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Bankrupts -- two

Kayseri merchant

The Two Bankrupts and the Merchant of Kayseri

There was a merchant in Kayseri who was very rich. One day he was visited by two of the friends of his youth from another city. Both of these friends had suffered bad fortune and they were both penniless. The Kayseri man fed them well and they left his house, but every day thereafter they came back again, together or separately, to accept his hospitality.

The Kayseri man soon tired of their unwelcome presence, and he thought of some way of ridding himself of them. When one of the friends came alone to his house, the merchant said to him, "Here are 1000 liras with which you can return to your town and start life over again.

Will you sell me three whiskers from your beard for this amount of money?" After thinking about this proposal for a few minutes, the friend agreed to the bargain, gave the merchant the three whiskers, and left with the 1000 liras. He went immediately to the other bankrupt and told him that the merchant had given him 1000 liras for three whiskers from his beard.

The second friend now went to the merchant's house and waited for the same largesse to be offered to him. Tired of his presence, the merchant held out 1000 liras to him and asked, "Will you sell me three whiskers from your beard for this amount of money?"

The second friend said, "Efendim, for that amount of money I'd give you as much of my beard as you wished," and he pulled out a whole handful of hair and offered it to the merchant.

Fortune -- bad

Three whiskers --  
Sold for 1,000 liras  
Whiskers -- three --  
Sold for 1,000 liras

Liras -- 1,000

The merchant thought for a minute, and then he put the 1000 liras back in his pocket. "No," he said, "I have changed my mind. A man like you would probably squander my money and become penniless again."

**Note:** Beards have much more significance in Turkish culture--perhaps in all Islamic cultures?--than in European or American societies. There is a good bit of lore about the beard of the Prophet.

To shave the beards of mustaches of captives was, in earlier times, a way of disgracing and insulting them.