

Citation for Ali Nesin, Leelavati Prize 2018

Ali Nesin has been awarded with the Leelavati Prize 2018 in recognition of his outstanding contributions and great achievements towards increasing public awareness of mathematics in Turkey, especially because of his tireless work in creating and developing the "Mathematics Village" as an exceptional, peaceful place for education, research and the exploration of mathematics for a wide range of people.

Ali Nesin was born in Istanbul in 1957, and he began his early academic career as a distinguished research mathematician. He graduated in France at Université Paris VII, earned his PhD at Yale University in 1985, and took several temporary positions at prestigious universities in the USA (Berkeley, Notre Dame, Irvine).

On the death of his father, the renowned writer Aziz Nesin, in 1995, he made a conscious decision and returned to his native Turkey. In place of pursuing his academic career in the US, he decided that it was desirable and worthwhile to contribute to the development of mathematics in Turkey. He pursued his father's work as the director of the Nesin Foundation, a non-profit institution devoted to provide educational opportunities for children who did not have them, and he created the Nesin Mathematics Village, which is now the main activity of the foundation.

Since his return to Turkey he has devoted himself to developing the appreciation of mathematics as an element of modern Turkish culture. His activities towards the awareness of mathematics in Turkish society are numerous:

- he was the founder and editor-in-chief of "Matematik Dünyası ("The World of Mathematics"), a magazine for the popularisation of mathematics in Turkish, mainly addressed to high school students;
- he is a member of the Editorial Committee of NTV-Bilim, a Turkish popular science journal;
- he authored nine popular mathematics books (e.g. "Mathematics and Games", "Mathematics and Nature", "Mathematics and Infinity", "Mathematics and Truth") and many popular mathematical articles in several periodicals;
- Several lecture notes and monographs by Ali Nesin received awards and became recommended material by the Turkish Academy of Sciences.

His books, popular journals, editorial work, articles, public lectures, and internet activities had an enormous influence on enabling a new generation of Turkish mathematicians to flourish.

However, what makes the work of Nesin unique and goes beyond all envisaged activities for the Leelavati Prize, is his creation, organization and development of the Mathematics Village, despite difficult economic and political conditions. The Nesin Mathematics Village is a physical site south of Izmir, near the ancient Greek town of Ephesus, entirely devoted to the mathematical enrichment of gifted students at all levels, from elementary school through graduate level, as well as constituting a major venue for international conferences. It is perhaps most appropriately characterized by Gizem Karaali in *The Mathematical Intelligencer* as constituting "a possibly unique experiment in building a mathematical community in one of the most unexpected places on earth".

Ali Nesin's work in mathematics education and popularization of mathematics has and continues to have a truly transformative effect on Turkish culture with respect to the profile and appreciation of mathematics.