

Research Article

# Harmony in Temporality: A Psychoanalytic, Scientific, and Pedagogical Inquiry into Surah Al-Asr in the Quran

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## Abstract

This essay examines Surah Al-Asr from the Quran, exploring the complex interaction between spiritual teachings, psychoanalytic theory, and contemporary challenges. The study explores the multidimensional concepts of time, loss, faith, righteous deeds, and patience. Faith is presented as a psychological anchor, countering fear—the most primal human emotion—while righteous deeds align with honesty and authenticity, reflecting psychoanalytic practices such as free association. Patience emerges as a virtue vital for navigating intrapsychic conflict, promoting resilience and emotional regulation. The paper also highlights the modern challenge of instant gratification perpetuated by technology and social media. It points out the significance of teaching delayed gratification, especially in education for children, to cultivate self-regulation, resilience, and holistic development. Through these discussions, the essay reveals the enduring relevance of Surah Al-Asr, offering profound insights into the symbiosis between spiritual wisdom and psychological understanding in addressing timeless and contemporary human challenges.

**Keywords:** Surah Al-Asr; psychoanalytic theory; delayed gratification, education.

## INTRODUCTION

Al-Asr (The Epoch, Time) is the 103rd chapter (Surah) of the Quran, the Muslim holy book [1]. It contains three verses. Surat Al-Asr is the third shortest chapter, following Al-Kawthar and Al-Nasr, being shorter than Al-Nasr by only two words in the third verse. While many Islamic scholars have debated whether it is a Makki or Madani Surah, this question lies beyond the scope of this paper, and readers are encouraged to consult other references for more information on this topic [2].

The authors wish to humbly clarify that they are not Islamic scholars, nor do they have any formal affiliations with religious academic or institutions. Both authors come from scientific and engineering backgrounds, and their engagement with this subject stem from a shared personal interest rooted in their common faith. This exploration is an endeavor to analyze the profound teachings of Surah Al-Asr through the lens of psychoanalytic theory [3] seeking to bridge the realms of spirituality and modern

psychological understanding. The approach is academic and reflective, aiming to offer fresh insights without claiming authority on Islamic jurisprudence or theology. By this, at first, it's worthy to mention the meaning of the whole surah in a glimpse as follows:

*By Time [God swears by time].*

*Indeed, Man is in Loss,*

*Except those who have Faith and do Righteous deeds, and enjoin one another to [follow] the Truth, and enjoin one another to Patience.*

In the verses of Surah Al-Asr, the Quran opens a gateway to contemplation by raising the essence of time itself: "By Time". This invocation, a solemn oath, sets the stage for an exploration of the human condition and the inexorable passage of time [4]. Within the concise yet profound verses that follow, the surah declares, "Indeed, Man is in loss", serving as a poignant reminder of the perpetual struggle and inherent vulnerability of the human experience.

The sweeping acknowledgment of human loss lays the foundation for a multidimensional journey into the symbiosis of spiritual reflection and scientific inquiry. As we explore the intricate tapestry of Surah Al-Asr, we find a profound interplay between the spiritual insights of the Quran and the complexities of the psychoanalytical concepts. The surah presents a dichotomy — a stark contrast between the state of perpetual loss and the potential for salvation.

As we unravel the layers of Surah Al-Asr, we encounter a transformative shift in tone and perspective encapsulated in the verses: "Except those who have Faith and do Righteous deeds, and enjoin one another to [follow] the Truth, and enjoin one another to Patience". Here, a glimmer of hope emerges from the declaration of loss, outlining a path of salvation marked by faith, righteousness, a commitment to truth, and an emphasis on patience.

The relationship between these virtuous qualities and the concept of patience forms a critical nexus that connects the spiritual insights of the Quran with contemporary psychological discourse. Patience (Sabr) [5], as articulated in Surah Al-Asr, extends beyond mere endurance; it encompasses the psychological resilience to withstand the trials of life, adopting delayed gratification for a greater, spiritually enriched reward.

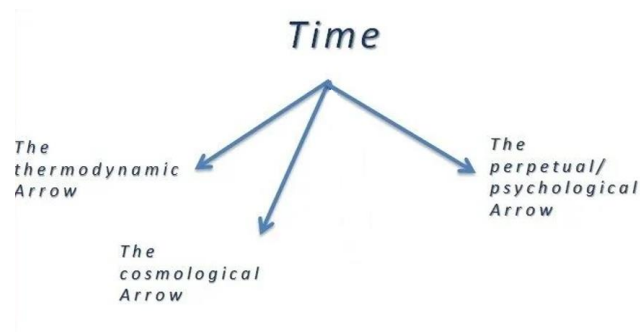
Psychologically, the concept of delayed gratification, pioneered by the Stanford marshmallow experiment and later explored by researchers such as Walter Mischel [6], aligns with the Quranic emphasis on patience. The ability to resist immediate rewards for more significant, long-term gains finds resonance in the call to patience within the surah. This parallel emphasises the profound wisdom embedded in the Quranic teachings, as the ability to delay gratification becomes a testament to one's steadfastness in faith and righteous deeds.

This paper seeks to unravel the intricacies of this relationship, navigating the temporal labyrinth where spiritual reflection converges with the psychoanalysis of time, loss, faith, righteousness and patience. We go on a thorough journey that crosses disciplinary borders by analyzing Surah Al-Asr's elements and relating them to modern psychological findings.

## BY TIME

According to history, majority of people believed in an absolute time till the turn of the century. In other words, every event could be uniquely assigned a number called "time," and all accurate clocks would concur on the amount of time that separates two occurrences. Nevertheless, the theory of relativity was developed as a result of the finding that light traveled at the same speed for all observers, regardless of their speed. This meant that the notion of a single, absolute time was rejected. Rather, every spectator would own a unique clock that would record the passing of time; the clocks held by distinct observers would not always align. As a result, time started to have additional meaning specific to the individual measuring it. In an attempt to reconcile quantum physics with gravity, the concept of "imaginary" time had to be introduced [7]. Directions in space are identical to imaginary time. If one can go north, they should be able to turn around and travel south; similarly, if someone can move forward in hypothetical time, they should be able to turn around and travel backward. This implies that the forward and backward directions of imaginary time cannot differ significantly from one another. However, as we all know, there is a significant difference between the forward and backward directions when looking at "actual" time. What is the source of this distinction between the past and the future? What makes us recall the past but forget the future?

One example of what's known as an arrow of time—something that gives time direction and separates the past from the future—is the growth in disorder or entropy with time. Time is represented by at least three distinct arrows [8]. First, there is the direction of time in which disorder or entropy grows, known as the thermodynamic arrow of time. The psychological arrow of time comes next. This is the way that we perceive time to be moving—that is, the way that we recall the past but not the future. The cosmic arrow of time is the last one. The cosmos is expanding rather than shrinking in this direction of time (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Time in three arrows: Thermodynamics; Cosmological; Psychological

From philosophical perspective, according to Kant's understanding of distinction between noumena and phenomena [9] (Figure 2) (Phenomena are the appearances, which constitute our experience; noumena are the (presumed) things themselves, which constitute reality) one can say that the thermodynamic arrow and cosmological arrow can be considered as noumena, and the psychological arrow as phenomena. In this manner our focus would be on phenomena.

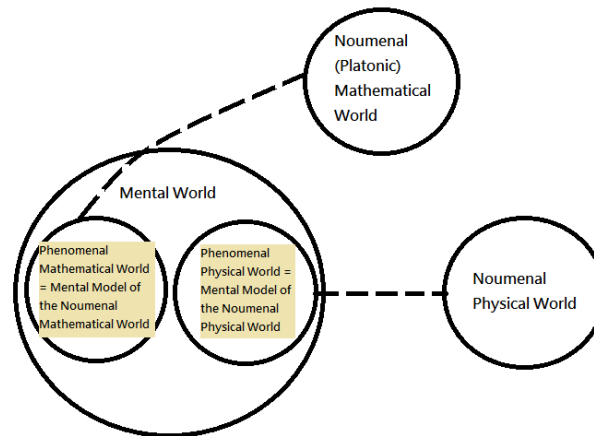


Figure 2. Kant's noumena and phenomena

In psychoanalysis, the time is a fundamental issue because it is an effort to understand how disturbances in the present are determined by events in the past from Freudian perspective [10]. Technically, we know that the person who is reporting immediate perceptions is not aware of the passage of time, but he becomes self-conscious as undesirable elements threaten to appear in his associations. Time is not sensed by direct awareness, nor is it an agent of action or events. Various functions of the ego influence how time is experienced consciously, leading to phenomena such as *déjà vu* (a French loanword expressing the feeling that one has lived through the present situation before) [11], a sensation of timelessness, misjudgement of time duration, the experience of premonition. Psychoanalysis more than any other discipline sheds light on the coexistence of past, present, and future, as influenced by unconscious fantasy thinking [12]. The analyst's understanding of the patient's associations is guided by temporal factors such as context and contiguity, succession of similar or opposite elements. Basically, the self is a time-bound concept; identity implies that a self is the same entity at different points in time. There is a deep-seated rebellion against the tyranny of time, beginning with need frustration in the infant and culminating in the knowledge that man is destined to lose the struggle against death.

So, the time regardless of arrow views, can be seen as an important concept in human life which determine his past, present and future. By the first Ayah of Al-Asr, the passage shows how important is the time and take an oath on this fundamental concept of human life no matter where and when he lives [4].

## INDEED, MAN IS IN LOSS

In the context of Al-Asr's declaration that "Indeed, Man is in loss," there exists a profound parallel with the scientific understanding of human aging. The verses emphasize the inherent state of loss for humanity, a theme that aligns with the inevitable physical and physiological decline associated with aging.

Our understanding of human aging is quite recent, as most periods and locations humans did not survive much past 40 years of age. People did not have the luxury of passing away from cancer or heart attacks around 1900. People over 50 were typically affected by different disorders [13]. Rather, infectious illnesses and parasites were the cause of death—and they still are in many areas of the world. The more common human senescent phenotype, which includes greying hair, sagging and wrinkled skin, joint stiffness, osteoporosis (loss of bone calcium), loss of muscle fibres and muscular strength, memory loss, deteriorating eyesight, and a slowing of sexual responsiveness, was also uncommon until recently. Shakespeare said, "Sans teeth, sans sight, sans taste, sans everything," of individuals who did not succumb to senescence in *As You Like It*.

The scientific discourse on aging, explores various theories, including oxidative damage, wear-and-tear, genetic instability, mitochondrial genome damage, telomere shortening, and genetic aging programs. Each of these perspectives contributes to the understanding of why, at a cellular level, the aging process unfolds. The concept of oxidative damage, where reactive oxygen species (ROS) [14] in cell membrane, protein, and nucleic acid damage, can be seen as a metaphorical manifestation of the loss mentioned in Al-Asr. The gradual accumulation of such damage resonates with the surah's assertion that mankind is in a perpetual state of loss. Moreover, the wear-and-tear theory, with its emphasis on small traumas building up over time, reflects the idea that aging is a cumulative process leading to a decline in bodily functions. This aligns with the surah's portrayal of a continuous loss experienced by humanity.

Additionally, the discussion on genetic aging programs shows that certain gene influence the aging process, and their mutations can lead to premature aging syndromes. This notion corresponds to the idea that there are intrinsic factors contributing to the state of loss mentioned in Al-Asr. In the pursuit of understanding aging, scientists grapple with questions about the fundamental causes, just as the surah prompts individuals to reflect on the existential meaning of the perpetual state of loss. As scientific inquiry and religious contemplation converge, a holistic understanding of the human experience emerges—one that encompasses both the physical reality of aging and the spiritual reflection on the transient nature of life. This relationship between scientific discourse and religious teachings gives a new perspective on the multifaceted nature of loss and the profound interconnectedness of physical and metaphysical dimensions in the human journey.

**EXCEPT THOSE WHO HAVE FAITH AND DO RIGHTEOUS DEEDS,  
AND ENJOIN ONE ANOTHER TO [FOLLOW] THE TRUTH, AND  
ENJOIN ONE ANOTHER TO PATIENCE.**

Within the transformative verses that follow, the surah introduces a paradigm of hope and redemption, stating, “Except those who have Faith and do Righteous deeds, and enjoin one another to [follow] the Truth, and enjoin one another to Patience”. This shift in tone introduces the psychoanalytic lens through which we can understand the intricate concepts of faith, righteous deeds, and patience.

*Faith from a Psychoanalytic Perspective.*

From the psychoanalytic standpoint, faith can be viewed as a profound and complex emotion deeply rooted in the human psyche [15]. Sigmund Freud posited that human behaviour is driven by unconscious forces and drives, and the concept of faith can be seen as an antidote to one of the most primal emotions – fear. Faith, in this context, becomes a psychological defense mechanism against the existential dread and uncertainty that fuel fear [16]. It provides a sense of purpose, security, and meaning, acting as a counterforce to the innate fears that haunt the human psyche.

Moreover, Freud's exploration of the human mind searched into the dynamics of the id, ego, and superego [17]. In the context of faith, the superego, representing internalized moral standards, becomes a guiding force. Faith, then, can be seen as a harmonious interplay between the id's instinctual desires, the ego's reality testing, and the superego's moral compass.

*Righteous Deeds and Truth as Honesty through Free Association.*

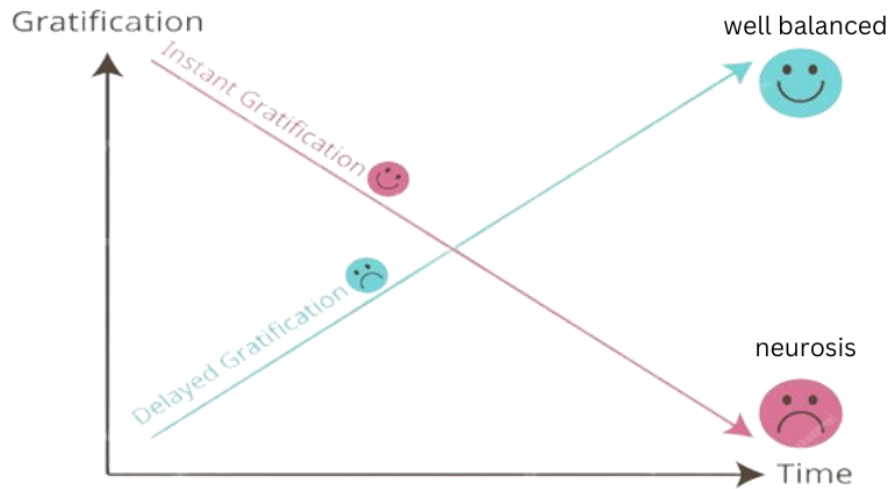
Surah Al-Asr emphasizes the attached connection between faith and righteous deeds. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the concept of righteous deeds can be understood through the lens of honesty as manifested in the practice of free association [18]. Freud introduced the technique of free association in psychoanalysis, encouraging patients to express thoughts without censorship. In the same vein, righteous deeds, when grounded in honesty, reflect an unfiltered and authentic expression of one's moral and ethical convictions.

The Quranic another reference, “if they had been honest to God, it would have been better for them” reinforces the psychoanalytic understanding of honesty [19]. True adherence to divine principles is akin to engaging in the therapeutic honesty of free association – it leads to a better understanding of oneself and, by extension, a more harmonious existence.

*Patience: A Psychoanalytic Exploration.*

The call to patience in Al-Asr resonates with the psychoanalytic concept of delayed and its implications for intrapsychic conflict. According to psychoanalytic theory, an individual's ability to delay gratification is intimately tied to the ego's capacity to regulate conflicts between the id's impulsive desires and the superego's moral constraints [20]. A

person incapable of patiently navigating these internal conflicts experiences psychological distress, often manifested as anxiety or "neurosis."



**Figure 3.** Gratification over time and psychoanalytic

Patience, Instant Gratification, and the Role of Modern Technologies in Education

In the context of Surah Al-Asr, patience emerges as a psychological virtue deeply connected to the ability to withstand internal conflicts between desire and morality. This insight gains additional relevance when viewed against the backdrop of contemporary society, where modern technologies, particularly social media, have fundamentally reshaped the way individuals experience gratification. The prevalence of instant gratification—driven by algorithms designed to provide immediate rewards, likes, and validation—has had profound implications on human behavior, particularly among children and adolescents [21].

### *The Challenge of Instant Gratification*

Social media platforms, video streaming services, and other digital technologies are engineered to provide users with a continuous stream of engaging and pleasurable content. This constant access to immediate rewards can diminish the capacity for delayed gratification, a skill critical for long-term success and emotional well-being. Children, in particular, are vulnerable to these influences, as their cognitive and emotional regulation systems are still developing [22].

Studies in developmental psychology have shown that delayed gratification—the ability to resist an immediate reward in favor of a more significant future benefit—is a key predictor of academic success, emotional resilience, and social competence [23]. As mentioned before, Walter Mischel [6] demonstrated that children who could delay gratification tended to perform better academically and exhibited healthier psychological outcomes later in life [24,25]. However, in a world saturated with instant rewards, the



ability to practice patience is increasingly undermined, posing challenges for educators and parents alike.

### *Delayed Gratification and Pedagogical Implications*

Incorporating the concept of delayed gratification into educational frameworks can have transformative effects on children's learning and personal development. The Quranic emphasis on patience, as highlighted in Al-Asr, provides a valuable foundation for pedagogical strategies that prioritize self-regulation, perseverance, and resilience [26]. The proposed educational framework for delayed gratification practices can be (Figure 4):

**1. Cultivating Self-Regulation Skills:** Educators can design activities that encourage students to work toward long-term goals, such as project-based learning or incremental skill development. By rewarding sustained effort and perseverance rather than immediate results, children can learn the value of patience and the satisfaction of achieving meaningful objectives.

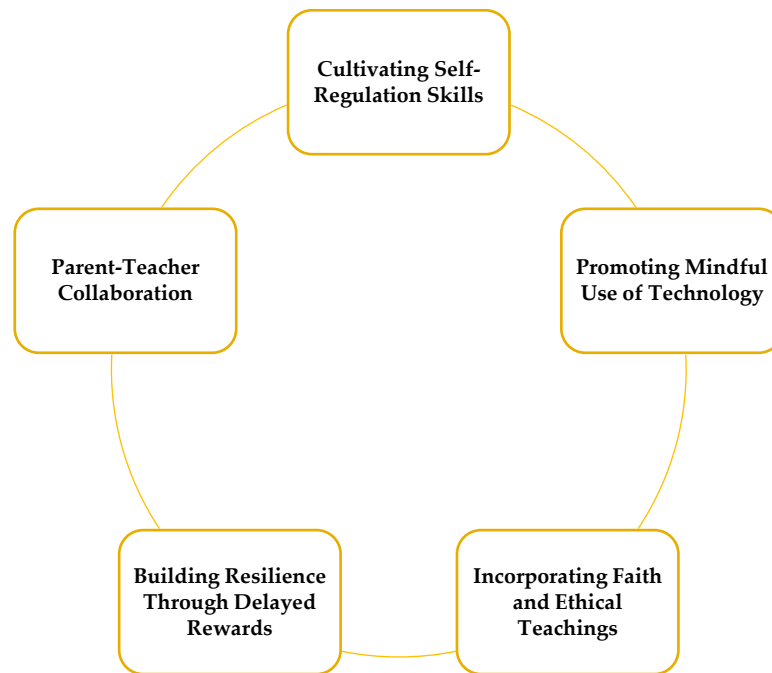
**2. Promoting Mindful Use of Technology:** Schools and parents can guide children in developing healthy relationships with technology. Digital literacy programs that teach children to recognize and resist the manipulative design of social media can empower them to make conscious choices, reducing their dependence on instant gratification.

**3. Incorporating Faith and Ethical Teachings:** Integrating moral and spiritual teachings, such as the Quranic emphasis on patience, can provide students with a sense of purpose and inner strength. These teachings can help them navigate the challenges posed by instant gratification, fostering a mindset of reflection and intentionality.

**4. Building Resilience Through Delayed Rewards:** Structured classroom activities that delay rewards—such as gamified learning where points accumulate toward a final prize—can mimic real-life scenarios requiring patience. This approach can help children internalize the principle that perseverance leads to greater rewards.

**5. Parent-Teacher Collaboration:** Educators and parents can work together to create environments that support the practice of delayed gratification. For example, parents can encourage habits like saving money for a desired toy rather than buying it immediately, reinforcing lessons learned at school.





**Figure 4.** Proposed educational framework for delayed gratification practices

### *Practical Applications in Education*

Patience and delayed gratification can be woven into various aspects of the curriculum and teaching methodologies:

- **Mathematics and Problem-Solving:** Assigning challenging problems that require sustained effort teaches students the value of persistence.
- **Literature and History:** Discussing stories of historical figures who demonstrated patience and perseverance can inspire students to adopt these virtues.
- **Extracurricular Activities:** Sports and arts often require consistent practice and delayed rewards, making them ideal for teaching patience.

The call to patience in Al-Asr gives a timeless antidote to the pressures of modern technology. By integrating the Quranic principles of patience into education, alongside psychological and pedagogical strategies, we can help children develop the resilience needed to navigate a rapidly changing world. In doing so, we can align ancient wisdom with contemporary challenges, equipping the next generation with the tools to balance the demands of desire and morality in the age of instant gratification.

## CONCLUSION

The study of Surah Al-Asr reveals a profound connection between the Quran's spiritual teachings and psychoanalysis, emphasizing the virtues of time, faith, righteous deeds, and patience. Faith provides purpose and stability, countering fear, while righteous deeds highlight the transformative power of honesty and authenticity. Patience, central to both the Surah and psychoanalysis, regulates intrapsychic conflict and fosters resilience. In modern contexts, patience counters the culture of instant gratification perpetuated by technology and social media. From an educational perspective, teaching delayed gratification helps children develop self-regulation and resilience, essential for personal growth and academic success. Surah Al-Asr thus bridges spiritual wisdom and psychological insight, offering timeless guidance for individual and societal well-being. This study highlights the enduring relevance of these teachings in addressing contemporary challenges.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest associated with this publication.

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