

Tafsir Sūrat al-Hujurāt

Learning Objectives:

- A study of verse 11 of Surat al-Hujurat

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرُ قَوْمٌ مِّن قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِّنْهُمْ وَلَا
 نِسَاءً مِّن نِّسَاءٍ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِّنْهُنَّ وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا
 بِالْألقَابِ بِئْسَ الإِسْمُ الفُسُوقُ بَعْدَ الإِيمَانِ وَمَن لَّمْ يَتُبْ فَأُولَئِكَ هُم
 الظَّالِمُونَ [11]

O believers! Let not (one) group of men laugh at (another) group of men, it may be that they are better than them; and let not women (laugh) at (other) women, it may be that they are better than them; and do not find fault with each other, nor call one another by nicknames; evil is a bad name after faith, and whoever does not repent, they are the unjust.

1. Background and occasion of revelation

The exegetes mention that the first part of the verse was revealed about the conduct of Thābit b. Qays. He was hard of hearing so when he attended mosque, people would give him a place near the Prophet (S) so that he could follow the sermon. One day he arrived late for the morning prayer and people had already settled down. He started telling them to make way for him so that he could move to the front. At one point one man told him to sit down and stop disturbing the people. Thābit sat down behind him but was very angry. After a while he asked him who he was. When he identified himself, Thābit said. "O so you are the son of that woman?" And he used a derogatory word for his mother, which was how she was known before Islam. The man became embarrassed and lowered his head. At this point this verse was revealed directing the Muslims to stay away from this sort of behaviour.

And the portion about women was revealed about the mother of the believers, Umm Salama, whom the other wives of the Prophet (S) would tease because she wore simple clothes, and was of short stature. Once more the verse forbade them from this practice.

2. An Explanation of Some Terms use in the Verse

- **يَسْخَرُ** This means to laugh and make fun at someone's expense
- **تَلْمِزُوا** This comes from لامز **لَمَزَ** which means to criticize and find fault in the presence of a person (whereas hamaz **هَمَزَ** means to do so behind a person's back). Both these habits have been severely condemned by God in the Qur'an:

وَيْلٌ لِّكُلِّ هُمَزَةٍ لُّمَزَةٍ

“Woe to every slanderer and defamer!” [104:1]

- **تَنَابَزُوا** This means to call other by derogatory names

3. Ethical Guidelines for Social Harmony

This verse gives several ethical (*akhlaqī*) guidelines that are important for harmony and love to flourish in a society. Failure to be careful about these matters will bring about false feelings of superiority and arrogance in some, and in time, cause divisions and resentment amongst the members. These guidelines are:

1. To abstain from ridiculing others
2. To abstain from finding fault in others
3. To abstain from embarrassing others by calling them with nicknames that they dislike

The verse quickly reminds the believers that the one whom they are ridiculing may be more honourable than them in the eyes of God.

4. A Solution taught by Imam al-Riḍa (A)

The best course is as advised by the Ahlul Bayt (A) – In a long hadith, Imam al-Rida (A) lists 10 qualities of a mature and intelligent believer. After mentioning the first nine, he said, “As for the tenth, how important it is!” He was asked about it and he said,

[The tenth is that he does not see any other believer except that he says to himself, “He is better than me and more pious.” People will be of two kinds, those who are better than him and more pious and those who are worse than him and more sinful. So when he encounters the person who is worse and more sinful than him, he should say, “Perhaps his goodness is inner and hidden and that is better for him, while mine is apparent and visible and that may be worse for me in the long term.” And when he sees someone better than him and more pious, he is humble before him and gets closer to him. And when he behaves this way, he will have reached the highest level of honour...]¹

5. Class Teacher to briefly discuss Bullying in the Classroom

¹ قال الإمام الرضا عليه السلام: لَا يَتِمُّ عَقْلُ امْرِئٍ مُسْلِمٍ حَتَّى يَكُونَ فِيهِ عَشْرُ خِصَالٍ...: ثم قال عليه | Saduq, *al-Khiṣāl*, chapter of tens | قال الإمام الرضا عليه السلام: مَا الْعَاشِرَةُ وَمَا الْعَاشِرَةُ؟ قِيلَ لَهُ: وَمَا هِيَ؟ قَالَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: (لَا يَرَى أَحَدًا إِلَّا قَالَ: هُوَ خَيْرٌ مِنِّي وَأَتَقَى، إِنَّمَا النَّاسُ رَجُلَانِ: رَجُلٌ خَيْرٌ مِنِّي وَأَتَقَى، وَرَجُلٌ شَرٌّ مِنِّي وَأَذَى، فَإِذَا لَقِيَ الَّذِي هُوَ شَرٌّ مِنِّي وَأَذَى قَالَ: لَعَلَّ خَيْرٌ هَذَا بَاطِنٌ وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لِي، وَخَيْرِي ظَاهِرٌ وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لِي، وَإِذَا رَأَى الَّذِي هُوَ خَيْرٌ مِنِّي وَأَتَقَى تَوَاضَعَ لَهُ لِيَلْحَقَ بِهِ، فَإِذَا فَعَلَ ذَلِكَ فَقَدْ عَلَا مَجْدُهُ، وَطَابَ خَيْرُهُ، وَحَسُنَ دِكْرُهُ، وَسَادَ أَهْلُ زَمَانِهِ)