

Chapter 103, Al-Asr (The Time)

Description: A short chapter revealed in the early period of Mecca consisting of only three verses. It summarizes the path to success in a few words.

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Verses 1-2 The condition of the disbelievers

At every moment we are advancing towards our death. This means that if a person does not utilize his time available to him for things that really matter, he will finally face total destruction. In order to be successful, a person has to exert himself, while for failure he has to do nothing. It is rushing towards him anyways.



The biggest asset, which God has given to each and every individual evenly is time, twenty-four hours a day, no more no less, whether you are rich or poor, young or old, living in the east or in the west. It is a treasure that keeps going out of our hands, slipping away into a place from where we cannot bring it back. The only way to avoid losing this treasure is to use it; every moment is like a jewel and we must buy a good deed with it. The test of life is to see who to buys the most deeds, and the best deeds, pure in intention and excellent in their quality. However, who is going to tell us whether we are buying the right things with our time or are we just collecting worthless trash?

There is a story in classical Islamic literature of a man who understood this chapter by an ice vendor who was shouting in the market, "O people, have mercy on one whose assets are melting away!" This was when people sold their products in the open and refrigerators did not exist. The man then spoke to himself saying that just as ice melts and reduces, the lifespan given to man is fast passing away. If the opportunity is lost in inaction or evil action, this is man's loss.

It is such a deception that instead of asking God for true guidance, we have formed our own opinions about life and think them to be enough as our guiding principles. However, if our ideas and principles don't match with God's commands then what will we gain at the end of the day? This is why God warns us that if we do not turn to Him

for guidance, then it is the greatest loss that we are inflicting on ourselves. Only those people will be saved from loss who have some specific qualities.

Verse 3 The condition of the believers and the basics of salvation

One who utilizes his time properly is one who adopts three courses in the present world. One, is faith, i.e. consciousness of truth or reality and its acceptance. Second, one of virtuous deeds, i.e. doing what is required to be done as a matter of religious duty and abstaining from what is sinful. Third, that of advising people about truth and forbearance. This follows upon a deep realization of truth such that the person becomes its preacher.

Faith is the characteristic by which man, a small creature with a life of short duration in a limited world, attains closeness to the Absolute and Everlasting Originator of the universe and all that exists in it. He thus establishes a link with the whole universe, which springs from that One Origin, with the laws governing it and the powers and potentialities it provides. As a result, he breaks away from the narrow boundaries of his trivial self to the broadness of the universe, from his inadequate power to the great unknown universal energies, and from the limits of his short life to the eternity that God alone comprehends.

What does faith have to do with success or failure? Is being a good person not enough? However, if you think about it, what good can be in a person who denies the Creator and Sustainer?

Can an ungrateful person who takes everything and then denies the Provider be called a good person? The fact is that faith in one God is the root of all goodness. In addition, it is the only motivation for us to be consistently obedient to God and to be unconditionally good to people. However, we cannot remain steadfast on our faith and good deeds unless we make a conscious effort to spread this goodness to others too. Human beings cannot survive in isolation. We can never be entirely independent, neither for our worldly needs nor our spiritual growth. So that is why God has made it a requirement upon us that if we want to save ourselves from loss, then just being good in our own spirit and character is not enough. Rather we will have to cultivate this goodness of faith and good deeds all around us.

Finally, patience ensures our safety. The journey to Paradise is tough, and we cannot reach our destination without patience and perseverance. Therefore, we must help each other to stay determined and focused. Thus, faith, good deeds, and helping each other are the ultimate keys to success.

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