

#208: NORWEGIAN PROVERBS

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional proverbs can provide a unique insight into attitudes, standards and the cultural state of mind of the people who relate them and pass them on as part of their oral tradition. Norwegian proverbs are a great example of this because they encode native values of perseverance, thrift and social responsibility, often presented with an ironic or darkly comic twist.

However, over time proverbs can migrate from one language to another and across physical and cultural borders. In fact, many of the most commonly told proverbs in both Norwegian and English come originally from Latin or the Bible. Others began as quotes from literature that took on a life of their own. The collection that follows is by no means intended to be comprehensive. Instead, we have shown preference to proverbs that are particularly common in Norway today or those that seemed especially “Norwegian.”

TRANSLATION & LANGUAGE

In translating these proverbs, we have tried to strike a balance between making the meaning clear and retaining some sense of the original language. For example, in Norwegian, many of them rhyme or alliterate – “*Bedre med trøtte **ar**mer enn tomme **tar**mer*” does both – in some cases it was possible to retain those qualities, in others it was not. Additionally, many of these have a stark or earthy quality that we have also tried to preserve by translating certain things directly, rather than supplying an English-language idiomatic equivalent. Take for example the proverb quoted above, which means “Better tired arms than empty bowels.” Generally in English we would think of an empty stomach instead, but the overall meaning is the same and the original Norwegian (*tarmer*) is quite clear.

The proverbs listed here come from a variety of sources, including the previous version of this unit, websites (like ordtak.no) and dozens of books, plays and poems. Again, we chose to preserve the original form of the language and spelling used in each instance, so Norwegian speakers will notice that Bokmål, Nynorsk and dialect forms are all used interchangeably.



PROVERBS

Aldri så galt at det ikke er godt for noe.
Never so bad that it is good for nothing.

Alt har en ende, men pølsa har to -
pannekaka har ingen, men er likevel god.
*All things come to an end, but a sausage
has two – the pancake has none, but is
nonetheless good.*

Av barn og fulle folk skal man
høre sannheten.
*From children and drunks one
will hear the truth.*

Bak skyen er himmelen alltid blå.
Behind the clouds the sky is always blue.



**BETRE TI HÅR PÅ HOVUDET
ENN EITT I SUPPA.**

BETTER TEN HAIRS ON YOUR HEAD
THAN ONE IN YOUR SOUP.

Bedre å være brødløs enn rådløs.
Better to be breadless than helpless.

Bedre dårlig kledd enn naken.
Better poorly clothed than naked.

Bedre føre var enn etter snar.
Better alert before than quick after.

Bedre med trøtte armer enn
tomme tarmer.
Better tired arms than empty bowels.

Bedre sent enn aldri.
Better late than never.

Betre små fiskar enn tomme diskar.
Better small fishes than empty dishes.

Betre ti hår på hovudet enn eitt i suppa.
*Better ten hairs on your head than one in
your soup.*

Blind høne finner også korn.
A blind hen also finds grain.

Borte bra hjemme best.
Away good, at home best.

Brent barn skyr ilden.
A burned child avoids the fire.

Den drukner ei som henges skal.
*He who is destined to be hanged will
not drown.*

Den enes død den andres brød.
One man's death is another's bread.

Den fugl ein ikkje kan fange, får ein la fly.
The bird you can't catch, let it fly.

Den som graver en grav for andre,
faller selv i den.
*He who digs a grave for others
falls into it himself.*

Den som har ete seg sjuk,
får faste seg frisk.
*He who stuffs himself sick,
gets to starve himself healthy.*

Den som ikke i hete vil svette,
får i kulde sulte.
*He who will not sweat in the heat,
gets to starve in the cold.*

Den som intet våger, intet vinner.
He who nothing dares, nothing gains.

Den som kommer først til mølla,
får først male.
He who arrives first at the mill will grind first.

Den som ler sist, ler best.
He who laughs last, laughs best.

Den som leter, han finner.
He who seeks, finds.

Den som sover synder ikke.
He who sleeps has not sinned.

Det er ikke gull alt som glimrer.
All that glitters is not gold.

Det er mangt et godt hode under
en gammel hatt.
There are many good heads under old hats.

Det er mye mat i godt drikke.
There is much food in good drink.

Det er vondt å få det alle vil ha.
It's bad to get what everyone wants.

Det ville vere skam å lengte etter
sommaren så lenge det er jol i huset.
*It would be a shame to long for summer
when it's Christmas.*

Du skal ikke tro at du er noe.
You shall not think that you are something.

En kan reise hvor en vil,
men aldri fra seg selv.
*One can travel anywhere,
but never from oneself.*

En liten fisk i båten er bedre
enn en stor i fjorden.
*A small fish in the boat is better
than a big one in the fjord.*

En fugl i hånden er bedre enn ti på taket.
*A bird in one's hand is better than
ten on the roof.*

En svale gjør ingen sommer.
One swallow doesn't make it summer.

En ulykke kommer sjelden alene.
An accident seldom comes alone.

Enhver er sin egen lykkes smed.
Everyone is the maker of his own luck.

Enige og tro til Dovre faller.
United and true until Dovre falls.

Eplet faller ikke langt fra stammen.
The apple does not fall far from the tree.

Etter den søte kløe kommer den sure svie.
*After the sweet scratching comes
the sour sting.*

Etter regn kommer sol.
After rain comes sun.

Fagert barn ser mange blide øyne.
A beautiful child sees many kind eyes.

Finneren er vinneren.
The finder is the winner.

For mye klokskap er dårskap.
Too much cleverness is foolishness.

Fram og tilbake er like langt.
Forward and back is equally far.

Freunde er freunde verst.
Kinsman is worst to kinsman.

Gammel kjærlighet rustet ikke.
Old love does not rust.

Gammel vane er vond å vende.
Old habits are hard to change.

Gjemt er ikke glemt.
Hidden is not forgotten.

Man skal ikke gråte over spilt melk.
Don't cry over spilt milk.

Har du klave, får du ku.
If you have a [priest's] collar, you will get a cow.

Har man sagt A, får man også si B.
If one has said A, one also will have to say B.

Hastverk er lastverk.
Haste makes waste.

Heleren er like god som stjeleren.
The receiver is no better than the thief.

Hevnen er søt.
Revenge is sweet.

Hver mester var engang svenn.
Every master once was an apprentice.

Hver fugl synger med sitt nebb.
Every bird sings with its own voice.

Hver synes best om sine barn.
Everyone thinks best of their own child.

Hvis du gir fanden lillefingeren, tar han snart hele hånden.
If you give the devil your little finger, he soon takes your whole hand.

I krig og kjærlighet er alt tillatt.
In war and love, everything is permitted.

I mørket er alle katter grå.
In the dark all cats are grey.

I nøden spiser fanden fluer.
Necessity makes the devil eat flies.

I politikken må sannheten vente til noen får bruk for den.
In politics the truth has to wait until someone has a use for it.

Ingen roser uten torner.
No roses without thorns.

Ingen røyk uten ild.
No smoke without a fire.

Ingen vet hvor haren hopper.
No one knows where the hare jumps.

Jo flere kokker, dess mer søl.
The more cooks, the more mess.

Kjennskap gir vennskap.
Acquaintance makes friendship.



Krake søker make.
A crooked one seeks his mate.

Lediggang er roten til alt ondt.
Idleness is the root of all evil.

Like barn leker best.
Similar children play best together.

Man fanger ikke fisk med tørre fingre.
You can't catch fish with dry fingers.

Man kan ikke få både i pose og sekk.
One cannot receive both in bag and sack.

Man kan ikke gjøre alle til lags.
One cannot get everyone on their team.

Man kan ikke leve av luft og kjærlighet.
One cannot live on air and love.

Man skal ikke rette baker for smed.
One should not damn the baker for the blacksmith.

Du skal ikke skue hunden på hårene.
One should not judge the dog by its hairs.

Mange bekker små gjør en stor å.
Many small streams make a large river.

Mens graset gror, dør kua.
While the grass grows, the cow dies.

Mennesket er det farligste av alle dyr.
Humans are the most dangerous of all animals.



Myke senger gir late drenger.
Soft beds make for lazy boys.

Noen liker mora, andre liker dattera.
Some like the mother and some the daughter.

Norrøna-folket det vil fare, det vil føre kraft til andre.
The Norse will travel, they will give strength to others.

Nød lærer naken kvinne å spinne.
Necessity teaches a naked woman how to spin.

Når det regner på presten, drypper det på klokkeren.
When it rains on the pastor, it drips on the sexton.

Når katten er borte, danser musene på bordet.
When the cat's away, the mice dance on the table.

Når maten er spist, er måltidet gjort, enten det er lite eller stort.
*When the food is eaten, dinnertime is done,
whether it was a little or big one.*

Når nøden er størst, er hjelpen nærmest.
When the need is greatest, help is nearest.

Om hundre år er allting glemt.
In a hundred years everything is forgotten.

På ridestellet skal storfolk kjennes.
You can tell great men by the style of their mounts.

Selvgjort er velgjort.
Self done is well done.

Smak og behag kan ikke diskuteres.
Taste and preference cannot be debated.

Små gryter har også ører.
Small pots also have ears.

Som man reder, så ligger man.
As one prepares, so one lies.

Som man roper i skogen får man svar.
As one calls in the forest, one is answered.

Selg ikke skinnet før bjørnen er skutt.
Don't sell the skin before the bear's been shot.

Smuler er også mat.
Crumbs are food, too.

Tale er sølv, men taushet er gull.
Speech is silver, but silence is gold.

Tomme tønner ramler mest.
Empty barrels rumble the most.

Utsett ikke til i morgen hva du kan gjøre i dag.
Don't postpone until tomorrow what you can do today.

Utakk er verdens lønn.
Ingratitude is the world's reward.

Uten mat og drikke duger helten ikke.
Without food and drink the hero is no good.

Vennskap ender ofte med kjærlighet,
men kjærlighet ender aldri med vennskap.
*Friendship often ends with romance,
but romance never ends with friendship.*

Ærlighet varer lengst.
Honesty lasts the longest.

Øvelse gjør mester.
Practice makes master.