequence is storming down upon us. We are badly in need of vision, badly in need of determining what part we might play in the salvation of the planetary ship lost at sea. We can no longer afford to stuff our faces with chocolate mocha pie, while out of the corner of our eye, we desperately ignore our brothers and sisters hungry in the streets. It is no longer possible to pretend that we are not also there, homeless and destitute and shivering in the cold.

I believe there is more room in this world for people with vision, for people with compassion, for those who see a need and care enough to do something about it, for those fringeland bodhisattvas who could easily live well outside the system, yet choose to serve a higher calling. With these words, I honor all those who choose to live with eyes open in the shadow of death, and build an alternative that celebrates life. My heart goes out to all those visionary entrepreneurs who have survived the falling of the house around their heads, who have shrugged with the gods and goddesses, realized there was work to be done, and rolled up their sleeves. In the end, what choice will any of us really have.

Ultimately we are all homeless. This planet is our home and there is nowhere else to go. We have been given a garden, and we have chosen to cultivate weeds. Yet as we begin to choke in the tangled debris of our own collective folly, the awakening is equally profound. Higher ground awaits us all, awaits only the vision in our hearts to ripen and connect us to the whole. Ultimately, we are also destined to be visionary entrepreneurs, to take the gifts with which we were born and become the humble apprentices of our own compassion. Perhaps as we rediscover the living connection between our compassion and our creativity, we may also discover the other, more joyous side of the wolf, and celebrate our primal interconnection in grand family style.

**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 adventure in dreaming, 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](mailto:joelandwehr@socket.net) and/or [sara.firman@yahoo.com](mailto: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.
- 5) Attend one of our workshops. Join us in our contrarian attempt to engage the dreaming world from our vantage point upside down on the World Tree.

**Yggdrasil is a 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* – Fall Equinox 2013  
Contributions in the spirit of Yggdrasil are welcome by September 15.

