

Surah 103, al-Asr, Mecca 13

The Quran's text & Yusuf Ali's Translation

وَالْعَصْرِ ﴿١﴾

1. By (the Token of) time (through the Ages),

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ ﴿٢﴾

2. Verily Man is in loss,

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ ...

3. Except such as have

- Faith,
- and do righteous deeds,

... وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ ...

- and (join together) in the mutual teaching of Truth,

وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ ﴿٣﴾

- and of Patience and Constancy.

Muhammad Asad's Translation

CONSIDER the flight of time! 1 (2) **Verily, man is bound to lose himself** (3) **unless** he be of those 2 who attain to faith, and do good works, and enjoin upon one another the keeping to truth, and enjoin upon one another patience in adversity.

Muhammad Pickthall's Translation:

103:3

Save those who believe and do good works, and exhort one another to truth and exhort one another to endurance.

Ali's Comments:

6262. Al-Asr may mean:

(1) Time through the Ages, or long periods, in which case it comes near to the abstract idea of Time, **Dahr**;

(2) or the late afternoon, from which the **Asr** canonical prayer takes its name (see n. 271 to 2:238).

An appeal is made to Time as one of the creations of Allah, of which everyone knows something but of which no one can fully explain the exact significance.

Time searches out and destroys everything material. No one in secular literature has expressed the tyranny of "never-resting Time" better than Shakespeare in his Sonnets.

For example, see Sonnets 5 ("never-resting Time"), 12 ("Nothing against Time's scythe can make defense"), and 64 ("When I have

seen by Time's fell hand defaced The rich proud cost of outworn buried age").

If we merely run a race against Time, we shall lose. It is the spiritual part of us that conquers Time. See verse 3 below.

For the "afternoon" idea see next note.

6263. If life be considered under the metaphor of a business bargain, man, by merely attending to his material gains, will lose. When he makes up his day's account in the afternoon, it will show a loss.

It will only show profit if he has Faith, leads a good life, and contributes to social welfare by directing and encouraging other people on the Path of Truth and Constancy.

6264. Faith is his armour, which wards off the wounds of the material world; and his righteous life is his positive contribution to spiritual ascent.

6265. If he lived only for himself, he would not fulfil his whole duty. Whatever good he has, especially in moral and spiritual life, he must spread among his brethren, so that they may see the Truth and stand by it in patient hope and unshaken constancy amidst all the storm and stress of outer life. For he and they will then have attained Peace within.

Asad's comments:

1 The term "asr denotes "time" that is measurable, consisting of a succession of periods (in distinction from dahr, which signifies "unlimited time", without beginning or end: i.e., "time absolute").

Hence, asr bears the connotation of the passing or the flight of time - time which can never be recaptured.

2 Lit., "man is indeed in [a state of] loss, except those. . .",etc