



[Gafla: What it Means to be Heedless](#)

In the Holy Qur'an, Allah Swt reveals:

Today We will save only your body so that you may be assigned to those who come after you, and truly most people are heedless of Our signs.

That's in Surah Yunus; also in the same *surah*,

Truly, those who do not hope for a meeting with Us, but content themselves with the worldly life and feel secure in that, and those who are mindless of Our Signs, for those their refuge is the fire because of what they earned in this world. Truly, those who believe and perform wholesome deeds, their Lord will guide them by their faith. Beneath them rivers will flow and gardens of bliss.

I was trying to understand today some of the terminology of *gafla*. It has many meanings to it. It means to neglect; not to heed, to disregard, to ignore and be forgetful, to be careless, unmindful, foolish, indifferent, apathetic. To be heedless means not to pay attention. To think about the tones of each of these meanings is really important. To think about the qualities of heedlessness, to be neglectful, to disregard and ignore, these are all very conscious acts. To forget, to be careless, to be foolish and indifferent and apathetic might not be so conscious. It might be more of character / *akhlaq*.

To be near to Allah and close at hand to Allah is an obvious goal. “Something to happen, soon,” comes from the same root. You have this indifference and heedlessness, disregarding and unconsciousness; yet at the same time, you have the inclination that something might happen soon. It’s a very dynamic and potentially changing manifestation and mentality. The shortest and most direct way to have close companionship and put these concepts together goes back to the implications of *qurban*. I spoke about the small sacrifices, compared to the large sacrifices of Sidna Ibrahim (as). These small sacrifices obviously are things that people either do by character (at the highest level) or by choice, at a lower and more basic level. You see that there is a relationship between this kind of ignoring, forgetfulness, carelessness, and indifference; and the dynamic of understanding what we could do to come closer to Allah.

When you put these together, you see how heedlessness absolutely makes it impossible to come toward Allah or toward the truth. To be foolish, and disregard, and forgetful is the same thing. How can you do that and hope for a relationship that will bear fruit, or give you a sense of companionship? No one wants to be near a heedless friend, or a person who is forgetful of their commitments. It has other meanings of intimacy and closeness, too. It tells us of our attitude. One who sacrifices is not someone who expects something in return. If we look to heedlessness briefly, and to the human qualities of coming near to Allah, we have to see that heedlessness in all its meanings of *gafla* is spiritual darkness, plunged into a state of spiritual darkness. To be heedless is to be a servant of ego and desires.

The fruit of serving the ego is heedlessness, and ignoring, and forgetfulness, disregarding warnings, and not paying attention to the signs. To disregard the signs, the ‘*āyāt* of Allah, is to ignore what is right in front of you because you want something else. You think that what you want is important: fame, power, money,

possessions, attention. Each of these grabs you and holds you by one leg and pulls you under. Obedience is to be a servant of Allah Swt, to trust in Allah Swt. It has its correlative, too, in independence, not dependence – freedom. Freedom doesn't come from having a pocket full of money or power. If you have a pocket full of money, you can bet that you will have a mailbox full of bills, too.

It doesn't have to do with skills that you use in a way of goodness. It has only to do with skills that you might use in the way of *dunya*. Only skills that you use in *dunya* in the way of Allah are worthwhile. They are the skills we use hopefully every day in our work. If you don't believe in it, you will be brought to believe in it one way or another. Heedlessness is to prefer your own ideas to the meanings you can plumb from the minds of the knowers, that you can find in the '*āyāt* of the Qur'an. To favor your own opinions over the teachings of the Prophets – may Allah help us to remember the teachings of the Prophets – is to forget, be foolish, heedless, indifferent, and apathetic. It's like an addiction to our own ego, to be sure we are always right, to be preoccupied with the fantasies of our *nafs*.

Maria Montessori said, "Help me to do it by myself." We have taken that on as "Help me to help myself and help others." It implies that you need someone to help you. The ego says, "I want to do it by myself," but "help me to do it by myself" is different. You can almost sum up the teachings of Islam and the Qur'an in that saying – guidelines direct enough, and at the same time, flexible enough. This heedlessness encompasses the denying of the rights that Allah Swt has over us, denying the rights we have ourselves, and responsibilities we have toward one another that Allah has given us. We have no rights that do not involve our neighbor, our brother, our sister.

To be heedless and indifferent shows its face as we criticize the creation of Allah Swt, how Allah unfolds things in our lives, how He makes us face things in our lives, and choose between preferences and desires, our submission and obedience.

Heedlessness exists in our finding fault in the way Allah Swt handles our affairs, not liking what position we are in, or the portion He has given us, wishing that it were some other way. Of course, there is always room for questioning; though it may sound like complaining sometimes. But Allah does not lay upon us a burden we cannot bear, and it implies that there are times when we feel burdened. We can question that. We can either go on to understand, or we can turn in the other direction and complain.

To fail to realize the purpose of our existence is the worst kind of indifference, heedlessness, disrespect, disregard, foolishness, and apathy. This is *gafla*: not to even seek the reason for our existence. How can we have real purpose in our life unless we understand why we exist? To continue to allow activities that make us heedless, and focus us on heedlessness, is the worst thing we can do—not to take our responsibility, not to do the best we can do, not to heed the guidelines of our parents, our elders, our Lord. We can struggle our whole lives with these problems, believe it or not. You young people might not believe it, but I can assure you. You can struggle your whole life with things like anger, desires, or fears. I guess the good thing is we struggle. The other meaning is apathy. When we give up struggling and succumb without struggling, that's even another story.

Allah tells us in Qur'an that we are heedless to the signs; you knew them and you forgot them. You're indifferent; you are apathetic. You don't see; you are too involved with your own self. Along with that, you don't praise Allah. You don't stand with one another. You don't stand with members of the family, friends, brothers and sisters. You don't say, *inshā'a-Llāh*, and mean it. We say, "This is what I believe. This

is what I think. This is what it is.” You can be 92 years old or 2 years old and say the same thing. The older you are, the more you should realize and the more you should heed. The more you pay attention, the more you give respect to others. The older you get, the less sure you could get also in certain ways if you deviate. The worst thing perhaps is not to realize that Allah Swt is closer to us than our life itself. We don’t understand that our essence is rooted in Allah.

I use the word “understand” on purpose; I don’t mean “believe.” Understanding is a dynamic process. Belief can be something you were taught, and never thought about. Understanding means you have to work at something, because you have a question. To ignore the kindness, the signs of love and mercy and plenty that Allah gives us every single day – the gifts, the assistance, the service – to fail to embrace and to fail to cherish the opportunities that Allah Swt has given us in our lives is a great travesty on our own existence. The goal of life is not material. You can’t make an argument that the rewards of life are material. Most people don’t see the spirituality and the opportunities of changing their concepts and minds and attitudes toward the rewards of a life.

Whatever we get from Allah Swt, inward or outward, we have to realize that’s there they come from. It’s what we really need. And how are we going to deal with what He gives us? He gives us a check from work, a house to live in, influence to guide other people, talent to make things beautiful, to build gardens and homes. How do you accept it? He gives you a job where you don’t know the language in a strange country. He gives you opportunities that don’t seem to be opportunities. How do we accept them? To fail to assume these responsibilities we have been given with respect, and to care and to protect what He has given us—these are some of the travesties, *gafla*.

The way He has brought us up in Islam, in Tasawwuf, in this community, as friends, brothers, and sisters—this is the most important thing. To be heedless of these things is a great travesty on your own life. Why come to the end of your life and wonder what it was about? Nothing is better than to let the soil lie fallow for a while so it gives better crops for the next year. But it doesn't mean that you don't segment it; otherwise, you would have no crops. Nothing is worse than to have fallow soil and not plant on it for your needs for the coming season. To be heedless is to treat love as if it were not a nice word, a different kind of four-letter word. To be heedless is to be attached to hatred and malice; the worst is to be attached to a kind of competition that makes you attracted to power, and insecurity, and ego.

When we start to realize that we have lost our ability and our capacity to distinguish between what is real and what is illusory, when we realize that we savor the things of this world more than we savor the things of the inner world, and the outer world is more than the inner world in our minds – that is to be heedless. Heedless means to neglect. When we neglect our self, we neglect others. When we neglect others, we disregard the welfare of the whole community. When we disregard the welfare of the community, we disregard the welfare of the world. And we begin to ignore all the signs; we don't see them anymore. We become forgetful. We become careless in what we do, and we lose access to being able to distinguish between what is real and what is unreal. And we join another group.

We join the army of those who are willing to spread the disease of ego and desires and partisanship. If we say the things of this world are more important than that, we are saying that fear is more important than courage, and doubt is more important than assuredness, and living for myself is more important than living for Allah and for the community of the *ummah*. We become inattentive and inactive in helping the poor, the homeless, the orphans, the hungry, and all those who are ill.

We start to think we are independent of Allah. But when we are in trouble, Allah is there: “O Allah help us, O, Allah is merciful.” But when you are out of trouble, there is no pleading, no *gawth*.

What’s reinforced is our ignorance and heedlessness, to the point where people prefer not to be near to Allah, because near to Allah is near to seeing yourself. We prefer to have everything we need, and all the bases covered, not to sacrifice. That’s heedlessness. But placing our trust in Allah is buying something of great value; it is not selling our soul. Or maybe it is, in the form of *bai’at*: selling ourselves to the Good Owner. When we plant seeds of good, things will grow even in bad soil. The next thing you know, instead of being drunk for the things that are bad for you, you are uplifted by the things that are good. When you are heeding the signs, then all knowledge comes to you that you need in the moment. Nothing can attack us that can overcome us. And we have the minions by our sides to help us defend what is good and what is true.

We need to wake up. We have to realize we are asleep. Sometime we wake up from a dream, and we think the dream is very, very real; and that all this is a sign something’s going to happen. Sometimes there are signs, but most of the time we mix the world of reality with fantasy. When we find ourselves thinking the good thoughts, making choices to assist others, choices that affirm our trust in Allah, when we are affirming the bounties that come from Allah Swt, and the friendship with one another, kindness in words, caring for one another, we realize that life is a two-way street, and what I give out is going to come back in a good way. So the example of our lives becomes very, very important. To be positive, to take our relationship with Allah, with the *ambiyā*, with the *shuyukh* is very important. It is important that our identity lies in our association with Allah Swt.

We can depend on science, on medicine, on political choices, on academic knowledge as giving us some assistance, some help in our lives; but who we [really] depend on is the One Who created all those things. We have to carry that dependency in a proper way. It's why we have linguistic things that help us, like when we say *inshā'a-llāh*, *alhamdulillah-llāh*, *mā'sha-llāh*. It is not just to say those things, but to remind ourselves of where this all comes from. "*Alhamdulillah-llāh*, you went to the doctor on time." "*Mā'sha-llāh*, Fatima Mirza had her baby this morning at 9:00, a baby girl, Muneera." We named her a few months ago. Natural birth, after all the trouble they had. *Alhamdulillah-llāh*, may Allah give her long life, and wisdom, and bring her not only properly into Islam but into *tariqah*.

You come into this life as a spiritual being, connected to something greater than yourself: your mother, by an umbilical cord. You come into life with your soul resting in Allah Swt, not even breathing. You are a water animal, swimming in the sea. Then you take the first breath, and immediately the bacteria and viruses and all the rest say, "Aha! A new target! Delicious." A spiritual human being is how we enter this world, and a spiritual human being is how we should exit this world. In the middle of which, there are a lot of challenges. We know that Allah Swt is our Good Friend. We know that we want to pay attention to the signs. We know that we want to be in the company of good people, and make the proper sacrifices. We know we want to trust. Every day we wonder, every one of us wonders, how can we not have *gafla* and to heed the signs? *Aslaamu aleikum*.