

Sura Sad, Verses 23-24

إِنَّ هَذَا أَخِي لَهُ تِسْعٌ وَتِسْعُونَ نَعْجَةً وَلِيَّ نَعْجَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ فَقَالَ أَكْفُلْنِيهَا
وَعَزَّنِي فِي الْخِطَابِ

This is my brother. he has ninety nine ewes and I have one ewe. But he says, give it to me to look after. And he wins over me in speech.

قَالَ لَقَدْ ظَلَمَكَ بِسُؤَالِ نَعْجَتِكَ إِلَى نِعَاجِهِ ^{صله} وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِنَ الْخُلَطَاءِ
لَيَبْغِي بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَقَلِيلٌ
مَا هُمْ

He said, he has surely wronged you by asking for your ewe to add to his ewes. Indeed many partners wrong each other, except those who believe and do good deeds, and they are so few.

Reflections

- Why would the brother want the single ewe his brother had when he already had so many?
- How does someone win over another person in speech?
- Why would most partners, or people who interact with each other, easily wrong the other person?
- What can stop a person from wronging someone else?

Tafsir

Nabi Dawood listens to the brother who narrates his story. He has one ewe while his brother has ninety nine. But the brother is not satisfied, and still wants more. He insists on having the only ewe his brother has and in their argument about it he was able to defeat his brother. An important point from this verse is how human beings can fall prey to greed. Even though they may have a lot, they still want more. That is why Islam emphasizes contentment. Having more does not make you happy, being satisfied with what you have is important.

Another point is that people who are good at talking sometimes manipulate their words to insist on something that is wrong. Debates and arguments can be won not due to the truth but according to how eloquent the presenter is. The brother with one ewe was not able to convince his brother of his wrong demand as he was much more eloquent than him.

Nabi Dawood does not listen to the other brother. Instead he says it was wrong of him to demand that he get the one ewe his brother has. He goes on to state an important truth of many relationships - most people who work together, live together, or even interact together, would wrong the other person. It is easy to do that, either unconsciously, or consciously due to self love. It takes self discipline to refrain from that. Nabi Dawood says that only people who have faith and do good deeds would not do that. Their God consciousness would prevent them from wronging others. But such people are very few. Even from those who claim to believe in God, many would still wrong others. People do it either because they care only for themselves, or because sometimes they do not even realize they are doing it. They are not vigilant over themselves and don't realize their actions are wrong.

Relevant Verses

God consciousness as a firm foundation - 9:109

Hadith

In his love for the world, the greedy is like the silkworm: the more it wraps in its cocoon, the less it has of escaping from it, until it dies of grief.

Imam Muhammad al Baqir (a)

If the son of Adam were to possess two valleys of gold and silver, he would long for a third.

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a)

Important Lessons

- 1) Be content with what you have.
- 2) Do not use words cleverly to argue a wrong point.
- 3) A good case is when both sides are heard and judgment is carried out. People should not jump to conclusions by listening to one side.
- 4) Faith and good deeds (God consciousness) helps you stay away from wronging others.

Story

Fairness in Judging

A man happened to be the guest of Imam Ali. After a time he told the Imam about his dispute with another person. He wanted Imam to be the judge between them. The Imam told the man, 'Up till now you were my guest, but since you have become a party in a dispute with another man and you want me to judge between you, you will need to leave this place. The Holy Prophet advised me not to make any one of the disputants as your guest unless the other one is also with you because hospitality is one thing and making a just and impartial decision is another thing. Hospitality is based on sympathy and decision of a case is based on Divine law.'

One should not be influenced by emotions when making a judgement in a case.

(Extracted from **Wasa'ilush Shi'ah**, vol. XVIII, p. 158)

Possible Ideas for activities

- 1) Discuss and explore greed and the importance of contentment. Link it to modern society and show examples of greed in today's world. Pollution, poverty, oppression . . . are all the negative results of greed.
- 2) Give examples of scenarios when wrong judgement can take place after listening to one side only. This can happen in simple everyday examples of conflicts with family members, friends etc. Role play scenarios, or put them on the board/on a poster and let students conclude the judgement.
- 3) Taqwa or God consciousness stops you from doing wrong to others. Taqwa is like a shield, a fence, a fortress . . . anything that protects. Draw or make images that portray Taqwa. Show different scenarios or play a game about occasions when people would act with/without Taqwa.

Sources:

Āytaullāh Nāsir Makārim Shirāzī (ed), *Tafsīr-e Namūneh*;

Aghae Muhsin Qaraati, *Tafsire Nur*

<https://www.al-islam.org/lessons-quran-muhsin-qaraati>