

episode 1

ARD – Seelenfänger (Soul Catcher – Hunter of Souls)

Podcast – Toxic Tantra

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1. Yoga for beginners

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Filmmakers - Katja Paysen-Petersen (narration) and Christiane Hawranek.

Translated with Google.

Filmmaker: Romania, Black Sea coast, late summer 2021. Nathalie remembers clearly.

She piles into the back seat of a silver van. She's cramped in here because there are five other women in the car with her. They're all young in their twenties, they're all pretty and bubbly.

Nathalie: The fact that there were other girls traveling with me, so there was a bit of a group dynamic, I think that helped me not to completely panic.

Filmmaker: I'm on my way to Paris or somewhere nearby, Nathalie doesn't know exactly. She only knows that they will go to him, where he stands: Grieg, her spiritual teacher, her guru.

Nathalie: I think it was two days in the car, no break, so not a hotel or anything, but two days in the car with six girls.

Filmmaker: I cross the border into France and then, just before Paris, the car slows down, turns into a supermarket parking lot and stops. Everyone gets out. Nathalie lies down, breathes in the fresh air, looks at the midday sun and the bustle around her, the people pushing shopping carts in front of them.

Nathalie: There were other cars, there were other people, so we weren't hidden somewhere in a super shady corner, but right in the center.

Filmmaker: But it all gets really dubious in a few moments. Because now a man is coming straight to Nathalie's group. He is about 40 years old, speaks Romanian and motions for them to get into his car. Changing the vehicle. What follows, Nathalie has only seen on TV, in crime movies.

The Romanian hands the women in the car wide-brimmed fisherman's hats.

Nathalie: When they put these glasses on us, with the hats and the other things, it was very difficult. It was the first time I really thought "wow, I'm really scared now!"

Filmmaker: When they all put on their hats, they also got sunglasses. Nathalie puts them on, then everything around her goes black, because the glasses have foil stuck to the inside. Women must not be recognized and must not be able to see where they are being taken.

Nathalie: It was really traffic, like you see in the movies. That was really, really bad, because then I had the feeling that now everything is getting really surreal.

Producer: The journey continues to Paris. Or maybe on the outskirts? Nathalie doesn't know. She can't see anything behind her glued-on glasses (with opaque film). But what does Nathalie remember well? An apartment in Paris.

A lot of half-naked women in a small space. The smell of perfume and sweaty bodies.

And she still remembers this moment very clearly. Her, again, somewhere, in his apartment. How she stands there in a narrow corridor, waiting outside his door. Nathalie is naked and shaking. Not from the cold, but from...

Nathalie: ...Fear.

But then I convinced myself that no, it's because I have emotions, because he's my guru and all that. So that's how it actually starts, that you carry the work of persuasion with you to get excited, so that you don't go completely crazy.

Filmmaker: Then he opens the door for her. It's Nathalie's guru, Grieg. He threw only a purple velvet bathrobe over his bare body. Many things about him are white: the skin, the hair on the chest, the hair on the head, the beard.

Nathalie: So I didn't expect him to look so old. But that's right, he's really old!

Director: Grieg is old. He is almost 70 years old. He has big dark circles under his eyes. A few strands of hair fall over his furrowed forehead. Grieg smiles at Nathalie and Nathalie smiles back.

Nathalie: Well, yes, this is my guru. He is my guru. And this pressure that has been put on you is so real. So it is your guru and this is now a big event. It's your moment, this changes your life here and now!

Filmmaker: Grieg opens his bedroom door for Nathalie and motions for her to enter. Nathalie looked at him.

Should they really do it? Should she go in, sleep with her guru, and be initiated into the greatest secrets of tantra? Or should she tell him: "I've changed my mind!" and come back?

Listen to Soul Catcher. Season 4, Toxic Tantra.

A podcast made by Christiane Hawranek and myself, Katja Paysen-Petersen.

Episode 1, Yoga for Beginners.

Filmmaker: What Nathalie experienced in Paris, blindfolded trafficking to her guru, who invited her naked into his room, sounds like a thriller. It seems to have nothing to do with yoga. But it has, because that's what it can lead to here in Nathalie's yoga movement.

This visit to her guru is said to be the culmination of tantric yoga practice. At least that's how it was sold to Nathalie. It all started harmlessly enough, in a yoga school.

Nathalie: At the beginning it is as normal as possible and very interesting, everything is new and there is a completely different perspective on the world.

Filmmaker: At a certain point, women like Nathalie do not only yoga in this school, but also tantra rituals.

You learn to view body and mind as one. They treat their peers completely differently, more intensely, more intimately, they say. Feel like you're glowing from within. And this radiance radiates outward, and others see it.

Nathalie: But the thing is, it's all so misleading. Once you're in it, it starts pulling you like quicksand, just like that.

Filmmaker: We tell you the story of Nathalie and Liz. They were part of an international Yoga Movement, the ATMAN Federation of Yoga and Meditation. Many say it is a sect.

The members of the ATMAN movement say that "We are not. We do traditional, original yoga." ATMAN followers, men and women, practice yoga in schools in 30 different countries. They are independent organizations and have different names almost everywhere, but they follow the same teaching. The group is estimated to have up to 30,000 followers worldwide. The oldest school, MISA in Romania, describes itself as the largest yoga school in Europe.

There is also a yoga school in Germany that belongs to this Movement, the German Traditional Yoga Academy DAtY. It currently has nine locations, for example in Berlin, Munich, Freiburg and Stuttgart.

For me and my colleague Christiane Hawranek, it all starts in the spring of 2023. I got a tip from a Soul Catcher listener.

She told us that she went to the German Traditional Yoga Academy, at first she just did yoga and ended up sleeping with her guru, not necessarily wanting to. Even years later, she still feels quite uncomfortable talking about it, but says she wants to warn others about the machinations of the yoga movement and would love it if we could investigate it.

That's what we do. And we'll start by watching an official video from the German Academy of Traditional Yoga, DAtY for short, on YouTube.

Yogis at the Berlin Yoga Center talk about what is so special about their school: DAtY representatives: Yoga has practically influenced every area of my life, making it more intense and better. I notice this in the fact that, for example, I struggled to quit smoking for ten years, and suddenly it somehow became easy for me.

And those who practice yoga can shape their bodies, experience their sexuality, increase their social skills and self-esteem, open their hearts and experience their emotions in a way that brings them happiness, hone their inspiration and intelligence until they are truly happy.

Producer: Everything seems totally harmless. But if you do not go to the official pages on the Internet, you are reading completely different things about the schools of the ATMAN yoga movement as a whole.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: But now be careful, I saw some things here on Facebook.

Christiane Hawranek: Wow, really getting to the point here.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: "Tantra not trauma" (name of a Facebook group). It's always sexual abuse.

Filmmaker: The accusations of those who have left the yoga movement in various countries make for harsh reading. It is about sexual abuse, sex work, human trafficking, psychological terror. And we also find an anonymous warning about the German Yoga School in Berlin.

Christiane Hawranek: On a site called Free in Berlin. And there are also several entries from this yoga school. But there is a comment right there: "WARNING!", in capital letters. "This is a sex sect!" Filmmaker: Okay, so what's actually going on with this yoga move? Christiane and I want to find out. We sign up for a trial lesson at the yoga center of the German Academy of Traditional Yoga in Berlin and we are going there now.

It's May 2023 and it's a sunny spring afternoon. Berlin is booming. We can't really enjoy the pleasant atmosphere because we are a bit agitated because of the accusations being made against the school we are going to visit. And there's this: today is a trial Tantra yoga class, and it's the first time for both of us.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: I'm getting a little excited about what's to come and how it's all going to play out.

Also, I'm a little afraid I'm going to giggle at some point or something.

I have no idea, because tantra yoga isn't necessarily a topic I've covered in particular before.

Producer: Yes, I admit it. On the way to school, I still have the dominant image of Tantra in my head: that you do some exercises to have more and more intense sex. Actually, I know better because of course I did the research. Tantra is an entire philosophy of life, about 5000 years old, from India.

There are many definitions of it, but basically it is a spiritual technique to develop yourself. I know everything, but somehow I wonder: what exactly do they practice in school and what do they expect from us?

Christiane also makes up her own mind.

Christiane Hawranek: I also had various yoga experiences. For example, I was in one (class) where you used to do partner exercises with sweaty men I didn't know. And I thought it was very, very terrible, so I never went there again. If there were to be partner exercises there, dear Katja, then I would love to do them with you.

Maker: The German Academy for Traditional Yoga is located in a lively area of Berlin with hipster cafes and restaurants side by side. Well, let's take a look.

Shortly before yoga school, we turn off the microphone and put it away. We don't want to be recognized as journalists because we want to get the most authentic and unaltered impression possible. We won't record secretly either, because that would be illegal. Three hours later, our trial lesson ended and it was now dark in Berlin.

We turn on the microphone again.

Christiane Hawranek: Did you turn it on?

Katja Paysen-Petersen: It's already on, yes. So then?

Christiane Hawranek: Okay, so Katja, we can finally talk about this.

Filmmaker: We're sitting in a park near the yoga school and we're pretty tired.

Christiane Hawranek: It's 10:36 in the evening.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Exactly. I just ate some kebabs.

Christiane Hawranek: We had to, because we were so hungry after this experience, because you weren't allowed to eat anything two hours before. And it was also very important that the stomach was empty. She told me this again, between them.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Yes? Did she tell you that?

Christiane Hawranek: At that abdominal massage exercise.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Ah, good. So how was it? God knows what I had in mind before.

Filmmaker: My preconceptions about Tantra were not confirmed. No one touched the other. I don't even think the word yoni, meaning female genital organ, was mentioned. From that point of view, it was totally unspectacular.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Exactly, so for me it was a mixture of Pilates, I knew some exercises, but also more sporty things that require effort.

Christiane Hawranek: I didn't find it sporty at all. I really didn't find it sporty at all. It seemed very light to me.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: So, nothing that seems completely abnormal, new or strange to me.

Christiane Hawranek: It didn't seem so normal to me. You know what I noticed? That there was something in the direction of healing.

Filmmaker: Christiane talks about yoga exercises and how they were introduced to us. For example, we lie on our backs and stretch our legs up, with our arms extended parallel to them. Like an abdominal exercise, only with the legs extended. This only works if we contract our abs. But here at the yoga school, it's not just a simple abdominal workout, but the exercise is designed to activate the Manipura

chakra and thus provide more willpower, self-control and harmonious expressiveness. So far, relatively unspectacular from a yoga perspective, but something more is promised here.

Christiane Hawranek: Do this exercise and you will become so and so.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Yes.

Christiane Hawranek: Do this and that asana and then you will have this and that ability, for intelligence or self-awareness. Or with this you will have more awareness or with this you will have more this and that. So many and different... what are these? Feelings and ...

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Qualities. Positive features. And frankly, it's something that everyone in our society, who otherwise has everything they need, is looking for somehow. What are we looking for? We seek self-confidence. We are looking for charm.

Christiane Hawranek: Exactly, and that's kind of a healing promise, I put it in quotes, that you basically improve your whole life.

Producer: We will hear more often about promises of healing. They are central to the teachings of this yoga movement. Improving life through yoga, of course, sounds great at first glance, and obviously attracts many people to this school.

Christiane Hawranek: There were eight women, eight men. It was practically full, to the last seat. I think there were a lot of young women. I would say. Maybe female students, right?

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Yes, and all quite attractive, young, attractive.

Christiane Hawranek: And the yoga teacher. Exactly, and this is what I find so interesting, that this young woman manages to have such status in this yoga class that you can ask her questions about your entire life.

Filmmaker: That's exactly what happens in this test session. After an hour and a half of yoga, we are presented with an hour and a half of theory. This is quite unusual, I have never seen anything like this in other yoga schools. And the content also makes our ears prick up. The yoga teacher talks about the tests you have to pass in life.

Christiane Hawranek: She even said it's like the Super Mario video game, you always have to go to the next level. And you will have a test beforehand, before you get to the next level, then you have to pass this test. And there are always other life tasks and you never finish, so to speak.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: You are responsible for your own happiness.

Christiane Hawranek: And if you really want something, you can get it.

Maker: It sounds very simple, but it can become toxic, because not all people have the same conditions in life, because there are factors like chance, health and social status, and the will alone, often, can't do anything. According to the teachings of the school, you can obviously pass the tests I'm talking about with yoga, and of course you get help from the teachers here at the school.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: She was bombarded with questions as a therapist, so all these men were mainly asking her. Again and again: "yes, what if I have this problem, but I can't move forward?" Christiane Hawranek: And one of them actually had a specific problem. He had a project and thought he could make a lot of money. What should he do?

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Many people who are looking for meaning in their lives and who are now looking for some kind of counseling and find it in this form of yoga.

Producer: Counseling, life counseling. This is what the German Academy of Traditional Yoga entices. They advertise that they can give people practical help with

their job and everyday life.

It doesn't even take a major existential crisis for this, anyone can feel targeted. But it's not just that. In our trial session we learn that if we continue this course we will also be initiated into the secrets. Yes, it almost has a sacred aura to it.

Christiane Hawranek: The first slide was titled "those who are initiated". This word "initiate", I immediately thought, what is this? When exactly are you initiated?

Producer: "Initiation", keep that in mind for now, It will concern us a lot later. .

Katja Paysen-Petersen: She said that this will happen at the next meetings. A magical promise you can't access until later. And she also said that such a thing is learned only in two years.

Christiane Hawranek: In a few years, exactly.

Filmmaker: Got it, it's best to do this school for as long as possible, until enlightenment, so to speak. Christiane and I feel as if we are bombarded with mysterious promises in this theoretical lesson. And after three hours, at the very end, another surprise awaits us. A teaching material to go through, a few A4 pages. We look at him here in the park and see that suddenly there are quite a few sensual-sexual exercises for partners.

Christiane Hawranek: Esoteric-Tantra Esoteric Yoga, Lesson 1. We must examine it further. Man and woman sit on top of each other here in a photo.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: In the grass Christiane Hawranek: We have to be together, again, to... Here's another picture, with them having sex in a lake, it seems, or a pond. Oh my God, now here... "Caution, secret information, structure of divine power!"

Maker: Christiane could go through this work endlessly. I'm logging off, I'm tired, my voice is hoarse, I'm done for the day.

Christiane Hawranek: Now we have to go.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: I'm cold.

Christiane Hawranek: You froze. And I think I have already talked a lot, very mixed.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Totally mixed. But we can sit down again tomorrow and reflect a little more, right?

Christiane Hawranek: Yes, absolutely.

Filmmaker: But we don't have that much time to let things clear up. The next day we have a meeting with a former member. We know that, like many other people, she was searching for meaning, improvement and a fulfilled life. She believed she had finally found all of this at the German Traditional Yoga Academy. This is probably what she wants to tell us about today. Because, before she tells us anything, she wants to know us.

Christiane Hawranek: We don't know anything about her. All we know is that she dropped out of school. So she wrote something like: she is just learning how to deal with other people, she needs a lot of gentleness.

Filmmaker: And she wants to remain anonymous. In this podcast she wants to be called Liz. She set a condition for our meeting: it must take place on neutral ground. Not at our place, not at her place, but in a park.

Christiane Hawranek: So we're at the lake now. On the other side is a woman, shifting from one leg to the other. She wears a red cap.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Does she have a yoga mat under her arm?

Christiane Hawranek: She has a yoga mat under her arm. Exactly, that could be her. She looked around.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: I think she is.

Christiane Hawranek: We are excited.

Maker: The yoga mat turns out to be a red fleece blanket. We greet each other. Liz is

reserved, cautious, almost shy. We are equally excited. Will she tell us what she experienced at the yoga school? We sit together on her blanket. Liz is tall and sits across from us with her back straight. Like Nathalie, Liz is also strikingly beautiful, with a well-proportioned face and large eyes.

We're not telling you this because we're shallow, but because there seems to be a system. The women I have met who are advancing the yoga movement are obviously very attractive. Liz, Christiane and I chat for a while. At some point we ask her if we can record. And she says yes.

Christiane Hawranek: I'm going to put the phone here, like this.

Filmmaker: Because we don't want to be intrusive, we put the smartphone a little further away from her, that's why there's a little noise in the background.

Liz: So I took everything they offered me because I was very curious. I was shocked myself. I still believe a lot of things, so I need to detox.

Christiane Hawranek: When did you get out (of DAfY)?

Liz: I'm still on the way out. Emotionally, psychologically and mentally, I am still in the process of coming out.

So I couldn't say I'm done yet.

Filmmaker: Of course, we're interested in how Liz ended up enrolling in the yoga class at the German Traditional Yoga Academy. She says she had a problem with so many topics being ignored in school and in life in general. Body, sensuality, desire.

Liz: Who teaches us that in school? Who brings our body to attention? Who even talks about the body? Even sports are somehow just about throwing balls or something, but it's never really about your own body.

Filmmaker: So there was this lack. Finally, she wanted to talk about all these topics. But before finding out how it all started with her and the yoga school, she moves on to the next topic, using terms that are foreign to us: the factual world, the dualistic worldview.

At this point, I feel like I need more background on her story first, so I ask Liz this question: Katja Paysen-Petersen: If it's not too much trouble for you, can you take us back to the beginning and tell us how it all started? Describe your path to this school and what experiences did you have?

Filmmaker: Bad question, because Liz suddenly folds her arms and leans back. Don't say anything for now. This silence, this closure, is hard for us to bear.

Liz: It's just something very personal.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Then I'll take a quick step back. Simply say only what you are willing to talk about.

Filmmaker: At first, Liz gives only vague hints about what fascinated her about this yoga school. The teachers there, she says, always communicated to her: Liz: "We have such amazing knowledge that we can finally show you how to become the coolest version of you." And you swallow that right away. "And we can do it in all areas of your life. In your sexuality, in your profession, in your vocation, in your spirituality, in your contribution to the world. And if you're truly radical, you can even achieve enlightenment through us, as well as a supremely enlightening and uplifting spiritual sexuality.

The winning lottery! Do you take it or not take it?

Filmmaker: We, Liz, Christiane and I, laugh a lot in this conversation. But what we are discussing is no laughing matter. Christiane and I are just insecure. We often don't know how to react to Liz's statements. We laugh to cover our tension. I don't know why Liz is laughing, maybe she feels the same way. The winning raffle she just told us about soon turned into a no-win for her.

Liz: I've always been somehow shown my own deficiency. And physically, really physically. Women should be like this, women should have big breasts like this, women should have big asses, so very sexist.

Producer: Wait, are we still at Tantra yoga or is this something completely different? Now, Liz's thoughts are bouncing around.

Liz: So everything was always a sign: a divine sign, angels, entities.

Filmmaker: So this doesn't really have a place in classical yoga teaching.

Liz: From morning to night, you believe you are being watched by God to see if you prove yourself worthy by your daily actions, to reach the next level.

Maker: We know about the next level from our test session: keywords, Super Mario.

Liz: Receiving the gift, the investiture, the initiation.

Maker: Initiation, and that's what we heard in our trial lesson, and we wonder again what it means.

Liz: It's very exciting, it's very addictive, but it's also very crazy. You simply lose touch with reality.

Producer: We tell Liz that we have already heard about these terms, "investiture", "initiation" during our Tantra yoga trial session at DATY. She thinks it's good that we went there and tried Tantra yoga ourselves. We feel like we're getting closer and closer to Liz. But then comes this.

Liz: What was also very extreme was a kind of total devotion to the guru, the belief that the guru is simply a servant of God.

Christiane Hawranek: Which guru?

Filmmaker: Actually, we already know. Many in Liz's yoga movement look up to a kind of guru, a spiritual teacher.

DATY itself does not refer to him as a guru. We know his name is Gregorian Bivolaru.

Christiane, a bona fide investigative reporter, doesn't want to put this in Liz's mouth. If she does, let her say it herself. But these two words - "Which guru?" – are enough and Liz struggles to keep her cool. From one moment to the next, she stands there, frozen, and seems momentarily to be in a completely different world.

Liz: I realize it's very... I have to slow you down.

Christiane Hawranek: Yes, yes, yes, yes. We take a step back.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: I think we really have to keep our mouths shut now.

Liz: From a Tantra yoga perspective, I would say: Take your feminine energy and get out of that rushed masculine energy, which is also super important, but relax, dude.

Filmmaker: Even after our meeting in the park, we still can't understand Liz. We aim to be even slower and more cautious, but we are also uncertain. What are we allowed to ask? Apparently, all it takes is one wrong word like "guru" and our dialogue partners shut down.

Shortly after our meeting, Liz sends us another voicemail, again alluding to her time at the German Traditional Yoga Academy.

Liz: I feel like I've been raped deep down. They really violated me in my whole being and I feel them still inside me. I'm still in my thoughts, I'm still in my feelings. I find myself again and again in these worlds.

Maker: While Liz is still fully occupied with breaking out of the yoga movement, Nathalie has recently made the leap. She contacted us in response to a search request on a network of affected people.

You already heard Nathalie at the very beginning of this episode. She is the one for whom Gregorian Bivolaru opened the door in his purple robe. But more about that later. Nathalie's story in this yoga movement, which she is about to tell us, is quite adventurous and looks at many more aspects than her guru. We have a meeting

with her through the Teams platform.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Is your recording going?

Nathalie: Yes, it's running in the background on my laptop. Yes.

Maker: Nathalie is too far away for a face-to-face meeting. She lives and works where others vacation, surrounded by palm trees and miles of white sand beaches, on an island in Thailand.

Nathalie blends well into the landscape. She is 27 years old, with long brown hair and model features.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: I would like to go back to the beginning, before I was introduced to the yoga school.

Filmmaker: Nathalie takes us back in time, to a time when she was about 16 years old. She grows up sheltered in a small town somewhere in Germany and comes from a good family. They don't have to worry about money. Her parents raise her as an atheist. It has nothing to do with religion, with spirituality.

Nathalie has nothing to do with yoga either. Instead, she often goes to the gym.

Nathalie: Well, I was kind of very into bodybuilding. So that was definitely what I was interested in.

It was two hours a day, it took up a lot of space in my life.

Maker: Nathalie is also passionate about psychology. She studied it later.

Nathalie: I've always been very interested in understanding somehow more deeply why we work the way we do. And when you look back now, it's interesting that I'm the one who slipped into it.

Producer: In parallel with her studies, Nathalie already works in the human resources department of a luxury car manufacturer. She likes the work she does. She has the opportunity to meet interesting people and travels a lot. So now, examined just like that, theoretically. Nathalie is attractive and intelligent. She has a hobby that fulfills her. She has money and a good job. But she is not really satisfied.

Nathalie: Is this really what I want to do for the rest of my life? Not really. Can I find something somewhere that makes sense to me?

Filmmaker: Try to travel, to see the world, to think about something else. But then India comes along and suddenly everything changes. For better, but also for worse. It all starts in 2019. Nathalie is currently in Rishikesh, a small town on the Ganges. The Beatles meditated here in the Maharishi's ashram. Yoga is quite important here. Travel guides even call it the "world capital of yoga". Nathalie receives a flyer on the street in Rishikesh from a school called Mahasiddha, which offers Tantra yoga.

Nathalie: Tantra, that would be cool to take a look at. And that's exactly what I did, I called and then Jasper answered.

Producer: Jasper. Nathalie's story at yoga school is also Nathalie and Jasper's story at this school.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Ah, you met on the phone, so to speak.

Nathalie: Yes, yes. Exact.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Do you remember that first phone call? What did you think of him?

Nathalie: Actually, what I had in mind was that it must be an older guy, an older Western man who somehow broke away and is now somehow teaching his Tantra class here in India.

Filmmaker: Jasper is 29 years old and from Australia. Nathalie meets him immediately when she first visits the yoga center. Jasper is an "apparition" for Nathalie. Muscular, tanned, his hair falls unruly on his face. Everything about him attracts Nathalie.

Nathalie: Right after that, when I got back from the gym, I texted my best friend like, "Oh my God, because I was totally blown away, oh wow, that's so great ."

Maker: This amazing Jasper is part of the team of teachers at the yoga school.

Nathalie: The first thing I went to was an introduction, they have an introduction night which is also free, so you don't have to pay for this introduction and looking back, that's how you get people.

Producer: There are about 30 people in the yoga room. They are sitting on the floor, talking, laughing, and then their eyes turn to a television. It now has testimonials, videos of people who are already at this school talking about how great yoga is there.

Nathalie: Yeah, and then they turned off the TV and played the music and then she came in.

Filmmaker: She walks in, no, she walks in and everyone standing there looks up at her. That's how Nathalie remembers it to this day.

Nathalie: It's quite a sight in itself, because she's such a beautiful Eastern European woman. So it stands out and it's very neat and all that. He doesn't look hippie like everyone else sitting there.

Producer: The yoga teacher speaks to the participants in English. She talks about the basics of yoga, the content of the course and...

Nathalie: ... what Tantra is and how great it is and that the school is the only one that offers true, correct Tantra and so on.

Filmmaker: Then, at the end, there is another exercise...

Nathalie: ... in which we did something called "walk of angels".

Katja Paysen-Petersen: What's the name?

Nathalie: "The walk of angels".

Producer: For the "walk of the angels", all the Tantra students line up next to each other...

Nathalie: ... And then you walk past them. You walk with your eyes closed and then everyone kind of comforts you.

Producer: Nathalie enrolls in the Tantra course. She lives in a hostel in Rishikesh, but her entire life now revolves around the yoga school. She opens her chakras, meditates and unlocks her energies. For four months, every day, for two hours in the morning and six hours in the afternoon.

She is absorbed into this school like quicksand.

Nathalie: It also meant that you were very close to all the people who were part of the group, so in the evenings you would go out to dinner with them or something. So we were very, very close.

Filmmaker: Only the person Nathalie would most like to spend time with tends to stay away. It's Jasper from the teaching staff.

Nathalie: Well, yes, they were a little more special.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: So they were at a higher level then?

Nathalie: Yes. Exact.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Does that mean you couldn't approach him from the beginning?

Nathalie: No, no.

Filmmaker: However, Nathalie wins Jasper over relatively quickly for a date. The two approach, meet, it goes. But one thing annoys Nathalie.

Nathalie: Because in the beginning he was actually a little bit like a teacher, like, "I'll tell you how it works," and I was like, "Okay, but I don't want to know." It's cool that you do tantra here and all that, but that's not you.

Nathalie doesn't know it yet, but Jasper lives and breathes the teachings of the yoga movement. Nathalie doesn't hear anything about this guru in Tantra classes , although she sees him every day in a photo from the yoga school.

Nathalie: So it was a relatively small photo, not something big, "Here's the guy who's a guru!", so nothing like that he was younger, he still had black hair.

His name is Gregorian Bivolaru. Everyone here just calls him Grieg. Nathalie only finds out a few months after her first visit to the school, in March 2020.

Nathalie: Yes , that was the first time I found out about this whole story with the guru.

Filmmaker: It's Bivolaru's birthday. He celebrates it elsewhere, not in Rishikesh, but there is a meditation on him at school, says Nathalie.

Nathalie: There they just play the music for six hours, like that, and you close your eyes and you have to somehow connect with the guru, because he's supposed to be meditating at that time and he's somehow connecting with us and stuff.

Filmmaker: Nathalie doesn't feel a connection with Grieg during these six hours, but with the people around her.

Nathalie: I remember thinking at the time, "Wow, it's really nice that he formed such a community."

Maker: This guy that the yogis in this Indian school celebrate so much, the one with whom Nathalie is supposed to connect for hours, three and a half years later is in the middle of a long-planned mission to France - in the morning, on a Tuesday in November 2023, 175 French policemen are on a mission. They are dressed in dark clothes, have guns and wear caps. They are listed in various locations in and around Paris, as well as from the south of France. They are to carry out raids there. Among them is an apartment complex in Yvry-sur-Seine.

He is said to be hiding in an apartment on the ground floor from here Gregorian Bivolaru, Nathalie's guru, and Liz's guru have orders to arrest him.

episode 2

ARD – Seelenfänger (Soul Hunter) Podcast – Toxic Tantra 04/24/2024

2. The Holy Guru

<https://www.ardaudiothek.de/episode/seelenfaenger/toxic-tantra-holy-guru-2/bayern-2/13338389/>

Author: Tuesday, November 28, 2023, early in the morning, in Ivry-sur-Seine, very close to Paris.

Police in dark clothing, with guns and balaclava, approach an apartment located on the ground floor of an apartment complex. White shutters on the patio windows and door block the view inside.

The police storm the apartment. They are looking for Gregorian Bivolaru, the so-called guru of the ATMAN yoga movement. That's roughly how it would have happened.

A few hours later, messages appear on my colleague Christiane Hawranek's and my cell phones from the dropouts. We are in contact with over a dozen women and men at that time. Several of them informed us that Gregorian Bivolaru would have been arrested in France. They knew this from reliable sources. We are trying to check the news, contact the police and the prosecutor's office in Paris, get as much information as possible. And then, later that day, the news is suddenly all over the French press, even the main news program. The operation was a success. The police arrested Gregorian Bivolaru.

Instead of a door, television footage shows only wooden boards blocking the entrance sealed off by police. On it is written, in French, "GB Apartment" and a list of criminal offences.

The Paris public prosecutor's office is investigating rape, human trafficking, breach of trust of a protected person and kidnapping in an organized gang. Apart from Bivolaru, 40 other suspects are placed in police custody, all with Romanian citizenship, we later learned from the Paris Prosecutor's Office.

And 58 women were found during house searches. Most of them from Romania, but also from other countries.

For example, one woman from Germany, one from Argentina and one from America. The media claim that the women have been released and that they had previously been imprisoned in cramped and unsanitary conditions. In the main news show of the main French television station TFA, a neighbor of Bivolaru speaks in an interview, under the condition of anonymity. The man says: "Once I saw a woman blindfolded, but I never suspected anything was wrong." Interesting neighborhood... And we report on Bayerischer Rundfunk about the arrest of the so-called yoga guru. In the meantime, former followers we are in touch with keep us updated. Here, for example, is Nathalie's voicemail. She was informed by insiders that Bivolaru is in preventive detention.

Nathalie: Hello, Bivolaru is now in pre-trial detention, so he is not coming out now. That's very good, I was a little worried that he would somehow find a way out again. But now, yes, it's a big relief.

filmmaker: At some point it's official. The magistrate ordered the preventive arrest of Gregorian Bivolaru and five other people, important members of the movement,

according to some sources.

And Bivolaru risks up to 30 years in prison. That is if the investigators will confirm the charges and he will be convicted. First of all, of course, the presumption of innocence applies.

The Romanian yoga school MISA, which Bivolaru founded, issued a press release shortly thereafter. The allegations are baseless. It also states that the women who were released were in no way victims. At most, they were victims of alleged brutal behavior by the French police. None of them considered themselves exploited, abused, trafficked or victims of rape.

At the very end of our research, we will interview the MISA spokeswoman.

She will say in English that she has no doubt that Bivolaru is innocent.

Christiane and I keep asking ourselves these days, what does this arrest do to those who have abandoned the group? What turns Nathalie and Liz on? And what happens next with Bivolaru?

This is Soul Hunter Season 4, Toxic Tantra. A podcast made by Christiane Hawranek and myself, Katja Paysen-Petersen.

Episode 2, The Holy Guru.

In this episode of Soul Catcher, we want to find out what drew Nathalie and Liz to the yoga movement. How it happened that at first they only wanted to do yoga and Tantra and ended up alienating themselves.

Nathalie, who is on an island in Thailand, tells us her story through the Teams platform.

Nathalie takes us where we left off with her story in episode 1, to Rishikesh, India. Here she got involved in the yoga movement, founded by Gregorian Bivolaru. Here she practiced yoga and Tantra, took part in the "walk of angels" and meditated on her guru. And it was also here that she met and fell in love with the handsome Australian Jasper.

But now, in April 2020, it all ends suddenly. Because suddenly Corona appears. Nathalie stays alone in her hostel and takes yoga classes online. But at some point, she can't take it anymore and her parents start stressing her out. So she flies home to Germany to her rather worried mother.

Nathalie: I remember the first day I came home we had a really big fight.

First, Nathalie's mother has to let go of all the worries she had about her daughter while she was somewhere in India and Corona was wreaking havoc around her. And now that Nathalie is finally back, her mother realizes that this yoga group in India has changed her daughter. It is, for example, about the meat thing. Her daughter, who used to eat chicken all the time because she was bodybuilding, is now suddenly a vegetarian. There is nothing dramatic at first, on the contrary. But there are more changes.

And these not only surprise Nathalie's mother, they alarm her. Instead of going out and going back to her normal everyday life, her daughter retreats to her room. She does yoga there, for hours.

They are also taking online classes at the school in Rishikesh. She fasts every Sunday to cleanse her body and soul. Once she even ate only cereal for 10 days straight.

In fact, Nathalie's thoughts are mainly focused on the yoga school and her friend, Jasper.

He also left India. Together with several other students from the yoga school, he flew

to Romania.

The origins of the ATMAN yoga movement lie there, in Romania. There is the school that started it all. And that's why she packs her bags and waits for the planes to take off from Germany again.

Nathalie: I boarded the first available plane and left for Romania.

filmmaker: Nathalie will fly to Romania to live there. This decision will prove disastrous and her guru will play a very important role. The Guru. The Guru, again and again.

Here is a YouTube video from a MISA sympathizer channel, MrLeonte.

<https://www.youtube.com/@mrleonte> We see kitsch images of waves reflecting sunlight. Women holding hands and spinning in circles.

Then there are images of Catholic saints included. And over all this, the voice of Gregorian Bivolaru is heard. He praises the benefits of blessings.

"The Art of Blessing", by Gregorian Bivolaru: "The effects that appear after a blessing and that intensify over time, are complex and diverse. Some of them last for days, weeks, months or even years." When Christiane and I start our investigation, we already know that he is on the Interpol list for serious human trafficking charges. For which he is liable to 10 years in prison. And for sexual abuse. However, this offense is time-barred.

But we also know that he is still revered by his followers. Framed photos of him hang in several yoga schools, dropouts tell us. We saw it with our own eyes during our test session in Berlin.

A framed photograph of Gregorian Bivolaru hung there, surrounded by photographs of other spiritual masters. Jesus Christ, for example. What is with this guru as many call him? Why is he so revered by his followers, even though he has been internationally persecuted for years?

Gregorian Bivolaru grows up in Romania in the 1950s. In the 60s, Nicolae Ceaușescu comes to power. An unscrupulous dictator who has huge, imposing buildings built for him while his people starve.

Ceaușescu's secret services, the Securitate, authorize the brutal persecution of all those who think differently. Gregorian Bivolaru is one of these nonconformists, as we read on the Internet. He already does yoga when almost no one in Romania knows what it is. At 15, he is already reading books in English and French on parapsychology, sexology and esoteric traditions.

This is what a yoga teacher from the movement writes. And it is said that he was doing 8-9 hours of yoga a day, and at the age of 18, he was also teaching it. But at some point he has to do it secretly, because yoga is banned in Romania in 1982. Bivolaru is arrested several times and even sent to psychiatry, like many other critics of the regime. In a televised interview, he talks about how he was persecuted. He states that he has always told Security that the allegations against him are not true. A real discovery for us is a documentary film about Gregorian Bivolaru from 1995, also posted on the MrLeonte channel. Bivolaru tells a truly adventurous story about how he managed to escape from the custody of the Security.

Gregorian Bivolaru: The truth is that I organized my own escape from the Security prison, from which, as far as I was told later, no one else had escaped. It is certain that yoga procedures helped me a lot, and by combining certain telepathic and hypnotic procedures I was able to achieve this feat.

This is his version.

filmmaker: Here is the revolution of 1989, the people of Bucharest shouting freedom, freedom in the streets. Ceaușescu's regime is collapsing, and Bivolaru is now

celebrated by his followers as someone who upholds spirituality and free thought. Shortly thereafter, in 1990, he founded MISA, officially known as the Absolute Spiritual Integration Movement.

This is the first school of the Yoga Movement, the one that started it all. In the 90s, it is very big in Romania. It is said that there were 40 ashrams in Romania alone. And it is expanding to other countries. In a YouTube video published by a local newspaper in Romania in 2017, Bivolaru praises himself and his school.

It's a kind of press release.

Gregorian Bivolaru: I am satisfied with the activities at the MISA yoga school. It is the largest yoga school in Europe and is constantly expanding.

filmmaker: Even today, Bivolaru is considered by his followers to be a sage, an enlightened person and a spiritual master. And because of his past, he is also seen as a person who has always been unjustly persecuted for political or religious reasons. His followers still believe this in 2004. Someone denounces Bivolaru for allegedly having a sexual relationship with an underage yoga student. Bivolaru is imprisoned for a short time, but then he is released, disappears abroad and goes into hiding. He is even granted political asylum by Sweden.

Authorities have spoken to some of his followers and believe that, yes, that's right, Bivolaru is being persecuted because of his religious beliefs. Only later, in 2013, he was sentenced to six years in prison in Romania for having sexual relations with a minor. He is not in the country.

When Bivolaru is investigated, he has a lawyer that I have read about repeatedly on the Internet. His name is Mihai Rapcea. What's interesting about him is that he was apparently a follower of the movement himself, but has since broken away and posts warnings about the school on his blog. He is still a lawyer and lives in Bucharest. We write to him. Maybe he has documents from that time, notes, something that can help us.

While we wait for an answer from him, we talk to Nathalie, who lives on the Thai island. We want to know more about the time she spent in Romania. We are connected with her again through Teams. Nathalie tells us that no one at school made a big deal about Bivolaru's presence on the Interpol list.

Nathalie: So everyone knows he's hiding, that he's being followed. This is somehow of absolute notoriety.

filmmaker: Nathalie, like other yoga students, is told that Bivolaru is being persecuted for political reasons, just like under communism, and that there are some pretty evil forces at play.

Nathalie: Because, of course, he wants to bring a lot of good to this Earth. And then, of course, all the demons somehow start stalking him again. And the demons, of course, infiltrate all the people and then begin to hunt him down.

filmmakers: Demons. That's how the school justifies a lot of things.

Nathalie: That's why he has to hide now. Not because he really did anything bad or anything, but because there are just demons trying to stop him from doing good.

Filmmaker: Well, from the beginning Nathalie doesn't like the demon story. She's too rational for that.

When she arrives in Bucharest, Nathalie is not too interested in the whole story with the guru. She just wants to be with her boyfriend and do yoga in this wonderful community. But others are talking about Grieg more and more often, she says.

Nathalie: And then I was also told to do a daily meditation with his photo.

filmmaker: Nathalie is handed photos of Bivolaru. She places them in front of her and looks at the first photo. Bivolaru, a complete stranger to her, looked at her with a

gentle smile. Nathalie calmly tries to connect with him.

Nathalie: That was, when I think about it now, wow, it didn't work at all.

filmmaker: In the man others see as their guru, Nathalie sees only an old, unattractive guy with seductive eyes and white hair.

Nathalie: I actually had trouble with that when I was doing this meditation. I wasn't in the mood for that at all, and that's it, so I got really angry. I just didn't feel like doing it.

filmmaker: Nathalie's yoga teachers are trying to convince her to do this meditation with Bivolaru, she says.

Nathalie: Of course I was also told that it's all just a spiritual test. If you have trouble with this guru thing, it's a spiritual test. These are the demons who want to prevent you from contacting your guru.

filmmaker: For cult experts, it's a red flag, a feature we need to pay attention to. Powerful people manipulate others so that they no longer trust their own intuition. This is also known as gaslighting (manipulation and psychological control) Nathalie continues to not believe in demons, but swallows the "spiritual tests" thing. She knows this theory from her Tantra classes. So, life holds various tests for you. You either master them and level up, or you don't and fall.

Ultimately, is meditation with Bivolaru such a test for Nathalie?

Nathalie: In retrospect, it was totally my intuition that it was all bullshit. And then, at some point, I gave up, so I said: "I don't feel like it anymore, it's not going to work anyway".

director: Nathalie puts Bivolaru aside and now does what she came to do in Bucharest.

She does yoga, does tantra, meditates, hangs out with the yoga school folks, and hangs out with her boyfriend, Jasper.

Everything goes well for a while, but then Nathalie finds out something. Something that will change everything for her. She finds out that Jasper isn't just with her. He has had another girlfriend for a long time, one from school.

Nathalie: When I found out he was with someone else the whole time, that was my spiritual test. Not to say "well, that's it, dear, we won't see each other again", that was my test.

filmmaker: One more test...

Nathalie: I've been told all the time: "If you have a problem, it's just your demons and you have to let them go." filmmaker: When Nathalie said that on the Teams platform, Christiane had to step in: Christiane Hawranek: Who said that?

Nathalie: And she said, Jasper, he was totally involved. That's how he justified everything, like: "Yes, it's all your stuff."

And our teachers always said that, the boundaries are a little weird. You always go to your yoga teachers with your relationship problems and say "Yes, this and this is happening right now". Then their input is always like "Yeah, it's all demonic and divine and blah blah blah", so harsh.

filmmaker: Yes, Nathalie also goes to yoga teachers with her relationship problems. They teach her that the freedom of an open relationship is good for spiritual development. Jealousy has no place there.

So Nathalie's yoga teachers advise her to overcome her jealousy through various exercises. With yoga, meditation and so on. Try as she might, Nathalie can't deal with sharing Jasper with someone else. Jealousy almost consumes her.

Nathalie: When things got really crazy with Jasper, of course I was told again that he could help me, because I was in so much trouble now.

filmmaker: He is Bivolaru, her spiritual master, her guru. The guy on the Interpol list. The guy she can't meditate on, no matter how hard she tries, because everything inside her is against it.

Of all people, should he help her now? Nathalie is desperate. She wants to save her relationship.

Nathalie: And then, at some point, the idea really came to me "Okay, now I'm going to write him a letter!" filmmaker: She sits down and writes to Bivolaru, asking him if he can help her overcome her jealousy and if he has any advice for her. Attached to the letter is a photo of her, a selfie with her face.

She heard that Bivolaru needed it to read your aura. We will come across aura reading more often. It seems that Bivolaru is best at this when the women are only wearing bikinis or are naked.

When Nathalie finishes her letter to her guru, she gives it to the women at the yoga school, she tells us.

She hopes he will answer her. You've listened as Nathalie from the island of Thailand takes us deep into her yoga school experiences. She even tells us about her journal entries. She seems completely relaxed, as if she has already put what happened behind her.

With Liz it's completely different. We met her in episode 1, she's the one with the straight back on the red fleece blanket in the park. We are about to enter into an exchange of lines, at the end of which we are very worried for her. So far, Liz has only hinted at her time at school.

But when we wanted to ask her about the guru, she was silent. Shortly after our meeting with her in May 2023, she sent us voicemails and explained what was preventing her from speaking to us.

Liz: So what's happening to me is... The mainstream media, the satanic media, the mainstream media, so that kind of accompanies everything in the background. You are part of this category that you should avoid.

So, I took that over somehow.

filmmaker: Christiane tries to reach out to Liz and convince her to get back together.

Christiane Hawranek: I'll admit it, I think this is already the fifth voicemail I'm starting to send you because I'm struggling to find the right words without saying the wrong thing or something.

Maybe we can talk again, because then I'll see more of your face, even if I might say something that sounds stupid.

Filmmaker: But Liz doesn't want to meet with us in person right now, not even via video link, and she doesn't want to talk on the phone either. The only thing she's okay with is voicemails, because she says she can answer them anytime and quietly.

Liz: Part of me feels that it's sacred, and when I connect with you now and talk to you, I also feel, in part, that I'm initiating you into some knowledge. And that's why I feel like a total pathetic traitor right now.

filmmaker: It's only now that we really realize what it means that Liz is still on the way out. She still walks between worlds, as she says herself. In other words, between the world of yoga school and our normal world.

She still believes things that were obviously drilled into her at school.

Liz: The more I integrated into this community, the more I adopted their way of thinking, their way of speaking, their slang, the words that are used there, the customs, the attitude, the inner attitude and a view of the world. And I was also given a certain confidentiality appeal.

producer: And now she's talking to Christiane, a representative of the satanic media.

Liz: Definitely, I have an inner voice that says, "This is your ultimate test. And now you're being tested, so to speak, to see if you're actually somehow honoring this call to secrecy, and you're not doing it at all." filmmaker: Maybe that's why, out of this guilty conscience, she's so keen to point out that she also had good experiences at the yoga school.

Liz: I also got a lot of beautiful and positive insights, especially about femininity. I received a very beautiful perspective on myself. I also gained a lot of courage to allow myself to live and radiate a certain feminine sensuality and sexuality. Also, I've really noticed it in contact with other women who realize I have a glow or something and I realize they want it too.

Christiane Hawranek: About this ambivalence, about the fact that you also experienced good things, many people have already told us. But what I'm ultimately trying to find out now is, so to speak, what are the points where things tip over, where people just don't feel good about it anymore.

filmmaker: Christiane is getting more and more voicemails from Liz. Sometimes 20 in one day, then none for a week. Sometimes they are just very short, recorded quickly on the way to the bus or train, then again very long, 20 minutes, intense.

filmmaker: Liz is almost talking to herself on a walk in the park or at home, it's like an audio diary.

Liz: I went to this yoga school with the intention of getting even healthier, and stronger, and more stable, and it ended up being such an obvious pile of shit. And I'm completely confused and I feel like I've been in a car accident and I'm completely broken inside. And also so hurt and disappointed deep down, but most of all, so confused.

filmmaker: We realize that Liz really has a lot to say, she wants to say a lot, but she only sticks to these hints. She is locked in a struggle: "Am I breaking my oath and silence? Can I trust the media?" And only now do we really realize that Liz is afraid. She is afraid of the people at the yoga school.

Liz: Because they really have a lot of power now, they have schools all over the world. They are very professional in what they do and I am alone. I'm not attached to anyone or anything, I don't have an employer or anything like that to support and support me, I'm alone.

Filmmaker: Above all, Liz has no money for a lawyer. And that's what this is about. She is afraid of being sued for defamation.

Liz's fear is justified. In 2018, some colleagues of ours broadcast a short TV report about Gregorian Bivolaru and the yoga movement, and lo and behold, a letter from a lawyer appeared. But the court application was rejected.

Bayerischer Rundfunk had made no mistake. It just showed us that even now, members of the yoga movement can put pressure on us and threaten us with lawsuits to stop us from reporting and those who drop out of the movement, like Liz, from speaking out.

Liz: And then I shut up and I'm left alone with this huge load of shit that I've been through. And nothing happens and it actually repeats itself.

filmmaker: Liz is not only concerned with herself. She is also concerned about all those who still make it to these yoga schools.

Liz: The doors are wide open. They are spreading more and more. And more and more young people ... creep in.

So, in my opinion, this is unthinkable. It's impossible. And I see an urgent need for action to stop them.

filmmaker: But what exactly did Liz experience at this school, which is part of the German Academy for Traditional Yoga? The more time Liz and Christiane spend on voicemails, the more familiar they become with each other, the more we realize that what she's been through has hurt her deep down.

Liz: Well, since I don't go there anymore, my way is very difficult. In fact, I just need a safe space to cry, to rest, to have someone deprogram me and say, listen, this and this and this and this, what did you been planted in my mind for years is absolute bullshit, it's not the truth.

filmmaker: Liz already has one such person trying to help her. She goes to therapy. But she actually needs a lot more help. Help in all areas of life.

Liz: And I need someone to tell me every day that someone is there for me all the time, to help me get out of these damn movies. But I can't, because I'm busy and I need money to pay my rent, to pay my bills, to have something to eat. I haven't had money for food for a long time. I have been hungry for a long time. And it's a continuing miracle that I'm still alive and that I survived all this shit.

filmmaker: It's perhaps a small miracle that Liz hasn't returned to her yoga movement, as many others do who have left sectarian groups. They return to their group because they simply have too much difficulty finding their way in their new life, because they do not have a social network, a job or institutions to turn to.

filmmaker: But then, after all the voicemails between Liz and Christiane, the moment finally comes. Liz trusts us and wants us to meet again. In person.

Of course, we want to learn more about this yoga movement and talk to as many people as possible about their experiences. So we contact a large number of practitioners. We look for them in affected person forums, through social media groups, through reports from other media, all over the world.

Christiane Hawranek: What's really amazing is how many locations they have around the world. And I think there's a very, very large number especially in Europe.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Spain...

Christiane Hawranek: France, Italy, Hungary. Great Britain, Iceland, Scandinavia, in Oslo, in Stockholm.

Even in Athens.

filmmaker: And, moreover, in almost every country the movement has a different name and is organized independently.

What they all have in common is that they are based on the same teaching and use the same course materials.

Christiane Hawranek: Well, they decided not to follow the McDonalds strategy, where you have the same name everywhere in the world, but to call yourself something different everywhere. And of course, that's what makes it so difficult to know that in the end it all comes together.

filmmakers: We spend weeks scouring the yoga school's websites and videos. We talk to former followers from Finland, Romania and Germany.

Women who don't know each other but whose yoga school experiences sound very similar.

We are trying to better understand their stories. We ask them all if they still have documents. For example, some send us their secret didactic materials, invoices, "Bivolaru meditation cards" or plane tickets to Paris.

The others have nothing left but their memories and nightmares.

And then, while doing background research and sifting through sources, we suddenly receive an email from Bucharest.

The email is from Mihai Rapcea, the person I wrote to. He knows Bivolaru

personally, was his lawyer and wants to meet with us.

This was Holy Guru, the second episode of Seelenfänger, Toxic Tantra.

You can find all the episodes in the ARD audio library. If you like Seelenfänger, please subscribe, write a comment and give us some stars. This will help other people find this podcast.

If you want to leave a cult yourself or help others to do so, we have a list of counseling centers and offers of help for you. I've included the link in the show notes. There you will also find additional information about this episode.

episode 3

ARD - Seelenfänger Podcast – Toxic Tantra

24.04.2024

3. State of Shakti

<https://www.ardaudiothek.de/episode/seelenfaenger/toxic-tantra-shakti-state-3/bayern-2/13338351/>

filmmaker (Katya Petersen): A park somewhere in Germany in June 2023. My colleague Christiane Hawranek has a meeting here with Liz. Liz is currently struggling to leave the yoga school. But now she wants to meet again in person after weeks of voicemails. In some of the messages, Liz was very angry.

For example, she asks: Liz: How is it possible that a school like this is opened in Germany, in the center of Berlin, and no one does anything about it? To me it's a question mark: what the hell is wrong here?

filmmakers: Not only in Berlin, but also in Munich, Dresden and Hamburg. In 2024, the German Traditional Yoga Academy will have offices in nine cities. Where does Liz's anger come from? Christiane hopes to find out today.

Like last time, Liz has the red blanket with her. He lays it out on the grass again.

They both sit on the shore of a lake.

But something changed this time. Here are two people who know each other. And Liz smiles at Christiane. Unlike the last time they met, she seems genuinely anxious to talk to someone about her experiences at school. On her yellow hoodie it says in big letters: "Voilà la réalité" - "Here comes the reality!" It's a statement.

Liz: I'd be more interested in giving you more information. And I brought you the book.

Christiane: Great.

director: Liz takes out a book and puts it on the blanket: "The secret tantric path of love to happiness and fulfillment in a couple relationship".

Gregorian Bivolaru wrote it. I've heard that this pink book is sort of the bible of the yoga movement, and Christiane can look into it later. For now, Liz wants to finally tell her story. From the very beginning.

Liz: At university it was complete anonymity. There was an atmosphere of know-it-all, competition and pressure to perform.

filmmaker: Liz tells us that she moved to another city after finishing high school, away from family, away from friends.

Liz: But there was also an atmosphere of loneliness. There was no community at the university I was at. After the wonderful phase of childhood, there was more and more coldness and pressure for performance and competition, too little balanced with warmth, with joy of life, with community. And there was no better alternative.

Somehow, there was no one around me who was really interested in me.

filmmaker: But then a yoga school appeared in the neighborhood. Here, in a branch of the German Traditional Yoga Academy, Liz met people who welcomed her with open arms. People who would listen to her and talk to about her feelings. When Liz tells this to Christiane, she goes into ecstasy.

He says that there was finally a warmth, that she had the feeling that she could find real friends here, and that she thought she was doing real yoga for the first time.

Traditional, original yoga.

Liz: It all seems very innocent and very interesting and makes you want to dig

deeper.

filmmaker: Liz tells us that she really wanted to be initiated into these secrets that so many people at the yoga school have been talking about since the beginning. She wanted to learn the magic formulas of how to become more successful, more efficient, more attractive, better.

Liz: I studied it properly. I've taken it seriously a thousand times. And I was one hundred percent involved and so excited.

authors: Two folders full of teaching materials in English. In between, there were always images of yoga exercises, but also of women with large breasts or couples in various tantric positions. She had piles of such sheets lying around the house, on the desk, on the floor, on the bed and did not catch the dust. No, Liz flipped through them, page by page. She highlighted the issues and discussed them with the practitioners at the school. For weeks, months, three years. That's about how long Liz was at yoga school.

Liz: I'm finally here. It is like a door to a very durable house. It doesn't disappear, so it will take you home.

filmmaker: This new home will absorb Liz. It will take her to a world full of wonders, angels and secrets. There she will do yoga and tantra rituals. She will divide people into divine and demonic, believe in angels and cross herself for her guru. But then she feels like her new home is done with her. She lands hard on the ground of reality. Voilà la reality.

This is Soul Catcher, Season 4, Toxic Tantra. A podcast made by Christiane Hawranek and myself, Katja Paysen-Petersen.

Episode 3, Shakti-State.

filmmaker: Liz sits in front of Christiane, in the candle position. She says that comes from yoga.

She practices it even now, in June 2023, up to four hours a day.

Liz: Doing yoga has become an anchor for me and because doing yoga is also good for my body. It's a way of moving that's unique and it's a way of getting in touch with myself that I haven't experienced in other sports.

filmmaker: Yoga is about the only good thing left from school, says Liz. She now takes Christiane back to a time when she was already deeply immersed in the world of school thought, after a few months at the German Traditional Yoga Academy. Her alarm clock always went off very early every morning.

Liz: I tried 3am for a while. It has a specific name, but I can't remember it.

(Brahma Muhurta, n.trans.) filmmaker: Between 3 and 4 in the morning, that's what the Dalai Lama and others do. The Dalai Lama also crept into the teachings of the school, which is made up of elements of Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Catholicism, all on all levels.

So Liz woke up at 3 a.m. every day for a while.

Liz: There is a certain time when consciousness is at its highest on Earth and when everything is at its most still, which is perfect for meditation.

filmmaker: Liz tells us how she used to sit on the floor in a yoga position. Now, here in the park, she is transported back to that moment. Close your eyes, inhale and exhale. Just like then.

Liz: You always first consecrate the day. So you would always do a prayer meditation, where you would focus on your heart 21 times and say, "Lord, have mercy on me and bless me!" to get blessings for the day, so to speak, and divine protection against all evil, negative energies around you. Then you say a prayer to

the archangels three times, like this: "Dear holy Archangel Michael..." director: Christiane sees Liz standing and praying like this. She realizes how much this prayer must have entered her blood, and how much her thoughts were centered on this teaching. That was the first thing she thought of when she woke up.

Liz: It's always very much about protection, protection, protection. Protection from the evil world, which is full of demons and negative energies. They all follow you and affect you all day through other people and everything else.

filmmaker: Liz says her time at yoga school was immediately characterized by fear. She was always told that there were demons in people and in the works created by people: in movies, in music, in the world of fashion. On the Internet, on a page belonging to the Romanian yoga school MISA, we find an essay on this topic that describes how bad certain television series are for children, because they promote, quote, violence, stupidity and homosexuality, for example The Simpsons, Spongebob or Family Guy. It is also said that Lady Gaga made a pact with the devil and that fashion magazines like Elle or Vogue are filled with evil to the point of saturation.

Liz: If anyone doubts, wavers, or expresses displeasure, they are silenced to their faces. She is talked down to, she is invalidated, she is immediately seen as a weakness. They make you do it, do it, do it, do it. It is only your ego, it is only your mind that opposes the process of transformation. It will be worth it, this is your test now, this is your divine test.

producer: "The divine test, the spiritual test". Again, terms we already know from research. Liz tells us that at one point, her entire life consisted of such tests, and yoga students stimulated each other. For example, they fasted to cleanse their bodies and souls, but to the extreme.

Liz: If you're too thin, it can be dangerous to eat only grains. I also found it too dangerous for me at one point because I became very thin during this yoga experience. I also did a 3 day water fast once. There are also much more extreme programs where you don't eat or drink anything.

filmmaker: Liz describes that it felt like playing a game. If she kept up with the post, she moved on to the next level, a step up to enlightenment. If she couldn't keep up, the mission failed. Even today, she feels guilty when she eats pizza.

Liz: We were like kung fu students all the time, pushing and challenging each other. When you always wake up so early and go to bed so late and do these things excessively and then fast and so on, it's bad for your psyche. Then you just go "boom!" and you went Being carried around like this makes you even more manipulable.

filmmaker: Liz felt like the yoga teachers were even able to tell her what to think and what not to think at any given time. Cursing, for example, is demonic, so Liz banished that from her thoughts.

Liz: Everything has an energetic effect. You must try to keep the frequency as positive as possible and think as pure and positive as possible. Preferably all the time, 24 hours a day, even overnight. You are physically captured, conditioned and mentally and emotionally captured.

Christiane Hawranek: What about sleep?

Liz: Sleep is seen as negative, Tamas (inertia, n.trans.). So I was always very tense when I was sleeping, because you are most vulnerable to all the negative energies around you when you are sleeping. That is why you should always wake up half asleep and always be half awake.

filmmaker: Not only sleep is controlled, but also sex life.

Liz: You can't even just lay down and fall asleep, cuddled up. You should always do at least 2 hours of yoga after sex, otherwise something really bad will happen. They say it's a liberating sexuality but at the same time it becomes totally compulsive again because it makes you feel so dirty all the time.

I just had sex and now I really need to do yoga. It becomes more and more narrow and strict.

It becomes like a cell: to be fair, to think and to do good. Anything else is not good. This makes her very unfree again and leads to tension again.

filmmaker: Liz says she felt constant pressure for years to show no weakness, to follow all the guidelines. Playing the perfect game.

Liz: I was totally in this mindset that all the other people were sleeping. The word "sleeping sheep" is also used, so derogatory. It was just them and us.

Christiane Hawranek: You once said "elite".

Liz: We are the chosen ones, the chosen ones, and you are the ones in a satanic sleep.

Always looking down on you: "And you, poor lost soul!" Filmmaker: Liz laughs at all these things. She says it's good for her, it brings her some relief. She talks about how she sent videos to a friend from her old life before school to open her eyes. Conspiracy theories, from the Illuminati to Bill Gates out to screw us all. And she also conveys to her friend what Gregorian Bivolaru preaches. For example, that homosexuality is a sin, a mistake, a disease that can be cured.

Liz: She was totally horrified and told me it was something homophobic. This totally confused me because I couldn't see it yet. I was so blinded by all this yoga and all this ethics and stuff. And I knew nothing about all this. I had no idea. And I was asking myself: "What, are you stupid?". So, I didn't know.

filmmaker: Now, here on her red fleece blanket in the park, Liz can't believe how petrified she was back then.

Liz: And it looked damn right! To take on these very bad views of the world, when I had never been like that before, and then suddenly see that now I had become like that too, that was very bad for me.

producer: Experts in sects call this differentiation from others an "alarm signal": "We have divine knowledge, everyone else is deluded".

There are several such warning signs in Liz's story.

The rules Liz has subjected herself to - even down to sleep deprivation, estrangement from old friends and family - are all red flags. So if you ever have to deal with something like this, be careful.

Christiane talks to Liz about another feature of cults.

Christiane Hawranek: Is it actually proselytizing as well? So I also had to...

Liz: One hundred percent. It was like a boot camp, a training camp to become a missionary. Our angelic fight against evil and our training camp for the evil world.

filmmaker: Although Liz has now finished school, the nightmare is not over for her. Even now, in June 2023, the rules are still in effect.

Liz: It was like a straitjacket that I sort of trained in. And gradually I come out of it and allow myself more and more to lie down, sleep more, eat when I want, what I want.

Right now I am freeing my thinking, because I have censored my thinking a lot.

filmmaker: Liz told Christiane her story for two hours, and Christiane wants to give her time to catch her breath.

Christiane Hawranek: How are you feeling right now? Are you hungry, thirsty?

Liz: I'm thirsty.

Christiane Hawranek: Thirsty?

Liz: Yes.

Christiane Hawranek: Well, I have a Bionade with me, if that's what you like. I haven't opened it yet, you're welcome.

Liz: With pleasure.

Christiane Hawranek: And I have two more croissants.

Filmmaker: Liz widens her eyes. She eats his croissant and drinks Bionade with gusto. For Liz, it's a luxury she can't afford. A few minutes later, a guy collecting bottles walks by. He wants to take the bottle from her, but Liz keeps it and says, "No, I need it!" As long as she's been in the yoga movement, she's been keeping herself afloat with odd jobs.

Liz: I'm a bit shocked myself of my ideas. I've accepted a lot of them, I still believe a lot of them. Sometimes I'm scared of myself and I have to reprogram myself somehow accomplishing things: "Reprogramming" is an appropriate keyword, because the German Academy of Traditional Yoga, says Liz, is also about reprogramming women, and that brings us to the pink book that Liz put it on the blanket at the very beginning: "The secret tantric path of love to happiness and fulfillment in the relationship of a couple". Author: Gregorian Bivolaru.

Liz now initiates Christiane into this sacred book.

Liz: Yes, look, you can see such beautiful photos here!

filmmaker: Christiane sees black-and-white photographs in which a lot of naked people appear. Couples having tantric sex with each other in seemingly artistic positions. A woman lying on the floor. A rose is stuck between her buttocks. Curious blonde meditating in wave yoga pose, naked. And again and again photos of women with very large breasts.

Liz: The perfect picture, isn't it? Big breasts. You can do certain magical, occult yoga postures to make your breasts very big.

filmmaker: Liz tells us she's been in certain women-only groups where they did exactly these exercises to make their breasts bigger, to suppress their periods, and to be generally sexy. Liz says they learned to be perfect mistresses.

Liz: To awaken the feminine goddess within you, who is truly so connected to everything, who is omnipotent, who is very wise, and who can initiate all men, sexually or just in terms of the wisdom of life. This high expectation is placed on women. It is called the permanent state of Shakti, for it has a certain magical, sensual, sexual, attractive, savory state, so to speak.

The word "savory" is also used very often, savory.

filmmaker: Liz feels that sexual training takes place in these groups. Why all this? For whom are women transformed into sexual figures? For themselves, for their tantric partner, or for someone else entirely?

Liz pulls out several photos and places them on the blanket. And here is Gregorian Bivolaru again. In one photo she is looking straight into the camera, in the other he is hugging someone, her eyes are closed and she is smiling.

Liz: There are pictures like this of gurus. They should always meditate on their guru.

Christiane Hawranek: There was once a report where the official statement was that they distanced themselves from the guru whose photo you showed me.

Liz: When was that?

Christiane Hawranek: A few years ago, not long ago.

Liz: When I was there, from 2018 to around 2022, there was talk of the guru Gregorian Bivolaru, and ashram students were writing him letters asking for advice and life advice. And they always said "Grieg says", so always with his affectionate diminutive: "Grieg says, Grieg says, Grieg says, Grieg says, Grieg says", always

"Grieg, Grieg, Grieg, Grieg, Grieg, Grieg". It was always about him.

filmmaker: Currently, DATY writes on its website that some of its instructors and students have chosen Gregorian Bivolaru as their spiritual master, but that, however, this is the free decision of each individual.

Are women trained to be sexy for Bivolaru? Does he have his perfect girlfriends modeled in these groups, just the way he wants them, with big breasts and other very special features?

I've talked to 20 dropouts and many of them have this assumption. Some of the women have been to so-called guru Grieg themselves and know the groups that Liz told us about.

But they also say it's not just about Grieg. Some go further and suspect that there is a whole business behind the school, a sex business.

People who wish to remain anonymous tell us how schoolgirls masturbated live, naked in front of the video camera, on sex sites, on the Internet. One of the interviewees says she did it herself. Others tell us about strip clubs in Japan, Austria and Bucharest. Strip clubs where schoolgirls are said to have bar danced in nothing but bikinis.

One of the women interviewed says that she did it herself, in a club called Lucky Love in Bucharest.

Almost every dropout I talked to knew about it. Some have only heard of it, others have been there but cannot prove it. No wonder, because they weren't allowed to take pictures in the strip club, and there are no payrolls either, because the women say they did everything on a voluntary basis or for little pay. How can we confirm or at least support this suspicion without any evidence?

There is only one way: we must go and see with our own eyes.

We have to go to a strip club in Romania, in the country where the first school of the international ATMAN yoga movement is located. The place where it all began. So let's go.

"Bucharestians, dear guests, please keep your seat belts fastened until the belt signals are turned off. If you want to adjust your watch to local time, it's now 10:00 PM." Bucharest greets us at night, with massive neon signs of casinos and nightclubs and a taxi ride, without seat belts in the back seats. It's the start of a business journey so bizarre, adventurous and scary that Christiane and I will probably be talking about it for years to come. The next morning, we're standing in a park again, and someone else is there.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: I read in the travel guide that Bucharest is the Paris of the East. Is this true?

Anca: In the interwar period, it really was the Paris of the East. Everyone spoke French.

producer: She is Anca. She just came to pick us up from the hotel and is part of our team here in Romania.

She will translate for us and will be a real blessing to us on this trip. Anca is tough.

Christiane Hawranek: Of course we need you to translate because we are now on our way to the trial course.

filmmaker: Today there is an introductory lecture on the courses at MISA. Another trial lesson for us. But we want to go, because we want to know what makes the yoga movement work here in its home country and if the classes here are different from those in Germany. We're going undercover. Anca registered us and talked to the teacher. The course is in Romanian. We do not speak Romanian. Will we be discovered?

Anca: We wanted to discuss with you, what we say, why we participate.

Christiane Hawranek: Well, I would say that we are just interested and that we know a little bit of Romanian. But I don't even know how to say "Good morning" in Romanian!

Anca: "Hello!" Christiane Hawranek: We go in and say "Hello". My plan would be for us to remain silent.

filmmaker: So we go in without a microphone, we keep our mouths shut, we pretend we understand everything, we hope we won't be found out and nobody will get mad at us for it.

Christiane Hawranek: What is our safe word?

Filmmaker: Oh, yes, because the whole thing might be a bit complicated for us: keywords, undercover operation, sex work, Bivolaru on the Interpol list.

Anca: Suggest.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Our bosses told us to use a safe word.

Anca: It got cold.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Yes. It got cold.

filmmaker: So if we're ever in a situation where one of us feels uncomfortable, scared, threatened, say the safe word and then we stop.

Christiane Hawranek: So "It got cold!" is our safe word and "Hello" means "good day".

Anca: Good.

filmmaker: On the way to school we see a bit of the city. Apart from a few neat houses, we see a lot of prefabricated buildings with crumbling plaster. People begging, stray dogs and ...

Anca: Romania is the country with the most cat owners.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Amazing!

Anca: There are a lot of cats.

filmmaker: Anca loves cats. She even has food for them and knows where most of them sleep, because she has lived here in Bucharest for a long time. She knows about MISA, the Romanian yoga movement, since the 90s. Back then, mostly students attended Bivolaru's classes in the huge halls, says Anca.

Christiane Hawranek: One minute, we have a little more and we're done.

Anca: Here it is.

director: 30 years after the big debut, here we are, in front of the yoga school in Bucharest. At first we are surprised, because here nothing looks like yoga at all, but rather like a company headquarters. Several white vans are parked in the yard in front of the deep green, bungalow-like building. It looks a bit dilapidated and dirty. Time to turn off the mic and hide it. We go inside.

Three hours later, while I was at the yoga school, we sit in the taxi and turn on the microphone again.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Okay, we're recording.

Filmmaker: We're already on our way to the next meeting, so we're talking about what we just experienced here while we're driving.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: I just got out of yoga class, let's call it that.

filmmaker: It wasn't actually a traditional yoga class, but a lecture where MISA, as the Movement is called here, introduced itself.

About 40 rickety wooden chairs were lined up, but almost all of them were empty. Including ourselves, there were nine in all. That's why the woman who gave the lecture kept looking directly at us, and we had to pretend we understood everything for 3 hours.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: It was entirely in Romanian.

Christiane Hawranek: Exactly, but you understood some things, the essential ones.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: I understood once that "we are not a sect, with us you can decide and if you want to be vegetarian or eat meat, you don't care about any of that, it's freedom, here is freedom", possible ?

Anca: Yes, she also said that the press always wrote bad things about them, about MISA and so on, and that they were called a sect. But it is not true that they are a sect. Everyone has total freedom to believe what they want.

Freedom of religion, freedom of choice and so on.

Christiane Hawranek: And then she took the devices out of the box.

filmmakers: The devices, exactly. At one point, the yoga teacher walks over to a small wooden table stuck to the wall. On it is a black cloth. The teacher picks it up and reveals two small black devices with a metal gear on the top. At the bottom, there are two rows of numbers from 1 to 24 with bright red, yellow and green dots.

Anca whispers to Christiane that these are measuring devices.

Anca: The aura measurement was a surprise and a gift for us.

makers: Aura measuring devices, just for us. Special Secret Information. We later learn that the devices are called Egely Wheels and are not an invention of MISA, but have been used in the esoteric scene since 1990.

Christiane Hawranek: Then I whispered to you that I would try if you didn't have to talk.

Anca: Exactly. And you just hold your hands next to this device and it measures your aura with values from 1 to 24.

Filmmaker: So Christiane and Anca sit at this table, they hold their hands next to the device and their aura is measured. One is the lowest value, 24 the highest.

Christiane Hawranek: Now guess how much I had?

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Three.

Christiane Hawranek: Zero. Unfortunately, I have no energy at all because I haven't been relaxed enough.

Anca: Yes, that's what the woman said.

Christiane Hawranek: The woman said I wasn't relaxed enough.

Filmmaker: Of course, a German journalist, driven by demonic forces.

Anca: I had a good aura.

Christiane Hawranek: Five, right?

Anca: Yes, I almost had five, yes.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Congratulations.

Anca: Thank you.

filmmaker: We're still laughing now, here in the taxi, because we find this whole thing too bizarre.

At one point, the yoga teacher turns on the TV and starts a video that looks like amateur footage. The registration date, 2007, is written in yellow in the lower right.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: And suddenly Gregorian Bivolaru appeared on TV.

Christiane Hawranek: Yes.

filmmaker: No one mentions his name, but Anca, Christiane and I recognize him immediately.

Gregorian Bivolaru appears in the school video. They walk around a table. On it is a large compass.

Anca: They say that through yoga you can develop magnetic waves so strong that you can even move a compass needle.

filmmaker: Bivolaru does exactly that. He doesn't touch the compass, he just waves

his hands around it and moves the needle as if by magic.

Anca: It was a comment from the hall. Someone in the back said he was a very famous yogi. And she said he's more than known, he's famous.

filmmaker: Famous and infamous. It seems that Bivolaru still plays a central role in the school. So was this the yoga lecture or rather the magic show?

We continue by taxi to our next meeting. The man we are about to meet is not a magician, but a lawyer. And he worked for Gregorian Bivolaru. That's all we know about him.

He was a supporter of MISA but left and now warns against the school on his blog.

We want to speak to him because we think that as Bivolaru's lawyer he may have been very involved in the MISA system and we hope to get information from him.

That's what we specifically want to do when we talk to him.

We want to know the truth about allegations of sex work in the yoga movement.

Christiane Hawranek: There it is.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: It is him.

Christiane Hawranek: Yes.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Katja, hello.

Christiane Hawranek: Hello, Christiane Hawranek.

Mihai Rapcea: I apologize for the delay.

Christiane Hawranek: No problem.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: No problem.

Mihai Rapcea: Okay, so what is the plan? What do you want to do?

Christiane Hawranek: Should we sit down somewhere?

Mihai Rapcea: Yes, of course.

director: Mihai Rapcea is around 50 years old. He is bald and wears a red t-shirt that is a bit tight on his stomach. He smiles a lot, seems gentle and likeable. Its appearance does not match at all how it is described online. On a MISA website, he is also referred to as the devil's advocate. He and the yoga movement did not part on good terms. We have to keep this in mind. Everyone has an agenda, and what Mihai Rapcea is going to tell us is his version. And it started with him in the 90s, as a young student and supporter of MISA in Bucharest.

Mihai Rapcea: At first I practiced with Grieg, I was in his group. He was a very, very ordinary man, you know, he was... even now, he kept this appearance of a man who... a very decent man, with the same clothes, not something extravagant or expensive.

filmmaker: Rapcea was Bivolaru's student and tells us what experiences he had with this modest, common-looking, reserved man, who became a kind of guru.

Mihai Rapcea: He had an extraordinary knowledge about yoga and all that, so that's why his authority was growing more and more.

Filmmaker: Says that Bivolaru was considered an authority on yoga due to his vast knowledge.

And there was something else about him, says Rapcea, something supernatural. He gives us an example.

Mihai Rapcea: Grieg told a woman not to leave the house for 5 days, because she risks having an accident, dying. After 4 days she went out and was hit by a car.

filmmaker: Bivolaru once advised a woman not to leave the house for 5 days because she is in danger of having an accident or dying. However, the woman only stayed at home for 4 days. She was then hit by a car, says Rapcea.

Mihai Rapcea: These kind of events, you know, have a big impact around because people know each other, look, these guys have complete trust in Grieg, his advice is

quite correct!

filmmaker: His followers have unconditionally trusted him ever since. Rapcea still believes this today, but he still broke up with him.

Mihai Rapcea: Because of this kind of sex and money and power.

Filmmaker: Sex, Money and Power. Rapcea says that in his opinion, at one point, it was all about turning his peaceful hippie yoga movement into a business. And that this was the beginning of the end.

Mihai Rapcea: There was a moment in the year 2000 when a lot of online video chat activities started in Romania.

filmmaker: Rapcea explains that it all started at the beginning of 2000, when video chats with sexual content took off in Romania. Users paid money to watch women undress on

camera or masturbate themselves. Rapcea says that those from MISA also became aware of these video chats. Why not start something like this yourself? Big internet business with yoga school women.

Rapcea knows this for a reason. He helped establish all of them, he says.

Mihai Rapcea: It was my first year as a lawyer and a lot of colleagues were asking me for help to start a business like this with video chat and everyone was looking for girls, beautiful girls, to expose online, you know...

filmmakers : Rapcea was only a first-year lawyer and had been in MISA for a long time. That's why they came to him with their business idea, he explains. They needed his help to start the company and he helped them. But first, he tells us, he had to ask Bivolaru's permission.

Mihai Rapcea: Someone told him, you know, "we can use women from the ashrams to do this" and they asked for his approval.

filmmaker: Could they use women from ashrams for video chats? What would Grieg have said?

Mihai Rapcea: I think he thought that "yes, yes, it's good if you bring money, you know, let them do that because they can also become more feminine, expressing themselves and maybe they will attract more people", something of this kind.

filmmaker: "Yes, do this. Women bring money, perfect their own femininity. And that's crucial."

Mihai Rapcea: Because they don't just have sex, normal sex, it's sacred sex, so it's a sacred sexuality because your intention is good and so on and so there's a theory behind it, you know, it's not simple manipulation.

filmmaker: They don't have normal sex, no, they have sacred sex. And now, with the help of video chats, this can be conveyed to all those who do not know. It is proselytizing.

"And this justification is offered to women", says Rapcea. As an offering, a gift, completely voluntary. Become a sex goddess with sex chats and spread the good message all over the world.

Mihai Rapcea: It's not something spectacular because I was thinking "yes, we do Karma yoga on construction sites" and so on.

Filmmaker: Everything is done under the name of karma yoga. Do good to elevate yourself spiritually.

Voluntary work for karma is nothing unusual in the yoga scene. Rapcea says he has worked on construction sites, delivered school supplies and translated yoga books.

Liz, who I met in the park in Germany, says she cleaned the yoga school without getting paid.

Nathalie says she translated videos for the yoga school in Bucharest. Well, some of

the ATMAN women also did video sex chats for karma yoga. And later, says Rapcea, they also did striptease or tantra massages.

Mihai Rapcea: And they made a lot of money, but with this kind of clubs, more money came with karma yoga.

filmmaker: We ask Rapcea if he has anything in writing for us, documents, receipts, but he disappoints us.

Mihai Rapcea: At the last meeting with them, I returned everything and said: "I don't want anything to do with you!" filmmaker: He says he gave them everything back. He wanted nothing more to do with them.

But his account matches what dropouts have told us, speaking anonymously.

It started with video chats and later switched to striptease. So he takes stock of Bivolaru himself, he says. He writes him a letter and asks him to make a change.

Mihai Rapcea: I told him "please, stop, please, do something, change something here to separate the activities, let MISA do yoga and don't use the people from this for the other"... you know, and he never answered that.

director: Bivolaru never answers him, and that annoys Rapcea. Of course, no one is forced to masturbate live on the Internet, but he calls it manipulation.

"That's how it was with the women in Lucky Love," he says.

Lucky Love, that's why we're here. This is the strip club here in Bucharest where ATMAN women are supposedly sent to strip. Rapcea has memories from the club's beginnings.

Mihai Rapcea: We can do something very different from other bars, you know, something more sophisticated and like this, to do something spiritual in this area.

director: "They wanted to create a strip club with a spiritual touch. But that was a long time ago," says Rapcea, adding that he had not been there for years.

Mihai Rapcea: I think Lucky Love hasn't been working these days for several years, it's closed.

Christiane Hawranek: But the club is still open!

Mihai Rapcea: I don't know, I didn't enter. It is open?

Katja Paysen-Petersen: Yes, yes, I think so!

filmmaker: At least that's what we read on the internet. The site is still active. We will show him.

Anca: Okay, so Lucky Love which still... see here, for example, the team...

Rapcea: Yes, yes...

filmmaker: We look at photos of half-naked women, at the bar and see what it has to offer the club: tantric massages and striptease. We also have research papers on the strip club with us. Rapcea indicates the name of a woman.

Mihai Rapcea: I remember the name, I know it.

Anca: Yes, luck...

Mihai Rapcea: ... Because she is...

Anca: "Luck" means "luck" in Romanian...

Mihai Rapcea: ... She is from my generation.

filmmaker: Rapcea knows the woman from before, since she was at MISA.

Anca: She runs it, yes, the empowered person.

Filmmaker: Well, obviously Lucky Love is still active and there seems to still be a connection with MISA.

And now we want to see if there are women from the yoga school dancing on the pole. So, a few hours later, we are sitting on some bar stools, outside, in the outer area of a pub in the center of Bucharest.

We relax for Lucky Love, the strip club we are going to.

Katja Paysen-Petersen: What time is it now? It's half past eleven. I arrived just in time.

Are you excited, Christiane?

Christiane Hawranek: Oh, we'll take a look now. We will go there and then we will have to see if we can actually talk to them. I can imagine the strippers probably have their own group, I don't think you can get close to them unless you slip them bills. I think it's difficult to engage them in a conversation.

filmmaker: But we have to talk to the strippers. We want to know if they really come from yoga schools that are part of ATMAN. We have money with us, banknotes. And then, at one o'clock in the morning, we head to Lucky Love. The strip club is off the beaten track. The further we walk, the quieter, emptier and darker the streets become.

"Lucky Love" is written in pink letters above the door of a beige building. The symbol of love, a heart.

And below, Gentleman's Nightclub. We are three women and to get in we have to ring the bell.

Christiane and I look at each other. We hesitate. We're about to start discussing whether or not we should really call, but then Anca comes and rings the doorbell, as if it's perfectly normal for three women to go to a strip club for gentlemen at night.

episode 4

ARD – Seelenfänger (Soul Catcher – Soul Hunter)

Podcast – Toxic Tantra

24.04.2024

4. Lucky Love

<https://www.ardaudiothek.de/episode/seelenfaenger/toxic-tantra-lucky-love-4/bayern-2/13338327/>

filmmaker: Romania in October 2023, at midnight, on a dimly lit street in Bucharest. Anca, Christiane and I just left the Lucky Love strip club.

discussion between journalists: - What time is it?

- Well, it's almost half past two.

filmmaker: We lived a lot in this club and we have to reveal everything now, talk on the microphone, because we couldn't record inside. So, from the beginning. Let's jump back about an hour and a half.

Anca rings the bell of the men's nightclub and the door opens. Loud music reverberates towards us.

Anca, the Romanian language translator: I entered and the first person I met was the man on the stairs, the bartender.

Filmmaker: What did he actually say? Because he spoke to us in Romanian first.

Anca: I asked him if women are also allowed inside and he said, yes, of course, women are allowed inside.

Filmmaker: And then a stripper appeared from around the corner. Long brown hair, curvy figure, pale complexion, light blue strappy corset. She looks like she's only in her 20s and walks right up to us in super high heels. We call her Ella here on the podcast, but that's not her real name. Ella looks at us with a mixture of total surprise and pure joy.

Discussion between female journalists: - She immediately came to dance and was delighted that now women are also coming.

- "Yes!" she said. And she's from Sweden. "Yes, girls!" filmmaker: Finally some women here in the club. Inside me, there is total relief. Looks like we're welcome here. I look around and my heart rate picks up again. Apart from us and the staff, the hall is deserted.

Anca, Christiane and I are the first customers of the evening. We sit down on a long, black leather couch.

Me next to Christiane, Anca across from us. Ella asks us what we want to drink and the bartender gets down to business.

One by one, all three strippers on duty today sit around us.

discussion between female journalists: There is no question of reaching their height, they were above us. They weren't standing right above us, but close!

filmmaker: Ella starts talking right away and tells us that she's from Sweden, that she's been here in Bucharest for a while and that she hasn't been doing striptease for too long. "So please understand if everything doesn't work out perfectly for now!" Okay, interesting.

discussion between journalists: These beautiful young women are Swedish and Danish. What brings them here?

filmmaker: Why are the two of them doing this here, in a strip club in Romania? That's unusual.

We suspect they might be yoga students from Scandinavia. There are some yoga schools that belong to ATMAN.

In Denmark they also organize training courses for yoga and Tantra teachers. Scandinavian schools are designed to cater specifically to young people, including something like erotic dance classes.

So, while we are talking with the Dane and the Swede in the club, the Romanian goes to a white platform in the center of the room and starts dancing on the bar, just for us. I pretend to be excited about it, but I'm just thinking about how we can get women to tell us why they're here. As discreetly as possible. I mean, we can't ask them directly like that, I think to myself.

But then Christiane does just that with Ella. I laugh about it now, but in the club, when Christiane started asking her so directly, I was just scared. They shouldn't have, now we're about to be discovered and they'll bring their bodyguards.

Christiane: No, you know something, the story was my idea, like a part of me is looking for something.

filmmaker: Christiane tells the strippers that there's a desire in her, that she's searching, and that's what attracts her.

The women begin to tell Christiane about themselves.

This is Soul Catcher, Season 4, Toxic Tantra. A podcast made by Christiane Havranek and me, Katja Peisen-Petersen.
Episode 4, Lucky Love.

Filmmaker: We remind you, we are in this strip club because we want to find out if any women from ATMAN's yoga schools work here. Overall, our goal on this trip here in Romania, the country where MISA was founded, is to find out what all the women who come here to the yoga school from many different countries in Europe and around the world are doing.

Are they really only delving into Tantra here or is there something else behind it?

Now, at three o'clock in the morning, on the way back from the strip club to the hotel, Anca and I can finally ask Christiane what exactly Ella and the Danes told her, because we both heard only fragments.

So Christiane tells us about Ella.

Christiane: She's 28 years old, she's from Sweden, and I talked to her a bit more and more intensively. It's interesting that they started doing yoga on their own, that they do yoga and a lot of tantra yoga as well, and that they are totally convinced of this lifestyle. And they said it's just totally a lifestyle and they do this seven hours a day. Seven hours of yoga a day. This immediately makes us think of the dropouts we talked to, Liz and Nathalie. They too did yoga for hours. But there is also something else.

Christiane: The word spirituality came up, they talked about spirituality, they talked about healing.

Filmmaker: Once again, I mentally ticked off the clues, signs that there are obvious connections to the yoga movement.

Christiane: So, I went on to talk about secrecy as well. Yes, time and time again, when I asked something, it was secret.

producer: Boom, boom, boom. Tick, tick, tick. One reference to yoga movement follows another.

Christiane: There was another thought-provoking moment, I have to remember that they said "Express your femininity", because that's exactly the wording. That's what

they said in the beginning, why they like to do it the concrete way so much.

filmmaker: Bivolaru's former lawyer also told us about this theory from the yoga school in the previous episode, that women who go to striptease were told that they can develop their femininity in this process.

Christiane: And then she wanted to start telling me how she came to do that. And then she said: "I started talking to you as if you were my sister, this happened to me." But actually it works like this: "you have to treat me to a drink and only then can you talk to me and then there's a show." Yes, I bought her a drink.

director: Christiane bought Ella a piña colada. Suddenly, we have Ella's bare breasts to the right and left of the tips of our noses. And she gives me and Christiane a private dance. All we want to do is talk to her, but that doesn't work anymore, because suddenly new guests arrive in the club. Three men. And Ella moves on.

Christiane: Unfortunately, she doesn't say anything more and goes to the other table, to the two men who are still sitting there. They lured them in, then left with them and almost certainly massaged them.

producer: Massages. Women also do tantric massages at Lucky Love.

Christiane: Then we also asked, where did you learn this?

filmmaker: One of the three women told us about a kind of massage school, the Esoteric Massage Academy. I remembered the name. Then I left the club. We have a feeling that this is the end for us, that we won't get any more information.

A strip club with a spiritual twist. A club where strippers unleash their femininity and convey the concept of sacred sexuality to others, the ignorant.

Christiane: I have to say I felt very uncomfortable there. You probably could tell by looking at me.

But it was so amazing to see this young Swedish woman who was so happy that women were finally coming to her to see her show, who was so warm and open and said, "Yeah, I just started practicing I haven't done all that for a long time." And she was very happy that someone was watching and applauding her. At the same time, I was thinking to myself: "Girl, what are you doing?"

filmmaker: After our trip to the club, we have the feeling that we managed to confirm our suspicions.

We believe these women here are part of the yoga movement. We were able to tick off a lot of clues. And I found another clue. This Esoteric Massage Academy, the one where one of the women said she learned to massage, this academy has staff overlaps with MISA. So, we have a lot of clues, but we have no real proof, no evidence. None of the women in the club said clearly that "I was sent to striptease by the yoga movement".

The spokeswoman of the Romanian yoga school MISA will later tell us that it is possible for individual yoga students to striptease, work on erotic video chats or give tantric massages.

If so, then they do it voluntarily and as private individuals. This is not managed by MISA.

The spokeswoman cannot imagine women doing all this as karma yoga, that is, expressing their femininity in the service of the yoga school, she says in the interview. And he's never heard of Esoteric Massage Academy.

Strange, we think, because MISA is currently following this Academy on Instagram.

The women at the Academy did not respond to our request. I also wrote to the Lucky Love club and their response sounds a bit hokey. They give us a simple answer to our questions about MISA's ties to striptease and massages performed as karma yoga: "NO!" With capital letters.

The next morning, Christiane, Anca and I sit together again, this time in Anca's car. She's driving us out of town, or at least she's trying to.

Anca: It's terrible, it's chaos here. I can't turn back. To be honest, I have no idea how we're going to get out of here.

filmmaker: We want to get out of Bucharest and go to the Black Sea. We are traveling to Costinești, a seaside resort in Romania. It is not only frequented by regular tourists during the summer, but is also a place of pilgrimage for the ATMAN yoga movement. Thousands of yogis from different countries have been gathering there for decades, because the famous international esoteric yoga summer camp, organized by the Romanian yoga school MISA, takes place for almost five weeks during the summer. With lectures, events and messages from Gregorian Bivolaru played through loudspeakers and with a special gathering for which they seem to have a cult. The yogis meet outside at the edge of the village in a large field and hold their spiral meditation there. Thousands of people form a huge spiral holding hands and meditate.

On the way to Costinești, we document again how to participate in the yoga camp. Two 10-15 centimeter photos, front and half-profile, in a two-piece swimsuit for ladies, in which the body can be seen in its entirety, must be submitted for registration. These must be recent, taken after June 1, 2023. A negative HIV test and a negative syphilis test are also prerequisites for participation. This yoga camp - it's clear - is not a normal yoga camp.

And Costinesti is a special place, practically the heart of the yoga movement.

We want to see it with our own eyes, even if it is autumn now and the big crowds have passed. We want to talk to people and we want to see a house where things are supposedly happening that are top secret even within the yoga movement. They are not part of the official summer camp program.

In this house, selected women are said to meet to be taught how to be sexy. At least Nathalie thinks so, because she was one of these chosen women.

Nathalie: So, this house is in Costinești, where this summer camp takes place, and Viluta is a relatively big house with lots of small rooms, where all the girls sleep together on one mattress.

filmmaker: Nathalie is a school dropout who discovered the yoga movement during a trip to India and now lives in Thailand. She leads us to this Villa, as there is no official information about it. She recorded a video for us using Google Street View. We're watching it here in the car.

Nathalie: This is Viluta, this building. The building next to it, right here, is also the school's. They call it the Lotus Hotel.

producer: Hotel Viluța. There are several buildings on a single street in Costinești, where yogis come and go, especially in the summer. And Nathalie is about to take us into this world. But until we get there, in just under three hours by car, we still have time to tell you something. Something that is somehow related to Viluța and which is basically a kind of precursor to it. These are special groups, only for women. These are called Shakti groups, after the Indian goddess. They also exist in Germany. We know this because one of them included Liz, the school dropout who had a date with Christiane in the park.

Liz: It's kind of preparatory steps. These were the bikini photos that I took and then sent via stick and where I've been. And the next step after that was the invitations to the Shakti group.

maker: Liz tells us through an audio message about this group, which she attended at a school of the German Academy of Traditional Yoga.

Liz: I was in lingerie, sensual, and there were a lot of exercises that had a lot to do with the lingams. I mean penises, so to speak, because there's Shiva energy around us and we're supposed to imagine that it's a lingam, that it's a penis and then we actually did these supposed mudras and yoga positions where it was about moving the hips, of sensual movements, of having a certain attitude. And it was always about opening up to the male Shiva energy and sexual training.

filmmaker: Although she is convinced by these teachings, Liz does not feel at ease within the group.

This attitude of being sexy is not for her. She has a strange feeling about it.

Liz: Yes, and in the Shakti group there is also a feeling that "if I don't do it now, if I question it, if I oppose it, if I think it's stupid, if I don't come here dressed in sexy clothes, then I'm doing something wrong. Then I'm a stinker, I'm full of ego, I expose myself to risk, I'm spoiled. So there was a double message: "You can be who you are. Maybe you would do that, but if you don't do what we say, then you're nothing."

filmmaker: Liz feels like she can no longer trust her own intuition. This reminds us of Nathalie. And she told us that at some point she didn't trust herself anymore. Red flag, sect characteristic. Liz hopes that all of these courses will help her progress on the tantric path to enlightenment. That's why he keeps going, despite the negative feeling, and even takes a very special dance class...

Liz: ...Where women are taught how to dance sensually and sexy on the bar, for example, and where you're also taught how to turn someone on with a very hot and sexy dance, for example, when they're sitting on a chair.

filmmaker: But at some point Liz also wonders: why all this? And for whom should she become a perfect Shakti? She remembers a meeting to which only those who had been attending the yoga school for some time were invited. And that brings us back to Gregorian Bivolaru.

Liz: I always felt like I was conditioned to idealize him in the most extreme way possible.

You spent about half an hour watching a slideshow of photos of Grieg, with obviously idealized music, and you were told that he channels your energies, so to speak, which constantly purifies you and transforms your energy system and accompanies you and prepares you on your way. But it was just mental manipulation, training you like a dog. And that's so disgusting.

Filmmaker: Naturally, we want to find out what the German Academy for Traditional Yoga has to say about all this and send them an interview request. However, we are initially delayed by a few

weeks. The President writes to us that he has used this time to meditate and apologizes for the delay.

So, it still takes some time to decide whether an interview will take place or not.

Costinesti, on the Romanian coast of the Black Sea. It won't take long and we'll get there. And we are delighted to be in this place, because these sexual trainings are said to have taken place here, in Viluța, in the house we are moving to now. But everything should have been even more special, even more secret, with the cream of the cream of women in the yoga movement, with women like Nathalie.

Nathalie: The first time I actually heard about Viluta was in India. Then my teacher said: "Oh, yes, and the villa." It's so cool because all the girls go there and then we're all together." filmmaker: Nathalie learns that the villa can only be visited by special invitation and only after several years.

But then everything happens very quickly.

We told you about it in episode 2. Nathalie came to Bucharest in 2020 and that's

when she realized that her boyfriend, Jasper, had someone else besides her: a girl from school. Instead of breaking up, Nathalie tried to overcome her jealousy, as her yoga teachers had advised. But it didn't work so at some point Nathalie wrote a letter to Gregorian Bivolaru. He asked her for advice and added a photo of her. Nathalie now tells us that her guru answered her rather quickly, also by letter or at least she is told that the letter came from him. And it's not handed to her personally, but read to her by her yoga teacher.

Nathalie: He praised me so much, how great I was and that I had such great qualities, that I was so pretty and that I had such a beautiful smile. It was still a great delight.

filmmaker: Nathalie would later call this "The Love Bombing Letter." Nathalie: ...That I can still achieve so much and that now I've basically opened up to him, that this is the best thing ever.

filmmaker: It's amazing, Nathalie thinks. Her guru says how beautiful she is. He sends her gifts: a dress, body oils, herbal mixtures, and she receives an invitation to Viluță.

Nathalie: Wow, that's amazing, because the first year I was there, I was allowed to stay at Viluță for the whole month of August. Normally you only stay for two weeks and I was there all August. That was really special.

filmmaker: A very special honor for Nathalie. She has one more thing to do. She must take a sacred oath - she says - and promise a teacher at MISA that she will never reveal anything that happens in Viluță. Nathalie does this. She swears on the Bible.

Nathalie: So you don't get any information about what it's about. At the beginning, when you're invited, you get a letter with your invitation in it, which you have to take with you to Viluță, and then in this letter are all these testimonials from other women saying "oh, it was so great and it was the best thing I've ever done" and things like that.

filmmaker: Nathalie just says that this Fairy basically changes your life, but she has no idea what's happening to it.

Today he knows that, obviously, the women are prepared in Viluță for the meeting with their guru, Gregorian Bivolaru.

We'll get there soon, we'll get to Costinesti soon. We take another look at the video that Nathalie recorded for us. The school is organizing an event in this ashram today, a yoga camp that will last for a few days. This is what we read on the MISA website from Romania. But we won't participate, we didn't send any bikini pictures in advance. That would have been a prerequisite, I repeat Christiane: You can see the sea flashing in the distance. And not a soul on the streets.

filmmaker: The tourists have already left at this time. Christiane looked out the car window at the vast wasteland of this place.

Christiane: I wonder if it shows that we are actually journalists. That's why I start to feel very tense and agitated. Because you have to wonder what are these three women doing in this desolate place?

filmmaker: Now I'm getting agitated too. Will we be discovered today?

Christiane: So now we turn down a side street. We should get closer and closer to Viluță. I'll hold the mic down now. We still have 130 meters to go. Okay, here it is.

producer: Nathalie's little villa. We drive right by Viluță. But before we look closer, we have to keep walking because in front of us, on the other side of the road, someone is walking. A young, red-haired woman dragging a green suitcase behind her.

Christiane: This woman must have been in the camp. And it was already there, on

the left side I just passed it. There are a lot of cars here. So are they still there? I'm still there, that's right.

Realist: Yogis are in their camp. We go further out of the small street and park around the corner. The small street is now completely empty in front of us.

As we pass the ashram room, we hear the "music of the spheres" through the open windows. Yogis probably meditate. A few minutes later, we are right in front of Viluța. The villa is a drab, older building with flowery white curtains like grandma's on the windows.

But we don't see much. The entire building is surrounded by a green, opaque metal fence.

On a sign it says "Private property" in Romanian. "We do not offer accommodation". There is no plate or buzzer, just a code you have to enter. The villa seems deserted. All windows are closed.

For Nathalie it was different. When she arrived, it's summer and the MISA summer camp is in full swing. Costinești is full of ATMAN followers and a lot is happening in Viluța as well. Nathalie stands in front of this beige building with her luggage and watches the women go in and out. She introduces herself and shows her invitation.

Nathalie: I was excited because I didn't know what was going to happen, because no one told me what we were actually doing. So, yes, of course I was excited.

filmmaker: He had heard somewhere before that everything at Viluța was free and relaxed. But instead of that Woodstock feeling, Nathalie expects to do boring administrative work.

Nathalie: You get there and then you have to do hours of paperwork.

filmmaker: She is handed a lot of forms, just like in an office.

Nathalie: There you have to read the rules three times, you have to copy the rules.

producer: I mean the rules of the house that apply in Viluța.

Nathalie: "You are not allowed to sleep outside. If you don't want to sleep in Viluța for a night, you have to let us know, you have to attend all the classes." Yeah, so it's super strict somehow.

maker: Nathalie fills out other forms. Name, place of residence, current year of yoga and Tantra and so on. And then it begins. Someone pulls out a video camera and points it at Nathalie. She has to photograph herself so that her guru can read her aura. Nathalie already knows this, but this time it's more extreme, she tells us.

Nathalie: I was completely naked. So before it was always like that, with bikinis for camps and stuff, there you were completely naked. And it was also the first time I was filmed naked.

filmmaker: Nathalie really wants to get into this exclusive villa that so many people talk so positively about at school. But taking nude pictures for it? Allow her to be filmed naked?

Nathalie takes a deep breath and lets herself be photographed. But after that, she is still not allowed to enter the villa. First he must answer one last question. Answer correctly!

Nathalie: Do you want to meet the guru? So. The only answer that's okay is YES, of course. Because if you check "NO", you will be kicked out immediately.

Christiane: Is that what you were told?

Nathalie: No, we weren't told that, but it happened to a girl who was there with me. And that was exactly the point.

Then there is the question: "How do you feel when you think about meeting your guru?" Things like this are specified: "so excited, happy, ecstatic", something like that. And exactly, only positive things. You can't tick anything negative. Then, you

also need to specify the periods of time in which you would have time to meet with him.

filmmaker: That's how Nathalie remembers it. She doesn't really want to meet the guru, this old man with whom she still has no real connection, even though she has already meditated on him and written him a letter. She just doesn't feel any connection with him, but she wants to get into this little house. And then?

Nathalie: Well, I checked "YES".

filmmaker: She just does it. She says she wants to meet Bivolaru.

Nathalie: And then I put these periods very, very late. So next year, sometime next year.

Filmmaker: Now Nathalie can enter.

Nathalie: It was really cool in itself because of course it was all the girls you knew a little bit before and then they were all together.

filmmaker: With Nathalie, there were around 40 women there, from different countries. That's what she says. Many Romanians, some of them people Nathalie already knows from Bucharest. But also German, Scandinavian, English, Australian. Each room is a bedroom with mattresses.

Nathalie: Of course, we didn't have to pay for food or anything, so everything was completely free. It wasn't like we were locked inside.

filmmaker: So the women go to the sea every day, on their beach, further away from the usual tourist beach. Rougher, more natural. But in the morning, noon and afternoon they have to go back to the camp and listen to lectures.

Nathalie: Of course it was interesting to learn all these things. It was very much for women too.

filmmaker: In these lectures, women learn, for example, how to better control their jealousy or how to suppress their periods. "It's bad", teaches Nathalie, "because it consumes your energy".

Nathalie: That's where we had to evolve as women, basically become as much like Mahashakti as possible, and Mahashakti is basically God in female form. And that's what we had to learn.

filmmaker: That's why women get feedback on their performance at some point, on the nude photos and videos they took to get into the Villa, at first.

Nathalie: You will then receive a personal message from Bivolaru in response to your videos and photos.

filmmaker: Nathalie is in her room right now. She knocks on the door and someone hands her a note. It is supposed to be from Gregorian Bivolaru himself.

Christiane: What did Grieg say about your photo or video?

Nathalie: I don't think it was anything negative or anything like that, so I think it turned out really well. But after that it was the same with many other girls who were around me, and they got these answers, like "yes, if we had a belly, it's not possible". So they were told that "you need to do more yoga and do more exercises on your chakra here in the belly so that it harmonizes again". They were also told along the lines of "yes, you need to get your breasts enlarged". We were also told that we could do this by somehow working on them energetically and so on.

director: "Okay, thanks for the tip!" Nathalie: What is so normal? That's just the thing. So no one takes it as an insult or anything, but it's like "yeah, of course I have to get rid of my belly, of course I have to". Doubt it and say, "Man, what kind of person is he to tell me that my breasts need to get bigger?" Such a thing would have been completely forbidden.

filmmaker: In Vîlcută, women are supposed to be given skills to transform their bodies

and shown how to be perfect mistresses, as Nathalie tells us. They watch porn together and prepare for the great tantric ritual that is said to lead them to enlightenment.

Yes, according to the doctrine, women can also make love to each other, so they say. Men don't make love to each other, but women do. For Nathalie, it all seems like a boot camp to become a sex goddess.

MISA's press officer will tell us later in the interview that she doesn't know some things or can't comment on them.

The oath to the Bible, the rules of the house, the nude filming. Maybe the individuals have had certain experiences, but then "please let them prove it!".

She denies that Bivolaru receives photos from women. And although the MISA lessons are also about eroticism, they are against porn. They call them "erotic films", which are also shown in the camp, but supposedly without any sexual activity on the part of the camp participants.

It's getting dark here in Costinești in the fall of 2023. However, Anca, Christiane and I still really want to talk to the locals. We want to know how they perceive the yogis, who have been organizing summer camps here for decades, and that's why we go to the center of Costinesti village.

Because there is nothing going on in the village streets, we almost want to turn back. But then we see only one lighted building, a small supermarket. The supermarket is actually a small grocery store. The sidewalk in front of him is brightly lit. Three men are sitting outside drinking alcohol.

Two middle-aged and one in his 70s, he's already pretty robust. While Christiane and I feel slightly out of place here, Anca runs straight to the dog. A huge creature is lying in the middle of the sidewalk in front of the grocery store. Anca, our animal lover, bends down to him, pet him, caress him and hugs him.

And we earn the respect of the villagers. Good, Anca earns their respect. The man holding the dog looks just as huge and massive to us. He is the owner of the grocery store. He sits behind his cash register and looks with interest at our blue BR microphone.

The man in the supermarket: I have my family in Deutschland, in Deggendorf, I don't speak German.

Christiane: So we're doing research on yoga and yoga...

Supermarket Man: Yoga?

Christiane: Yes, yoga camp here. What do you think about this?

Supermarket man: Please stop!

Christiane: Good!

Supermarket Man: Please stop if you want to know the truth!

Christiane: Good!

producer: He asks us to turn off the microphone. The supermarket owner is watching very carefully. Only when he sees that there is no red light left on him does he start talking to us. He introduces himself as Luca.

We talk with him about MISA, about Bivolaru, about the yoga camp. What we learn from Luca is quite interesting. So interesting that we really regret not being allowed to record on the microphone.

But we have Anca. At one point, Anca speaks to Luca in Romanian from the sidelines. And then Luca suddenly says "Ok, turn the microphone on again!"

Supermarket man: We can have a good conversation.

filmmaker: Later, Anca told us that she provoked Luca a little. Such a powerful man with such a big dog, how could he be afraid to talk about the people at the yoga

school?

Supermarket Man: I have no problem telling the truth. And don't scare me at MISA.

Christiane: How do you feel when there is a yoga camp here? How many people are there and where do they come from?

Supermarket man: Oh, like... There's 10,000, 15,000 people here. They come from Romania and other places in the world.

Christiane: And what do you think of this guru, Bivolaru?

director: Luca seems to think for a moment what to say. Then he tells us that yoga itself is a good thing.

Supermarket man: I think yoga in the world is good. It is about mind, soul, God. But here he's just...

achiever: But the sex thing is going too far for him.

Christiane: How do you know that?

The man from the supermarket: Ladies, because I have lived here for 42 years and I know everything that has touched this land of Costinești and I live in front of the camp about... 100 meters?

Supermarket man: 25 years ago, I pay. They go in, follow them.

Christiane: What did you see there?

The man in the supermarket: Porn.

Christiane: Porn?

Supermarket man: Yes, a girl with five boys, ten boys.

Christiane: Were they watching porn or filming porn?

Supermarket Man: No!...

Filmmaker: It's getting difficult with English here. Luca first wants to describe him to us by making signs with his hands. Then Anca helps us.

Supermarket man: What do you call this, it's a screen... what do you call this on the floor, like a desk...

Christiane: They had a huge TV or something, a screen?

The man in the supermarket: A floor like that where they used to do shows.

Anca: Oh, like a stage!

Supermarket Man: Stage, exactly!

Christiane: There was a stage at the back.

The man in the supermarket: They put a woman on stage there and she was having sex with five guys, ten guys. Or two girls and ten guys. And they are watching, everyone is watching. They masturbate.

filmmaker: That's how Luca remembers it, everything happened 25 years ago. We can't prove it, but it sounds familiar.

Dropouts told us similar stories.

filmmaker: We're going home, back to our hotel in Bucharest. Later that night, we let the experiences from Costinești sink in. We get to thinking. We always burst out laughing.

But what we are actually talking about here, about the many women who first just did yoga and then at some point they found themselves in this little house, what they lived about, is no laughing matter.

Nathalie, for example. She had the impression that most of the women in this villa were ready for only one thing: a meeting with Gregorian Bivolaru. Just like her.

Remember the form Nathalie had to fill out at the Villa in the beginning before she was allowed to actually enter?

Nathalie: Do you want to meet the guru? The only good answer is "YES", of course.

filmmaker: When Nathalie's time in Viluța comes to an end, there is a meeting with

the women who organize Viluța. And suddenly they start talking about what it's like to meet your spiritual master.

Nathalie: That everything is really wonderful and that it is super important for our spiritual evolution.

And ... then they also talked about their experiences, of course. In the sense that it was absolutely... a change in their lives.

Filmmaker: Nathalie listens to all this. Before Viluța, in fact, he didn't like Bivolaru. But now something has changed.

Even the few weeks at Viluța did not change the problems between her and Jasper. The other woman is still there. And Nathalie's jealousy is there, despite all the yoga and meditation.

Nathalie has the feeling that nothing she tries helps her.

Nathalie: It was very, very bad. It was very difficult for me.

filmmaker: Nathalie is desperate. She desperately wants to save her relationship. But how? What else can she do?

Nathalie searches and searches and searches and searches for a solution, a saving grace.

And when she hears that such an encounter with Bivolaru can apparently change everything in her life, that such an encounter can turn her into a tantric enlightened person, Nathalie thinks that maybe everything will be all right after all .

Nathalie: Because I was so sick of the world that I said I'm going there now. I will do it now.

And then I went there and said "Yeah, I know I specified next year, but I want to go now!"

episode 5

ARD – Seelenfänger (Soul Catcher – Hunter of Souls) Podcast – Toxic Tantra
24.04.2024

5. Trapped

<https://www.ardaudiothek.de/episode/seelenfaenger/toxic-tantra-in-der-falle-5/bayern-2/13338329/>

producer: Costinești, in Romania, in September 2021. After about a month, Nathalie leaves Viluță.

Along with several other young women, she gets into a silver van.

Nathalie: Those who lead us are some people from school, some Romanians. And for us it was actually a couple, a guy and his girlfriend. Exactly, they were perfectly normal people or something, they were nice.

producer: The mood is good, everyone is very excited. Will they really meet their guru?

And if so, what will happen?

Nathalie: The fact that a few other girls also went with me, so there was a bit of a group dynamic, I think that helped me not to completely panic.

filmmaker: Nathalie and the other women know only this: they will go to Paris or somewhere nearby.

Gregorian Bivolaru is there because, they believe, the authorities are unfairly pursuing him.

They drove the car for two days, without much breaks, and then, around noon, they stopped somewhere near Paris, in the parking lot of an ordinary supermarket.

Nathalie gets down, lies down and watches as people push their carts around. But then the next driver comes towards them. Women have to get in the car with him.

Nathalie: We then got into another car with another Romanian, who drove us. And then he gave us sunglasses and hats, handed them out and said, "Yeah, put them all on now!" Christiane: And how did he justify that?

Nathalie: Not at all. That's the thing, the fact that nothing is ever justified, you just give up on this idea that you can ask for explanations. So I didn't question anything anymore.

So we never got to the point where we were like, "But why are we doing this now?" Because you just learned that if you ask questions at the beginning, the answer is always that "Yes, you will learn later. You will learn later. You still don't understand!" And then at some point you just get out of this thing that you can ask questions and then you just accept.

Filmmaker: So Nathalie puts on her sunglasses and fisherman's hat and they hit the road.

About 15 years earlier, another woman experienced almost exactly the same thing. The one by car, with parking somewhere near Paris. We call her Eva. You don't know her yet, but we met her early in our research in Munich. She is the listener of the "Soul Hunter" show in episode 1, who gave us the hint about yoga. At first she hesitated for a while, but then she said: "Okay, I'll let you interview me, but you have to change my voice." That's what I did, with AI.

Eva: I left the Munich Olympic Center for Paris by car. When I arrived in Paris, I was walked from car to car like cargo in a parking lot.

filmmakers: Eva and Nathalie don't know each other. They never spoke to each

other, but their stories about Paris are very similar.

Eva: From that moment on, I had to wear a hat and a blindfold so I wouldn't know where I was going.

And most of all, I had to walk away from the man I trusted and get into another car with a stranger.

director: And yet, Eva obeys.

Eva: That was a very bad moment for me. I felt totally exposed and helpless.

filmmaker: Eva and Nathalie still don't know exactly where the driver took them. Of course, they couldn't see anything.

Nathalie: Then we went to this first house, where he always waits for all the girls who go to him.

Eva: I realized something else. It's a huge house, it has a pool and four-poster beds, everything is silk, we're all in really fluffy robes, it's a hippie vibe and everyone has flowers in their hair. I remember arriving in the underground car park. It was a classic Parisian high-rise complex. I took the elevator up to a very high floor, and by the way, I had to hand in my cell phone at the entrance.

filmmaker: So no one forces them to leave their mobile phones in the apartment, but they are advised to do so, because electrical devices are harmful due to vibrations.

Nathalie: So they're all wrapped in aluminum foil so they can't be tracked or whatever. I have no idea.

filmmakers: Nathalie and Eva hand over their wallets and passports.

Eva: I remember this moment in the apartment. In fact, I wanted to go right back. I was thinking something like "No, it's not possible. I have to get out of here right now!" I really think I had something like a panic attack.

This is Soul Catcher. Toxic Tantra - A podcast by Christiane Havranek and myself, Katja Peisen-Petersen.

Episode 5. Trapped:

When Eva enters the apartment, she sees a lot of nudity.

Eva: It was full of women. Lots of women.

filmmaker: They are waiting for a meeting with their guru.

Eva: Well, it was dark everywhere, I remember that. They had covered a lot of the windows so no one could see in, I definitely remember that. Not in all directions, but in the directions that one could see in from other houses. He would only see half-naked women all the time, right?

Nathalie: There are a few girls, I think about five or six, who live there permanently. They organize everything.

Eva: A little older, who didn't even pay attention to us. I guess they didn't always think it was too great to be there with all these young women.

Christiane: All the women are old.

Eva: All women. The men just looked after us and carried us to and fro.

filmmaker: These women are the helpers. They cook, do the announcements and also show them around the apartment.

Eva draws the plan of the apartment for us.

Eva: Let's do this. As you enter, there was the kitchen and the large bedroom.

filmmaker: Eva's descriptions are similar to Nathalie's.

Eva: Then, a little further back, was the small bedroom.

Christiane: Maybe 75 square meters or something like that.

Eva: Yes, that's about it. And how many were there? We had to move the mattresses

against the walls once a day to make room and then put them down again.

Nathalie: There are usually about ten people who pass by, who just arrive, see it and then go home.

And then stay there. So here you are sleeping in a room with a few other girls.

Eva: So crowded with so many people and that was the weirdest thing. I could hardly breathe there. And it was so dirty and so disgusting and so crowded and everything else, but it was not at all spiritual and holy and beautiful and uplifting.

Nathalie: And then you just wait.

filmmaker: The waiting room for meeting her guru. But Bivolaru is not there. He lives in a completely different place. Only a handful of people know him. Women are brought to him individually or in small groups, but they do not know how long they have to wait for this moment.

Christiane: What did you do all day?

Nathalie: Yoga. So you do yoga or watch porn for hours. Any porno he chose where the women in the movie are said to have a very good shakti state somehow, just the way he likes it. And that's all we have to do for hours. All these movies we receive as gifts.

Eva: I remember a funny ritual I did. Well, one of them lay bare and we were only allowed to touch it. And then, I don't remember what the purpose of the whole act was, it was probably just to generate a sexual arousal so that you would then be turned on by the guru, I don't know. Let's put stuff on her or touch her with feathers and stuff like that. A bit of sexual teasing. It was like that.

filmmaker: To this day, Eva still wonders how the hell she got into that apartment. Her experiences happened about 15 years ago. Today she has a completely different life. She has a family and children. Until now, she has barely told anyone what happened then in Paris. It's obviously difficult for her.

Eva: I think to myself that I am an educated and intelligent woman. How could this happen to me?

How could I walk into something like this and be fooled by all of this? How stupid. And at the same time, I realize now how much manipulation was behind it, how they manipulate you.

Filmmaker: We will find out later from a psychotherapist how this can happen. But it is precisely this dynamic that Eva wants to warn people about, because others can be drawn in as she was. Especially young women. Likewise for her, it started innocuously, when she took yoga classes at the German Academy of Traditional Yoga, or DATY for short, in Munich. She was a 20-year-old student.

Eva: And this is a small promise, at least that's what I read from it, that you will practically experience a sacred sexuality, a divine one. A connection with the divine. So, through sexual intercourse, you manage to pass into a divine realm. And I found it extremely fascinating, because I was just an extreme seeker when it came to sexuality.

What I was really looking for was closeness, love and connection. And somehow I had the thought that maybe I could learn to connect and join them in this way. A kind of good, healthy, sacred sexuality.

filmmaker: And that's why Eva doesn't only do classical yoga, but soon she will also take a Tantra yoga course at DATY.

Eva: Everyone was completely happy, warm and fulfilled. That's what this yoga community is like. It's like a happy hippie family. Everyone loves each other, lots of physical contact, hugs, closeness. Of course we had something very hot.

filmmaker: We meet Eva in the evening, in the center of Munich. We sit on a blanket

on the banks of the Isar river, talk and Eva spontaneously shows us some yoga exercises she learned at school.

Eva: There is an exercise that is said to stimulate the sex chakra. Then I felt some things, I really felt that my sexual energy increased. Or I went to another yoga class and I wasn't feeling well. And then I did the Cobra pose, which opens your heart chakra, and I started to cry. And these are experiences that add up. And then of course I started to think that, look, what's happening is true.

maker: Eva is doing more and more yoga, more and more Tantra and learning about interesting rituals.

Eva: There are all these purification rituals, like what you should brush your teeth with and how you should rinse your stomach and so on. And I always thought, "Hey, sure, I'm going to swallow some water and then I'm going to do this weird spinning exercise and then I'm going to get all the water out again so my stomach is cleared."

Christiane: Wait, do you have to puke or what?

Eva: Of course, if I do this many times, I see it as vomiting, because it is a purification ritual.

And I thought I'd say to them, "Well, today, it's so unnatural, I find it extremely strange, to be honest." But then there's a small part of me that harbors the wish that maybe it's all true. Maybe there is a grain of truth and now don't be so cynical, let yourself be involved and maybe you will finally discover something that maybe will surprise you.

filmmaker: And so Eva is gradually drawn in. What attracts her most is the prospect of sexual fulfillment.

She even begins an affair with her Tantra teacher. It all starts harmlessly, but the teacher knows Gregorian Bivolaru, Grieg, personally. And at one point - Eva remembers - he tells her that he can arrange a meeting between her and Grieg.

Eva: When someone like this is the leader of a community and everyone adores him and is so revered, they think of a calm and wise Buddha. I thought I would meet a very wise man who I could ask anything and who could answer almost anything, all the questions I had.

Filmmaker: But before that, Eva has to take a picture of herself. She doesn't remember exactly, but she thinks she was naked or just in her underwear so that Grieg, as you already know, could read her aura.

Eva: And I said I won't send something like that to anyone. I think it's stupid, so I had a discussion in the yoga group with a few other girls. "No, we won't do that!" Then the yoga teachers laughed a little, there was really no need, it was something very serious. And at some point, probably a few weeks later, an offer was thrown into the room again. "Oh hell, why not?" What can happen, it doesn't matter. And then I said, "Yeah, well, let's try it, see if anything comes of it." filmmaker: So Eva gives her Tantra teacher a photo of her. It is assumed that he passes it on to Gregorian Bivolaru.

Eva: At one point, he gave me the good news that I had received an invitation. And I still remember the feeling, it was a total shock. And to be honest, I already had a vague idea of what was going to happen.

I thought: "Well, Tantra invitation, meeting with the guru, it's 100% about an initiation." filmmaker: Initiation, that word again. Eva tries to get more information about this encounter from her Tantra teacher.

Eva: Then his yogi and loving expression appears on his face: "You'll see, it's very beautiful. And there are so many young girls, it's so beautiful, you're all there and it's a beautiful community." maker: A referral to her guru via a Tantra teacher from the

German Academy of Traditional Yoga. That's how Eva remembers it. What does DATY say about this? We will ask for details.

But for now, let's go back to the apartment in Paris. Eva is still waiting to be allowed in to see her guru.

Eva: I was definitely scared, but at the same time I had this curiosity. And then there was also an obvious feeling: "You're here anyway. Go try it, now take a look, perhaps great enlightenment indeed awaits you.

Filmmaker: But Eva and later Nathalie will wait for days for this enlightenment. It's the other women's turn first.

Nathalie: That was very difficult for me. Because you arrive and then you tell them when you want to go home, and I had given a certain date which, of course, no one cared about afterwards. And then I was just there and I didn't know, because you have no control. When you can go home, when you can meet him, you just don't know. That's entirely his business. It was difficult because I was thinking, "What if I'm here forever and stuff like that?" Christiane: And how long did you wait until the visit?

Nathalie: Two weeks.

Eva: After two or three days, I said I can't stay that long. And then I think the invitation came the next day.

They must have told him there was someone there who had to leave now. So a note came and it basically had the following name on it.

Christiane: And how did you feel when you received the invitation?

Eva: Oh, God, I think at first it was "Oh, God!" And then there were small discussions: "What's going on there?" And she said something like "Exactly what you want." And I said, "Can I go over there and talk to him?" And she always said: "Yes, everything, everything you want. You will be fine there, everything will be fine. And only what you want will happen."

Nathalie: I was doing yoga again. And then a girl came and said: "Yes, now you are going to his house. You have to pack your things and everything." Eva: And then, when my invitation came, they said: "Now please go take a shower and shave." And I said: "Why should I take a shower? And how should I shave? I never shave!" Full shave, they were talking about a full shave. And I said: "No, I'm not doing that!" "Yes, simply out of respect for him." Me: "Yes, but why? He won't get to see me again. Why would I do it?" "Just do it. And yes, you're free to decide everything, but that's not really a bad thing." And then, somehow, another girl or two appeared: "Come on, do it! It's not that bad!" And then I really did. It seemed to me like a complete medical check-up. I found it totally scary.

filmmaker: Nathalie and Eva get into the van by two men, they say. Eva is alone, Nathalie is with other women. They are again blindfolded. Again, I don't know where they are taken.

Nathalie: I mean, it was. At first I was already in the car, I was exhausted, so scared, but then I said to myself that "No, I'm excited because he's my guru" and all that.

So now, when I think about it, when I look back, that's what I did. It was something like: "Ok, it's my guru, it's my guru, it's my guru, don't be afraid, don't be afraid!" Eva: "Oh my God, what has to happen, what is happening?"

filmmaker: At some point, the car stops. Judging by the smell and noise, Nathalie thinks they're in an underground parking lot.

Nathalie: And there we were taken out of the car, from the underground car park, and led up a staircase that goes up into the garden. And it was also there that I took the patch off my eye for the first time.

filmmaker: Nathalie is in the courtyard of an apartment complex. It seems that

Bivolaru lives here, in an apartment on the ground floor. Eva remembers another place. She describes it for us.

Eva: An apartment, it was a kind of courtyard, it was much less urban, it was a suburb. And then there was his front door, up a flight of steps.

Filmmaker: The two men who brought Nathalie here push each other in front of the front door. It is difficult to open. It is very narrow.

Nathalie: It's like that, you open the door a crack and then you have to sneak inside. And then you stand in that corridor, one behind the other, because there is no room.

Eva: Well, it was completely dark, I remember that.

filmmaker: One of the two Romanians knocks on the door of a room. It lasts for a few moments, then it opens.

And HE appears.

Eva: I remember how he opened the door for me, how he was standing there.

Christiane: And what is he wearing?

Eva: With a bathrobe.

Nathalie: Well, that always wears. His bathrobe. It's purple with all that stuff. Very extravagant.

Eva: So, when I saw him, I said to myself: "God, what an unattractive old man, I have to go there now too, he doesn't inspire me with an iota of wisdom or kindness!" He just greeted me, he had a smile on his face and I was so excited, and then I smiled a little.

Then I remember him opening his arms and saying something like, "Oh, what a beautiful smile, how you smile!" Nathalie: So he's as tall as me. Yeah, he's not that tall. He is also very old. That was another thing: I didn't expect him to look so old. He really is an old man.

Eva: "Ah, what a beautiful smile, you smile!" And I really thought at that moment: "Oh my God, if you were really a wise guru, you would know that I am not smiling with happiness now, rather I am smiling with fear. If you had some kind of plan or if you could read auras or something, you'd know that I just want to die right now because I'm so scared!" Nathalie: "Don't be afraid, don't be afraid, don't be afraid, like that!" That's what I thought when I saw him for the first time.

And also, "Ok, yes, he's my guru. He is my guru, yes!" Yes, it was very, very difficult. But, again, it's just this pressure that's instilled in you, like this is your guru and it's a mega-event. It changes your life here and now!" And then you interpret everything that happens to you through this filter:

"You know, this fear you feel is emotion. And it's so positive and so great," when actually your whole body is screaming, "What the hell are we doing?" Eva: Then I asked to come in and I got there. The next thing I thought was, "God, I'm here now. I don't know where I am, I don't have any money, I don't have a cell phone, I don't even know when these guys are coming back. How do I know when they will take me back? So, very obvious.

filmmaker: At this point, the women's memories differ slightly. While Eva stands before her guru and he examines her, in Nathalie's case, Bivolaru disappears with her into his bedroom. The men who brought her and the other two women continue down the corridor into another room. This is dark. There is a white blind in front of the window, so no one can see out and no one can see in, Nathalie recalls.

Nathalie: Our room, where the girls are, is completely covered. All around, I've never seen anything like it before. There are sheets of paper written all over the place with all kinds of rules. What we are allowed to do, how we are allowed to do, what we are not allowed to do and so on. It's very strict, so there's a lot going on.

We have to be very quiet about the bathroom, because we have to be very, very clean.

filmmaker: There is a triple bunk bed where women can sleep. They share the bathroom with Bivolaru, who has his room right next to it. I never see him go in there, but I see his hair in the sink.

Nathalie: So, she couldn't bear to see a single hair. If it was his hair, of course it wasn't a problem.

Our hair was not allowed. We weren't even allowed to wash our hair because, of course, I think the problem was that if something got clogged, you couldn't call a plumber.

film maker: One of the men who brought Nathalie here sits down at a folding table by the front door.

Several metal bars are attached, Nathalie recalls.

Nathalie: We definitely can't go out. And then your clothes will be taken away. They also have bathrobes and other things hanging there, but we don't have our clothes. And that's why I can't go out because I have nothing to wear. And even if we had said, "hey, I want to go", he wouldn't have said "ok, sure, we'll take you home now". It would have been a huge argument like "you have some demons, what's wrong with you and this is not possible!". So there is no problem at all.

filmmaker: For Nathalie there seems to be only one solution. She stays with the other women in her assigned room for hours, days. The food is delivered to them in plastic boxes, prepared by the women in the other apartment.

Nathalie: All four eat Romanian food, because that's what he likes. Vegetarian, of course.

The thing was, if something expired, we still had to eat. They were eating this expired food, even though I always said "I'm not going to do it". Because, you can not do it. The ones who ate this expired food were like, "wow, I'm just in such an amazing spiritual state and everything is so great because it's so charged with his energy" and so on.

And then you do it too and you delude yourself that what you are doing is good, so that you don't go crazy.

filmmaker: Because it is dark in her room, Nathalie loses track of time at one point.

Nathalie: There is no sunlight, right? It doesn't exist at all. You can't go outside, there's no sunlight, you stay in your room, you're quiet, and then you stay there. You do yoga, read something, sleep.

filmmaker: Nathalie wastes time for seven days. Then the door opens. Gregorian Bivolaru himself is standing there watching Nathalie.

Nathalie: He came in at one point and said, "Yes, you can get ready now."

filmmaker: Nathalie takes a shower, shaves and brushes her teeth. She follows the instructions on the many pieces of paper on the walls in her room. She is excited and waiting for her guru to call her.

Nathalie: But then he didn't come back for two days.

Christiane: What?

Nathalie: I thought it might be another hour before he comes back. Almost two days passed, in which he simply did not return. And then he came at a certain point, as if to say "yes, okay, let's start".

director: Nine days. That's how long Gregorian Bivolaru kept Nathalie waiting for Nathalie in this apartment.

That's how she remembers it. With Eva it was faster. She is led to him by herself and her turn comes immediately.

Eva: It was also amazing that I was given water to drink on the way. They gave me water and I drank a lot on the way.

Later, I perceived a strange light, as if I were a little drugged. That's how I felt when I was there. Then, I remember, I actually asked him if there was anything in this water that I drank from. And he laughed loudly, "what water did they give you to drink during the journey? No, no, everything is fine."

filmmaker: We don't know any more than Eva does if there really was something in the water or if it was just her agitation.

Nathalie: First he gave me a weird aphrodisiac thing, a drink that is definitely alcoholic, so there's no doubt that it has alcohol in it. Exactly, with some herbs and cinnamon, which is said to be an aphrodisiac. Yes, then I drank it and he took me back to his room.

Eva: Then we sat on the bed, I remember that. And then, I don't even know what the conversation was.

Then I told him, yes, I did in fact have questions, and then I told him about someone who was mentally unwell. And I had questions about it, so I thought he might have some wise answers. I even realized my mouth was dry, I was flustered, and I tried to keep talking and keep the conversation going, just to avoid what might have come next.

Nathalie: The way he interacts with us is like we're his girlfriends, like that. So he's not super aloof, but he's great, he makes jokes and stuff, he's very funny and laid back.

Eva: Then he said something if I... what did he say? Something like "if I wanted to experience spiritual expansion". And I immediately knew what that meant, and then I immediately said, very clearly, does this have to happen in order to progress spiritually? He knew what I meant by that.

He also showed me a passage like this from him to me, indicating that I actually already knew what I had to do here. And then he said something like, "Do you want to experience this?" Want to get involved? First, relax and surrender to it. Let's meditate together for now!"

episode 6

ARD – Seelenfänger (Soul Catcher – Soul Hunter) Podcast – Toxic Tantra
24.04.2024

6. Initiation

<https://www.ardaudiothek.de/episode/seelenfaenger/toxic-tantra-initiation-6/bayern-2/13338265/>

filmmaker: An apartment, somewhere near Paris, in Gregorian Bivolaru's bedroom. Nathalie and Eva sit cross-legged in front of their guru on his bed. Nathalie in 2021, Eva in 2007.

Eva remembers exactly how Bivolaru asked her this one question: Eva: "Would I like to experience spiritual expansion?" And I immediately knew what that meant, and then I asked very clearly: "Does this have to happen in order to progress spiritually?" director: Eva wants to say: "Does sex really have to happen now? With him?" She remembers that Bivolaru tried to convince her.

Eva: "Do you want to experiment? Want to get into it? Above all, relax and let go! For now, let us meditate together." filmmaker: And Nathalie remembers this situation.

Nathalie: This is when we basically ask God if the act is integrated. I didn't feel like I had a choice. I just knew that if I said "NO" now, he would have said, "What's wrong with you? Your demons and everything else and your ego" and blah blah blah. So I just didn't feel like I was safe and I could say "well, NO, the answer is NO!"

Eva: Then we sat facing each other, he took my hands and we meditated. And the strangest thing was that things happened again that I can't explain. There were indeed, clearly, some strange vibrations right then in the place. I noticed how a sexual desire was triggered, but I can't tell you what it was and how it happened. I do not know. Maybe because I thought it had to happen. Maybe there was something in the water after all.

I have no idea. Maybe my shallow breathing combined with the idea that it would happen then. I do not know.

Nathalie: I still remember the moment he took off his bathrobe. And I mean, he's just an old man.

And my reaction was that I realized that actually, wow, it's not working, but I pushed it aside because they were my demons, I couldn't listen to them.

Eva: Then, basically, it started with the transition to real intercourse. But then it started with all these chakra awakenings through intercourse. Yes, and that was the experience.

Filmmaker: Initiation is what the yoga movement calls an event that's supposed to change your life, but in reality it's really long-lasting sex with your guru.

This is Soul Catcher. Season 4, Toxic Tantra. A podcast by Christiane Havranek and me, Katja Peisen-Petersen.

Episode 6. The Initiation.

filmmaker: Nathalie and Eva both had sex with Gregorian Bivolaru, they say. Of course, we only know their accounts. We would have liked to hear Gregorian Bivolaru's version as well. We tried to contact him several times through his lawyer,

but neither he nor Bivolaru answered us.

Eva: I don't really want to tell you in detail what exactly happened, what happened and when.

Filmmaker: We won't go into details either, but we will tell you how Nathalie and Eva felt about this tantric sex with their guru.

These descriptions can be disturbing. If it gets too much for you, it's best to skip to the next episode. Let's begin.

{Details not present in the podcast: Bivolaru doesn't follow his own teachings. He manipulates his victims in many ways, also in paranormal ways, a bit like hypnotizing them. The girl first has to drink 2 litres of water to become more yin and receptive to him. They start with consecration of the ritual to God/Shiva/etc but the fact that many of his victims have bad experiences shows that the consecration is fake and God doesn't answer it. Then there is no proper foreplay, just lousy oral sex. Bivolaru hasn't been able to have a proper erection for a long time, still he manages to go through all the positions of the chakras for many hours. At the end of the ritual they pee in each other's mouth and swallow, you have to drink your own urine then for 24 hours. There should be 2 hours of yoga for sublimation after this, but this is not happening.}

Nathalie: The first time it took a long time. Nine or ten hours, something like that. So it was long. I also remember counting the hours saying, ok, one more hour, one more hour. Can you handle this? An hour, an hour, an hour.

Eva: Actually, I've lost track of time. I had absolutely no idea how long I was there. I think I was there for a very, very long time. Quite a few hours.

Christiane: Did you also get something to drink and eat there, for example?

Eva: No, no. Well, I don't know if it was potable water, probably. Just the water I took in the car.

Nathalie: He's sleeping in the meantime. There are three positions in which he lies on his back. And yes, he just sleeps there. But right there, that's exactly it, but they (those from MISA, n.trans.) tell a kind of story again, like "yes, he's somewhere in the astral realm, so it's basically another reality", in that talk about him helping you somehow and so on. There is a justification for absolutely everything.

Eva: I remember, but he fell asleep a few times. And the strange thing is, of course, it's no wonder if you sleep with young women from morning to night.

Nathalie: Go on, go on, go on. I didn't know if I was there or somewhere else. So that was the thing.

Then, I remember crying a lot during that time. He told me afterwards: "Yes, you see, you have some problems here and there. And everything is better now, because yes, you just took them out and it's better now."

Of course it wasn't better.

Christiane: And now why do you think you had to cry?

Nathalie: Because I didn't listen to my body at all. I wasn't in my body at all, you know, so that was kind of the feeling I had. So I was always in my head, like, "Okay, you have to do this now, you have to do this now, you have to do this now." And I wasn't connected at all to what was going on there.

"Okay, now we just practice, just practice, just practice".

Eva: By the end, I was thinking something was wrong, something was wrong.

Somehow I couldn't get out of it either. Apparently I was breathing so shallow that my hands and face were cramping, and I was cramping with the whole thing. And I

remember thinking, "God, what's going on?" And then: "Don't worry, it's your Kundalini energy!" It's amazing, something happens that I've never experienced before during intercourse. My body tenses up, my face, therefore tenses up and "Yes, I have blocked my Kundalini energy, clearly!" Nathalie: After nine or ten hours, I let it be known that I was tired and he said, "Yeah, okay." Eva: I think at some point I made it clear that I was very exhausted and I would like to go back.

Nathalie: So when I came back to the room, I was very close to falling. I was shaking all over and completely exhausted. Then I slept a little and ate a little and then, a few hours later, I was allowed to go.

filmmaker: Nathalie is led back to the first apartment, the one with the other women still awaiting their initiation. She says she is led into a room.

Nathalie: First, you give your testimony, so you are filmed again, where you tell your experiences, how it was.

Then I remember exactly that I made something up, because I felt that I did not actually experience anything great. When you're being filmed, there's a girl in the room with you who's been there for a long time and all that. And then, of course, you don't sit there and say: "Yeah, that was really shit."

filmmaker: Eva is also brought back to the first apartment. But unlike Nathalie, no videos are made of her afterwards. Instead, she is asked by the other women in the apartment.

Eva: I remember when I came back, the girls had an excited reaction, one of them clung to me, smelled me, ah, Justina Larkin and wanted to know everything exactly, I was totally overwhelmed: "How can you how can you all want to do that? What is actually happening? You are all wonderful, beautiful and intelligent young women!"

filmmaker: Eva spends the next night there.

Eva: The next day I was told I could come back again.

filmmaker: That is, to visit Gregorian Bivolaru again.

Eva: And I mean it's not rare.

filmmaker: Nathalie is also asked if she wants to meet her guru again two days later. Nathalie says yes, so she is taken to him again. Again, she is asked to put foil over her eyes, again given an aphrodisiac drink, she says. And with Bivolaru, everything is exactly the same as before, in exactly the same positions.

That's what Nathalie tells us. When everything is over, Bivolaru says goodbye to her:

Nathalie: "You'll be back in a few months".

producer: Nathalie nods. The second visit to Bivolaru will not be the last. Later, her guru will show her another side of him and it will be quite disturbing for her.

But first, Nathalie signs a document that the people on the scene present. In it, she confirms that everything she did at Bivolaru was voluntary and without coercion. This document will give us work.

After that, Nathalie flies back to Romania, to her yoga school, to her friend Jasper. She doesn't tell him what happened in Paris, because everything is strictly secret.

Eva decides not to return to Bivolaru after their first meeting. She leaves the apartment and is taken to the train station to catch the train to Munich.

Eva: You can't just go home and swallow this, something's wrong.

filmmaker: Eva meditates for two days on what she experienced in Paris.

Eva: And then I quickly realized that I didn't want to continue, no and no. I said to myself: I'm leaving!

filmmaker: When Eva and I are sitting on the banks of the Isar River and she has finished speaking, silence falls between us for a while. What she obviously experienced seems so unreal here in Munich on the banks of the Isar.

Eva is our age. Like us, she has a family. She has a normal job. She laughs at the same things we laugh at. It could have been us in her place.

What Eva and Nathalie told us can be described as manipulation (in the original, "gaslighting"). <https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaslighting>

They were tricked into not trusting themselves, questioning their own judgment. And their inhibitions were gradually lowered. First tantric exercises, then bikini photos, later watching porn and finally sex with their guru.

Eva and Nathalie are not the only ones who told us this. I have spoken to over 20 people who have abandoned the movement. Some of them received an invitation from their guru. Eight of them traveled to Paris, to Bivolaru. Their experiences are similar. The blindfolded journey, waiting in the first apartment, the bedroom with the triple bunk bed, the many sheets on the wall, the cinnamon aphrodisiac, the Bivolaru in the purple robe and the initiation. Yes, even the sequence of positions is apparently the same.

The eight women come from Germany, Finland, Romania and Great Britain and attended courses there at DatY, MISA and NATHA, all schools organized under the umbrella of the Atman organization. Are the eight women I spoke to the only ones? How many more are there?

Christiane: I have one more question for you. I don't think you filed a complaint or anything like that.

Eva: I wouldn't have known on what basis. What exactly should I have reported?
perpetrators: Sexual assault, sexual coercion, rape. According to Article 177 of the German Penal Code, these offenses would be given if the act is committed against the apparent will of another person.

Eva: It was quite clear to me that they would have simply said that "you took every step voluntarily, that you are mature and that no one forced you to do anything".

producer: That's why Eva doesn't file a complaint. This is why many other women do not file a complaint. Not even Nathalie. But she is thinking of doing it today.

Nathalie: He didn't physically force us to sleep with him in any way, so that wasn't the problem. But it means something to me if I can't really say "NO" because I know the consequences are huge and also this whole situation where you're alone somewhere, you don't know where you are, you don't have anything, so basically you don't not even clothes to wear - to say "NO" in this context, you really need manhood. Therefore, for me, it is not rape in the sense of physically forcing us, but in a certain way it is psychological pressure.

Eva: The shame was so great! How could something like this happen to me? How could I fall for something like this and agree to it? What nonsense, why? Why did I do this? Yeah, I'm not feeling great and it's been weighing heavily on me for a long time. I also remember how long it took me to tell my husband. It was really terrible to tell him.

filmmaker: For years, Eva lived with the thought that it was her fault. Until, one day, she confesses her story to a representative of the sect. She carefully mentions the word abuse.

Eva: But I wouldn't have told him that, because I've never said "NO" seriously, at one point.

And at the same time, I realize now how much manipulation was behind this situation, how they manipulate you in this direction. And the word fits very well. It's brainwashing, it doesn't kill you.

filmmaker: Eva really realizes this only in the conversation with the representative of the sect.

Eva: When that happened, it was a real release for me, because that's when I really started to cry. It was the first time anyone had ever said they had an intrinsic experience of abuse.

filmmaker: Of course, I asked DatY, the German Traditional Yoga Academy, what they knew about the fact that a student from one of their yoga schools had been taken to Paris by a DATY yoga teacher.

And what do they say about the allegations of abuse? The answer comes just a day away.

"Manipulation? Brainwashing? Abuse? We don't know anything like that!", writes the president. Likewise regarding reports or witness statements with reference to DatY when it comes to an initiation with Gregorian Bivolaru.

"DATY didn't recruit anyone to visit him." The president writes that, "if the testimony of that former student is true, which we cannot verify, we are expressly in favor of criminal prosecution," which is not enough for us.

We want to find out more about DatY's point of view and interview people from the school to discuss our research. However, we are delayed for now, for a few weeks. The President writes to say that he has used the time to meditate and apologizes for the delay.

He has a few more questions for us and wants to see samples of our work first. We answer it and still hope that the interview will take place.

A few years after her initiation at Bivolaru, Eva gradually begins to be preoccupied with something completely different.

Eva: Then I started really documenting it and then I read more and more about what it is, but also what is actually being watched, with all this human trafficking.

filmmaker: You mentioned this in a dropout forum that is exclusively focused on the ATMAN yoga movement. Stories from women who have gone through experiences similar to hers and more.

Eva: Some stories about video chats and other inside weirdness, about women masturbating, then being filmed, then suddenly appearing in a porn movie.

Filmmaker: Well, stop. We know about sex talk on the internet. During our research, we learned that some women in the yoga movement masturbated live on the Internet, on various paid sites that only exist for a few months at a time. We have seen some sites and women ourselves. But porn movies?

Eva says she has read about women who ended up in porn films without their knowledge or consent, women who thought they were being filmed just for their guru, having sex.

Eva: I still had the horror in my head that everything that happened in his apartment was secretly filmed and that I would end up on profile sites at some point.

filmmaker: Is Eva's fear justified? Could there be recordings of her having sex with Bivolaru that she doesn't know about? Could it have ended up in a porn movie? And how great is the danger to the other women?

For Liz, who sent a bikini photo at yoga school, for Nathalie, who also filmed herself naked.

We meet with the only woman who can clarify such things for us, because she has been involved in the ATMAN movement for years. Her name is Cecilia Tiz. I came across her name again and again during our research. Cecilia is like the hero Spider-Women in the fight against the yoga movement.

Many threads lead to her.

We're sitting here with her, talking to her about our research so far, and scouring the internet for clues to the ATMAN. Cecilia knows exactly where to look.

filmmaker: And what motivates you? You certainly give it a lot of time, don't you?

Cecilia Tiz: Yes, of course. People need to know what is behind them.

filmmaker: Cecilia herself was involved in the yoga movement from a very young age. She comes from Romania and attended several MISA summer camps as a young student. She moved to Germany with her then-husband in 1989 and the two later even opened their own yoga center, a location of the German Traditional Yoga Academy in Essen. Cecilia stayed there for 14 years. Then, she says, she found out what the visits to Paris with Gregorian Bivolaru really meant. And she gave up.

Cecilia Tiz: Years later, I realized that MISA itself and the whole story is much worse than I ever thought, and I'm sure it's only the tip of the iceberg, even with the things I know now.

Filmmaker: We want to hear from her about the porn movies that Eva told us about, where the women from the yoga school are everywhere, with photos and videos.

Cecilia places a magazine on the table in front of us.

Cecilia Tiz: This is a yoga brochure published by MISA in 2007.

artist: The cover features a woman with long brown hair in a yoga pose. She wears a bikini that covers almost everything and has very large breasts like the models. On the left it says: "Tantra, from Super Orgasm to ecstasy".

Everything oozes yoga and sex.

Cecilia Tiz: You received them as a participant in courses, as an instructor, as a yoga teacher, at camps or I don't know what else.

There were 7,000 copies back then. They were then distributed to people and sold at kiosks in Romania.

filmmakers: Magazines are still sold online today. We also received one as a gift during the test session in Bucharest. Cecilia flips through the magazine, to page 27.

Cecilia Tiz: And there's something about Miss Shakti.

filmmaker: Now I have to look.

Cecilia Tiz: Yes, exactly.

filmmaker: There is a Miss Shakti contest at MISA. It is legendary at school and took place in summer camps until before the Corona pandemic, in Costinești. Yogis choose their Miss Shakti in this contest.

The most beautiful, the most intelligent, the most sensual woman.

Cecilia Tiz: And this is Miss Shakti Costinești 2006.

Filmmaker: We see a photo report from the contest. It takes place outside in a field under a large tarp.

Cecilia Tiz: It is a large area. You can see the banks.

filmmakers: Ordinary banks?

Cecilia Tiz: Yes, without a table.

filmmaker: Men and women are standing there and looking at a large stage. In another photo, the contestants are lined up there. They are all young women.

Cecilia Tiz: Here you can see that they are still dressed. Then here this woman is almost naked.

filmmaker: Cecilia tells us that there are different stages in which women have different tests. After each stage, they are eliminated until, at the end, only one Miss Shakti remains.

Cecilia Tiz: In the first phase, they introduce themselves and tell us something about themselves. Then they are given different samples that they have to somehow embody on stage. One of them gets two apples and a banana and has to embody something. Or she's the secretary and she has to do something too. And always something erotic. So everything is going in this direction.

filmmaker: That sounds a bit like soft porn, like scenarios that the contestants have to think of and then perform on stage. Here's what Cecilia tells us: Cecilia Tiz: Seasoned with meditation. Here they do a meditation with the great cosmic power Matanji.

filmmaker: So this is Tantra. Something higher, something sacred. "Express your femininity!" Two dropout students I spoke with also wanted to express their femininity in such a contest. One of them says she had to dance on stage wearing only a bra. She also talks about secret tasks without an audience as part of the pageant. She says she saw women masturbating and urinating and there were people with video cameras filming them.

We don't take great pleasure in telling you this in so much detail, but urine is central to the teachings of yoga movement. It is considered an elixir of life and a magical potion.

Urine is drunk as an aid against pain, inhibitions, stress and psychological trauma. Urinary orgasm brings exquisite bliss, energy and aura expansion. And that brings us back to pornographic films.

There are some movies that seem to have something to do with the yoga movement. Cecilia Tiz: Exaltation of Pee, Kingdom of Golden Pee, Shiny Pee Sea. These films here, the first five, are created from scenes that took place in various Miss Shakti pageants.

<https://www.themoviedb.org/movie/701867-to-pee-or-not-to-pee-for-ecstasy>

<https://www.themoviedb.org/movie/702312-exaltation-of-pee> <https://www.themoviedb.org/movie/702329-shiny-pee-sea>

<https://www.themoviedb.org/movie/702329-shiny-pee-sea>

producer: Exaltation of Pee, porn movie where people pee. So it seems that this is where women who thought they were simply being filmed for the pageant as part of secret rehearsals ended up. That's what Cecilia tells us and we read about it in a press report as well. The students who dropped out made this public. The films, Cecilia says, were made before 2003 and then sold on DVD and later online.

Eva feared that she was being secretly filmed during the initiation. Fortunately, during our investigations we found no evidence of secret filming at Bivolaru.

Therefore, Eva and Nathalie should be safe in this regard. But there are also photographs of them that they gave to yoga teachers before their visit to Paris so that their guru could read their aura, it is said. Photos in underwear, bikini and a film of naked Nathalie. What happens to these records? What are they really for?

We need to finally talk to MISA about these questions, formally. We need to arrange an interview with them. Our catalog of questions is long.

We will ask them about initiations at Bivolaru, about sex work, about striptease, about tantric massages, about sex chats and porn movies, about bikini photos for aura reading, about negative tests for HIV and syphilis as a prerequisite for participation in camps. And for Vilută.

And we have to talk about a completely different topic because during our research we come across another important point. It has nothing to do with sex. It is about life and death and takes us to a cemetery in Romania.

episode 7

ARD – Seelenfänger (Soul Catcher – Hunter of Souls) Podcast – Toxic Tantra
24.04.2024

7. Expensive herbs

Narrator: An endless line of tombstones. Elena, Lucia, Michaela.

My colleague Christiane Havranek and I scour the graves for names and dates of death.

It's the fall of 2023 and the dropout, Nathalie, has taken us to a cemetery in Romania.

She wants to use Google Maps to guide us to a specific grave.

Christiane: Now let's listen to Nathalie again.

Nathalie: Well, that's the general direction. So if you stand in front of the chapel and walk towards the main road, it is on the left and not so far, but relatively close to the path that leads from the main road to the chapel.

narrator: Nathalie stood at this grave herself. A woman in the yoga movement was buried there, she says. A woman from Germany. Only Nathalie doesn't know her last name, because we need it to find the relatives. We are now looking for her grave.

Nathalie: Anyway, that's the area and I'm very sure of it.

Narrator: Nathalie was at least able to give us her first name and date of death.

Nathalie: I was there the day she passed away in our house and it was quite intense. In fact, it was the first time I had anything to do with a death.

This is Soul Catcher. Toxic Tantra.

A podcast made by Christiane Hawranek and myself, Katja Peisen-Petersen.

Episode 7: Expensive Herbs.

Narrator: Why are we telling you about this woman? Because her death put us on the trail of what is thought about illness in the yoga movement. And about healing. And what terrible consequences such thinking can have.

Katja: Shall we go to the chapel and watch from the chapel on the left?

Christiane: No, actually, three.

Katja: Come on, let's go different.

narrator: The woman, Nathalie tells us, had cancer. It was 2021, the Corona pandemic, and she didn't want to go to the hospital. So Nathalie quickly vacated her room in a communal apartment, which she shared with other yogis, for herself.

Nathalie was there the whole time, caring for the woman along with others from the yoga school, until her death.

Nathalie: What else should I have done? At the end she was in great pain and it wasn't really pleasant, it wasn't a cure, because everything in the school is demonized.

narrator: That's how Nathalie remembers it. Her feeling was that it was all mainly for spiritual reasons.

Nathalie: Because of the school and because she's brought up that way too, going to the hospital now to get radiation therapy and stuff, it's just not possible. It is not good for you in any way.

narrator: What does MISA say about this? Does it advise against medical treatment

of serious illnesses?

We receive the answer in writing: "NO. The board of directors of the yoga school has never heard of such cases. Alternative healing methods, such as yoga techniques and herbs, should not replace treatment by a physician."

But it also says: "Many diseases can be cured only with the help of plants". Is this scientifically proven?

"Yes, in some cases herbal treatment is even superior to conventional medicine."

We want to know more about this whole topic of health and healing and what MISA thinks about it.

Nathalie: Yes, it's just your karma. And you just have something inside of you that you're so attached to that you can't let go of and that's why it's the way it is now. And you could fix everything with herbs, somehow, and with enough yoga, you could save everything. She also believed that something was emotionally wrong and that she should have done more yoga.

narrator: Nathalie has never heard anyone tell this woman not to treat herself, not to go to the hospital, but to do more yoga. This seriously ill woman is said to have chosen this path voluntarily, as have many other people outside the yoga movement who reject cancer treatments.

But it seems some in the yoga movement believe the natural way is best.

Shortly before our cemetery tour, I found numerous health related articles on the MISA website.

One of them says that 75 percent of doctors reject chemotherapy for themselves.

Also immediately below this article is a source, Natural News, a fake news, far-right conspiracy theory site.

I found even more articles on the pages of MISA. Studies are presented that would prove that certain plants, fruits or herbs are natural remedies against cancer and in some cases more effective than chemotherapy. We do not know if the woman whose grave we are looking for has read all these articles on the pages of MISA.

But Nathalie tells us...

Nathalie: She was in Bucharest when she was very sick and then she entered a rehab clinic at our school, so they really did it with crystals and other things.

narrator: The detox clinic is located just outside Bucharest. Officially, it has no connection with MISA, but I found several references to connections with the yoga school. And I talked to a naturopath who practiced there himself. He also says that MISA people come and go from there. "Therapies" include colored light therapy, hemispheric synchronization, forgiveness therapy, pulsating plasma, and ozone baths.

Nathalie says the seriously ill woman is being treated at this rehab clinic. Afterwards, she returns to Nathalie's old room.

Nathalie: I also know that she wrote him a letter afterwards.

narrator: So this letter reached Gregorian Bivolaru. She wanted to know from him, says Nathalie, if it can be treated conventionally, with an operation.

Nathalie: Well, he just didn't answer. And then she said "Yeah, so I can't do that. With such life threatening stories, I don't trust myself enough to make such a decision and then I wait for him to send me a reply. And if you don't send me anything, then I'd rather die." Narrator: This is Nathalie's memory. We can't verify it, we should find the grave and talk to the woman's family.

Christiane: Yes, it's not like we know from cemeteries, where there are alleys and you look left and right for the graves, but rather the graves are close together and you have to sneak between the headstones.

narrator: And so all we can do is look up the first name and the date of death. We go and research and research again. At some point, everything becomes blurred before our eyes.

Christiane: I spent, I think, three hours looking for this grave. My eyes sting, my legs hurt. I didn't succeed.

It's frustrating. Yes, but now my head is spinning, all I see are crosses, tombstones and numbers. And Maria and Elena and Luzia. So that's it. What a shame.

narrator: Let's try one more time. We ask another dropout, Liz, the woman we met on the blanket in the park. For all we know, Liz may have been at the yoga school in Germany at the same time as the woman who died.

Liz: Hello. Yes, I met her. She's been through a lot and found a lot of support in this community and it's given her a lot of support and hope to have this office as a contact and information and a person to trust.

I think she wrote to her a lot about all kinds of things, and she also got very attached to everything.

narrator: This is what Liz remembers. Sounds almost exactly like what Nathalie told us.

Liz: Towards the end, when I was about to leave, I somehow realized that she had died. The fact was presented thus: it was God's will, so to speak, that it was only His plan, that everything was good and right as it was, or that her very soul chose to die now.

Narrator: So, two witnesses who independently corroborated the story about the deceased woman.

We make a few more attempts, but that's all we know about the woman. But there are many other things that trouble us.

When we bring up the topic of health with Liz, she gets emotional.

She herself suffers from a chronic illness, which forces her to have regular check-ups.

Liz: The fact that the entire outside world is portrayed as evil is also important. So really, all the institutions, the authorities and so on, everything that was outside was evil, it was satanic.

Then, I hadn't been to the doctor in a very long time.

narrator: Liz thought she could heal herself with yoga. But during her time at the yoga school, she says the disease spread.

Liz: In this context, you're often told that you should connect to what's higher and that your physical needs are really unimportant and that you need to learn to control and suppress them because those are your lower instincts, so the body is highly demonized. This rule, for example, was also considered a total taboo there. So the purpose of yoga with certain yoga asanas was to completely prevent menstruation from taking place, which would be very bad for a woman.

narrator: Nathalie also told us that she learned at Viluță that they say you can suppress your period, because it robs you of your energy. She dismissed this idea as crazy. Liz, on the other hand, took it very seriously.

Liz: I had just come out of the context of loving my body and finding peace with my period.

And it was really crazy how everything changed and became so negative, so dirty that you had to try to remove it, not think about it, not evoke it, remove it through yoga.

narrator: Liz thought she didn't need doctors anymore. After all, she had her guru and he was giving her very precise instructions. It all started during the coronavirus.

Liz wanted to move to an ashram run by the German Academy of Traditional Yoga. It is officially described as a place for a short or long retreat from conventional life to deepen spiritual practice. Liz remembers what she had to do to get in there.

Liz: Then you must personally write a letter to Grieg. You have to give him all your data, date of birth, what is your zodiac sign and what time you were born. They can then draw up a natal chart, so to speak, an astrological chart, and then get a lot of information about you, where your nodes are and your planets.

narrator: Liz begins this letter with the words "dear G, G from Grieg". She writes to him about what concerns her, about her worries and desires. She doesn't mention her chronic illness, but she does mention mental issues.

She writes that she is grateful for all the healing, for all the energy from the yoga teachers at school and from him, that she is now ready to finally let go of her ego and if he thinks it was a good idea to move at the ashram.

Liz: I sent this letter and then you're waiting all this time like a little kid for Santa Claus. Either you get a response from Grieg or you don't. You're either chosen or you're not, because some people really never got an answer. They were not accepted.

Narrator: But Liz gets one. It is handed to her at the yoga school in a brown A4 envelope with two glittery heart stickers on it. On it, in capital letters, in Romanian, TREATMENT is written.

Inside is a nine-page, typed letter. It's not signed, but Liz is sure it's from Gregorian Bivolaru himself. He writes to her that in order to overcome her ego, Liz should strive to assimilate into her being various Divine Attributes: love, courage or perseverance. She is then advised to do a small bowel cleanse in addition to standing on her head for ten minutes. And it says in English that: "we will also send you a treatment with medicinal plants, which will help you enormously." But this is secret. She must swear on the Bible. Liz gets some kind of prescription.

Liz: It was really cute with so many stickers on it and it was weird, but he brought out the kid in me so I was totally hooked. Ah, I love stickers!

narrator: The names of the herbs and plants are listed in a multi-page table: 116 herbs for psychomental balance. Liz's list mentions rosemary, mint, and garnet, but she doesn't understand most of them because the names are only in Latin and Romanian, as is the dosage and contraindication information. Fortunately, a catalog of questions and answers is attached, in somewhat clumsy English.

Liz translates it herself.

- How long does the treatment normally last, unless otherwise specified?

"The treatment must be administered over a period of 7 years. This is true for serious illnesses.

In other cases, 3 years." - Are you breaking your oath if you forget to take the herbs 4 times a day?

"Not unless you do it consistently and intentionally." But where does Liz get all the plants now? Should she collect them all? She continues to look through the catalog of questions and answers. There's a name there: - Do you break your oath if you show the list of plants to the Divine Star, for example?" Because they accept the plant list.

"You go there and ask for these plants without telling anyone what you're buying."

narrator: Divine Star. We have come across the name of this company before. With Jasper, meaning Nathalie's Jasper.

He also received a list of herbs and then ordered the herbal preparations from the Divine Star.

Nathalie: They have a big spread at school. And actually you always get them if you have a health problem that you tell someone about. Or something, any other problem. So it's also very expensive, of course. And it is a Romanian company.

Narrator: And the yoga students at MISA work in this company, for their karma. I was already inside the Divine Star, by the way, almost by accident. In Bucharest, at the strange aura measurement conference, to enter the yoga room, we had to pass through another room first. It smelled like a health food store and there were jars of plants everywhere. We go through Liz and Jasper's lists with our translator, Anca.

Anca: Arm, this is fir. "The tail of the mouse"... The aerial part, what is the aerial part? Well, what can be seen.

Christiane: And what does it say here in the column?

Anca: Ah, how much do you have to take. And here are the contraindications, side effects, and when not to take it.

For example, in the first one, it says that you have to be careful if you are allergic, because it can cause irritating reactions such as hemorrhages, epistaxis, hemorrhoids, and that you should not take more than four grams a day.

narrator: Anca looks at the page of a large online store in Romania to see if the products are also available there.

Anca: Of course. And here the Divine Star is seen, 133, they say. Shilajit, 60 capsules, 58 capsules are just over 10 euros.

Katja: If you have to take them for seven years, of course, a full cycle.

Christiane: It has a list of 116 products. But the other one had over 300. 363 different herbal preparations.

Anca: I think you can really make a lot of money with this.

Katja: The Divine Star attracts its customers in this way.

Christiane: Exactly, what a business model! People go to yoga and then you have customers for plants.

Narrator: We decided to talk to the MISA officials about this while we are still in Bucharest. So far we have traveled undercover, but that will soon change. We go to the so-called MISA information center.

Christiane: After re-watching the allegations today in the hotel room, I have to say I felt an inner rage. I'm going there now with a big chest. I've completely ditched the mask now. Absolute.

narrator: The MISA information center is hidden in a block of flats, with no doorbell. When we enter, a woman, the secretary, comes to us. We tell her that we are journalists and that we want to know more about MISA.

She tells us to wait, as she needs to check with her press officer first. Then we have her on the phone.

Christiane: I asked again, isn't it an official information center? Then she said, no, not for journalists.

It is not specifically open to journalists.

Anca: It is a private place and journalists are not allowed to enter because they have had unpleasant experiences with them.

Narrator: We are asked to leave the information center and told to send an official email with questions.

Christiane: My favorite moment of the entire visit was when I asked for the press officer's name again. The secretary wrote it by hand on a piece of paper, then called the press spokeswoman again, and she said, "No, you can't give me my name."

Then she ripped the ticket out of my hand, crumpled it up and threw it away. I've never seen anything like this before, a press spokesperson who doesn't want to give

her name to journalists.

narrator: But the press spokeswoman told us her name: Cosmina Oprea. She wrote that the MISA board should agree to an interview with us. At first I didn't have much hope, but then I actually got a video interview with her. She has one condition: she doesn't want us to superimpose an audio translation over her answers.

Our list of questions and accusations from school dropouts about MISA is so long that we fear we won't be able to go through them all, but she has plenty of time for us. Three hours.

At the end, she will say that she has never given such a long interview before. And there will be some surprising answers for us.

Christiane: Okay, so if you're ready, let's get started.

Cosmina Oprea: Good.

Narrator: We're asking about the Divine Star plants, of course.

Christiane: What is the connection between the Divine Star and Misa?

Cosmina Oprea: So Steaua Divina is a company, you know, a commercial company that was founded, many years ago, by some doctors who are also students of the school, and as far as I know, some of them are still students of the school, but that is their private business.

narrator: A private business that has nothing to do with MISA, except that it was founded by former and current students. We know. It was the same with Lucky Love Club: a private matter of some students and teachers. As an organization, MISA is not allowed to enter schools. She is not even allowed to do business. We also ask what the yoga school thinks about yoga healing.

Cosmina Oprea: Practicing yoga would have a very obvious and immediate effect on improving health.

There are some exercises you can do to improve your eyesight, vision, but they do not claim to be treatments or cures, they are just complementary to any other treatment your doctors recommend.

Narrator: So improving eyesight through yoga is supposed to be possible.

But all these exercises are not labeled as treatments or cures, they are only in addition to what doctors recommend. We must remember the herbal letters and Gregorian Bivolaru.

Cosmina Oprea: He was, is and will always be an important person for us, he is the one who started everything, but since 1995 he no longer teaches in the school.

narrator: He doesn't teach school anymore. It seems that his role is now quite small. We had a different experience during our trial lecture in Bucharest, where he moved the compass needle in a video.

Narrator: So he wrote books and gave conferences in the MISA camps. And?

Cosmina Oprea: We never use the word guru, we sometimes refer to him as a spiritual guide.

narrator: The same thing happens at the German Academy of Traditional Yoga. He is a spiritual master for some participants. That's what it says on the website. But nothing more. He is not a guru. We ask Cosmina Oprea if the yoga teachers at MISA are in contact with Bivolaru, if they forward letters from students to him, as we were told.

Cosmina Oprea: I don't know who said that and they should explain a little bit more because otherwise I honestly don't have an answer to that.

Christiane: So you would say he didn't communicate directly with the yogis?

Cosmina Oprea: No, no, I say that I don't know, maybe there were cases - of which I

am not aware - and I also say that not everyone who says this should be taken as such.

narrator: You shouldn't believe everything you're told.

Christiane: Could they ask him questions, for example, that they had mental health problems or health problems and get answers?

Cosmina Oprea: Yes, let me tell you something. You said mental health issues. Everyone was accepted in our school; the only requirement, the only special condition so to speak is that he doesn't have mental health problems, so I seriously doubt that people with mental health problems, mental health problems, would be in school and then ask for advice, I mean he's not, you know, Dr. Psychiatrist, because that certainly didn't happen.

narrator: She is sure that no one has written to Bivolaru about mental health issues. Ultimately, anyone with such problems is not even accepted into yoga school.

Keyword: conditions of participation. Of course, we also ask about bikini photos for camps.

Christiane: I read online that yogis must submit pictures in a bikini or swimsuit to participate.

Why?

Cosmina Oprea: Well, because... So... it's clear that she's not in a bikini, yes, I know, we're not talking about pornographic pictures or other things that I've read in the press. Because by looking at the person's body, you can kind of see if they have some potential, I don't know, like issues, physical issues that would prevent them from doing yoga, or some indication that the person wouldn't be a good fit for a camp.

narrator: Bikini photos as a health check. That's right, so many dropouts have claimed to have been told that Bivolaru can read your aura based on photos.

Christiane: Is that right?

Cosmina Oprea: No!

Christiane: Huh?

Cosmina Oprea: Maybe someone told them, I can't say that they weren't told, maybe someone said because maybe they believed that, but no, that's not the case.

narrator: Well, she says, "maybe some people have been told that, but it's not," that's her message.

Christiane: So he doesn't get these pictures.

Cosmina Oprea: Well, these pictures are, they said, with the camp organizers, so as long as he is not here, I don't see how he could get these pictures, honestly.

Narrator: As long as Bivolaru is not in the camps himself, he doesn't know how he would get the photos.

"And if you have a problem with the photos, you don't have to come to the camp," she says.

Cosmina Oprea: Now, if you have a problem sending pictures, don't send pictures, you don't have to come to the camp.

Narrator: By the way, the same is true for HIV and syphilis tests. Cosmina Oprea confirms that these are also prerequisites for participating in the camps. MISA wants to protect itself legally in this way.

We arrive at Vilită, the house that Nathalie told us is a kind of sexual training camp. House rules: nude photos.

Cosmina Oprea: I can't talk about it because I've never lived there.

So in all other places this doesn't happen, why would it happen there?

narrator: Why would it happen there if it doesn't happen anywhere else? Maybe

because Viluta is surrounded by an opaque fence. MISA's press officer can obviously only give information about things she has witnessed herself. We hope she was at least present at the Miss Shakti pageant. Was pornography filmed there? Cosmina Oprea: We're against pornography, so pornography is something really, you know, inferior, degrading, you know, it's a lower energy, low level show, you know, it's not a high perspective on love relationships between men and women, so I can tell you for sure that pornography does not exist. Now, there has been a scandal about so-called porn movies that are actually erotic movies.

Narrator: They are against pornography, but there are erotic films made by some Tantra teachers and their students. But this is something separate, independent from the Miss Shakti pageant. As far as he heard, there were no erotic film shoots there.

Next point. Karma yoga: Christiane: And erotic video chat activities?

Cosmina Oprea: It is an activity that surely exists everywhere in Romania, just as well, and it may happen that some of the people are involved in this kind of activity, it is not an activity that is done or managed in any way by school; if some people do it, they do it individually.

Narrator: And again, if a yoga student works on erotic video chat, then that's a purely private matter. School has nothing to do with it.

We begin to wonder what MISA is up to. Of course, I also asked Cosmina Oprea about the allegations of human trafficking, about the initiation with Bivolaru in Paris and about his arrest.

We will tell you about this in the next episode. But let's take a break here at the cemetery. The yoga student who died of cancer. We still want to know how MISA rates Gregorian Bivolaru's abilities when it comes to illness. I also read about very special meditation events. They are said to facilitate miraculous healings and confer divine grace on all whom God the Father and his archangels have chosen.

Christiane: Is it some kind of healer?

Cosmina Oprea: No, he is not a healer. Under no circumstances have I heard him or in a lecture or anything say that he is a healer. I have never heard him say that he is a healer.

Narrator: We've never heard them say he's a healer either. But some followers obviously believe this and post this on the MISA website.

"Miraculous healing, my spirit guide removed a huge tumor," it says. And that Bivolaru saved someone from shingles.

Liz felt the same. When Liz receives this letter with a list of over 100 herbs that she should take for 7 years, she quickly feels lost.

Liz: They have their own plants. Somewhere in Romania, I think they have a school or built something there, they grow them themselves and then you can contact them and call them and buy them, for a lot of money.

It was definitely about money, and as always, we didn't have any money at the time.

narrator: And what should she do now? The herbal letter helps here as well: "If you don't have enough money to buy all the herbs in the treatment plan, or if at some point you don't have enough money to continue the treatment, then you break your oath." This highlights their lack of will and determination and then they break their oath.

But Liz is ready and she's determined. She just needs to get the plants.

Liz: I was really stressed that I had to buy these plants now so I wouldn't get kicked out. So it was like I was under the influence of drugs, constantly watching the videos, constantly doing all kinds of meditations, and constantly with this fear of doing

something wrong on a divine test.

So every day was like a divine test. And yes, it was very stressful for me because I never had any money anyway, I had nothing to eat and I also got a lot of food from the ashram.

So, on this existential level, I was also a bit dependent on them. And so it was kind of doubly stressful that now I had to somehow find money for some plants and that this was proof of my loyalty to this group. Because it also meant that if you didn't find that money, it meant that you didn't really want it and you hadn't really made an effort. So it's against you again.

Christiane: It's your fault.

Liz: It's your fault, exactly.

Narrator: But as much as Liz gives up everything else, as much as she tries to raise this money, she just can't, and she feels terrible about it. Inferior, failed in her path to enlightenment.

And that's why she's taking a radical step.

episode 8

ARD – Seelenfänger (Soul Catcher – Soul Hunter) Podcast – Toxic Tantra
24.04.2024

8. Therapy

narrator: A town, somewhere in Germany, 2022. Liz is at the end of the road.

Liz: I failed and gave up. And I felt like I begged for it and did my best and just failed.

narrator: Liz couldn't raise the money for the herbs. She still remembers the exact words from the herb letter: "Anyone who cannot afford to buy the herbs is showing a lack of will and breaking the sacred oath." Liz: It feels like a kind of test, the ultimate test. It's like you got the winning lottery ticket now, you got the invitation in gold letters: "Please be very aware and very attentive to this invitation." narrator: Liz is sure she needs to commit herself even more to yoga school life. She must enter this ashram of the German Traditional Yoga Academy. But how?

Liz: Because I noticed that a lot of people who were already living in the ashram, they just gave up their apartment, so to speak, and then they were allowed to move into the ashram. It was like an entrance ticket.

narrator: That's it. Liz thinks they'll get her before she ends up on the street, homeless. She writes another letter to Grieg. She asks her permission to live in the ashram. She is attaching bikini photos. And she writes another letter to the landlady. Liz is giving notice for her apartment.

Liz: This is now my proof of loyalty to the group, to the faith, and to the guru. He will see that.

It was like a total sacrifice to belong to him.

narrator: Will this resignation be her ticket to the ashram? The end of her old life?

Here is "Soul Catcher". Season 4, Toxic Tantra.

A podcast made by Christiane Havranek and me, Katja Peisen-Petersen.

Episode 8, Therapy.

narrator: When Liz wants to move into this ashram from the German Traditional Yoga Academy, someone outside notices and wants to stop her. She's Liz's therapist. She plays an important role in Liz's story because she has always been there.

Liz's Therapist: Well, at first she told me she thought it was just a normal yoga school. I wasn't worried at all.

narrator: She is, Amelie Warnschaffe. Christiane meets her for dinner in her office kitchen after a full day of therapy sessions. Liz has waived her doctor-patient confidentiality for this conversation about her yoga school experiences.

Liz's Therapist: It still amazes me how intelligence is undermined in this way. In other words, the fact that people who actually have discernment and intelligence, end up in a situation where they are somehow lost.

narrator: It was the same with Eva and Nathalie. It's as if these smart women turned their common sense switch to "OFF" while attending yoga school. Have you ever thought to yourself while listening to this podcast, "This would never happen to me. Would I see through that?" Or "Why didn't she just say NO?" The psychotherapist says it can happen to anyone.

Liz's Therapist: Because the emotion is stronger.

Narrator: Because sometimes you're at a point in life where you'd rather follow your feelings than be rational. Like when you fall in love, maybe.

Liz's Therapist: If you ask about that, then the doubts and the resentments have always been there, and the awareness of what is wrong is then denied, because the attraction is greater and because there are always arguments that nullify the doubts.

Narrator: But Liz came out of it, and her therapist was instrumental in that. We want to hear from her how she managed not to lose Liz.

Liz's therapist: I didn't try to hold her back, I didn't put any kind of pressure on her. I told her: "if you don't feel comfortable with me, that's okay. Get in touch with me if you want to see me again." As a result, I also had breaks from therapy and never followed through. She always came back alone.

narrator: If you know someone who is part of a destructive group or someone who is at risk of being drawn into it, don't try to speak out against the group, advises Amelie Warnscliffe.

Liz's Therapist: I've had to swallow quite a bit in the coronavirus pandemic, too, all the things I've been involved in and talked about, where I've had to get my own attitude or even anger under control.

narrator: Liz often talked about the Apocalypse and at the same time had a certificate from a naturopathic doctor so she wouldn't have to wear a mask. Her therapist often felt like she was fighting a beast, against what Liz had obviously internalized in yoga school.

Liz's Therapist: What gave me the upper hand, so to speak, was this non-demanding and non-judgmental.

I said, "As long as it's good for you, then go there. That's your decision." Narrator: That's different from yoga school, where Liz felt like she had to follow very specific instructions.

Liz's therapist: I think that really helped her see the difference. When she's with me, she has a choice.

narrator: So, one more piece of advice from a psychotherapist for relatives. Offer yourselves. Have an open ear.

And very importantly, don't judge because if loved ones are ever in doubt, there is someone from the good old world, someone they can turn to. That someone will be you. Liz's therapist did not judge for almost three years. But there were also situations where she had to say something. When Liz told her about the bikini pictures, for example.

Liz's therapist: I was sure then that it was a very abusive structure and that it was dangerous. At that time, I took a clear position. And I think now I would also recommend to relatives that if you are told about actual boundary violations, you should also say that this is not acceptable. Such a thing is not possible, nothing can justify such a thing.

narrator: Amelie Warnscliffe knew that Liz's inner voice was buried somewhere among the theories about demons, angels, and gurus. She wanted to strengthen her.

Liz's therapist: I advised her to educate herself, explained again how to check facts and what reliable media organizations are. And then she actually did it. Then at some point I think she came across a documentary or an article about conspiracy theories and I think that article was actually the turning point.

narrator: It all happens when Liz wants to move into the ashram room. She actually has a desire to devote herself totally. On the other hand, doubts are growing.

And now we're at the point in Liz's story that decides everything, because Liz talks to her therapist about her dilemma. She confesses to her that she gave notice for her apartment.

Liz: But then, with the help of my therapist, I kind of got back in touch with my mind and said, "Okay, let's save my apartment now." Narrator: This will be Liz's exit.

Liz: My therapist helped me turn things around and sort of turn things around with the help of a lawyer. And that was very tiring, there were weeks of endless stress, but we still managed to save the apartment.

narrator: Liz doesn't move into the ashram room.

Liz: I think if that had happened, I don't know if I would have left by now.

narrator: Liz ends up going back to her old life. She has no friends, no steady job, no money, and is totally unsure of right and wrong.

While Liz is in the process of leaving yoga school, Nathalie is still at her core. In April 2022, she travels to Paris for the second time to see her guru.

Nathalie: This time it was really crowded, so there were about, I don't know, 7 other girls there with me.

narrator: "Everybody is waiting together, in the room with all the books. Then I hear voices from Bivolaru's room." That's how she remembers it.

Nathalie: He was kind of in the room with another girl and all of a sudden he starts bending over her completely and yelling at her.

Narrator: Shortly thereafter, the woman enters. She tells them that Bivolaru chased her away.

Nathalie: Because he said: "yes, your belly has to shrink, otherwise it won't work".

narrator: Nathalie often realizes that Bivolaru is causing a scandal.

Nathalie: If we do something wrong, he gets completely pissed off.

narrator: So when he's in his room, he has to make an effort, Nathalie thinks. She must be able to do the different sex positions, because they are always the same.

Bivolaru explains it to them once, at initiation, but not at other meetings.

Nathalie: If you don't know that, then there will be problems. Like, "God, you're not focused" and all that.

Exactly, but that's why we often practiced in our room when we were there with other girls. Okay, how do we go from one position to another and from foot here to foot there? So that we don't do anything wrong, so that we don't bend over backwards.

narrator: Nathalie doesn't question this behavior. She knows why that is. When he yells at you, he's doing you a favor.

Nathalie: When he yells at you, he basically destroys your pride. So, spiritually, you just passed the test and everything is wonderful.

narrator: During this visit, her guru is happy with her. But then, at the next meeting in June 2022, something happens.

Nathalie: The body just stopped cooperating. Nothing was working anymore.

narrator: Nathalie just can't have sex with the old man anymore.

Nathalie: The moment I walked out the door, he said "Yeah, if it happens again, you'll have to shave your head!" narrator: He shaves his head. Nathalie has seen it again and again, before, in Bucharest. Women with bald heads. A penance for wrongs done.

Nathalie: Many, many girls do this at school. They are threatened with it and then follow through. Some also do it voluntarily, because there is a spiritual idea behind it. But that's normal at school.

Narrator: And other girls who dropped out of school told us about it and also that Bivolaru still scares them. Will Nathalie be bald soon too? Cut off her long brown

hair? Never, she thinks to herself.

She is led back to the first house, to the women who await her.

Nathalie: And then I had a really bad emotional reaction. 24 hours later I was just crying.

I couldn't even stop, so my whole body was going through it. All the girls said something like: "Yes, everything is a purification. It all comes out now and it's all good and then you come back and it's all better." And then I said: "Girl, I'm definitely not coming back!". I didn't say that, of course, but I thought about it.

narrator: Nathalie flies back to Bucharest, to Jasper.

Nathalie: I told him everything, so I told him that I always went there. It was like that, it was like that last time, and everything is terrible.

narrator: When Nathalie reveals all this to Jasper, he can only think of one thing at first: "Holy Shit!" That's what he told us too. During his time at the yoga school, he heard stories from time to time. About Bivolaru who spiritually initiates women in Paris. But he didn't find out anything. Everything was always so top secret. Now that Nathalie has told him everything down to the smallest detail, Jasper is simply annoyed and disgusted by Bivolaru. Jasper begins to question everything. The story he was told about why Bivolaru is hiding from the authorities. School teachings. Jasper breaks up with the other girl and chooses Nathalie. And because they now question everything, the two come into conflict with their yoga teachers and their friends at school. They want to confront their guru with these doubts.

Nathalie writes an email to Gregorian Bivolaru. The address is without a clear name, with a Russian domain.

Nathalie: He has to be an intermediary, because his English is not good enough, so someone has to translate for him. But he reads these e-mails, because when I was there, he also talked to me about things that I sent him in letters.

Narrator: In this email, she doesn't mention the meeting with Bivolaru that went wrong. She mentions the problems she has with some of the yoga teachers at the school, writes that they do not act like role models in her eyes.

Nathalie: And this is what I wrote: "I'm very sorry, but when I look at these people, I don't want to stay at school.

If school is turning me into that kind of person, then thanks, no!" I was really super honest about how I felt at that moment.

Narrator: It doesn't take long and Nathalie gets an answer. An e-mail, several pages long.

It is signed "The Selfsame" ("The self-same")

The author writes in the "plural of majesty", that is, in the WE form. Nathalie has to struggle to get through this email because it's all worded a bit strangely and with a lot of chatter.

He talks about Jesus, Lucifer and the Apocalypse. "Selfsame" attests to her psycho-emotional problems.

She has failed certain tests and is under the influence of demons and there is nothing more that can be done for her.

It's like playing roulette, he says. "Nothing will add to us!" ("Nothing works!") Jasper also receives Selfsame's reply email. None of them can believe what they are reading.

Nathalie: He said I have some kind of psychological problem. I did not say that.

Narrator: They're both completely clear now.

Nathalie: If he was a real teacher, spiritual guru or whatever, then he would have helped me.

So then he would say, okay bunny, come on, you can do this and this and this and this now and then you'll feel better. But he wasn't like that at all. So he was completely caught up in a kind of fever dream.

narrator: The two now want to know how their guru will react when he learns the truth. So Nathalie writes to him again. It begins with the words "Dear G".

Nathalie: I would like to give you some information about my experience and our meetings, as well as what I have heard from other girls I have met during my visits.

narrator: She writes to him that she was constantly afraid of doing something wrong with him and then being scolded.

Nathalie: From my point of view, it's not a "YES" if I'm too afraid to say "NO".

narrator: Nathalie sends the email and waits for a week. Then Selfsame answers her.

Nathalie should urgently try to fight the demonic states in her being. She should name the women who say they were scared when they met him. He had never raised his voice or screamed and sends Nathalie a testimony. He says it was written by a German woman after meeting him. Even long after that, she had endless orgasms. A divine pleasure. He says he has more than 3,000 testimonials, according to the email, from women who apparently were filmed after initiation or who wrote him letters.

Nathalie: I mean, if you imagine that every woman who goes there does a testimonial for every date she has with him, and he's been doing that for I don't know how many years, yeah, I can imagine.

narrator: Is Bivolaru trying to protect himself with this? It would not be the only attempt, because there is something else.

A kind of contract. Nathalie received it every time she met with Bivolaru and she had to sign it and return it. But on the last visit, she forgot.

Nathalie: And then I basically took it with me. I thought that was cool. I was thinking "oh, now I have something, I have proof!" Narrator: The document is six pages long, in black and white. At the top is the Declaration.

The text begins with the words: "I, the undersigned, born at, in, declare the following without reservation and willingly..."

Christiane: Well, I find it interesting. Something about trying to protect yourself, so to speak, that you've never consumed alcoholic beverages?

Nathalie: Yes, nonsense.

Christiane: "I have never been raped, I have never been trafficked, I have never been blackmailed, threatened, terrorized." It's amazing that here they say it's common sense about anything.

"I can't complain about anything that traumatized me."

Nathalie: This note probably came out after they were reprimanded and then, of course, they put in this note everything the girl probably said, like, "Yeah, none of that happened!" Christiane: So all the accusations have nothing behind them.

Nathalie: Exactly.

Narrator: I showed this statement to our lawyer at Bayerischer Rundfunk. She says none of this would have much probative value in court, especially if Nathalie doesn't corroborate her statements later.

It's not even a contract if only one party signs it.

But the statement is leverage against many women who signed it with their first and last names. As are the testimonials. Just like the bikini photos.

Shortly after corresponding with The Selfsame, Jesper receives letters from his school friends.

Nathalie is possessed by demons. He should stay away from her. This is when Nathalie finally leaves. Together with Jesper. They both have each other and Nathalie is quickly reunited with her old life. There is her best friend, who has been waiting for her for a long time.

Nathalie: She always listened, she was always totally non-judgmental. And when I came out, she said: "Hallelujah! I was so afraid for you!" But she did well, because you know if someone is in a group like that and you start shooting at them, then that person just runs away. And that's why she did really well, she was always there, always with an attitude like, "Okay, I'm going to listen to this, yeah, everything's fine," just so she could somehow keep in touch.

narrator: Jesper and Nathalie move to Thailand. Nathalie uses her psychology degree.

Offers relationship counseling sessions. And Jesper does the same. The views they hold today are very different from those of the ATMAN Yoga movement. It's about listening to your own body or seeing jealousy as something that's just there and you can't train it to go away.

Nathalie: If my body says NO, then it's not just my problem. It's a problem with the environment I'm in because it's not right and I don't feel safe.

But I don't have to say "hey body, what's up with you?" narrators: Nathalie, Liz, Eva. They let us interview them because they want to warn us.

Because obviously the judiciary can't do anything because in the end they took every step voluntarily.

But then comes November 28, 2023: Breaking news, France: "... Ivy sur Marnes. Des femmes sous l'emprise de quelle qu'elles appelaient Grieg. Une ancienne adepte raconte avoir subi sexuels."

narrator: Gregorian Bivolaru is arrested in France. The Paris prosecutor's office is investigating rape, human trafficking, breach of trust of a person under protection and kidnapping in an organized gang. Several homes are searched. Money totaling 300,000 euros was allegedly found at Bivolaru's residence. But that's not all. The legal situation in France is different from that in Germany. Therefore, spiritual abuses can be traced more easily. There is even a kind of sect law and a state committee to monitor and combat sectarian deviations. When we learn of Bivolaru's arrest, we immediately contact the dropouts we are in contact with. They send us voicemails.

Nathalie: I hope that with the statements on the merits, it's enough to kind of keep him there for a while.

Narrator: Whether there really is enough evidence for a conviction, we don't know now, in March 2024, when we do this podcast. Until then, the presumption of innocence applies.

Nathalie: And of course the best thing would be for all the other schools below to also be able to go to court. There is no hope of this shit crashing down in a very cool and epic domino effect, so to speak.

narrator: Liz, Nathalie and Eva are all watching our report on Bivolaru's arrest.

"You read that the German Academy of Traditional Yoga writes about the accusations against Bivolaru.

DatY is not involved in such activities. The association does not organize, promote or support such activities. They are not aware of any such DATY-related testimony. They are also not aware of any cases of brainwashing, manipulation or abuse of power." These words enrage Liz and Eva. Nathalie, on the other hand, is not surprised.

Nathalie: So that's what they're saying now, or the German school is saying right

now, "yes, we have nothing to do with it, we're not manipulating anyone and it's not brainwashing" and so on. I can understand that somewhere, because the thing is, the people who write this are manipulated, so of course it's not brainwashing for them, they don't see it. So when I was there, I didn't see either.

narrator: Nathalie also thinks about the many women the police have found in their raids in the squalid flats.

Nathalie: In the media, yes, it says they were released, but the thing is, the girls who were there mostly didn't see things that way. The fact that he was being chased by the police was part of the whole story that they always told us, so I don't think it's like, "oh, well, I've been released and now the problem with the school is over."

narrator: Nathalie still knows the world of school incredibly well, because that's exactly what MISA, the Romanian yoga school, focuses on. On December 12, exactly two weeks after Bivolaru's arrest, in a press statement entitled "The accusations are all over the press, but where are the victims?", MISA writes that none of the alleged victims consider themselves exploited, abused, kidnapped or rape victim.

Of course, I also spoke to MISA's press officer, Cosmina Oprea, about this. She tells us that she spoke to some of the Romanian women who were found by the police during the house raids.

Cosmina Oprea: They have returned home and we have the opportunity to meet them.

narrator: "Some of these women," the press spokeswoman tells us, "were traumatized, yes, but because of the way the French police treated them." Cosmina Oprea: They were extremely, extremely aggressive with each one, no one explained to them what was happening.

I mean, they asked all the time: "but why are you doing this, show us something, do you have a mandate?" Narrator: The police were extremely aggressive. Spiritual communities, in particular, are at the center of state persecution, she tells us. She is one hundred percent sure that Bivolaru is innocent.

Cosmina Oprea: If something bad happened, first of all, we wouldn't have thousands of people who would stay in school for four years. Seriously, I mean, ok, you can fool 100 people, you can fool maybe 200 people I don't know, but thousands of people, for years, let's be serious!

narrator: "If it was so bad, why did thousands of people stay in school for years?" We want to find out from Cosmina Oprea if the houses where the women stayed in Paris are MISA houses.

No, she says. She suspects that these houses belong to private individuals and were made available to yogis to take some kind of spiritual retreat.

Cosmina Oprea: It's a retreat to a quiet, peaceful place in the modern world, that was the main reason, to have a place to practice yoga and focus on your spiritual development. In this context, there are people who come from different countries.

Narrator: Because it comes to spiritual development, of course, now we want to know officially what exactly was happening at Bivolaru in Paris.

Narrator: I spoke to several yoga students, they told us that they went to something called an initiation with Gregorian Bivolaru, which was something tantric...

Cosmina Oprea: Yes, I read about it in the newspapers. Okay, if they said that, they should explain what it was, and they should be able to prove it. That's all I can say.

Ersteller: So what do you say, does it exist or not?

Cosmina Oprea: I don't know, I'm saying that if they claim that there are such things,

someone should be able to bring some evidence.

narrator: According to MISA, women should provide evidence. It's difficult if you have to hand over your mobile beforehand, as Christiane also said happened at Bivolaru. The spokeswoman answers: Cosmina Oprea: What do they mean by abuse? They said they did something, they were forced to do it, they weren't forced to do it, they change their mind.

Narrator: What do they mean by abuse, say they were forced to do something and changed their mind?

Cosmina Oprea: The fact that people, you know, realize after a few years that they have been abused, traumatized, please, and only after someone else tells them this as an expert, these things are really strange and not very believable and many , have often been proven to be false.

Narrator: So Cosmina Oprea suspects that someone else told the women that they were abused by him, and in such cases it turned out many times that it was false, so to be honest, we really don't have a reply.

We want to know if she knows of any yoga students having sex with Bivolaru when she had an initiation.

Cosmina Oprea: It's not about having sex, it's about making love.

Narrator: We want to find out if she knows of any yoga students who made love to Bivolaru at initiation.

Cosmina Oprea: I cannot answer this question.

narrator: We want to know if she knows that the women were brought from Romania to Paris, wearing big hats and sunglasses, by the people from MISA.

Cosmina Oprea: I read in the newspapers that people claim that this is happening. I've never heard of this happening in real life, of people involved in it. The official answer is that we are not aware that such a thing is happening in Romania. Not. This is the best answer I could give in my official capacity, and I do not pretend to know everything that is going on in the world.

Narrator: MISA's official position is that it does not know of such a thing happening in Romania. She doesn't pretend to know everything that's going on in the world.

After Bivolaru's arrest, I published an article on BR24 and wrote that this podcast was in the works. Anyone with information for us is welcome to contact us. And indeed, people do get in touch. They write that they also had experiences with the yoga movement and Bivolaru. Almost all of them went to the German Academy of Traditional Yoga in Munich, in Freiburg, in Dresden, in Berlin. Their experiences took place different periods of time ago, but their memories are very similar, even in the details. They tell us about the act of cleaning as karma yoga, about bikini photos, about Shakti groups, about women with shaved heads, about medicinal plants. One of them had a friend with cancer who refused treatment and died.

They tell us about brainwashing, about manipulation. Some of them received an invitation from Bivolaru, sent by the yoga teacher. One of them describes a top secret conspiratorial meeting in the park.

Some of them didn't make the trip to Bivolaru itself, but others did.

We alone contacted more than 20 students who dropped out of school.

What does the German Academy of Traditional Yoga have to say about this? I waited a long time for an answer.

It arrived in early March 2024. The DATY president wrote to Christiane and she called me right away, of course.

Christiane: The email arrived. I will open it now. He also apologizes again for taking so long and here are the answers.

Narrator: For almost three months we have been trying to communicate with the DAy president. He practices here in Munich, and this is also where the headquarters of the association is located. We would have liked to visit him for an interview, but he does not want to answer us except in writing.

Narrator: The email is very long.

Christiane: It has 6 pages.

narrator: Christiane first looks for the point that interests us most. Does DAy know that some of the participants in their courses went to Gregorian Bivolaru in Paris for the so-called initiation?

Christiane: Write quite succinctly: "No, we are not aware of this. There are some, let's say, that, in retrospect, I describe as abuse." How do they judge this? And then it simply says, in general terms, that the DAy strongly condemns abuse of those under its protection, rape, human trafficking or deprivation of liberty, as well as any criminal offence.

Narrator: We get the feeling that the DAy president avoids us when things get critical.

DAy emphasizes that it is an independent association and has no point of contact with MISA, apart from some teaching content. They are just part of the same umbrella organization ATMAN. He also writes that every program is voluntary, for example the body cleansing fast. Liz told us on the red blanket in the park that she lost a lot of weight during the yoga experience - the fasting was extreme. DAy writes that, in general, "we advise against extreme cures."

Christiane: And now, watch out, here it comes. According to our research, there is a kind of ritual in Shakti groups or for admission to an ashram: submitting a bikini photo. Correct?

"There are no admissions rituals for any of the DAy events and no photos of any kind are required." narrator: Sure, former members tell us, it's not mandatory, everything is voluntary. Even the supposedly demonic shows and movies that Liz told us about. "Each participant must decide for himself, based on the principles from the courses. And course participants should actually keep certain course contents secret because not everyone is properly trained in the methods," writes the DAy president.

Christiane: The next sentence that comes up, I find it very blatant, because I've talked to several people recently who have told me the exact opposite. It was very believable.

The president writes that there are no meditations in our events where participants should practice with photos of Gregorian Bivolaru.

Narrator: Should he practice? Does it mean that no one tells them they have to, but some of them willingly meditate with Bivolaru's photos? We then send another email with questions but get nothing back. Also, we would have liked to talk personally with the president of DAy about another issue, because here too there is room for interpretation.

Christiane: According to our research, it was possible to write messages to Gregorian Bivolaru at DAy to get advice from him. Communication was said to be through the yoga teachers at DAy.

Are you aware of this? "DAy does not offer such a thing".

narrator: Aren't DAy yoga teachers part of DAy? Or is it, again, a private matter for each individual teacher or is it not an offer? We are confused.

And we hope to get a really clear and unequivocal answer to that last question. If DAy is aware that its participants seek advice from Bivolaru when they have health

problems, instead of going to the doctor?

Christiane: The DATY believes that any health problem should be examined by a doctor or alternative practitioner.

Narrator: The association also emphasizes this in the course participation conditions.

Christiane: I find it extremely interesting that doctors and alternative practitioners are on equal footing.

So it fits very well into this picture. In any case.

Narrator: Of course, I also asked Gregorian Bivolaru all these questions and many more. But there was no response from him or his lawyer by the time of publication. The only thing we can find about his position is an article in French. In it, we read that Bivolaru stated, at the time he was arrested, that he assumed there was a political conspiracy.

He was a spiritual master and women loved him in his house after a step called initiation.

His lawyer is also cited. "Bivolaru's innocence will be proven." narrator: Liz has now undergone the first preventive examinations. Her chronic illness continues to bother her, and she is worried that she is now suffering the consequences of not going to the doctor for regular check-ups while she was at the yoga school.

Liz: Now, slowly, I've cooled my mind enough to realize that they're all just normal people doing their jobs. I finally managed to make an appointment. I think I haven't been there in two or four years.

narrator: She still lives on very little money, gets food from the food bank and finds it difficult to get along in the group. It is not easy for her to find a stable job and get along with her colleagues.

Liz: I was really extreme and blatantly radical, and at the slightest thing that was somehow against my attitude, I would immediately start declaring war and throwing everything at them.

narrator: At a counseling center, Liz learns that many of those who leave destructive groups have this rage. And she also learned that this anger is allowed. It's really important. During her time at DATY, Liz always tried to fit in with her group. In a way, she drugged out all the feelings that didn't fit her. The anger she feels now comes from deep within her, from her inner Self that no longer wants to be ignored.

Liz: It's important for me to show my limits too, when I realize that something is not good enough for me to dare to say so. This is very important to me now.

narrator: She's also told at the counseling center that it's important for Liz to take her time. But that's exactly what she struggles with.

Liz: It's like a race against time now because I'm getting older. People who are my age now have already started a home or a family somewhere. So I'm already somewhere else. And I still have a long way to go.

I am not where others are. And I've had a lot of trouble in the last few months becoming more and more aware of this. And also of this immense pain, which I can no longer change. That's the way it is now and I have to make the best of what I have left. It's brutal, it's true that you've been robbed of an experience of a lifetime. 18 years.

narrator: December, 2023. Liz is outside the State Criminal Police Office building. Breathe deeply.

Liz: Seriously, I was shaking all the time. My legs were shaking. I couldn't do anything.

I actually wanted to prepare hard and write lyrics and stuff. None of this worked. I had to go as I was.

narrator: Her therapist is there too. The two enter and meet with an officer from the human trafficking department.

Liz: I saw her and knew right away that I could trust her. She's nice, she's empathetic. I feel safe here and that was a big relief. Then there were only the three of us, so only women. And that was good and it gave me a lot of time and space and I was allowed to say everything.

I was finally allowed to say everything. And I had the feeling that I did everything for it.

narrator: Liz talks about her experiences at the German Traditional Yoga Academy. About how she felt pressured to submit bikini photos to attend certain groups. About the challenges of the post.

Liz: When I sat there in this chair in front of this woman, I told her all the details of what I'd been through, and I started listening to myself, and I realized, "Oh, shit. , that's true, true.

All this really happened. I'm actually sitting here, right now." And it was true, I barely had any strength left. Somehow, I squeezed everything I could remember out of me with all my might, and it really wasn't easy.

narrator: Liz moves on. About how her therapist was said to be possessed by Satan, how her mindset was that doctors were demonic, how she wanted to invest all her money in herbs. And then, after two hours, she was done.

Liz: But it was a feeling like when you've been running for a long time and you finally reach your destination. So, and then, somehow, I managed to take all this baggage that I've always carried with me, like a huge mountain that I've always carried by myself, and I finally managed to take it somewhere and to say: "Okay, you are the experts. I will put this mountain of experience that I have in your hands and then you can do what you want. But you better get it right." Narrator: We don't know if anything will come of it. The presumption of innocence applies here as well. But it was a very important moment for Liz. At the very end, she again says loud and clear that she wants to file a complaint.

Liz: When I said that sentence out loud in that huge building, it was my personal victory. It was the victory of my life. That was my Mount Everest.

ARD – Seelenfänger (Soul Catcher – Soul Hunter) Podcast – Toxic Tantra
03.05.2024
Update

<https://www.ardaudiothek.de/episode/seelenfaenger/toxic-tantra-update-9/bayern-2/13370377/>

Hello, Katja Peisen-Petersen here again...

Christiane: and Christiane Hawranek.

Katja: We got a lot of feedback from you about Soul Catcher - Toxic Tantra, about these eight episodes, so we decided to give you another update. There are some new things.

Christiane: First of all, I produced the podcast in March and then I found out that the investigation against Gregorian Bivolaru was extended to Germany. There was a request for legal assistance from France.

Katja: We also know that several women have filed complaints in Germany or are planning to do so. Yes, and secondly, we've also been contacted by other dropouts.

Christiane: It was quite hard for them at times and also upsetting to hear that. But what several people have already told us is that in the end, they found it healing to hear that and realize, "Hey, I'm not alone and other women aren't stupid either!" We have another voicemail for you from another dropout who also wanted us to change her voice a bit.

Voiceover: It's like having a nightmare and now you realize it wasn't a dream.

Katja: Several people have actually told us that at some point they no longer trusted their own intuition.

And here's this dropout who thought, "Maybe I just dreamed it all up after all and it didn't really happen." Christiane: Exactly, then she also said, yes, she had the feeling that "maybe I'm too sensitive? Am I not spiritual enough?" And this was the case for several people. Nathalie and Liz, for example, told us very similar things.

Katja: Yes, and Nathalie and Jasper listened to the podcast and then sent us a voicemail.

Nathalie talks here about episode 3 when I went to the aura reading.

Nathalie: With the Egely device, I really have to laugh, because it's something very widespread at school.

I don't know how many times I stood in front of that machine.

Christiane: They've also had feedback from other dropouts that the podcast is helping them and yes, that they're just realizing they're not alone.

Nathalie: I hope it somehow helps even more people who are maybe in the process of slipping into it, or gives other people who have been in it for a while, a little bit of confidence to maybe take the step out.

Katja: Some listeners have also asked us if we are interested in more details about the yoga movement, more memories that they have.

Christiane: The clear answer is YES. So for us, it's not over yet.

Feel free to give us advice, write us, send us voicemails. You can find the addresses in the show notes.

Both women who have been part of the yoga movement and men, because we are also interested in the male perspective.

Katja: And also, if you've had experiences in other groups where it seems to you that there was something strange, something that needs to be investigated, please contact us. Without a tip from Eva, this Toxic Tantra podcast would never have been

created. So we really depend on your stories, your memories.

Christiane: We've had a few more questions and we'd like to answer a few of them now.

Katja: Exactly, question number one, quite a few people have asked us that. How did they actually manage to finance themselves? Gregorian Bivolaru has a lot of money, because the house where the women stayed was quite poor.

Christiane: Regarding the finances, unfortunately, we have not been able to find out exactly, because it is quite opaque. But what I can say is that the French article states that during the raid on Gregorian Bivolaru, €300,000 in cash was found. And we assume that karma yoga also plays a pretty big role in this yoga movement in general.

Katja: For example, we know several people who now teach yoga without getting paid.

Or Liz, for example, from the podcast, who cleaned the school.

Another question we got was how many people were actually arrested besides Bivolaru?

And yes, there must be many more people behind this system.

Christiane: Well, there were over 40 arrests during the raid and now there are a total of six people in custody.

So that means Bivolaru himself and then people in his circle. And the presumption of innocence generally applies.

Katja: How did the ATMAN federation react to the podcast? That was another question.

Christiane: I haven't had any reaction yet, I can tell. This was our little update. We look forward to hearing from you.

Katja: Bye. Goodbye.

{Comments on this podcast:

So the conclusion can be made clearly that the Atman schools are masters in lying. They do not respect their own teachings of Satya (truth). Their interpretation of truth is that everything that seems to work for them is allowed.

They skilfully bypass any critical questioning and are not standing for what they are doing in this world. True authentic spiritual masters or traditions would take full responsibility and accountability for their teachings and their actions because if you are practicing the absolute truth you don't need to hide anything.

By contrast their guru is hiding, not taking any responsibility for his actions and mistakes. Always bypassing any accusation with the demons story. In other words he is a coward and a weak man not honouring and respecting women and a disgrace for manhood.

They never show any empathy or compassion for their victims. If you have issues, serious illnesses or doubts then you are never helped but instead accused of wrong doing and demonic influences. You are either in or out. And if you are leaning out then they will push you out if they cannot pull you in anymore. True authentic spiritual masters or traditions always have empathy and compassion as their foundation and will never send anyone away.

Misa has never integrated anything in the absolute, in fact they are masters of relativity, and everything is always black and white, in or out, good or evil. True authentic spiritual masters or traditions are beyond these childish games that keep

everyone, especially their students, trapped in the endless samsara. True authentic spiritual masters or traditions will empower you and set you free and by that give you full control over your own life.

From this we can conclude that this is not a genuine spiritual organisation but a corrupt "spiritual" business with a fake guru who manipulates everybody for his own satisfaction.

They try to make everyone believe that everything is within the law and that every "student" has full control over what they consent to do or not to do. But they fail to comment on the intense atmosphere of indoctrination and manipulation that forces their students to believe, behave and act according to their doctrine. By this they violate the law of freewill and are per definition not a true spiritual organisation. To put it in their own words, they are demonic and even an instrument of Satan himself.

The only chance for those in the MISA sect to get out is to realize THEMSELVES the contradictions within MISA, the contradiction between what is said at MISA and reality and the violation of moral principles.

Who does not value moral principles, especially on respecting the Truth, has no chance. It is difficult to fight against "euphoric states" only with rational arguments, for the arguments must be accepted, the truth must be accepted however disturbing and troubling it may be.

When the guru says one thing and then says it the other way around, even the one who trusts him will wonder: which of the two options do I choose? But how can he not give up either of the contradictory options, because both are from the All Knowing Guru? The conflict that arises should break the walls of the prison, provided you accept the idea that the guru is wrong, for he is denying himself.

The only way is to confront the guru, to confront his many faces and see how one dissolves the other. If you are subdued by faith in the guru, then losing faith is liberation. You just have to have the guts to admit he's a charlatan. For that, you have to really stick to the Truth, beyond appearances. }