



SURAH AL ASAR

وَالْعَصْرُ إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ
إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَّصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَّصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ

Introduction

This Surah is short but in line with the miraculous nature of the Quran is very comprehensive in its meaning and message. Indeed its message is so comprehensive that Imam Shafi'ee was able to claim

'If people only read and understood Surah Al Asar that would be sufficient for their success'.¹

The Prophet's ﷺ companions were well aware of the meaning and significance of this Surah² and would regularly remind each other of it, such that whenever two companions would meet one would recite this Surah and the other would listen to it and take leave by offering salaam.³

Brief Synopsis

This Surah confirms that the human beings are in a great loss except those who possess four qualities; Imaan, Pious deeds, encourage each other to the truth and encourage each other to show patience.

It is narrated that this Surah was revealed when one of Abu Bakr's ﷺ old friends taunted him that he used to be a great trader but had committed a great loss by becoming Muslim⁴. Upon this comment Allah ﷻ revealed this Surah to counter this claim and explain that it is not the believers who are in loss but those who don't believe!

Most of the Ulama state that it was revealed in Makkah⁵

Detailed Explanation

Allah ﷻ swears by Al Asar.

وَالْعَصْرُ

¹ Tafseer Ibn Katheer, Ruh ul Biyaan and Dhyaa ul Quran

² Dhyaa ul Quran

³ Tafseer Ibn Katheer from Tibraani

⁴ Tafseer Dhyaa ul Quran: Qulla bin Usayd was a great friend of Abu Bakr Sidiq in pre-Islamic days. When he found that Abu Bakr had accepted Islam he came to advise him and bring him to his senses! He said to Abu Bakr that he was a great trader and his every move was profitable but now he had left the deen of his forefathers! (i.e. incurred a great loss). Abu Bakr replied 'Whoever accepts the truth and remains steadfast upon the right is not in loss'.

⁵ Tafseer Dhyaa ul Quran

It is a practice of Allah ﷻ throughout the Quran that when wishing to proclaim a significant fact He takes the oath of something honourable or worthy. Note that the item taken as oath has to be of significance and worth, for no one takes the oath of an insignificant item. It is also possible that previously the human may not have considered the item taken as oath to be significant but the fact that Allah ﷻ took an oath by it reveals to the human that the item is of significance and he should in future consider it to be significant.

A number of interpretations of Al Asar have been mentioned:

The prayer of Asar

This is the most obvious usage of this term and everyone knows the virtue of this prayer for Allah Ta'ala Himself ordered the believers to safeguard the middle prayer, which is commonly interpreted as Asar⁶. The famous companion Ibn Abbaas ؓ has also taken it to mean the Asar prayer.⁷

The Prophet ﷺ also said 'Whosoever Misses the Asar prayer it is as if his family and wealth have been destroyed.'⁸

A woman was once screaming in the paths of Madeenah for people to take her to the Prophet ﷺ, when they did the Prophet ﷺ asked 'What is the matter?' She said 'My husband had gone away and I committed Zinah from which a child was born. In fear I threw the baby into a pot of vinegar until he died. Then I sold on the vinegar. Will my repentance for these sins be accepted?' The Prophet ﷺ replied 'You will be killed for the Zinah and the punishment for killing the child is Hell and in selling the vinegar you have committed a great sin. However I believe that you missed the Asar prayer (all these misfortunes befall due to that).'⁹

Ibn Katheer and Mazhari also confirm that some have taken Al Asar to mean either the prayer of Asar or the time of Asar prayer. Muqaatil said that it was the prayer of Asar. The relevance of taking the oath of the Asar prayer is that the human is in a great loss for missing this prayer.

Time, in general

Al Asar refers to time, in which the human performs good or bad deeds. This is the most famous statement.¹⁰

Some of the Ulama state that Allah has taken the oath of time because for those who reflect time has a great amount of lessons for the human.¹¹ Here time would mean history, i.e. the events that have happened in time, who were successful, who were in loss etc. Even the Quran details events of the past as a source of lessons, how nations were destroyed, how times changed for them, at one time they were on the rise and at another time they were in a great loss.

⁶ Tafseer Ruh ul Biyaan

⁷ Tafseer Ibn Abbaas, although tafseer Mazhari says that he took it to mean time in general.

⁸ Tafseer Ruh ul Biyaan

⁹ Tafseer Ruh ul Biyaan

¹⁰ Tafseer Ibn Katheer.

¹¹ Tafseer Mazhari

‘Time is the greatest witness upon the subject matter being discussed. If you were to look at history you will see that the nations void of these four attributes remained in loss.’¹²

With Allah ﷻ taking the oath of time it reveals the honour of time for a lot of weak willed people blame time for their misfortunes, e.g. they say ‘Times are bad’. Consequently time is honourable and people should not blame it for their perils. Indeed there is a hadith in which it is ordered ‘Do not swear at time for verily Allah, He is Time’.¹³

The time of the Prophet

Although every age comes within the subject of this verse the greatest testimony to its message was the time of the Prophet ﷺ. ‘Those who did not accept his invitation were finished despite their wealth and power ... and those that did accept it and had the four qualities (mentioned in this Surah) became the honour of humanity.’¹⁴

In addition the time of the Prophet ﷺ is most virtuous so Allah Ta’ala takes the oath of the most virtuous period of time. ‘Everyone knows the fadeelah of the Prophet’s ﷺ time over the others.’¹⁵

Tafseer Ruh ul Biyaan states that Asar has been used to describe the time of the Prophet ﷺ because compared to what has preceded the time left for his Prophethood is like the time of Asar before the setting of the sun.

By Time is the culmination of the previous verses of Qasam in which Allah Ta’ala has taken the oath of Al Fajr (morning), evening, As Shams (sun), Al Qamar (moon), night and day. Because this was the last verse of Qasam He ended with the collective term for all these Qasams; time.¹⁶

Verily the human is most definitely in a great loss

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ

The tanween of Khusr denotes a great loss. It is such a great loss that only Allah ﷻ knows the gravity of this loss¹⁷.

All humans are in loss except those who bring imaan¹⁸.

الْإِنْسَانَ

The human is sent onto this earth to earn his Akhirah and so should use, or in other words, trade his limited resources, of time and wealth, to ‘buy’ or earn Akhirah.

However the human wastes his wealth and life in matters that are of no use in Akhirah¹⁹. There can be no greater loss than of those who waste time in leisure, pleasure and in

¹² Tafseer Dhyaa ul Quran

¹³ Tafseer Ruh ul Biyaan

¹⁴ Tafseer Dhyaa ul Quran

¹⁵ Tafseer Ruh ul Biyaan

¹⁶ Tafseer Ruh ul Biyaan

¹⁷ Tafseer Ruh ul Biyaan

¹⁸ Tafseer Ibn Katheer

¹⁹ Tafseer Mazhari

pursuit of material and perishable things. Once spent they can't have a second chance for that time has passed²⁰.

Some Mufasireen state that al-insaan refers to humanity in general and that Alif Laam is for Jins and istigraak²¹. 'The Istisnaa from it is proof that it is Jins and istigraak.'²² All humans are in a state of loss for they are constantly losing their wealth that is their nafs and age.²³

Except those.....

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ

All humans are in loss except those that have four qualities; Imaan, perform pious deeds, encourage each other to the truth and encourage each other to have patience²⁴. It is these people who understand the true purpose of the human and thus use their time and resources to earn Akhirah.

These people are not in loss because they are giving up perishable rubbish for perpetual goodness²⁵. Thus their trade off, this temporary life for eternal Akhirah, was beneficial.²⁶

Who believe

آمَنُوا

The first quality is those spared from loss is that they believe.

They believe in Allah ﷻ and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ²⁷, and the Quran as their guide. They do so with a sincere heart.²⁸ These people know that Allah ﷻ is the true effector.

And perform righteous deeds

وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ

Alongwith belief they perform righteous deeds. They not only believe in their hearts but show the effect of that belief in their physical actions. Some of the Mufasireen²⁹ highlight the distinction between good deeds (hasanaat) and righteous or pious deeds (amal us Saalih); the latter are sincere and pure and a direct result of Imaan; they don't do deeds because they are intrinsically good but do them as a result of their Imaan and obedience to Allah. This negates the acceptance of good deeds undertaken by non-believers or by believers for ulterior motives such as show or the praise of others.

They do acts of obedience privately between them and their Lord³⁰. Their every step in the realm of action and deeds confirms what their heart and tongue proclaim³¹.

²⁰ Tafseer Dhyaa ul Quran

²¹ Tafseer Jalaalayn; Tafseer Ruh ul Biyaan, Tafseer Mazhari, Tafseer Ibn Katheer however Tafseer Ibn Abbaas narrates that AL Insaan refers to the disbelievers for they are the ones in loss. This tafseer is reconcilable with the above because those humans that don't have the mentioned four qualities are mostly disbelievers whilst true should try to acquire such qualities.

²² Tafseer Ruh ul Biyaan

²³ Tafseer Ruh ul Biyaan

²⁴ Tafseer Ibn Katheer

²⁵ Tafseer Ruh ul Biyaan

²⁶ Tafseer Mazhari: because they traded this temporary life for eternal Akhirah

²⁷ Tafseer Ibn Abbaas; Tafseer Dhyaa ul Quran.

²⁸ Tafseer Dhyaa ul Quran

²⁹ For example Tafseer Dhyaa ul Quran

³⁰ Tafseer Ibn Abbaas

³¹ Tafseer Dhyaa ul Quran

And they encourage each other to the truth.

وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ

The first two attributes relate to the individual but the following two attributes prove that the successful pious believer has to have a positive impact on the society around him. 'Who will call a candle that which does not eradicate the darkness around it!....(thus) in his sphere of influence (the successful human) tries to propagate and establish the truth.'³²

تَوَاصَوْا *Tawaaso* means to encourage or remind each other. It is on the scale of tafa'ul and denotes mutuality and co-operation. It's root is wasiya.

Allaama Raagib says that wasiya is to encourage/motivate to action by speech whilst Ibn Manzoor says it is for one person to emphasise an action to another³³.

An attribute of successful humans is that after having Imaan and undertaking pious deeds they encourage one another to the Haqq. A number of interpretations of Haqq have been mentioned:

'Enjoin one another to follow the truth, faith.'³⁴

'Qataada and Hasan said it was the Quran whilst Muqaatil said it referred to Imaan and Tawheed.'³⁵

It is compulsory to order good and prevent evil. Whoever stops doing this will be in loss. The famous hadith in Muslim states that whoever sees evil before him should change it with his hand, if he is unable to do that then with his tongue and if he is unable to do that then he should reject it in his heart and that is weakest form of Imaan. Imam Baghvi in Shar us Sunnah narrates that the Prophet ﷺ said 'The punishment from evil deeds of certain people does not fall upon others except when the other ordinary people see bad before them, have the power to stop it and do not. Then Allah ﷻ punishes both the specific and the ordinary. This hadith is also narrated by Ibn Majah. There is also the statement of Syeduna Abu Bakr Siddiq ؓ 'When sin occurs in a nation and it has the power to change it and does not then listen carefully! Soon a general calamity will befall upon it.'³⁶

And they encourage one another to patience

وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ

Not only do the successful people encourage one another to truth but also encourage one another to be patient. Patience is important because one can only encourage to the truth if one has the ability to withstand the hardships of this path. By being steadfast upon pressures they can become an example to others³⁷.

³² Tafseer Dhyaa ul Quran

³³ Tafseer Dhyaa ul Quran

³⁴ Tafseer Jalaalayn

³⁵ Tafseer Mazhari whilst Ibn Abbaas said it was belief in Tawheed and the Quran. Tafseer Ibn Katheer denoted it as encouraging one another to good.

³⁶ Tafseer Mazhari

³⁷ Tafseer Dhyaa ul Quran

