

Story 1941 (1996 Tape 5)

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Location: Ankara, capital of  
Turkey; taped at  
ATON

Date: April 1996

Hamsi<sup>1</sup> Heads as Brain Food

An Englishman once went to visit Trabzon, a city where many Laz<sup>2</sup> people live. There he became acquainted with Temel.<sup>3</sup> One day that Englishman asked, "Temel, why

<sup>1</sup>The hamsi is a type of anchovy, five to eight inches long, found in great abundance in both the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. They are a staple of the diet of many northern Turkish communities.

<sup>2</sup>The word Laz originally referred to an ethnic minority living primarily in Trabzon and Rize provinces along the extreme eastern end of the Turkish Black Sea coast. More recently, however, the term has been applied to any resident of the entire Turkish Black Sea coast. In Turkish folktales the Laz is stereotyped as being stupid or inept. This stereotype (like most others) is unjustifiable, for Lazes are, of course, much like other people.

<sup>3</sup>In tales about the stereotyped Laz as numskull or fool, the male characters usually have one or another of five or six very common Laz names. Temel is the name used most often, with Dursun in second place. Thus if either of these names occurs in a folktale, the audience knows at once that it is a Laz story. The name Temel is sometimes extended by Turks to tag anyone as dummer, whether he happens to be Laz or not.

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is it that everyone here likes to eat hamsis?"

Temel answered, "There is a very good reason for that. Anyone who eats the heads of hamsis becomes a very intelligent person."

Unable to understand that, the Englishman asked, "Why is that so?"

"It is true, whatever the reason may be," answered Temel. "I shall prove it to you. Come along with me to the marketplace."

They went to the marketplace, where Temel bought two kilograms of hamsis. Temel then cooked those hamsis. He served the Englishman the heads of all these little fishes, and he took the bodies himself.

As the Englishman chewed and chewed on the bony heads of the hamsis, he found them very unpleasant food. He thought, "Temel is eating the tended part of the fishes while I am trying to eat the rough part. There is something unfair about this arrangement." He finally asked, "Temel, why am I eating the rough, bony heads while you are eating what seems to be the tasteful and tender flesh of these hamsis?"

Temel responded, "Aha! You are already becoming more intelligent. Just one plate of fish heads caused you to become a clever person