

Surat al-Asr

Note: two types of Qur'anic tafseer:

1. tazakur: focus on the clear explanations and lessons in the text. Primary motivation is remembrance. The tafseer of surat al-Asr is done as tazakur. For tadabur tafseer, see booklet, in 'Salvation – in Light of Surat al-Asr'.
2. tadabur: detailed explanation and exfoliation

Basic Preliminary Points of Surat al-Asr:

1. one of the earliest revelations of the Qur'an revealed in Mecca
 2. one of the smallest surah's in the Qur'an
 3. The most profound and most comprehensive Surah of the Qur'an regarding salvation and the prerequisites of salvation.
 - a. Sahaba: Tabrani hadeeth (awsad?) & Bahati (??) – companions didn't depart each other's company without reciting Surat al-Asr to each other.
 - b. Imam Shafi': 'if people ponder only on this 1 Surah, it would suffice for (their salvation?)'. or another narration 'Even if only this Surah were revealed, it would have been sufficient to guide mankind'.
- Aside: other sections of Qur'an can be most profound ayaat with regard to a different topic:
- i. Surat al-Ikhlās: most profound Surah on tawheed
 - ii. Surat al-Fatiha: most profound Surah on philosophy/wisdom of Qur'an
4. Although the subject is very profound, the language of this Surah is very simple and easy to access. There are no philosophical terminologies or complex logical juxtapositions, etc. The simplest person can understand this language of this Surah.
 5. Consists of 3 ayaat, but consists of 1 sentence (or at max, 2 sentences). Will discuss this in further detail below.

Translation of the Meaning:

1. By the fast fleeing time,
2. Verily all humans are (truly) doomed
3. Except those with real Imaan, which leads to good deeds, which leads to exhorting others to truth and steadfastness.

Tafseer:

1. This Surah defines the Criteria for Success. Our understanding of success and how success is measured will determine our goals and what we spend our time and energy pursuing. Our purpose in life is determined by how we define success
 - a. Worldly definitions of success: wealth, property, status, fame, honor, authority, power
 - b. Qur'anic definition of success: those who believe, perform good deeds, enjoin to truth, and enjoin to patience
 - i. Irrespective of what these implications are for worldly definitions
 - ii. Without all four, one is doomed
 - iii. Useful to look at how this definition of success was manifested in the Sahaba (Bilal, Abu Dharr – Prophet (SAWS) said of him that he had the 'piety of Isa', etc.)
 - c. To acknowledge this fact is one thing, but to live by the Qur'anic definition of success is very difficult.

- i. Surrounded by all kinds of manifestations of misguided efforts to accumulate worldly success (status symbols, property, wealth, etc). Unguarded, exposure to this will influence your own value structure.
 - ii. For this reason, the Sahaba recited this Surah to each other whenever they were departing – to ward off these external influences; to clean their minds, remove the negative influences corrupting their understanding of true success and focus on achieving true success.
 - iii. **Note: Allah will give you what you want – whatever you are seeking, Allah will give it to you (insert ayat where Allah says this).**
- 2. These are the minimum conditions for success. Therefore, must complete all Four!
 - a. This Surah is profoundly threatening – Allah states as a fact that the general rule is that man is doomed.
 - b. Irony – for worldly success, men race to outdo each other, but for true success (everlasting success in the Akheera) many are content with the bare minimum.
 - c. Must put our main effort for the Akheera.
- 3. All four are necessary – really one organic whole.
 - a. Degree of success depends on how much we did in each of these categories, but salvation requires that you do each one of these.
 - b. Should be in balance. Level of Imaan should be reflected in your good deeds, enjoining to truth, and enjoining to patience/steadfastness.
 - i. Real Imaan must lead to good deeds. Actions and Imaan are inevitably joined together.
 - ii. Real Imaan must lead to calling others to truth
 - 1. hadeeth: if see something wrong, stop it with your hands, if can't stop with hands, then speak against it, if can't do this, then at least feel bad about it in your heart (and this is the weakest of Imaan). After this, you have no Imaan.
 - 2. Imaan/conviction builds strength of character.
 - iii. Real Imaan must lead to patience and endurance.
 - c. Must be an organic whole where each category has proportionate attention & effort
 - i. I.e. doctor prescribes medicine. If you take it, take it as a whole – not just a portion of it. If you only take a portion of it, you will not be cured.
 - ii. Another example: Imaan is the seed. The Tree represents the good deeds. The fruits of the tree are the enjoining to truth and righteousness.
- 4. Very eloquent with maximal Emphasis.
 - a. All the modes of emphasis in the Arabic language are used in the first two ayaats. Allah is therefore drawing the reader's attention to the profound importance of what follows.
 - i. Allah swears by time (wal-Asr) – note: Oaths and swearing in the Qur'an are used in the context of witnessing.
 - ii. Next ayaat begins with Inna (verily)
 - iii. Lafee khusr – lam adds even greater emphasis.
 - b. A sidetrack on tadabbur of 'Asr':
 - i. Time is the fourth dimension of space
 - ii. Other Qur'anic language referring to time – surat ad-dhahur.
 - 1. Both Asr and Dhahur connote time and space element.
 - 2. Asr: time element is more emphasized
 - 3. Dhahur: space element is more emphasized.
 - iii. Philosophically, time is difficult to define. Two types:
 - 1. Serial Time: past, present, future (therefore, asr – connotes fleeting time)

2. Pure duration: absolute time
- iv. Also, asr may refer to past civilizations – their rise and fall.
 1. Allah and time are witness to the fact that all humans/civilizations are doomed except those who believed, did good deeds, stood for truth and patience/perseverance.