

A Different Approach to Anatomy Education: “Sami ZAN, Professor of Anatomy, MD”

Sami ZAN was born in 1921 in İstanbul. After graduating from İstanbul Haydarpaşa High School in 1940, he enrolled, upon the recommendation of the Ministry of Health and Social Aid, in the İstanbul Faculty of Medicine, İstanbul University. When he had completed his fifth year of education in this Faculty, again by instruction of the Ministry, he was transferred to the then newly-founded Faculty of Medicine at Ankara University. In 1946, he graduated from this Faculty, and after two years, in 1948, he started his first academic career as a research assistant in the Institute of Anatomy, affiliated with the İstanbul Faculty of Medicine, where he became an associate professor in 1955 and a full professor in 1966. He was appointed Chair of the Department of Anatomy of the same Faculty in 1978, and in 1982, he became the Head of the Departments of Morphology and Anatomy. He continued his successful services in this position until his death on the 24th February, 1984 (1). Sami ZAN was one of the prominent professors of İstanbul Faculty of Medicine, who gained legendary fame among physicians and scientists, not only because of his life-long services for and dedication to the Faculty, but also due to his extraordinary method of teaching as an anatomy professor (2).

The features that make an academician a successful lecturer can be enumerated as follows: proficiency and competency in the field, team-spirited, sharing his/her knowledge generously with other academics, research fellows, assistants, and especially with students, motivating students and assistants to excel in the field and even become better than him/her, turning no one down from his/her circle, always keeping in mind that the most valuable wealth is to care for people and earn their respect, behaving towards them humbly and not being swayed by the ambition of making more money and without ever forgetting his/her teaching responsibility. After all, the title of teacher is not given by the one who is taught to the one who teaches, but is a type of eminent rank conferred by a third party (3).

The reason for Sami ZAN having become a master-lecturer and a sage of Anatomy was because he possessed almost all of the above-cited desirable features and excellent merits in himself. Sami ZAN was an outstanding academician and lecturer during the times when there were none of the technological fa-

cilities that are available to us today and he even lacked, apart from cadavers, many of the resources and materials that are commonly used in anatomy education in the present day. Despite these drawbacks, he struggled to make everything that he taught in classes permanent, and moreover, he tried his best to make anatomy, against the contrary thinking of the time, more loveable for students, with the help of detailed drawings on the board and models constructed by any imaginable materials (such as paper, cartoons, lunch-boxes, hoses, cones, etc. (Figure 1) and sometimes even food (sandwiches, eggs, etc.) (1).

For example, during his teaching of ovulation, he brought to the class an already boiled egg and handed it over to one of his students. To demonstrate to his students that the misuse of a curette during abortion may result in uterus perforation due to the swollen and softened uterus, Professor ZAN brought along a large ripe pear, used a nail instead of a curette, pushed the nail from the bottom to the top of the pear and perforated “the uterus” (1). These examples could be multiplied. What is expected of a good lecturer, like Sami ZAN, is that the lecturer handles extremely complex topics with ease, manages to present them in an intelligible manner with clinical pictures and implementations displayed on a cadaver and actively involves the students in the teaching process through interactions with one another, thus helping them to digest the subjects that are studied and taught in the class. It is through this effective method of teaching practiced by Sami ZAN that students will continue to appreciate all that has been transmitted to them in class and also remember them throughout their lives.

Another factor which made the classes of Sami ZAN quite interesting was that he used to come to classes half an hour earlier and start discussing, under the title of philosophical anatomy which had become a common and open lesson followed, not necessarily by the students of the medical faculty, or even by the students of many other faculties such as law, pharmacy, economy, etc., some interesting issues related to the subject-matter of the day and conveying to his students, with his own sense of humor, general knowledge sometimes about anatomy and sometimes about clinical anatomy, knowledge which he had obtained from newspapers and magazines. He would also

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FIG. 1. Prof. Zan gives a lecture by using the anatomical model made by himself (obtained from annual of Istanbul Faculty of Medicine)

answer the questions posed to him by his students (1,2). Professor ZAN regarded his students as precious and taught them first how to become a human being, and not just a doctor. His primary aim, as we all closely observed from his overall attitude, was first and foremost to raise a good human being rather than a good doctor. Some of his personal words testify to this, as, for instance, he would say: “most of the people listen to the warnings, but the wise make the most of those”; “a doctor is an eternal learner”; “the one who seizes the opportunity, seizes the life”; “no one is dearer than the one who won’t listen”; “looking is not staring at my face, it is to understand me”; “incompetence is the fountain-cause of jealousy”; “don’t promise the thing you cannot do, promise is a debt” and “persistence in flaws is the most fatal flaw.” Both in theory and practice, the lecturer indeed gave a life lesson to his students (1).

Although anatomy is still trying to be learnt via cadaver dissection in many medical schools, whether dissection is the major and irreplaceable method and also useful for learning human anatomy remains controversial amongst anatomists (4). Apart from the traditional materials like cadavers and plastic models, this is thanks to the rapid technological development and its impact on our lives; also, teaching anatomy is now more miscellaneous (5). The number and quality of materials that can be used in anatomy training is diverse at the present time. Many new materials like computer applications and videos that can be watched and/or downloaded via the internet, 3D digital images and cell phone applications have all become very effective in today’s teaching and learning.

Since anatomy is not a subject that can be learned easily in a short period of time and is also likely to be forgotten if learned by memorizing, lecturers should definitely make use of the tech-

nology. However, on the other hand, one needs to question how efficient it will be for a candidate physician to learn anatomy subjects and grasp its nature, philosophy and intricacies simply with the help of digital materials, without inhaling the scent of a cadaver and touching a cadaver with hands. In fact, in order to ensure the permanence of anatomy knowledge throughout the years, along with the cadavers, plastic models or digital images, we need to learn and teach anatomy by using everyday objects, by living, by reproducing, by being involved and by making others involved, just as Professor ZAN did previously.

In the hope of serving as a model for new generations of academicians and candidate-physicians, we happily salute Professor ZAN, duly acknowledge his significant contributions to the field of anatomy and pay this modest tribute to his memory, hailing at the same time the legacy of his scholarship that will forever remain a source of inspiration and an exemplary guide for those who wish to take their academic journey in the footsteps of this great master-lecturer. Needless to say, his memory, his wisdom, as well as his superb teaching philosophy will continue to be remembered, appreciated and implemented by many of the medical experts and scientists who aim, like him, to raise their students as good human beings, while training them to be good and humble doctors.

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