

## MODULE 5

**Class Title:** Surah Al-‘Asr

**Aim of the lesson:** To understand the message of the *surah*

**Category:** Scripture

**Lesson Format:** Power point presentation with discussion

(Greeting to students) *Assalamu ‘alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*

(*Ta’awwudh*) *A’oodhu billahi min Ash Shaytaanir Rajeem*

(*Tasmiyah*) *Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*

(*Du’a*) *Rabbish rahli sadri wa yassirli amri wahlul ‘uqdatum millisani yafqahu qawli* [Surah Ta-Ha 20: Verses 25-28]

Slides 1 – 4:

Surah Al-‘Asr. This is how it begins:

*Bismillah ir Rahmanir Raheem*

*Wal ‘Asr:* I swear by time.

*Innal insaana la fee khusr:* No doubt that human being is in loss.

*Illal ladheena aamanu:* except for those who have believed,

*Wa ‘amilus saalihaat:* and done righteous deeds,

*wa tawa sau bil haqqi:* and advised each other to truth,

*wa tawa sau bis sabr:* And advised each other to patience.

That’s the translation of this *surah*; three *ayaat*. It is one of the shortest *surahs* of the Qur-an but very powerful.

There are actually scholars who have written thick books on just this *surah*; it’s so powerful. Some of the scholars have even said that just understanding this particular *surah* can be enough for one’s salvation. So it is a very important *surah* and I think for all of us sitting in this class, it’s going to be a while before we manage to study the Qur-an cover to cover. Let’s take this *surah* very seriously and understand what Allah (swt) is trying to tell us in these very few words.

First let’s just focus on the exceptions. We know that Allah (swt) is swearing by time and Allah (swt) is giving a very general statement that no doubt, the human being is in loss. Nothing difficult to understand in this!

Then Allah (swt) gives the exceptions: there are four exceptions. He says that the ones who will not be in loss, in *khusr* are the ones who have believed, done righteous deeds, advised each other to the truth and advised each other to patience. These are the four things that you have to do if you want to save yourself. Now, if you take a look at these four things, the first exception is the one who believed. Belief is what? Faith, your *eemaan*. Can anyone see your *eemaan*? Can you tell what my level of *eemaan* is? Other people can’t tell about your *eemaan*; that’s between you and Allah (swt). Nobody can see it.

Slide 5:

The second thing is doing righteous deeds. Can anyone see your righteous deeds? Most of the time righteous deeds can be recognized, because they are actions. What constitutes righteous deeds? If I told you that someone does righteous deeds, what actions come to your mind?

We normally think of five times a day prayers, charity, helping the poor, fasting, going for Hajj, staying away from *haraam* deeds, these are generally the things that come to our minds; things that would please Allah (swt).

Slide 6:

Now, after saying righteous deeds, Allah (swt) specifies two particular kinds of deeds; the first is something you can't see, something that's between you and Allah (swt). The second is a very general thing. Allah (swt) just chose two out of so many deeds and pinpointed them as the third and the fourth exception. He said that you have to have *eemaan*, you need to do righteous deeds, and then two specific righteous deeds. What are those? Advising each other to truth and advising each other to patience. Why these two? I'm going to leave this discussion here and proceed, till we come to the conclusion of why these two are important. I want to keep the air of suspense in the class for a bit.

Slides 7 - 12:

If you would look at the four exceptions, Allah (swt) says that the one who has believed **and** did righteous deeds **and** advised each other to truth **and** advised each other to patience. Do you see these 'and's coming? What do they imply? That you have to do all of them; Allah (swt) did not say that one who believed **or** did righteous deeds, **or**... He said **and**. This *wow* (Arabic letter) that you see in the beginning of '*amilus saalihaat, tawasau bil haqq, and tawasau bis sabr*, means **and**.

So Allah (swt) is saying that you need to do one AND two AND three AND four. Can any one of us, on the Day of Judgement, say that at least I did the first three, give me some credit for it? We will not be able to say this, because Allah (swt) is saying that everybody will be in loss, except the ones who do number one AND two AND three AND four. Meaning all four are very important for our survival, our salvation. Are we clear on this?

Slides 13 - 15:

Now, the other thing that I would like to discuss today is the difference between exception and general principles. Can anyone tell me what the difference is between a general principle and an exception?

If I say that this is the general principle for anything, and this is the exception, what do you think is more in number; the general principle or the exception? For example, if I say, everybody came to the class today except for so and so, so and so and so and so; the three of them, so what am I implying? Who are coming in the general principle? The majority or the minority? The majority.

What if I say that nobody came to the class today, except for Meher, Aila, Zeenat and Sana? What am I trying to imply? That the majority came or didn't come?

They didn't come. So the exceptions are always few and the people qualifying in the category of the general principle will always be more. This is the relationship between general principle and exception.

Now, in this particular *surah*, Allah (swt) is saying *Innal insaana lafi khusr*. Meaning, human beings are immersed in loss; that's a general principle. Then He says, *illa*; *Illa* means except. Then He talks about exceptions; who are these exceptions? The exceptions are the ones who have these four qualities: they believe, they have righteous deeds – *tawasau bil haqq and tawasau bis sabr*.

What Allah (swt) is trying to tell us is that very few people have these qualities, and they will be the only ones who will be saved on the Day of Judgement. What should be the reaction to all this? There can be two reactions; either you can say, "That's not fair, Allah (swt) made us like this. If most of us are thrown into the Hell fire, it is Allah's (swt) problem, how can He throw most of His creation in the Hellfire? There's something wrong in the way we've been made." That's one attitude.

The other attitude, a more positive attitude, is to pray to Allah (swt) that He makes you one of them. Make me one of the exceptions. Rather than challenging Allah (swt) or doubting what Allah (SwT) has said in such clear words, what do we need to do? We need to pray to Allah (swt) right now that may He (swt) make all of us fall in the category of the exceptions.

Slides 16 - 18:

This *surah* talks about what we call in simple words, passing grades. There are some people who get 85, and then some who get 95, and then some who get 100. Somebody gets an A, others get a B and some get a C in their exams. Then there is the person who barely survived and didn't fail; this *surah* is talking about that person. This *surah* is talking about survival. It's not talking about the ones who got As and Bs. It is talking about the ones who get just the passing grade; just 65 This is what it is focusing on.

Slides 19 - 21:

When we talk about survival, there's another concept that has to be very clear in our minds; that is the relationship between success and survival. This particular *surah* is about survival, it's not about success. What is the difference? When your survival is in question, you forget about everything else. When you are, for example, drowning in water, when you're in a building that is on fire, when there is a danger headed on your way, when your survival is in question; the one thing that you don't think about is success.

For example, you are having a conversation with your teacher in your school and you're convincing her that you actually qualify for an A grade and she has given you a few marks less. All of a sudden, God forbid, you come to know that the school building is on fire. Now, are you

going to insist on continuing your conversation regarding the A grade? Do you think anybody would do that? It's common sense; you cannot talk about success unless you secure your survival. So before we talk about higher levels of Paradise, and *Jannah*, what we need to evaluate is, are we actually surviving? Are we falling in the category of the ones who are passing, or are we failures? That should be our first concern.

Allah (swt) is making very clear to us that anybody who has these four qualities will qualify, right? The rest of them will be thrown into the Hellfire. When I read Surah Al-'Asr, am I going to think how many Muslims are there? How many are going to qualify? Will that be my concern? No. My concern will be, will I pass or not? I'm going to be worried about me. Am I falling in that category of exceptions or not? That should be my concern.

Slide 22:

Now, another way of looking at this particular *surah* is that the same school building, God forbid, is on fire and there is a door to exit from; the door to the exit has four locks. To save yourself, you need to open the locks. This *surah* tells you what those four locks are; your *eemaan*, do righteous deeds, how much you help each other out in good deeds and the fourth thing is to have patience. This is what this profound *surah* is about.

Slides 23 - 24:

What are the first two things that Allah (swt) says that you are in loss without? Belief and righteous deeds. Are these for the benefit of other people or yourself? When you do righteous deeds, when you have a good level of *eemaan*, is it for yourself, or for people around you? They are concerned with you and Allah (swt). But the other two are for others; enjoining the truth and enjoining patience. For these two things, you need to focus on people around you, your loved ones, your friends, and your family. What we need to realize is that it is necessary to have concern for others, in the quest of our own salvation.

Slide 25:

In order to survive ourselves, we can't remain in this bubble, in this little circle that we have for ourselves. We can't forget about what the other Muslims are doing. You can't do that. Just being a practicing Muslim, and having a couple of good people around you, is not enough for your salvation because you're just doing two of the things. All four are a must. Are you focusing on other people? When you say *Wa tawasau bil haqq, wa tawasau bis sabr*, what all is included in it? Teaching others, encouraging others to do the right things to please Allah (swt); that's the third prerequisite. The fourth prerequisite is that even if they react badly, or if they don't listen to you; even if they make fun of you, even if you get tired of doing it again and again, you must still be patient about it. No matter what hardships you have, when you tell other people and encourage your friends, family and relatives to do good, you must do *sabr*. If your friends get upset with you, people tell you that it's none of your business whether they offer their *salah* or not, you need to show patience.

So the first two are for you, and the other two are for other people.

Slide 26:

We've talked about two things, survival and success. I would like to talk a little more about success. All human beings have some kind of understanding of the meaning of success.

Slide 27:

For example, most of you might feel that success means getting good grades. For a lot of you, it could be good looks, or the right sort of friends. For your fathers on the other hand, it could be something like getting a good job or a good car, maybe a promotion. For your mother, or women, it could be something like getting a bigger, more beautiful house, more money. The criteria of success can be different for all of us.

Slide 28:

Let me just give you an example. You go to a party and you see this girl with a great figure; she's dressed up in just the right clothes, she talks very confidently, she's got just the right people around her, she carries herself very well. Will your eyes remain on her for a minute, for half a minute? For 15 seconds? Will you have that "Wow" expression on your face? If she's drop-dead gorgeous, she's wearing this amazingly beautiful dress and talks so smoothly; the way she carries herself and the way she's got just the right people around her...

Slide 29:

Even if we don't agree with it, this is how we will react; because somewhere in our mind, without realizing it we will be thinking that this person has actually reached a milestone of success. We might not even say it to ourselves, we might not even use the word success for that girl, but this is the reason we actually looked at her attentively.

The resistance that is coming right now is mainly because we're sitting at Perceptions; if any teacher walking in would ask what is your criteria for success, the first thing that comes to our mind is *Jannah*. This is because we are sitting in a religious class, the moment we step out, we have a very different way of thinking.

Slides 30 - 31:

Kids are more honest than us. We still try and keep our egos before we admit that this is a "wow" thing for us. Ask any 9 or 10 year old that if we're going down a road, and we see a beggar living in a cardboard box and just next to this beggar there is a huge mansion with a rich guy living inside, who do you think is successful? What do you think he'll say? Does anyone think that the child will say that the beggar in the cardboard box is successful? I would really like to meet such a child, because I don't think any 10 year old can tell you that the man living in the mansion is a failure; obviously the guy who is in the mansion seems successful. Let's just face it; there's nothing wrong with it, it's a very normal reaction. Outside the house, in your school, your criteria for success are totally different; the frequency or the wavelength that we have right now in this class is about *Jannah*, about *salah*, and *zakah*. I get faster responses to these religious

questions. But if I talk about somebody dressed up nicely or a wealthy guy, you feel like there's a catch somewhere; you wonder if I mean it when I say that the wealthy guy is successful, or that a good-looking girl can be successful?

Slide 32:

But what we learn in this *surah* is something very, very radical. We learn that all of these are not the measures of success or failure. They have nothing to do with success and nothing to do with failure.

Slides 33 - 34:

We are human beings. We all think in the same manner and this is human psychology; this is success for us. There was this TV show by the name of 'Celebrity Cribbs'; has anyone seen that show? They go to different multibillion dollar homes and people show their homes and talk about their lifestyles. Who do you think had that special celebrity crib in the time of Musa (as)? That's right; *Firawn* - the Pharaoh. He was the one who had this beautiful house. It's still there. But tell me, would you call him successful? You wouldn't; he's the biggest example of failure there is.

Slide 35:

Have you heard about Qaroon? He was a very wealthy guy. He was so wealthy that people had to carry the key to his vault. Forget the kind of vault he had. People had to carry the keys to the vault. He was so rich, but he too was a horrible failure.

Slide 36:

How would you feel if one of your close relatives or cousins got deported from America, Canada, or the UK? Would you be proud of them? You'd be embarrassed; but what happened to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)? He was literally deported from Makkah.

Another example: let's say you come to know that an acquaintance was kicked out of his house. What kind of impression will you have of that person? What did he do that the parents couldn't tolerate it and had to kick him out? That's the first thought that should be coming to anyone's mind. If this boy can't get along with the parents or the family members, who else can he or she get along with? The Messenger (saw) however, did have to live in a cave, eating off the shrubs. The greatest example of success, and yet he was made to live in such conditions.

Slide 37:

What happened to Ibrahim (as)? He was kicked out of his house and yet, he's the greatest example of human success in history. Why am I giving you these examples? The reason is that the criteria that we have for success is not the kind of criteria that Allah (swt) wants us to have. Allah (swt) talks about something very radical in this *surah*; in order to understand that, we need to understand human psychology.

Slide 38:

Look at this image. Think about which fish is displaying normal behavior; the red one or the blue ones? The blue ones. Why? Because in psychology, 'normal behavior' is the behavior that everyone displays. What is abnormal behavior? That which is out of the norm; what none or very few of the others are doing. Despite that, what is Allah (swt) telling us in Surah Al-'Asr? That the majority of people will be losers. Do you see the contradiction?

Slide 39:

In today's age, we are told over and over again what success is and it's the wrong definition of success that is being bombarded on us.

Slide 40:

You cannot so much as turn on your computer without something popping up to tell you that you need to buy that latest designer bag. You are constantly reminded what school to go to if you want to be successful, what kind of neighborhood you have to live in if you want to be successful, what kind of job you must have if you want to be successful, what kind of husbands, or families you should marry into if you want to be successful.

What's happening? We're being told constantly, this is success, this is success, and this is success, without using the word success. As a result there is some kind of programming that is taking place, because of which, when we look at this image, we feel that the blue fish are in a better situation than the red one.

Slide 41:

But that's not the case in Islam; that's the whole tragedy. In Islam, Allah (swt) tells us very clearly in Surah Al-'Asr, that the majority is not the authority, because the majority of people will be thrown in the Hellfire; this is something that we really need to understand. The strangest and the most amazing thing is that when everybody around you is not doing what you've been told to do, in the end what happens? You start doubting yourself. You say, "I have to be crazy to do this, because nobody around me is doing it. Maybe I'm the abnormal fish; maybe I need to change my direction, because if I were right, I would have had people around me. They come from good families; they think logically, they're very sensible people, how come they can't see what I'm getting at? Maybe I'm not getting it correctly." Right?

So again, think about Surah Al-'Asr:

*Innal insana lafi khusr.* Majority of human beings will be thrown in the Hellfire.

Where does this logic go then? When Allah (swt) says that the majority will be thrown in the fire, do we still doubt it? Yes we still doubt it, because of this society that we live in. That is the aspect of Surah Al-'Asr that I wanted to share with you.

Slide 42:

This world has nothing to do with success; that is not to say that this world is evil. After all, Allah (swt) says in the Qur-an that He created for you whatever there is on this Earth. But then how do we reconcile these two things? Having wealth is not a bad thing, having a nice car is not a bad thing, having pretty clothes is not a bad thing, but if you think that that is success, then you have failed.

Slide 43:

Having *dunya* is not a problem; loving *dunya* too much is a problem. Allah (swt) does not talk against the one who has *dunya*, He (swt) talks about the one who gives preference to this worldly life. You can be very wealthy and still not be in loss if your preference is the hereafter and you can be very poor and still have *dunya* in your heart and you will still be a loser. So that's the issue of success versus survival.

Slide 44:

I would like to talk about the imagery in this *surah* and what Allah (swt) is trying to tell you; *inshaAllah* this will make the message very clear to you.

Close your eyes and imagine that you are drowning and you have lost consciousness; do you think you have a lot of time? No, you don't have much time. Do you know what word is used in Arabic for time that is running out? It is *Al- 'Asr*. It is the last part of the day when the day is finishing; running out of time. So in such a situation, you need to act immediately, right?

Slide 45:

What is the first thing that you need to do if you want to save yourself? You need to regain consciousness; you need to wake up and realize that you are drowning; that if you don't do anything about it right now, you will be dead!

Slide 46:

Now let's say you have woken up; you wake up and you realize that you're drowning. Now imagine that you were having this wonderful dream about being in a Ferrari; you see these advertisements about cars like Ferraris with good-looking people driving away in cars with perhaps mountains on one side and the ocean on the other, really enjoying their lives. So you wake up, and let's say you were having this dream, that you're driving this Ferrari and having a great time.

Slide 47:

You wake up and realize that you're actually in a pitiful state! You think, let me just go back to sleep, it was such a good dream; I want to be back in my dream! If you said that, what kind of a



person would you be? Yes! You'd be insane! Nobody would think like that; despite the fact that you woke up, you want to sleep again and die? You have to be crazy, right?

Slide 48:

So, what do you need to do? What is the right thing to do when you wake up? The first step was to wake up. What is the second thing that you need to do? You need to realize that this is a really bad situation for you and you need to do something about it. Even if you don't know how to swim, are you not going to flex each and every muscle in your body to make sure that you make it to the surface? So what would be a logical step for any person who wakes up, drowning? To try and swim upwards, even if you don't know how to swim, you'll try and save your life.

Slide 49:

Let's say you reach the surface and you gasp for air, but the moment you breathe in, guess what happens? You get pulled down in the water again. You're not going to believe this; you get pulled down because your foot was tied to a rope and you were tied up with a friend or relative of yours and this time you're drowning because your friend or relative is pulling you down! That person is unconscious too and since he's not making any effort, he's sinking and so are you.

Realizing that you need to wake up is referring to Belief; believing that you are in loss, you're drowning and you're going to die.

The second thing was swimming upwards. That is referring to doing righteous deeds.

Slide 50:

Then you get sucked in again. So what do you need to do now? You're going to wake up your relative. Let's say this relative of yours also gives you the story about the Ferrari dream and wants to go back to sleep. You remind her of the reality; you say, "We are drowning! We are dying!" Yet if he does not want to wake up, will you say, "Well sure. Suit yourself? I didn't like you anyways. So you can drown?" Can any sane person say that?

Slide 51:

No, because if he drowns, you will drown with him too! You are being a little selfish, but even if you don't like him, you have to wake him up. If he drowns, you'll drown with him. You are in loss too! So, *tawasau bil haqq*; you have to tell people around you, your friends, relatives, and all near and dear ones what they need to know. Tell them if what they're doing is wrong. Tell them that they need to offer their prayers; we are Muslims.

Slide 52:

Keep telling them, until when? Until this relative of yours finally wakes up and says, what do you want me to do? You'll say, let's just swim upwards, let's go to the surface; the two of us can survive. So the two of you swim upwards to the surface, but the moment you reach the surface

and you gasp for air, what happens? You get sucked in again by your grandma or cousin or *khaala* (maternal aunt), or another friend. Why? Because she's unconscious and this time, she's pulling you down. Then you have to repeat the whole exercise again. How long do you think this will carry on? It will carry on till you are alive. This is a test coming from Allah (swt).

Slide 53:

The third exception was '*tawasau bil haqq*': keep telling people, keep waking them up. What do you think will happen eventually? Let's say that you are doing the first three things and you keep telling people around you, this is the right thing, you should do this and you should do that; what will finally happen? Finally you'll get sick of it. You'll get tired and say, I can't do this anymore, I'm tired.

Slide 54:

Have you seen those movies where there is a base camp and some of the men are trying to escape, but one of them becomes really tired and says that he can't do this anymore and tells the others to carry on? What do the rest of them say? "No brother, we're going to make it. Together." Why? Because their own survival is at stake. We need to have that kind of attitude towards people around us.

Slide 55:

To sum up what we've done so far; first of all, He (swt) says time is running out, then He (swt) says all human beings are drowned in loss. Do you see the parallel? Who are the exceptions? Those who believed; believed what? According to the context of this *surah*, what is the first thing that they have to believe?

Slide 56:

That they are in loss; that they are drowning. And if they do come to believe that and they correct their *eemaan*, what is necessarily going to happen? They will swim and move upwards. How does Allah (swt) describe this action? They do good "deeds." They do things that help to reconcile the situation.

Slide 57:

Then they have to tell others about the truth; and it is not just telling them about the truth, they have to wake them up and they have to do this over and over again.

Slide 58:

Do you know why? Because even if you succeed in waking up people temporarily for 20 min., 30 min. during a *dars*, guess what happens when the preaching is done? They go back to sleep. They start drowning again. So what do you have to do? You have to go and wake them up again.

Slide 59:

Then a time will come when you'll say, "I can't do this anymore, I can't take the kind of reaction I'm getting from other people, after all, I've got my self-esteem; why should I take this, I've told him once, that's enough. If he's not listening, let him die." Can you do that, in that situation? I told him, I tried to wake him up, he's not waking up and that's enough. I've done all I could, I've played my role. You keep trying again and again because your own survival is at stake.

Eventually we become tired and that is the reason that in the end Allah (swt) puts the fourth exception: *wa tawasau bis sabr*: you will have to have patience; you will have to have patience for people around you, because they're going to say all sorts of things to you. Some of them will not even listen to you; they could be your friends, your children, your parents, or even your grandmother. It can be anybody around you. But if you want to survive, you will have to keep telling them, even if they don't like it.

That does not mean that you take a hammer in your hand and start banging on other peoples' heads to wake them up; you have to do it with a lot of wisdom, with a lot of *hikmah*. You will learn by doing it again and again. When we keep practicing by telling people, slowly and gradually we learn what works for them, how they will understand what you're trying to say.

Slide 60:

In the end, if you do all of these things but you have no patience and you give up, you drown too. You see the logical progression from *eemaan* to good deeds to telling people about the truth and encouraging patience? It is beautifully articulated in this *surah*.

Slide 61:

What Allah (swt) is talking about, is our own survival; literally our own escape from the hellfire, our own escape from the impending loss in this world and then in the next. But keep in mind that this *surah* is first and foremost about this *dunya*. How do we know this? Allah (swt) uses the words *wal 'asr*, time that is running out. In which world is this time running out; this world or the next? In this world; in the next world there is no time running out. Either you are in *Jannah* or in the Hellfire. May Allah (swt) not make us from the people of the fire.

Slides 62:

In the end I would like to talk about a very ironical thing. Do you know what the irony of Surah Al-'Asr is? How many of you actually know it by heart? There are times when we are running late, for example we have to go shopping or to our friend's house. We quickly do a hit and run *salah*. That is unfortunately the time that we recite Surah Al-'Asr. It tells us that time is running out; we need to take our lives seriously. Why do we choose Surah Al-'Asr at such times however? Because it's a short *surah*. We recite Surah Al-'Asr and say: *Innal insaana lafi khusr. Illal ladheena amanu wa 'amilus sawlehaati wa tawasau bil haqqi wa tawasau bis sabr*. What are we saying? Do you see the irony of it? Such a powerful *surah*, it should turn our lives upside down and we use the same *surah* for the fastest *salah* that we want to pray. When we recite this

*surah* in our *salah*, we should keep in mind the meaning too; we must assess ourselves whether we are really qualifying for *Jannah*.

Slide 63:

In our homes we have calligraphies of this *surah* right next to the TV or the DVD player where we sit and watch TV for hours and it says right there, in our faces, human beings are in loss; time is being drained away from all of this. This is the *surah* to understand and it is basically the heart of the entire Qur-an.

Slide 64:

May Allah (swt) enable us to embed its powerful message into our hearts and enable us to communicate it to others, especially our families and friends.

(*Du'a* for end of a gathering) *Subhana Rabbika Rabbul 'Izzati 'amma yasifun wa salaamun 'alal mursaleen, walhamdulillahi Rabbil 'aalameen*

(Parting salutation to students) *Assalamu 'alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*

**References:**

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