

THE STORY OF A SUN VILLAGE

Çetin Göksu



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The Mysterious Garden of the Sun

Güneş, Gök, Doğa, Su and Ay, a group of five young graduates fresh out of university, who have reunited in their out-of-the-way Anatolian village high in the Caucasus, set out on an adventure that will change not only their lives but that of their rural community, for ever.

On a journey that takes them into the remote forests and mountains above their quiet Anatolian home, they confront many challenges and quite a few scary moments before finally arriving at the Mysterious Garden of the Sun.

While there, they meet some extraordinary characters who teach them about all about a lost civilisation that enables people to live in harmony with nature and the ancient Anatolian philosophy of the sun... a way of life that their country has virtually forgotten...

Armed with this amazing understanding of how life could be, they realise that the time has come for them to share this knowledge with their fellow villagers... and come up with a way of reintroducing this lifestyle to their homeland.

But in a modern world that focuses more on self-seeking energy monopolies promoting oil, nuclear energy and fossil fuels and a love of concrete and consumerism, rather than nature, self-sufficiency, sustainability and traditions that have stood the test of time, their once beautiful village is gradually dying.

How can they possibly manage to achieve such a radical project and bring their village back to life?

Explanations and glossary

The heroes of this story have names that are somewhat unusual but not totally unheard of in Turkey.

Güneş: *“Sun,” Göksu is fascinated by the similarity of the words Sun and Son in English and their association with light, a link that he uses to great effect throughout the narrative.*

Gök: *Sky*

Doğa: *Nature*

Su: *Water*

Ay: *Moon*

All these names have great significance, for reasons you will understand when you read the story.

The village in the book is actually *Meşe Köyü / Vartgel* – in the Kaçkar Mountains in the Black Sea province of *Artvin*, close to Turkey’s border with Georgia. The author’s family originates from this village.

Turkish letters

Although Turkish letters are phonetic, there are several specific to the Turkish alphabet which may present difficulties for the non-Turkish reader.

These are:

C – as in “cep” (pocket) is pronounced like the English ‘j’ as in ‘jump’

Ç – as in “çay” (tea) is pronounced like the English ‘ch’ as in ‘chat’ or ‘chop’

Ğ – is a sound unique to Turkish. If the vowel before it is one of a, ı, o, u then “yumuşak ge” will lengthen the sound of that vowel, eg. yağmur, ağaç. If the vowel is one of e, i, ö, ü then “yumuşak ge” will be pronounced as “y”, eg. eğitim, içne. Since “yumuşak ge” is always preceded by a vowel there are no words in Turkish that start with it.

İ – as in ıspanak (spinach) is pronounced like the English ‘i’ in ‘cousin’

İ – as in İngilizce (English) is pronounced like the English ‘i’ in internet

Ö – as in ördek (duck) is pronounced like the English ‘ur’, as in ‘fur’

Ş – as in şeker (sugar) pronounced like the English ‘sh’, as in ‘sheep’

Ü – as in ülke (country) is pronounced like the English u, as in ‘cute’

Many thanks to the *Turkishbasics* website for this information. To learn more about the Turkish alphabet and Turkish pronunciation visit: <http://turkishbasics.com/grammar/alphabet.php>

Idiomatic Turkish words and phrases:

As in all languages, there are some words and phrases that are untranslatable using a single word.

Here is a list of those that are used in the book – in order of use - with a simple interpretation:

Saz: a traditional stringed instrument rather like a lute, mandolin or balalaika.

Davul: a kind of drum.

Muhtar: the elected leader of a village community.

Çardak: a kind of sheltered balcony, often covered with vines.

Sofra: can either be a low table, often circular, which diners sit around cross-legged on the floor, or an assortment of dishes that comprise a meal.

Usta: a master-craftsman (or woman)

Yayla: The traditional name given to Anatolia's highland pastures, where for millennia Yörük tribes decamped for the summer months, to escape from the sweltering Aegean and Mediterranean coastline with their families and livestock.

Yörük: the generic name given to the traditional Anatolian semi-nomadic, transhumance tribes, social groups from which much of the Turkish population that used to predominate throughout Anatolia but are now few and far between due to government legislation geared at ensuring families became settled and became part of the system.

Hayırlı olsun!: Here's wishing for the best

İmce: a communal form of traditional solidarity

Hoca: Traditional Turkish word for teacher.

Bey: respectful Turkish word for Mr.

Hanım: respectful Turkish word for Miss/Mrs/Ms

Teyze: Auntie (sister of the mother), while **Hala** is the sister of the father

Şimdiden başarılar: It'll be a success

Türkü: Traditional Anatolian folk music

Mani: a recital of poetry or stories

Şenlik: a traditional celebration

Su gibi aziz ol: “Su gibi aziz ol” is an idiosyncratic Turkish expression which is used to thank someone when they give you a glass of water.

Caravanserai: an overnight inn providing simple secure accommodation for travelers, merchants, and their animals.

Hamam: a Turkish bath

Kermes: borrowed from French ‘kermesse’ which means charity sale of handicrafts.

Aşevi: a traditional eating house where soup and food are served.

Sağolun, var olun: thank you and may you live long

Lokman Hekim: Lokman remedies are folk or alternative medicines named after Lokman (a pre-Islamic sage) and in Turkey considered to be a famous physician. For more information see Luqman:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luqman>

Tarhana soup: This traditional soup, made every summer all over Anatolia, has a long history and as many 300 variations, according to the region. Ingredients include cracked wheat, chickpeas, flour, yogurt, vegetables, spices and herbs, and the resulting dough is fermented and dried. In some areas, the dough is powdered, while in others it is formed into flat palm-sized lumps. The mixture can be stored for months.

Tarhana soup is made by rehydrating some of the dough with water or stock, to which butter is added, resulting in a tasty and highly nutritious soup.

Boğa güreşi: Bull wrestling. In Turkey, unlike European bullfighting, this is bull against the bull and is performed every June on the Kafkasör yayla (highland plateaux) of the Caucasian region. In this sport, the bulls lock horns according to prescribed rules.

Yağlı güreşi: Oil wrestling. This is a traditional sport and an important part of Yörük culture. Men cover themselves in olive oil. Wearing specially made leather trousers, called kisbet, the pehlivan (name given to the wrestlers, which translates as champion or hero) attempts to control his opponent by putting his arm through the latter's kisbet. Oil wrestling can be traced back to the ancient Sumer and Babylon. Oil wrestling is also evident in Greco-Roman cultures.

Konukluk: An important part of Anatolian hospitality where guests are respectfully welcomed into the home.

A brief biography of the author

Çetin Göksu was born in Antakya in 1943. He graduated from Çoruh Primary School and Artvin High School in Artvin, studied at Yıldız Technical University where he received a diploma in architecture, a PhD Diploma in urbanism from the Paris Sorbonne University. Göksu is one of the founders of Karadeniz Technical University Department of Architecture and since 1980 has been a METU Faculty Member. Göksu has published a large number of scientific articles, essays, and academic works on subjects including the sun, culture, and ecological planning.

Chapter 1

Back to the village

A dome of light

The young companions, Güneş, Ay, Su, Gök and Doğa, had lived through some extraordinary adventures. But now they were running down the mountain, singing a Turkish folk song about the sun at the top of their voices. They only stopped when they could see their village in the distance. Taking great gulps of the mountain air deep into their lungs, they gazed at the scene below with longing. It was the same place they had left just a few days before. The same village in which they had spent nearly all their short lives. The place they were looking at was their home and where their beloved families and friends lived.

But, in another way, it was as if they were seeing their village for the first time, or at least through different eyes. The bleakness they had known was gone and a new radiance had taken its place. The village they were gazing at from the mountain-side was somehow altered; shining, shimmering. If truth be told, the village had not changed. Of course, it hadn't. Only ten days had passed since they'd left, and the village was the same. So, what if the change was not in the village at all? What if it was simply that, for the first time in their lives, they were beginning to realise how brightly the sun shone on their home?

Güneş was the first to speak: "Look how beautifully the sun's illuminating our village!" he exclaimed. "The sun...It isn't only shining on every tree and every building, and every nook and cranny, it's as if its rays are infusing everything with energy. Why haven't we ever noticed this before...?"

Pointing excitedly, Gök interrupted Güneş: “Look! Look! The village is flooded with light and there’s a kind of dome of light over it too. I’ve never seen anything like it. Could it be a mirage do you think, or is it a miracle?” Turning to his friends, he asked them, “Can’t you see it?” They all looked more carefully at the area to which Gök was pointing and indeed, they could now see that there was, most definitely, a brilliant dome of light shining over their village. “Yes!” they exclaimed, “Somehow the sun’s shining in a different way over our village. It’s got to be some kind of miracle.”

“And it’s not only there!” Güneş exclaimed. “Look... There are domes of light over other places too: every town and village. The Sun doesn’t deprive anyone of its light unless it wants to. It shines everywhere: sharing out its light and energy over the entire world. But, as you know, there’s a special reason why it focuses on towns and villages. Buildings absorb some of the sun’s rays and reflect others. This reflected energy, combined with other rays, is especially concentrated on built-up areas, creating these domes of light. But, as we’re all too aware, nobody’s using this energy.”

Thrilled by what she was seeing, Doğa joined in the conversation: “Although I don’t really understand it, looking at all the animals and plants, isn’t it obvious how they all make the most of the sun? For example, virtually every kind of plant absorbs energy from the sun through photosynthesis. It’s how they stay alive. Life’s only possible because of this energy. With it, living things can produce new cells and flourish. Also, thanks to this energy, fruits and berries ripen and vegetables grow. Then animals, and us humans too, can feed on them. It’s this, the same energy, that enables them to survive, mature, reproduce and live their brief lives. To put it simply, it enables everything to exist. But, for some reason I don’t understand, people aren’t using this energy. Honestly, how can people be so foolish, so ignorant?”

Güneş spoke: “You’re right, Doğa. These days, people don’t know how to make use of the sun. But it wasn’t always like that. There were times when people used the sun much more than they do now. Long ago, people devised an incredible number of ways to make use of the sun’s energy, and some of these we saw for ourselves and learned about while we were on Sun Mountain.”

“But...” said Gök, hesitating, “What do you mean exactly? Are you saying that nowadays people aren’t more advanced? Do you mean civilizations haven’t really progressed and we aren’t really living in a *modern* age?”

Güneş smiled patiently and said, “What you’re saying is true, my friend, or rather people think it’s true. But the fact is, the truth is actually very different.”

“So,” said Gök, “Are you telling us it *isn’t* true, and civilization and culture *haven’t* developed?”

“Well...” Güneş replied, “It really depends on how you look at it. You see, capitalism thrives by taking control of energy, just as it does with everything else. It’s a system that exploits people by dominating the oil, coal and nuclear energy industries. In other words, people become dependent on them, and believe they can’t manage without them and don’t have any alternatives... If you like, they’ve become hooked on them. These days, most of us feel as if we’ve become slaves to the capitalist system and changing it is way too complicated. To put it another way, it isn’t possible for us to use the extraordinary energy of the sun that shines over our heads, as we’re already totally dependent on the energy systems created by capitalism.”

Inspired by what Güneş had said, Su asked: “Would it ever be possible for us to get rid of this unfair system and develop

a new one that uses the sun?” Without a second thought, Güneş replied, “Of course we could... But only if we use our awareness of the Sun Philosophy that we learned on Sun Mountain. We’ve all seen how the sun was once used in Anatolian culture. The Wise Ones of the Sun have taught us all about it. What we’ve got to do now, and without delay, is to create the first actual Solar Village, starting with our own village. Gök agreed: “Yes, yes... you’re right. I really believe we can do this; just as other people are. People who know about sun philosophy...”

Ay interrupted: “Hey! Not so fast, Gök... It won’t be as easy as you imagine... People only think according to the prevailing system: what they already know. It’s more than likely most people will reject the idea of solar projects. They might even try to stop us. Seriously, it’s going to be hard, very hard; an uphill struggle.” The others knew that what Ay had said was absolutely right, but even so they were all determined to put what they had learned into practice. Filled with determination, they continued on their way to the village.

A Reunion

Arriving at the village, the young companions were met with a profound silence. The whole place looked as if it were asleep. There was no one about: no adults, no children. What could have happened to them and why was everywhere so silent?

Walking along the lane, they encountered a young girl. They looked at her carefully from a distance but could find nothing out of the ordinary about her face. Nor did there appear to be anything unusual about the situation. She was simply smiling at them, as she did with everybody. Running towards them she cried, "You're here at last! Everybody's been so worried about you... Where have you been?"

A small, kind-hearted child of about twelve years old, Ayşe was always cheerful. She hugged them in a friendly way and kissed them one by one. It was only then that the youngsters became aware that something was wrong. Something about her embrace seemed different as if it embodied another sense or feeling. Her behaviour surprised the youngsters. What was she trying to tell them?

Everyone knew that the young companions had been away on a journey, so why should they be bothered about them? Ayşe kept pace with the group and as they continued, they were joined by other villagers. People started coming out of their houses and gardens to walk with them, so in the end, there was quite a crowd. Güneş and his friends began to get a strange sensation. What could all this mean? They'd never experienced anything like it. Something odd was going on, and they didn't understand what it was.

The young friends gave each other concerned glances, but none of them were any the wiser. Then they became aware

of something that completely astonished them. They realised that they were being surrounded by children of all ages. Most were much younger than they were and were watching them, following in their wake without making a sound. By the time they reached the village square, the numbers had grown significantly. Something was clearly happening. As Güneş continued walking, he was mulling over the situation in his mind. It was certainly unexpected, but what could it be?

Customarily, guests were always welcomed at the entrance to the village and villagers would always try to help them in whatever way they could. But this kind of hospitality was for people who were coming to the village for the first time and of course, Güneş and his friends were not guests. As youngsters, they would often go climbing in the mountains and return to the village without any fuss or bother. Although Güneş was well aware of the old customs and traditions of the village, he also knew that it was the first time something like this had happened and it perplexed him.

Ayşe was walking next to Güneş and Ay couldn't resist whispering to her: "What's going on, Ayşe? Why are all these children joining us? Why are they walking with us?" "I don't think anything's wrong," Ayşe replied brightly, in her usual cheerful manner. "They're probably just inquisitive." Ay was surprised by her friend's quip and not knowing how to respond, remained silent.

According to Ayşe, there was nothing wrong or mysterious. They had simply been to the mountain and returned unharmed. So, why were children tagging along with them and behaving so curiously? What possible reason could there be for these children escorting Güneş and his friends?

As they continued on their way through the village, people started to open their windows. The people inside looked out

and began to wave. Although the grownups weren't joining the crowd, they were greeting them, smiling cheerfully. It was as if they were saying "welcome," but no one came out of their houses to join the procession; they were simply waving and smiling. The situation was becoming even more intriguing. What was the matter? What could be going on?

Ay and Güneş were now at the head of the convoy.

Ayşe was behind them, followed by Su, Gök and Doğa. By now, about thirty children had joined them; all of them marching in complete silence. There was no sound apart from their footsteps. Gök was as baffled as the others. Doğa and Su continued to walk but were deep in thought. Su turned to her friend and murmured under her breath: "This is incredible, Doğa. I've never seen or heard of anything like this in my entire life."

Su's character was different. If truth be told, she had several traits that evoked her name, Water. Just like her namesake, she was sometimes very calm, but at other times she could be incredibly wild and spirited. She was intriguing, in that she could go anywhere, everywhere, no matter how difficult or impossible it appeared, or so it seemed to everyone else. Her temperament was such that nobody could stop her from doing exactly what she wanted. She adored roaming in the mountains and wandering through deep valleys and across plains. She also loved exploring dark caves. As a result, she was considered to be very perceptive but, on this occasion, even she wasn't clear about what was happening.

Now, Doğa, on the other hand, was much more affected than her companions. This was something she hadn't previously experienced and the village children's curious behaviour re-