

Surah Al'Asr

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالْعَصْرِ
إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ
إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ
وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ

*By the declining day
Surely, man is in loss.
Save those who believe, and do good deeds,
and enjoin on each other truth, and enjoin on each other patience.*

Some interesting facts

- It is generally agreed that Surah Asr is a Makkiyah surah, i.e. it was revealed in Mecca.
- The word Asr is found five times in the Holy Quran: In Surah Asr, Surah Yousuf, 12:36 and 12:49, Surah Baqarah 2:266, and Surah Naba 78:14.
- The word Insaan is mentioned in the Quran 97 times.
- The word khusr is mentioned 65 times.
- The word amal is mentioned 359 times.
- The word sulh (the root word for salihat) is found 189 times
- The word Haq is mentioned 287 times.
- The word sabr is mentioned 103 times.

[Cited from Tafseer al Bashaer]

Fazilat of Surah Asr

- It is said that if Surah Asr alone had been revealed it would have been sufficient.
[Tafseer Bashaer]
- A tradition from Imam Ja'far Sadiq (as): says: "He who recites (Sura) "Asr, in his optional prayers, Allah will raise him with a shinning, bright face, cheerful features, and delighted eyes (looking upon the blessing of Allah), until he enters Paradise on the Day of Judgment." *[Majma'-al Bayan, Vol 10 pg545]*
- Whoever recites Surah Asr, Allah will endorse him with forbearance and patience. He will be among the truthful on the day of reckoning.

The meaning of 'Asr'

- In the Holy Quran verse 103:1, Allah SWT says:

وَالْعَصْرِ
By the declining day

- 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.
- 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 sura duha, no. 93, verse 1: "by the glorious morning light", or sura muddaththir, no. 74, verse 34: "and by the dawn as it shineth forth".
- The literal meaning of asr is 'to squeeze' or 'press'.
- That is why juice in Arabic is called 'aseer. Hence according to lexicologists the word asr means to press or squeeze.
- For example, the word 'aseer is used in Surah Yousaf, verse 12:36, where one of the inmates is narrating his dream to Prophet Yousaf. The verse is as follows:

قَالَ أَحَدُهُمَا إِنِّي أَرَانِي أَعْصِرُ خَمْرًا

Said one of them, I dreamed that I was pressing the grapes.

- The Holy Quran places considerable importance on time. For instance, Surah Asr starts with the verse, 'by time verily men are in loss'. Some say *Asr* refers to the age of mankind. Some interpret *Asr* as the time of *nubuwwat* while one interpretation is that it is the time of the rise of the Imam Shahibuz-zaman.
- Some have rendered the word 'Asr' to mean the ceremonial afternoon prayer for its special importance among the obligatory prayers, because they interpret *salat-e-wusta* on which the Quran emphasizes particularly, as afternoon prayer.
- In Surah Baqarah verse 2:238, Allah SWT says:

حَافِظُوا عَلَى الصَّلَوَاتِ وَالصَّلَاةِ الْوُسْطَىٰ وَقَوْمُوا لِلَّهِ قَانِتِينَ

Be you watchful over the prayers and the middle prayer; and do you stand obedient to God.

- The Arabic word *wusta* means that which comes in between. This is the reason why in Arabic the middle finger is called *wusta*. Many commentators argue that *salat-e-wusta* refers to the ceremonial prayer of *Asr* since it falls in the middle of the day and evening. Some commentators say that it refers to *zuhr* prayers since it *zuhr* falls in the middle of *fajr* and *asr*. Hence there is a discrepancy regarding which prayers *salat-e-wusta* refers to.
- In the above verse the Arabic word *Salawat* has been used which means 'prayer'. It also means 'salutations'. Thus the verse refers to the *Ahlul Bayt* and more specifically to Imam Ali (as) on whom we send our salutations.
- The Arabic word *Qoomo Lillahi* means 'for the sake of Allah' or 'seeking the pleasure of Allah'.
- With regards to the guarding of *salat*, *riwayat* has mentioned that if the prayer is being looked after, the prayer will come to its master and tell him, 'You have looked after me and may Allah look after you.' However if it has been neglected, it will come and say, 'You have ruined me and may Allah ruin you. If we are a guardian over our prayers then our prayers will pray to Allah to guide us.

Man is in loss

- The following verse refers to the object that this great oath refers to. The verse says:

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِفِي خُسْرٍ
Surely, man is in loss.

- The word *insan* is used for both genders.
- Imam Sadiq was asked why *Insaan* is named as *Insaan*. The Imam said: “*Insaan* is called *Insaan* because they have the tendency to forget.” [*Ilalul asyaraa’ii*, Vol 1 pg 26]
- Indeed in Surah TaHa verse 20:115, Allah SWT says:

وَلَقَدْ عَهِدْنَا إِلَىٰ آدَمَ مِن قَبْلُ فَنَسِيَ وَلَمْ نَجِدْ لَهُ عَزْمًا

And We made covenant with Adam before, but he forgot, and We found in him no constancy.

- Allah SWT says that *Insaan* has been created in the best form. However, *Insaan* himself lowers his level by his actions.
- Man has been created by Allah as the best of His Creation but if he is not mindful of his duties then he will be at a loss.
- Man willy nilly loses the capital of his existence. Hours, days, months and years of life pass quickly, spiritual and material potentialities decline and abilities fade.
- Man is like a person who possesses great capital and without his permission everyday a portion of that capital is taken away. This is the nature of life in this world; the nature of continual loss.
- Commenting on the above verse, Fakhr-e-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 this case, is in loss.*” [*Tafsir-e-Razi*, vol. 32, p. 85]

- According to Islamic world view, this world is a market of bargaining, as a tradition from Imam Ali Naqi (as) says: “*The world is a market wherin some gain and some others lose.*” [Tuhaf-ul-Uqul, p. 361]

Four principles of salvation

- The above verse denotes that all lose in this market except a select group of people, who are defined in the following verse.
- The only way to avoid the compulsory loss is pointed out in the last verse of the Surah. It says:

**إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَّصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَّصَوْا
بِالصَّبْرِ**

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

- Hence we can change the great loss into a profit and get a high return on capital as long as we follow the admonition given in the last verse of the Surah.
- Imam Ali (as) says: “*The breaths of man are his steps (put forward) towards his death.*” [Nahjul Balagah, saying 74]
- The best possible reward that we can get is Heaven. Hence we should try and utilize our capital (time) as efficiently as possible and maximize the returns on our capital so that we can attain Heaven and have the pleasure of being close to Allah SWT.
- Indeed Imam Ali (as) has said: “*Verily, there is no price for you save Heaven. Beware not to sell it; save for it.*” [Nahjul Balagah, saying 456]
- Thus in return for our good deeds, Allah will grant us Heaven Inshallah. In other words, Allah will purchase our capital if it is used correctly and give us Heaven in return.
- Indeed in Surah Tawbah verse 9:111, Allah SWT says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ اشْتَرَى مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَأَمْوَالَهُمْ بِأَنْ لَهُمُ الْجَنَّةَ

God has bought from the believers themselves and their possessions against the gift of Paradise.

- Further, Allah will buy even the smallest of our good deeds. In Surah Zilzal verse 99:7, Allah SWT says:

فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ

So, whoever has done an atom's weight of good shall behold it.

- Furthermore, Allah pays a great deal for a little; sometimes tenfold and sometimes up to seven hundred times as much, or more than that. For example, in Surah Baqarah, verse 2:261, Allah SWT says:

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنْبَتَتْ سَبْعَ سَنَابِلَ فِي كُلِّ سُنْبُلَةٍ مِئَةٌ حَبَّةٍ وَاللَّهُ يُضَاعِفُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

The likeness of those who expend their wealth in the Way of God is as the likeness of a grain of corn that sprouts seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains; so that God multiplies unto whom He will.

God is All-embracing, All-clement.

- Further, in Surah Baqarah, verse 2:207, Allah SWT says:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَشْرِي نَفْسَهُ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ رَؤُوفٌ بِالْعِبَادِ

But other men there are that sell themselves desiring God's good pleasure and God is gentle with His servants.

- The above verse refers to none other than Imam Ali (as). In response to Allah's Will, the Holy Prophet had to suddenly migrate from Mecca to Madina while Imam Ali had to sleep in the Prophet's place to encounter 40 murderers who ran away upon seeing him. That was on the night of 17 Rabi ul-Awwal 622 AD.

- Imam Ali performed sajdah when he heard that the Prophet will be safe if the Imam lied in his bed. It is said that this was the first *sajdah shukr* in Islam.
- Surah Asr offers a complete program with four principles which can make us free from the great loss.

The 1st condition: Faith

- The first condition is faith (*illalazina amilu*) which forms the basis of all activities of Man.
- In other words, the actions of Man are reflections of his beliefs and thoughts.
- It is interesting to note that faith, here is mentioned in an abstract form in order to include the faith in all scared things, like belief in Allah and His attributes, belief in the Hereafter and Reckoning, Divine Books, Prophets and Imams.
- 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.

The 2nd principle: Good Deeds

- In the second principle it refers to the worthy product of the fruitful tree of faith, the good deeds.
- The holy Qur'an has mentioned the word /salihat/ particularly in the plural form and especially with *al* 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. 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 effect; it changes the whole entity of man to its own essence.
- Belief alone is not sufficient unless we practice in accordance with our beliefs.
- 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 3rd principle: Enjoining towards truth

- The third principle is the general invitation to 'Truth' (*tawasau bil Haq*) so that we recognize the right from the wrong.
- Faith and good deeds cannot endure in a community unless they are admonished. That is why we always need the presence of our Imam.
- 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 neglectful' and `encouraging and preaching faith together with good deeds.'
- The Holy Quran has ascribed several meaning to 'Haq'.
- In the Surah Al Anam verse 6:62, the Holy Quran says:

ثُمَّ رُدُّوْا اِلَى اللّٰهِ مَوْلَاَهُمْ الْحَقُّ اِلَّا لَهٗ الْحُكْمُ وَهُوَ اَسْرَعُ الْحَاْسِبِيْنَ

Then they are restored to God their Protector the True.

- In the above verse, *Haq* refers to Allah SWT.
- In Surah Ali Imran, verse 3:86, Allah SWT says:

وَشَهِدُوْا اَنَّ الرَّسُوْلَ حَقٌّ

Bear witness that the Prophet is Haq.

- In the above verse, *Haq* refers to our Holy Prophet.
- The Holy Prophet has said: "Ali is with Haq, and Haq is with Ali. Both inseparable till it come to me at the well of Al Kauthar". [*Ali fi Al Kitab wa As Sunnah, Vol 2 pg 54*].

Hence *Haq* also refers to Imam Ali (as).

- The Holy Quran has also attributed other meanings to *Haq*. *Haq* has also been referred to as the Holy Quran itself, the religion of Islam and justice.

The 4th principle: Patience

- The fourth principle of salvation is patience, perseverance and enjoining these on each other (*tawasau bis sabr*).
- The first three principles can only be preserved by *sabr*. In the course of practice (of good deeds) everyone faces some difficulties which need patience and constancy; otherwise, he can never adjudicate and do a righteous deed or preserve his faith.
- Adjudication and execution of truth and fulfilling it in society is not possible, except by having perseverance against problems. Hence, *sabr* is a necessary condition for salvation. *Sabr* will protect the capital called 'time'.

It is narrated that Imam Sadiq (as) has said:

الصَّابِرُ مِنَ الْإِيمَانِ بِمَنْزِلَةِ الرَّأْسِ مِنَ الْجَسَدِ فَإِذَا ذَهَبَ الرَّأْسُ، ذَهَبَ الْجَسَدُ، وَكَذَلِكَ
إِذَا ذَهَبَ الصَّبْرُ، ذَهَبَ الْإِيمَانُ.

- “Verily, *sabr* is faith what the head is to the body. The body perishes without the head, and so also when *sabr* goes faith also goes.” [Usul al-Kafi, ii, Bab al-sabr, 128, hadith No. 2]

Imam Sadiq (as) said:

قَالَ : إِذَا دَخَلَ الْمُؤْمِنُ فِي قَبْرِهِ كَانَتِ الصَّلَاةُ عَنْ يَمِينِهِ وَالزَّكَاةُ عَنْ يَسَارِهِ وَالْبِرُّ مُطِئًا عَلَيْهِ
وَتَشْتَعِي الصَّبْرُ نَاجِيَةً، فَإِذَا دَخَلَ عَلَيْهِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ اللَّذَانِ بَلَيَانِ مُسَاءَلَتُهُ قَالَ الصَّبْرُ
لِلصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ وَالْبِرِّ: دُونَكُمْ صَاحِبِكُمْ فَإِنْ عَجَزْتُمْ عَنْهُ فَأَنَا دُونُهُ.

- When the believer enters the grave, *salat* is on this right hand, *zakat* on his left, virtue faces him, with *sabr* taking him under its shelter. When the two angel's charged with questioning enter upon him, *sabr* says to *salat*, *zakat* and virtue, “Take care of your companion, and if you fail to assist him I will take care of him myself.” [Usul al-Kafi, ii, Bab al-sabr, 128, hadith No. 8]

The party of losers vs. the party of victors

- It is clear that Surah Asr is very powerful given that magnificent contents 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 defeats will be changed to victories, and the vice of wickedness will be removed from them.
- In Surah Mujadulah, verse 58:19, Allah SWT says:

**اسْتَحْوَذَ عَلَيْهِمُ الشَّيْطَانُ فَأَنسَاهُمْ ذِكْرَ اللَّهِ أُولَئِكَ حِزْبُ
الشَّيْطَانِ أَلَا إِنَّ حِزْبَ الشَّيْطَانِ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ**

*Satan has gained the mastery over them, and caused them to forget God's Remembrance.
Those are Satan's party. Why, satan's party, surely, they are the losers!*

- In verse 3:85, Allah SWT says:

**وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ
الْخَاسِرِينَ**

*Whoso desires another religion than Islam, it shall not be accepted of him;
In the next world he shall be among the losers.*

- It is clear from the above verse that anyone who rejects Islam will be amongst the losers and hence will be part of Satan's party given verse 58:19.
- Furthermore, we need to accept the whole religion of Islam and cannot justify accepting only a fraction of the religion. Indeed we need to remember that the religion of Islam was completed only after the incident of Ghadir (5:3) and hence *wilayah* is a necessary condition if we want to avoid being amongst the losers.
- The verse of mastership (5:55) admonishes us to take Allah, the Holy Prophet, and Imam Ali (as) as our wali. Following this verse, Allah SWT says in verse 5:56:

**وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فَإِنَّ حِزْبَ اللَّهِ هُمُ
الْعَالِبُونَ**

*And whoso take Allah and His messenger and those who believe for guardian (will know that),
lo! the party of Allah, they are the victorious.*

- For those who ponder it should be clear from the above verse that in order to be in the victorious party we need to accept Allah, the Holy Prophet and Imam Ali (as) as our wali. Hence wilayat is a dividing line between the party of losers and the party of the victorious!
- After the revelation of Ayah Tatheer (33:33), for a period of six months, the Holy Prophet used to pass by the door of Fatima (sa) and her family before the starting of the prayers and used to recite: “Allah wishes to remove all abomination from you, Ahlul Bayt and to completely purify you, so come to the prayer, may Allah have mercy on you.” This hadith has been narrated in a number of books both Shia and Sunni including Al-Sahih, al-Tirmidhi, vol. 5, p. 31.
- This again emphasizes the importance of following the Ahlul Bayt given that they have been purified by Allah SWT. It is therefore imperative that we be the true Shias of the Ahlul Bayt.

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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.*

Disclaimer:

In this tafseer class, there might be shortcomings in imparting the knowledge of the tafseer. If there is any information that requires correction, please do not hesitate to let us know via e-mail: jaafari_tafseer_committee@yahoo.com.sg. Allah knows best.