

Aziz Sancar: “Whatever You Do, Do It Well and Work Hard!”

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Aziz Sancar, 2015 Nobel Prize Award Ceremony (Photograph: Anadolu Agency).

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Aziz Sancar was influenced by a chemistry teacher in high school and it was at that time his relationship with the subject began. Prof. Mehmet Öztürk says that Sancar gets his work discipline from his father and his intelligence from his mother. While he had his heart set on studying chemistry, at the insistence of his friends he enrolled in the medical faculty, where he was afraid of failure as a student from the southeast. For this reason he studied day and night and took part in no social activities and even though he loved football he didn't go to a single match.

Sancar says that the three key qualities a successful scientist should have are knowledge-based creativity, industriousness, and perseverance in the face of failure.

Aziz Sancar shared the 2015 Nobel Prize in Chemistry with Tomas Lindahl and Paul Modrich. Sancar says there may be two reasons when the Nobel Prize in Medicine or Chemistry is shared among people. The first is that these people have made indistinguishable contributions to the same subject.

The second is that they contributed to the same subject, but each independently to its subfields. Aziz Sancar belongs in the second category, because there are five important mechanisms of DNA repair: direct repair (repair with photolyase), nucleotide excision repair, base excision repair, repair of interstrand cross-links, and double-strand break repair.

The fifth mechanism previously received a prize, while the other four received the 2015 Nobel Prize. Sancar was deemed worthy of the Nobel Prize for his work on direct repair and nucleotide excision, Lindahl for his work on the base excision mechanism, and Modrich for his work on the mechanism of DNA mismatch repair.

Sancar was frequently asked if he had expected to receive an award. He answered that his work deserved a Nobel Prize and he'd thought that if a Nobel Prize were to be given one day for DNA repair then they would give it to him, adding that what he cared about was his contribution to science rather than winning a prize, and that he had always trusted himself and his work.

Sancar donated the prize money to Carolina Türk Evi (Turkish House), where young people visiting from Turkey can stay and that also functions as a Turkish cultural center. He donated his Nobel medal to Anıtkabir, the mausoleum of Atatürk, the founder and first president of the Republic of Turkey. He stated that this was completely natural and the medal was in the right place, because it was given not to him but to the Republic of Turkey and Atatürk and it was won due to them.

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Prof. Dr. Aziz Sancar presented the medal and certificate of the 2015 Nobel Prize in Chemistry to the Anıtkabir Command at a ceremony attended by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Anıtkabir, in Ankara, is the mausoleum of Atatürk, the founder and first president of the Republic of Turkey.

Photograph: (www.ntv.com.tr)

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