

Upon This Earthquake I Build A House

Comments on teaching the foundations of family therapy in Turkey.

By Stephen J.M. Bray



In Turkey the word '*Deprem*' refers to that complex phenomenon where the earth shakes and buildings are shattered often with much injury and death.

Jesus uses a parable of two men who each built a house, one building upon rock and the other upon sand. When the winds and rain come, the house built upon sand falls but the one built upon rock endures.¹

International standards suggest that anyone building a house must comply with regulations. These make dwellings safe to live in even when rains, winds and mild '*deprems*' occur. Of course this has tended to make houses rather predictable in some elements of their design.

Stuart Brand wrote a wonderful book called *How Buildings Learn: What Happens to Them After They're Built* which was published in 1994.

I saw a film that Stuart made about the theme shortly before travelling on 16th August, 1999 to Turkey in order to determine if I might be prepared to live there. I travelled without Irem, my Turkish born wife, by choice, as I wished to make the evaluation for myself.

On 17th August Turkey experienced one of the largest earthquakes to affect it during the 20th century. By then I had travelled beyond the epicentre and only learned of the news via an English-speaking radio station.

Unused to the idea of earthquakes I attempted to 'mime' to my Turkish mother-in-law and her aunt an earthquake. The result was entertaining, if pathetic.

Eventually I resorted to the phrase book not expecting to find the word earthquake described. Of course '*deprem*' was present, and I was surprised. On uttering the word '*deprem*' my mother-in-law and her aunt let out alarmed screams, and later asked if I wished to sleep out of-doors?

I thought they were crazy!

For the next month the Turkish TV stations gave minute-by-minute accounts of people being dug out of holes. Cameras were lowered into the ground. I never actually saw a televised account of anyone dying down a hole in the ground, but then I didn't watch TV all of the time.

When I came to Turkey the next year I vowed to do 'nothing' for a year, but instead listen and absorb an understanding of Turkish people and their culture. But this was not possible, since there were survivors of the earthquake to be cared for, and volunteers who had worked with those survivors who needed to be debriefed.

It took Irem and I nearly three years to wind-up the work we started with the survivors of the earthquake. We helped to publish the stories of the volunteers, in the book: *One Earthquake: Infinite Awareness*² ~ then what?

And so it came to pass that the *Association for Child Guidance and Mental Health, Turkey* (CARE~DER) approached us to train public service workers in Family Therapy.

Our first step was to create a training clinic, which is a place where qualified clinicians from such disciplines as psychiatry, psychology, social work, counselling and pedagogy might meet with families and receive supervision.

Our aim from the start was to offer services to those with low income, such as low income families and State employed clinicians who receive lower salaries than those in private practice.

We are like a 'family' so we always eat together throughout our clinic. Dolma, burek, pizza, profiterole, and baklava are all members of our clinic. Also the boiling urn of sweet Turkish tea.³

During *Ramazan* our therapists, and families are served soup immediately upon the setting of the sun.

Providing a theoretical training is rather more challenging than running a clinic.

Like houses, theoretical trainings have to conform to specifications. These are agreed internationally. The specifications of, for example, an English house will enable it to withstand the onslaughts of wind and rain, but such designs may not best be suited to the hotter climate of the Balkans and Middle East. Here they must also withstand earthquakes.

I have to confess to knowing a little of building houses, for as a nine year old child I watched my father design a house that he imagined would last well beyond his lifetime. Indeed I helped him to check items on its specification, and to supervise its construction.

It was built upon a raft of concrete six feet in depth! Our specification had indicated three feet, but the builder made an error and had to make good his mistake. This house was built to last!

The theme of Stuart Brand's book is that as people live in identical homes, the homes are adapted around the people. It is not up to the people to adapt because of the confines of their 'cages'.

So with this in mind when it came to designing a Theory Course for Family Therapy in Turkey, Irem and I determined that our Course, like a good house, would follow International specifications and also learn from those who lived within it.

It must be a home that recognizes prejudice, accepts it 'As It Is' whilst compassionately reaching out to prejudiced people including ourselves, the Course trainers, for each of us is prejudiced in some degree.

Traditionally covered Muslim women are welcomed; as are mini-skirted Kemalists, Jewish mothers and even English speaking Arabs who need the help of our interpreters collaborate together.

We eat together. We enjoy training exercises together. When the muezzin calls us to pray from a nearby minaret a room is available in our building for that purpose. Those of more liberal persuasions in the meantime smoke, drink tea and chat.⁴

That's how It is! We are about to complete our first year and we have learned a great deal. For example writing eight modules about Family Therapy is a huge undertaking, but translating each into Turkish and then marking 40 assignments from students each month is a bigger one.

Irem is exhausted, which is not surprising since throughout the Course she has borne Amazon, our daughter, at first in utero, and now as the youngest attendee within 'the house'.



My father took great comfort from knowing that his home rested upon six feet of concrete, and died happily at the ripe age of 93. My mother was convinced from the time of his death that the house was a burden to her, could not be adapted for use by further family generations, and despite 'evidence' to the contrary held firmly that certainly Irem and I could not support her there.

Thus I used to explain how I came to Turkey in the summer of 1999. It was a reaction to her decision to sell the property.

When Jesus refers to a 'rock' upon which to build a house, he refers to faith, and indeed I believed that my mother had little faith in six feet of concrete, people or the ability for a house to adapt to the needs of its inhabitants.

Salvador Minuchin, one of the first practitioners of Family Therapy states: "Man has memory; he is the product of his past. At the same time his interactions in his

present circumstances support, qualify, or modify his experience." (Minuchin 1974 p. 14).

I chose to place my faith in a crisp, focussed, athletic, kung-fu trained, embodiment of determination. She is the mother of Amazon, my wife Irem. She is one of the rocks upon which this house of Turkish Family Therapy is built. No wonder she uncomplainingly translates those modules and marks so many essays each month!

Gregory Bateson, a founding father of Family Therapy Theory writes: "Break the pattern which connects the items of learning and you necessarily destroy all quality." (Bateson 1980 p. 16).

And indeed somewhere ineffable there is a connection between the lessons that I learned from my Father when I lived as a part of his house, and this Course.

Steve de Shazer a contemporary 'Solution Focused Therapist', does not care for the word 'Therapy' because it fails to acknowledge the reciprocal nature in the relationships between the elements of conversations that mark change (de Shazer 1994 p. 5). He writes:

"The first step in defining the differences between a theory based upon the family-as-a-system and one based on the therapy situation-as-a-system is to draw a distinction. To spell out my position . . .

a) the study of the family-as-a-system [a description based on having a separate, objective observer of the family-as-a-system];

and

b) the study of therapy-as-a-system [a description that includes the therapist/observer as a member of the system under consideration."] (de Shazer, 1982)

Throughout the Course Irem and I attempt to facilitate the study of 'therapy-as-a-system', rather than the study of 'therapy' with 'families-as-a-system'

Such an approach begs a question. In the study of therapy-as-a-system what observes?

Ken Wilbur quoting the physicist Edwin Schroedinger is clear: "The external world and consciousness are one and the same thing." (p.47). Jalalu'd Rumi declares: "Existence in time past or future is only in relation to you; both are the same to Him, but you think them two." (p.81). The question is whether memory reports a real phenomenon which we call 'time', or whether memory creates an illusion of 'time. (p.85). Creation is thus nowever, coming straight out of the Voidness of this timeless Moment-and this creation is not the creation of things, or material, or of substance, but the creation of dualisms. (p.88). "Thus," to repeat the words of Schroedinger, "you can throw yourself on the ground, stretched out upon Mother Earth and with the certain conviction that you are one with her and she with you." In other words, the space between you as observing subject, 'in here' and the observed objects, 'out there' is absent. (p. 90).

So if Irem is earth mother to Amazon, or a rock to me, she is no less Amazon or I the (apparent) embodiments of Consciousness observing her. Nor is she any less the students who take part in our trainings and 'dream her up'⁵ twice a month.

My father's house built upon six feet of concrete was within months of the sale torn to the ground, not by an earthquake, but by a speculator seeking to erect a different kind of dwelling. Perhaps my mother was right, the old one was unable to learn?

And so today, as our Course nears completion I start editing all of my notes into a book, which will be available both in Turkish and English. This book may outlive Irem, Amazon and I, for Istanbul is a city in expectation of an earthquake. Once published it will be much easier for people throughout Turkey to train in Family Therapy. I hope that they will ever eat baklava together whilst doing so, as I move forward into the next adventure. But of one thing I am certain, in order for this Course to survive it must, like any good house, and like me, continue to learn.

NOTES

¹ Matthew 7: 24 or Luke 6: 45

² This is a translation from the official Turkish title: '*Bir Deprem Sonuz Farkindalik*'.

³ Dolma are savoury delights wrapped in vine leaves. Burek is a light filo-pastry dish with cheese and spinach. Pizza is an ancient Roman flatbread plate served with a topping of tomato puree and other savouries. Profiterole is a small ball of soft sweet choux pastry filled with cream and covered with chocolate sauce. Baklava are sheets of super-thin pastries filled with the white meat of nuts marinated in golden syrup.

⁴ A muezzin is an Islamic priest who calls the faithful to prayer five times every day.

⁵ For a discussion of 'Dreaming Up' see Mindell, 1985

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