

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: SŪRAT *Al-‘Asr*, 103.

This early Makkan Sūra refers to the testimony of Time through the Ages. All history show that Evil came to an evil end. But Time is always in favour of those who have Faith, live clean and pure lives, and know how to wait, in patience and constancy. *Cf.* the theme of S. xcv.

Al-'Asr, or Time through the Ages.

*In the name of Allah, Most Gracious,
Most Merciful.*

1. By the time,⁶²⁶²
2. Verily Man
Is in loss,⁶²⁶³
3. Except such as have Faith,
And do righteous deeds,⁶²⁶⁴
And (join together)⁶²⁶⁵
In the mutual enjoining
Of Truth, and of
Patience and Constancy.

سُورَةُ الْعَصْرِ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالْعَصْرِ

إِنِّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا

بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ

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 ii: 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 gainst Time's scythe can make defence"), 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.

APPENDIX NO. 7

Oaths and Adjurations in the Qur-ân

1. An oath is an invocation of the name of Allah or of some person or object held sacred by the person using the invocation, to witness the truth of a solemn affirmation and to emphasize that affirmation.

2. An adjuration is a solemn appeal to a person or persons to do some act or to believe some important statement by the evidence of something great or sublime or remarkable or out of the ordinary.

3. On these subjects as thus defined, let us review the teaching of the holy Qur-ân.

4. Among the Pagan Arabs the use of oaths became so common that it almost ceased to have any solemn meaning. On the other hand, when they wanted to suppress the rights of women or do some unjust acts, they would resort to an oath to do so, and then plead that they were bound by their oath when pressure was brought to bear on them to desist from their injustice. Thus, they doubly dishonoured oaths: they took the name of Allah lightly, and on the other hand, they made an oath an excuse for not doing what was right and just. It is much to be feared that our own contemporaries are not free from such forms of disrespect to Allah.

5. Such practices are condemned in the strongest terms in the Qur-ân. "Make not Allah's name an excuse in your oaths against doing good, or acting rightly, or making peace between persons" ii. 224). Perjury is condemned as deception which hurts both the deceiver and the deceived. "Take not your oaths to practise deception between yourselves, with the result that someone's foot may slip after it was firmly planted, and ye may have to taste the evil consequences of having hindered men from the Path of Allah, and a mighty Wrath descend on you" (xvi. 94). See also iii. 77. You must not only fulfil your oaths, but you must fulfil all covenants, express or implied, and all your obligations of every kind, without reference to an oath: v. 1, n. 682.

6. Considering the harm caused by thoughtless oaths, in which there was no intention to deceive or to do wrong, it is provided that they may be expiated for. "Allah will not call you to account for what is futile in your oaths, but He will call you to account for your deliberate oaths: for expiation feed ten indigent persons....or clothe them, or give a slave his freedom. If that is beyond your means, fast for three days. That is the expiation for the oaths ye have sworn. But keep to your oaths" (v. 89). See also ii. 225 and lxi. 2.

7. Some examples may be cited of the false oaths which were used for deception. The Hypocrites, "in whose hearts is a disease", "swore their strongest oaths by Allah" that they would be with the Muslims, but treachery was in their hearts (v. 52-53). See also xxiv. 53. On the other hand, the oath of Joseph's wicked brethren, "By Allah!", in speaking to their father, xii. 85), seems to be a mere expletive, used lightly, and therefore worthy of condemnation.

8. In passages like the following, the oath seems to be emphatic and solemn as in a court of law:-

- xii. 66 ... By Joseph's brethren, at Jacob's request.
- xii. 73 ... By Joseph's brethren, to the Egyptians.
- xxii. 57 ... By Abraham, to the Polytheists.
- xxvi. 97 ... By the denizens of Hell, when they realise their wrong.
- xxxvii. 56 ... By the righteous one in heaven, when he realises the great danger he escaped in life.
- xxxviii. 82 ... By the Power of Evil, who solemnly swears by the power of Allah.
- xlvi. 34 ... By the denizens of Hell, when they realise the Truth.

9. In the following passages addressed by Allah to men, an appeal is made to man's realisation of Allah's own greatness, goodness, and glory, or Allah's special relationship to man as Creator, Cherisher, and Protector, to teach him the lesson of truth and right conduct. In English phrase it might be rendered: "As I am thy Lord Allah, believe in Me and follow My Word."

- iv. 65 ... "By thy Lord" (they can have no real faith until...).
- xv. 92 ... "By thy Lord" (We will call them to account).
- xvi. 56 ... "By Allah" (ye shall be called to account).
- xvi. 63 ... "By Allah" (We sent apostles).
- xix. 68 ... "By thy Lord" (We shall gather them together).
- xxiv. 3 ... "By my Lord" (said by the Prophet to assure men of the coming of the Hour of Judgment).
- lxiv. 7 ... Do. Do.
- li. 23 ... "By the Lord of heaven on earth" (this is the very Truth). See also lxx. 40 (paragraph 12 below).

10. Another way in which an appeal is made to men is by the evidence of the life of the Holy Prophet, whose truth and purity were known to them, or by the holy Qur-ān, whose wonderful power over men's hearts was a miracle which they witnessed before their eyes:-

- xv. 72 ... "By thy life" (to enforce the lesson of the unspeakable crime of Lot's people).

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| xxxvi. | 2 | ... | "By the Qur-ān, Full of Wisdom" | (to show the Prophet's inspiration). |
| xxxviii. | 1 | ... | "By the Qur-ān, Full of admonition" | (to show the error of the Unbelievers). |
| xl.iii. | 2 | ... | "By the Book that Makes things clear" | (to show that Revelation is reason- able and conformable to truth). |
| xliv. | 2 | ... | ...Do... |Do.... |
| l. | 1 | ... | "By the Glorious Qur-ān". | (to quell the wonder of the ignorant). |

11. Now we come to the great passages in the Makkan Sūras, in which men are adjured to turn to the wonders of the spiritual world by striking phrases full of sublimity, and using the wonders of the heavens and the earth by way of illustration. They are the despair of the translator, because the words used are widely comprehensive, with little that is precise in them. There are layers upon layers of meaning, and only the profoundest spiritual experience can probe their depths. An attempt has been made in the notes to analyse and explain some of their meanings. All that we can do here is to bring them together into juxtaposition, to help the earnest student. They may be divided into three categories: (1) those introduced by the words "*Lā uqismu*" (I do swear or I do call to witness), (2) those introduced by the particle *wa*, which is the general form of adjuration, and (3) those, mainly concerned with the Judgment to come, which are introduced by the adverb "*izā*" (when).

12. *Lā Uqsimu* (with the first person singular) implies that special attention is drawn to something by a personal and beneficent God, and an appeal is made to His creatures:-

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| lvi. | 75 | ... | "The setting of the stars." | Other glories may set, but not the glory of Revelation. |
| lxix. | 38 | ... | "What ye see and what ye see not." | Revelation is good for both outer and inner life. |
| lxx. | 40 | ... | "The Lord of all points in the East and the West." | Allah's Kingdom extends everywhere. |
| lxxv. | 1-2 | ... | "The Resurrection Day and the self-reproaching spirit." | Evil should be eschewed. |
| lxxxi. | 15-18 | ... | "Planets, Night, and spirit." | Nature may vary, but Allah's Light is ever the same. |
| lxxxiv. | 16-18 | ... | "The ruddy glow of sunset, the Night, the Moon." | Man must travel from stage to stage. |

xc. 1-3 ... "This City (of Makkah) Man is created for toil and struggle, but Allah has given him guidance.

13. The great Signs, introduced by the particle *wa*, by which man is adjured to turn to the higher life, are rich in suggestive imagery, which loses part of its charm by any attempt at precise definition:-

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| xxxvii. | 1 | ... | "By those who range themselves in ranks". |
| li. | 1-4 | ... | "By the (Winds) that scatter broadcast" etc. |
| li. | 7 | ... | "By the heaven with its numerous Paths" etc. |
| lii. | 1-6 | ... | "By the Mount (of Revelation)" etc. |
| liii. | 1 | ... | "By the Star when it goes down." |
| lviii. | 1 | ... | "By the Pen and by the Record which men write". |
| lxxiv. | 32-34 | ... | "By the Moon, the Night, the Dawn". |
| lxxvii. | 1-5 | ... | "By the (Winds) sent forth (to man's profit)" etc. |
| lxxix. | 1-5 | ... | "By the (angles) who tear out" etc. |
| lxxxv. | 1-3 | ... | "By the Sky (displaying) the Zodiacal Signs" etc. |
| lxxxvi. | 1 | ... | "By the Sky and the Night-Visitant (therein)". |
| lxxxvi. | 11-12 | ... | "By the Firmament which returns (in its round), and by the Earth" etc. |
| lxxxix. | 1-5 | ... | "By the Break of Day", etc. |
| xc. | 1-8 | ... | "By the Sun and its (glorious) splendour, By the Soul..." etc. |
| xcii. | 1-3 | ... | "By the Night as it conceals (the light); By the Day as it appears in glory" etc. |
| xciii. | 1-3 | ... | "By the Fig and the Olive" etc. |
| c. | 1-5 | ... | "By the (Steeds) that run with panting breath" etc. |
| ciii. | 1 | ... | "By (the Token of) Time (through the Ages)". |

14. The great Signs introduced by the adverb "when" (*izā*) do not *in form* belong to the category of Adjurations, but their meaning and imagery bring them within this category. They refer to the end of the present order of things, and the inauguration of the new world of perfect eternal values, but they need not necessarily be understood in a definite sequence of time such as we know it, for the spiritual world overlaps the material:-

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| lxxvii. | 8-11 | ... | "When the Stars become dim" etc. |
| lxxx. | 1-13 | ... | "When the Sun is folded up" etc. |
| lxxxii. | 1-4 | ... | "When the Sky is cleft asunder" etc. |
| lxxxiv. | 1-5 | ... | "When the Sky is rent asunder" etc. |
| xcix. | 1-3 | ... | "When the Earth is shaken" etc. |

15. Every Sign is connected with the argument of the passage concerned, by way of metaphor or illustration. See n. 5798 to lxxiv. 32. The appropriate meaning suggested is explained in the notes to each passage as it occurs.