

**ATOP Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Outreach Certificate Project to Romania:
Ancestral Healing and Meaning-Making**

Utilizing the Biopsychosocial and Eco-Spiritual Model Training

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I have been away from Romania since the end of Communism. In fact, the week after they shot Communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena (which was the first live non-Communist broadcast the country ever saw), I left Romania with my parents and sought asylum in the United States. Despite being gone as long as Communism – 21 years, I will always call Romania my home and part of me will always reside there. Yet going back with Dr. Ani Kalayjian on our ATOP/Meaningfulworld Ancestral Healing Mission to Romania, I had mixed feelings of excitement and apprehension; after all, I had not touched Romanian soil in 8 years. Zipping along on the brand-new Bucharest expressway in a new Dacia, I saw the changes that were mandated by the European Union such as better roads and more respect for the law. Newly constructed colorful buildings shone next to the crumbling grey façades of buildings that were once beautiful in the Communist era. As we dined with Mr. Aurel Mocanu, the Chairperson of our ATOP/Meaningfulworld branch to be registered soon in Romania, the People's Palace lit up over the Bucharest night and I wondered how much of the effects of Communism still existed beneath the shiny contemporary veneer.

On Wednesday, September 28, Dr. Kalayjian experienced a unique Armenian independence festival at the Romanian Athenaeum, where a musical celebration program commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Republic of Armenia was taking place under the auspices of the Ambassador of Armenia to Romania, the Archbishop, and other Armenian dignitaries.



On Thursday we presented our Ancestral Healing and Meaning-Making program using the Biopsychosocial and Eco-Spiritual model at the Spiru Haret University, where we were welcomed by the Dean, Dr. Florin Todose, as well as Dr. Elena Claudia Rusu along with close to one hundred students, professors, and enthusiastic audience participants. Dr. Tudose keenly pointed out that students sitting far away from the podium in a large auditorium with plenty of seats was a Romanian trend, one that we

inherited from the Communist regime that signifies distrust in others, in ourselves, and in authority. Some participants recalled their fears in 1977 when a 6.4 magnitude earthquake shattered Romania, while others expressed interest in forgiveness and meaning-making in their everyday lives. Dr. Kalayjian was honored with a Visiting Professor title as well as a plaque and certificate, a distinction conferred to celebrate her 20+ years of experience in disaster management, mass trauma interventions, conflict resolution, academic and postgraduate teaching, and psychotherapy practice.



After our presentation at the university, we were warmly welcomed at the Armenian Orthodox Church and the Ararat Armenian Association in Bucharest by Bishop Datev Hagopian and Father Paul Bogdan. There Dr. Kalayjian and the team admired and were educated about 1,600 year old Armenian monasteries, churches, and artifacts reflecting Armenian history and presence in Romania. I was especially proud to read in the Ararat magazine that out of all the countries hosting Armenians after the Ottoman Turkish Genocide, Romania has given them the most support and welcome, and we continue to have a thriving Armenian community in Romania.



On Friday Dr. Kalayjian and I visited the Pro Vita Association Orphanage located in Valea Screzii. We were accompanied by Mr. Mocanu and Mr. Dorian Radu, who kindly drove us 90 km outside of Bucharest into Prahova County. It was a splendid warm day and the scenery accompanying our journey was lush green valleys, beautiful orchards, and the hospitality and culture of the Romanian towns and villages that embraced us on our way.



The orphanage was colorful and beautiful, and the children were well cared for despite the need for more space, buildings, and resources. This place is the dream and life's work of Father Nicolae Tanase, who has welcomed the unwanted children with open arms. Though in the past the abundance of unwanted children was due to the Communist ban on abortions, in modern times their presence is due to economic hardships, alcoholism, and domestic violence. More than 20 years since its foundation, the Valea Screzii Pro Vita Association orphanage is the safe and loving home of more than 78 children and 26 women who suffered from abuse, neglect, and lack of appropriate care. Mrs. Melanie Tanase and the lovely, happy children showed us around the orphanage where we visited the nursery and the dispensary, which is in need of new medications and vaccines. We met some of the volunteer teachers, workers, and aides who give their time and love to the wonderful children of the orphanage, and we had the pleasure of observing school time, during which we asked children to draw us their "happy and safe places." It was no surprise that they all gave us marvelous portraits of the surrounding hills and views of the orphanage itself – their home and their safe haven. ATOP Meaningfulworld donated much-needed coloring pens, coloring books, snacks, and gifts to the children, the staff, and the volunteers. The orphanage, the children, the women, and the workers, as well as Father Tanase and his parish family, all touched our hearts and souls. We have made plans to facilitate healing, empowerment, and nonviolence workshops with the women and children of the Pro Vita Association on our next mission in May 2012.



Friday evening was the start of our three-day ATOP Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Outreach Project (MHOP), stages I and II, on Transforming Generational Trauma Through Ancestral Healing and Meaning-Making Utilizing the Bio-Psychosocial and Eco-Spiritual Model at the Chemarea Sufletului (Calling of the Soul) Center. The warmth, enthusiasm, and openness of our participants was impressive as they embraced our methods while we explored empathy and forgiveness in the healing circle, through Dr. Kalayjian's Ancestral Healing Meditation CD, lectures, discussions, and through films.



As we journeyed together through the seven steps of the Model, the remnants of the Communist regime and transgenerational trauma were obvious in the hesitancy of our trainees to disclose their emotions, especially the men, and the feeling of shame and distrust in talking about matters of the heart. Abandonment, forced separation, grief, helplessness, and somatic complaints were some of the issues shared. Together we worked on exploring empathy, reinforcing compassionate listening skills, and strengthening the inner self so they can be advocates for peace-building and conflict transformation in their self, community, Romania, as well as around the globe. The trainees all held advanced degrees in psychotherapy, medicine and other healing professions, and they were very keen to include spirituality

and ancestral healing in their practices and everyday lives. Some of the physical-release activities included chakra balancing, yoga stretches, meditation, and energetic release. This journey with the participants was very transformative; we were both impressed at the levels of enlightenment, eagerness to heal, and compassion for one another. Dr. Kalayjian and I are extremely excited to assist our local hosts in establishing the ATOP/Meaningfulworld branch in Bucharest, Romania, with Mr. Mocanu as Chairperson and Mr. Radu as Vice Chairperson.



Throughout our experiences at the university, in the Armenian community, at the orphanage, and in the training workshops, Dr. Kalayjian and I were very impressed by the evolution of psychology, healing, group consciousness, and spirituality in Romania, as well as the people's journey in healing their psychospiritual wounds, which resulted from 40 years of Communist oppression, two devastating wars, poverty, and forced displacement. In future missions, collaborating with our Romanian ATOP/Meaningfulworld branch, we hope to continue transforming generational trauma into peace-building through education and empowerment. As for me, finally going home after so many years, I found myself again in the new and the old façades of Romania, and I found my path in life: to heal trauma and spread forgiveness, hope, and love around the world, like my loving and amazing mentor, Dr. Ani Kalayjian.