Benedikt Bech

Riding the Waves of the Soul

A Story of self-conquest

Translated by Tammy Stone Takahashi



To baby Benedikt, who lay buried beneath the wreckage of my life.
And to Jens, who helped me rescue him.

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Foreword

by Jens Tasche, body-psychotherapist

Therapy is like an adventure. Ever since Sigmund Freud first came to the world of the unconscious through the life and work of Anna O. [Lorenzer], therapists have been supporting clients through their respective journeys into the very depths of the soul. More often than some therapists would care to admit, these journeys take an uncharted course into worlds previously unknown to both therapist and client. Although for more than a century psychoanalysis has done a remarkable job of creating maps of these inner worlds, the fact remains that these maps are still rudimentary, and in many cases do very little to ward off great feelings of helplessness as therapists support clients in their processes.

Despite the common unpredictability of people's individual therapeutic journeys, therapists find themselves time and again astonished by the courage and determination they witness in the clients they come across. The journey that Laika relates in this book is a perfect example of this kind of astonishment I've had the good fortune to experience. It is the journey of Benedikt, who has dared to this day to allow himself to be guided by his ›soul dog‹ Laika – a charismatic and feisty visual figure originating in the depths of his psyche – and a few of Laika's archetype friends. Laika serves as Benedikt's travel guide, member of his rescue team and mediator between the different worlds, psychical and actual. With remarkable ease, she maneuvers between the past and present. For over a decade now, I have been enjoying the privilege of accompanying Laika and Benedikt on their journey together. At times, I have been able to provide Benedikt with helpful roadmaps to orient him; other times, it was likely little more than my unwavering supportive presence that helped anchor Benedikt on his journey.

I got to know Benedikt during a Bioenergetic Analysis workshop I conducted, which happened to take place very soon after the death of his mother. I have to admit that our first encounters were rather difficult. Someone who has just lost a close relative will naturally

seek a few things from others, such as consolation, concern and space to grieve. Participants of a psychotherapeutical seminar, on the other hand, will inevitably, as an inherent part of the process, be provoked by the therapist to confront the deeper shadows of their personality. In Benedikt's case, this provocation entailed bringing the narcissistic aspects of his personality into his awareness – not an easy thing to face at any time, let alone when in the throes of grief. I have rarely met a person as skilled as Benedikt in evoking sympathy for himself in other people, while at the same time remaining infinitely far removed from authentic feelings for himself and others. Benedikt's ›false self‹ [Winnicott], so carefully maintained for nearly a lifetime, had nothing unpleasant or even arrogant about it. As long as one was not looking for a deeper relationship with him, Benedikt was the best guy you could imagine having around. His entire attitude was oriented towards making as few waves as possible – that is, making life as comfortable as possible for everybody around him. Back then, one probably had to be in contact with Benedikt for quite some time before understanding how severely he was battling for his very existence, without the skills to let anyone in, or communicate emotionally with them. The efforts Benedikt made to be liked by others were extremely stressful for him. Despite his relatively young age – he was 28 when we started our work together – he was suffering from various somatic symptoms you'd be more likely to find in people much older than him. His body was riddled with tension and he had almost no sense of when he was exceeding his physical limits. It seemed as if, time and again, Benedikt was overstraining his body in direct proportion to the need he felt to be liked and accepted by everyone.

In this first workshop we attended together, I somehow managed to strike a good balance between the consolation Benedikt was seeking and the confrontation he needed, which allowed him to find the will and desire to continue his work with me. Since then and to this day, consolation and confrontation have remained the two central aspects of our work together. Ours was a ›long-distance therapeutic relationship‹ from the beginning: throughout the course of our relationship, Benedikt always lived at least a few hundred, if not a few thousand kilometers away from me. Several times a year, he would come to Berlin to work with me for a few

hours or attend one of my workshops. Additionally, we would speak on the phone at relatively regular intervals every three or four weeks. Of course, there were various – including job-based – reasons for the large distance between us. But I always had the impression that this was one way for Benedikt to protect the ›idealized image‹ [Kohut] he had created of me, so that our journey together could continue.

As a body-psychotherapist, I am used to working with my clients' physical, somatic expressions: I help them understand themselves and their biography with the help of their bodies. Benedikt chose his own therapeutical path by combining this kind of body-psychotherapeutical work with his immersive meditation practice, thereby making use of my psychodynamic interpretations for any processes that emerged in both fields. It took me quite a while to understand that Benedikt's somatic blockages went too deep to be successfully engaged with using my Bioenergetic Analysis toolbox alone. Rather, Benedikt needed this space of deep meditative concentration to be able to approach his body in a manner appropriate for him, at his own pace. After all, it is true that all clients have their own intuitive therapeutic approach, which is why, in the beginning, I followed Benedikt's voyage into his inner world with the rather easygoing conviction that I would be capable of offering him competent support along the way.

Then Laika appeared, and quite a few things changed. I don't remember in detail when Benedikt first told me about her – about the images, daydreams and visions in which Laika featured. But from that point forward, we both knew that Laika's messages were to play an increasingly important role in our work together. Of course, I was fascinated by these inner phantasmatic worlds of Benedikt's, but at the same time, I was only in the slightest way prepared to greet them. After all, my therapeutic interests and qualifications mainly revolve around Bioenergetic Analysis, Attachment Theory and Ego Psychology; these fields form a clear and well-structured setting for my work. The visions offered by Benedikt, on the other hand, could not be interpreted without the Analytic Psychology of Carl G. Jung – a form of psychodynamic understanding that was quite unfamiliar to me, aside from my great admiration for the

works of Erich Neumann and the rather reluctantly accepted insight that Jung's personality model (with its comparably loose structure and terms like *anima*, *shadow*, *individuation*, or *archetype*) provides a much more plausible description for the human soul than the respective Freudian model.

It was an extraordinary situation indeed: Benedikt, with a background in natural sciences and barely familiar with his creative potential at that time, started discovering and reviving his body – mainly with the help of Vipassana meditation, a practice that obviously has other, more transpersonal aims –, encountering mental images, stories and figures along the way that can only be associated with the collective unconscious and that are probably not often experienced with such a degree of curiosity and complexity. What's more, in me, he chose a guide for his pioneering journey who knew little more about this world of the collective unconscious than Benedikt himself! In view of what has just been said, I'm convinced that experts in different disciplines would have justification for raising arguments against what this book presents. It might also be maintained that the ›unspiritual‹ use of Vipassana meditation is no more correct than the ›Jungian‹ interpretations that occur throughout the book. But it is a well-known fact that (soul) travelers do not always have the perfect tools at their disposal. Rather, their gift is in their ability to improvise, to make ends meet and rig up all that is necessary for the journey at hand. For our specific journey, however, it turned out to be very helpful that Benedikt's inner images exude such strong power that they are almost self-explanatory and therefore more or less simple to interpret. I would venture to say that a version of Laika and the other archetypes you are going to meet – the old Monk without a Name, Pudra the Witch and Arkan the Warrior among them – live in one way, shape or form inside all of us. Although they may initially be perceived as strange and even threatening, these figures emerge as somehow familiar to us.

Karl Jaspers coined the saying, »I am only with others, alone I am nothing« [Jaspers]. When it comes to human growth, to individuation, *the Other* – a human counterpart apart from our own self and identity – is necessary, maybe even decisive. In the course of the book, it becomes obvious that there exists an inner voice within

Benedikt that has preserved much of what we have worked out together over the years. In Benedikt's story, the Other – about whom he regularly asks »What would Jens say to this?« – is me... and also, not me. We know from those who train in psychoanalysis that they can hardly describe anything about the therapists who train them, since their recollection of them is intricately weaved into those aspects of their memory that have become part of their own identity [Mehler] – an experience that I can absolutely confirm from the work I've done with my own therapist. But how does one feel as a therapist when one's own experiences are used as a scaffolding for someone else's self-development, when my convictions, attitudes and perspectives find their expression in a helpful ›good inner object‹ [Winnicott] within Benedikt's psyche? Well, reading the book, I certainly encountered myself quite regularly, and I also experienced the mixed feelings one would reasonably expect to arise with such encounters. But since the good inner object living inside of Benedikt kept developing its own lively dynamics, I also felt very liberated. Benedikt has accorded me a sense of meaning without which an in-depth therapeutic process cannot take place, but at the same time, he has always been able to bring a critical eye to our therapeutic relationship. This is why I do not always find myself in the remarks of the introject Jens – that is, the ›Jens‹ who was internalized by Benedikt and now speaks to him in the inner landscape of his own mind – scattered throughout this book. Benedikt's story is an impressive example of how the therapeutic bonding experience does not, in the best outcomes, lead to the uncritical adoption of a given ideology, but instead works to support clients as they content with their fraught biographies.

Laika tells Benedikt's story as one of self-discovery, and maybe also recovery. Such narrations are rather rare in the therapeutic world. Three books, ›The Words to Say It‹ [Cardinal], ›I Never Promised You a Rose Garden‹ [Green] and ›Mars‹ [Zorn], are impressive, profound and sometimes also sad testimonials of self-confrontations, or else chronicles of the self-rescue of a soul with the help of a trusted guide. What is unique about Benedikt's book is of course that it is narrated from the perspective of an archetype – a narrative form which I have never encountered before, but which certainly makes it easier for the reader to grasp Benedikt's life sto-

ry. Laika's light-hearted tone elegantly balances out the heaviness that is part and parcel of the backdrop of Benedikt's life and that might otherwise have overwhelmed the interested reader. I see in Laika a symbol for the enormous healing power that resides in every human being – no matter how hard a particular destiny might be – and is a constant source of hope for us all.

How vivid are the archetypes living inside of us? Which experiences from our own history, as well as the history of humankind, can we find stored there? Although there can never be any definitive answers to these questions, the book you are about to read hints at the enormous potential to be tapped by exploring the unconscious in order to reveal and to realize one's own true self.

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