

A Great Teacher: M. Orhan Öztürk



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Writing about a person I highly value and deeply love is challenging. Also significant to me is the desire to introduce him and share memories. Eventually, this somewhat unusual editorial came into the place in remembrance of our teacher. As a twist of fate, prior to his passing, the editorial board had decided to publish an interview of Prof Orhan Öztürk conducted by his student, Sağman Kayatekin (Kayatekin 2023)*. I find this interview intriguing and significant in many respects and inspired by that, I will attempt to express my thoughts about Dr. Öztürk and being his student.

At the outset, I would like to emphasize that Orhan Öztürk was a brilliant teacher, as anyone who has met him was well aware of, with his ability to think systematically, his immense care of the use of language, especially the “Öztürkçe” (literally ‘pure Turkish’, a movement that promotes the use of a specific style of Turkish language), his straightforward and clear style of communication and, most importantly, his passion for teaching. As an intellectual brought up by the Turkish Republic, he always told us that he aimed to improve psychiatry in Türkiye rather than continuing his academic life in the USA where he could become a world-renowned physician. Indeed his works on psychiatric education, his efforts on the proper translation and the use of medical terms, the Associations that he founded and led, the Turkish Journal of Psychiatry, the books that he wrote; they all consistently align with his predetermined path.

Besides teaching, I believe one of Dr. Öztürk’s most prominent qualities was his skill in building up effective systems. The Department of Psychiatry at Hacettepe University is a prime example. Even 25 years after his retirement, this structure

he built largely continues. The architectural plan of the ward, the framework of the resident training program, the therapeutic environment created for patients, even the job descriptions for the staff—these foundational features are well-alive. Moreover, the rules that he established defined the identity of the Department; the open-door policy to all residents, prioritizing the clinical condition and waiting time for inpatient admission (*not the title and the position of the admitting physician!!*) are in effect without hesitation. I am not sure whether we mentioned to him that we were all proud of the way our department functioned. A similarly well-thought system was established for the Turkish Journal of Psychiatry. Residents took turns coordinating the issues, weekly editorial board meetings were held, the editorial board’s door was open to anyone interested, every submitted article was evaluated by a junior member of the editorial board, and all referee evaluations were read during these meetings. These gatherings served as a class where the writing and evaluation process of a scientific article was taught.

In creating successful systems, Dr. Öztürk’s systematic thinking ability, attention to detail, and work-oriented personality were undoubtedly crucial. However, these are not sufficient to achieve long-lasting programs that have been accepted and maintained by the people. While reading Dr. Kayatekin’s interview, I realized another characteristic of Dr. Öztürk that I hadn’t considered in this context before. During our residency, we were all somewhat intimidated by him to a certain extent. But Prof. Öztürk would ask the opinion on the diagnosis and the treatment of their patient to every resident, even to the most junior ones. He would listen to the formulation and the management plans, recommend his own

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*To read more about Orhan Ozturk in this issue, please check the references.

opinions, discuss with the residents when necessary, always oversaw the management with an utmost respect to the views of the resident whom he viewed as the primary doctor of that patient. He could get upset when something went wrong, yet it was apparent that his disappointment was related to the job itself; I don't recall him saying anything offensive to a person.

Similarly, when he embarked on the endeavor of publishing the Turkish Journal of Psychiatry with a group of residents, all of us felt that our opinions and contributions were valued; it was not 'Dr. Öztürk's journal' but 'Our journal.' For a collaborative piece to survive the leader needs to create this sense within the team. What's even more challenging, as mentioned in the interview, was how his works and the institutions that he founded survived after his departure, how the transition occurred successfully. At some point, Dr. Öztürk handed over the editorial directorship of the journal. During my tenure as the Editor, I always felt Dr. Öztürk's support, yet never felt that he interfered in my work.

Dr. Öztürk was a hardworking individual and a prolific writer. He continued his spirit of sharing in this field as well. He transferred the publishing rights of the book "Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy" to the Psychiatric Association of Turkey. Another significant work is the book "Mental Health and Disorders," published in 1988, which is an important reference for psychiatrists of my generation and subsequent ones. In 2005, it was an honor for both Berna Uluğ and me when Prof. Öztürk offered updating this book together in the later editions.

Dr. Öztürk believed that our society is not well-organized. In his own words, "*I believe that societal problems are derived more*

from the individual and societal insecurities than the proposed political causes. In order for one to say 'let's do something together' to someone else, the individual needs to have the confidence in oneself and the trust to the others. If we look at the ways we've been brought up in the family and schools, we notice that the characteristics such as obedience, accepting without questioning, lack of trust in relationships outside the family, and inability to develop an autonomous self prevail. Institutions' autonomy is discussed in our country, but individual autonomy is not given much attention"(Öztürk 2010). Bearing these beliefs in mind, he made substantial contributions to the foundation of the Psychiatric Association of Turkey, served as its first president, provided constant support after his leaving.

As I write these lines, I notice that the traits of Dr. Öztürk are characteristics of "good parenting.;" being controlling yet encouraging, his respect to our autonomy, his emphasis on ethics, his promotion of collaboration and sharing among peers...I feel so fortunate that I had such a great teacher not only academically but also with high personal attributes.

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