

Story 1936 (1995 Tape 3)

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The Loss of a Little Laz¹ Compounded

One day the child Temel² was crying loudly on a street in Trabzon. When İdris passed down that street, he found Temel sobbing there. “Why are you crying so hard, Temel?” İdris asked him.

Little Temel answered, “My father gave me 10,000 liras,³ but I lost it.”

¹The word Laz referred originally to an ethnic minority living primarily in Trabzon and Rize provinces, along the extreme eastern part of the Turkish Black Sea coast. More recently the word has come to be applied to any resident of the entire Turkish Black Sea coast. In the Turkish oral tradition Laz people are stereotyped as being stupid or inept. This stereotype (like most others) is unjustifiable, for Lazes are, of course, much like other people.

²Temel (like İdris) is a name given to so many Laz males that it automatically signals Laz to most Turkish audiences. Because Lazes are stereotyped as being stupid people, the name Temel may, by extension, be applied to any stupid person, whether or not he happens to be Laz.

³This anecdote must have originated after 1980, when rapid devaluation of the Turkish lira began. In 1961 the U.S. dollar was worth 9 liras. At that point in time no one would have given a child 10,000 liras, nor would any friend replace it so readily as İdris did. By the time this tale was “processed” in 1997, the exchange rate was 131,000 liras to one U.S. dollar.

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Feeling sorry for the child, İdris took from his pocket 10,000 liras and gave it to Temel. "Here is the same amount of money that you lost. Now stop crying!" But little Temel did not stop crying. In fact, he cried even harder than he had before. Annoyed at this, İdris demanded, "Tell me what you are crying about now, Temel!"

"I am crying because if I had not lost the 10,000 liras my father gave me, I would now have 20,000 liras!"