

I Spoke with Mt. Fuji

Yener Sonuŝen

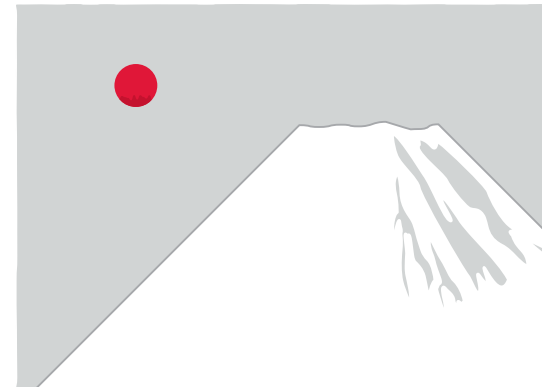


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Everyone begins the awareness of their struggle to find themselves at some place and time. I suppose mine started the year I encountered the Fujians in some way...



If I said Fuji, I meant you...

**EVEN IF WE'RE NOT THE
SAME WE'RE NOT APART**

THE FIRST FUJIAN IN MY LIFE.

My life in Japan began in Tunisia. In the summer of 1983 I was in Tunis, conducting research for Enka, a general trading company, mini version of Japanese sogo shosha, and taking an Arabic course, where I found myself chatting one day with a fellow student from Japan. His wife interrupted us to borrow my adhesive tape, I obliged, and in return I was invited to a “watermelon party” a few days later.

I had heard of Halloween pumpkin parties, but never of this. A huge watermelon sat beside a knife on a square table, and what transpired between them was no less than a watermelon ceremony. That evening I learned that the couple, Ryuta and Chisato, were newly-minted social anthropologists. They wanted to spend a few years doing research in their field in either Tunisia or Turkey before launching business careers, and they were brimming with questions about my country. Naturally I offered to help them in any way I could, if they decided to move to Turkey.

WHO CAN KNOW WHAT LIFE WILL ASK OF US?

THE FIRST FUJIAN IN MY LIFE.

Ryuta and Chisato did indeed come to Turkey, hoping to find positions as university researchers, or kenkyusei. So I introduced them to a Professor, an expert on Japan's Meiji period, who secured positions for both of them. Finding them a suitable place to stay proved more difficult. But I, in the meantime, was preparing to move to another country for a few years for my employer. So they wound up moving into my own apartment in Istanbul's Levent neighborhood, which henceforth became our shared home.

During that time I began reading a great deal about Japan's culture, starting with Isaiah Ben-Dasan's impressive analysis, *The Japanese and the Jews*. Friends later told me that Ben-Dasan was actually a Japanese author writing pseudonymously, a revelation that greatly enhanced his book for me.

Later on, Kurt Singer's *Mirror, Sword and Jewel: The Geometry of Japanese Life* was such a treat that I regretted not having read it earlier. And when the Idemitsu Collection came to Turkey in 1986, I saw a painting in which a rectangle, a triangle, and a circle represented the universe, that struck me as a perfect embodiment of Singer's thesis.

My Japanese friends were constantly urging me to visit their country, telling me that their families awaited me. But rather than just visit, I wanted to spend a short period of study there, to have a richer cultural experience while hopefully earning a bit of money as well. After weighing my options at length, we decided it would be best for me to join their university as a kenkyusei, just as they had joined mine.

I requested a transfer to Enka's Tokyo office, but the company had prospered during the two years I worked in the Middle East, and my directors wanted me to stay on longer. Without knowing much about negotiations at all, in those days, I took an "ask to receive" approach: I asked for what I wanted and stood firm. My director interpreted this as an ultimatum – though I hadn't meant it that way – and agreed to my request on condition that I would return to the Middle East a year later.

And that was how I negotiated the first important deal of my own business life. In those days, while I was busy investing in myself, most of my friends were investing in real estate, and the contrast caused me a fair bit of self-doubt. But I realized much later that this had indeed been the right path. I believe that one must always take initiative, maintain momentum, and embrace change; and I hoped that my move to Japan would be one such meaningful initiative, not just an adventure. But that was merely a hope. And how much can we ever count on those?

Meanwhile, my Japanese friends and I were creating our own international exchange program, which was also the beginning of a long friendship. It was a win-win deal for all of us.

Good deeds are always repaid, even when performed out of obligation. As my dear late grandmother always prayed, "May God lead you to meet good people."

MAY YOUR LIFE PATH BE WITH GOOD PEOPLE

THE JAPAN OF ROCK GARDENS.

Before I left Turkey, my Japanese friend told me to stay with her mother and father until I found my own place in Tokyo. I gathered that it would not be appropriate to pay them rent, so I asked what might be expected of me as their guest. With a smile, she suggested I help her father in his garden.

As it happened, my flight to Tokyo laid over in London, so I spent a week visiting a friend in the suburb of Richmond, where I learned two things. First, my friend taught me how to lay turf across his little lawn. Unrolling sod is notoriously hard work, demanding the greenest of thumbs, but I rose to the occasion. (I jest, of course; a child could do it.)

Second, when I took a walk around Richmond early one Sunday, everyone I saw greeted me with a bright "Hello!" which made me feel quite important. But when I reported back to my friend over breakfast, he wryly assured me that everyone's doctors had prescribed cheerful smiles and hellos as morale-boosters.

Upon arriving in Tokyo, I first stayed with a friend's family, the Haradas, in the Nerima district. I decided to deposit the bit of money I had brought along in a Japanese bank, with written instructions in English not to convert my U.S. dollars into yen. My plan was to move from Japan to the United States a year later, if I could persuade my company to transfer me, and in those days I didn't know much about currency exchange. So keeping my money in dollars seemed like the prudent thing to do.

The Haradas resembled my own family in more ways than one. Mr. Harada was a psychiatry professor who had lived in Germany for a while and learned the language. My own father had also spent a few years working in Germany. And I think it would be fair to say that my father spoke and moved in a more samurai manner than Mr. Harada. Mrs. Harada, for her part, was very eloquent in Japanese, just as my mother was in Turkish.

If you consider the amount of language we had in common when I first arrived in Tokyo, perhaps you can imagine how communication unfolded between the Haradas and me. The memory calls to mind a consultant I once heard about, who worked on foreign construction sites and communicated remarkably well with only ten words of English. For instance, if he wanted to refer back to three days ago, and the only word he knew was "yesterday," he would gesture backwards and say "yesterday yesterday yesterday."

Similarly, on my first Sunday in Tokyo, as Professor Harada was tending the garden, Mrs. Harada invited me for tea on the patio. I sat cross-legged, sipping my tea and watching them garden, when I suddenly remembered my conversation with my friend. I had just undergone a very serious horticultural training in London, and remained unaware of the fact that a Japanese garden is a miniature copy of the world. So, with all the zeal of the neophyte, I offered them my landscaping services.

Gesturing with my hands and using a few words of English, I explained how I would clear away the puddles which represented lakes and oceans, dislodge the rocks that symbolized mountains, pull up the clusters of shrubs representing forests, level the soil, and unroll smooth sheets of sod, as I had learned to do in London. Unbeknownst to me, I was kindly offering to obliterate an entire symbolic world. Mrs. Harada replied "No, no, no, thank you" with polite alarm, and I assured her, "Please, it's no trouble! I'd be more than happy."

Needless to say, after that incident they made sure never to leave me alone during my two months as their guest. You might even say they killed me with kindness. And this is why one of the first Japanese words I learned from Mrs. Harada, when I was twenty-six, was *dame*. It means “don’t do that/forbidden” and is generally used by mothers telling their children to STOP!

This might be called learning new boundaries.

THE UNIVERSE REFLECTS THE GARDEN AND THE GARDEN REFLECTS THE UNIVERSE.

STRAIGHT VS. CROOKED LEARNING.

My first day at International Christian University, ICU, included an orientation program where I first met Professor Tadashisa Fujita. An alumnus of the prestigious Harvard and Hitotsubashi universities, he introduced us to his department.

That week I happened to be reading Kenichi Ohmae’s book *The Mind of the Strategist*, and I asked Professor Fujita where I might be able to take courses on the subject. “Oooh Ohmaesan,” he replied, recalling the author’s pedigree: “nuclear scientist at MIT, CEO of McKinsey Japan. Please come talk to me after the orientation.” A person could often earn special treatment from Prof. Fujita, by asking detailed questions and conveying a sense of drive. After the two-hour orientation, Professor Fujita invited me to his office to speak more comfortably.

When he asked about my background, I told him I worked for a Turkish company part-time during afternoons, so that I could go to school in the mornings. My company bought machines and equipment from Japan, sold metals and minerals, and was expanding into textile products, I told him. I was considering going to the United States the following year, and before I did, I wanted to absorb all there was to learn about strategy and business life in Japan.

“You will have no trouble doing that,” he replied. “But who would you like to be in Japan?”

For some reason, this question completely shifted my frame of mind. I thought of a Turkish saying about what it means to live with integrity, that is often referenced, rarely spoken aloud, and nearly impossible to translate. “I would like to be a good man,” I finally said. “Why?” he asked.

At that moment I remembered my previous position in international sales, where a director two levels above me had handed down a dismaying conclusion. “Yener, for some reason the deals I’ve been expecting aren’t working out; you must not be scratching the right backs,” he said. “If you keep doing what you’ve been doing, you’re not going to succeed.” I told Professor Fujita how I had realized, then, that the dirty face of business could at any moment trigger the treachery latent in all of us. I felt that business should be conducted more honestly, and during my year in Japan I hoped to examine my own conscience and find a new balance. During that first conversation with my new professor, my unhappiness about those earlier days must have shown plainly on my face. “This could be a good start for you, and not just for your career,” Professor Fujita told me. “Life can begin anew at any moment. Each breath we take can lead us to a new state of being. And I think you should stay in Japan a bit longer than a year.” Then he looked at his watch. “I should excuse myself now, as I have another commitment. Would you like to come to our house this weekend for a sake? You could meet my family.”

I accepted with delight. But to avoid embarrassment later, I warned him, “A bottle of cola is enough to get me drunk.”

That weekend I went to visit Professor Fujita and his family. His traditional Japanese home, with countless cats in a little garden, and a dog out front. We ate together at a low table in a corner of the house that conferred honor upon guests. And all the while, I fervently hoped that none of the cats would jump onto my shoulder and make me topple the table.

At one point Professor Fujita drew a beautiful samurai sword out of its wooden sheath, a family heirloom, and showed it to me with a reverence he must have felt each time he shared it. I also seem to recall him sharing his family tree, as well as letters of commendation bestowed upon his ancestors by high-ranking officials.

Midway through the visit Professor Fujita said, “Yenersan, I don’t think one year in Japan will be enough for you. You should plan to stay at least two more years and get a master’s degree here, if possible. In the meantime you will learn the keys to communication in Japan, and develop friendships at school that will be useful to you later in life. This is very important in Japan and throughout the world. Later in your life you will form bridges between the two countries, and with other countries as well.”

But, he noted, the deadline for applying to masters programs had already passed. “Since you need to spend some time learning Japanese anyway, wait and apply next year.”

STUDY DEMANDS MASTERY.

TEMPORARY OUTCOMES.

Professor Fujita's excellent advice tested my plans and dreams. Starting graduate school would mean leaving my company position in a year, after which my savings might last me another year at most. So I would need either a scholarship or a new part-time job. Looking back at my student life and my business life until that point, I felt as if I had trained with a weightless ball of straw, in preparation for a basketball career. Looking ahead, three years seemed like a long delay to impose on my new career. Would I fall behind the other businessmen my age?

Most pressingly, I was very attached to the idea of going to the United States and making my way onto the "F list" of Forbes and Fortune. So, as politely as possible, I explained to Professor Fujita that I couldn't accept his wonderful offer because it conflicted with my financial goals. He was disappointed. "I thought you were different – that you valued more than money," he told me. "You should set yourself higher goals."

I thanked him sincerely and left, aware that I had reached an impasse. But I finished the university year, and continued to drop in on Professor Fujita at least once a week in search of some book or piece of advice.

I've generally found that the less you expect in life, the less you get – hence the importance of keeping expectations high. During that unusual period, though, I did fairly well for myself despite aiming low, and I realized I had to adjust my expectations. The theory of expectation is, after all, a key part of any negotiation. Towards the end of the year I spoke with my director at Enka's Tokyo office, told him of my plans, and of the wonderful opportunity Professor Fujita had offered me. He scolded me roundly upon learning that I had declined. It was a fine position I had gotten myself into; all of my mentors were berating me. Calling in an accountant, my director fired me on the spot, with three months' pay to get me through my master's degree. I was welcome to visit Enka in my free time, he added. Privately, I thought he was glad to be rid of me.

From there, I had only one direction to turn: back to Professor Fujita. The academic year ran from March to March, so I had to rush to secure a scholarship for the period from September to March. After that, I hoped I might be able to secure a grant from Japan's Ministry of Education.

EACH BREATH OFFERS A NEW BEGINNING.

THE TRUTH!

Professor Fujita decided that we should start by approaching the Japanese-Turkish Businessmen's Association, run by the famous industry captain Renzo Taguchi. An appointment was made, and soon we were en route to the headquarters of Taguchi's company, Ishi Kavajimi Harima (IHI, which later won the contract to build Istanbul's Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge). Professor Fujita was teaching me about negotiation at the time, so I asked him what our strategy would be. "We're going to tell them the truth," he said.

"In this world, and perhaps even throughout the universe, the truth is always the strongest card in a negotiation." I was very ashamed to have approached the matter in such a technical way. Years later, when concluding my doctoral thesis, I used the Professor's words as my final sentence.

That day at the IHI headquarters, as Professor Fujita spoke to the respected Mr. Taguchi, I didn't hear a single word uttered about any scholarship. After we left, I asked the Professor when we would discuss it, and he replied that the subject was closed. "But," I replied, "It didn't seem like we'd even opened it."

He answered, "A good beginning carries within it a good conclusion." They already knew the reason for our visit, and they had already accepted us, welcoming us in the most pleasant possible way. "You have been introduced, and I have been introduced. Now the problem isn't whether the scholarship will be granted, but how."

With that problem resolved, I knew I'd be in Japan for a while. And I realized that I must have lost around 35 percent of the unconverted dollars I had deposited, due to shifting exchange rates. So I made a beeline for the bank, handed the cashier my account book, and asked her to convert my money into yen. She looked at the computer, and then, with a startled expression, went to see the

manager in the back room. They stayed back there for a while, and then emerged to approach me together. The manager began, "We are so very sorry, respected customer. Despite the instructions you gave us, your money was converted into yen when you deposited it, at that day's exchange rate."

I told them that I was very grateful for the mistake they had made. Or, rather, for correcting my mistake.

When you aim wrong, fate can sometimes set you straight anyway. Since Japan was my fate, the details were just a matter of negotiation.

WHEN FORTUNE IS WITH YOU, NEGOTIATION IS JUST A GAME.

WILDFLOWERS ARE AN ANNOUNCEMENT.

One day I was discussing marriage and romance with Takahasisan, a Japanese friend who had studied in Turkey. He gave me an example of how people communicate emotions in Japan.

“Yenersan,” he advised, “If you ever have a Japanese girlfriend, never give her a huge bouquet of flowers the way they do in Western films.”

“Why?” I asked, “Don’t Japanese men give their girlfriends flowers?”

“Of course they do,” he answered, “but natural objects always have deeper meanings here. Small objects are usually valued more highly than large ones, and they can symbolize things that are vastly larger.” (The economist E.F. Schumacher describes this in his book, *Small is Beautiful*, which is also the title of a book about Japan.) “Instead of buying a huge packaged bouquet for a girl you admire,” he explained, “you might first borrow a book from her, and then return it with a tiny, beautiful flower dried between its pages. If you want it to be seen right away, of course it’s best to leave it between the first and second pages. This way you can avoid putting her in a difficult position the way a bunch of roses might. Because if she likes you in the same way, that dried flower clearly expresses your feelings. And if she doesn’t, she can just pretend she hasn’t seen it.”

In a similar vein, I later read that at evening parties, a man would sometimes place a cloth over his head to express his feelings. A woman would uncover him to convey her own interest, and if she did not, the man’s head would remain covered until the next day. Like a theater curtain that remains drawn, this symbolizes a drama that will never begin.

However, no Japanese friend has ever confirmed this practice, and I can’t remember where I read about it. Perhaps it was done long ago, or in some particular region. Even if it’s not true at all, it helps illustrate the sensibility behind giving small flowers as gifts.

RIGHT INTENTION IS A FLOWER



ACCEPTING MISTAKES.

The season for leather sales starts at the beginning of November at the earliest, even during a cold autumn. It takes a month and a half to ship a container from Turkey across the Indian Ocean, and if customs formalities in Turkey and Japan go smoothly, the whole trip takes two months. Taking into account the factory's capacity, and exports from other countries, shipments have to leave Turkey by the end of September at the very latest.

One day my good friend Murakoshi called me and said, "If you have any extra capacity at the end of August, I have an urgent order I'd like to place." I told him that I might have the production capacity, but was out of raw leather. "Kindly do whatever you can," he said, "to get me enough leather for five hundred jackets."

When the company owner and I visited our warehouse together, we found we just didn't have enough stock. However, the next day he reported finding some very high quality Persian leather. Compared to Turkish leather, which is made of sheepskin, Persian leather is of a wider grain, and is therefore seen as coarse within the industry. When I told this to the company owner he proposed we take a look at the product together. We inspected the leather – perhaps thirty or forty pieces, enough for five jackets – and found that it was of a very high quality. I called Murakoshi with the good news, and he voiced the same concern that I'd had about Persian leather. Its wide grain, he worried, made it a risky choice for high-end women's jackets.

In an effort to strike a good deal for my company and develop this friendship, I reassured him that I had seen the leather myself. "If all the stock looks like what I saw, it will be superb," I said, and he assented. "I've been in this business for twenty years," he replied. "Please make sure there's no mistake." I promised I would do my utmost, as always, and asked my director to let me

inspect the leather as soon as it arrived. However, I didn't have time; within two days of arrival it had all been cut and stacked, and our quality control department told me they had performed inspections before loading. I received a message inviting me to attend the final inspection. And when I did, I saw that the leather was as coarse as Murakoshi had feared.

I was very upset, and I wanted to talk to Murakoshi immediately, knowing that he must have already sold this order to a buyer of his own. But the owner of the company warned me, "By no means are you to call him; we will have to ship this leather as is."

"Not on my life," I told him, but he pressed: "If the Japanese don't want these five hundred pieces, we'll never be able to sell them in Europe or in Turkey, where sizes are different. We'll be stuck with them and forced to absorb their cost. So send them, and if they are rejected we can offer a discount."

"That," I said, "would be breaking my promise." As if I could keep every promise I made!

Once the owner felt sure (from my silence) that I would not make the call to Murakoshi, I picked up a phone in a glass room in the office, and dialed my friend straightaway. At one point the owner saw me talking and made a gesture that said, "You're not talking to Japan, are you?"

I signaled "OK," and meanwhile told Murakoshi that he had been right. I had no other option but to send the goods, but I told him I would be there in person when the container was opened, to help him write a report, and take whatever responsibility was necessary. He thanked me for the phone call, adding,

“No one in the leather business would ever tell me something like that. Whatever happens, I thank you.”

When the container arrived I was in Japan, and I told Murakoshi that I wanted to inspect the goods.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you because we’re in the middle of our distribution season,” he chuckled. “I don’t know how much trouble you have caused, because I forget who we sold it to.”

And he didn’t allow me to pay any indemnity.

GOOD MISTAKES.



FRIENDSHIP IS CREDIT.

In 1992 the leather company I represented, one of the biggest in Turkey, was struggling amid signs of an impending economic crisis. The company’s owner and financial director approached me to ask whether Murakoshi might sign a contract with us, to help convince a bank to let us open a credit line. Credit lines for our industry were usually opened around June, and I believe this was in January, when we knew we wouldn’t be receiving any orders for a good six months.

So I asked Murakoshi if he might be willing to send the L/C early that year, and without hesitating he opened a \$2 million credit account. Our jackets normally sold for \$160 to \$200 apiece, so we had to estimate how many items his two million dollars would buy; off the cuff, Murakoshi suggested two thousand.

Meaning we could invoice him for 2000 jackets at \$1000 apiece, to receive the full \$2 million from the bank. Fraudulently.

But when the summer distribution period began, we brought the bank our documents for the first two thousand jackets, at their correct prices. Naturally a great deal of money remained, and we informed our bankers that we had accepted an order from Japan for a few thousand more items. They were amazed.

TRUST IS A VALUABLE COLLATERAL.

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“I SAY YES, WILL YOU SAY NO?”

If I were only allowed to share one story to illustrate Japanese communication, it would be this one, from my first year at Enka. We had just approached a large Japanese company to propose a business deal. “Hmmm...” was their reply, “maybe.” In the months that followed we visited them numerous times, assuming that their “maybe” was equally capable of developing into a yes or no. Each time we drank tea and coffee, and each time things dragged on without results.

But at that time I was studying Japanese, and I was beginning to understand that it was less a language of words than a body language of gestures and facial expressions. Anthropologists refer to it as “high-context communication,” in which one's cultural knowledge is expected to fill in for things left unsaid. In light of what I understand now, I can look back, past their English response to the question “Is this deal possible?” and remember their body language.

The person talking to us tilted his head 30 degrees to the right and pulled his chin to the left, while saying, “Maybe...” In spoken Japanese, this translates to *soreva chotto muzikashi des ne*, whose exact translation is, “What you say is really very difficult, isn't it? Hmmm...” In other words, impossible.

When a Japanese speaker wants to convey such impossibility to a person who understands their high-context communication, they will simply tilt their head 45 degrees to the right and say “Hmmm,” and be understood.

If they want to use a few more words they will add, “Soreva hmmm,” and if they wanted to use even more words they would say, “Soreva chotto ne.” Out of respect for the other person, they will try to use the fewest, most meaningful words possible, which carry the least risk of causing offense. And that is how those business men's “maybe” meant “impossible.”

Gestures and facial expressions have so much meaning in Japan that just knowing how to use them – even in conjunction with a foreign language like English – confers the same advantage as knowing more than half of the Japanese language. That, anyway, has been my impression.

It's as if a visit to Japan had inspired the Beatles to write these lyrics:

"You say "Yes", I say "No"
You say "Stop" and I say "Go, go, go"
Oh no.
You say "Goodbye" and I say "Hello, hello, hello"
I don't know why you say "Goodbye", I say "Hello, hello, hello"
I don't know why you say goodbye, I say hello"

After reading Keiko Ueda's article, "Sixteen Ways to Avoid Saying 'No' in Japan" I asked a dear friend whether he knew all 16 ways. "I can think of at least a hundred ways," he replied.

TO UNDERSTAND ONE PERSON IS TO UNDERSTAND MANY MORE.

"TOOKTE CHIKAI KUNI TORUKO"

As far back as 1983, I knew of a Japanese book called Turkey: The Country That's Far Yet Near. In those days I could only admire the shape of the Japanese script on its pages, but it was also a lovely title. I used to think that if I ever wrote a book about Japan, I would craft it as a response to that book and use the same title, with "Japan" swapped in for "Turkey."

People are often hostile to the unfamiliar and the far-away. Sometimes this distance is geographical, but among today's nations it seems as if everyone is hostile to their neighbors, and friendly with their neighbors' enemies. It's like the joke where Polish people, asked what their favorite country is, answer, "Thailand." Why? "Because we're not neighbors."

Neighbors can develop a relationship stronger than blood ties, when they do it right. But it's also true that when you're on good terms with your neighbors, sometimes mutual neighbors won't leave either of you alone.

In the absence of strong historical ties between Turkey and Japan, I think that early Japanese book offered a wonderful opportunity to inspire cultivating true neighborliness between countries and their people.

FAR IS NEAR.

COMMANDERS AND AMBASSADORS AS NEIGHBORS.

When Professor Fujita and I approached Tokyo's Turkish Embassy to learn which organizations in either country might offer scholarships, we were fortunate to find willing help. We were put in touch with Japan's Chamber of Commerce, including its members who did business in Turkey. As luck had it, the man in charge of that section had been Professor Fujita's university classmate.

After leaving the Embassy in the Harajuku district, we crossed the street and came to a temple dedicated to Admiral Togo, the naval hero who led Japan to an historic victory in the Russo-Japanese war. There was something poignant about seeing this monument next to the Turkish Embassy, an intimate twist of fate that pleased Professor Fujita greatly. We ate soba noodles together in memory of the great Togosama (the honorific sama is used to convey respect toward someone of high rank).

WHEN A NEIGHBOR COOKS, WE ENJOY A BITE.

DOMO ARIGATO, MR. ROBOTO.

- One day, on my way out of the university, I walked to Sakura Road and called a Japanese friend from a phone booth. I didn't realize it, but I kept bowing as I said "Hai, hai" into the phone receiver. At one point someone slapped the glass of the telephone booth, and I looked up to see my jocular American friend Jim.

"Yenersan," he said, "if you're bowing like that even on the phone, you've definitely reached a higher level of assimilation." We had a good laugh. "If you're not busy this weekend," he said "some close friends have invited me to go to the hot springs with them." I told him I'd love to come along.

NOBLESSE OBLIGE.

A MEETING OF FRIENDS.

Jim's friends met us after dark for a two-hour drive in a beautiful red sports car, to a luxury villa one of them owned, with its own hot spring. It was a night of youthful wildness, Japan-style. In all frankness I felt a bit bored, but the most interesting part was how we finally turned in for the night: all fifteen of us slept in our clothes on the floor of the villa's large living room. In the morning we had breakfast and returned to Tokyo.

Jim asked, "Do you know where I know these people from?" and strangely enough, it hadn't even occurred to me to ask. The Japanese friend who had invited everyone had been Jim's college classmate in the U.S. Back in those days, Jim once found his friend smoking marijuana with a few other international students, and he told them, "If you get involved in anything like this again I'll have you deported."

Innocently, I asked him, "How can a student say something like that to another student?" But there was probably an obvious explanation: Jim had to have been working for some sort of government agency. After considering his story, I had another question for him: "You invited me to spend the night at the house of a person you once threatened? Are you insane?!"

Later I remembered that before coming to Japan Jim had been enrolled and employed in programs connected to NATO in Belgium, submarine research in Israel, and some other venture in China.

A THREAT IS LIKE SLEEPING IN A STRANGER'S HOUSE.



A TRIP TO WONDERLAND.

One day about a year before I moved to Tunisia, I was making my way from Istanbul's Grand Bazaar down to the secondhand book market in Eminönü, when I saw a mop of curly blond hair at a jewelry shop. It was a classmate of mine from primary school named Erdener, who looked utterly unchanged since our school days. He had been a plucky, ebullient boy full of opinion.

Now, standing in front of a jeweler's shop, he was the spitting image of a Grand Bazaar merchant. Unless my memory fails me, his father had been a renowned jeweler in the Anatolian city where we lived, so he must have come to Istanbul later on. I stood and looked at him from a few meters away, until he noticed me.

"Excuse me," I said, about to ask where he had gone to school, but his memory was so quick, I didn't have time to ask. "Yener, my friend!" he shouted. "Come in here." He ordered tea, coffee, and food to his shop, for us to share while we caught up. In later years, after I had graduated university and begun working at Enka, I'd stop by every so often, to sit and chat with Erdener over coffee. He did not know any foreign language, but he was very persuasive, and he had the right mentality to do business at an international level.

When Enka confirmed that it was sending me to work in Qatar, I made plans to go to Tunisia first, to do a bit of market research and learn some Arabic. The next time I passed through the Grand Bazaar, I dropped in on Erdener and told him about my plans. He, it turned out, knew some prominent merchants and hoteliers in Tunisia who might be helpful contacts, and said that he'd love to come along himself. "With pleasure!" I told him.

I gathered from Erdener that the Tunisian owner of a resort complex had bought some items at his father's shop and, while handing over his credit card (with



a very high spending limit), mentioned he would be flying through Paris en route back to Tunisia. "I'll look into some family jewelers in Paris," he said, "and if your prices suit them, I'll be back to make a large purchase from you each year." His father astutely understood that this was an indirect way of bargaining, and, said, "Ah, wait, you've given me your credit card. I thought you were going to bargain first, so let me give you a large discount," and gave him a price that would be attractive to another jeweler.

The man soon called from Paris to thank him for the good prices, and he later returned to make several more purchases.

So, Erdener's contacts were these kinds of customers.

I flew to Tunis first, Erdener came a few weeks later, and we explored the area together when I wasn't in Arabic class. He enjoyed the international atmosphere immensely, and he was wonderful company. On our first weekend we stayed at the hotel owned by the man who'd asked about prices in Paris. When we met, I remarked to myself that he looked just like Dr. Christian Bernard, the man who'd performed the world's first heart transplant operation.

He arranged for us to stay in a beautiful room, and we spent the whole next day swimming. But I must have gotten too much sun, because when we sat down for dinner I realized I had no appetite. I felt nauseated, my head was spinning and I turned out to have a low fever from sun poisoning, which had happened to me as a child.

With great insistence, and trying to hide a teasing smile, Erdener pointed to a little plate of sauce on our table and said, "Have some of this." I knew it was

a trick, and I wasn't feeling well, so I said, "forget it." But he cajoled me: "If my friendship means anything to you, try it, just a little bit for me." So I took a little bit on the end of a teaspoon and touched it to my tongue. And it was as if I could see the smoke that shot from my mouth up to my brain, through the

Eustachian tubes and out my ears. It was horrifically hot. I was like the diplomat visiting Japan in Jean Reno's film "Wasabi."

Erdener was doubled over with laughter. To carry off his trick, he had burned his own mouth without letting on, and he barely managed not to choke on his food as he stuffed bread and sweets into his mouth to ease the burning, his eyes full of heat and laughter.

In the end, I must admit, that hot pepper did cure me of my sun poisoning..

WHICH IS MORE HARMFUL: FRIENDSHIPS OR ENEMIES?

THE SWEETEST WATER.

En route back to Turkey we stopped in Italy, with some new friends from my Arabic course, two Malaysian men in their sixties who were among best people I had ever met. They were coming back with us for a visit to Turkey, and we all decided we'd like to spend a few days in Italy first.

On the first day, en route to our hotel in Rome, an argument broke out with our taxi driver over the circuitous route he'd chosen. So the next day our poor friends, who were mature and peaceable types, hired a guide and a touring car. "Please don't worry about the money," they said. "We were planning to travel around anyway, so be our guests." They also wanted to do something nice for us because they would be visiting us in Istanbul for a week before heading back to Malasia.

Our Roman guide was an alarmingly stereotypical Italian playboy type, alligator-skin shoes and all. He brought us to a little fountain which gave forth, he claimed, "the sweetest water in Italy," and we took a quaff. It was soft water, not bad at all.

When it occurred to me to ask him why this water was so sweet, he replied, "Because I was born in this neighborhood." Suddenly I felt my first inkling of sympathy for this dandy.

There's no neighborhood like your own neighborhood. That, anyway, is how it always feels.

A THREAT IS LIKE SLEEPING IN A STRANGER'S HOUSE.

SHOPPING IN THE GRAND BAZAAR.

- One day, after returning from Japan, I dropped into Erdener's Grand Bazaar shop just as a group of Japanese tourists paused to peer into his window.

Grand Bazaar merchants typically invite customers into their shops insistently and aggressively. The shop boys accost tourists with "Yes Mr.!" or "Where are you from Mrs.?" in a number of languages. That is just how the salespeople are – utterly audacious.

So I was surprised by what I saw at Erdener's shop. He called me into his shop right away, and I asked him, "aren't you going to reel in those Japanese tourists?" You would think I hadn't just spent four years in Japan!

His reply, however, was astute: "If you try to sell to Japanese people by putting them under pressure, and they know it will be hard for them to refuse you once inside, they'll bolt," he said. But if they like what they see, they'll just come in and buy it."

"What technique you have!" I said. "You're turning into a regular social anthropologist." "Indeed," he said. "The other day a man in his fifties came in with a woman who looked about 25, and I sized up the situation quickly. When he asked the price of a fairly expensive ring, I told him, 'that's not for you,' with feigned friendliness – a classic tactic around here. The woman was taken aback, and the man, annoyed, asked why."

"It's a little expensive," I replied, and he grew angry. "What do you mean, it's expensive? Take it out," he demanded, just as I'd guessed he would. All told, it took me ten minutes to sell an expensive ring to someone enslaved by a very particular psychology. That's how our profession works."

As Erdener recounted this to me, I remembered his adroitness in an earlier situation that had unfolded in his shop one Saturday. I had entered to find a Clark Gablesque Turkish man with his wife, a tall, full-figured woman of thirty-nine whose hands glittered with diamonds, and a second man who turned out to be his brother and the family heir.

Erdener, poring over account books at his desk, barely acknowledged the trio.

Affluent customers like those ones apparently react in one of two ways to such neglect. They either leave, or they make their personalities felt with a full-blown “Do you know who I am?!” Erdener offered these ones nothing more than a terse welcome, as two young assistants helped them. Until the older brother approached Erdener, pulling a cigarette out of his little carrying bag, and asking for a lighter.

At that, Erdener’s face changed. He heaved his account book closed with a slam, berated an assistant for neglecting the guests, and told the man, “I’m very sorry, sir.” Then, turning back to the assistant, he barked, “Get him a lighter!” and actually smacked the boy’s neck. He began ordering coffee and tea, and set out to help the guests with their selections.

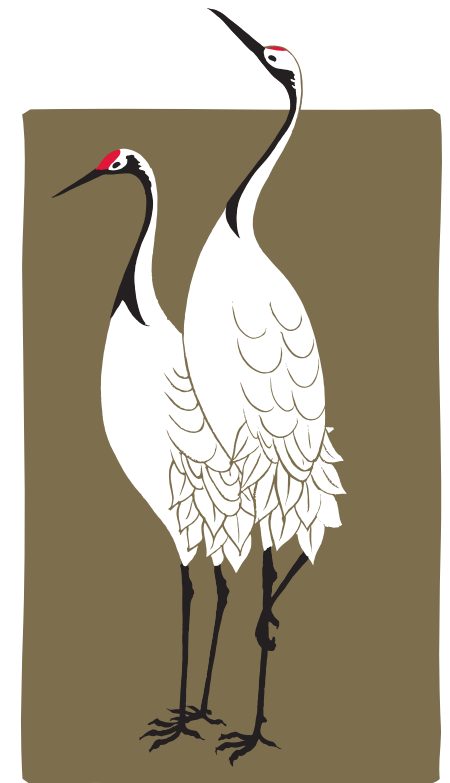
Later, as Erdener tallied up their considerable bill, the customer asked why he hadn’t paid them any attention earlier. Erdener shook his head and improvised, “Don’t get me started – these tax officials are a nightmare, always inspecting our records.” And with that, Erdener and the customer fell to chatting about the common problems they faced in business life.

It turned into a huge purchase, and my friend’s behavior really surprised me. “What really happened here, when you suddenly started paying attention to the them?” I asked him. “And why did you berate your poor assis tants?”

He said, “While pretending to look for his lighter, that guy made sure that I saw a wad of cash in his bag, and gestured to say, ‘You’re ignoring us, but look what you’re missing out on.’”

That’s just how our profession works. To each its own.

EVER PROFESSION HAS ITS STARS



BOOKSTORES ARE LIKE OCEANS.

One day at my university's bookstore in Tokyo, I encountered a fellow student whose backpack-toting appearance was unremarkable. When we happened to come face to face from across a stack of books, we nodded at each other. "Hi, my name's John," he said, in such an American way that I barely refrained from asking him, "John as in Wayne?"

I introduced myself as Yener, and he asked where I was from. "Istanbul, Turkey," I said. For some reason, in Japan I always specified Istanbul. I suppose because the city has a better image than Turkey.

"So you're from Turkey. How is Turkey these days?" he asked. I replied, "Tell me the last thing you remember, and I'll fill you in from there," He admitted, "You're right. I don't really know anything about Turkey."

The American anthropologist Edward T. Hall once called the U.S. custom of using first names "an artificial attempt at high-contexting" that falsely implies a connection between speakers. The famous Russian film director Sergei Eisenstein spoke of trying to learn the names of set workers in order to name them before audiences of three thousand people. He did this to create his own legend, and also to leave an impression on the workers who helped create films like "Ivan the Terrible" and "Battleship Potemkin." Similarly, one of my professors at Hitotsubashi University used to memorize students' names from their biography cards before meeting his classes.

In any event, everyone has read the books of Dale Carnegie. And La Fontaine.

A BOOK: A BEGINNING WITHOUT AN END.

THE UNKNOWN IS THE ENEMY.

I heard a joke once about decision-making in Japan, that must have come from a member of the Tokyo American Club. An American, a Japanese man, a Sicilian, and a global citizen are playing poker. When the global citizen loses a hand, he turns to his opponents in distress and says, "I'm losing in both love and at cards; my girlfriend is cheating on me too. What should I do?" The American advises, "If you have a joint bank account, split it up." The Sicilian says, "Shoot her!" When the global citizen asks what the Japanese man thinks, he replies, "I'll fax my main office in Tokyo and ask them for an assessment."

The harms of dealing in such stereotypes are well known – but somehow foreigners get their revenge through these kinds of stories.

IF YOU FEEL LIKE A FOREIGNER, YOU BECOME ONE.

FEMININE BEAUTY.

• I found myself browsing art gallery one day, with a Japanese professor for whom I had the utmost respect. While I tried to choose from among some non-figurative prints that somewhat resembled Turkish miniature paintings, the professor pointed to a print of a kimono-clad Japanese woman, showing the nape of her neck from behind.

“Look how beautiful this one is,” he said. “How do you like these kinds of prints? Doesn’t this display her beauty in the most wonderful way?”

“How so?” I asked, feeling naive.

“Look at her neck, just visible through the slightly open collar of her kimono,” he indicated. “We find this kind of approach very beautiful.” It was the beauty inherent in glimpsing a small expanse of neck; not too much and not too little.

He was right; such an artistically-chosen glimpse would reveal any woman’s beauty. I’ve seen a similar approach in our Turkish miniature paintings, notably in the way that the necks of Sultans’ horses were emphasized. These works play scale and perspective against one another, to beautiful effect.

Western notions of beauty can become ingrained in your mind, if you don’t spend a long while in Japan. After I had lived there for a year and a half with only one trip out of the country (to Seoul), a friend asked me if I thought there were beautiful women in Japan. “They’re all beautiful,” I said, with appreciation for the creator who had made them. “You’ve been here so long you’ve become assimilated,” he told me.

That same friend and I went shopping in the Harajuku district one Sunday, when the main avenue was closed to traffic. Young people were playing music in the streets, including a group of punks who all seemed so peace-loving and relaxed, my friend gruffly called them “a disgrace to punks” before laughing long and hard. To soften the put-down, let’s call it imitation. I include this anecdote in an effort to balance out the many images samurai films show us, of Japanese warriors massacring people.

THE HUMAN “BEING” IS BEAUTIFUL.



LOSING CLARITY.

During mornings in Tokyo I liked to eat little pyramids of rice-stuffed seaweed called onigiri, that you could buy from vending machines. They were tasty and filling, and according to tradition they were unquestionably to be accompanied by green tea. Because taste and aesthetics should intermingle harmoniously.

But in those days I was developing my own elegant sensibilities. One morning I bought an onigiri, unwrapped it, and then bought myself a strong coffee, the only way I could think of to wake myself up. When a chatty American friend spied me in passing, he said, “Yener, you’ve been here a good long time, but you’re still a henna gaijin (strange foreigner). Coffee and nigiri? May God forgive your sin.” We laughed. The same week, at lunch in a cafeteria, I poured ketchup over my gohan, or sticky rice, a food which symbolizes purity. A group of locals on their way out looked at me and my defiled cup of gohan with horror. At that point I figured I should clean up my act, and resolved never to pour ketchup over my gohan again.

A PURE SOUL.

WHAT WE YEARN FOR.

Later, when I was working for an electronics import company in Turkey, an elderly Japanese gentleman who also happened to be a Shinto priest, came for a business visit. “What did you enjoy eating most in Japan?” he asked me.

I told him that the foods I missed most were misoshiri (miso soup) and zaru soba (cold buckwheat noodles). He was amazed to learn that I was so fond of miso, a fermented soybean paste, and he went on to quiz me as he would a fellow countryman: “More importantly, where does soba come from?” I replied that the best noodles came from Jindaiji temple, and he pressed, “yes, they’re very famous, but why?”

“Because Jindaiji has such good water,” I answered, and he emptied his wine glass in my honor.

He, too, must have thought that I’d become assimilated.

UNDERSTANDING IS ESSENTIAL.

FAREWELL TO ARMS.

When I first moved to Japan I met a renowned Pakistani banker who was also a very pious Muslim.

“Mr. Sonusen, never argue matters of faith in Japan,” he advised me, “and never try to explain your belief system. They might ask us why you don’t eat pork, but they usually already know the answer. So if you say ‘there are worms and microbes in pork,’ they’ll argue, ‘Pigs are no longer raised in filthy places, and they’re not fed with filth; they are raised under strict veterinary controls now, and sometimes they’re even raised on bowls of milk. So why won’t you eat pork?’”

I did indeed encounter such arguments. On one occasion someone both asked me this question and replied to it, without my contributing a word.

On another occasion a Japanese man who I think was a member of a peace group, asked me, “Yenersan, is yours a religion of peace?” “Yes,” I replied. “Islam, salaam: these words contain messages of peace, even at an etymological level.” But, at a time when two of Turkey’s neighbors were at war, they would ask, “Aren’t Iraqis and Iranians all Muslims?”

After a certain point I began to refrain from giving even the simplest answers to such questions. Because whenever I did, I felt like the corrupt state officials in a poem by Fuzûlî, who “gave nothing but answers to my questions.” My answers would never be taken at face value. Japanese tourists run from conversations about faith just as swiftly as they run from invitations into Grand

Bazaar shops. But if something piques their curiosity, and they are the ones inquiring, they may engage the matter differently.

As Rodin quoting Michaelangelo in his own way said, “Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it.”

PEACE IS TRUTH.



NOT EVERYTHING IS COMMERCIAL.

The ultra-affluent city of Nagoya is home to a number of major companies including Toyota, and some of the world's wealthiest people. Nagoyans, who are known for their style of negotiation, are said to use pencils until only a tiny nub is left, and then combine the nubs. They're also said to order double-sided photocopiers from Canon. Generalizations can, of course, lead to errors, but within Japan, Nagoyans are renowned for their belief that thrift leads to wealth.

When I set out to find leather customers outside of Tokyo and Osaka, I eventually secured an order for six hundred jackets from a customer in Nagoya.

When the time came we shipped the order, but somehow the customer failed to get it past Japanese customs. Eventually, as our credit account's expiration date loomed, he offered to get the order cleared after all, but only if we gave him a 30% discount. It was frustrating to accede to this demand simply because we were in a bind, and in the end, he never did pick up the shipment. Instead, it was returned to Istanbul, we were not paid, and we swallowed the loss. That was the first and last time I did business with a Nagoyan client, and I haven't forgotten the poor impression he made.

Still, the wrestler who loses a match doesn't give up on the sport. And I continue to give discounts, because I believe it's a mistake to expect negative outcomes. Perhaps there will yet be a next time.

WE SHOULD BE THANKFUL FOR OUR OPPORTUNITIES.

A CHILDISH FORAY.

My Japanese friends were writing to pass along an invite to visit their friends in Matsumoto, where I could also meet the family of a charismatic lady English teacher. Delighted, I soon boarded a train and headed to Matsumoto for a weekend.

In public spaces like trains, Japanese people read their books hidden inside paper covers that both protect the volumes and provide advertising for bookstores. So I took out my covered book, and began reading in my four-seat compartment. The man seated next to me was traveling with two girls seated across from us, and the three of them chatted amongst themselves cheerfully for the length of the trip. For my part, I kept to my book like an introverted foreigner.

At one point they opened up a bag of fruit, and discussed whether or not to share with me. I pretended I didn't understand a word, figuring a Japanese person would do the same. One of the girls said something like "Poor guy – all alone and far from home. Let's give him some." Which they kindly did, and I thanked them in English, revealing no trace of any Japanese knowledge.

For the rest of the trip they chatted away, and I maintained my air of oblivion. But by the end of the trip I began to have the kind of feelings described in Georges Duhamel's books; I could no longer control myself. When the conductor announced we were five minutes from Matsumoto, I turned to the gentleman next to me, pointed to a chapter heading in my book, and asked in Japanese, "Pardon me, but I don't have my dictionary on hand; what does this character mean?" Astonishment washed over the girls' faces, and they shot to the lavatory at the far end of the car. But the gentleman, stuck answering my question, had

no escape until the train finally pulled into the station and everyone disembarked. It was the last stop, though, and I was in no hurry. As I stepped off the train, I decided to end the joke, and extended the girls my most elegant Japanese apology and farewell, from the other end of the train.

REDEMPTION IS ALWAYS POSSIBLE.

KIDS GROW UP.

If only I, too, could grow up. Anna's, 3 years old cute Japanese girl, parents took me to explore Matsumoto during the region's biggest local festival. Exhibitions of every kind filled the city – samurais, historical reenactments, traditional Japanese sports – and we also visited the castle where the city's feudal lord had once lived. It's a shame they didn't have elevators in those days, but that eagle's-eye view of the city was wonderful.

In fact I grew pensive, thinking about that view: people who look at the world from great heights – be they thinkers, politicians or business leaders – are doomed to a certain loneliness. And in historic places like castles, it can feel as though every object, even the paving stones beneath one's feet, might have important messages to deliver.

That evening at home we took our baths in the Japanese order, by age. I was shown how to use a tall bathtub called an ofuro, and then left to my fate (although, of course, everyone is alone with their fate, even in the densest of crowds). I'm someone who struggles to bear the heat of hot springs, and that bath water was piping hot. But I survived, and dried myself with the pristine towel that Japanese hosts always provide, and put on a long, fresh-smelling yukata robe. I don't remember getting into bed, but I remember hearing someone ask what time I wanted to get up for breakfast, and replying, "Whenever you'd like." My eyes closed, and I seemed to be dreaming, but I saw nothing. I simply heard the rhythmic sounds of Ottoman soldiers marching – "ceddin deden, ceddin baban" (ancestors, grandfathers, father) – and felt as if the curtains would rise to let my ancestors climb in through the window. When I managed to open my eyes, the room was filled with sunlight, but the march continued. Astonishingly, this Ottoman rhythm was coming from an alarm clock beside me.

Later the Matsumotos told me that bands of these Ottoman soldiers, known as Janissaries, had visited Japan a few times and proven very popular; the sounds of their early-morning marching were deemed invigorating. Thanks to my hosts, I learned that this rhythm was indeed an exceptional wake-up call. The best-known parts of Turkish culture, they told me, were Janissaries, Cappadocia, Istanbul, and whirling dervishes. What a wonderful thing technology is! A cassette player – a descendant of disc records made of slate and limestone pebbles – allowed us to listen not only to music, but to history. The stones had been speaking at the castle the day before, and here they were playing Janissary marches.

Nature has equipped us to develop ever newer technologies. So long as we remain mindful of whom they help and harm, these technologies can in turn help us understand the natural universe we belong to. The humblest alarm clock can plunge us into the most unexpected memories.

IF WE COULD ONLY WAKE UP!

NOT EVERYTHING IS COMMERCIAL.

In his book *Doing Business with the Japanese*, Boyé de Mente observed that everyone will see you in Japan, and everyone will know who you are. But the only people who will talk to you are those who feel obligated to do so. For example, if you enter an open office with sixty or seventy workers, you'll have a hard time catching someone's eye to ask for help. The person sitting nearest the door, usually a young person, and most often a woman, will feel that her knowledge of foreign languages is insufficient, and think 'I won't be able to help that person' or 'I don't want to cause problems for myself.' She will quickly make herself appear busy, using body language to keep you at a distance.

When I read this, I felt that de Mente had hit the nail on the head. And the first time I visited a Japanese company with a few hundred employees on each floor, and found myself on the thirtieth floor of a forty-storey office block, I used a trick of his to find the person I was looking for. I rushed in, immediately caught someone's eye, and signaled "One moment," before he'd had a chance to sit down, lower his head, and pretend he hadn't seen me. Halfway to his chair, he stood back up. "Bravo, de Mente," I said to myself. That week I bought another one of his books.

WE CAN ONLY SEE BY LOOKING.

EVIL FROM WITHIN AND WITHOUT.

Right near the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, my dear friend Olivier saw a TV program where someone opined at length about the likelihood of foreigners introducing the disease to Japan. An audience member asked, "On trains and buses, should we avoid touching the handles that foreigners have touched?"

As a joke, when the two of us found ourselves feeling very conspicuously foreign on trains, we touched as many things as possible to see whether the idea had gained traction. Perhaps because of our little experiment, some looked at us fearfully.

In those days, knowledge of AIDS was just beginning to spread. Perhaps the locals imagined we were vectors of some other disease.

A HUMAN IS HIS NATURE.

THE PHARAOH'S THREAT.

At one point the director of a Japanese company that I traded with, a half-Japanese, half-Malasian man with a wonderfully cheerful disposition, visited Istanbul. Our plan was to draw up an action plan, a budget, and – most importantly – a price list for the upcoming fiscal quarter. As a group of us walked past an obelisk in Sultanahmet Square, I was visited by inspiration.

"Would you like me to read from the hieroglyphs on the obelisk?" I offered my visitor, astonishing the Turkish friends who were with us. "I would be pleased if you did," he said. And I intoned (in English, for everyone's benefit): "Oh, you, who stand here reading this years or even centuries hence! Today you are in sound health! But for a truly rewarding visit to this country, you must offer good prices and supportive advertising to your companion. If you behave otherwise, history will hold you responsible, and I myself will return to haunt you."

From the moment I launched into, "Oh you!" I spoke in a trembling, resonant voice, like a mummy in an adventure movie. The man had a good sense of humor about it.

SOLVE YOUR HISTORY.

MY PERSONAL POLICEMAN.

One day before I moved to Japan, I was chatting with my Japanese friends at my home in Istanbul, and we fell to discussing the box-like simplicity of Japan's police stations, the transparency of its police methods, and the fact that Japanese police didn't seem to indulge in threatening people behind closed doors. The discussion grew heated and I got annoyed when they insisted that police intimidation couldn't happen in their country.

I remembered this conversation when I finally arrived in Japan and saw its koban, small, local police stations that were little more than four walls and a ceiling. On one lazy Saturday morning as I was struggling to wake up, my doorbell rang and I dragged myself out of bed to squint against my front door's peep-hole. Good heavens, it was a policeman! I quickly straightened my hair in the mirror, called, "I'm coming!" threw clothes on, and opened the door within two minutes. The officer introduced himself with a card: "I am Suzuki, the official in charge of you."

I almost replied, "And I'm Yener, who is responsible for you!" But I held my tongue and he continued, "Should you have any problems, it's my duty to assist you." Apparently, I thought, the Japanese government had assigned me a police detail. But I later learned that there were policemen responsible for the residents of every neighborhood.

As delighted as I was to have my own policeman, I was even more relieved that he hadn't come on pressing business.

SO, WHO AM I IN CHARGE OF?

GOOD NEWS!

On another lazy Saturday morning, as I was sitting around in sweats reading a book, the doorbell rang again, around eleven o'clock. I wasn't expecting anyone, and I wondered if the gendarmes had come. I looked through the peep-hole, and saw an elegant woman in a fur hat. Not wanting to be seen as

I was, I opened the door just a crack and said in English, "Yes, please?" She introduced herself graciously and said, "I have good news for you."

She was there, I gathered, to proselytize her religion in my two-storey building, a collection of ten or twelve apartments whose dwellers were all foreign. I was in a playful mood, so I smiled brightly and told her, "I can't invite you in because I'm in my pajamas, and my house is very small. But if you wait ten minutes for me to get dressed, we can sit in the garden and talk as long as you want, and you'll see that I have good news for you as well." A few minutes later I took a peek into the garden. She was gone.

For several weeks afterwards I greeted my friends with a cheerful, "I have good news for you!"

ALL ARE WELCOME.

WATCHFUL EYES.

"In Japan someone is always watching you, but you never know it," a fellow foreigner once told me. "Especially on trains. The Japanese just have a different way of watching people than Westerners."

I rushed to test out this theory, as I dangled from a strap in a packed train car the next day. I turned quickly to the right to see if I could spot anyone watching me. I made eye contact with three people, who looked truly surprised.

Suppressing laughter, I tried to make them feel that I hadn't looked because of them. But it got so awkward that they all scurried off at the next station. I imagined them all jumping right back onto the next train.

KEEP YOUR DESTINATION IN MIND.

SECRET SLEEPERS.

Train platforms are always tightly packed during Tokyo's morning rush hour, even though trains come rattling down the tracks every three or four minutes. They are so crowded that white-gloved officials are paid to push passengers into trains with the flat of their hands, so that doors can close. The Japanese truly excel at the art of reading newspapers in these conditions.

They fold huge newspapers down to squares smaller than a letter, and manage to turn the pages without disturbing anyone. When you look around during less-crowded rides, it seems as if half of the passengers are sleeping and the other half are reading.

Sometimes, when people take a train home after a night out, the smell of drink wafts through the car. It's the funniest thing to watch these people, who sometimes appear to be sleeping, their eyes blinking slowly, or slammed shut. But when their stop is announced, their eyes fly open and they disembark robotically. "If I'm going to get by in Japan," I remember thinking, "I need to learn how to do that." The next evening I closed my eyes lightly on the train, feeling tired anyway. I tried to program myself to wake up when I heard my station's name, and as soon as I heard an announcement I opened my eyes and got right up. The station we'd arrived at didn't seem to my usual stop, but I got out just in case. I had overshot by five stops! Laughing at myself for being such an incompetent vagabond, I caught a train back in the other direction and disembarked at Mitaka. It should have been simple; my computer just like theirs, but somehow it had different software. I never again dared sleep on a train. Sometimes, in Japan's markets or airports, you can see men holding their umbrellas upside down and swinging them like golf clubs or baseball bats. That might seem odd to us, but it's so common over there that no Japanese

person would look twice. The most extreme example I saw was early one morning on a train to Haneda Airport. There were very few passengers aboard, and I watched a man, standing in the middle of the car's articulated extension, grasp the handles to his right and left, and commence a session of ring gymnastics.

I learned to stop laughing at things like this. That, too, can be learned.

THE APPEARANCE OF SLUMBER CAN BE DECEIVING.

TURQUOISE BREAKS A FRIENDSHIP.

My dear friend Murakoshi once flew to Istanbul from Paris with his most important customer. When I picked them up at the airport and drove him to our company, he was alarmed to see pedestrians crossing the highway, and said he would never dare drive a car in Istanbul. It didn't help when I told him that a famous pop singer had just driven his car into a flock of sheep on the main highway.

After several hours of work at the factory, we headed to the Grand Bazaar to do some shopping before dinner. After a quick walk-through with a bit of window shopping, I brought them to my friend's shop, assuring them they wouldn't be cheated there. Both of them found turquoise necklaces that caught their eyes as gifts for their wives and children.

I knew the market price for these items, and was surprised when my friend quoted prices that were as much as twenty percent higher. "Aren't these prices a little steep?" I asked him "Is there a reason? Because my relationship with you is not based on commission." Before the question came out of my mouth, I saw from his expression that he had expected to ask whatever price he pleased, to the customers I brought him. "Hey, aren't we friends?" he asked.

"Yes, you're my friend," I said, "but so are these guys, who came here because they trust. Shouldn't you respect that trust, and spare me this awkward position?" Then I made an excuse and took my friends out of there. In the next fifteen years I probably only saw him twice. How difficult it can be, at such moments, to say where one's allegiance lies.

I've made many mistakes of my own, and I didn't want to criticize my friend over something I knew so little about. But his prices embarrassed me, and I never felt like bringing customers to him again.

TRUE FRIENDSHIP IS INVALUABLE LIKE A GEM.

“GOMEN NE OMATESE SHITE”

One day at a Japanese trading house, or sogo shosa, I made the acquaintance of a young, Harley-riding Japanese designer and wholesaler who flew to Istanbul to see my company's factory and collection. After his tour he placed an order. During the final negotiations, he mentioned the company owner's beautiful Mercedes sports car, which I had used to pick him up at the airport. “Yenersan, please just charge me for the antenna, and not the whole car.” He wound up doing quite well for himself, in that deal.

Later we visited Sultanahmet Square together, with a group that included a travel companion of his, as well as my brother. As we all remarked on the colorful outfits of three Japanese girls looking at a monument, one of the Turks asked our visitor, “If you wanted to approach girls like that in Japan, what would you say?” He replied, “I'm a very shy man; I could never do such a thing.” A younger Turk insisted, “Then go say something to them just so we can watch you get slapped.” Helpless, he went over to the girls. He said “Gommenne omatese shite,” which means, “Pardon me for keeping you waiting so long.” The girls were so surprised to hear this coming from a Japanese man that they scattered – in three different directions, in fact – before they gathered their wits and hurried back together.

As I considered where to bring our guests to eat, they asked, “Is there a Turkish home we might visit after dinner?” They were simply curious to see one. “It would be an honor to welcome you to my own,” I offered. So, after dinner, we headed to my home, with its notably minimalist furnishings. The designer impressed. “Yenersan, I was expecting a more baroque, oriental house with lots of ornate furniture.” On the floor there were very beautiful bright blue, red, and yellow carpets from Çanakkale, Biga, and Milas. The designer, I realized later, found a deft way to weave the subject of carpets into the conversation, and asked “How much did pay for them?” I told him, and offered to stop by a carpet dealer en route to the airport the next day.

But this unique man proposed something unexpected, especially coming from Japanese person. “I like this carpet very much, and I know you won’t ask anything for it,” he said. “How would you feel about letting me buy this carpet from you, and buying yourself a new one? That way we can spend tomorrow working on the factory models.” I simply offered to give it to him, but he insisted on paying me. “Then, please, let’s go buy one from the carpet dealer,” I implored.

The other Japanese man turned and said, “Yenersan, normally in Japan you wouldn’t even ask a relative for something like this. But he only said this because he feels comfortable with you. He is quite taken by this particular design, and we’re not confident he could find the same one tomorrow. If it isn’t a problem for you, please accept his money and his tremendous gratitude.”

“All right,” I consented. “I’ll wrap it up and have it sent to you.” But the designer objected to inconveniencing me. “If you don’t mind, we’ll take it with us now,” he proposed, being sure to add, “Your wife won’t mind, will she?”

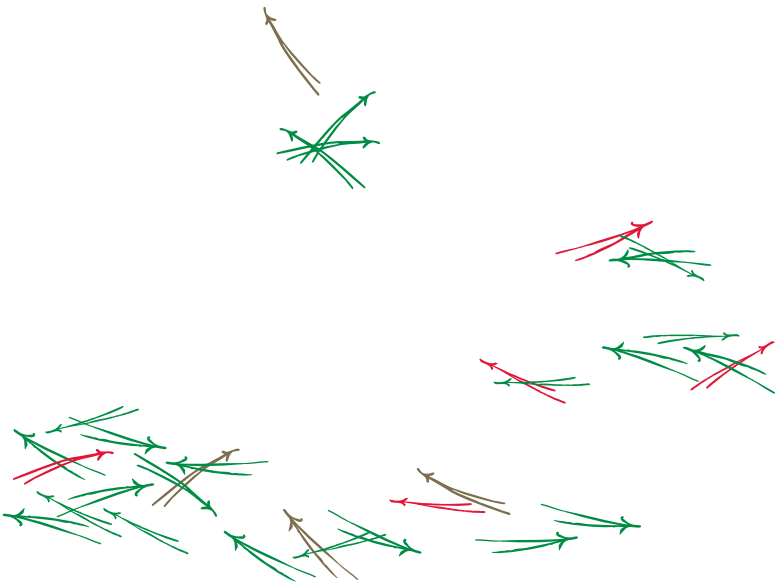
“I’ll definitely get a beating for it,” I told him, and we all laughed. Together we moved a table aside and rolled up the carpet with whatever paper and string I could find in the house. It all seemed worth it, just for the thrill it gave him.

But two odd things happened after that. First, when my company found other customers to buy some unused models we had sent him, he asked us to cover the cost of the discount we gave them, even though though he must have made a huge profit on the deal. Which we agreed to do; and yet, he never worked

with us again. And second, it took six months of looking at the bare spot where that carpet had been, before I got around to buying a new one.

Next time I hear a proposal like that, I should probably turn it down. Perhaps the curses it drew from my wife came true.

SOMETIMES WAITING ISN’T JUST WAITING.



OITA IS AN OINTMENT.

One day at the university, an announcement came from a lovely girl in the student services office, who used to help all of the foreign students before she moved to the U.S. herself.

“To keep foreign students occupied during the upcoming short holiday, we have arranged a home stay program that serves as a cultural exchange, giving host families a chance to practice their English,” she said. “Let me know if you’re interested.” I accepted with delight.

I was matched with a family on one of southern Japan’s two islands. First I travelled to its largest city, and from there the program director sent me to a smaller city where I was introduced to the family of five who would host me for three days in the town of Oita. One day I helped the father restock shelves for his small frozen food distribution business. I was paid for this work, which I enjoyed. The next day I went to the seaside with his three children, the oldest of whom was just beginning middle school. While they swam, I sat on the beach in my trousers and shirt to avoid a sunburn. It was a lovely day; basking in the world of those children, their relationships, the sea, and just being on holiday in Japan, felt like a healing balm.

But when we got home in the evening, I realized that my bare feet had gotten badly sunburnt, and the nearby pharmacy was closed. I got through the night by putting cold things on my feet, and set out early for the pharmacy, where I bought a custom-made ointment. I sat reading and treating my feet all day, in a neighborhood coffee shop.

As luck would have it, a district-festival, or matsurisi, was taking place that evening. The whole town gathered in a stadium and danced, including my host mother and all three children, while I helped the father sell soft drinks and food. I had never understood how people could bear to walk around a city in sandals, but I got a taste of it that night, on the train ride back from Oita. It felt like everyone was staring at me; we are all slaves to our habits.

I returned to Tokyo wearing tokyo (the Turkish word for sandals), and later I returned to Istanbul thinking about the wooden Japanese sandals called getayla.

AN ISTANBULLER IN TOKYO BROUGHT TOKYOS BACK TO ISTANBUL



HORSES RUN FASTER ON THEIR WAY HOME.

Habits are clearly influential, and not just because they become reflexes. Wherever I traveled in Japan, I was always glad to return to my little house in Tokyo. My late grandmother Hacı Pembe used to say, "Those who have homes might as well own a thousand homes, and those who don't are on the street." Perhaps these sad words are a way of saying that those of us who don't have a home become a burden to others.

One day, upon returning to my empty home and announcing "Tadai ma!" (I'm home!), I felt as if the furniture called back to me, "O kairi nasai!" (Welcome!). I sat down and wrote a letter to a poet friend in Istanbul that evening, and received a reply a while later: "Recently I took a two week trip," he wrote. "When I got back I found that the furniture had missed me a lot."

DO WE MISS THE PLACES WE'VE COME FROM OR THE PLACES WE'VE GONE?

GÜLPEMBE'S GRANDSON PERFORMS MY GRANDMOTHER'S SONG IN TOKYO

I've always felt that Barış Manço's song for his grandmother, Gülpembe (Pink Rose), could have been written for my own grandmother, whose name was Pembe, meaning Rose.

Japan is full of active and widely-embraced peace movements, which formed in response to the terrible violence of WWII. I was never involved in these movements, but I had Japanese friends who both supported and opposed them.

Barış Manço (whose first name means "peace" in Turkish) was invited to Japan for a concert tour in the early 1990s that I watched on TV from Turkey. After Manço's last song ended, the head of the organizing institution and everyone in the audience waved Turkish and Japanese flags and embraced one another, for no evident political reason. The sight of these embraces left many Turkish viewers with warm feelings toward modern Japan.

Years later, in November 2006, I gave university talks in both Tokyo and Sapporo, on the invitation of Professor Mitarai, a department chair. This man introduced me to nearly all of the faculty and students we encountered in the hallways, including a twenty-six-year-old Korean student who has remained in my memory. "Yener sensei [teacher] has come from abroad," he explained to the student. Without much ado, she said, "Yes, pleased to meet you," until Prof. Mitarai added, "From Istanbul, Turkey." The expression on the girl's face suddenly changed, and she smiled widely. "We are your siblings," she said, surprising the professor as much as me. She got off the elevator with smiles and waves, and greeted me warmly when I later ran into her on the street.

I wondered if her feelings could somehow have been connected to the Battle of Wawon, when Turkish soldiers fought for South Korea during the Korean War. But that seemed so unlikely. Then I remembered the World Cup in Seoul two years earlier, in which the Turkish team had beaten Korea for 3rd place. Could the friendly way the two teams saluted the audience together have inspired such fraternal feelings? My brother, who was with me when that thought occurred to me, agreed that must have been it.

BROTHERHOOD IS A WARM GREETING.

ALL GROWN UP!

During my initial two-month home stay with the Haradasans, instead of retiring to study in my room after dinner, I would always try to spend two hours with my hosts, no matter how tired I was. I thought it would be rude to do otherwise. When I told this to my sempai (big brother) Katsuhirasan at the Tokyo office he said, “Yenersan, you’re a grown man. But so is everyone else. If you’re tired, just think how much more tired they must be.”

That was when I realized just how polite they had been to me, and decided to find myself an apato (apartment) as soon as possible.

MATURITY IS LETTING EACH OTHER A REST.

HOME, FIRST HOME

On my first day of university, all new students' names were read aloud in a welcome ceremony, after which a large, baby-faced American greeted me with, "Merhaba Arkadaş" ("hello friend" in Turkish). He'd spent a year as an exchange student in Turkey, and was delighted to meet another Turk. He invited me to join him for dinner and church, and when he heard that I still hadn't found a place to live, he suggested I check out his apartment building, near the school. The very next day we visited a small apartment there, with a petite bedroom, a Japanese tatami mat, and a tiny kitchen and bathroom. But everything was new and modern. I showed it to my dear friend's mother and aunt, and they both said "Chotto chichaii" (It's a bit small). Even by Japanese standards.

But apartment searches are unpleasant anywhere in the world, so I made a quick decision and loaded my few things into the Haradasans' car. My supervisor Turan advised me to get a combination bookcase, desk, and chair that could be folded away, as well as a folding bed. And for the first time in my short working life I received a bonus, for around sixty thousand yen. I accepted it with immense pleasure. When I become a director one day, I thought, I shouldn't forget this.

A week after my move, the doorbell rang. "Hello friend," said my American friend. "I've come to say goodbye." After such a short period of time, he was too homesick; he just couldn't adapt to Japanese life. So he was returning home.

"Oh, how the Lord Almighty uses the hands of others to help his servants," I thought. An American who was well-treated during a year in Turkey, comes to

Japan, meets a Turk, and wants to help him out. But just a few weeks in, he changes his mind about his own stay, and leaves. It was as if he had completed his mission of helping me and was returning home.

Who can understand God's wise and mysterious ways? As the poet Yunus Emre said, "See how fate works."

LIFE'S "MATRIX" IS A SECRET.

SAINTLY LOVE!

During one particularly intense period of study, as I lost track of days during my trudge between home and school, I caught sight of a “Happy Valentine’s Day” message written on a chalkboard. And when I went to check my mailbox between classes – amid rows and rows of other 2-inch-tall boxes, barely wide enough to fit a sheet of A4 paper – I found an elegantly wrapped box of chocolates.

Naturally, the song “With love from me to you” came to mind, and it gave me an unfamiliar sensation. Who could have sent it?? Back in class, a number of friends said they had found similar chocolates in their mailboxes.

Later we learned that a very thoughtful Japanese girl, whose identity we never learned, had sent chocolates to all 100 of us foreign students, lest we feel sad for lack of Valentines. And they were, indeed, the only chocolates I received that Valentines Day.

I remember another student, too, who spoke good English and was exceptionally kind to me. She often came over to ask me questions during class breaks, and addressed me as Yenersan. One day I asked, “You address all of my classmates as Bill, John or Mary, yet you address me as Yenersan. How should I take this?” She said, “We address you that way, because we respect you and see you as one of us. But we address the others by the names they’re used to, since they like that.” I’m not sure either explanation was entirely true, but it was fine of her to say.

WHEN STYLE SURPASSES CONTENT, ELEGANCE WINS.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE.

On my first day of work in Tokyo, I was as excited as a child starting school. I shaved, picked out my nicest tie, and dressed for a day of school followed by work. But as I reached the door to leave home, Mrs. Harada opened her purse and surprised me with a gift of around 10,000 yen. I didn’t understand; she had grown to feel like a second mother, but I saw myself as a young businessman. I think she gave another 10,000 yen to Professor Harada, though, who slipped it right into his wallet.

Later Mr. Harada explained to me that in Japan, men hand their salaries over to women, who are responsible for all household and family expenses. Whereas back at home, my mother only found out how much my father made when a newspaper published the salaries of civil servants. Even now, I don’t think my father tells her how much he earns. If she knows, it’s through her own devices. Mothers, of course, have their ways.

So, no matter how close I felt to Mrs. Harada, it was hard for me to accept money from a woman. But I later saw that when married Japanese men got drunk and stayed out late, their wives often drove out to collect them. In our culture, this would be odd. In many areas of Anatolia, in fact, and even in old Turkish cinema – called Yeşilçam – a woman will often hand the keys of her own car over to a man. When I consider the title of Jane Austin’s famous novel, it seems to me that pride often stems from prejudice, as they go hand in hand.

DOES PRIDE STEM FROM PREJUDICE OR PREJUDICE FROM PRIDE?

NAVEL MONEY.

One evening a friend and I spent some time chatting in the university garden, before stopping by the office of a professor he worked for, on an errand. We found Professor Kimura in extremely bright spirits – a bit tipsy, in fact – and he invited us to stay and talk awhile. As we sat and listened, he first held forth on the subject of microeconomics, and then changed course.

“Know why I’m so cheerful today?” he asked. “I translated a book without telling my wife!” As it happened, I had a Turkish copy of the same book, translated by one of our professors at Boğaziçi University. “That’s the one,” he said. “But I’ve made good money on this – my wife doesn’t know about the job, so I put the money in a separate account. I don’t even keep the bank statements at home.” Later he added, “We call this kind of secret money navel money. Today I treated some economist friends to a round at an akachochine [traditional red lantern bar] to celebrate finishing the job. Somehow, it’s so much more fun when it’s a secret,” he said with a wink.

If I’m not mistaken, Professor Kimura had two daughters. And he was such a transparent man, so self-deprecating, that I feel sure he must have told his wife about this job, in the end. He was also a Christian, and he confided, “Yener, I’m a believer, but somehow I just can’t wrap my head around angels. The invisibility, the wings – all of that. What do you make of it, as a Muslim?” he asked.

I recalled the three rules I had learned early on about my military service in Turkey: “Don’t interfere, don’t get involved, and don’t slack off.” And I considered the the famous three monkeys, whose original carved wooden statues dwell, unbeknownst to many, in Japan’s Nikko temple. “Professor,” I replied, “I’d need a sake to answer that.”

He enjoyed that, and changed direction again: “Yenersan, do you know how to prepare a good thesis?” he asked. “If this is your first time, you may need some kind of guide for the inexperienced.” I told him I’d welcome one.

“Well. Start by writing down your goals, and then review all relevant literature,” he advised. “Next, evaluate your thesis in light of this research, and arrive at your own conclusions. At that point you’ll find that your conclusions are not the ones you set out to research. So you’ll rewrite the research section to make it look like they are.”

It was wonderful: after a few drinks, the professor couldn’t be held responsible for his words. In the morning he could make proper, professorial conversation, but that night he could say whatever he felt like.

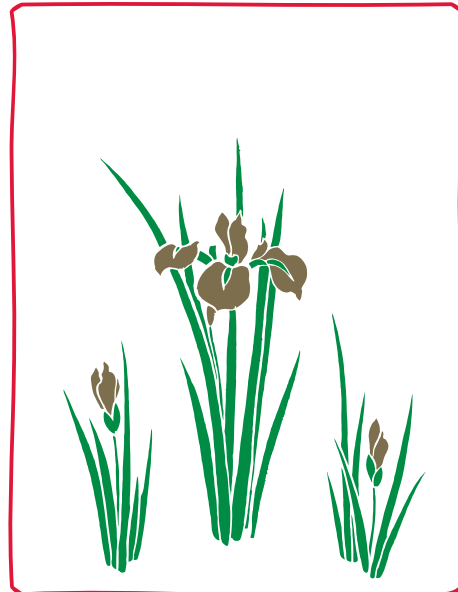
In Japanese business life, socializing over meals and drinks is an institutionalized custom, cultivated to make space for relationships to grow through the sharing of genuine feelings and thoughts (*honne*). I have made sure to pass along Professor Kenichi’s tipsy words of wisdom to anyone writing a thesis. Another sage whose thesis wisdom has remained with me is Prof. Haydar of Marmara University, who sadly later died of a brain hemorrhage. He taught five of his favorite doctoral students a secret course, “30 tips for preparing a thesis,” but the man had a heart so full of love that everyone who worked with him felt they were his favorite. And he transmitted to all his students a beauty which was, to quote the film *Don Juan de Marco*, “completely incurable, and even worse, highly contagious.”

Each of Professor Haydar’s rules was invaluable, but these were two of the best: 1) study a sample group that is as representative as possible of the whole population you are studying. This way you will have more findings to report.

And 2) leave some visible notes in the first pages of your thesis, that look like you merely forgot to erase them. Since the committee won't actually read the whole thing, they'll ask about those points you raised right away. Which you will be able to address beautifully, since you'll be expecting them.

I applied the first rule when writing my thesis, and interviewed 100% of the population I was studying: 99 companies. That way, I didn't even need to run statistical tests on my results.

A HUMAN IS THE SEED OF THE UNIVERSE.



GLOVES ARE NOT FOR DIRTY WORK.

In the West, gloves are often a symbol of dirty work, in both government and business. But in Japan, gloves seem to signify honest work that respects the customer, the profession, and oneself. Even for short rides, taxi drivers will always don white gloves and a tie, and behave with even-tempered politeness. The only taxi snag a foreigner might encounter is a look of annoyance, if you don't know your destination's address and you can't direct your driver there.

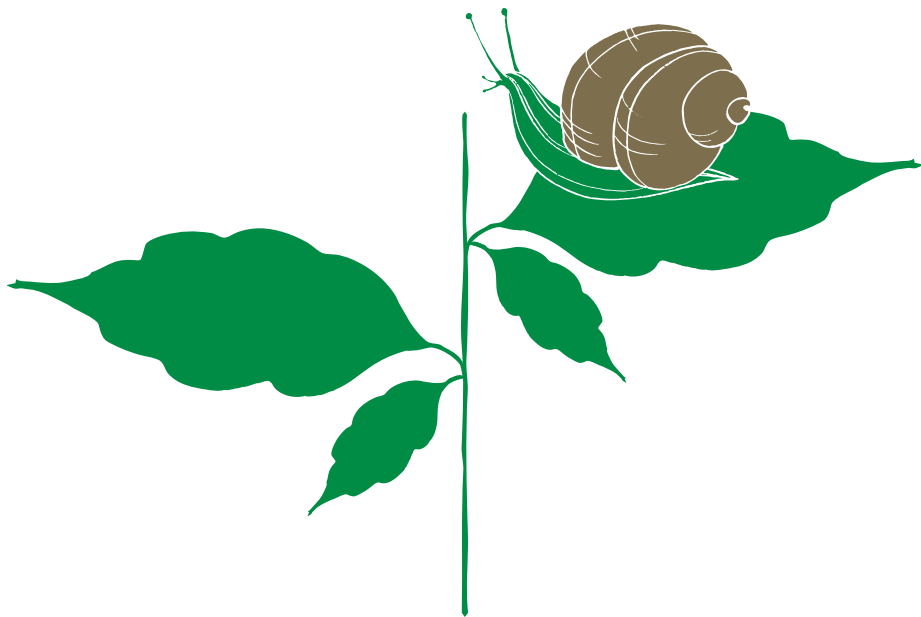
I once needed a very short ride at night, and caught a taxi in the Shinjuku neighborhood. I knew that Japanese people didn't take such short taxi rides, so I acted like a helpless foreigner and just gave the name of the building where I was headed, a famous landmark. He replied, "Hai," unruffled. Apparently this didn't pose a problem. The radio was on, and he asked, "Okay?" to check whether I minded. "Okay," I replied.

He was listening to the news, and from the snatches I paid attention to, I gathered the segment was about a politician who had taken bribes. The driver was muttering to himself, saying, "Why? Why do you do this? You make all of us look bad before the whole world." There was something sweet about this, and I couldn't resist saying, in Japanese, "Unfortunately, politics is like this almost everywhere in the world. Don't feel bad."

"Ah, respected guest, you speak Japanese," he said, turning off the radio, perhaps so I wouldn't hear any more. Then he added, "Some might argue that regular people like us need to accept bribes. But these people have money, they

have houses, they have gardens. What sense does it make, taking bribes just to build their garden walls four inches higher?"

THE WHITE GLOVES ARE THE BEAUTIFUL ONES.



FESTIVAL LIFE.

In Istanbul, when I used to co-teach undergraduate and masters courses with another professor, we decided to organize a Japan Day festival, and a week-long academic program at the university. Professor Selçuk would lecture on Japanese social life and history, Professor Mariko would teach the basics of Japanese language, and I would present methods of doing business with Japanese partners. It became quite an enjoyable week.

At my request, Morinagasan, who had spent fourteen years working for Itochu in Turkey before becoming the company's business development director in Tokyo and Professor Fujita gave talks at the university about Japanese business life and current Turkish-Japanese business deals. Professor Fujita, who came expressly for three days from Japan- or waza waza, as the Japanese say - to support my effort while graciously covering all of the expenses.

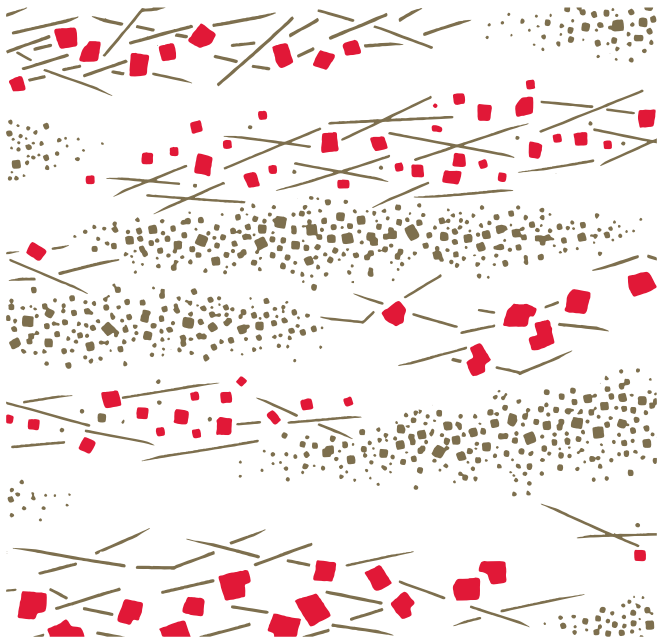
When I met Professor Fujita at the airport, we greeted each other with bows and a handshake. He was a guest in our home, and my then-two-year-old daughter Zeynep had so many things to tell her grandpa Fujita that she started stringing sentences together for the first time. Professor Fujita answered her in Japanese, laughed, and said "Zeynepchan (little Zeynep) speaks wonderful Japanese." He still asks me how her Japanese is coming along, and urges us to send her to Japan for graduate school. When I last saw him in November of 2006, he told his wife, "When Zeynep comes, we'll prepare the upstairs room for her."

On the last day of the festival in Istanbul, after hearing a performance by a Japanese singer who had married a Turk, Professor Fujita's eyes turned misty. "We've had conflicts with so many countries," he said softly. I assured him that Turkey had had its share, as well. "Being neighbors is the simplest thing, yet

so difficult,” I told him. “Neighboring countries are practically direct kin. But true neighborly harmony is as unique and precious as the North Star.

He replied, “Of all the countries with whom Japan has succeeded or failed to find harmony, I have never felt toward another people the way I do now.”

A GOOD TEACHER, RARE AS THE NORTH STAR, EITHER SHOWS YOU THE WAY OR CALLS YOU HOME.



MAN DESTROYS, GOD BUILDS.

It has been observed that writing a doctoral thesis is so fatiguing, it can destroy one's ability to enjoy reading for months afterward. During my last month of thesis writing, that's exactly how I felt. I had just turned in a rough draft to Professor Fujita, who wanted me to make some changes, being very familiar with the preferences of a member of my thesis committee. But in order to make these changes, I would have had to comb through at least fifteen books and run some burdensome calculations. I told him how difficult this would be, and he told me how difficult my thesis defense would be.

He was trying to tell me gently that it would be nearly impossible. And I was trying to tell him that I'd be fine. I knew that my insistence pained him, but scouring three hundred sources – especially for the first time – can sap a person's strength.

When the day arrived, I was faced with a panel of three professors. And it went just as Professor Fujita had said: for two hours, one female professor hammered me with questions, each time adding “just one more.” By the end, neither of the other two professors had gotten a word in edgewise. Professor Fujita was disappointed to hear of the professor's behavior and hurt by my nonchalance. I gathered something similar must have happened in the past. He had tried to rescue me by emphasizing the unpredictability of the thesis defense process, but I had ignored his lifeline, far too confident in my own swimming ability.

To tell the truth, in that state of mind I had failed to grasp the importance of having any kind of lifeline. Up until that point, I had managed to maintain a perfect grade point average. And even though my thesis didn't affect that average, it bothered me immensely not to have scored top marks on it.

But, it still felt wonderful to graduate. I had dinner that evening with the Haradas, and told them how I had been treated during my defense, with some bitterness. Mrs. Harada turned to her husband, who was himself an academic department head, and said, "Let's call Professor Fujita and complain about how this lady treated him." In his pleasant, introverted manner, he said, "I'm not going to do that, but you can if you want." Mrs. Harada turned and said: "Give me the phone number." At this point everything was out of my control. If I had just heeded my professor from the start, everything would have gone well with the panel. He wouldn't have felt hurt, I wouldn't have felt bitter, and the professor wouldn't had the pleasure of trouncing me. Mrs. Harada wouldn't have been upset, and she wouldn't have called Professor Fujita.

But she did call, and now she was telling him, like a protective parent, "we shouldn't allow such small things to hurt this poor boy." I have no doubt that my professor felt the same way. "He's my student, my assistant and my eighth child," he replied. "I want the best for him." Unfortunately, I had embarrassed Professor Fujita yet again by failing to hold my tongue. But it was a wonderful luxury to be the Haradas fourth child and Professor Fujita's eighth child. And I think I made the most of it.

Still, it was hard for me drag myself into Professor Fujita's office the next week. When I did, he acted as if nothing had happened. I suppose that episode was an occupational hazard of being a professor.

Years later, as luck would have it, when Professor Fujita came to Istanbul for our Japanese festival, he overlapped for one day with the Haradas, who had come to Turkey with their little daughter Yuki.

The Haradas had a friend at the Japanese consulate who insisted on hosting them for three days before they came to us, and then visited Izmir, Ephesus, and Pamukkale. But they arrived in Istanbul on the last day of Professor Fujita's visit, and I didn't tell him, since I knew how rude it would be to leave him alone that day. Instead, I arranged for a Japanese-speaking student to give him a tour during the two hours I would be away fetching them from the airport. I apologized profusely, telling him I had to an important meeting to attend for two hours, and would join his tour as soon as I was done.

But he would have none of it. "Let's go together and I'll wait in the car," he said. I was forced to admit, with apology, that I actually had to go to the airport. "Don't worry about it," he said happily, "it's better this way." While the Professor waited for me at an airport café, the Haradas arrived and Mrs. Harada said, "Take these gifts directly to your car, we don't need to carry them around with us." She presented me with their most significant gift, a painting by an artist known as "the painter of the silk road," and just as they were saying they hoped I liked it, Professor Fujita appeared beside me.

"Ah, how nice, you've come to meet Japanese people," he said. N either party knew who the other was. At a loss to explain, I smiled and introduced them. Mrs. Harada, sharp as always, swiftly grasped the situation, slapped me on the back maternally and said, "Ah, Professor Fujita, the boy has upset all of us." The way she whacked me made it clear that I had muddled everything, as indeed I had. I was devastated yet also delighted. Professor Fujita, who remained calm in the face of this surprise, said, "Yes, Yener's arrangement has been exceptional for all of us."

The ever-skillful Mrs. Harada saved the day by saying, “Go ahead, don’t keep the professor waiting, we’re going to see you later anyway.” As we made our way to the car, I could see from my Professor’s face that he was pleased to see me receiving Japanese guests, despite the hassle it had caused him. As we got into the car he merely said, “So that’s how it is!” I can’t remember how I responded to that. But when I took him to the airport the next day, I made a Japanese gesture of deep respect, with sincere and eternal gratitude, and the professor responded in kind. Then he said, “Come here,” pulling me in to embrace like a Turk, with a slap on the back. “I came here Japanese and I’m leaving as a Turk,” he said.

I felt as if I were seeing a new side of him. God’s grace had allowed these two dear families, both of whom I had caused needless grief after my thesis defense, to meet and make up. The encounter, which I would never have had the courage to arrange myself, lifted a weight off my shoulders. But the way I botched the whole thing lent a weight of its own.

Once in Tokyo I ran into an English friend, a teaching assistant, carrying a stack of students’ papers out of an exam room. “How is it going in there?” I asked. “This,” he said, “is an exam that no one will fail.”

US FLUNKING IS NOT DESIRED.

WAS THAT YOU?

Japan’s Ministry of Education – called *mombusho* – used to award five scholarships to Turkish students. When my friends started looking for a school for me in Japan, they advised me to apply for one of these, rather than traveling to Japan on my own dime. So I returned home from my job in Middle East and applied for a scholarship. It was an interesting wait for that interview. Interesting in the sense that I was not among the top five candidates, nor among the five alternates. Yet I was the only applicant whose research topic related to Japan.

Many years later, after I had returned from Japan to Turkey, a recent graduate, who knew a friend of mine, called my company asking to meet me. He had been granted one of the *mombusho* scholarships, and he had some questions about Japanese life. After talking for a long while, I asked him which body had granted his scholarship, mentioning that the ministry in Ankara, which was tasked with choosing all five recipients, ran an exam that was sadly just for show. He said, “Mine came from the Japanese ministry, thank God.” He had jotted in his exam booklet a short explanation of the research he wanted to do in Japan, and submitted over a hundred pages of preparation for his study, including question formats and a bibliography. Ankara had not chosen him, but thanks to a juror who worked for the Japanese Embassy, a sixth scholarship was created for him, funded by the Embassy.

Our prayers had been answered in completely different ways – mine in Japan, and his in Turkey. Without wanting to lay any blame, I always thought that this creation of a sixth scholarship was a gentle message from the Japanese to us, that power should be given to those who were the most capable.

During that same meeting with him, I also jokingly asked him, “What do you want to be when you grow up? I, for instance, wanted to be rich when I was your age.”

“Aha!” he replied, surprisingly. “Was that you?”

“Who?” I asked. He said he had met a former roommate of mine at a public seminar at his university. This roommate had observed that students who pursued knowledge became scholars, and students who pursued wealth became rich, but that knowledge was sacred. I had wholeheartedly declared the sanctity or knowledge as a young student, while my roommate had chosen that sacred path for himself. Somehow, I wound up as the villain in the story.

“You’ve spent just three hours with someone you don’t know, without expecting anything in return. And you’ve done all you can to help me,” he said. “I don’t think your roommate knew you very well.” Indeed, I wouldn’t say that he did.

Friendship has its obligations, and nobility resides in the soul. I later met that same former roommate one more time, yet couldn’t bring myself to remark on the compliment he had paid me. The fact is, the faults we see in others often reflect our own faults. And I’m sure I am no exception.

WE ARE OUR FAULTS.

THE SADDEST SONG.

Professor Fujita had another assistant before me who was more mature than his classmate – the type who drank straight. When he fell ill and could not come to school, we held class celebrations in places like the trendy Kichijoji district, where he could join us. He would drink heavily despite being ill. One morning we learned that he had passed away, and a funeral would be held in a temple that afternoon.

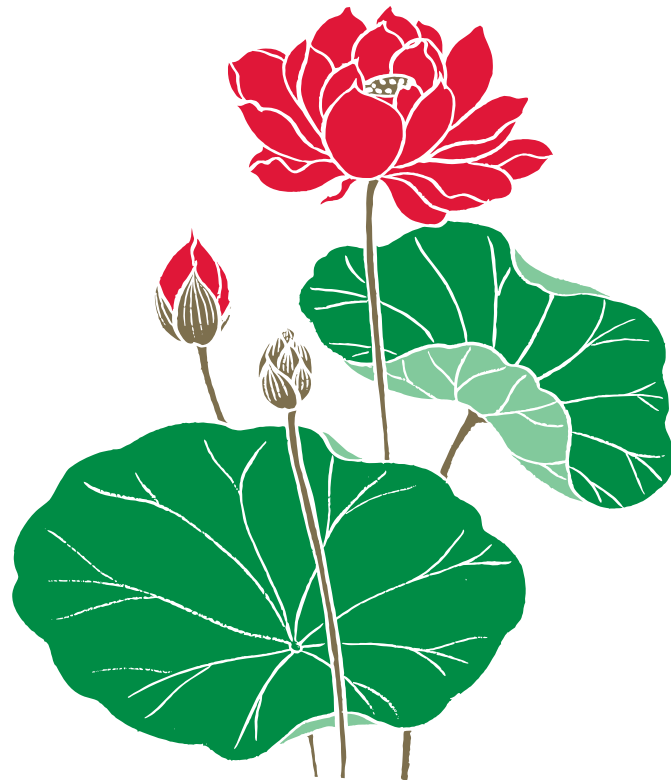
I knew that Japanese people wore black clothes and white shirts to weddings and funerals, with beige, yellow or white ties at weddings, and black ties at funerals. This simplicity of attire allowed even the poorest people to attend these rituals. But I was wearing dark blue clothes that day, so I asked a friend for guidance. “You should be alright,” he assured me. I didn’t own a black tie at all, so I bought myself one at a train station kiosk, hoping I wouldn’t need it again.

As we approached the temple, I asked my friend what to expect of the ritual, and what might be expected of me. He told me we would offer the family our condolences, and I asked what I should say. “It is ok if they don’t understand you,” he told me. “On an occasion like this, it may not be possible to say anything meaningful anyhow. It’s enough just to murmur and bow.”

It’s customary for wedding and funeral guests in Japan to give the family an envelope of cash, perhaps 10 thousand yen; but the appropriate amount will depend on one’s economic status and relationship to the family. And the family, in turn, will give the visitor a gift worth about half what they guess will be in the envelope. In Turkey, neighbors prepare and share food, and help with the details of the rituals. I wanted to give the family an envelope too, but my friends

assured me we didn't need to, as students. Instead, we said our good-byes to the dignified family, received our gift bags, and spent an evening together that my memory has somehow erased.

OUR PRAYERS FOR OTHERS ARE BOUND TO GOD'S GRACE



NOTHING LIKE THE SIX A.M. TRAIN.

One night a friend suggested meeting for a cheap and tasty dinner at a restaurant in Kichijoji district. Someone must have dropped us off, because we arrived without our bicycles, and met a female friend of his there. The three of us enjoyed our meal and sipped our tea, until something drove my friend to observe aloud that all of us were single. At that, the girl burst into tears. "Yes," she said, "but I'm the loneliest."

Only true loneliness can make a person cry the way that girl cried. Even parents enduring the loss of their own children manage hold themselves together at funerals. The poor girl just kept repeating, "I have no one," until the three of us decided to go to a five-film marathon at a nearby theater, for a change of scenery.

It was not my idea; it must have been mid-April, and by the end of the second film, at midnight, our shirts and jackets were failing to keep us warm. By about 1:30 a.m. we regretted our decision. We didn't have our bicycles, or money for a taxi, and the next train wasn't until six in the morning. I must say that the fourth and fifth films gave me a wholly unprecedented kind of pleasure. My new Japanese eating habits had made me so thin that I was swimming in my jacket; that evening I tried to wrap it around myself twice instead of wearing it. By the time we boarded the first train that morning, I was frozen so solid, I could have been erected as a monument in Mitaka Field. And that night was when film, the so-called "seventh art," took on a special role in my life.

LONELINESS IS WAITING FOR THE DAY'S FIRST TRAIN.

A DIFFICULT SUMMIT.

Ever since I was a child, every time I've knelt down or practiced judo, my left knee has seemed to get stuck and I've heard a snapping sound.

As New Years was approaching one Tokyo winter, my friend Hosaka, an importer of medicinal herbs, invited me to spend the holiday in the snowy region where his family lived. "Don't spend the holiday alone in Tokyo," he said. I didn't want to be a burden, but he insisted his family would be happy to welcome me. "Just bring some warm clothes," he said.

So we caught a train together in Tokyo, and disembarked in a place that looked like one of the snowscapes described by Nobel Laureate Yasunari Kawabata. There we met Hosaka's extended family, including his sister, who worked at a school for disabled children with only two students.

"Yenersan," my friend asked, "have you ever gone skiing?" I had not, and asked if it was difficult. His response was so charmingly provocative – "I'm going to bring you to a place where you'll have no choice but to ski" – that I could only acquiesce. I'm not a very brave man, but I'm a sucker for a well-turned phrase.

So the two of us climbed to the top of the snowy peak, where we did a few warm-up exercises and then, just like that, I started to ski. It was my first time, and I can't even venture to guess how many times I fell. At a certain point my left knee began hurting so badly that I could barely stand, let alone ski, and Hosakasan's cousin – the district ski champion – came to my rescue. I held

onto his shoulders for a very difficult descent that included several falls before we made it to the next station down the mountain. From there, a medical team brought me to the foot of the mountain in a sled-shaped stretcher. I wondered whether I should ease the pain with hot water; old judo wisdom advises warming a cold injury and icing a hot one. So my friend and his brother brought me to a nearby hot spring, and I implored them to enjoy their time on the slopes while I rested there; I had recovered enough to walk without help by then.

It was still so early in the morning that I was alone in the spring, and the mountains loomed above me like a charcoal drawing on white paper. I felt like I was looking at one of the framed prints hanging on my office wall in Middle East, which I had cropped out of a gift calendar from Japan. But I was not in my office; I was submerged in a stone pool, and the landscape before me was real. My thoughts and impressions began swirling together, and I wondered which most resembled a painting: that framed print or the landscape before me? Many of the moments we have yet to experience are already framed on our walls, where we see them repeatedly without knowing they lie in wait for us. At times I've reflected that, just as a building has walls, so does a body. I wonder what images hang on those inner walls.

AT A CERTAIN POINT, THE ONLY WAY DOWN IS BY SLIDING

NOBLILITY IS INNATE.

My close friend Olivier and I took great pleasure in our Tokyo diets. But the food we ate there was so much lighter and more natural than what we'd been used to, in Turkey and France, that we both lost quite a bit of weight. He, meanwhile, had become engaged to marry a Chinese woman, and was awaiting a visit from his parents to introduce them. Olivier and his fiancée paid them a visit as soon as they arrived at their hotel. But when he came back alone to see them that evening, he was in for a shock. His parents criticized him at length for growing so thin, for getting engaged to a Chinese girl, and for being so bookish that he didn't have enough friends (in fairness, he's one of the three most erudite people I've ever met). He was physically and mentally tired, they told him; he needed to rest. "You're practically a hermit," they went on. "You don't have any real friends." When he mentioned me, they grew exasperated. "We meant a European, someone normal," they clarified. He and I got a lot of laughs out of that.

SOME FRIENDSHIPS ARE LIKE A DREAM.

WHOSE LANGUAGE ARE WE LEARNING?

A few months into my first Japanese language course, my teacher warned some of us male students that women and children speak Japanese differently. Those of us learning from girlfriends needed to be careful, she warned, or risk quiet ridicule for getting it wrong. Then she asked how we practiced Japanese in our free time, and turned to me. "Yenersan, from your manner of speaking, and from the sounds you produce in your larynx, I think you've benefited a great deal from watching samurai films," she observed. "But if you keep this up you're going to sound like an actor in a Shakespearean tragedy." She was right; I watched samurai films every night. I liked their historical content and the fact that I could follow them, since they all had pretty much the same plot.

FILMS ABOUT OTHER'S LIVES ARE NOT A SUFFICIENT EDUCATION.

DECEIVING OURSELVES.

One late afternoon towards the end of May, Olivier and I were holed up in the periodicals section of our university library, discussing possibilities for the future. Go to America? Stay in Japan for grad school? Or come up with some other plan, we pondered. "Do you think I should do a master's degree somewhere?" I asked. "It depends on who you want to deceive, and how," he said, cutting right to the core of how knowledge is used. Being well-acquainted with the dual pressures of applying for jobs while trying to learn a basic alphabet of 1947 symbols, he added, "The most important thing is to take good care of the horse on which you want to cross the desert."

THOSE WHO CROSS DESERTS SHOULD CARE FOR THEIR HORSES WELL.

EIGHT DAYS A WEEK...

Work life in Japan is exceptionally stressful. Whether you are a futsu no nihonjin (regular Japanese person) or a shai in (company employee), expectations are daunting. Of course, everyone knows people who just give the appearance of working. But workaholism is a disease with a uniquely strong foothold in Japan; there are numerous cases of people suddenly dropping dead at their jobs. Even if they leave work at a normal hour, men (both married and single) frequently head to a cafe to read a book over tea or coffee, to avoid arriving home before nine or nine-thirty. Because if a high-level executive were to come home early, the neighbors might think he didn't have to work late, a perception that neither he nor his family would want. One night, when I was out late with a friend in the Shinjuku district, we passed a building of at least twenty-five storeys and he said, "What a great company!" I asked him why, and he said, "Look at all the lights on at this hour! People are still toiling away in there."

WORK IS A STRUGGLE.

SPRINGTIME BY PERCENTAGE.

The blooming of the cherry trees is one of Japan's biggest seasonal events. Their exquisite blossoms swathe everything in white and pink. You may not even notice it happening until you begin to hear snippets of conversation about percentages: ten percent of flowers have bloomed, and then 35 or 60 percent, until the day a majority of the sakura flowers are fully open. Parks and gardens fill with spectators, and spring's arrival becomes a week-long picnic, held day and night.

**WHY IS SPRING'S ARRIVAL, BUT NOT ITS DEPARTURE,
DESCRIBED IN PERCENTAGES? SUMMER IS THE ANSWER.**

JUSTICE WHERE JUSTICE IS DUE

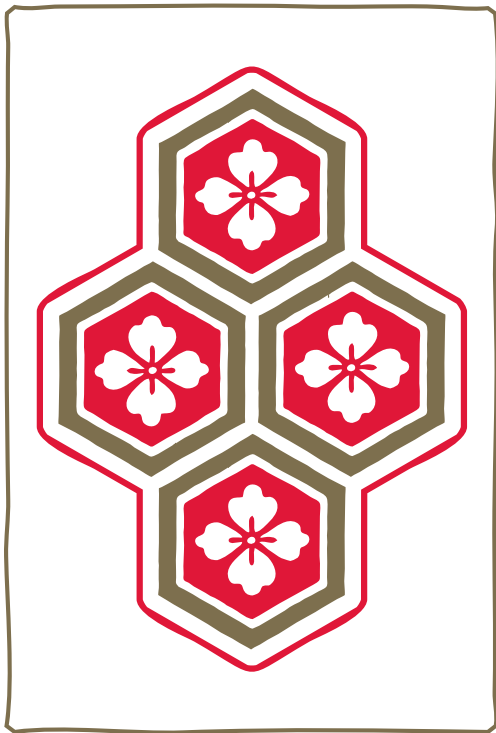
A top executive from the Koç Group, Turkey's largest industrial conglomerate, was recently hired and sent to visit our Istanbul worksite, where self-appointed office criers trumpeted his arrival. Mr. Turhan had been appointed to lead an international desk, and his two-day orientation included a visit to our office. As we all gathered around the perimeter of a spacious conference room with our backs to the walls, he rifled through binders of telexes about the company's subsidiaries and partnerships, to understand foreign sales contracts. From time to time we cast curious glances at his progress, but apart from thanking us for two days of coffee, Mr. Turhan said nothing to anyone. Until suddenly this new director, who had been received with all the pomp befitting a diplomat, looked up and asked, "Which one of you is Yener?" I gave a silent yelp. Why on earth could he be asking?

"I am," I said, rising to my feet. Gesturing at the telexes in front of him, he asked if I had written them, and I said I had. Had I had any legal education? "No, just a healthy respect for law and justice," I replied. How had I learned this kind of Turkish? "By reading a lot," I told him. "And, I suppose, by memorizing rules and precedents on doing business abroad."

I knew why he was asking. A mistake had been made in the customs forms for a container shipped to Saudi Arabia, and the Istanbul office seemed to be shouldering the blame. I was trying to resolve the situation by corresponding technically with the district administration. "Someone over there must be operating on the strength of their personal connections," Mr. Turhan remarked, as he read the other side of the correspondence. He gestured for me to sit back down, and by the next day he was off getting oriented at another group

company. I next encountered him on a staircase six or seven months later, after he had returned shortly from a Tokyo posting. When I greeted him he made a gesture of recognition and asked, "How are the correspondences going?"

EFFORT COUNTS.



LIFE IS FULL OF FAVORS.

Business in Middle East was thriving in 1985. We did 19 million dollars of new business in one year, and we made a 17% profit on 9.2 million of that. It called to my mind the Talmudic question, "If not now, when?" Though the first part of that aphorism, "If not me, who?" did not apply, because any number of people could have taken my place. It was during that period that I called upon the executive board member responsible for Middle East dealings, Mr. Fatih, to tell him that I'd been accepted at a school in Japan, and seek his permission and blessing to go. I hoped to work at the Japan office while I studied, and I felt that my knowledge and passion for the barter system could make me useful over there.

"What if we can't make that happen?" he asked, and I told him I would go to Japan regardless. "Listen," he said. "Mr. Turhan, who heads up the Japan office, has made it very clear that he won't accept anyone who joined the company on the strength of their personal connections; and also, that he will be responsible for the budget of anyone working under him. We can only send you there if he accepts you himself."

"Personally," he continued, "I'd prefer you stay in the Middle East and become director of that office, where I can promise you a raise. But if Mr. Turhan accepts you, I'd be glad to see you take the opportunity, because you're young and you want it so badly." A week or so later he called me in. "What a guy," he said. "Mr. Turhan, asked what kind of person you are, so I described you, and he said, 'If he's that short guy with the green eyes, send him. He seems like someone who can get things done without connections.'" I was thrilled. You can imagine how glad I was to have penned those eighteen exchanges about the mistake in Saudi Arabia, which caused me so much distress at the time.

MAY LUCK BE YOUR IN.

HONG KONG, KING KONG, KING HONG...

I'm not quite sure how Mrs. Harada and I managed to communicate during those early days, but I remember her asking me what I thought of Tokyo. I gave her some sort of oblique answer like, "I was surprised when Hong Kong didn't look like the set of King Kong; but Tokyo comes pretty close." She looked at me in amazement and retorted "masaka" with a snort. Which pretty much means, "you've got to be kidding." When she asked how my flight had been, I kept it up, saying "It would have been better not to ask for coffee." She asked why, and I replied that I'd asked the flight attendant for coffee on the plane. But when I asked for it black, the black man next to me was offended and beat me up. This time it was Mrs. Harada who beat me up.

THIN LINES SEPARATE DECEIT, HYPERBOLE, AND HUMOR

MUSIC NOTES ARE UNIVERSAL.

One autumn at boarding school, my literature class was within earshot of a music room whose windows stayed open clear through the month of November. As a result, all of us spent the semester listening to a beginner saxophonist struggle up and down endless scales. At a certain point our English teacher ran out of patience and exploded, "I don't feel any human emotions behind these sounds!"

"ALL THAT LASTS UNDER THE HEAVENS ARE BEAUTIFUL SOUNDS" -BÂÎ

SHARE WITH YOUR GUESTS.

One of my first office colleagues in Tokyo, Katsuhira sempai (a Japanese term of endearment meaning “older brother”), invited me to visit for a weekend, to help me learn a bit more about Japan and adapt to my new home. He met me at the station for a wonderfully fun weekend. We went bike riding – my first time since childhood – and he told me the story of how he had come to marry his wife. He also gifted me one of the red goose-down jackets that Japanese tourists always used to wear, insisting that it was a spare. “In my country we share our extra things,” he explained, “first with our family, then with our neighbors, and then with society at large.” When I was shown to my room that evening, I was given a yukata to wear, a kimono-like nightgown that replaced the pajamas I’d been told not to bring. A fresh toothbrush and toothpaste also awaited me, which I made a mental note of. One day when I marry and have guests of my own, I told myself, I mustn’t fail to provide toothbrushes.

NOTHING BEATS THOUGHTFUL HOSPITALITY.

LEARNING TO BE SILENT

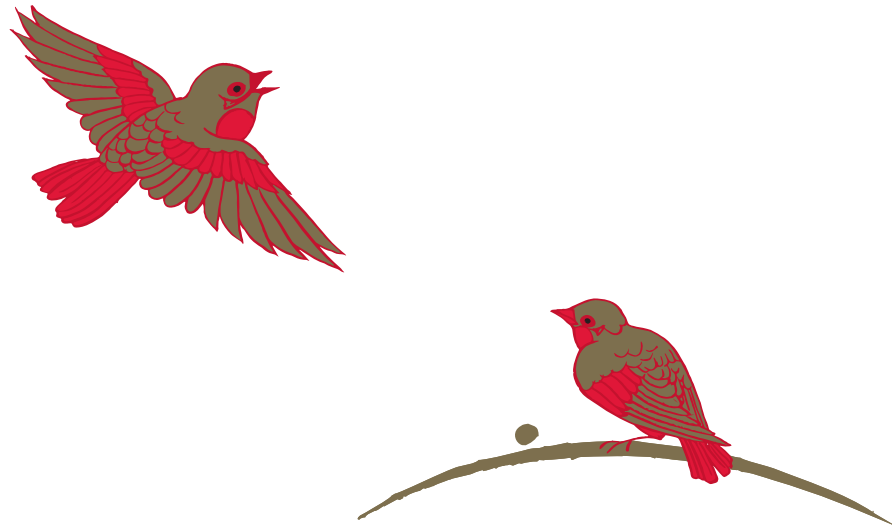
My friend Hosaka, who was not a talkative sort, once took me to a restaurant where we ate alone on a reed mat in a large, ornate dining room. He had wanted to treat me to a luxurious Japanese meal, and this was a beautiful place indeed. But I remember feeling that I would really have preferred a nigiyaka, one of Japan’s cheerful, noisy eateries with a different TV channel on in each corner.

I think one of the things I found hardest to adjust to, among Easterners, was their ability to sit comfortably in silence with one another. Turks and Westerners always try to fill these silences with conversation, but my friend and I talked about very little over the course of that lengthy meal. Thankfully I had read about this difference beforehand, so I decided, right then, to cultivate a state of mind in which I could bear and even enjoy this kind of silence. And I managed to make the leap.

A year and a half later, after returning to Turkey, I spoke with a friend who was struggling to negotiate a purchase of some Japanese machinery for his factory. A previous deal had cost him too much, and he was skeptical of the person he was dealing with. When I heard how far the asking price was from what he hoped to pay, I told him, “You won’t win this by talking; you need to stay at the table and say nothing.” Later, in a crowded meeting between Turkish and Japanese business teams, after exchanging polite greetings, he heard the Japanese side’s offer and replied, “This is my offer,” just as we had discussed. And he stayed there, listening to everyone without offering any further

comments of his own. Eventually the Japanese side requested a recess, talked amongst themselves, and returned, saying, "You know your business; we accept your offer." Years later, at a meeting where I was also present, he said, "Mr. Yener interpreted silence in the most profitable way, and we really profited."

SILENCE CAN BE A DEBT, AND DEBT CAN BE SILENCE.



ACTING IS NATURAL, THEATRICAL EXPERIMENTS ARE MANDATORY.

In my Japanese class in Tokyo, a few of us garnered great admiration for the role of Butterfly. But this was not Henri Charriere's film adaptation of the novel Butterfly. It was a little experiment based on a humorous story in which a character feels like one of the winged beauties. We faithfully impersonated the way butterflies flap through the air, and the performance greatly pleased our teachers and classmates. Like Richard Bach did in his book, Jonathan Livingston Seagull, we really conveyed the feeling of flight.

FLYING IS ACTING.

DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR.

The English novelist Margaret Drabble gave a seminar at Istanbul's Boğaziçi University (Robert College) while I was a student there in 1978, and friends of mine invited me to come hear the famous feminist speak. I was glad I could make the event, as I wanted to learn what feminism was really about. We went and listened, though an argument broke out as soon as it ended, so we left to have tea together. Our gears were churning after that lecture. A Japanese lady asked us all what we wanted to accomplish in life. "Very important things," I joked, and she turned to all the men in the group, saying, "My husband also has delusions like that."

THE MIRROR IS FOR THOSE WHIT PEACEFUL HEARTS.

SOMETIMES LESS IS MORE.

Before living in Japan, my perceptions of Japanese people had been informed by what I'd seen in childhood cartoons: tiny people capable of vanquishing foes with a few swift martial-arts moves. And during my stay there, as I was showing a visiting committee of Turks around Tokyo by subway, one gentleman mentioned having similar preconceptions. Moments later, we all caught sight of a teenage boy seated at the other end of the train car. Without standing up, the boy reached a long arm up to the baggage rack (which I could barely reach standing), grabbed his bag, pulled something out of it, and shoved it back into place, all while sitting down. This kid wasn't average at all, and it gave us a laugh to see him at that moment.

AVERAGES ARE FOR THE IGNORAMUS.

PRINCIPLES CANNOT BE NEGOTIATED.

Enka's Tokyo office rang me one day, after I had stopped working there to become a student. The entire Board of Directors would be visiting Tokyo, and I was asked if I'd like to meet them again. I was thrilled. I imagined one of the men saying to another one, "Let's not think any less of Yener for wanting to go back to school. Studying is like politics: it's in the blood." So an afternoon was set aside for the group to see the city, but first we set out to take care of the shopping lists each visitor had brought with him. We started in the Akihabara district to buy electronics, and then headed to a famous shop located in a hotel, to buy pearls for everyone's wives. We already had a 35 percent discount in the shop, but after looking over the goods for a long time, the visitors wrote down all the prices they'd heard, and wound up asking the shop manager for a discount of about 55 percent. I can't even describe the stricken expression on the man's face. "I'm very sorry gentlemen," he said, as he returned his goods to their drawers in a way that clearly conveyed his anger. We were then thrown out of the shop, and I don't mean figuratively.

I had never imagined seeing a scene like that in Japan. I told the visitors we had taken the wrong approach, that things weren't done that way. "Yener," said one of the directors, "you've become assimilated! Your gentle heart can't handle a little skirmish anymore." He was right. I was still dwelling painfully on what had befallen us and our pearls as I asked the men, "Well, what would you like to do now?" They were keen on seeing the luxury shopping district Ginza, so off we went, and they were a merry group. When we'd seen all the interesting shops on one side of the street, I proposed, "Let's take that crosswalk seventy meters down the street." And at that, the whole group crossed right where we were, at the street's widest point at rush hour. As if that had been my suggestion. I shouldn't have joined them, but who knew where they might have wandered off to by the time it took me to trot 70 meters

down the street, cross, and return to the same point. Bowing my head and grunting, I darted across the street with them. We had a good time wandering around Ginza.

After about three hours, one of them looked at his watch and muttered about having to return somewhere, as if he'd left a pot simmering on the stove. Slowly it dawned on me, amid waves of alarm, what he had in mind. "We're not going back to the pearl shop, are we!?" I implored. That, alas, was indeed his plan, and my heart sank. "I'll bring you there," I told him, "but I am not going back into that shop." So we returned to the hotel, and I sat on a step outside while they went in.

I watched the whole thing as if it were a movie. The manager wended through the crowd, tending to customers and shop assistants, when suddenly he caught side of our group, and they approached him. He immediately picked up a cloth, turned his back to them, and started polishing his glass display cases. But they were undeterred. One of them tapped him on the shoulder, with a "Hello friend, we're back. Please take the items back out of the case." Normally, of course, no shop manager would turn their back on entering customers. But I don't think he himself could believe what he'd done, and seeing them again reminded him of his error. The visitors remained relaxed, however, and the manager eventually turned back to them. He took the jewelry out, tallied up their bill again, and they escaped that shop with a 45% discount.

I received this news with amazement when they came back out of the shop. One of group managers, who'd seen my mortification, turned to me and said, "Dear Yener, the best negotiation is the negotiation that ends. We upset you, I know, but we also closed the deal."

THE BEST NEGOTIATION IS A FINISHED NEGOTIATION.



LEARNING IS A LONG ROAD.

Any visitor to Japan would be very lucky to meet the Haradas' only son, my friend's brother Michio – whose name comes from the word michi, meaning road. He takes profound pleasure in foreign cultures, books, films, and people; by any measure, he is a person who lives deeply. So, when I arrived, it fell to him to show latest Turkish visitor around Japan. I saw a great many sites with him, including the widely-sought Buddhist temple at Akasuka.

The most interesting thing Michio taught me was how to handle myself on Japanese streets. During our first days of exploring Tokyo together, I obeyed most pedestrian street signals, but crossed against red lights when I could. For the most part he joined me in these illicit crossings, but on one instance he held himself back until the light had turned. When I asked why, he pointed to a young boy nearby, in a colorful primary school hat. If the boy had seen us jaywalking, he said, he might have decided to try it himself.

Around the same time, I mentioned to him that I'd taken to buying the triangular sandwiches sold at train station kiosks, and munching on them while I waited for my morning train. But I noticed that nobody else seemed to be eating them on the platform. Michio explained: "If there are children around who can't afford the sandwiches, it's better not to make them feel hungry."

CHILDREN AND STOPLIGHTS OFFER WONDERFUL BOUNDARIES.

KARAOKE IS A SOCIAL AFFAIR.

During my first trip to Japan with Mr. Nuri, a technical friend, the two of us tried to stay out of trouble. But we did go to a karaoke bar as guests of the host company, to sing our teleprompted hearts out years before Easterners gifted this foray into performance and extraversion to the rest of the world. Our business partners insisted that we join them in singing, and I recalled that Nuri belonged to some kind of musical association. "What do you think?" I asked. "I don't want to go on stage; it's all too unfamiliar," he answered, and we mulled over a way to get out of it.

I tried explaining to our Japanese friends that for me, culturally, this would be quite hard. To make my point, I said, "If you'll go and openly eat a sandwich on a train platform where children are present, I'll get up and sing." I knew he wouldn't take me up on it. He did, however, turn the full force of his persuasion upon Nuri, after I stealthily tipped him off in Japanese, "Tell him he can sing from his seat!" to his delight. "Oh, do sing a song," he cajoled Nuri. The karaoke lyrics were almost all written in Japanese, but the bar did have two songs written in the Latin alphabet, and Nuri chose "Yesterday." As soon as the first word escaped his mouth, a hush fell over the noisy bar. And when he finished, the owner of the restaurant came up and said, "You will be our guest whenever you come here." Our Japanese friends were very happy about the trust and friendship Nuri had shown them. I didn't sing because the only song in my repertoire, learned in grammar school, was "The Poplars of Izmir," and it wasn't on the menu.

I SHALL SING, SING MY SONG...

VALUABLE GIFTS.

A Japanese friend brought my mother an origami crane on the occasion of their first meeting. When my mother opened the box, she turned to me and discreetly joked, "Did they bring me paper all the way from Japan?" I explained that according to Japanese custom, we would be expected to give them a gift of equal value, and that they surely didn't want to put us in a difficult position. My mother smiled sweetly and assured me they would never have put us in a difficult position.

A CRANE IS A PAPER BRIDGE.

IGNORANCE IS COURAGE.

Takahashisan was a friend I met in Istanbul, who had also been the doctoral classmate at Hacettepe University in Ankara of a Turkish sempai from the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation. Takahashisan treated me like a younger brother from our first meeting in Tokyo, when we set out for an afternoon coffee together. At that time, European-style cafés were fairly new in Turkey; far more common were traditional kahvehane, where men gathered to drink coffee and tea, and play backgammon or cards. As I wondered what these new cafés were all about, I looked into a sweet shop and saw a display bowl containing a replica of crushed ice sprinkled with chocolate and candy. I asked what it was, and Takahashisan responded, “Japanese ice cream.” I wanted to try everything during that period, so I said, “Let’s have some.”

“I don’t really eat ice-cream,” he replied with an edge in his voice, so I assured him he could have coffee. And in we went; I ordered an elaborate sundae and he had coffee. But he was clearly uncomfortable, and kept looking down at the table as we talked. It wasn’t until I looked around that I realized all the other customers in the café were middle-aged women. “Takahashisan,” I asked, “why are there no other men in here?”

“Men don’t eat sweets as often,” he said. “And they would never come here.” We paid the bill in a hurry and left; my new friend was visibly relieved.

KINDNESS LINGERS LONGER THAN MEMORY.

KNOWLEDGE IS A DIMENSION.

One evening Turhan sempai and I left work together for the Onarimon train station. Our relationship had remained polite and professional until that point, and he had given no particular indication that he trusted me. People like to say things like, “You make your own luck,” especially in business. But the fact is, you’re out of luck if your boss decides not to give you a chance.

As we walked, he reminisced, “You’re too young to remember this, but I’ll never forget the day when two of Faulkner’s novels were released at once. I was so excited, I scraped together all the money I had, and rushed out to buy them both. One of them was called *The Bear*, but I can’t remember the name of the other one.”

Goodness, I myself had that book! I prayed that I could remember the name correctly. “Was it... *As I Lay Dying*?” I ventured, and he stopped in his tracks to stare at me in surprise. “How do you know about that?” he asked. “The book had quite a limited release.” I told him I had a copy of my own, and he asked if I had any other books from the same publisher. Asked like a true collector! (Later I learned that he also had a prize-winning stamp collection.) I tried to think of some obscure titles I owned, and came up with Wolfgang Borchert’s *On This Tuesday*. He was thrilled. Moments before he had been in a hurry to get home, but now he was glowing. “Son, you seem to be a reader,” he said. “That’s a good thing to be. What do you say we make like the Japanese and go to one of those informal restaurants with the red lanterns? I say we drink to this.”

After all my failed efforts to endear myself to Turhan ağabey and his colleagues through hard work and meticulous presentations, it was Faulkner who finally got me in the door. Ever since that day, I've adopted Faulkner's style as my own. A wavelength is one thing to an electrician and something else entirely to a sailor.

WE ALL HAVE OUR OWN WAY OF THINKING.

IDENTITY IS SIMPLE.

While in Japan, a doctor friend and I decided to look for a parcel of land in Antalya where we could build a golf resort. My father had gone into real estate after retiring, so he said he'd work on finding us this parcel while we planned our visit. By the time we came, it was the heat of summer. We made a road-side stop one day for some ice cream and cold drinks, and when we went to pay, my father – whose face looks very Asian – asked “How much will it be?” and the shop boy commented, “Your Turkish is very good!” On another occasion, my brother flew to visit me in Japan, and the flight attendant didn't offer him a customs form. When he requested one, she assured him they weren't necessary for Japanese citizens.

OUR FACES ARE OUR PASSPORTS.

STOP TEACHING...

One morning at a company meeting in Tokyo, I was using a whiteboard to make a presentation, as I had for much of the day before. My left hand habitually rested in my pocket as I wrote, and stayed there as I turned back around to address my colleagues' questions. After dinner that evening, my friend Matauzaki, who had arranged the meetings, said, "Yenersan, I know you used to be a teacher, but there's really no need to do that in front of CEOs and managers. Can't you see it keeps everyone standing at attention?" Later he jokingly called me Yener Sensei (Teacher Yener).

The very next day, after another meeting, we were in a train station en route to another company when I heard a woman's voice calling, "Yener Sensei, Yener Sensei!" It was Ilgin, one of three extremely talented students I'd had in an advanced management seminar at Boğaziçi University, for whom I had written references in Japan. I greeted her in Turkish, we chatted, and as we boarded our train, she bade me adieu as "Sensei," with her newly-learned and very polite Japanese. Matsuzaki was surprised and said, "You really are a Sensei." Solid proof of the elevated qualities implied by the title.

TEACHERS TEACH BECAUSE THEY CONTINUE TO LEARN.

DEVELOP YOURSELF ALONGSIDE OTHERS

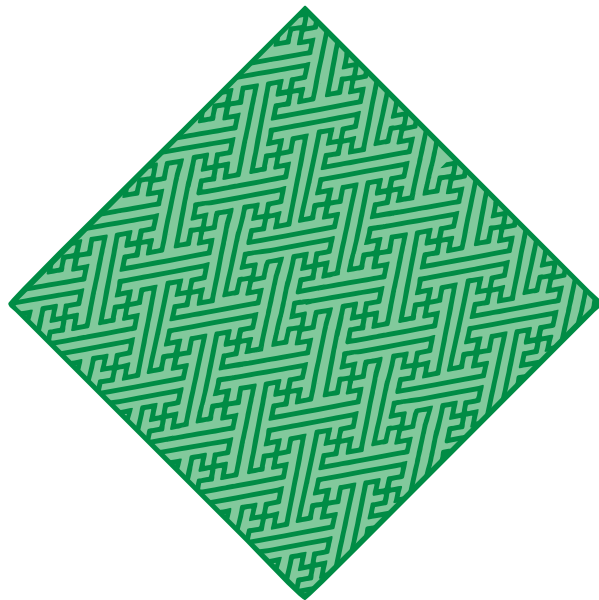
The advanced management courses we taught at Boğaziçi University were unique for a business school, bringing together techniques of both Eastern and Western business administration, strategic management, sales and marketing, personal improvement, and general cultural knowledge. During the few years I taught the course, I was able to introduce some very talented young people to a variety of cultures and business customs, drawing from my own experience. In the February 2005 issue of the Boğaziçi University Alumni Association's magazine, a student of mine from that period, Murat, published an article called "Masters and Grasshoppers."

Yener Sonuşen's teaching style develops a mentor-mentee relationship. As someone from within the business world he would share his experiences like an older brother. Outside of class we would have conversations together with my dear friend Cenk, about business stories that were 'not to be spoken of in class.' Yener would ask us for our ideas, and comment upon them. He shared tidbits from the books and magazines he had read, and created an atmosphere of trust in which we felt we could reach him 24 hours a day. Looking back, I can see that because of him I started my business life one step ahead of the game. Perhaps one of the most important lessons Yener Sonuşen imparted to us without realizing it was the joy of mentorship. That's why all of us try to share our experiences and ideas with our younger friends in the same manner.

Tunç, another of my students from that period, wanted to go to Japan but didn't have enough money to stay for two years. Selling his car, which was either a Murat 124 or a Şahin, would raise enough money to fund one year, and he wanted to know what his risk might be, of having to come back after that first year. Without a second thought I said, "I think you should go, study hard, earn a high grade point average, and at the end of the semester explain the

situation to your advisor. Since he'll know you by then, he'll surely find a way to help you." Tunç did go, stayed to finish his master's degree, and worked in Japan for several years before moving to London. I recently came across a newspaper article about business managers living abroad who might return to Turkey, which detailed Tunç's career path.

MANAGEMENT IS CREATING A SITE OFF-WEB.



IT'S A SMALL WORLD

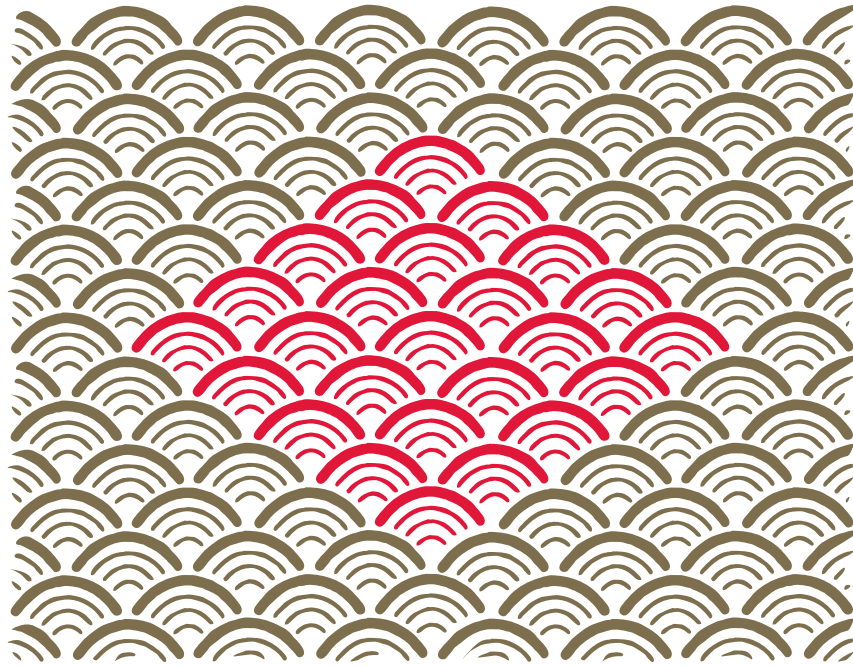
One of my earliest wishes was to travel as much as possible. And finally, en route to Japan for the first time, our flight from London was going to make a stop in Anchorage. I was on my way to the arctic regions and Japan! When we disembarked at Anchorage, I was struck by the impossibility of knowing the time of day without looking at my watch. (I remembered that peculiar feeling years later, at a restaurant in Moscow, when heavy curtains were drawn after 9PM to blot out the nighttime sun.) We only spent a few hours in the Anchorage airport, but while I was browsing souvenirs I was stupefied to run into a friend from Turkey. I knew someone in Alaska! Amazing. It just went to show: if you set out to travel incognito, your cover could be blown even in the most far-flung place.

We got back onto our plane and I watched Karate Kid, which I identified with strongly. I wasn't all that much older than the Karate Kid, but I looked more mature, and more Japanese too. With my head full of these thoughts, we landed at Tokyo's Narita airport, and I boarded a LimousineBus, as my Japanese friends had instructed me to do. I was to get out at the Ikebukuro Limousine stop. After forty minutes we entered the city center, surrounded by colorful neon signs, and I said to myself, here is Tokyo! Just as a visitor to Istanbul, on seeing Üsküdar or Kuleli in front of them, or the view from Sultanahmet to Suleymaniye and the Galata Tower, will declare, here is Istanbul! I got off the bus, and the Haradasans, who recognized me from photographs, welcomed me immediately.

I couldn't sleep at all that first night; I tossed and turned on the futon bed in my guest room. In the heightened sensations of my excitement, I could hear all the sounds of the night. This was a day to be wide awake, to miss nothing. And what a wonderful sight it was, when I finally saw that first rising sun. In

the heightened attention of my excitement, I could hear all the sounds of the night. This, for me, was a day to be awake, to miss nothing. And what a wonderfully beautiful sight I beheld, of that sun rising.

SOMETIMES THE SUN IS YOUR WHOLE WORLD.



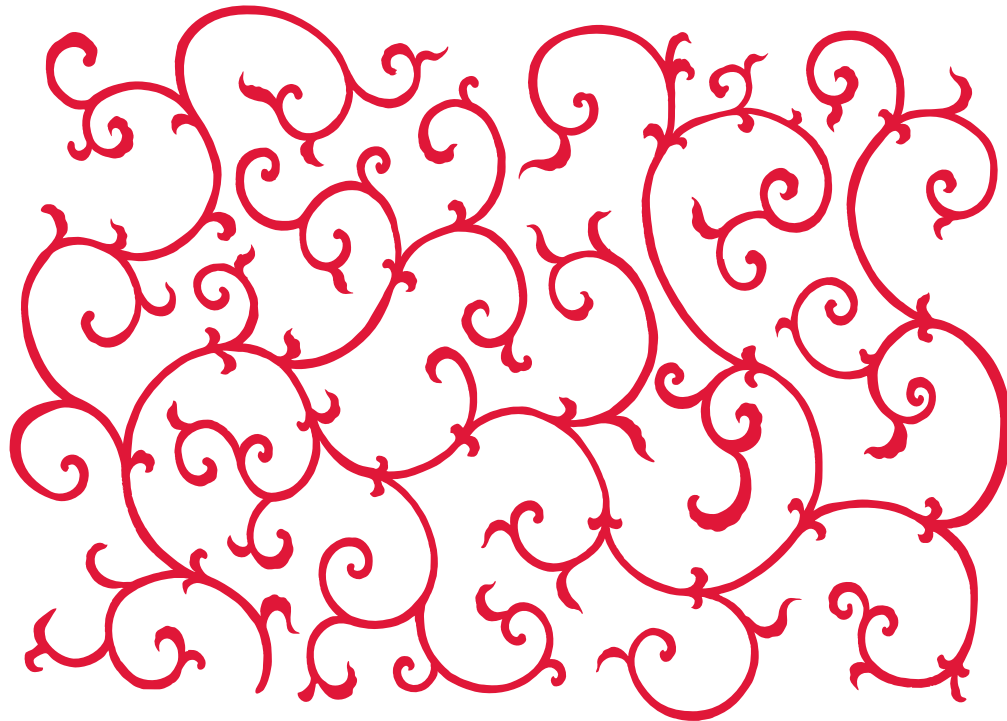
ASKING FOR DIRECTIONS IS A RITUAL. WHILE

While I was at large in Tokyo one weekend with my dear friend Michio, the information sponge, we found ourselves lost. Like a typical Anatolian, I spotted a fellow pedestrian and moved to ask him for directions. But Michio stopped me quickly. "You can't just approach people like that," he said. "You should do your utmost to find your own way. And if you can't, find an official to ask. Approaching a civilian should be your very last resort. But if you must, it is important to choose the right person carefully." He proceeded to lay out a complex set of rules – definitions and descriptions, do's and don'ts – for identifying such a person. By the end, I still didn't quite have it straight.

The next day I found myself unsure of which train to board, at Tokyo's largest central train station, which four million people are said to pass through every day. But I spoke fluent Japanese by then, so I scoured the crowd for someone fitting Michio's appropriate-to-ask criteria. After several minutes I finally identified one, standing about thirty meters away from me on the same side of a broad underground walkway. My plan was to weave toward him and ask, "Excuse me, how do I find [such and such] train?" in Japanese. But he saw me coming, and started walking with his head lowered. I persisted undeterred, so he turned his head away from me and walked faster. He walked so fast that I could barely catch up to him, and when I did, he was looking pointedly away from me. Every fiber of his being seemed to plead, "Stay away, leave me alone!" but I stubbornly put my question to him. He must have expected English to come out of my foreign mouth, so he tried to say, "Please don't ask me." But I insisted, and he retorted "I don't speak English," while racing away. I couldn't help but collapse with laughter on the stairs. From that poor man's perspective,

I was not a divine wind (kamikaze), but a punishment from God. What a fast cultural learner I was.

POSITIVE THINKING IS ONE WAY TO GO.



MAKE A WISH!

The Japanese are said to do a great deal of reading and research. The country's three largest newspapers had, at one point, a combined readership of forty million, with about half a million dedicated photography magazines sold each month, publishing an impressive number of photos. Anyone who has wandered into a Japanese bookstore will know what I mean.

Shortly after the start of a new term, I was talking to Professor Fujita about some books I had checked out of the library, and he made me a wonderful offer. "You read a lot, and I know there are some books you can't find in the library," he said. "But if I give you the forms, you can order whatever books you want. Fill them out, I'll sign them, and later we can chat about some of the books." I must have ordered as many as two hundred books this way, and they weren't even limited to my field of study. It was an enormous privilege he afforded me, beyond the dreams of most of our university professors.

Books about Japan are a joy to read. But when it comes to writing them, they say that visitors could write a book after a few weeks, scientists might write an article after a few months, and those who stay for years will either postpone or entirely abandon the task. The culture is just so full of surprises, which run both deep and wide. Perhaps, in these paragraphs, I'm telling my own story more than Japan's. If you said to me, as was said in *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand, "it's you," I would answer: No, these paragraphs tell the story of my friends, my chosen family, my teachers, and those who have been kind to me. The people I met in Japan hold a meaning, for me, akin to the airborne feather that drifts down to land beside Forrest Gump.

SO MANY APPLES FELL ONTO MY HEAD, AND EACH OF THEM BROUGHT EPIPHANIES.

THERE'S NO KNOWLEDGE LIKE SELF KNOWLEDGE.

The word jin means “person” in Japanese; by extension, yabanjin means “wild man” and gaijin means “foreigner.” The term gaikokujin, meaning “a person who comes from a foreign country,” is more polite, but gaijin, which implies “outsider,” is more colloquial.

One tired evening as I returned home from work, I boarded a very crowded bus at Mitaki station. At one stop, a sweet little girl of four or five approached my seat with her grandmother. When the little girl saw me she turned and asked, “Grandmother, is this what a gaijin looks like?” The grandmother was flustered, told her never to use that word, and without looking directly at me, tried to make out whether I understood Japanese. I feigned oblivion, but I was awfully amused. Imagine a little Japanese girl pointing at you and asking, “Is that what a foreigner look like?” That really is the only age at which you can express yourself freely. My wits must have quickened by then, because just before getting off the bus I bent down and told the girl in Japanese, “I’m a gaijin. Don’t worry, and don’t be afraid to use the word.” I said this within earshot of her grandmother, whom I then honored with the most polite bow in my repertoire, and I was off.

Not long after I returned from Japan, the government stopped using the phrase “alien registration” to register foreign residents. This unfortunate phrase did indeed misrepresent the delicacy of the Japanese language and culture.

OUR LIVES ARE ON THE RECORD.

ONE MUST LOOK BEYOND.

One evening at the Haradasans’ there was a flurry of activity and chatter, as they prepared to take me out for a delicious type of fish. When we arrived at the restaurant, I could see from the signed photographs hanging on the walls, the long lines, and diners’ attire, that it was a place of great renown. After we took our seats, the famous fish arrived with a big head and scant flesh; it was a pufferfish, called fugu in Japanese. I dug in, and could only surmise that the Haradasans felt about this fish the way my Roman tour guide had felt about his neighborhood water fountain. As we ate, we discussed the fish in detail, right down to its lineage. And as I polished off the last bites of my tiny portion, I was informed, “Yener, the most important thing to know about this fish is that it’s caught in the deepest part of the sea, and it’s lethally poisonous. If the cook has any small cuts on his hands while removing the poison, it can enter his bloodstream and kill him.” I didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. If I had known beforehand, I would definitely have invoked my right to refuse. But I tried to stay calm, and they assured me, “The cook didn’t die today, and it’s not his first day, so don’t worry about it.” I washed that fish down with several bottles of soda.

POISON IS HARD TO CLEAN AWAY.

KENYA-KONYA-JAPONYA.

At a time when Turkey's postal system was not up to current standards, I remember watching a TV program about African students studying at Turkish universities. A student from Kenya said, "You have a nice country, with no violence on the streets. With a few exceptions, people here don't denigrate people of African origin, and sometimes we're treated with great kindness." When asked what negative experiences he'd had, he replied, "Your postal system has some quirks. A letter I sent from Istanbul to Kenya came back three months later saying that the address could not be found in Konya [a large city in Turkey]." That sounded like a joke, but it wasn't.

Each of us is like a posted letter, and also like a mailman. Everything in life is moving towards an address, and it is our job to read the addresses correctly.

During one of many conversations with my Japanese friends at our home in Levent, one of them invited me along to visit Konya for Şeb-i Arûs, the 10-day festival when the Whirling Dervishes commemorate the death of their order's founder, the 13th century mystic and poet Rumi. So, just like that, we set out for Konya, a trip lasting a night and a day, with a bus change in Ankara. We had made no arrangements, but my friends had books full of information, curious minds, and good hearts. Thankfully Rumi speaks to everyone whose hearts seek beauty, and my friends' hearts carried me along to Konya.

WHERE WE GO IS WHERE WE COME FROM.

CURIOSITY AND INSISTENCE ARE GOOD.

My mother doesn't speak any foreign languages, yet she decided to stop in Singapore anyway, to do some shopping on her way to visit me. When I picked her up at the Tokyo airport, her first observation was that "these people are very competent." When the customs officer asked her a question, she figured he must be asking about the purpose of her visit to Japan. So she showed him my picture and, pointing to herself, said, "Mother." Then she pointed to the picture and said, "Yener, my son." Finally, she summarized, "Mother and son." As far as I can surmise, that official probably rushed to stamp her passport just to save himself.

My mother came to Japan at a moment when I had stopped asking questions about things that made me curious, and her arrival restored me to a more natural social state. One night a Japanese friend phoned me about a problem he was having with his fiancée, and I spent more than an hour talking to the poor guy. After I hung up my mother observed, "That was a long conversation – must have been something important." I explained that my friend was having relationship problems, and I'd just tried to help. My mother's answer was interesting. "Was there not a single Japanese friend he could turn to, in a country of a hundred and thirty million?" she wondered.

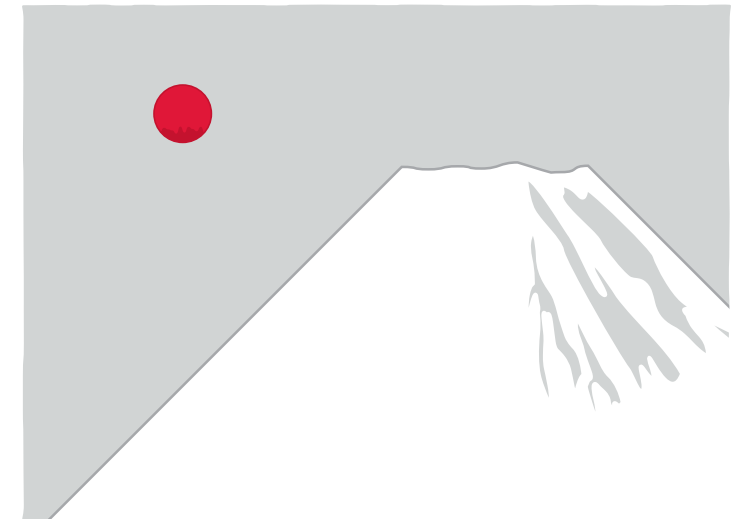
WHAT IS KNOWN IS FOUND.

I SPOKE WITH MT. FUJI

On a night in Tokyo where we were perishing from the cold, we watched the movie “Being There” directed by Hal Ashby and starring Peter Sellers (translated into Turkish as “Bahçıvan”) at a film festival. Driven by my belief in self-discovery, upon returning to Istanbul I acquired a small garden and planted various trees and flowers. One day, while looking for a warehouse manager for the company I was working for at the time, I noticed gardening listed among the hobbies on a male candidate’s CV. Pretending not to be particularly impressed, I said, “What’s this about gardening?” With an expression that seemed to say, “I wish I hadn’t written it,” he said, “I... sir, I love flowers.” “Is that so?” I replied, “So how good are you at this job?” Looking straight into my eyes as if asking himself, “Should I say it or not?”, he said, “I... talk to flowers.” “Then the job is yours,” I said. “Was I selected?” he asked. “Who could be more trustworthy to entrust our treasures to than someone who speaks the language of flowers or birds?” I replied.

With a joy growing like a mountain within me, descending, ascending, falling, getting up, on some days and nights I too spoke with Mount Fuji. That Mount Fuji which says, “How beautiful it is if the Sun and Moon are born within a person,” Mount Fuji from Hokusai’s famous painting. Mount Fuji that stands as if distant and concealed on the horizon of mountain-like foamy waves, yet is their emulation and truth.

SO WE STARTED TALKING WITH MOUNT FUJI



NEITHER THE FIRST WORD NOR THE LAST.

Childhood memories of one's close family members often begin with the words, "I'll never forget that time..." and then change over time. They are like Rosebud, the childhood sled invoked in the poignant final moments of Orson Welles' film "Citizen Kane" – but more vivid still.

I can still remember my mother coming in to school to cover my books with red and blue paper (even in the sixth grade, because she knew I would never do it myself). Years later, I remember her poring through clothing shops, to keep me presentable as I worked and studied hard during my last year of university. I remember my father making me a cardboard top hat to wear as I recited a poem, tuxedo-clad, at the end of my fourth-grade year. And I remember him helping me prepare a geography project, framed on white cardboard. Each student presented a different country (from an encyclopedia, almost all of which I knew by heart), and my father chose Japan for me. By the end of the year, ours was the only project still honored with a place on the classroom wall.

These are the buds that unfurl to become our true selves.

Dedicated to my mother, my father, my teacher of horizons, the exalted family, the true essence of the universe, and God's great identity.

TO ALL OF THEM AND TO HIM...

