

*Forgetfulness –  
Should we be concerned?*



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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*Surely all praise is due to Allah the Guardian Evolver of all that exist; Master of the Exalted Seat of Authority. He is the One who taught the Quran, created the human ones and then taught them what they didn't know. He is the Omniscient, the Wise and, He is compassionately responsive to His servants. We glorify Him with praise and we seek forgiveness from Him. We ask him for all good and we seek refuge with Him from every evil. There is none to be worshipped except Him and to Him is our final return.*

### About the Quran

قُلْ مَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُتَكَلِّفِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾  
إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْوَعْدُ لِلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾  
وَلَنَعْلَمَنَّ نَبَاهُ بَعْدَ حِينٍ ﴿٨٨﴾

*Say, "I am not asking you for any reward for this, nor am I an imposter. Indeed, he (the Message) is only a reminder for all knowledgeable beings, and you will surely know his great knowledge after a while. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 38: ayaat 86 – 88)*

As Allah ta'ala has indicated, the entire Quran is full of اذكار (reminders). This very Surah opens with the statement – ذى ذكر ان قص، و ال – This Book that we have received from Allah is a reminder to the forgetful (humans), a reminder to the deviators (humans and Jinn) and a reminder to all of creation of the reality of their Lord, Creator, Master and Owner. It is a reminder, which means that we already know, for one cannot be reminded of what was never known.

### Commentary

**Study Quran:** *What Muhammad is told to say here (ayah 86) is exactly what was said by Prophets before him – Nuh, Hud, Salih Lut and Shu'aib in Surah 26.*

*The Quran is only sent to remind people of God and the Hereafter and is naught but a revelation revealed (53: 54). People will come to see that what the Quran says is true after they die, after the Resurrection or after the victory and spread of Islam.*

**Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali:** *So far from there being any false or selfish motive in the Message proclaimed in Revelation, it is a healing mercy to all mankind. More, it is in accord with all parts of God's Creation, the handiwork of the One, True God.*

*There may be many things which we, in our “muddy vesture of decay”, may not fully understand or take in. If we only follow the right Path, we shall arrive at the Goal of the Hereafter, and then everything will be clear to us.*

**Ibn Katheer:** *... the Quran is a reminder for all those who are held accountable, men (humans) and Jinn. This was the view of Ibn ‘Abbas (rA).*

*You will see confirmation that what he says is true (after a while) means soon. Qatada said, “After death.”; Ikrima said, “It means on the Day of Resurrection.” There is no contradiction between the two views, because whoever dies comes under the rulings of the Day of Resurrection.*

## Forgetfulness: Should We Be Concerned

وَلَا نَقُولَنَّ لِشَيْءٍ إِنِّي فَاعِلٌ ذَٰلِكَ غَدًا ﴿٢٣﴾  
إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ ۗ وَاذْكُرْ رَبَّكَ إِذَا نَسِيتَ وَقُلْ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَهْدِيَنِي  
رَبِّي لِأَقْرَبَ مِنْ هَٰذَا رَشْدًا ﴿٢٤﴾

*And, do not say about anything, “I will definitely do that tomorrow.”, except (that you add) if Allah wills. And, remember your Guardian Lord when you forget and say, “Perhaps my Evolver will guide me even closer than this to a right path. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 18: ayaat 23 – 24)*

In Surah tul Kahf (18) Allah mentions forgetfulness three times and each indicates a different aspect of this condition. In this ayah it appears to be speaking without a true awareness of or attention to the words.

### Commentary

**Study Quran:** *These verses are addressed to the Prophet Muhammad reminding him that he should never make a promise regarding what he might do tomorrow, meaning the future in general, without acknowledging that its fulfillment depends upon the Will of God. In context it pertains to the Prophet’s initial promise to the Makkans that he would respond to their queries about the youth of the Cave the following day, assuming that he would receive revelation from God before that time about how to answer their questions. He did not receive revelation for 15 days, according to some... Some commentators suggest that the verse can be read as an instruction to the Prophet to acknowledge verbally God’s will to all such matters by adding the conditional clause, “If God wills.” to any promise of future action. It is, thus, a regular Muslim practice to utter this formula whenever one is speaking of what one expects to accomplish or hope will come to pass in the future. This practice serves as a constant reminder that nothing happens outside the Will of God.*

**Abdullah Yusuf ‘Ali:** *We must never rely upon our own resources so much as to forget God. If by any chance we do forget, we must come back to Him and keep Him in remembrance...*

*In Geometry the perfect circle is an ideal. Any given circle that we draw is not so perfect that we cannot draw one closer to the ideal. So is our life, there is always the hope of drawing closer and closer to God.*

Remembering erases forgetfulness. Bringing Allah to mind changes the inner and outer environment and is restorative.

فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لِي وَلَا تَكْفُرُونِ ﴿١٥٢﴾

***Then, remember Me, I will remember you. And, be graterful to Me and do not reject Me.***

(interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 2: 152)

The promise of Allah to remember us, as we call Him to mind generates activity in the heavens and on the earth. It elevates us in the presence of all submissive beings and increases our inner qualities.

### **Forgetfulness of Overwhelming Concern**

Then there is another form of forgetfulness mentioned in Surah tul Kahf related to the experiences of Prophet Musaa (as) with the Knowledgeable One (Khidr – the Green One). Khidr has told Musaa (as) that he would not be able to have patience with him.

وَكَيْفَ تَصْبِرُ عَلَىٰ مَا لَمْ تُحِطْ بِهِ خُبْرًا ﴿٦٨﴾  
قَالَ سَتَجِدُنِي إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ صَابِرًا وَلَا أَعْصِي لَكَ أَمْرًا ﴿٦٩﴾

***And, how will you be patient about that of which you do not have complete knowledge. He (Musaa) said, “You will find me, if Allah wills, one who is patient. And, I will not disobey you in any matter.*** (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 18: ayaat 68 – 69)

So, Musaa (as) was told that he could accompany the Knowledgeable One if he didn't question the experiences and decisions until explanations were given to him (Surah 18: 70). He agreed but, after the first seemingly unjust event, he began to question. When rebuked,

قَالَ لَا تَأْخُذْنِي بِمَا نَسِيتُ وَلَا تَرَهَقْنِي مِن أَمْرِي عُسْرًا ﴿٧٣﴾

***He said, “Do not punish me because I forgot and don't impose hardship on me from this matter.*** (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 18: ayah 73)

Musaa (as) is a Prophet and a Messenger. In Surah Maryam (19) Allah gives him the title of مُخْلِصٌ, one who is truly sincere.

وَأذْكُرْ فِي الْكِتَابِ مُوسَىٰ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مُخْلَصًا وَكَانَ رَسُولًا نَّبِيًّا ﴿٥١﴾

***And, mention Musaa in the Book. Surely, he was one dedicated and sincere and he was a messenger and a prophet.*** (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 19: ayah 51)

So, this forgetfulness is one caused from concern in the moment with what seems unjust and un-called for. Khidr had put a hole in the boat of impoverished youth scraping out a living by transporting people across a river. Musaa (as) was very sensitive to injustice and he himself had

been saved as an infant and as an adult by water. The reminder was sufficient for the moment and, surely, Musaa asked for forgiveness for his lapse of remembering his promise. We should also pay attention to when we are in similar situations and try to call ourselves to a consciousness that may provide self-control. At the same time, we should not be too hard on ourselves, realizing that one much greater than we are forgot.

Forgetfulness may begin as a simple fault, a deficiency that may have any of various causes or a combination of causes. According to a Harvard Health publication, the tendency to forget may come from these very common causes and, as you may observe, is treatable or able to be corrected.

1. Lack of sleep – this is perhaps the greatest unappreciated cause of being unable to remember. This can also lead to mood changes and anxiety, which in turn contribute to problems with memory.
2. Medications – tranquilizers, anti-depressants, some blood pressure drugs and other medications can affect memory, usually by causing sedation or confusion.
3. Underactive Thyroid – again a treatable condition
4. Alcohol – excess consumption interferes with short term memory. (While this should not be a problem in the Islamic community, it definitely is.)
5. Stress and anxiety – anything that makes it harder to concentrate will block the formation of new memories and the retrieval of old ones.
6. Depression – sadness, lack of drive or motivation and being unable to come out of that state. Forgetfulness can be a sign of depression or a consequence of it.

### **Forgetfulness Caused by the Evil Ones**

Then, there is a third type of forgetfulness that is truly a cause of concern. Reference to it is found in various places in the Quran. In Surah tul Kahf it is while Musaa is on the journey to find the Knowledgeable One with a young companion, who most identify as Yushaa (Joshua),

قَالَ أَرَأَيْتَ إِذْ أَوَيْنَا إِلَى الصَّخْرَةِ فَإِنِّي نَسِيتُ الْحُوتَ وَمَا أَنسَنِيهِ إِلَّا  
الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ أَذْكُرَهُ، وَاتَّخَذَ سَبِيلَهُ فِي الْبَحْرِ عَجَبًا ﴿٦٣﴾

*He said, “Did you see that, when we rested at the rock, I completely forgot the fish? And, nothing caused me to forget to mention it except Shaitan. And, he took his path in the sea in a wondrous manner.”* (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 18: ayah 63)

### **Commentary**

**Abdullah Yusuf ‘Ali:** *The attendant actually saw the fish swimming away in the sea and, yet, “forgot” to tell his master. In his case the ‘forgetting’ was more that forgetting. Inertia had made him refrain from telling the important news. In such matters, inertia is almost as bad as active spite, the suggestion of Satan. So new knowledge or spiritual knowledge is not only passed by in ignorance, but sometimes by culpable negligence.*

And, it seems, by the words of Allah, that this culpable negligence is influenced and perhaps instigated by Shaitan.

**Study Quran:** *When asked for the fish, Joshua remembered having witnessed its miraculous escape to the sea. Didst thou not see? Is not meant as a question, for Joshua knew that Moses had not witnessed the loss of the fish, rather, this is Joshua’s way of introducing the marvelous account to Moses.*

*Commentators note that Joshua, like Moses, knew that they were seeking the juncture of the two seas – according to some reports, he even knew that losing their fish was to be a sign that they had reached their destination. Yet, he fell asleep after witnessing the fish’s escape and forgot the matter upon awakening. Joshua attempted to excuse his oversight by claiming it was Satan who had caused him to neglect to mention the matter of the fish to Moses.*

Though this may be one way of seeing the behavior and statement of the companion in this particular incident, it can not be ignored that Allah chose to state this in this particular way and to make a similar statement prior to this one in Surah Yusuf.

وَقَالَ لِلَّذِي ظَنَّ أَنَّهُ نَاجٍ مِّنْهُمَا اذْكُرْنِي عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ  
فَأَنسَهُ الشَّيْطَانُ ذِكْرَ رَبِّهِ فَلَبِثَ فِي السِّجْنِ بِضْعَ  
سِنِينَ



*And, he said to the one he estimated would be saved of the two of them, “Mention me in the presence of your lord.” Then, Shaitan caused him to forget to make mention to his lord. So, he (Yusuf) remained in prison for a few (more) years. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 12: ayah 42)*

### **Commentary**

**Study Quran:** *On account of forgetting of the cup bearer, Joseph’s stay in prison was prolonged for several years, a total of seven years according to most commentators. Satan caused him to forget to make mention to his lord can also be translated, “Satan caused him to forget remembering his Lord in which case it would mean that at the particular moment when Joseph told the wine carrier ... he forgot to remember God. According to Ibn ‘Abbas, had Joseph remembered God when he told the wine carrier to mention him to his Lord, God would have released him from prison earlier. (Q). About this the Prophet is reported to have said, “God have mercy on Joseph. Had it not been for a statement he made ... he would not have remained in the prison as long as he did.” (T)*

**Abdullah Yusuf ‘Ali:** *The eternal plan does not put God’s men under obligations to men commanding mere worldly favor or earthly power. If they are given a chance, the obligation is on the worldly men ...in this case, the poor cup bearer was but human. When he was in the midst of the court, he forgot the poor fellow prisoner languishing in prison. In this he yielded to the lower part of his nature, which is guided by Satan, the personification\* of evil – a real force in our lives, if we but knew it.*

Remembering Allah is the greatest act we can do. Memorizing the Quran will assist our physical ability to remember.

أَتْلُ مَا أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ ۖ  
الصَّلَاةُ تَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ  
وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا تَصْنَعُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

*Recite what is revealed to you from the Book and establish the Salaat (formal prayers). Indeed, the Salaat restrains from the indecent and repugnant. And, the remembrance of Allah is greatest (of what you do). And Allah knows whatever you do.* (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 29: ayah 45)

Then Allah says,

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنْسَاهُمْ أَنْفُسَهُمْ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ  
الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

*And do not be like those who forget Allah so that He causes them to forget their own souls. They are those who are wickedly perverse.* (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 59: ayah 19)

### **Commentary**

**Study Quran:** *Prayer prevents these and other sins in that it purifies the heart. “He whose prayer does not prevent indecency and abomination, his prayer increases him in naught but distance from Allah. (Ibn Mas’ood)*

**Abdullah Yusuf Ali:** *To forget God is to forget the only Reality. As we are only reflected realities, how can we understand or do justice to or remember ourselves, when we forget the very source of our being?*



Duah

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا  
اَكْتَسَبَتْ رَبَّنَا لَا تُؤَاخِذْنَا إِنْ نَسِينَا أَوْ أَخْطَأْنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْ  
عَلَيْنَا أَصْرًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تُحَمِّلْنَا  
مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِ ۗ وَاعْفُ عَنَّا وَارْحَمْنَا أَنْتَ مَوْلَانَا  
فَانصُرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ

*Allah does not burden a soul except to her capacity. For her is what she has earned and against her is what she has brought upon herself. “Our Lord, don’t take us to account if we forget or make mistakes. Our Lord, and don’t place a burden on us as You placed on those before us. Our Lord, do not impose on us what we do not have the ability to bear. And, pardon us and forgive us and have mercy on us. You are our Protector, so help us against the disbelieving people. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 2: ayah 286)*