34854 - Can Allaah be described as forgetting?

the question

Can Allaah be described as forgetting?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Forgetting can mean two things:

1 – Overlooking something that is known, as in the verses (interpretation of the meaning):

“Punish us not if we forget or fall into error”

[al-Baqarah 2:286]

“And indeed We made a covenant with Adam before, but he forgot, and We found on his part no firm will power”

[Ta-Ha 20:115]

- according to one of the two scholarly opinions.

And the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “I am only human, I forget as you forget, so if I forget then remind me.”

And he (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Whoever sleeps and misses a prayer or forgets it, let him pray it when he remembers it.”

This kind of forgetfulness cannot be attributed to Allaah, on the basis of two kinds of evidence, textual and rational.

The textual evidence is the verse in which He says of Moosa (interpretation of the meaning):

“[Moosa (Moses)] said: ‘The knowledge thereof is with my Lord, in a Record. My Lord neither errs nor He forgets’”

[Ta-Ha 20:52]

The rational evidence is the fact that forgetting is a fault or shortcoming, and Allaah is far above having any shortcomings. He is described as perfect, as He says (interpretation of the meaning):

“and for Allaah is the highest description. And He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise”
[al-Nahl 16:60]

Based on this it is not permissible to describe Allaah as forgetting in this sense, under any circumstances.

The second meaning of forgetting is deliberately and knowingly neglecting something, as in the verses (interpretation of the meaning):

“So, when they forgot (the warning) with which they had been reminded, We opened for them the gates of every(pleasant) thing”

[al-An’am 6:44]

“And indeed We made a covenant with Adam before, but he forgot, and We found on his part no firm will power”

[Ta-Ha 20:115]

- this is according to the other scholarly opinion concerning the meaning of this verse.

And the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said concerning the categories of those who own horses:

“… and a man who keeps them [horses] for earning his living so as not to ask of others, but he does not forget Allaah’s rights (i.e., zakaah on the wealth he earns through using them in trading

etc) and does not overburden them”

This kind of “forgetting” is ascribed to Allaah as He says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Then taste you (the torment of the Fire) because of your forgetting the Meeting of this Day of yours. Surely, We too will forget you”

[al-Sajdah 32:14]

And Allaah says concerning the hypocrites:

“They have forgotten Allaah, so He has forgotten them. Verily, the hypocrites are the Faasiqoon (rebellious, disobedient to Allaah)”

[al-Tawbah 9:67]

And in Saheeh Muslim, in Kitaab al-Zuhd wa’l-Raqaa’iq it is narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: They said: “O Messenger of Allaah, will we see our Lord on the Day of Resurrection?” … and in this hadeeth its says: “Allaah will meet His [disbelieving] slave and will say: ‘Did you think that you would meet Me?’ He will say, ‘No.’ He will say: ‘I will forget you as you forgot Me.’”

Allaah’s leaving or forgetting something is one of His actions that happen by His will and in accordance with His wisdom. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“and left them in darkness. (So) they could not see”

[al-Baqarah 2:17]

“We shall leave them to surge like waves on one another”

[al-Kahf 18:99]

“And indeed We have left thereof an evident Ayah (a lesson and a warning and a sign)”

[al-‘Ankaboot 29:35]

There are many well-known texts which confirm that Allaah leaves or forsakes things and also confirm His other actions that have to do with His will. This is indicative of the perfection of His power and might, and the way in which He does these actions is not like the way in which His creation does things, even though they share the same basic meaning, as is well known among Ahl al-Sunnah.