

Story 2162 (1999 Tape 9)

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of Trabzon Province

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A Laz¹ Plan to Cheat Allah

Once two Laz men went fishing for hamsis² in the Black Sea. At first their luck seemed to be good, for it was not long before they had filled their boat with fish. But then their luck changed, for as they were returning to shore, a sudden storm arose on the Black Sea.³ Both fishermen were frightened by the height to which the waves were rising.

The first Laz began to pray for help. He said, "O my Allah, please save us. If we get off this boat safely,

¹The word Laz originally referred to an ethnic minority living along the extreme eastern end of the Turkish Black Sea coast, mainly in Trabzon and Rize provinces. As time has passed, the term has broadened to include all Turkish residents living along the entire Turkish Black Sea coast. The Laz people are stereotyped as being stupid or inept, and there are countless jokes and anecdotes that so picture them. This stereotype, like most others, is baseless, for Lazes are much like other people.

²The hamsi is a type of anchovy found in great quantities in both the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. They are so cherished as a staple of Laz cuisine that they have become almost a state of mind as well as a food. Lazes brag that they have 100 ways of cooking those little fish. The present tale is but one of many stories about the hamsi.

³Whether factual or legendary, the Black Sea has a

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I shall give you an okka⁴ of hamsis." As the wind grew stronger, that man prayed a second time. "O, my Allah, I shall give you two okkas of hamsis if you will help us land safely." When the tempest increased still more, the praying fisherman offered Allah three okkas for a safe passage to shore.

The second Laz thought, "If this fellow gives some of his hamsis to Allah, I shall not be the loser." But he became alarmed as he noted the rapid increase of the size of the payment promised to Allah. And when the first Laz finally offered Allah the whole boatful of hamsis to be saved from the storm, his partner spoke up sharply. He shouted, "Hey, what do you think you are doing? How can you promise Allah not only your share of our catch but also my share?"

"Sh-h-h! Not so loud! I am trying to persuade Allah to help us reach land safely. Once we are safe ashore, I won't give him anything."

reputation for generating numerous and sudden squalls and actual storms.

⁴An older measure of weight equivalent to 1,282 grams or 2.8 pounds.