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Khutbah



Title: [The Loss of Human History: A Paradigm Shift?](#)

DVD title: Tafsir on Sūratu-l-Asr  
The Real Significance of Time in How we Live our Life

Opening duas. Bismillah ir Rahman ir Raheem.

Allah Most High said in a very brief *sūrah*, which we have touched on an off over the years:

**By the token of time throughout the ages, truly man is in loss, except such as have faith and do righteous works, and join together in mutual teaching of truth and patience and constancy. (103: 1-3)**

Another translation that Shaykh Nooruddeen gives is,

**I swear by what remains of time that surely the human being is at a loss, except for those who faithfully believe and perform good deeds, and counsel one another to the truth and to steadfast patience. (103:1-3)**

As you know, his translations are a combination of Yusuf Ali, Pickthall and others. Before I dive into that once again, as it applies to us today, I think we need to look at the words a little. “Al- Asr” may mean two things: it may mean time throughout the ages, as it usually is translated. Or it may mean long periods of time, as it comes near to the

abstract idea of *dahr*/time. Or it means late afternoon, like the ‘*asr*’ prayer, which takes its name from that period of time. In this *sūrah* there is an appeal made to time as one of the creations of Allah (swt), which everyone knows something about; but no one can fully explain the real significance of time. It can be experienced, but it’s not easily explainable.

Many things result from time. Time, it is said, “*Searches out and destroys everything material.*” The moment we just sat through while I read has been searched out by time and destroyed. It is never to be recaptured again. It is totally obliterated. The only thing that remains is the memory of what occurred during that time, but that moment is gone. Very few people in non-spiritual literature have expressed the tyranny of never-resting time better than Shakespeare in the Sonnets: “*Nothing against time’s scythe can make defense.*” Do you children know what a scythe is? It’s a big swing blade, and it’s usually associated with death. The Angel of Death carries a big scythe according to Western imagery.

He says also, “*When I have seen by time’s fell hand defaced, the rich proud cost of outworn, buried age.*” It takes time to think about Shakespeare’s language. Many things of the ego come, and many things are very important. But when time comes, they are all destroyed. The beauty is defaced and loses its sharpness. The time in which it took place is now worn and buried. The saying is, “If you try to run a race against time, you lose.” It’s in the spiritual part of this context that we have to understand what conquers time. Allah tells us that if life is to be considered under the metaphor of a contract or bargain in business, human beings by merely attending to their material gains will lose. When he makes up his daily account in the afternoon, it will show a loss. We will only show profit if we have faith, if we lead a good life, and if we contribute to the social well-being of humanity by directing and encouraging other people on the path of truth and constancy.

Because you are leaving a legacy of renewed effort, and renewed social welfare and faith. You are encouraging one another to faith, to good works, so that every moment is filled with faith and good works.

**Except such as have righteous faith and work, and join together in the teaching of what is true, and patience and constancy.**

In this sense, faith is like the armor which wards off the wounds of the material world. We are in battle with the material world and with our *nafs ammāra*. A good life, a righteous life is our contribution to our spiritual growth and ascent. If we live only for our self, we would not fulfill our full duty. But whatever good we have—especially in the ethical, spiritual and social good—we have to spread among our brothers and sisters, so that they may see the truth and stand by it in patience and in hope, with an unshaken sense of effort and constancy in the midst of all of the storms and stresses, the vicissitudes of our day to day life. For this person, for yourself, and for others, you have attained to this *sabr*/patience, perseverance, and peace.

It is just a few lines, and yet it is one of the most powerful *sūrah*s in the whole Qur'an. It's a map of life. It tells us how we should live our life during this token period of time. [It gives us] small evidence of something much greater, and how we have, by the blessings of Allah (swt), certain opportunities. Though we have spoken about this *sūrah* on a number of occasions, in its depth, we have to reflect upon it again. The last time I spoke on it I said, if a person came from another planet and looked at the conditions of the world we live in today (which have been brought to the forefront by the meetings in New York this week at the UN) and they saw the illnesses that beset human beings (and I don't just mean the swine flu or HIV-AIDS), they might draw some very profound conclusions about humanity.

One is that, if the future of humanity is determined by the state of humanity today, the future is not only neurotic but psychotic; not only bi-polar but quadra-polar (whatever that might mean). There is so much unhappiness, pain, hypocrisy, hysteria, and depression in the world today, that person might conclude that the whole history of humanity is a continuing sequence of irrationality, neurosis, psychosis and sometimes well over the line beyond even psychotic behavior: genocidal, absolute madness.

That's a conclusion one might draw from looking at the history of humanity. I guess it depends on where they land. If they landed in a *khanaqah* or this community, they might think something else. But if they took an overview or a scan of humanity and looked at the tendencies of human beings, they might see these pockets of peace or attempted peace in a world of chaos. The interesting thing is it's not what human beings mostly think about themselves. We think we are fine. Or they don't think about themselves in terms of fine or not fine, just in terms of working, surviving, and putting food on the table. We can't say that we represent the majority of human beings—hardly. The majority are in China and India, Indonesia and places like that, not in America and Europe. You only have 500 million people when you add Europe and America together. There are 1 billion or 2 in China, and a billion in India. We can't look at our mentality and say this is what the vast majority of human beings think and feel.

Then look and see how we deal with these issues. Open up a magazine. Turn on a television. Landing on this planet might be a very interesting experience for an alien. Maybe before they land, they scan the advertisements. These are the messages from their gods to them: "Buy this, buy that; do this, do that. Take a cruise here, and take a beta-blocker." (I'm commenting on what their observation might be.) What do we do with this information? What is this *'āyat* telling us? How do we overcome this narcissism,

there neuroses, these psychotic behaviors? Someone from a spaceship might say, “This is a pretty polluted place. Let’s clean it up.” BZZZZ! Everything’s gone. “I’m not going to land there. We might get swine flu and take it back to our planet. Let’s just scan it and get rid of these people. Faster than that, let’s send a couple of our people down to become president of the United States. They’ll screw it up for themselves and never know we were up here watching.”

Is it fair to look at the history of humanity as a series of constant pains inflicted on human beings by one another: injuries, illnesses, purposeful illnesses, vengeance, revenge, conspiracies? We don’t have to look back very far to have a whole panoply of those. Or can we look at humanity as a magnification, not a progression, but a kind of adolescent mentality people never grew out of? Or can we look at humanity as having an opportunity to raise themselves up and reflect upon themselves? What does it take for that to happen? Certainly, it’s a role that religion is supposed to have been playing. Certainly, it’s a role that religion *has* played in the lives of many people, [of getting them] to reflect upon themselves. Is it just about surviving and being healthy, eating organically and living in this community, and making some small contribution to humanity? Is it possible that a small contribution can be truly a large contribution?

Is it possible that there can be a major paradigm shift? If so, what does it take? It seems to take what is said in this *‘āyat*. It seems to take a reflection upon our self, a deepening of faith, and the doing of good deeds and good work. Isn’t it strange that it could be so simple? We have seen nations rise and fall, cultures destroyed and become extinct by the “improvements” made in them, by the people who came to pillage their lands, like the Mayans when the Spanish came to this part of the world. The Parthenon survived for millenniums, until someone stored explosives (modern technology) in it during war, and it blew up. That’s a metaphor for something. The Persians set fire to Athens, the Greeks

to Persepolis, the Germans lay waste to Moscow. The Russians destroyed Berlin (and we helped), and the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. We scorched the earth in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Beirut, Sarajevo, Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan. We sit back and look at the Romans who watched the gladiators, and think they were cruel and crude and barbarians. How do we get out of this situation? I didn't even mention Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

What does it take for us to reflect upon ourselves? Obviously, not that: cruelty is not enough. Genocide is not enough. Greed is not enough. Nothing has been really done in this financial debacle to change anything. Just a little scare and everyone goes back to nothing again, waiting for the next one. Worse than nothing has been done. What does it take? It takes another paradigm. We can't keep operating this paradigm; it doesn't work. If humanity was a car, it would be a lemon. If it was your computer, you'd be throwing it against a wall. If humanity's history teaches you anything, it is that all of it doesn't work.

It's great, and interesting, but you get a guy like Qaddafi who blasts the United Nations—a madman with some strange Bedouin sense in him. You have a Netanyahu who blasts the UN. Could two people at opposite ends of the spectrum both be right? What are they saying? That if this is an organization that's supposed to do what it says it is supposed to do, it has to do it. If it doesn't do it, it has no business being in existence. And they're right. Why? Because the paradigm doesn't work. [You have a] war, and [get] a peace treaty; genocide, and a couple of trials. Who goes on trial? [There is] an investigation into torture, and some low-level colonel goes to jail—not the president, not the vice-president, not the people who made the policy. It's the way it is; it's the “way of the world.” It doesn't work; it is only band-aids.

But Allah has told what works, throughout the centuries. You can do it your way, but it's

not going to work. If you do it this way, it will work. But nobody wants to do it that way. Religion and spirituality get put into the realm of secularism. It gets translated into the realm of the physical world and loses a lot. I can say for sure, that we don't know for sure, that if all those leaders sat under proper guidance and instruction, sincerely in meditation and prayer, that their decisions wouldn't be different—if they had *taqwa*, real fear of Allah. Wouldn't it be nice, “O Allah, if You really wanted us to act according to Your Means and Your Way, that You would give us all just a little peek at hell?” The problem with that is we'd believe we were hallucinating and it wasn't true. But just think if you could get just a little peek at Hell... There *is* another paradigm! There is the paradigm of love and service and good deeds and sincerity, good works, and faith. That's what Allah is telling us, but it's too easy. We have that here. We have it now in Jumah khutbah, or Shabat, or Sabbath, or Sunday.

At the beginning of the *khutbah* I read each time, “Come to Jumah, and leave your trading.” So, in Morocco at the end of the *khutbah* everyone goes running out with their shoes in their hands to get back to their trading. The idea about that is you take what you have and go and be an honest trader. It is not that you take a little bit of time, go to the mosque, pray, and then go back to cheating people and making money. The point is to take a break, remember, and return to being an honest broker.

Ah, but we improve the world we live in. What are we going to do after centuries of fighting in the name of religion for peace, and killing people in the name of peace? There is no God in this, no Judaism, no Christianity, no Islam. None! Allah has been forgotten. The truth has been forgotten, and the name alone remains. We have been told that the time will come when only the name Islam will remain, when up will be down, and wrong will be right. We are certainly skirting the edges of that. Not only do we see religious wrongs, but we have an irreligious society of individuals where the secular liberties are

being carefully excised from society and consequently, they will be forgotten. No matter what label one identifies themselves with, everyone is victimized by this kind of mentality—everyone. We are all suffering because of what’s happening in Iran, in Darfur, in China, in Palestine and in Israel. We are all suffering.

We have great inventions and discoveries. There is a new Iphone. When you take a picture of something, immediately it comes up where you can buy it. The kids were telling me you can hold an Iphone up to a radio and it will tell you who the singer is and the name of the song. How far away are we from holding it up to your face, and getting a complete profile? We’re there! “That’s Shaykh Rashid: he lives at this address, and he wrote the following things.” The new thing is you can comment on it in SideWiki. You can re-write my history. If I don’t correct it, that’s what I’ll be known for. I have a solution: forget about Islam. All you have to do is write a beautiful history of humanity: everything’s fine. There never were any wars. There’s no genocide. Everything’s fine. (Sound like something [you have heard before]?)

In millenniums, what have we discovered? Atomic power, space technology, communications technology, biotechnology. And the victims of our discoveries are us. We are not masters of our discoveries, but victims of them. Should they not have been made? That’s not the point. The point is in what paradigm do they exist? We are like invalids under the sway of our own creation. We see families slaves to their own children. We are more slaves than we are masters. The great Sufi Attar wrote, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, looking at his society and finding in it the same things, wrote about how our false wants and desires, our interests and corrupted values hold us back in both collective and personal growth.

*In about 7,000 lines of poetry, he discusses the story of a wise man who had six*

*well educated sons. All of them, despite the fact they were successful, were unhappy and discontent. One day the wise father called them together and said, "If you inform me of your deepest desires, I promise to help you attain contentment and satisfaction, or at least I'll show you the path to happiness." The first son said he was in love with the daughter of the king of the fairies, and nothing would make him happy but to be married to that one woman. The second said he was madly in love with magic, and sorcery. The third wanted to have a crystal ball to see the future. The fourth was seeking everlasting life through the fountain of youth. The fifth was in search of King Solomon's ring, his mind and his power. The sixth son was in love with alchemy. The father analyzed each case according to its merit, and using various allegorical stories, examples, and sayings, he showed that their desires were unrealistic and illusory. He then presented the path of Tasawwuf, of self-awakening.*

I recommend this poetry; you should read it. It's on the Sufis unpublished best sellers list, and has been around for a long time. Do you know which book it is? Figure it out.

The Sufis are the real Muslims, the real believers. Sufis believe that the desire of our mind and our social problems, our fears, insecurities, doubts, our own despair and envies, are due to unhealthy conditions of our life. We have to improve our health and our life. Through Islam and Tasawwuf, we can come to this kind of synergy or synthesis. The Prophet Mohammed (sal) in living this *sūrah* in the Holy Qur'an, *Sūratu-l-Asr*, emphasized that the truth comes out of intention. It comes out of action, out of faith. It comes out of good works and good deeds. He encourages and requires us to do daily prayer, to make *zakat*, to finish our fasting, and to make pilgrimage. Why? To affirm and defend our values. But the inner *jihād* (being the overriding and meaningful principle) is to clarify to the whole world: do good deeds, change yourself, disapprove of the things

that are wrong and destructive, be tolerant of the people who do them, but do not tolerate evil that comes from them. With these guidelines establish brotherhood and sisterhood and a camaraderie that has not been known before in humankind.

This is a strong foundation. It has some weak timbers in the structure, and periodically we have to renovate building. That's where we are: *tajdīd*/renewal. We know what we have. We built some buildings here on strong foundations and poor wood. Concrete block is okay, but some of the buildings are rotting away, and we have to fix them. We have to understand what the Prophet (sal) is telling us: why it is important to pray; why it is important to meditate and live a good life, and to serve others; why it is important to put your self second, and be a trustworthy person. What is prayer, really? Allah says in a famous *‘āyat*, “**Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth... whose oil is well-nigh luminous though fire has scarce touched it.**” (24:35) Each human being is made of that light, so let's find that light. The secret of each of us is in that light. Because we are *khalifas* of Allah, we have the opportunity to choose.

I'll end by saying what Shaykh Ibn al Habib (ra) said, “*If a man knew the secret of his heart, he would never speak again. He would shed a tear with every breath that he took.*” Allah (swt) guides those who allow Him to guide them. The metaphor of our own life says, inside of us we have to sing the praises of Allah. We have to walk toward the light. There is one reality we call the *‘ālam al mithal*. It is an expression within us that can't even be spoken. It has to be sung, revised with our hearts, hands, eyes, tongues, and intention so that the darkness of this world can lift, and we can move into a whole other paradigm. We have to believe it. We live at a time when this *khutbah* can be transmitted immediately. You can put it up on the Internet today if you wanted to, if we had the will and time and intention to, and it could be seen by thousands of people. We have to use our technology correctly.

We have to start our prayer properly, and finish them properly, and realize that everything that comes between those prayers are very important things that we do. We have to serve all those who need to be served, and be effective in our service. We don't cast out of this world those people who are in need; we have to provide for them. There is no excuse for our own selfishness. We can't excuse the selfishness and greed of others, either; but we can work to change it. All those miserable and horrible things I began with—genocide and wars and the history of humanity—can't be obliterated, but they can be ameliorated by the future.

I pray that Allah gives us a safe journey in this journey of life that we are on, *inshā'a-Llāh*. I hope and pray that the fools and idiots, the *kafirs* who call themselves Muslims, who dare to hurt innocent people, making bombs in hotel rooms. Stupid, stupid people: they should be punished to the extent of the law, but not just the secular law. They should be punished by Allah, by knowing what real justice is, until their repentance is such they do not excuse their own existence. If we don't change ourselves, who is going to change us? (Duas). SECOND KHUTBAH. (Duas).