

“LOVE KNOWS NO BORDERS”
AN INTERVIEW WITH FRANZ LUDESCHER

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This is a part of a tale about my journey trying to understand Love and how it motivates people to live a fruitful life. At the stage I took this interview, I had already been for couple of days in the beautiful farm lands of Bavaria and Tirol, where God brought me to experience the peace and gratitude towards a simple life and ease of communication. Further on my journey brought me to the beautiful Rein valley and the spectacular Alpen view in the west part of Austria, very close to the border with Switzerland and Lichtenstein.

There I managed to visit and spend few days in Viktorsberg, the place where dr Lozanov and dr Gateva lived and developed Suggestopedia after they left Bulgaria in 1990 [1].

I met at the Stiftung Kloster Viktorsberg with Mr Franz Ludescher, who helped them to adapt and get used to living in Austria and in the monastery, where they lived and conducted courses and education for seven years.

Introduction card: Prof. Franz Ludescher has been teaching English didactics for future elementary school teachers. He also has been employed as a practical supervisor for English students in addition he was working at the pedagogical institute in Feldkirch, Austria, where he researched holistic teaching and learning methods. And as part of the Chamber of Labour in the institute, he met with dr Lozanov and his methodology Suggestopedia, which became his focus later on.

Todor Terziev: Hello

Franz Ludescher: Hello. That used to be his office.

(A view over the Rein valley spread in front of my eyes, guarded by the high Swiss Alp peaks in the distance. The felling was something I can hardly explain, but it was very peaceful and heart-warming clean mountain view.)

And there are a lot of small similar rooms, so they had their seminars downstairs in this big room, and the feedback and everything else would take place in the small rooms upstairs. But you can imagine - sitting there and the view and doing the reading and research...

(After exploring the monastery, we sat outside in the beautiful rose gardens and continued.)

T.T.: How did everything start?

F.L.: So, they stayed here from 1991 to 1998, seven years and they stayed here in the monastery for 3 years right at the beginning and after that they moved down to Röthis.

(Which is a small town right down the hills of Viktorsberg)

And they established the center here in the monastery.

The beginning was actually when the Iron Curtain fell in 1989. Dr Lozanov was allowed to travel and to come in Austria, where there was a big conference

in Salzburg that was in October the 26th, 1990 attended by a lot of people, who were educated by dr Lozanov and dr Gateva. On that conference he told us that he would like to stay here. Somewhere near the Swiss border, in the West of Austria, because they both associated Austria with music and Mozart and peace and art. During those early days here in Austria, dr Lozanov was traveling a lot and one day on the train from Paris to Vienna, he passed this area here, and said "This is where I would like to stay one day." And in February 1991, he came here in Viktorsberg to establish the center. Back than I worked as a teacher trainer and I was in charge of English classes from 6-year-olds to adults in Feldkirch pedagogical school. Also, I was in charge of the Chamber of Labour there, which invited dr Lozanov and dr Gateva to continue their work in Suggestopedia here in Austria. The Labour Chamber allowed us further education and because of that we wanted them to come here and a cooperation between the Feldkirch pedagogical school Labour Chamber and Sofia University was signed by dr Popov.

After that we discussed two possible agreements. The first one was that dr Lozanov and dr Gateva will be appointed as university professors with the according salary, they will get their traveling tickets, expenses, accommodation, telephone, etc. covered by the university. But the fees received from the participants will be part of the Chamber of Labour. So, they would be paid like university teachers here and they could do whatever they wanted to and organize courses etc.

And then they said no, we don't want to do that, we want to be our own bosses and we want to do everything on our own. And this is something we also accepted.

But coming from a communist country, it was hard

to be your own boss. I don't blame him, but this was something that shocked me. Of course, we helped with everything we could. So, when dr Lozanov was here and he said how he wanted to establish the center. We said that we will help to organize seminars and we will look for accommodation. But then again, because you're your boss, you have to have an account in the bank. Without account, people don't know where to pay the money to.

T.T: I can imagine coming from a communist regime that it was difficult to adapt?

F.L.: The truth is that he went to three different banks and was suspicious about everything. Then finally he said Okay this bank is OK and it was amusing for me when the bank manager asked him to sign the papers required for opening an account. He said "No secrets here for me?" questioning everything. I understood that actually coming from that system he was afraid and he knew what it meant to sign something. It was enriching for me too to learn a lot about the communist system in Bulgaria. It was so different than what we are used to here.

T.T: But then again, he managed?

F.L.: Yes, he managed, he managed. But I spent more time with him than I did with my family those days.

T.T.: So, the agreement was done, dr Lozanov and dr Gateva were their own bosses. How did it come to settle here in this monastery?

F.L.: Yes, so there was this agreement and the person in charge of the monastery here Hubert Rigner, and we established this cooperation between Austrian universities to call it Academic of Suggestology. And there they were. Dr Lozanov and dr Gateva moved in from May 1991 to July in two

apartments here in the monastery. After that they moved down to Rõthis in two apartments that were attached to each other and each of them had his/her own apartment. He also got a new Golf, actually they earned a lot of money because right at the beginning they had many, many seminars and a lot of people were trained here. But he also had to pay a lot of fines, because he always exceeded the speed limit. And sometimes he couldn't accept that well 60, means 60. But the joke on the side, this is how it all started. And it was me, who actually took care of him while on the background I was working also in the Chamber of Labour.

T.T.: So, seven years dr Lozanov and dr Gateva were here teaching and developing the methodology? And after that they went to Vienna? How did they train and what were the courses like here?

F.L.: Yes, seven years, that's right. And then after that he went to Vienna, right. So, they really enjoyed being here but end of 96 and 97 it was very, very difficult to find not people who want to be trained but students who want to come up here and learn a language. It was a difficulty. Because first of all attending a course with dr Gateva, there were a lot of Italian courses up here, right. So, you watched her, observed her while people were studying Italian. And then there were most of the time two or three people who wanted to be trained and they also were participants in this Italian course. And after that they all had the background information about Suggestopedia. Later on, these people, who were trained had to run their own language course. As you can imagine probably in Bulgaria it was quite easy to gather let's say 15 or 20 people and dedicated 100 hours for a course: a session in the morning, then in the afternoon and they could go home again. This just doesn't work here in the western world, right. People simply can't take a

month off learning a language and its impossible. And actually, they had to reorganize it a bit, so most of the courses were in the afternoon, but still one was 100 hours. As you can imagine even though it's really crowded down in the valley, by that time it was difficult to get people who were willing to learn the language coming up here for such a long time. And then in 98 they decided to go to Vienna, because they said, well, there are more people and probably it will be easier for us to find people. But they didn't have those persons who helped them anymore there. So somehow it was even harder than here. But then again, it didn't work the way he wanted to. And then dr Gateva died. And for him..., he broke down. And he said afterwards that for more than two years, he couldn't walk the paths again, where they used to walk together.

And for me, you know, I've been with him for many years and completely helped them in any way. For me it was very clear that it took both of them. It took dr Lozanov as an expert, as the one who had this vision of how to teach right with all the psychology and behind it. But it also took dr Gateva to show how to do it.

T.T. : The love.

The Love. And the music, and the openness and everything. And this is something dr Lozanov couldn't pass on. And I invited him quite often to teacher training courses and so on. But just him, because dr Gateva needed some time to rest and prepare something. And it was very, very difficult when it was just him. Because he was not very well prepared. Of course, he was an expert, but how should I say it... His English had a very strong accent, right. And there were actually some people who said: "His method can't be that good, if his English is that bad." And in truth it took both of them because, she really... she really showed us how to implement

his ideas and... and she was wonderful in it.

T.T. : And while they were here in the monastery, what were they doing from a scientific perspective?

F.L.: Yes, right. For me it was the development of The Suggestopedia Viktorsberg. So actually, what there was during those years here, it was this shift from Suggestion to Desuggestion – to tap into the mental reserve capacities to desuggest everything and anything away from a sleep-like state of mind.

During this period the introduction actually became very, very important [2]

Introduction changed and at the end of it they made a summary and they already started singing and playing and further continuing to course.

Then there was a change in reading the concert sessions, in the passive [3] concerts. Instead of asking them to relax and just listen to it and calm down, dr Gateva actually asked them to stand up, repeat things. So, there was this “being alert of what's going on” and just avoid sleepiness, sleep-like state states of mind.

Also, the activation stage changed a lot. Right at the end of this activation stage there was this creative transfer phase which they introduced again. So here the students got the chance to practice, to immerse the quiet knowledge and this phase has become more important in the whole circuit, this creative transfer phase in the end. So there have been quite a lot of changes up here. Which were also well documented. And dr Lozanov really had the time to study and do some research. He did a lot of video recording of what was done here. Unfortunately, he didn't do any bookkeeping. Who was trained, who was here, how many times... That wasn't his job. So, I did some of it, but it was quite difficult. The best thing would have been if he had a

manager just for himself doing all the paperwork for him.

He also had to learn a lot, right. He couldn't just say bring me the people here. It takes advertising and takes a lot of planning. It took time for the people to understand what they were doing here. I couldn't just say – come here for 100 hours and try this. Probably that was something he could do back then in Sofia, but here that didn't work.

Nevertheless, they enjoyed their time here quite a lot and the only reason they left was because there weren't enough people here prepared to learn languages here up in the mountains in the monastery. Because he actually needed Spanish, Italian and English language courses for those people who wanted to be trained. They needed to monitor and be part of such course in order to get the background information about how the methodology worked. And there was first level, second level, third level, and it was very, very intensive.

T.T. : I see that there is quite strong resemblance with the view here with the one that dr Lozanov choose after he came back to Bulgaria. How it happened that he chose this place?

F.L. : First, you know, Lozanov came here himself and then I just showed him different places where he might make the center and we ended up here. And then about two months later, he came back with dr Gateva. And dr Gateva, I remember we were also sitting here on this bench when she said: “That's very strange. Because recently I had dreams. In my dreams people chased me and I had to run and I came up to a mountain and people helped me to go up the mountain and were friendly. But I can't tell you who these people were. All I know is they were very friendly and they helped me a lot.” And when

she came here and saw this place for the very first time, she said “It is very, very similar to what I experienced in my dreams.” It is very strange.

We entered in the chapel next to the monastery and a beautifully painted walls and ceiling greeted us with the calm and peaceful colours. The chapel was one of the favourite places, where dr Gateva was singing. The curator of the monastery opened a backdoor and as in those mystical fairy-tales, we entered in the corridors of the monastery. The curator explained that this particular monastery was with a very interesting history, because it belonged to a specific Rosenkreutzer who were responsible for learning and teaching language during the Franziskanner and Benediktinner ruling in Feldkirch. Those rooms and the entire building were built specific for a place where languages were taught. In the building there were never priests, but people from those societies, who wanted to learn a language since the Rome times.

F. L.: I remember dr Lozanov telling us that the energy between these walls always reminded him about something good and peaceful. He told me that he can feel the good thoughts and positive attitude of the people who were here before. The Carolingian [i] and the Merovingian [ii] were always protecting this monastery because it was very important place for education in the entire Rein Valley. It was focused on reading, writing and mathematics. But the language was always the most important thing here.

The curator of the monastery explained that they had their faith and corresponding church from Ireland, which received their believes, books and knowledge from a church at the Black Sea, somewhere between Romania and Turkey...

[1] Officially Prof. Dr. Georgi Lozanov and Prof. Dr. Evelina Gateva left Bulgaria and their work at Sofia University in 1993. Prof. Dr. Georgi Lozanov would return for good in his country in 2008. Prof. Dr. Evelina Gateva passed away on 14th September 1997 in Sofia, Bulgaria. Ed. Note

[2] The changes in the methodology, including the passage from deciphering stage to an introduction stage had already started in 1987, at Sofia University, the Centre of Suggestology and Development of Personality which Prof. Dr. Lozanov established. They had their fully experimented version, however, at Viktorsberg, Austria. Nowadays the four distinctively marked stages – Introduction, Concert Session, Elaboration and Presentation are the set frame for a Suggestopedic Global Theme. Ed. Note

[3] The standing up and reading on the part of the students happens in the active concert session. The passive session is the moment for them to feel free and just listen. Further details an the methodology can be found in “Suggestopedia/Reservopedia. Theory and Practice of the Liberating – Stimulating Methodology on the Level of the Hidden Reserves of the Human /Mind”, Lozanov, G., Sofia University Press, 2009, Ed. Note

[i] The Carolingian dynasty (/kæərə'ɪndʒiən/; [1] known variously as the Carolingians, Carolingus, Carolings, Karolinger or Karlings) was a Frankish noble family named after Charlemagne, grandson of mayor Charles Martel and a descendant of the Arnulfing and Pippinid clans of the 7th century AD.

[2] The dynasty consolidated its power in the 8th century, eventually making the offices of mayor of the palace and dux et princeps Francorum hereditary, and becoming the de facto rulers of the Franks as the real powers behind the Merovingian throne. In 751 the Merovingian dynasty which had ruled the Germanic Franks was overthrown with the

consent of the Papacy and the aristocracy, and Pepin the Short, son of Martel, was crowned King of the Franks. The Carolingian dynasty reached its peak in 800 with the crowning of Charlemagne as the first Emperor of the Romans in the West in over three centuries. His death in 814 began an extended period of fragmentation of the Carolingian Empire and decline that would eventually lead to the evolution of the Kingdom of France and the Holy Roman Empire.

[ii] The Merovingian dynasty (/mɛrəˈvɪndʒiən/) was the ruling family of the Franks from the middle of the 5th century until 751.[1] They first appear as "Kings of the Franks" in the Roman army of northern Gaul. By 509 they had united all the Franks and northern Gaulish Romans under their rule. They conquered most of Gaul, defeating the Visigoths (507) and the Burgundians (534), and also extended their rule into Raetia (537). In Germania, the Alemanni, Bavarii and Saxons accepted their lordship. The Merovingian realm was the largest and most powerful of the states of western Europe following the breaking up of the empire of Theodoric the Great.