

## **Fate-analysis - the life sketch of Lipót Szondi**

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Leopold (in Hungarian: Lipót) Szondi was born on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March 1893—in Nyitra, a settlement that today belongs to Slovakia. The original name of the family was Sonnenschein. He was born as the twelfth child in his father's second marriage. The family moved to Budapest in 1898. His mother, who passed away very soon, was remembered by the family as an illiterate, unwholesome woman who had to be supervised by the elder siblings during her depressive periods. The father himself had a huge impact on Szondi, influencing his fate-analytical works to a great extent.

These are his own words about his father: „ My father was a Jewish shoemaker, who spent most of his time studying the Jewish Holy Scriptures, supposedly Talmudic and Hasidic ones. I was five when the family moved to Budapest, and my elder brothers and sisters had to provide for the family, while my father contributed as an assistant rabbi during the service on big Jewish feasts. In such an environment I was raised to be religious. I was eighteen when he died, right before graduation. I used to say the prayer called Kaddis every morning and evening due to Jewish customs in front of the communion for a whole year. This was the time when my ego had internalized my father. These deep patterns were the ones leading me in my academic works later on, even when I had already given up the dogmatic customs of the Jewish religion. I still remained a Jew, a devoted one. Hence the role of belief function supposedly has a strong connection with me being brought up in a religious manner.”<sup>1</sup>

The father never introduced his religious beliefs to his kids. Leopold was the only one who regularly accompanied him to the synagogue, but neither could he catch a glimpse of his father's religious thoughts. Rabbis, with who he held seminars on religious matters, often visited the father.

Szondi attended the public school of the seventh district of Budapest, this was followed by eight years of secondary education in Damjanich Secondary Grammar School. His strong sense of

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<sup>1</sup> Szondi, Leopold (1973): Schicksalsanalyse – eine Selbstdarstellung In: Psychoterapie in Selbstdarstellungen. Herausgeben von Prof. Dr. phil. Ludwig J. Pongratz, Bern, Verlag Hans Huber.

justice (“e” factor in fate-analysis) had already occurred in elementary school, which he also stood up for. The story is about a teacher hitting one of his students in the face, an incident, which was followed by an inquiry. The fellow students all claimed to have seen nothing in fear of their teacher. Szondi was the only one, who told the truth and as a consequence he got a bad mark, what led to him not receiving any funding in secondary school. The bad experience didn’t break him at all, he felt even more forced to prove himself and kept on being an excellent student until the very end of school. He would be regularly helping his weaker fellow students with studying, and dedicate his free time to books. The fact that he would read a book every day shows his passion towards literature. He was especially fond of Dostojewski, whose writings had a huge impact on him.

After graduation he attended the Medical Faculty of Pázmány Péter University. In his remembrance he mentions his mother’s conditions, which could affect his choice of labour.<sup>2</sup>

At the time World War I. broke out, he just finished the third year of university. As he was obliged to do military service, he was sent to the front as a medic sergeant after a short training. During the four years of the war he had several life changing experiences, which he often referred to later on. He was saved by Divine Providence three times during these years.

Once he was sent to the next military post five kilometres away, and by the time he returned he found his two fellow soldiers dead after a bomb attack. Another time he was saved by Freud’s book *The Interpretation of Dreams* when he was shot by a fragmentation grenade. The book, which he carried in his backpack, held the grenade up saving his life. The third incidence was at the Italian frontline when his corps was stationed next to Udine, he was ordered to come back to Budapest immediately because malaria broke out. While he was away his corps was attacked and killed by the enemy.

After having had to face it every day, the fear of death disappeared from Szondi. He had seen so many people dying right after each other in their own way. Some were resigned about it; some felt that they are victims of the evil destiny.

The other key experience he had during World War I., called his attention to the familial heredity of people choosing partners. After getting wounded he was lying in hospital in Vienna in 1916, where he met a blond, Saxon, Christian girl, who he fell in love with. One night he had a nightmare about his parents talking about one of his elder brothers who had a tragic fate. This brother of his was thirty years older than Szondi and he used to be a medical student just like him, and once has fallen for a blond, Saxon, Christian girl, who was a teacher. The brother quit university and got married. The marriage was unhappy. This happened long before Szondi was

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<sup>2</sup> Dino Larese (1976): Leopold Szondi - Eine Lebensskizze. Amriswiler Bücherei, 14. p.

born. His dream helped him realize that unconsciously he wanted to repeat his brother's fate. He refused to undergo the familial fate, he wanted to live his own personal one. The next day he left Vienna.

He graduated from Medical School after the war finished in 1919. Between 1919 and 1924 he had been simultaneously working at two institutes as an assistant: at the Neurological and Psychiatric Department of Apponyi Polyclinic, and at the Psychological Laboratory of Research on children with special needs. Paul Ranschburg was the director of both institutes. Szondi always referred to him with very much of respect, he said Ranschburg helped him become familiar with the exact methods of experimental psychology. In his memoirs he said Ranschburg was the one he can thank for never having to change the original experimental fate diagnostic test. The version from 1938 has proven its validity.

Between 1924 and 1926 he was the head of both the Endocrinology and Pathology Ward at Apponyi Polyclinic. In 1927 the Laboratory of Pathology and Therapy (owned by the Kingdom of Hungary) was founded by the Ministry of Education. The Laboratory, which he soon became the professor of, was part of the Training College for Teachers of Children with Special Needs. He was working here until 1941 when he had to leave his position because of his Jewish origin. His Hungarian generative era had reached its highest peak between 1927 and 1941 while working at the Laboratory.

The Laboratory had two objectives. On one hand it was a research lab, on the other hand it functioned as a placement for students of the Special Education Teachers Training College where the interns visited classes such as biology, and the pathology of mentally and physically disabled children. Due to Szondi's merit these children were examined in terms of their whole personality, their biology, mental conditions and social circumstances. Due to his complex view on pedagogy, several professionals, such as special education teachers, psychologists, biologists and medical doctors were working together in the laboratory. As Szondi defined the objectives of special education: „special education is not a way of correcting vestigial disabilities with the help of pedagogy, but it is a complex, united pedagogical, medical, social, judiciary, religious, ethical approach of a discipline which focuses on the therapy of the whole personality of disabled people.”<sup>3</sup> Due to these views, the children had to undergo several examinations. Their growth, maturity level, biological reaction forms, psychological and somatic characters were considered and their inheritable features and genealogy were analyzed. The character diagnostics was based on a wide range of methods like skull inspection, x-ray analysis of the skull, microscopy of the capillars,

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<sup>3</sup> Szondi, Lipót (1931): *Beszámoló az V. német gyógypedagógiai kongresszuson, Kölnben elhangzott orvostudományi előadásokról.* (Report at the 5th German Congress of Special Education for Deficient Patients) In: Magyar Gyógypedagógia, Number 5-7.

blood type definition, testing for the immunological and allergic reactions, hypophysis and thyroid gland examination, monitoring sexual maturity, social and physical skills, complex personality and character studies. Szondi's complex view on special education, the extensive research methods of the laboratory and the articles Szondi published on the topic has all contributed to the fate-analytical conception. The multidimensional approximation on the personality had established the empirical background of the fate-analytical theory. This helped him to form his ideas on human fate which he described as the elements as self-, character-, social-, mental-, spiritual- fate. His new theory of object choice - „object choice guided by the ancestors”-, which he later named genotropism, was published in 1937. He came to the concept of genotropism through the discovery of the choice of illnesses. In pursuance of the research they have gathered data of a thousand child and their fifteen thousand relatives. The examination of family trees had helped him realize the similarities between illnesses amongst the families of spouses. According to his observations the traumas and sicknesses were often the consequences of the familial genotype and not due to other factors. This way the familial heredity is responsible for the sickness of the primarily weak organ. In Szondi's concept, not only the choice of illnesses but also the choice of occupation, spouses and friends is also due to its familial heredity. These thoughts have lead to the notion of the familial unconsciousness, which is rooted in the latent familial heredity everyone carries along. The familial unconsciousness appears in our choices; and according to Szondi's concept, our fate is a continuous line of the choices we make.

1937 was a turning point in the operation of the laboratory. The first fate-analytical study book of Szondi the „Analysis of Marriages. An attempt at a theory of choice in love”<sup>4</sup> was published in the Netherlands in English language. Along with the new object choice concept he introduced the genotest (the test later was named after Szondi by Rappaport), which contains forty-eight portraits of psychotic patients. A new period had begun in the laboratory. Instead of the constitutional analysis the focus was on fate-analysis. He introduced his colleagues to his theory which was already well conceptualized by that time. The enthusiastic work started, they tested thousands of people with different occupation, social status and age. Szondi's psychology had reached lot of professionals at that time. Psychologists, special education teachers and theologians visited his seminars as well. The memoirs of Imre Molnar<sup>5</sup> say that six of them were trained first: Ferenc Mérei, Klári Sándor, György Garai, Zsuzsa Kőrösi, Vera Groák and Imre Molnár. They were the „generation of the sons”, who were followed by the „grandchildren” who were already trained by the „sons”. The psychologists were trained by Mérei, the special education teachers by Vera

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<sup>4</sup> Szondi, Lipót (1937): Analysis of Marriages. An attempt at a theory of choice in love. In: Acta Psychologica Vol. III. The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff.

<sup>5</sup> Molnár, Imre: *Ami a kulisszák mögött volt a magyar pszichológiában 1932-1976 között*. (What was behind the curtain in Hungarian psychology between 1932-1976). Kiadatlan kézirat (Unprinted manuscript).

Groák, and the medical doctors by Klári Sándor. „I have to say that in the beginning of our training all of us were in resistance. We didn't believe in this whole new theory, we started to gather data so that we could prove that the theory is false,” - says Imre Molnár in his recollection. However, the test met with approval. In 1941 the laboratory had to stop with the operations, Szondi lost his job because of his Jewish origin, he only could work in his private practice.

In June 1944 the family was deported to the concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen, from where they were released in December 1944. It was a very special way how Szondi has lived through all these experiences. In his theory, aggression is an instinct we are all born with. In a letter he wrote to his friend Péter Balázs he defined what he thinks about being wrong: „What is wrong? I was taught by fate-analysis what being wrong means. It means that we still haven't found the right way to escape the bane, our instinct are drifting us into. I said not yet! Herewith I say maybe you can do different tomorrow or the day after.”<sup>6</sup> His belief in fate-analysis had helped him through concentration camp. This is how he remembered: „At the concentration camp life had a lot of psychological moral to teach me. I used to be a pastor and did pastoral care between two plank beds. The thirty centimetre wide gap was my consulting room, around us all over people were lying pallets, and still no one was bothered by this, and they kept seeking relief from me. It was an extraordinary experience for me. I was holding a seminar during those five months, with eight-ten people, two of them are still doing their training as fate analysts. I also organized a humanistic circle of people, which's gatherings we held behind closed doors in the dark, being cold and hungry while SS soldiers were marching up and down few meters away from us – I believe these experiences are going to appear in my work later on. (I am working on a brochure at the moment which is titled The Humanization of Instincts.)”<sup>7</sup> In a couple of his studies such as *The Road to Becoming Human*<sup>8</sup>; *Kain*; *Moses* Szondi reveals the possible ways of sublimation of aggression.

He was dismissed from the integration camp in Caux in 1945, when he got invited to work at a Private Sanatorium in Pragnins by Oscar Forel. His emigration was promoted by the fact that his name was already known in Switzerland. He gave a presentation in Genf at the I. International Congress of Special Education. The report of the conference was published in Zürich in 1940. Benno Schwabe Publishing issued his book *Schicksalsanalyse* in 1944.

Several people supported his settlement in Switzerland. Heinrich Hanzelmann, who was the Professor of Special Education in Zürich played a big role in establishing the Swiss connections, and facilitated the publishing of Szondi's works during World War II. Hanzelmann and his wife

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<sup>6</sup> Szondi's letter to Péter Balázs 1939. Húsvétvasárnap. MTA levéltár.

<sup>7</sup> Szondi's letter to Péter Balázs, 1946. VI.16. MTA Levéltár.

<sup>8</sup> Szondi Lipót (1963): *Der Weg zur Menschwerdung*. In: *Szondiana*, Number 46. 95-120 p.

Therese Simon (later became Theresa Wagner Simon) travelled to Budapest and handed the invitation in person to Szondi for the next years International Congress of Special Education. After the congress, Theresa Simon was the editor of the report and later on helped with the publishing of Schicksalsanalyse at Schwabe Publishing. Even before that she held presentations on fate-analysis for Swiss psychoanalytical and psychological associations. One of her presentations got published in the review called Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Psychologie und ihre Anwendungen, and because of this she was elected as a member of the board of the Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Psychologie und ihre Anwendungen (Swiss Association of Psychology and Applied Psychology). Oscar Forel was also a member of the Association, and he was already interested in Szondi's researches.

Károly Kerényi, who immigrated to Switzerland already in 1943 and who used to visit the seminars of Szondi had been teaching the subject: Introduction to the Fate-analytical test of Szondi for two semesters at the Applied Psychology Institute of Zürich.

While working at the Private Sanatorium of Oscar Forel between 1945 and 1946, Szondi had finalized his therapeutic approach, the psycho-shock therapy, which he only published in 1955<sup>9</sup>. He used to travel to Zürich every two weeks to give presentations on fate-analytical theory and method at the Applied Psychology Institute. He had moved to Zürich in May 1946, where he opened a private practice and step-by-step he started to build up the institutional background of fate-analysis<sup>10</sup>. Just like the Budapest times, he held seminars in his own flat, which were often visited by guests from different countries like the United States, France, Holland and Denmark. The Swiss Psychological and Applied Psychological Association elected a board in 1951, which was dedicated to improve the experimental fate-diagnostics, to establish an archive and to give regular basic and further training for their analysts. In 1951 Szondi founded the Experimental Instinct Research and Fate-Psychology Team (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Experimentelle Triebforschung und Schicksalspsychologie - AETS), which was the Institutional background of the systematic fate-psychological training until 1970. In the meanwhile, foreign teams had been founded in different countries, and of these teams Szondi had established the International Fate-Psychological Research Association (Internationale Forschungsgemeinschaft für Schicksalspsychologie - IFSP), which was responsible for organizing conferences from then on. The first International Conference of Fate-Psychology was held in Zürich, June 1958. In 1961 Szondi had founded the Swiss Fate-analytical Therapy Association (Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Schicksalsanalytische Therapie), which

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<sup>9</sup> Szondi, Leopold (1963): Schicksalsanalytische Therapie. Ein Lehrbuch der passiven und aktiven analytischen Psychotherapie. Bern, Verlag Hans Huber.

<sup>10</sup> Karl Bürgi-Meyer (1993): Leben und Werk von Leopold Szondi In: Sonderheft der „Szondiana“, Leopold Szondi zum 100. Geburtstag, Szondi-Institut, Zürich

played a role in the further training and specialization of the analysts. At that stage, the former students were responsible for giving the psychoanalytical seminars.

From 1953 the „Szondiana“ was issued along with the periodical *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Psychologie und ihre Anwendungen*. The Szondiana contained the publications of Szondi and studies, articles from other fate-analysts. The first issue was to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> birthday of Szondi. To highlight few topics of the Szondiana: it dealt with clinical psychology, criminal psychology, psychosomatics, labour psychology, fate-analytical therapy, instinct-diagnostics, psychodiagnostics of children, and few associated fields such as methodology and psychological statistics. After the Szondi Institute was founded, the Szondiana was published as the official periodical of it, and it is still issued the same way. In the school year of 1962/63 Szondi was invited by the University of Zürich to teach the Introduction to Fate-analysis for a semester.

The Szondi Institute was established due to a generous fund of a Swiss patroniser in 1969. The Institute has two functions. On one hand it is responsible for researches, on the other hand it is the training centre of the future fate-analysts. Fate-analysis has become well known worldwide. The strongest teams besides the Swiss group are in Belgium and France. There are also active groups in Germany, the U.S.A, Japan, Spain, Finland and Russia. Szondi's theory was begun to teach at the University of Loewe and University of Paris and in 1970 the Faculty of Psychology and Pedagogy of University of Loewe, and in 1979 the VII. University of Paris have given the title *honoris doctori causa* to Szondi. The Hungarian Psychological Association honoured him with the Paul Ranschburg Medallion for his outstanding medical and psychological work.

Leopold Szondi died at the age of 93 in Küssnacht near Zürich on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January 1986.