

Story 1247 (1988 Tape 1)

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How a Laz Named an Important Medicine

There once was a large conference in a European country that was assembled to discuss a newly developed medicine of worldwide importance. One of the reasons for calling the conference was to find a suitable name for the new medicine.

A great many people had registered for this conference, and there was a long line of people waiting to enter the building where the conference was to be held. Among these people there was a Laz. After he had waited in line for some time, the Laz became disgusted with the delay and decided to cancel his registration. In a loud voice, he shouted to the attendant at the door, Peni silin!" (which means "Erase my name!").¹ But few of the people there knew any Turkish, and they thought that he was offering a name for the new medicine. The conference later decided to accept what they thought was the Laz's recommendation for a name for the new medicine. And that was the way that penicillin was named.

¹Silmek means to erase, and silin is the imperative form. Peni is the Laz pronunciation for Beni; ben means I, and beni is the objective form, me. Thus Peni silin! means Erase me! or Erase my name!