

# IN MEMORIAM

## A Luminous Presence



**Zaharina Savova – Ina**  
1961 – 2024

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*Zaharina Savova – Ina was an accomplished psychotherapist, teacher, author, and dean of Filaretova Medical College, whose impact on the academic and psychotherapeutic communities in Bulgaria was truly immeasurable. She served as a board member and teacher at the Bulgarian Institute for Neo-Reichian Body Psychotherapy, where her passion for teaching and nurturing the next generation of therapists was abundantly evident. Her dedication to the field of body psychotherapy, coupled with her extraordinary zest for life, set her apart as a beacon of inspiration to all who had the privilege of knowing her, especially her students. What endeared Professor Savova to us all was not only her professional excellence but also the generosity of her spirit. Her infectious laughter was a gift that brightened any day, and her presence will be greatly missed.*

*As we grapple with the profound loss of such an extraordinary individual, we are committed to honoring Professor Savova's legacy by continuing the work and development of the Bulgarian Institute for Neo-Reichian Body Psychotherapy, just as she would have wished. In doing so, we will strive to emulate the dedication, passion, and boundless enthusiasm that defined her remarkable life.*

*May her soul rest in eternal peace.*

Alexander Vachev  
EABP Newsletter, January 2024

In tracing Ina Savova's academic journey, we uncover a rich legacy that not only expanded the frontiers of knowledge but also fostered tangible improvements in healthcare practices. Her academic contributions continue to resonate, leaving an enduring impact on the field of body psychotherapy.

Professor Savova earned her Doctorate in Social Medicine and Healthcare and Pharmacy Organization in 2006. In 2013, she assumed the academic position of Professor in the Faculty of Public Health at the Medical University of Sofia. Her habilitation thesis is titled *Social-Medical Issues and Approaches to the Prevention of Anorexia and Bulimia*.

In 2021, Professor Savova received the prestigious PANACEA Award in the medical-social field for her noteworthy achievements in teaching, scientific research, and expert contributions. Simultaneously, she was honored with the distinction of "Favorite Teacher" at the Medical University (MU) – Sofia, highlighting her exceptional impact in the field of medical-social sciences. As academic advisor to numerous graduates, specialists, and doctoral candidates at the Faculty of Public Health at MU – Sofia and the Bulgarian Institute for Neo-Reichian Analytical Body Psychotherapy, Professor Savova played a pivotal role in shaping the academic landscape.

An accomplished author and co-author, she made substantial contributions to over 170 scientific publications, spanning a range of topics including stress, psychogenic eating disorders, and the somatic psychotherapeutic approach in their treatment. Her scholarly endeavors extended to the creation of eight textbooks and teaching aids in critical areas such as social medicine, health prevention, gerontology, geriatrics, as well as pedagogical and psychological aspects of healthcare. She became a member of the Medical Science Council at the MU – Sofia in 2008. She served as the Chief Editor of the journal *Health and Science*, and was a member of the editorial board of *Health Policy and Management*. Additionally, she was a member of a number of national and international organizations, and actively participated in more than 80 events in her professional capacity.

Professor Savova's scholarly endeavors and professional career were prominently concentrated in the fields of social medicine with emphasis on prevention, individual and group psychotherapy, gerontology, geriatrics, and the pedagogical and psychological dimensions of healthcare and education. This rich tapestry of academic pursuits showcased her versatility and holistic approach to healing. The impact of her work weaves through diverse domains, encompassing groundbreaking research, innovative methodologies, and practical applications in a long list of achievements.

## Theoretical contributions

- *Pioneering sociomedical study.* The first comprehensive sociomedical study on psychogenic eating disorders in Bulgaria, which explored the intricate interplay of predisposing, triggering, and sustaining factors, offering a groundbreaking assessment of the probability of developing anorexia and bulimia.
- *Psychotherapeutic analysis.* In-depth analysis and evaluation of major psychotherapeutic approaches in treating psychogenic eating disorders.
- *Innovative methodology.* The novel methodology rooted in the neo-Reichian psychotherapeutic approach, involving systematic observation and psychotherapy, marked a pioneering effort in the treatment of patients with anorexia and bulimia, and provided a detailed analysis of the results.
- *Educational models for mental health.* A significant aspect of her academic journey involved the development of practical educational models for raising and educating

young children and adolescents. Aligned with the National Mental Health Program in Bulgaria (2004–2012), these models aimed at achieving proper development and mental health.

### Scientific and applied contributions

- In developing a model for the risk factors of anorexia and bulimia that can be applied in creating specific programs for adolescents, young people, and other at-risk groups.
- In adopting a new comprehensive methodology and toolkit for the diagnosis, observation, and psychotherapy of patients with anorexia and bulimia, with high efficiency. This allows for the integration of the methodology in both hospital and non-hospital sectors in healthcare.
- In the development of a guide with general rules and criteria for best practices in the prevention of anorexia and bulimia that can serve as a recommended standard in the creation of specific guidelines for participants in preventive activities.
- A significant aspect of her academic journey involved the development of practical educational models for raising and educating young children and adolescents. Aligned with the National Mental Health Program in Bulgaria (2004–2012), these models aimed at achieving proper development and mental health.

### Prevention and rehabilitation of malignant disease

As a consultant and participant in Bulgaria’s first comprehensive specialized program for prevention and rehabilitation following breast cancer, with objectives in two directions:

- Preventive (educational and awareness) activities targeting at-risk groups, those affected by the disease, and their families;
- Improvement of overall survival and enhancement of the quality of life for individuals with breast cancer through participation in a program for the recovery of mental, emotional, and physical health.

Research and analysis of the program’s results were published and presented at scientific forums in Bulgaria, France, Switzerland, and Montenegro.

### Education and teaching

- A lecturer at the Medical University of Sofia, Faculty of Public Health, and the Medical College “Yordanka Filaretova,” where she also assumed the role of director.
- A teacher and supervisor at the Bulgarian Institute for Neo-Reichian Analytical Body Psychotherapy, while concurrently serving as a member of its Board of Directors.

A distinguished psychologist, psychotherapist, scientist and researcher, author, teacher, supervisor, and leader, she left an indelible mark on the academic landscape.

But above all, and in all, she was first and foremost human.



## A Luminous Presence

I have been writing for as long as I can remember. I write prolifically and effortlessly, akin to breathing. Now, facing the blank page, words elude me. I am still in the phase where I can't believe I have to bid farewell and write: Farewell, Ina! In Bulgarian, "Farewell" means "with God" – no longer a physical presence among people, but at home *with God*.

Ina emerged as a trailblazer in body psychotherapy in Bulgaria, undergoing her training in the Therapy of the Five Movements in Switzerland as part of our Institute's fourth cohort some 30 years ago. In 2010, she joined the board of directors at BINAP. As a professor at the prestigious Medical University – Sofia, she secured the distinction of being the first individual member from Bulgaria to gain acceptance into EABP. Her membership not only paved the way for us to apply as a professional community and training institute, but also facilitated the subsequent inclusion of many of us – her colleagues and students – as individual members. Without her pioneering efforts, we wouldn't be part of the expansive European professional family today.

Ina was one of those people whose luminous presence will forever remain etched in memory. I recall her words: "Today, our lives are increasingly hectic, laden with tasks and demands. We suffer from a chronic lack of time for ourselves and our loved ones. The responsibilities, often self-imposed, haunt us, but what our soul and body yearn for, is a *question for another time*. 'They can wait,' we often say. But it is up to us, I am convinced, to live in harmony, feel content, and achieve happiness and success. What we have to do is to embrace our nature, put in the effort, and, most importantly, desire and strive for a change. The wonders are within us, and my life experience and the many years of psychotherapeutic practice prove exactly that."

Ina embodied a radiant and diversely gifted spirit – remarkably resilient, yet maternally warm. Her attire, thoughts, and emotions painted a kaleidoscope of colors, and she unleashed a whirlwind of vibrant ideas and laughter. Her laughter, a trademark emblem, echoed with healing qualities. As my consciousness wrestles with denial and yearns for understanding, I contemplate the possibility that other realms may now be beneficiaries of Ina's therapeutic laughter. Ina, who facilitated laughter therapy, left an enduring mark on those whose lives intersected with hers – colleagues, students, and grateful patients alike. *Ina, we will dearly miss you, but we are committed to perpetuating and advancing our shared mission in your honor.*

In our last conversations, we delved into the prevalent longing for unity among people today. Therefore, each of us – her colleagues and students at BINAP – commits to embracing and endorsing any initiative that fosters our collective sense of belonging. This commitment extends beyond professional gatherings, aiming to encompass human dialogue and promote unity among us as individuals, parents, and persons with diverse talents or shared personal challenges. It is within this community, where we share common values, philosophy, and beliefs, that we strive to counteract loneliness and alienation, preventing these forces from distancing us from our inherent human nature and well-being.

Ina, we extend our deepest gratitude for the wealth of knowledge, invaluable experiences, and the personal example you set – living with vibrancy and always with love! Your passing imparts yet another profound lesson in the journey of life. We hold you dear, Ina, with love and gratitude.

Madlen Algafari

*Co-Founder and Developer*

*Bulgarian Institute for Neo-Reichian Analytical Body Psychotherapy*

*Madlen Algafari partnered with Ina Savova in founding, developing, and leading the Bulgarian Institute for Neo-Reichian Analytical Body Psychotherapy (BINAP), and remained a longtime colleague and a dear friend.*

## Feeling Her Hand in Mine...

My first encounter with Ina took place during my admission interview at the Bulgarian Institute for Neo-Reichian Analytical Body Psychotherapy. I vividly recall her welcoming smile, and the welcoming tranquility with which she greeted me as if she were embracing me into the family. It marked one of the rare instances in my life until that moment when I tangibly sensed what it means to belong, the security it imparts, the warmth and enrichment it brings. This is who Ina was – proficient in comforting, offering a sense of safety and stability. Her smile had the extraordinary power to provide warmth, even during the hardest of times.

The years of my training unfolded, affording me the privilege to glean wisdom from my teachers, with Ina standing prominently among them. She was the exemplar of an extraordinary therapist – perceptive in uncovering the unseen, delicately and powerfully addressing pain, and creating a nurturing space to reclaim that which life had taken away. And when during a training simulation where I confronted one of my most horrifying and deeply entrenched traumas, having pushed myself beyond the limits of tolerance, reason, and endurance, Ina was a steadfast presence. She was simply there for me. It felt as if I were simultaneously spreading my wings in flight but also giving up. Much of what transpired in that moment of overwhelming pain and erupting rage is a blur to this day, but what I do remember is her hand holding mine. In that moment of touch between our hands, my memory of this blend of warmth, firmness, and decisiveness is almost surreal. Seemingly insignificant, this point of contact was one of the safest anchors in my life. Feeling her hand in mine, I knew I was alive, present, capable, and deserving of *being*.

I found myself at the opposite end of the room, curled up like a baby on a mat – shattered into pieces yet whole, hushed but still attuned to the beating of my heart and... Ina. Ina had enfolded my body, providing me with a sense of security, presence, vitality, and life I hadn't known until then. Also the silence, and space and time, to rise from the ashes. This marked the pivotal moment, in which the healing of my wounds, and there were so many, truly commenced. And for that too, I thank you, Ina.

I learned a lot from Ina, who presented me with countless opportunities to grow, fostering my confidence as a person and a psychotherapist. She entrusted me as editor for her book on the psychology of eating, *See Your Reflection in the Empty Plate*. Ina consistently provided unwavering support throughout my evolution as a trainer, supervisor, and lecturer at BINAP. One of the last challenges I received from her was the invitation for me to be a keynote speaker at the 18<sup>th</sup> International Congress of EABP in Sofia in September 2023. I readily acknowledge that, yet again, my success in this endeavor was largely attributable to her support and belief in me.

To me, this is who Ina was – the embodiment of a smiling, accepting, profound, firm, reassuring force, perpetually giving. Oh, and rather mischievous... She had many sides with many colors. I am eternally grateful our paths were intertwined over the past 11 years.

Ina, you occupy a cherished space in my heart. May your soul forever beam with light. I love you!

Christina Bogdanova  
Ina's Student and Colleague  
Bulgarian Institute for Neo-Reichian Analytical Body Psychotherapy

## A Loving, Resolute, and Just Mother

The dearest memory I have with Ina is from a training simulation where she was the appointed supervisor, and I was chosen for the position of the therapist. The session was halfway through when suddenly, Ina interrupted it, and gave me a task. The interruption immediately signaled to me that I wasn't doing nearly as well as I had wished, which in turn activated a deep-rooted fear of failure. I made several attempts to fulfill the task, all of them contributing little to no value to the therapeutic process. Ina then intervened again, this time by taking control of the session and carrying it out through the end. Guiding the way, she helped the client, a fellow student, come to a profound realization, while holding them firmly yet lovingly every step of the way. Once the session was over, Ina turned to me and asked "How are you?"

I was surprised to find myself overwhelmed by a sense of utter failure. My body was frozen in shame, and my mind was buzzing, trying to find justification for my actions and appease my inner critic who was announcing the verdict – a critic I instinctively projected onto Ina.

"I feel so useless," I nearly cried out.

She looked at me and firmly said:

"You're not here to be useful; you're here to learn."

I had no idea what she was talking about. I was furious at her for exposing a part of me that I had buried deep, under layers of effort and accomplishments. It was the part of me that doesn't know it all, can't perform very well, would not inspire applause, is unable to be of help, and does not have it all figured out and under control.

Much time had to pass for me to grasp that her words did not imply I lacked usefulness or the potential for it. They simply meant I did not have to be useful, or rather aim at it, in everything. My worth did not diminish because of that; rather, it increased, for Ina had granted me permission to be uncertain, inexperienced, unprepared, unhelpful... In a broader sense, she had provided a safe space for me to not have to be the stable and capable figure that I aspired to be at all times, but a small inexperienced child who has yet to learn, through the care and support of others. Ina was not the critic I knew all too well I had projected onto her. Instead, she embodied a loving, resolute, and just mother, whose voice I wasn't accustomed to hearing.

This is who Ina was to me and to many of us, her students and colleagues at the Bulgarian Institute for Neo-Reichian Analytical Psychotherapy. She was one of the bedrocks of our community. She radiated acceptance and admiration for our individualities. She was genuinely curious about our lives, joys, and pains. She delighted in our talents and successes, shared in our sorrows, and supported us in our challenges. At the same time, she insisted that we assume responsibility. She had little to no tolerance for falling short of our abilities, and challenged us frequently and unapologetically. With her passing, we lost a leader, a supervisor, a lecturer, a role model, a colleague, and a friend. And many of us, in a sense, lost a mother as well – a subtle, yet infinitely more profound aspect of this loss.

It feels surreal to be writing words of farewell. In my grief for Ina, I don't know how to *be*, I am unsure of what to do... I am small, helpless and unprepared. I am to learn what it is like to live in a world without her in it. Yet I am loved and I have support. And I know this and feel it because of her.

Today, I make a promise to remember and live by the lessons in love and life that you imparted to me, Ina.

Kalina Raycheva  
*Student*

*Bulgarian Institute for Neo-Reichian Analytical Body Psychotherapy*



## Loving Myself

*I believe that our capacity for self-love is what draws us nearer to the life we yearn for!*

*True happiness proves elusive without self-awareness, especially when living in discord with one's true self.*

*The strength I draw from living authentically infuses my life with joy, fulfillment, and self-esteem.*

*Contentment in the way of life, delight derived from meaningful connections, cultivating positive self-regard, the experience of profound fulfillment and happiness... All require a gentle and loving attention towards oneself – the continuous practice of care and understanding. I endearingly refer to this as the acquired knack of loving yourself.*

*To love yourself is to not only comprehend but also to welcome and embrace your thoughts, feelings, emotions, and desires.*

*Choices made should resonate with your inherent nature and align with your genuine needs. Defending your right to be and allowing yourself the life that makes you happy – this is what begets a sense of purpose and the experiencing of living a meaningful life.*

*However, the knack of loving yourself is also intimately intertwined with recognizing, acknowledging, and understanding the realities faced by others.*

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