

## Surah Asr, Chapter 103

(Time)

Number of Verses: 11

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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

#### ***In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful***

It is known that this Surah was revealed in Mecca, though some commentators have also said that it is probably Medinan. Its short verses, as well as its tone and style, attest to the first idea, too.

In any event, the completeness of this Surah is so much that, according to some commentators, all the knowledge and objectives of Qur'an are briefly gathered in this single Surah. In other words, this short Surah leads Man to a total complete program for his happiness.

It begins with a meaningful oath to 'Time', whose commentary will be delivered later, to refer to the loss existing in nature along the gradual path in the lives of all human beings except for the persons who have: Faith, good deeds and who enjoin on each other truth, and enjoin on each other patience. These four principles involve, in fact, the theological, practical, personal, and social doctrine of Islam.

### [The Virtue of Studying Surah 'Asr](#)

On the virtue of reciting the Surah, a tradition from Imam Sadiq (as) says:

*"He who recites (Surah) 'Asr, in his optional prayers, Allah will raise him with a shining, bright face, cheerful features, and delighted eyes (looking upon the blessings of Allah), until when he enters Paradise on the Day of Judgement."*<sup>1</sup>

It is obvious that these honours and pleasures belong to the one who practices these four principles in his life and does not suffice only to the mere reciting of the Surah.

## Surah 'Asr, Verses 1-3

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

*In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful*

وَالْعَصْرِ

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ

1. ***"By Time",***
2. ***"Surely man is in loss,"***
3. ***"Save those who believe and do good deeds, and enjoin on each other truth, and enjoin on each other patience.***

## The Only Path to Salvation

At the beginning of this Surah we are faced with a new oath, thus:

***"By Time,"***

The term /'asr/ literally means 'to press, to squeeze' and then, it has figuratively been used for 'evening' meaning 'the affairs of the day are rolled and squeezed into the evening'.

After that the word has been used in the sense of –absolute time, in general; the course in the history of Man or a part of it, such as the appearance of Islam and the Call of the holy Prophet (S), and the like. This is why commentators have provided different probable meanings for the commentary of the oath which are given as follows:

1. Some have rendered it to mean the time of 'evening' with the evidence that in some other verses of the Holy Qur'an an oath is taken to the beginning of the day, like Surah Duha, No. 93, verse 1:

***"By the Glorious Morning Light",***

or Surah Muddaththir, No. 74, verse 34:

***"And by the Dawn as it shineth forth".***

This oath is made due to the importance that this time of day has, since this time is the time when the regularity in the life of Man varies; daily activities end, people return to their homes, birds and cattle come back to their shelters, the sun sets on the horizon in the West, and night gradually falls.

This variation attracts Man's attention to the endless, everlasting power of Allah dominating over this regularity. It is, indeed, a sign out of the signs of the Divine Unity that deserves an oath to be taken to.

2. Some others consider it to be the

***'Time'***

through the ages of the history of Mankind, which is full of lessons and teachings from the startling events which have occurred. For the same reason, it has such a dignity that matches the Divine Oath.

3. Some have emphasized on a proper part of the time like the Age of the Holy Prophet (S) or the Rise of the twelfth Imam, 'Mahdi' (as), which has peculiar specialities and a definite glory in the history of Man, to which, they say, the oath refers to. [2](#)

4. Some have also referred to the original meaning of the term and say that the oath points to the various kinds of stresses and difficulties that happen during the lives of people which awaken them from their neglectful sleep, reminds them of Allah, and develops the spirit of patience and constancy in them.

5. Some other commentators have taken it to mean 'the chosen ones' who are the 'pick of the crop' in the world of creation.

6. And finally, some others have rendered the word 'Asr' to mean the ceremonial afternoon prayer for its special importance among the obligatory prayers, because they interpret /salat-i-wusta/, on which the Qur'an emphasizes particularly, as afternoon prayer.

The above ideas are not contradictory to each other and they may be all correct for the meaning of the verse, and the oath could be taken to the whole of those important matters, but among all of them the most fitting one is 'Asr with the meaning of

***'Time'***

and the history of Man; because, as it was said repeatedly before, the oaths of the Qur'an are in relation to the subject that the oath is taken for, and it is certain that the loss human beings incur in their lives is the consequence of passing their lifetime, or passing the Age of the Call of the Prophet (S), because the command of 'four principles', mentioned in the, last part of the Surah, was revealed in that very life.

Referring to the above explanations, it makes the greatness of the Qur'an and the vastness of its meaning clear when one word of it is so expressive and deserves so many profound and diverse interpretations.

In the following verse it refers to the object that this great oath is made to. It says:

***"Surely man is in loss".***

They, willy nilly, will lose the capital of their existence. Hours, days, months, and years of life pass quickly, spiritual and material potentialities decline and abilities fade.

Yes, Man is like a person who possesses great capital and without his permission and will, every day, a portion of that capital is taken away. This is the nature of life in this world; the nature of continual loss.

The term /xusr/ as well as /xusran/, as Raqib cites in his book, Mufradat, means 'declining the capital'. Sometimes it is concerned with humans and it is said that such and such a person has suffered loss; and sometimes it is concerned with the action, itself, and it is said that the persons' bargain showed a loss. This word is often used for outward capital such as wealth and position, but it is sometimes used also for inward capital, like that of health, wisdom, faith and reward.

This is the same thing that Allah has referred to as 'the evident Loss' in Surah Zumar, No. 39, verse 15; where it says:

***"...truly those in loss are those who lose their own souls and their people on the Day of Judgement: Ah! That is indeed the (real and) evident Loss!"***

Commenting on the verse under discussion, Fakhr-i-Razi cites:

One of the old scholars said that he had learnt the meaning of this verse from an ice-seller who had been calling again and again:

*'Have pity on him whose capital is melting'.*

He said to himself that it was the meaning of

***'surely man is in loss'.***

Time passes and one's lifetime ends, but, he does not obtain any reward. Then, he, in the case, is in loss. [3](#)

However, according to Islamic world-view, this world is a market of bargaining, as a tradition from Imam Ali-ibn-Muhammad Naqi (the tenth Imam) (as) says:

***"The world is a market wherein some people gain and some others lose".***[4](#)

The verse under discussion denotes that all lose in this market except a select group of people, whom will be referred to in the next verse.

Yes, there is only one way to avoid this great compulsory loss; the only way which is pointed out in the last verse of the Surah.

It says:

***"Save those who believe and do good deeds, and enjoin on each other truth, and enjoin on each other patience".***

In other words, the thing that can change this great loss to profit, a wonderful gain, is that in place of losing this capital we try to obtain a more valuable and better capital in order not only to fill its empty room, but, also to earn something thousands and thousands times better and more valuable than that.

Every breath we take is a step toward death, as Hazrat Ali (as) says:

*"The breaths of man are his steps (put forward) towards his death".*[5](#)

Of course, nothing can match the priceless capital of Man; his life-time, save the pleasure of being close to Allah with gaining His pleasure.

Or, as Hazrat Ali (as) has said:

*"Verily there is no price for you save Heaven. Beware not to sell it; save for it".*[6](#)

There is reason for one of the names of the Hereafter being

***lyaum-ut-taqabun/ 'a day of mutual loss'***[7](#),

a day when it will be made clear who has lost.

The beauty of the matter is in that on the one hand, the buyer of the capital of the souls of the believers is Allah, the Almighty, as Surah Taubah, No. 9, Verse 11 says:

***"Allah hath purchased of the Believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the Garden (of Paradise)..."***

On the other hand, He buys the little and small materials, too, when it says:

***"So, whoever has done an atom's weight of good shall behold it"***[8](#).

And further, He pays a great deal for a little; sometimes tenfold and sometimes upto seven hundred times as much, or more than that.

For example:

Surah Baqarah, No. 2, Verse 261 says:

***“...of a grain of corn: It groweth seven ears, and each ear hath a hundred grains. Allah giveth manifold increase to whom He pleaseth...”***

Still more, having given all the capitals to us He, Himself, is so Gracious that He purchases them back for the dearest price.

### **Explanation: Salvation Through Four Principles**

It is interesting that the Holy Qur'an offers a complete program with four principles which can make us free from that great loss.

The first principle is Faith which forms the basis of all activities of Man, because all the practical movements he has originate from his theological doctrines, outside the realm of animals whose movements are from their instincts.

In other words, the actions of Man are reflections of his beliefs and thoughts. For the same reason all prophets used to improve the basis of the Faith of their people first and before anything else, and worked especially against blasphemy which is the source of many kinds of corruptions and miseries.

It is interesting to note that Faith, here is mentioned in an abstract form in order to include the Faith in all things sacred, like belief in Allah and His attributes, belief in the Hereafter and Reckoning, reward and punishment, the Divine Books and prophets as well as their vicegerents.

In the second principle it refers to the worthy product of the fruitful tree of Faith, the Good Deeds.

What a vast and expressive sense the phrase

***'good deeds'***

is!

Yes, verily

***'good deeds'***

are indeed not only 'worthy deeds', adorations, charity for the sake of Allah, Holy War on the path of Allah, and learning divine knowledge, but it also includes every worthy action that can be a means applied in the way towards soul-perfection, moral improvement, nearness to Allah, and the progression of the human society in all fields.

This meaning envelops all good deeds from even the tiny ones like moving a troublesome stone out of

people's way to saving millions and millions of men from aberration, perdition and going astray.

When in a tradition from Imam Sadiq (as)

### **'good deeds'**

is rendered into 'equivalence and generous help to bretheren', it is a statement of a clear example.

Sometimes 'good actions' may be issued by some unbelieving persons, but this behaviour is not certainly so profound and vast, because they are not based deeply on divine motives, thus they are hollow.

The Holy Qur'an has mentioned the word /salihat/ particularly in the plural form and especially with (al ج) at the beginning with the meaning of 'generality' and indicates the fact that the shield against that natural automatic loss is, next to Faith, the fulfillment of all good deeds, and not to suffice just one or a few of them. and truly, if Faith settles deeply in the soul of a person, this very effect will be produced in him.

Faith is not a mere single thought or belief in the mind, free from any affect, it changes the whole entity of Man to, its own essence.

Faith is like a bright lamp inside a room which not only gives light to the room, but the beams penetrate through all the windows and spaces to the outside so that everyone who passes by, outside, can realize the existence of that bright light inside the room.

Similarly, when a person has the light of Faith bright inside his soul, his tongue, eyes, ears, hands and feet reflect that light to others and the movements of every limb, outside, show that there is a light inside.

For that reason, in the verses of Qur'an the words

### **'good deed'**

and

### **'Faith'**

often come together as interdependent; for example, Surah 'Nahl, No. 16, verse 97 says:

***"Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has Faith, verily, to him will We give a new Life, a life that is good and pure..."***

Also, in Surah Mo'minun, No. 13, verses 99 and 100, the wrong doers, after departing from this world, regret that they had not done good deeds, so, they insist on saying:

***"...O' my Lord, send me back (to life),"***

***"In order that I may work righteousness in the things I neglected..."***

Again, in the same Surah, verse 51, Allah bids to His apostles:

***"O ye apostles! Enjoy (all) things good and pure, and work righteousness..."***

And since

***'Faith'***

and

***'good deeds'***

cannot endure in a society unless there is an invitation to the right and truth, and the acknowledgement of it, on the one hand, and an invitation to patience and constancy along the path of the achievement of that invitation, on the other hand, for completing the first two principles,

***'Faith'***

and

***'good deeds',***

the second two principles are, now, pointed out.

The third principle, the general invitation of all to

***'Truth'***

is referred to, so that all the members of the human race will fully recognize right from wrong and observing it will never forget it throughout their lives.

The term /tawasau/ is based on /tawasi /and as Raqib cites in Mufradat, it means 'to enjoin or recommend to one another'.

The term /haqq/ means 'Truth' or 'adapting to Truth'. There are twelve meanings used or applied for this term in the Holy Qur'an, as are mentioned in 'Wujuh-i-Qur'an', such as: Allah, Qur'an, Islam, theism, justice, truthfulness, sincerity, clarity, obligation and the like, all of which refer to the root word mentioned above.

In any case, the phrase /tawasau-bil-haqq/ has such a vast meaning that includes both 'enjoin the good and forbidding of wrong' and 'guiding with teaching the ignorant' or 'admonishing the neglectfull' and 'encouraging and preaching Faith together with good deeds'.

It is needless to go into the details about those who enjoin on others truth, because it is understood that they should be advocates and administrators of it in their own lives.

The fourth principle is based on patience, perseverance, and enjoining these on each other. Next to the acknowledgement of them, in the course of practice, everyone faces with some difficulties which need patience and constancy, otherwise, he can never adjudicate and do a righteous deed or preserve his Faith.

Yes, adjudication and execution of truth and fulfilling it in the society is not possible, except by a common decision and having constancy and perseverance against the problems.

The word

***'patience'***,

here has a vast meaning that involves both the patience of obedience and the patience against motivations of committing sin, and patience for bitter happenings like losing members, forces, wealth, etc.

Regarding what was said here about the four principles towards salvation, which are truly the most complete program for men to follow in their lives, it makes it clear why some narrations denote that the followers and companions of the holy Prophet (S) used to recite Surah 'Asr when they reached each other or before saying good-bye and separating from each other, they reminded each other of the magnificent content of this short Surah.

Verily, if the Muslim believers of today would carry out these four principles in their personal and social lives, their problems and difficulties will be solved, their retardation will be amended, their defeats will be changed to victories, and the vice of their wickedness will be removed from them.

## **Supplication**

*O Lord! Bestow on us the patience and constancy needed for accepting and supporting the Truth.*

*O Lord! All of us are in loss and it is impossible for us to recompense it save with Your Grace.*

*O Lord! We wish to follow the content of the four-principle-command in the Surah; please help us to be successful.*

- [1.](#) Majma'-al-Bayan, vol. 10, p. 545.
- [2.](#) Nur-uth- Thaqaalayn, vol. 5, p. 666, tradition 5.
- [3.](#) Tafsir-i-Fakhr-i-Razi. vol. 32, p. 85.
- [4.](#) Tuhaf-ul-'Uqul, p. 361.
- [5.](#) Nahj-ul-Balagha, Saying 74.
- [6.](#) Nahj-ul-Balagha, Saying 456.
- [7.](#) mentioned in Surah Taqabun, No. 64, Verse 9
- [8.](#) Surah Zilzal, No. 99, Verse 7

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