

Tiger and cake - Two episodes

Sabine Rittner

Dear Felicitas,

The first time we met was in 1993 in "Grube Luise" in Germany. This former coal mining place was a perfect setting for our ritualised "digging" into the realm of the alternate reality. A week's listening to your brilliant teachings in anthropology right in the beginning of our encounter was a gift that is still unfolding. Who would have guessed at that time that ten years later I'd be teaching the "ritual body postures" all over Europe, or who could have known that eventually they would become a central subject of my own teachings and research activities at the University of Heidelberg?

During that week in "Grube Luise" I had my very first, challenging experience of metamorphosis during a trance ritual with you: I was immediately transformed into a tiger, flying high up in the air over the Himalayas, then landing on the ridge of a steep valley. Two months later, when I actually travelled in Central Asia, I came across this pre-buddhist

myth again in different sacred places. And I found the very same place that I had seen in trance in a Bhutanese spot called Taksang Lhakang, "the Tiger's Nest", a nearly unaccessable Tibetan Buddhist monastery on the ridge of a steep valley. It was founded by Padmasambawa, who transformed himself into a flying tiger. In order to reach that place in the ordinary reality I had to travel exhaustingly for many days by plane and by car and finally take a long, strenuous hike over the mountains. But during our ritual in "Grube Luise", when I was travelling with the help of the "ritual body posture" and the sound of the rattle, only using the "fuel" of the ecstatic state of my consciousness, I had already seen and heard and touched and smelt every detail of that scenery in Bhutan. Isn't that a convincing way of travelling ecologically?

With your experiential work you have opened a door for us - not only for highly specialised and trained shamans - to transcend our daily lives and to leave our biographical egos behind by "travelling" outside in different times and spaces and cultures and by experiencing the healing quality of the metamorphosis - "for the benefit of all sentient beings", as the Dalai Lama keeps pointing out.

In February 1996 I invited you to our international conference of the "European College for the Study of Consciousness" here in Heidelberg. More than 1000 listeners were mesmerised by your rich female vitality and charisma when you demonstrated the bear posture in front of the audience and spoke about the role of women in hunter-gatherer-cultures. Heidelberg - this old German town where you studied from 1929 to 1931 and received your first academic degree of an interpreter for English and French (am I right?). You told me that while you didn't even have enough money for food and for coal in winter you still managed to complete your studies within half of the regular time.

Felicitas, do you remember our walk all over the old town and up to the castle? Our discovery, finally, of the old house and its courtyard in the "Karlstraße" that was built 500 years ago and where you had lived and studied in a tiny little room right under the roof? After this nostalgic walk we had coffee in "Cafe Burckhard", enjoying your favourite "Linzer cake". You told me that this was of course an unaffordable luxury in your student times. And you confessed, a smile on your face, to occasional flirts of the young and hungry student that you were with well-to-do male students – they'd feel so privileged being granted the opportunity to treat you to a piece of Linzer cake and a cup of coffee in "Cafe Burckhard".

The memory of these two little episodes provides only a small glimpse of my many inspiring meetings with you over the last 10 years. They can hardly reveal the impact you had on my life through your wonderful friendship, your ideas, your practice, your books and by providing the role model of your life as a powerful woman, a mother, a grandmother - and even of a great grandmother who succeeded in integrating profound spirituality, gifted writing and innovative research in her life's work. This is your wonderful legacy, and it lives on and resonates in the hearts of people all over the world.

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