

# Teaching cases presented as fables to learn the mentoring process in medical training. Part one: apprentice in the beginning. Spring

Jose Luis Turabian\*

Health Center Santa Maria de Benquerencia. Regional Health Service of Castilla la Mancha (SESCAM), Toledo, Spain.

**\*Correspondence Author:** Jose Luis Turabian, Health Center Santa Maria de Benquerencia. Regional Health Service of Castilla la Mancha (SESCAM), Toledo, Spain.

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## Abstract:

Fables allow us to understand something unknown in terms of familiarity. Therefore, they are frequently used in all sciences that adopt common terms to name complex realities. The mentoring process in medical training, is one of these complex realities, explained here through a fable: that of the virtuous and thoughtful mentor, the slow and parsimonious tortoise called Dr. Golden-Headed, who “discovers” a certain number of Scientific Laws of medical training, and his apprentice, whose name changes throughout the training and development process. Based on these short stories, the stages that medical trainees go through in training will be described, from their hesitant beginnings of preclinical training where basic sciences are studied (Spring), through clinical training, which involves practice in hospitals and health centers (Summer), and rotating internship, where practical experience is acquired in various specialties (Autumn), to their independent practice and specialization, which allows the doctor to focus on a specific area of medicine (Winter), and some keys to what the tutoring work should be shown. in this first part (Spring; the beginning) Dr. Golden-Headed “discovers” several laws: the law of the four seasons, the law of individualities, the law of the warm-up, the law of influencers, the law of judo, the law of dance, the law of Spock, the law of the sea of Tiberias and the Dead Sea. These “laws” explain the cyclical nature of teaching, safe learning environment, learner-centered education, empathy, modeling, meaningful and motivational learning, and positive feedback.

**Keywords:** medical education; tutoring; mentoring; teaching; medical intern

## Introduction

Dr. Golden-Headed was a semi-aquatic turtle native to China. She graduated from the Tortugina University with the title of Virtuous Educator. She worked for several years as an editor of the prestigious *Annals of Reptile Education* journal and as a consultant for the Ethnoherpetology Council Institute, and she has always been interested in the training of apprentices.

With this vision in her daily work, Dr. Golden-Headed has managed to “discover” several Scientific Laws of Anthro-Medicine Apprentice Training that have revolutionized the educational world of this specialty and that can be generalized to any mentoring process. These are the laws that govern the Universe of apprentice training in the mentor-mentee relationship.

For Dr. Golden-Headed, educating Anthro-Medicine students is a path to self-knowledge. To achieve this, Dr. Golden-Headed sometimes needs to be ruthless, astute, patient, and gentle. Being ruthless does not mean harshness, cunning does not mean cruelty, being patient does not mean neglect, and being gentle does not mean stupidity.

### The Law of The Four Seasons

And her exultant voice was heard, though slow, echoing a whole array of sounds: grunts, chirps, snorts, and more: “Eureka!” cried Dr. Golden-

Headed, as she looked out her office window as evening fell, and the birds sang from the new stems of the old elm tree in the garden. “I have discovered the LAW OF THE FOUR SEASONS! It seems as if life were an eternal rebirth... the day is born and dies, but is reborn. The year is born and dies... but is reborn, and so, days, years, and their seasons follow one another.”

“The cyclical nature of life and learning [1]. These cycles produce different contexts that facilitate certain educational practices. I now clearly see the stages that Anthro-Medicine trainees go through, from their hesitant beginnings in preclinical training where they study the basic sciences (Spring), through clinical training, which involves practice in hospitals and health centers (Summer), and rotating internships, where they gain practical experience in various specialties (Autumn), to independent practice and specialization, which allows the physician to focus on a specific area of medicine (Winter),” Dr. Golden-Headed mused [2].

And she wrote on the small blackboard in her room: “Harmony with the moment is the key element. While we stand still, the river of time continues to flow incessantly.”

Dawn breaks. Dr. Golden-Headed watches the sunrise with her usual bright eyes (which, by the way, allow her to see better in the dark), while she awaits the arrival of her new apprentice. Nature seems to awaken and be reborn in Spring. "The senses of the apprentice of Anthro-Medicine will awaken to the immensity that surrounds them. The apprentice must shake off routine and launch himself lightly into the adventure of discovery" [3], Dr. Golden-Headed meditates, sitting in her office chair.

### The Law of Individualities

Dr. Golden-Headed's apprentice was Green Shoot, a small green stem that pushed out of the ground to become a plant. This is how the new apprentice arrived after completing his first years of study. The young Green Sprout had nothing in common with Dr. Golden-Headed. The latter was originally from China, with her oval and slightly curved shell, with colors ranging from olive to ochre-brown with black spots; Plus, of course, the yellow lines that adorn its head and neck, and to a lesser extent its legs... While the apprentice was a plant belonging to the labiatae family, which sprouted in Spring with square, hairy stems one to two palms tall; its leaves were held by long stalks and were ovoid, entire, or with not very pronounced teeth, and it lacked aroma. It had grown in damp meadows. Young Green Sprout and Dr. Golden-Headed met for the first time at the official presentation of the apprentices joining the Center for Anthro-Medicine. Green Sprout didn't know anyone at the Center; people seemed very exclusive, speaking in cliques. The conversations sounded like code to him. There were quite a few wise animals there: chimpanzees, dolphins, crows, elephants, octopuses, and some birds like African grey parrots...

"We're all very friendly here, and if you're not one of us now, you never will be," Green Sprout imagined what they meant.

The coordinator gave a presentation about what the apprentices' arrival meant, and one of the teachers very slowly related some very long phrases from famous authors, of which Green Sprout only remembered something like: "torch and guide of humanity" and "chance favors the prepared mind." The people cheered him; he didn't understand what was so important or fun about it, and he started thinking about the holidays...

"Hello," someone called to Green Sprout from behind him.

Startled, he turned quickly. "I'm Dr. Golden-Headed. The coordinator told me you're my intern-in-residence."

"Oh no!" he thought. "Not the one with the torch phrase!" But he managed to return the greeting. "Hello!"

The next day, when Green Sprout arrived, Dr. Golden-Headed shouted excitedly, her voice filled with strange sounds...

"Eureka! I've discovered the LAW OF INDIVIDUALITIES!"

Green Sprout jumped in fright.

But Dr. Golden-Headed, unfazed by Green Sprout's sudden paleness, recited aloud: "Just as the waves in which different particles move, each living being is a unique, unrepeatable set of vibrations, completely different from all others. We could say that it has its own music, and that it is as distinct from one another as DNA."

"Each person is a unique and unrepeatable set of vibrations," Dr. Golden-Headed continued.

"To achieve this individuation, a safe learning environment is necessary" [2, 4], Dr. Golden-Headed reminded herself.

And she meditated: "The master and the apprentice are like two precious jewels, each in its own way: a diamond and an emerald." And she wrote it on the small blackboard in her room.

### The Law of Warm-Up

Dr. Golden-Headed spent some time during the first few days of the apprentice's stay, who was now Thick Evergreen Grass, chatting about their desires...

Dr. Golden-Headed strove to achieve a kind of genuine, real relationship—that is, to be aware of our feelings and able to express them in our own words and attitudes. It was a transparent relationship on the Master's part, where her true feelings were evident.

And they talked, moving from one topic to another...

"What feelings or emotions are you having now about Anthropolmedicine? Can you tell me about the most difficult incident or event you've had in your professional practice in the last few months? How did you react?... Where would you like to be in 5 years? Are you working toward those goals? What are your personal strengths? Do you know what the negative and positive forces are that will help you achieve your future plans?... How do you spend your time when you're not working?... What circumstances or events do you find most stressful? Who do you turn to for support? Who do you offer support to?... What is your preferred learning style?" Dr. Golden-Headed asked and listened.

Dr. Golden-Headed wanted to understand and accept Thick Evergreen Grass, and wanted to make her see that she considered her a person of worth and with rights, regardless of her current attributes, condition, behavior, or feelings, whether good or bad. This meant respect and sensitive empathy [5].

Dr. Golden-Headed listened and meditated... "The individual has within themselves the capacity and tendency, latent or evident, to move toward maturation and realize their potential, becoming autonomous. This tendency must break through deeply rooted psychological defenses. An environment of safety and appreciation is essential for learning to occur" [2, 4].

And she continued meditating: "Seek the conditions to provide help to another person so that they may develop. While reading or listening, don't overexert yourself. Be like the earth. When the rain comes, the earth only has to open itself to it. Let the rain come and penetrate to the seeds buried deep within your consciousness. Be like the soft sand of the beach to dig your nests and lay your eggs... A teacher cannot give the truth. The truth is already within you. You only need to open your body, mind, and heart so that their teachings may penetrate to your own seeds of understanding and enlightenment. If you let the words penetrate you, the soil and the seeds will do the rest of the work."

And he wrote on his blackboard: "The gentle Spring rain penetrates the soil of the soul. A seed buried for many years in the depths of the earth begins to smile."

"Do you think it's wrong for us to waste so much time on this kind of presentation, instead of focusing on the training we're here for...? And with such little time as we have," Dr. Golden-Headed asked Thick Evergreen Grass.

"No... erm... I think it's fine if we talk..." the apprentice replied.

"Well... starting next week, we'll start the training... or do you think we've already started it?" Dr. Golden-Headed asked.

"I think we started my training quite a while ago..." Thick Evergreen Grass replied with a smile.

— "Abraham Lincoln said: 'If I had 9 hours to chop down a tree, I would spend 7 of them sharpening my axe.' It's the LAW OF WARM-UP, also discovered by me, of course. You know... Warm-up should always be the first step in preparing the body so that it adapts slowly", explained Dr. Golden-Headed.

### The law of 'influencers'

Dr. Golden-Headed said to the apprentice, who was now a black swallow with metallic blue highlights above and creamy white highlights below, and whose arrival is unequivocally associated with the beginning of Spring: "Today you can observe me during the next few consultations we will have. Notice how I interact and care for the patient, how I perform the

physical examination, communicate the diagnosis, and develop a treatment plan."

"Aha, you'll be like an 'influencer,' won't you? I'll try to learn physical examination techniques, medical procedures, and communication skills by watching you, Dr. Golden-Headed," she replied. And she added, "I'll later imitate your model."

"Ok, Black Swallow with Metallic Blue Highlights Above and Creamy White Highlights Below, you've discovered the LAW OF INFLUENCERS!" Dr. Golden-Headed grunted, or perhaps chirped, or perhaps snorted.

"Um... I... I didn't do anything..."

"Well, okay, we both discovered this law at the same time. It would be another case of parallel discoveries, like the transistor, the inkjet printer, etc." Dr. Golden-Headed agreed.

"However... Modeling and influencers are fine; imitating role models can initially help students adapt to the clinical environment. However, if maintained, imitation can perpetuate undesirable practices, such as physician-centered patient interviews, and undesirable institutional norms, such as discrimination between patients based on a particular characteristic... Therefore, remember that the value of role modeling can be enhanced not only by identifying role models and improving teacher performance, but also by conducting reflective evaluations of their preceptors' behaviors, especially so that you can better discern those worthy of imitation" [3, 6-8], warned Dr. Golden-Headed.

Dr. Golden-Headed mused, withdrawn into her shell: "A student-centered approach is necessary. And this can be achieved, first, by warning students against uncritically imitating preceptors perceived as role models; second, by showing them that their preceptors share their doubts and uncertainties; third, by understanding the potential undesirable messages of the learning environment [9, 10]. And he wrote on his blackboard: "Excellence in role modeling involves demonstrating excellent clinical care, as well as teaching excellent personal skills and characteristics. Excellence is not an act, but a habit."

### **The Law of Judo**

A few weeks later, the apprentice, who now resembled the rustling of green leaves in the wind, frequently asked or commented to Dr. Golden-Headed things like:

"I don't know anything about this concept."

"I need to study this other thing."

"It's difficult to understand this subject."

So Dr. Golden-Headed had no choice but to discover a Law.

"Aha!" she cried, "your comments have led me to discover the LAW OF JUDO..."

The young Whisper of the Green Leaves in the Wind didn't dare say anything, so Dr. Golden-Headed explained:

"You already know the basic principle of Judo: take advantage of your opponent's strength, be flexible, and yield. Judo takes advantage of the opponent's strength and speed to let them pass and subdue them. Not to go against the opponent's strength, but rather to defeat them using their strength."

"So, Whisper of the Green Leaves in the Wind, you must be impulsive, yes, but taking care not to drift into blindness or stubbornness. You must follow the principle of gentleness" [10, 11].

And she wrote on her blackboard: "If we put clear water in a dirty glass, it becomes cloudy."

### **The Law Of The Dance**

"Dear Black-Lined Orange-Winged Monarch Butterfly -she was now the apprentice-, today I am going to ask you to focus on the family care of Anthropomedicine during the consultation..." said Dr. Golden-Headed.

But the Orange-Winged Monarch Butterfly with Black Lines was finding it very difficult to concentrate on that topic... She didn't see the connection to the clinical-epidemiological aspects of care... She forced herself to think about family care with each patient, but if she managed to, it was superficial and short-lived... And with the next patient, she forgot...

"Look, these two patients, mother and son, are two cases of keratoconjunctivitis," Dr. Golden-Headed indicated. "Let's keep in mind that they are two members of a large family, and this could be the beginning of an outbreak of epidemic keratoconjunctivitis."

"Aha!" said the Black-Lined Orange-Winged Monarch Butterfly as she performed a majestic, smooth flight across the office. "Then we'll need to investigate if there are other cases in the family, and if so, determine the attack rate, transmission patterns, control measures, and how to prevent future outbreaks in the family."

"This leads me to discover the LAW OF THE DANCE," Dr. Golden-Headed announced.

"Of the dance?" asked the Black-Lined Orange-Winged Monarch Butterfly in surprise.

"The way most teachers in traditional schools teach dance is 'put your right foot here and your left foot there, then bring them together, etc.' It's a slow and difficult method. Compare it to the way a typical 12-year-old boy or girl dances to any of the modern rhythms; they know how to dance then all, and the instructions are more complex than for classical dances. Imagine the size of the instruction manual for all those dances: rap, etc. But that boy or girl can fail math," Dr. Golden-Headed explained.

"Sure, they like it..." agreed the Black-Lined Orange-Winged Monarch Butterfly.

"That's right. Meaningful [13] or motivational [14] learning occurs when a person acquires knowledge about something they consider important, something they are interested in and drawn to, and something they can develop all their abilities through. It involves harnessing the natural drive and motivation a person feels toward a particular study/action and helping them achieve it, while incorporating new elements (reflection, training, etc.) that allow them to further develop their knowledge and overall learning capacity" [2].

And she wrote on her blackboard: "Memory is the bird that nests in the tree of knowledge, but meaningful learning is the flight that bird takes."

### **Spock's Law**

The apprentice, who now resembled a white and pink blossoming almond tree, with his mouth open, he spread his branches and said:

"This is so boring!"

"We don't have time to discuss that now, Young White and Pink Blossoming Almond Tree. We'll talk about it after the consultation," said Dr. Golden-Headed, looking calmly and unsmilingly at her apprentice.

Dr. Golden-Headed noticed the Young White and Pink Blossoming Almond Tree's expression of boredom, impatience, and perhaps insecurity and confusion. And she also noticed her own emotions... of disappointment, disgust, frustration, hostility, irritation...

And at that moment, Dr. Golden-Headed realized she was about to discover another very important Law of Nature.

"Wow!" Dr. Golden-Headed cried, "I've got it! SPOCK'S LAW!"

The Young White and Pink Blossoming Almond Tree had just woken up. His emotions were probably now ones of excitement and interest...

"Spock?" said the Young White and Pink Blossoming Almond Tree.

-“Yes, Spock, the half-human, half-Vulcan alien from Star Trek, was a almost human-looking creature, but he concealed a deeper difference that theoretically made him superior to humans: he had no emotions.”

-“A being without emotions is supposed to be more intelligent than we humans are. However, there is the opposite idea. Intelligent actions occur as a result of the harmonious conjunction of emotion and reason. Emotionless organisms are less rational than human beings. Knowing when to follow our feelings and when to ignore them is what constitutes “emotional intelligence” (15-17).

-“Emotions are allies, not enemies. In the end, it’s our feelings that give value to the fruit of our thought,” said Dr. Golden-Headed.

And she wrote on her blackboard: “Emotions glow in the dark.”

### The Law of The Sea of Tiberias and The Dead Sea

The apprentice, who at this moment resembled a poppy field, was overwhelmed by the problems his patients were consulting about.

Dr. Golden-Headed said to him:

-“Young Red Poppy Field, you are doing very well. I notice your great qualities: capacity for work, gift for observation and listening, and good clinical training. Although it may seem like a mountain to you now, you will see that in a few weeks it will be just a small hill, thanks to those qualities I perceive in you.” [2, 18-20]

The Young Red Poppy Field turned a little redder.

Dr. Golden-Headed continued: “You must forget the mental and emotional “I can’t do it.” The most wonderful things can happen without us even realizing it.”

-“Are you serious?” asked Young Red Poppy Field.

- “Of course. The teacher must give instead of taking away, praise instead of punishing. But with honesty and sincerity. That is the way to nourish life in response to Spring.”

Dr. Golden-Headed thought she had discovered the LAW OF THE SEA OF TIBERIAN LAKES AND THE DEAD SEA. She remembered that there are two lakes in the Near East fed by the same river that connects them, the Jordan River, located a few kilometers apart, but with astonishingly different characteristics. One is the “Lake of Gennesaret” or “Sea of Tiberias,” and the other is the “Dead Sea.” The first is blue. The Dead Sea is a dense, salty lagoon where there is no life. What makes the two lakes fed by the same river so different? It is simply this: The Lake of Gennesaret generously transmits what it receives. Once its water arrives there, it immediately departs. The water of the Dead Sea stagnates and becomes dormant. The more we give, the more we receive.”

Dr. Golden-Headed entered a meditative state and thought: “The Master must act according to feelings of love and compassion for the apprentice. This includes knowing what not to teach, due to the inappropriate material, the inopportune moment, or the apprentice being unprepared to receive it. Teaching should only be done if it can benefit the apprentice.”

And she wrote on the blackboard: “Giving and receiving are the same because the universe flows that way.”

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