

The Value of Time June 27, 2025

fa-inna ma`a l-`us`ri yus`ran inna ma`a l-`us`ri yus`ran fa-idhā faraghta fa-inṣab wa-ilā rabbika fa-ir`ghab - sadaq

Verily, with every difficulty, there is relief, Verily, with every difficulty there is relief. Hence, when thou art freed [from distress], remain steadfast, and to your Lord turn your attention (Surah Al Inshirah 94: 5-8)

We are currently in the month of Muharram, which is recognized as the first month of the Hijri calendar. In Islamic history, the concept of an official calendar was introduced 17 years after the Hijrah, during the caliphate of Hd. Omar (ra.) This was done in response to a suggestion from Hd. Ali(ra), as there was a growing need to systematically record events. Before this time, years were typically identified in relation to significant historical events rather than numbered consecutively, such as the Year of the Elephant, named after the most notable event of that year, the destruction of Abraha's army, which was led by elephants.

We perceive life through a measurement of time and moments. Our lives, whether measured by breaths or calendar years, are the primary setting where we truly understand the concept of time. Our brief lives become meaningful only when we become aware of time and its passing, and that it is limited; and wasting time or letting it be consumed by negativity is the biggest loss. In Islam, there's no such thing as "free time." As the Quran says, "Surely with every hardship comes ease, so once you have fulfilled your duty, strive in devotion turning to your Lord alone with hope" (Al-Inshirah 94:7-8).

Life is one of the most precious gifts that Allah has given to every living being, and it is meant to be used only once. For those who can see beyond the distractions of daily life, time stands out as a blessing which is incomparable with other blessings. That is why it is so important to use our time in ways that reflect its true value. A person who truly understands and values time is, in a real sense, truly alive. Living life with such awareness—by recognizing the value of each moment—can make every moment more meaningful than years spent without appreciating their true worth.

One of the prominent companions of the Prophet (saws), Abdullah b. Mas'ud (ra) , declared that "time" is one of the greatest blessings for which we'll be questioned. He is known for saying, "I have never regretted more than a day when the sun set, and a day was deducted from my life, yet my good deeds did not increase."

It is our **actions and intentions** that truly give time its substance, value, and meaning. We often hear the old saying, "Time is money," and that is true in a way; wasting time can feel like throwing money away. But truly, the **value of time goes far beyond** just its material worth. As was said wisely, "**Time is life itself.**" Think about it: if you waste time, you're essentially wasting a part of your very existence. A beautiful Arabic proverb states clearly:

"Pearls can be bought with time, but time cannot be bought with pearls." You can use your time to earn all the wealth in the world, but no amount of money or pearls can ever buy back a single lost moment. It just shows how incredibly precious and irreplaceable time really is.

Islam is a comprehensive framework that encompasses every moment of our lives from birth to death. Allah-u Ta'ala has appointed specific times for the obligatory acts of worship. There is great wisdom in the fact that the fundamental acts of worship in Islam—such as prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and almsgiving—are performed at designated times. These acts of worship, which enter in our lives at certain intervals, serve as reminders within this general framework, keeping the awareness of being Muslim alive and renewing one's discipline regarding time and keeping us synchronized with the divine rhythm of time. In Surah An-Nazi'at (79: 46) the Qur'an describes time as fleeting, passing quickly. In Surah Al Munafiqun (63:11) time is described as something irreversible, which cannot be turned back, and time is mentioned as a blessing for which there will be significant accountability in the Hereafter if wasted. Time is our greatest asset; once squandered, no other resource can compensate for its loss.

Our obligatory worship follows a clear rhythm. Daily prayers performed five times a day, the communal Friday prayer once a week, fasting for an entire month each year, all these obligations spiritually revive us; almsgiving once a year tests and purifies the believer's attachment to wealth for the sake of Allah. The pilgrimage, performed at least once in a lifetime, offers complete spiritual cleansing. All these serve as reminders. Through such reminders, a Muslim continually refreshes their consciousness and devotion, staying tuned to the harmony with the divine rhythm.

A significant challenge for Muslims today is a lack of time discipline and difficulty understanding life's rhythm. Much of this comes from not fully grasping how strongly Islam, through the Qur'an and the Sunnah, emphasizes the value of time, both directly and indirectly. Modern life certainly adds to these challenges. It is tough to manage time well with constant distractions from smartphones, social media, and being always connected. These distractions make it hard to focus and stick to a disciplined routine. Plus, the fast pace of work, school, and social life, especially in non-Islamic environments, can make it hard to fit in prayer times or participate in community activities. This sometimes leads to compromising on religious practices or community involvement, thus distorting the harmony in our lives.

As societies become more materialistic, the spiritual rhythms that once shaped daily life, like organizing the day around prayer, are losing their importance. This leads people to drift away from the divine rhythm intended to make us more mindful of time and connected to its Creator.

In Islam, each day should be an improvement over the last, as reflected in the saying, "Whoever's two days are equal is at a loss." True time discipline involves striving for what is best, not just good enough, and prioritizing the most important tasks over merely urgent ones. Failing to do so is like a poor man selling ice on a hot day, watching his wealth melt away: time, once wasted, cannot be regained.

The barakah of time can be achieved by shifting from a passive consumption of time to an active engagement with its flow. This way, seemingly short periods can yield disproportionately great results and benefits, far beyond what their length might suggest. It is the spiritual and practical amplification of time. Note that this concept directly challenges the modern, secular view that all time is equal, measurable only in quantitative units like minutes and hours.

Yurdaer Al Latif Al Jerrahi