

Story 1547 (1992 Tape 1)

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Location: Derinkuyu, a kaza town in Nevşehir Province

Date: 1992

Why a Laz<sup>1</sup> Laughed So Hard at a Joke

One day a number of friends had gathered in a coffee-house where they were telling each other jokes. After one of the jokes had been told, everyone except Temel<sup>2</sup> laughed very hard. People sitting close to Temel asked, "Why didn't you laugh, Temel? Didn't you like that joke?"

Temel answered, "I did not laugh because I could not understand that joke."

The man who had told the joke then repeated it. When he had finished telling it, everyone except Temel laughed again. Again they asked Temel, "Why aren't you laughing?"

<sup>1</sup>The Laz people are a large ethnic minority living primarily in extreme NE Turkey along the Black Sea coast. While there are Lazes throughout Turkey, the vast majority live in Rize, Trabzon, and Artvin provinces. Although their native language is a form of Mengrillian Caucasian, most adult Lazes speak Turkish readily, though they may have a number of dialectal pronunciations. Like the inhabitants of three or four villages elsewhere in Turkey, Lazes are often stereotyped as being stupid. Of course they are not in fact any more stupid than anyone else; they are simply the butt of folk humor.

<sup>2</sup>Temel, Dursun, Cemal (for the standard Turkish Kemal), and Hızır are very common Laz male names. The first three are so strongly associated with Lazes that whenever they appear in folktales they automatically signal Laz, even if the word Laz has not been mentioned.

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Again Temel answered, "Because I could not understand that

The jokester was a very patient man, and so he said to Temel, "I shall tell that joke still another time." He did that, but this time most of the people present did not laugh at all, for this was the third time they had heard it. Temel, on the other hand, began laughing like a crazyman. Throwing himself on the floor, he laughed and laughed so very hard that tears fell from his eyes. He almost died with laughter. He couldn't speak, for he just kept laughing and laughing.

The other people in the coffeehouse were confused by his behavior. One of them said, "Temel, Temel! Stop, stop! We all laughed at that joke, too, but not so hard. The joke was not really all that funny. Why are you laughing so hard?"

Temel controlled his laughter for a moment and said, "I am laughing so hard because even after hearing the joke told three times I still could not understand it!"