#Tafsīr | Sūrat al-Asr

**Introduction:**

Sūrat al-Asr is a Makkan Sūrah, which means it was revealed to Rasūlullāh (صلى الله عليه وسلم) before his hijrah to Madīnah.

It’s also 1 of the 3 short Sūwar in the Qur’ān, the other 2 are Sūrat al-Kawthar and Sūrat al-Nasr — all made up of 3 Āyāt each.

Even though it’s short, it covers and encompasses all aspects of the Dīn so it’s enough of a guidance and keeps one steadfast for the one who is seeking it if they hold onto the meanings of Sūrat al-Asr.

Imām ash-Shāfi’ī (رحمه الله) stated concerning this Sūrah: “If Allāh did not reveal upon His servants and upon the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) any Sūrah, except Sūrat al-Asr, it would have been enough for them.” This is stated in Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr.

Why is this? Because Sūrat al-Asr is basically a summary of Islām. Islām is about believing in Allāh, doing righteous deeds, calling/advising towards the truth and being patient with the trials that come.

**The placement of the Sūrah:**

This Sūrah is situated between 2 Sūwar which discuss loss.

1) Before Sūrah Asr, is Sūrat at-Takāthur. Sūrah Takāthur discusses the human being’s loss due to being distracted by wanting an increase in this worldly life, until his death.

2) The Sūrah after Sūrat al-Asr, is Sūrat al-Humazah. Sūrat al-Humazah also discusses a loss, and it discusses the loss of the one who gathered and saved his wealth, without giving any of it in the path of Allāh, until he was thrown in Jahannam, wal-‘Iyāthubillāh; and this is the ultimate loss.

Sūrat al-Asr came in between these two Sūwar that discuss loss, to teach us what exactly will save us from loss, and this is the 4 matters mentioned in this Sūrah.

Also, in Sūrat at-Takāthur, Allāh says, “You will surely see the Hellfire.” If someone gets to the point where they see Jahannam, then it’s a loss. Whilst
Sūrat al-Humazah mentioned: “He will be thrown into the Fire.” This is a worse loss, it’s the ultimate loss.

It’s important to note that there’s progression between these two Sūwar, and all of them from Sūrat al-Zalzalah to al-Humazah:

a) Sūrat al-Zalzalah spoke about the earthquake that happens on the Day of Judgement.

b) Then the Sūrah after it, Sūrat al-‘Ādiyāt spoke about what happens after that — when the earthquake happens, people begin to come out of their graves.

c) Then Sūrat al-Qāri’ah describes the state of the people at that time, they’re like “scattered moth”.

d) Then Sūrat at-Takāthur told us that the people will see the Fire.

e) Then Sūrat al-Asr came as a warning to those alive to save ourselves before it’s too late.

f) Then the Sūrah after it, Sūrat al-Humazah says that they will be thrown in the Fire, and it will be sealed so they will never come out.

This is the progression of these Sūwar, and Sūrat al-Asr comes beautifully to warn us that we don’t have much time — as some of the meanings of Sūrat al-Asr indicate when we get to the meanings Inshā’Allāh.

**The relationship between Sūrat al-Asr and the Sūrah before it, which is Sūrat at-Takāthur:**

1) The previous Sūrah, Sūrah at-Takāthur mentioned the person is being distracted by wanting a lot from this dunyā. However, in Sūrat at-Takāthur, we did not find what exactly he is being distracted from, is he being distracted from the remembrance of Allāh, the Salāh?

The answers are found in Sūrat al-Asr. It’s like Sūrat al-Asr comes to complete the question that was left in Sūrat at-Takāthur.

2) Also, the previous Sūrah was about wanting more and more, and this Sūrah is about the reality, and the reality is that mankind is in loss. So, the idea behind this is that, in general mankind is in loss no matter how much he gains and no matter how much success to his standard he achieves.
3) The last connection between the Sūwar is that the previous Sūrah, the last Āyāh said: “You will most definitely be questioned and asked about the continuous blessings that Allāh gave you”. And this Sūrah began with mentioning one of the greatest blessings that Allāh gave us, and that is the blessing of time itself.

In the authentic hadīth mentioned in al-Bukhārī (6412), narrated by Ibn ʿAbbās, he said that the Messenger of Allāh (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said: “There are two blessings which people tend to lose the most and that is their: health and free time for doing the good deeds.”

This is the truth as health and free time are the two blessings that people continuously lose because they don’t see its value. Therefore, this Sūrah needs to be implemented for life.

**Relationship between Sūrat al-Asr and Sūrat at-Tīn:**

1) In Sūrat at-Tīn, Allāh mentions the word “Insān” and in Sūrat al-Asr, Allāh also mentions the same word. The word “Insān” was mentioned in Sūrat at-Tīn first before Sūrat al-Asr. In other words, Allāh told us first, that the human being has been created in the best possible form, meaning we are qualified to become successful and in this form, we are qualified to be the inhabitants of Jannatul Firdaws.

Then, Sūrah Asr came later on to tell us the reality, that the human being didn’t take any advantage of the way Allāh created him, but rather he was found in loss, even though he was created with the ability to become successful but in the sight of Allāh, He found man immersed in loss.

2) The other thing between the 2 Sūwar, was that in Sūrat at-Tīn, Allāh said, “We returned him to the lowest of the low”, in other words, Allāh threw him in Jahannam. Then Allāh says, “Except for the one who believed and acted righteously.”

Then in Sūrah al-Asr, Allāh says the exact same words with an addition with 4 things being mentioned while in Sūrat at-Tīn, only 2 things were mentioned. Why is there an addition here? In Sūrah at-Tīn, Allāh taught us what will save us from being thrown in Jahannam — one must believe and do righteous deeds. In Sūrah al-Asr, it’s speaking about what will save us from loss: to believe, do righteous deeds, enjoin the truth and be patient.
1st Āyāh:

Allāh says in the 1st Āyāh:

“By Time”.

This is the last oath of the Qur’ān, and it’s the most comprehensive oath in relation and in comparison, with all the other oaths of time that came before. Before, Allāh only referred to parts of time, like parts of the day, or parts of the night. Like Sūrah ad-Duhā, means “I swear by the early morning.”; or Sūrat al-Layl, “I swear by the night” or in Sūrat al-Fajr, “I swear by the morning”.

But here, “Wal Asr” includes everything, the morning, the day, the night etc.

1) The first opinion on what “Wal Asr” means is that it’s the time spent on earth — the day we’re born till the day we die.

And by Allāh taking an oath by that, Allāh is saying: “I swear by your time on the earth.” It implies that Allāh wants every one of us to reflect upon His blessing of time, and Allāh made this Āyāh enough for us to really reflect and ponder over everything. The way we ponder over this Āyāh, is we ponder over the time that has passed and think what have we done and what remains, and how we plan to use this time. Are we prepared to stand before Allāh with how we used our time?

The Prophets made sure not a single second was wasted and the greatest thing that they have to present to Allāh is that they put all their efforts and time towards His Dīn; and from them, the Sahābah, the scholars, we’re supposed to learn.

2) The second meaning according to the scholars is that “Wal Asr” refers to Salāt al-Asr itself due to the significance of this prayer and due to the negligence and careless attitude that the people have towards this particular Salāh, as during this time, everyone’s busy with the dunyā.

In Sūrat al-Baqarah, Allāh says: “Guard strictly your prayers, especially the middle prayer.” [2:238]

Allāh highlights Salāt al-Asr from among the 5 prayers and warns us to be very careful with it.
The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) also said in the hadīth: “Whoever misses Salāt al-Asr, it’s as his family and his wealth has been robbed.” [al-Bukhārī (552)]

It’s just like if someone comes home and finds that their family has been abducted and all their wealth stolen, this person would be in a huge disaster; and this is the loss the person who misses Asr will feel on the Day of Judgement.

In Bukhārī (553), it’s also mentioned that, “Whoever leaves the ‘Asr prayer, all his (good) deeds will be nullified.”

The ‘Ulamā’ discussed this and they gave 2 meanings on this:

a) Whoever missed Salāt al-Asr intentionally, like the one who prays all his Salāt at the end of the night, his deeds are wiped away and he becomes a murtad with leaving one Salāt intentionally.

b) Whoever misses it due to laziness, like kept delaying it etc., the good deeds he did during that day are nullified.

Imām Ibn Taymiyyah (رحمه الله) said that missing Salāt al-Asr is worse than missing any other Salāt in the day, due to the severe penalty that it carries, and that this is the Salāt that was prescribed upon the previous nations, and they neglected it.

This is why one of the names of this Ummah, is Ummat al-Asr. What does it mean that we are an Ummah of al-Asr? The hadīth in Sahīh al-Bukhārī mentions that the Jews were the ummah of Fajr to Dhuhr, so meaning they were the very first of nations. Then the Christians came after them and they were an ummah of Dhuhr to Asr. Then the ummah of Rasūlullāh (صلى الله عليه وسلم) was given rise to, and they were the ummah of Asr to Maghrib. This means that we’re the last of the ummah, because from Asr to Maghrib, the sun is setting, in other words, the world is going to end.

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said in the same hadīth, that the people that did good, from Fajr to Dhuhr which were the Jews, they were given one Qira’at — the action they did, was according to what the deed was. Then the Christians after them, were given one Qira’at too. Then this ummah was given 2 Qira’at for every hasanah they did, in other words, our hasanah are multiplied.

So, in this way, we don’t come on the Day of Judgement with any excuse like the Jews will, as mentioned in the hadīth complained that their one action was only equal to one, but the ummah after received two Qira’at. So, it’s a blessing Allāh made us apart of Ummat al-Asr.
Also, Allāh mentions in the Qur’ān about Prophet Sulaymān missing Salāt al-Asr only once in his life. However, Allāh made it a whole story in the Qur’ān to teach us what he did after because he missed Salāt al-Asr.

Allāh says: “Indeed, I gave preference to the love of good [things] (horses) over the remembrance of my Lord until the sun disappeared into the curtain [of darkness]” [38:32]

Sulaymān (عليه السلام) was in charge of checking the horses which were used in the path of Allāh. So, during the Asr time, the horses were showcased in front of him, and one narration said about 20,000 horses. Sulaymān (عليه السلام) began to admire the horses, until the sunset and he realised he had missed the Asr prayer. Then when he realised this, there’s 2 opinions on what he did:

a) He went and he slaughtered all 20,000 horses because they distracted him from one Salāt, Salāt al-Asr.

b) He marked the horses to be used only in the path of Allāh and no more for personal gain, so it’s like he gave them as a Sadaqah.

This shows the importance of Salāt al-Asr, and this is why Allāh takes an oath in this Sūrah with the name of Asr.

3) One final meaning of “Wal Asr” is that it means time that is running out. “Asr” comes from the word “Aseer” which is juice. How is juice made? When the fruit is squeezed, at the end the juice just kind of trickles down. What is implied by that?

We are the “Asr” of time, in other words, we are being squeezed by time. The Sūrah would say everyone is in loss, except those who are “squeezed” from it — those who believe, do righteous deeds etc...

Salāt al-Asr itself was called Asr because it comes at a time when people are running out of time. Salāt al-Asr is a very urgent Salāt, the time just disappears fast and before we know it, it’s Maghrib time, the time is squeezed out of your hand.

When we read, “Wal Asr”, it implies urgency, worry and panic. In other words, Allāh begins this Sūrah by telling us, we're running out of time and we need to act quickly before sunset (meaning the end of this world and the end of our lives) as we don’t have much time left. And we need to rush to believing, doing righteous deeds, enjoining the truth and patience.
And whatever the result is by our own hands, either we’ll be rewarded or be in disaster because we wasted the time we were given.

All of these 3 opinions are correct, and they all come together in one comprehensive meaning to give us a understanding of what “Wal Asr” means.

2nd Āyāh:

 إنَّ أَلْدِينَانِ لِفِي خُسْرِ

“The human being is in deep loss”.

1) The word “Inna”, this word in Arabic removes doubt and creates certainty. So, when we hear this word, we know what’s about to come is a reality, and there’s no room to doubt it.

2) Then Allāh says, “al-Insān” — the human being — this is talking about every single human being, not just the believers or disbelievers etc...

This “Insān” is singular, Allāh did not say “Inna al-Nās” — the people. He said “Inna al-Insān”, the one human being. The singular is used so we reflect over ourselves and forget about others. Also, the word “Insān” comes from the word “Nasi’ah” — to forget.

Subhan’Allāh, what made the human being in loss was because he’s an Insān, he keeps forgetting no matter how many times he’s reminded. This is why he’s continuously supposed to recite the Qur’ān because he will always forget. So, the one who pursues the reminders, and does good, and is with righteous company etc, he’s someone that’s going to be saved from loss as the Sūrah would say later.

Another thing is that “al-Insān” is called this as it comes from the word “Uns” and “Uns” means affection and love. So, the Insān, apart from all other creation, is called this because he has the ability for affection and love of others. The animals and plants are called a different thing because they don’t continuously possess this quality.

So, these two meanings of forgetfulness and love come together. Meaning the human being forgot his role on earth because he developed a love for other than Allāh subhānahu wa ta’āla, and this was even proven in the previous two Sūwar. The man attached his heart to his want for money and children etc., and he has intense love for the dunyā as Ibn ‘Abbās mentions in his tafsīr.
3) This is basically the reason for “lafee khusr” — the reason why he’s in loss is because he forgot about Allāh. And what made him forget about Allāh is his love and attachment and affection for other than Allāh.

“Lafee khusr” — Allāh gives us the reality. Initially, by default, everyone is, not just in loss, but immersed, drowning in loss. Because the word “fi” is mentioned, it means you are surrounded by that thing. So, the human being is surrounded by loss, left, right and centre.

All the negative qualities that are mentioned in the Qur’ān, Allāh would attach them with the preposition, “fi”. For example, the word “dalal” which means misguidance and it’s a negative term. Allāh says “fi dalal”, because when someone is misguided, they’re immersed in it, they’re not just on the surface. But when Allāh speaks of the positive words, He will mention the word “Ala”, like “Ala hudan”. Because “ala” comes from the word “ulu” which means highness and being lofty and above something. So, the one who has guidance, he’s above all that which is drowning and sinking underneath him.

4) The words “lafee khusr” are scary enough, but Allāh adds certainty to it by using the word “Inna” — there’s no doubt at all.

Then Allāh also add the letter “lam” to the word “fi” so “lafee”. This is called the “lam” of emphasis, so in other words, “Surely, surely, surely, the human being is drowning, is immersed in deep loss.” That is basically the general translation of the entire Āyāh.

Also, the word “khusr” comes with a tanwīn at the end, and the scholars have a principle in which they say that the tanwīn implies greatness. So, it means that the loss is an ultimate, great, incredible loss. The human being hasn’t realised that his time on earth is the only time he has to earn Paradise, and if he doesn’t make the most of it, his life is finished forever, and he would end up in Jahannam if he never made the most of al-Asr — the time.

What kind of loss is meant when Allāh says “lafee khusr”?

There are 3 ways in which the word “khusr” comes in the Qur’ān:

a) Khusr — This means that when Allāh says “Inna al-Insana lafee khusr” — He’s speaking about general loss, as there’s only 3 letters in this word and this is the shortest one.
b) Kasaran — Allāh says: “This Qur’an will only increase the wrongdoers in loss.” [17:82]

There are 5 letters here from the alphabet, so the meaning is more intense. The wrongdoer is already in loss but added to that loss is even more loss.

c) Al-Khusran — This is the biggest version of loss in the Qur’ān: “He has lost [this] world and the Hereafter. That is what is the manifest loss.” [22:11]

This is the biggest, ultimate loss; someone losing this life, and the next life. The ‘Ulamā’ made a principle, and they say that the more the letters in a word, the greater and more intense the meaning.

In this Sūrah, Allah is speaking about the general loss that people are in, and this general loss is more than one thing. It’s general loss when a person doesn’t do enough good deeds, does bad deeds, and can’t stop the bad deeds etc.

**Tying between the object and subject of this oath:**

Allāh says: “I swear by time, the human being is surely, no doubt about it, is immersed in deep loss.”

The idea of oaths in the Qur’ān, the object, is always supposed to be related with the subject.

Here, “Wal Asr” is the object, Allāh took an oath by the time.

The subject is “Inna al-Insana lafee khusr.”

The relationship between these is that one is a witness to the other. In other words, what proves that the greatest thing in life that proves the human being is in loss, is him losing time. The greatest proof that the human being is in loss is to look at his attitude with time and him losing time very quickly. And this is the definition of “Wal Asr Inna al-Insana lafee-khusr.”

Also, in worldly terms, the definition of loss revolves around a person’s trade and business. If his money increases, he’s considered successful, and if it decreases, then he’s considered at loss.

In this Sūrah, it says everyone is in loss in regard to their trade and business with Allāh, not in this worldly sense, but spiritually. The greatest investment in this case that a person can earn is his time on earth, and when someone trades
their time to continuously do good, the product or result of their trade is Paradise. Our time on earth is supposed to be spent buying our place in Paradise.

Allāh says in Sūrah at-Tawbah:

“Allah purchased from the believers, their selves (i.e., their time, life on earth) and their wealth in return that they earn Paradise.” [9:111]

If you put great efforts in your time in doing what Allāh wants from you, and you earn Jannah, then you’re considered successful, but if you do this, yet it wasn’t accepted from you, then you’re considered in loss.

A good example is Laylatul Qadr. Allāh wants us to spend a few hours and in return he’ll grant us the rewards of worship that is better than 1000 months of worship. However, if you give in the same hours but your worship wasn’t accepted, then you’re considered in loss with Allāh.

As mentioned, Imām ash-Shāfi‘ī said: “If Allāh didn’t reveal anything from the Qur’ān except this Sūrah, it would’ve been enough.”

3rd Āyāh:

In the last Āyāh, Allāh is telling us the equation for what saves us from loss. Allah says:

إِلَّا أَلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوْا الصَّلَاحٍ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بالصَّبْرِ

“Except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience”.

• The first word “Illa” — except — it implies hope and fear at the same time as when except is said, it’s known that only a small number is being addressed. So, it gives a sense of fear and hope that whether we are a part of this group or not as generally everyone else is in loss.

• Then Allāh says “Allatheena Amanu” — those who believe — this is mentioned first because it’s the most important, as we need Îmān first before going onto the other things.

• Then Allāh says “wa amilua salihati” — and who acted righteously — and this proves their Îmān.
• Then: “watawa saw bil haqqi” — and they advised, and they encouraged one another upon the truth. And you cannot do this if there were no good deeds. So, the order is perfect, first belief then that belief should bring us to act righteously, then when there are good deeds, you can advise others to do the good, then when you start doing all this, you need to have patience to remain firm with doing the good.

• And finally, “watawa saw bis sabr” — and those who advised each other towards patience.

As-Sa’dī (رحمه الله) said, “the first two, believing and doing righteous deeds, it brings goodness to your ownself and it completes you. And the last two, it brings goodness to others.”

This is what will save us from loss, not just focusing on ourselves, but also acting and helping others, as we’re a part of the Ummah, as one body.

1) Back to the first words of the 3rd Āyāh, Allāh says “الذين آمنوا” — this is in the plural form.

The question arises, how can it be a plural when the Āyāh before was mentioned in the singular, as only one human being was mentioned, not the whole of mankind. So, the Sūrah began in the singular form, then Allāh shifted to the plural.

The reason is because, wallāhu a’lam, that Allāh is teaching us the importance of unity in this Āyāh — meaning you cannot have belief on your own. You need to also join with those who have belief and unless we learn the importance of unity then everyone will be in loss.

Allāh says in Sūrah at-Tawbah: “O you who have believed, fear Al-lah and be with those who are true.” [9:119]

And in Sūrat ‘Alī-Imrān, Allāh says: “And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided.” [3:103]

Also, when we speak about unity, we speak about unity upon the truth, upon the Qur’ān & Sunnah according to the first 3 generations of Islām; and we don’t call people to ourselves but call people to the rope of Allāh.
b) Next, Allāh said “Illa allatheena amanu” and He did not say “Illa allatheena astamu”.

“Astamu” — accepting Islām happens with the tongue, and this won’t save us from loss. You must accept with your heart and that is what Īmān is, you need to follow it up with action.

This understanding of what Īmān and Islām is, is explained perfectly in Sūrat al-Hujurāt where Allāh says:

“The bedouins say, “We have believed.” Say, “You have not [yet] believed; but say [instead], ‘We have submitted,’ for faith has not yet entered your hearts. And if you obey Allah and His Messenger, He will not deprive you from your deeds of anything.” [49:14]

There was a tribe called Banī Sa’d Ibn Khuzaymah, a Makkan tribe. They came to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) when he was in Madīnah, they came in a year of drought and they declared their testimony of faith with their tongues, but they weren’t true believers in the inside, from their heart. They used to ask the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) for Sadaqah just because they said the Shahādah. So Allāh revealed to the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) since he doesn’t know what’s in their hearts whether they were honest or not. Allāh exposed them and said: “This group that came to him, they said ‘We believe’, Say: ‘You did not believe, you did not accept it in your heart, rather you should say ‘We aslamna’ with our tongue and proper Iman hasn’t entered our hearts yet...’”

c) Then Allāh tells us what proper Īmān is in the second part of the Āyāh, that it is following it up with work, obedience to Allāh and His Messenger. Islām is to just declare it outwardly, but Īmān is to declare it on the tongue, affirm it inside of the heart and follow it with actions.

The first thing that will save us from loss is Īmān, which is to declare the testimony of faith on our tongue and follow it up with actions and that we believe what we say with our tongue, wholeheartedly.

And this was mentioned first because al-Īmān is the key to the next three things mentioned and the key to Paradise.

It’s narrated in Sahīh Muslim, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, “You will not enter the Paradise until you believe.”
d) Also, Allāh said “Illa allatheena amanu” — Those who believe — He did not mention what they believe in, He left it open and didn’t restrict it to anything. Concerning this, the ‘Ulamā’ say it’s left open so that it can accommodate for more than one thing. What is this? This refers to the pillars of Īmān. In the hadīth where the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was asked what is Īmān, everything he mentioned to believe in, he said “at-tuminu” once, but in the last pillar, believing in the Qadr, the good and bad, he repeated it twice and said “wat-tu’mina” because that’s the most difficult one people have grasping.

The people, in terms of their Īmān are divided into 3:

• Those who believe but have doubts. They doubt in the Qadr, they question Allāh’s decree in certain things, have doubt in the Angels and how they are created, doubt in some of Allāh’s Names etc. Īmān with doubt makes one in loss.

• Those who disbelieve in Īmān from beginning to end. These people are also in loss.

• Those who believe with absolutely no doubt, and these are the people who are saved. We must believe in the Oneness of Allāh with no doubt, His Lordship, that He’s the Provider and the Sustainer and the creator, that He’s the Only One worthy of worship, and all of His Names and Attributes. That’s Īmān Billah. Then with the Angels, we believe that they’re an Unseen creation, they were created from light, and they have tasks to do, some we know about and some we don’t. Concerning His books, it means that we believe in those that we know about and don’t know about. We believe that they all came from Allāh. We believe in all of His Prophets and His Messengers, the ones we know and don’t know.

Concerning the Ākhirah, we believe that people will be resurrected in the fashion described to us, and will face the questions of the grave, and the punishment of the grave. We believe in the Paradise and the Fire and the rewards that are in Jannah and the punishment in the Fire.

Concerning the Qadr, we believe that Allāh created the pen and commanded the pen to write everything until the Day of Resurrection, the Qadr is from the moment it began to write, to the last person that enters Paradise and the Fire.

2) Then Allāh said, “wa amilu as-salihat”.
This Īmān that was just spoken about should lead us to doing righteous deeds and that is a true sigh of Īmān.

The word “as-salihat”, it comes from the word “sалиh”, and “ salah” and “samuhah”.

“Samuhah” means to rectify something, it means to take something that is broken and fix it up. So “as-Salihat”, the good deeds, are called this because they rectify our state, our heart and soul.

Allāh said, “wa amilu as-Salihat” — they did the good deeds — and this is in the plural form, and this implies that the good deeds are many, meaning do as much good deeds as you can because there’s so many of them and don’t belittle even the smallest, good deed.

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said “Do not belittle anything of the good.” [Muslim]

The scholars put 2 conditions on a good deed to be accepted:

1) Sincerity: It’s narrated in the hadīth from Abū Hurayrah that the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said: “Allāh says: ‘I am so self-sufficient that I am in no need of having an associate. Thus, he who does an action for someone else’s sake as well as Mine will have that action renounced by Me to him whom he associated with Me.’” [Muslim]

Therefore, all actions must only be sincerely for Allāh Alone. We must hide our deeds the best we can. Some of the Salaf used to pray at night for 20 years yet no-one knew, not even his own wife. Those before us always feared if their deed will be accepted or not.

It’s narrated that Zayn al-‘Abidīn (son of Husayn Ibn ‘Alī) used to carry food and other things at night as Sadaqah, and distributed it among the poor, weak, oppressed etc., and left it in front of their doors. It was only when he passed away, they realised it was him who was giving them the sadaqah because after he passed away, they didn’t receive anything anymore.

The importance of sincerity is also mentioned in the hadīth narrated in Muslim (1905), that the first 3 people on the Day of Judgement who will be tested severely and thrown in the Fire are those who seemingly did an act for the sake of Allāh, but in reality, there was no sincerity and they only did it for show, like the reciter, and the one who spent in the cause of Allāh and the one who went out for the sake of Allāh.
2) In accordance with the Sunnah of Rasūlullāh (صلى الله عليه وسلم): So even if the good deed is sincere, if it’s not in accordance with the Sunnah of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) it will not count.

When we say the second part of the Shahādah, what does it mean? It entails 4 things:

a) That we believe in everything that he informed us about.

b) We adhere to his commandments and perform the obligations.

c) Avoid and stay away from what he prohibited us.

d) That Allāh should only be worshipped by that which the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) legislated (the only path to Allāh is that which the Prophet taught us).

This is what the second part of the Shahādah truly means, and not adhering to one of these points, means our statement isn’t counted, even if we claim to love him.

The best case for this is the case of Abū Tālib, due to his love and defence of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم), but he didn’t adhere to anything he came with, so his love didn’t benefit him at all.

In reference to the last point, that Allāh should only be worshipped how the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) legislated, nullifies any form of bid’ah. As what’s in the Qur’ān and the Sunnah is enough to get us to the highest levels of Paradise, there’s no need for anything new.

There’s a narration in Sunan ad-Dārīmī (1/67-69) with an authentic chain, that Ibn Mas’ūd saw a group of people making dhikr in a mosque in a way other that the way of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم). They were saying Allāhu Akbar, Lā ilāha ilā Allāh, Subhān’Allāh 100 times with pebbles, in a collective gathering so ‘Abdullāh Ibn Mas’ūd said to them: “Count your sins…Woe to you O nation of Muhammad! how quick you rush to destruction. These are the Companions of your Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) who are many in number and these are his clothes that have not worn out and his utensils haven’t broken, by the One whose Hands is my soul either you are upon a path better than the guidance of Muhammad or you are opening a door to misguidance.” They said, “By Allāh, O Abū ‘Abdul-Rahmān we only intended good” (the justification of many today). He replied, “And how many people intend good but don’t reach it.” Allāh says: “Say, [O Muhammad], ‘Shall we [believers] inform you of the greatest losers as to [their] deeds? [They are] those whose effort is lost in worldly life, while they think that they are doing well in work.’” [18:103-104]
If our righteous deeds aren’t in line with the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ then we will be in deep loss.

With the first 2 mentioned, believing in Allāh and doing righteous good deeds, that will save you, it’s for your ownself, and it saves you from the Fire. This is mentioned in many places in the Qur’ān, for example Allāh says in Sūrah at-Tīn: “We threw this human being in Jahannam, except those who had Iman and acted righteously.” [95:5-6]

Allāh also says in Sūrat al-Kahf: “Indeed, those who have believed and done righteous deeds — they will have the Gardens of Paradise as a lodging.” [18:107]

And Allāh says in Sūrat al-Hajj: “Indeed, Allah will admit those who believe and do righteous deeds to gardens beneath which rivers flow.” [22:14]

And in Sūrah Luqman, Allāh says: “Indeed, those who believe and do righteous deeds — for them are the Gardens of Pleasure.” [31:8]

So, the first one will definitely save you from the Fire and grant you entry into Paradise.

3) However, this Sūrah isn’t just about us being saved from the Fire only, this Sūrah is about us being saved by loss. Therefore, to be saved by loss, in this life and the Hereafter, there’s a higher standard, so that’s why there’s another two mentioned:

وَتَوَاصَوا بِٱلْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوا بِٱلصَّبْرِ

As mentioned before, this Sūrah is in the plural, meaning we’re not only looking out for ourselves, but being saved from loss and being successful, means we look after ourselves by believing and doing righteous deeds, but also save and look after others by advising each other towards truth and patience as it can save them too. So, this shows us the formula on what we need to do to save our own selves as well as others.

In Sūrat at-Tahrīm, Allāh says: “O you who believe, protect and save yourselves and your family from the Fire.” [66:6]

There’s a lot of rewards for advising others towards the truth and patience. In a hadīth narrated in Muslim (1893), the Prophet ﷺ said:
“Whoever guides someone to goodness will have a reward like one who did it.”

For example, the one who will get the most rewards for spreading goodness is Rasūlullāh (صلى الله عليه وسلم) as everything we do now, goes back to him so he will have the greatest rewards. So, spreading good should never be underestimated because of the immense rewards spreading and advising carries. The best good deed one could do is “watawa saw bil haqq”.

As Allāh first tells us, they believe, then do righteous deeds. So, what’s the best righteous deed? It’s advising others to the truth, giving da’wah etc. Allāh highlights this noble deed in Sūrat al-Fussilat: “And who is better in speech than one who invites to Allah and does righteousness...” [41:33]

Allāh did not say, “The one who does righteous good deeds and calls to Allāh.” The arrangement is different here, Allāh says who is better than the one who calls to Allāh first and then does righteous deeds.

Calling to Allāh was mentioned first, to highlight and stress on the fact that the best deed is inviting to Allāh, no other deeds come close.

So, “tawasaw bil haqq” basically means to call others to the truth and that is the most favourable, and beloved act to Allāh.

a) The word, “watawa saw” — tawasa — it comes from the word “wasa”. The word “wasa” is commonly translated as “advice”. The other common word for advice that people use is “Nasīhah”.

What’s the difference between the word “an-Nasīhah” and “al-Wasīyah” and why did Allāh choose to say “watawa saw” instead of using “nasīhah” and saying “Watawa nasahu bil Haqq...” as that would’ve also meant they advised each to the truth and patience as well.

“Wasīyah” and “Nasīhah” both mean advice, but there is a slight difference and implication with the word “wasīyah” that the word “nasīhah” doesn’t carry. This is that “wasīyah” is the word of advice that one gives to someone as he’s leaving this world (dying).

Allāh says in Sūrat al-Baqarah: “Prescribed for you when death approaches [any] one of you if he leaves wealth [is that he should make] a will [wasiyah] for the parents and near relatives according to what is acceptable — a duty upon the righteous.” [2:180]
In the Islamic will, it’s written before one passes away — if any debts are owned and the inheritance is written. However, also part of it, is the advice you will leave for your children. When someone is dying and wants to give advice to someone, how does he give that advice? The words he says are extremely sincere, are with gentleness, care, compassion, love, with mercy and with urgency.

That’s exactly what “watawa saw bil haqq” means; giving advice just like how someone who is dying gives advice — in the most sincere, truthful manner without delay, and this is the way we should give advice on a daily basis in order to be saved from loss. We don’t just give them nasīḥah, we give them wasīyah.

b) Another point is that Allāh said “watawa saw” and He did not say “aw saw”. He said it in the present tense and it implies continuity, meaning they continuously advised. In order to be saved from loss, this is what one must continue to do.

There are countless incidences in the Qur’ān where Allāh mentions how the Prophets like Nūh (عليه السلام) with his son, and Ibrāhīm (عليه السلام) with his father, used to give advice in the best way, with reason and hikmah to their families, and because of their advice, they were praised by Allāh and their ranks were raised in the sight of Allāh.

The example of Ibrāhīm (عليه السلام) is a beautiful example to implement when making da’wah, if someone is tired of you giving da’wah to them, end it with saying peace upon them and make du’a for them, not getting angry and frustrated.

Just a note that the case of Ibrāhīm of seeking forgiveness for his father was before the command of Allāh telling him not to. However, when advising our Muslim brothers and sisters, then we should make du’ā for their guidance. Most people think that successful da’wah is that the person accepts and changes his life etc., and being unsuccessful, is when a person rejects the message and becomes misguided. However, if you look at examples of da’wah in the Qur’ān, Allāh gave us the apparent unsuccessful examples of da’wah, to teach us that they’re the best and most successful examples.

For example, Nūh (عليه السلام) with his son and his son didn’t accept the message. Rasūlullāh (صلى الله عليه وسلم) with his family, he only received insults and curses from them. And Ibrāhīm (عليه السلام) with his father and his father’s response was to threaten him. And Fir’awn’s wife, giving advice to Fir’awn yet he didn’t respond.
Allāh chose to mention these examples of da’wah in the Qur’ān to teach us that the best and most successful da’wah is the one who remains continuous and persistent in his da’wah, and he has the best way in giving the da’wah — full of akhlāq and hikmah. The only role of the one giving da’wah is, not to achieve success but to advise others to the truth and Allāh guides the hearts.

What does “al-Haqq” mean that’s mentioned in this Āyāh?

- The ‘Ulamā’ say, one of the meanings of “al-Haqq” is Allāh. Meaning advise each other to Allāh, remembering Allāh, fearing Allāh, worship Him etc.
- Another opinion of what “al-Haqq” means the Qur’ān. The Qur’ān is al-Haqq. Allāh says in Sūrat Saba’: “What did your Lord say?” They will say, “The Truth...” [34:23]. In other words, they advised each other continuously to hold onto this Qur’ān and the teachings of it, listen to it, read it etc.
- In the 3rd opinion, it means “al-Haqq” refers to the entire teachings of this Dīn, from beginning to end.
- The scholars also say that “al-Haqq” is the prayer itself. At the end of Sūrat Tāhā, Allāh said: “And enjoin prayer upon your family and be very patient in commanding them.” [20:132]
- In the 5th meaning, they say “al-Haqq” is Tawhīd — they advise and encourage each other to hold onto the Oneness of Allāh and worship none but Him.
- Proving the opinion of Tawhīd, in the 6th opinion, they say that “advising one another to al-Haqq” means enjoining the good and forbidding the evil.

In Sūrah Luqman, there is some advice Luqman gives to his son, and this advice is exactly Sūrat al-Asr itself.

- In the beginning of his advice, he said: “O my son, don’t associate anything with Allah.” [31:13]

That’s “Illatheena amanu”.

- Then he says: “O my son, establish the prayer.” [31:17]
And this is “wa amilu salihat”.

- Next, he says: “Enjoin the good and forbid the evil.” [31:17]

This is “watawa saw bil-haqq”.

- Then finally he ends with: “And be patient with everything that befalls you.” [31:17]

And this is “watawa saw bis-sabr”.

So, the lessons in Sūrat al-Asr aren’t just for this ummah, they’ve been there from the time of Luqman (عليه السلام) and even before that; and this is why Imām ash-Shāfi‘ī (رحمه الله) stated that if this was the only Sūrah revealed, it would have been enough for the people.

c) And another point on “watawa saw bil-haqq”, the word “tawasaw” is in the plural form, and it means “everyone gave advice to each other” — no matter who it is, the old gave advice to the young and vice versa, and the parents give advice to the children and vice versa etc. This word means everyone is giving advice to each other continuously, and not just once.

4) The last part of the Sūrah, “watawa saw bis-Sabr”

a) Allāh repeats the word “watawa saw”.

The scholars said the reason for this repetition is that it stresses upon and emphasises what is about to come. The emphasis is so we don’t forget, Allāh repeats as a way to say that this is the one people always forget, so by repeating “watawa saw”, Allāh is saying, “And don’t forget, advising each other to sabr.” And Allāh knows best.

The greatest deed is patience itself, the people of Paradise, when Allāh speaks about them, the only deed He highlights from the millions of deeds they did was Sabr, as the Angels greet the believers saying: “Peace be upon you for patiently enduring in this life.” [13:24]

And Allāh also mentions in Sūrah al-Furqān, Āyāh 75, that the people who had patience deserve the highest levels of Paradise.
b) The word Sabr has been mentioned over 90 times in the Qur’ān. The scholars say that every letter (not word) in the Qur’ān must carry a benefit and have a reason.

Sabr is made up of 3 letters. Allāh commands it in the Qur’ān several times to be patient.

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said in the hadīth mentioned in Bukhārī, “Remain patient until you meet me, and our meeting place will be the Hawl” — which is where the fountain of Kawthar is where Rasūlullāh (صلى الله عليه وسلم) will be standing on the Day of Judgement.

c) The reason why advising one another to Sabr came after advising one another to the Haqq is because advising one another to the truth requires a lot of Sabr. People generally don’t like words of truth and goodness, and whenever someone does say words of truth, there’s always consequences.

So, when one does “advising towards the truth”, he’s undoubtedly going to see harm from the people — people will insult him, turn away from him, abuse him, cut contact etc.

So, when this happens, the only advice one needs is to remain patient. Allāh says in Sūrat Luqmān, that when Luqmān gave his advice to his son, he said “Enjoin what is good, and forbid what is wrong.” And then straight after, he said “and be patient over what befalls you.”

He said this straight after because he knew when one teaches others to do good and forbids evil, the natural response is people turn away from him and abuse him, but if one has Sabr, it will give them strength.

d) Another point is that “as-Sabr” has been left and mentioned at the end of this Sūrah because the 3 previous actions must be accompanied with Sabr, otherwise the human being is in loss.

One must hold firm onto their Īmān, and without patience, they won’t be able to do this. In terms of doing righteous deeds, like praying, and fasting and giving zakāt, if you don’t have Sabr than you can’t do that. One must have Sabr when teaching the truth, without Sabr, none of these 3 things can be done.

The beginning of the Sūrah began with “Wal Asr”, and the last word is “as-Sabr”, and in between, there’s the word “khusr”. In other words, if your time isn’t filled with sabr, then you’re in loss.
What is Sabr? The scholars say Sabr is 3 types:

a) Patience with the worship: praying all the Salāt, fasting when it’s required and doing the voluntary acts, praying Qiyām, paying your zakāt, giving Sadaqah continuously, reading Qur’ān, memorising Qur’ān, always making du’ā etc.

b) Patience in staying away from the sins: Whenever the nafṣ calls one to do harām, one must have a lot of Sabr to avoid this.

c) Patience in the trials and tribulations that Allāh gives us: One must have a lot of Sabr with all the tests that come his way.

Going back to the Āyāh where Allāh says: “And enjoin prayer upon your family and remain patient over it.” [20:132]

What does it mean “remain patient over it”? It can have 2 meanings:

a) It means you being patient in giving them advice in commanding them to pray without giving up on them as many do.

b) Command your family to pray and be really patient over the Salāt itself. The scholars said, the best form of da’wah of Salāt to the family is them seeing you pray.

Last point is that the Āyāh is saying, “Advise each other”, and it’s not just your family, friends or whoever you can reach. It should also reach advising the rest of the ummah whether near or far, and the first advice is to advise them to patience.

To give an understanding of how huge this word is, this is the same word that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) would say to the Sahābah when he wasn’t able to do anything with his own hands.

And this is also the case of the Prophets of the past. For example, with Mūsā (عليه السلام), Banī Isrā’il went through a lot of oppression under Fir’awn, and the only advise Mūsā (عليه السلام) had for them was to be patient where he stated: “Seek help through Allah and be patient. Indeed, the earth belongs to Allah. He causes to inherit it whom He wills of His servants. And the [best] outcome is for the righteous.” [7:128]

Eventually their patience paid off in the end and Allāh saved them and gave them so many bounties and favoured them as Allāh mentions. Also, this is what
Allāh commands throughout the Qur’ān. Allāh says to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم):

“Be patient like the Messengers before you.” [46:35]

Our time on earth is supposed to be full of Sabr otherwise we will truly be in loss.

*And Allāh knows best.*