

Timeless wisdom into timely action

THE OJAI FOUNDATION



*The mission of
The Ojai Foundation is to
strengthen individuals,
families, schools and
communities
by teaching ways
to listen and speak
from the heart,
to honor life's passages,
and to expand our
connection with nature.
By deepening our
relationships
with each other
and the Earth,
these practices
support the emergence
of a
compassionate, sustainable
and peaceful world.*



COUNCIL and the EARTH



The last several issues of The Ojai Foundation newsletter have focused on our work with council in schools and the many places council has been seeded around the world. This is a big part of our story and we are gratified that council is being embraced as a vital process for bringing peace and understanding to communities, whether they be public school campuses or the Holy Land. However, this is only part of The Ojai Foundation's story and mission. Our vision to turn "timeless wisdom into timely action" also means honoring and connecting with the Earth, bringing hope to the future on this fragile planet we call home.

In this issue, we address some of the following questions: What is the relationship between council and the Earth? What role does The Ojai Foundation play in the current global movement toward ecological healing? In what ways do we honor the Earth? How are we living our mission to "support the emergence of a sustainable world?" Please read on and enjoy!

— Laura Whitney and Doug Adrianson, co-editors

COUNCIL WITH THE LAND

Finding the Open Spaces

by Rachel Dawson, TOF Land Steward



Open space is the jewel in the council process—allowing the breadth so that new energy can emerge.

For eight years I worked with TreePeople in Los Angeles, helping nature heal our city

by working with communities to plant trees. My focus was on school campuses, where we had to open the asphalt for each tree we planted. There's not too much open space in Los Angeles. However, as I reflect on it now, I realize I was holding council with the Earth on a daily basis in that urban jungle. Council is about listening, acknowledging, hearing, noticing, reflecting. I've done it in the car on the freeway by choosing to notice and enjoy the trees instead of being frustrated by traffic. Even in my little apartment, the trees in the neighborhood became my friends. I knew where to go to find flowers for my vases.

But yet, this propelled me to go deeper—to nurture the land and work in partnership with the Earth. Stepping into the position of Path of Service and Gardens Coordinator here at The Ojai Foundation has opened my heart to a place of stillness. I am listening deeply to this peaceful world around me and connecting with the Land before making any plans. I have found that the Land tells me what it needs, and when I give it my care, it shines beautifully.

I invite each of you to step outside and experience council with the Earth. Sit for a moment with the trees and the flowers, listen to what the buzz of the hummingbird has to tell you, feel the wisdom of the oaks and let it sink into your being to open your heart to a deeper relationship with yourself and your environment.

If you'd like to go deeper, come visit our little slice of heaven here in Ojai. Join us for a Path

of Service program. Immerse yourself in community, ceremony and service during our two-week Work Retreat February 14 through 29. Join us for a Day of Service January 12 or 13, March 22 or 23 or April 19 or 20. Or rejuvenate yourself by living in our community as a Work Exchange participant. Either way, enjoy the wisdom of the Land!



"Thank you for giving me the opportunity to live. The past three days have been wonderful, great and freeing. I've learned to trust not only in myself but others. I learned to acknowledge that life isn't all about what I can do alone; part of life is what I can offer and share with others.

It took me a long time to realize I was looking for the father I never had; the family I never had. I saw them - the family I longed for, in the faces of each and every one of my fellow students, mentors and guides of life."

— Marvin, a ONE VOICE student, Ojai, October 2007

5 QUESTIONS FOR HANK

Hank Koransky

Hank has been with The Brentwood School for 11 years as a history teacher, chair of the History Department, and now as Dean of Faculty for the Upper Division and the chair of the Senior Seminar Department. For the last four years he has been part of The Ojai Foundation's Brentwood senior class retreat.



In three words, describe your experience with The Ojai Foundation. An uplifting, motivating experience.

What does the Ojai program add to the overall education provided by your school? The Ojai program adds a practical, real-life element to the ethical foundation we are trying to build into our students' lives.

Tell us a brief story about a moment that captures the essence of your retreat with Ojai. Two moments come to mind. On the first night, as curfew approached, all of the boys and many of the girls gathered on the porch of the boys' cabin to sing (several guitars accompanied). Will Walden led the singing and every one of the students joined in—their voices filled the huge space around them and rose above the trees. They were spontaneously united as a class. On the second night, their campfire ritual lasted almost twice as long as any previous campfire, despite near freezing temperatures and the largest senior class we have ever had. They continued to the end, under the patient guidance of [Ojai facilitator Kafaen Shaw] and stumbled into the mess hall giddy with affection for each other.

What impact does your school's three days with the Ojai folks have on the rest of the school year and school culture? The three-day retreat with the Ojai folks is the ideal way to start the year. The senior class is given the perfect setting in which to establish bonds that will last the entire year. They are also given tools that will help them make the transition into adulthood. For some of the students, it is their first face-to-face encounter with nature; for others, it is a reacquaintance with nature that might have been part of their childhood. Finally, the students become adept at using the Ojai method of council to discuss sensitive issues in a safe environment. Eventually these traditions are passed on to the junior class through Senior-Junior Council at the end of the school year, which the Ojai folks facilitate for us.

What's one habit or practice you have incorporated in your life as a result of your Ojai experience? One habit or practice I have incorporated into my life is a heightened awareness of nature, even in an urban setting. This was an awareness that was a big part of my young adult life, but one that I have grown away from in recent years.

Brentwood School Annual Senior Class Retreat

Three days of council, solo time in nature, ceremony and celebration facilitated by The Ojai Foundation's youth team. Big Bear, CA.



Living Lightly: Sustainability Is a Natural at TOF

By Doug Adrianson

It's wonderful to feel the rest of the world becoming more aware of Earth-friendly practices such as alternative energy, "green" building, composting, recycling, Permaculture, and eating wholesome, healthy food. The Ojai Foundation has been practicing as well as preaching these ways of living lightly and in harmony with nature for nearly 30 years.

Each year several hundred people—many of them teenagers—visit our organizational headquarters, the 40-acre training/retreat center we steward in Ojai. They experience the marvelous creative possibilities building with straw bales, earth bags, and super adobe; the efficiency of showering with energy-saving tankless water heaters; and the possibilities of life with solar power. (TOF has been off the electrical grid since its inception in 1979.)



Our spectacular gardens follow the water-saving principles of Permaculture, and their meandering paths encourage visitors to slow down and open their senses to the natural world. Our meals are nearly always vegetarian, organic, and include locally grown produce. Scraps become compost, which nourishes the gardens. And the circle of the wheel goes around.

Many stop first at our welcoming Gateway building, a living example of environmentally mindful building materials and techniques. It is the first straw bale building to be erected in Ventura County with official permits—a conscious pioneering step by TOF to make it easier for others to build with rice straw, a waste-disposal nightmare that makes an excellent insulating material.



The Gateway has numerous "green" features, including roof shingles of recycled vinyl, insulation of shredded-up old blue jeans, walls finished with earth plasters, and a gorgeous parquet floor made from wood scraps that otherwise would have gone to the landfill. Construction of the entire building produced only two small trashcans of waste.

The Council House—our newest and largest gathering space, due for completion in early 2008—is as Earth-conscious as it is lovely. Solar-heated water circulating beneath the "green" wood floor will heat its main room, and a "living roof" of tiny plants will protect it from Ojai's 100-degree summer days. Like all of our structures, the Council House will be kept cool by thoughtful design and partnership with nature, rather than mechanical air conditioning.

With growing worldwide awareness of global warming, the true costs of energy, and the need to stop wasting resources, many new voices are discovering what The Ojai Foundation has embodied all along—and shared with thousands of visitors.

“Trees and stones will teach you that which you can never learn from masters.”—Epistle of St. Bernard

The Nature of Council

By Gigi Coyle

At least three times a year I offer a five- to eight-day intensive course for council leaders, many of them teachers, wherein each participant is focused on council in the natural world. The community extends beyond the humans, and every day there is time spent “alone” as well as in group.

On the first day we spend time listening to and/or being with the water; the second day, the earth; the third day, we climb up high to be fully with air; and the fourth day we greet the sunrise and build the fire. Each participant brings a story back from the exercises in each of the Four Directions and the council is enriched.



These directions form the basis of our journey as they do every day in our lives: South, West, North, and East. Although different nations, tribes, and peoples assign different colors, qualities, and characteristics to them, the circle of life, the wholeness connected to life on Earth that they represent, is beyond boundaries.

During the last days of the training participants go on a longer solo and take the time to confirm their place as a carrier of council. We have found that this kind of empowerment is one that lasts and is not so easily subject to the up-and-down experiences that inevitably come when leading council, particularly in schools. Once the facilitators fully understand that they just have one seat, and are only part of the story that will unfold, there is room for more of the magic of council to emerge.

A good leader lets go of the need for every council to be a high. This lesson is confirmed in the natural world daily as one learns what it means to live more spontaneously, to be awake and open to all that comes and all that arises.

In every training I ask teachers to remember this inclusion of nature and find ways to invoke the wider circle of council. Often in classroom situations we are so lucky to have the students actually listening to

each other we forget, say, the added magic of the talking piece, which can remind us of other forces at play in the field. The dimming twilight, the power of a lit candle, the storm thundering outside, all affect what happens in council. When we're in wild nature this truth often comes more quickly.

Many of us have the challenge of bringing these teachings of the natural world alive in our classrooms. Fortunately there are many outdoor educational programs these days and more of them are incorporating connection and sensitivity to nature rather than a “use of.”

However, even here nature is often seen as something other, something we go to or visit.

The strongest message I hope to share, carried so beautifully by native elders, is that we are never separate from nature, we *are* nature, and the opportunity to listen to all our relations, not just the humans, exists wherever we are.

The nature of council is a call to the widest of circles—to all peoples and to “all our relations” in all the lands that nurture and teach us. The teaching is one of wholeness, shared experience, interdependence, and the natural creative round of life, which when remembered can bring mutual understanding, solace, inspiration, and hope.

The Nature of Council will be offered in February and April in Santa Fe, NM and Owens Valley, CA. See website calendar for details.

⊙ *Even in an urban classroom we bring our love for the* ⊙
⊙ *earth into the councils. We often use an object from* ⊙
⊙ *nature—a shell, a rock, a flower—as our talking piece,* ⊙
⊙ *reminding us of the beauty of the world that is within* ⊙
⊙ *ourselves—that part that is still, untamed and authen-* ⊙
⊙ *tic.* ⊙



INTERGEN: An Intergenerational Collaboration for Co-creating a Brilliant New World.

By Laura Whitney

On December 7, 66 people between the ages of 14 and 78, came from far and wide to gather in Ojai for the first annual INTERGEN, an “intergenerational gathering for co-creating a brilliant new world – a spiritual, bodily, intellectual, emotional inquiry.” This extraordinary event was hosted by Meditation Mount, The Ojai Foundation and the interGen Focus Group.



brainstorming and mind-mapping. (See graphic) Frustrations often ran high as we tried to “figure out” how to change the world in the little time we had together. But as we closed the weekend in a great circle of gratitude and song there was a feeling in the room that something big had happened—that despite our inability achieve clear results or to serve all the varied needs and expectations of the group—our

The intention of the INTERGEN gathering was to energize the intergenerational collaboration that will be necessary for human culture to succeed in healing ourselves and the Earth. All people, of all races, nations and generations, are going to have to work together as one. The very fact of TOF entering for the first time into a co-adventure with a neighboring spiritual center with very different philosophies and practices seemed like an important and paradigm-shifting move in itself. The idea of us dissolving boundaries, putting aside judgments or anything that might separate us in order to work together toward the common good, seemed the very stuff of the “great turning” toward a new, life-sustaining society.

impromptu community had succeeded in enlivening an intergenerational dialogue. New alliances were formed and most people left more clear about and more committed to their role in the great societal shifts that are taking place on our planet.

To our delight, and much to the credit of the younger generation’s ability to activate the network via the internet, we had a full house, including a wide range of generational representation, save a shortage of teens and people over 80. The group included luminaries such as James O’Dea, the president of the Institute of Noetic Sciences; Juanita Brown, the founder of The World Café; and a brief visit from Barbara Marx Hubbard of The Foundation for Conscious Evolution. These and other experienced leader/teachers agreed to come as equal members of the circle, not featured speaker/facilitators. This alone felt powerful and affirming as each was ultimately willing to accept the age-old notion that everyone in the circle, regardless of age, is a teacher and a student and the wisdom emerges from the alchemy in the center.

For me, I experienced great joy getting to know so many beautiful and committed young people. Part of me was re-awakened and re-inspired in the presence of their big hearts and expansive minds. (I can only hope some of them felt similar inspiration being around us elders, I can’t be sure.) I discovered that my place in the so-called “intergenerational movement” is to create spaces for multiple generations to come together in celebration. That there are more stories needing to be told. That our contemporary culture is longing for opportunities to bring the young and old together, as in ancient times, but in new ways that are fun and meaningful for all. I learned that the generation “gap” is more than a “gap”—that it’s actually a space in deep need of healing and reconciliation. I became more clear about and more committed to The Ojai Foundation’s role in building intergenerational relationships. This is something we are good at—council creates an atmosphere of respect, intimacy and mutuality for sharing our stories and learning to love each other across boundaries. I gained a deeper understanding of the healing power of the generational stories and a deeper level of appreciation for council’s critical role in bringing forth a more peaceful, just and life-affirming human presence on the earth.

Throughout the weekend we used a variety of modalities to explore and experience intergenerational collaboration. As advertised, we addressed the issues through the portals of the body, the mind, the emotions and the spirit. There was movement and dance, meditation, council and “heart circles,” and small and large group co-visioning,



INTERGEN planners: Jay Ma, Gordon Davidson, Judy Gabriel, Laura Whitney. Missing: Shiloh Boss, David Chang, Alpha Lo

ELDERS CHECK-IN

RE-IMAGINING COUNCIL IN MALI

by Jack Zimmerman

The Ojai Foundation has recently become a fiscal sponsor for an important and exciting project in Mali, Africa, administered by Jack Zimmerman and Jaquelyn McCandless. This project is titled, "Preventing AIDS with Low Dose Naltrexone (LDN) and Gender Education in the Treatment of HIV in Mali, Africa." The project involves both controlled clinical trials of the nontoxic and inexpensive medication LDN as a means of preventing HIV positive individuals from developing full-blown AIDS, and the use of council to address cultural taboos and gender behavior patterns that contribute to the spread of HIV and AIDS across the continent. Below is an excerpt from Jack's diary account of a recent council training in Mali.

The highlight of the first day was when we broke the group up into men and women and went more deeply into issues of faithfulness, trust, and the shame associated with finding out one



is HIV positive here. Our goal was to see how the facilitators handled the imbalance of power between men and women in the still-polygamous Muslim culture. Although the women loved being alone and

immediately took to Jaquelyn's ease with them and her feisty spirit, they still tiptoed around the big issue of the lack of ability of most women to shape their intimate lives.

On Saturday we talked about other forms of council, conflict resolution and heard wonderful stories about everyone's family. We even got into the coyote spirit that is so important in the Native American council tradition. It turns out they know the coyote energy well in Mali. This spirit is carried by the Koroduga—the little people of the Spirit World—that give you a hard time if you don't honor your ancestors sufficiently. We also discovered the analogous phrase to "Ah Ho" in the Native American tradition, which is a way of saying "Amen" or "I'm with you" when someone says something that really touches you. The word in the Bambara language (the native tongue here) is "Awo" and means virtually the same thing. Council is truly universal.

Read more at <http://www.lidnafricaaids.org>



Winter/Spring Calendar Public Events in Ojai and L.A.

January 18-20

Introduction to Council
Doug Adrianson & Lori Richards

February 14-29

Winter Work Retreat

March 1-2

Nonviolent Communication
Fred Sly and Christine King
The New Roads School in LA

March 8 (Part 1)

Council for Couples: The Heart of Relationship. At New Roads in LA
Leon Berg and Glori Zeltzer

March 15-16

Council 2: Deepening the Practice
The New Roads School in LA

March 22 (Part 2)

Council for Couples

March 21-23

Nurturing the Call to Service
(first weekend of yearlong series)

March 22 & 23, April 19 & 20

Days of Service on the Land
Volunteer work party facilitated by Rachel Dawson

April 26-27

Theatre of the Oppressed
Hector Aristizibal at New Roads in LA

June 13-15

Visionary Practice
Eric Davis, Dale & Laura Pendell, David Presti

Please check our website for updates.



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Deep gratitude to all those who serve TOF with their time, creativity, commitment and financial resources.

TELL YOUR STORY! Summer/Fall 2008 Issue: HONORING TRANSITIONS

Our next issue will be about the importance of honoring transitions and marking these sacred thresholds with storytelling and ceremony. We are seeking submissions about how Ojai Foundation programs deepen our connections with self, others and the Earth through the celebration of life's many passages.



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