

Ten Simple Ways to Overcome Feelings of Sadness (Based on Islamic Teachings)

Practical and spiritual steps based on Quran, Hadith, and Common Sense to overcome feelings of sadness and unhappiness

We all experience feeling of sadness and go through challenges during different parts of our lives. For some, feelings of sadness and gloom are not as common, but others may experience it more frequently. Depending on their severity, feelings of sadness can impact the day to day functioning of our lives. These feelings can cause irritability, difficulty concentrating, not wanting to do anything, and in severe cases may even impact our physical wellbeing and can lead to depression.

So, how do we deal with the ups and downs of our emotional states? Based on the teachings of Quran, Hadith, and Islamic teachings this article explores some of the ways we can try to address those feelings and to help us navigate through the daily cases of stresses and challenges that may bring us down and keep us there. We recognize that some cases are more serious and instead may need professional intervention. Those cases obviously should be dealt with separately.

So, let's explore the journey but remember that it involves a real effort from us. For those of us who are willing to work at it will be able to reap the benefits of the removal of these negative feelings from our hearts and will enjoy a path to joy and happiness.

1. Remember Allah often

There is no better remedy for the sadness in our hearts than the remembrance of Allah. Remembering Allah with focus, devotion and dedication is a known cure for the sadness of our hearts. Believers know this from practice and also from the words of Allah in the Quran, where He says:

“Those who believe and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah. Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest.” —

Source: Surah Ar-Raad, 28.

One of the Prophet’s (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) hadiths on this topic states:

“He who remembers his Lord and he who does not are like the living and the dead.” — *Source: Bukhari & Muslim.*

In another hadith mentioned in Tirmidhi, the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) referred to Allah’s remembrance as ***“...the purest in the sight of your Lord, which raises your rank to the highest...”***

So, let’s ensure that we take the time to remember Allah often and to do it with a lot of devotion and sincerity. Not only the remembrance of Allah can help remove or subside the sadness in our hearts, we can see its positive effects in other areas of our lives, not to mention the rewards in the hereafter. The Prophet (s.a.w.s.) has taught us numerous short remembrances (azkar) that we can repeat frequently throughout the day (e.g. ***SubhanAllah, Alhamdulillah, Allah-o-Akbar***, and others), not to mention the Quran verses are the best of the remembrances.

2. Ask Allah for His forgiveness (Increase Istighfar)

‘Istighfar’ or asking Allah for forgiveness is known to be a super spiritual remedy in Islam. Both the Quran and Hadith enumerate countless benefits of constantly asking Allah for His forgiveness. Not only can we expect its rewards in this life but we can expect even more in the hereafter as well.

And that’s for a good reason. We live in a world where we are constantly exposed to countless possibilities of committing sins and unfortunately, many of us end up committing them— sometimes even unbeknownst to us. We need to, therefore, cultivate the habit of constantly asking Allah for His forgiveness to ensure that we are cleansing ourselves and that we don’t get punished due to those sins. Consider this powerful and quite relevant hadith of the Prophet (s.a.w.s.), which was reported by mother of the believers, Ayesha:

“If the sins of a servant (of Allah) are numerous and he does not have good deeds to compensate, Allah will afflict him with sadness as an expiation for him.” — Source: Musnad Ahmad (#24708).

So, getting into the habit of constantly asking for Allah’s forgiveness provides us a way to redeem for those sins — the ones we know and the ones we don’t.

One of the simpler ways to ask Allah for forgiveness is to say “**Astaghfirulla**” (I beseech Allah for forgiveness). This was mentioned in a hadith in Sahih Muslim. In another hadith quoted by Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him), he said:

“I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say: “By Allah, I ask Allah for forgiveness and I repent to Him more than seventy times every day.” — Source: Sahih al-Bukhari (6307).

We also learn from a hadith of Ibn Abbas who reported that the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) said,

“Whoever increases his prayers for forgiveness, Allah will grant him relief from every worry, a way out from every hardship, and provide for him in ways he does not expect.” — Source: Musnad Ahmad 2234.

3. Being mindful in our worship

To ensure that our acts of worship have a positive effect on us, we must be mindful of Allah, especially during those acts of worship. [Mindfulness is defined as](#) “the quality or state of being conscious or aware of something” and “a mental state achieved by focusing one’s awareness on the present moment...” We can’t approach Allah — our ‘Rabb’ and sustainer — with a half-hearted eeman (faith) and being unmindful of Him and expect a remedy in return. Not only that’s illogical to assume but we also know it from the following hadith of the Prophet (s.a.w.s.):

“Know that Allah does not answer a dua from a distracted heart.” — Source: Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, 3479.

We also know from a [famous hadith of Jibrael](#) (Angel Gabriel) that our state of worship should be to ***“worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you do not see Him, then know know for certain that He certainly sees you.”*** — Source: Sahih al-Bukhari 4777 (Book 65, Hadith 299).

Worship, therefore, is not meant to be merely a ritual involving the uttering of a few words or physical movements. Rather, the idea of worshipping Allah is to engage our hearts and minds to the degree where we can actually feel the connection with our Creator. Accordingly, when we remember and glorify Allah and worship Him while being mindful (e.g. during salat, making dua, reciting

Quran, and so on), we will naturally make room for His remembrance in our hearts, diverting our attention from the sadness and gloom that may be overwhelming us.

4. Think positive about Allah — Our Lord

There's nothing more terrible than not expecting good from Allah — our Lord and 'Rabb'. This is especially true for us Muslims who have been fortunate to have already been guided towards Allah's message of truth and mercy. How can we think that Allah — **the most merciful** — would want something that's not good for the believers? Furthermore, how can we expect a positive outcome from our Du'as when we are preoccupied with thoughts that Allah wouldn't listen to us? In a Hadith Qudsi, Allah makes this part quite clear that we will find Allah as we think of Him. As narrated by the Prophet (s.a.w.s.),

“Allah the Most High said, ‘I am as My servant thinks (expects) I am. I am with him when he mentions Me. If he mentions Me to himself, I mention him to Myself; and if he mentions Me in an assembly, I mention him in an assembly greater than it. If he draws near to Me a hand’s length, I draw near to him an arm’s length. And if he comes to Me walking, I go to him at speed’” — Source: Hadith Qudsi.

About this hadith, one of the companions of the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) named Wathilah said to his friend Yazid who had a fatal illness, “What do you expect from Allah?” Yazid said, “By Allah, I expect good from Allah.” Wathilah said, “Rejoice! For I heard the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s.) say that Allah Almighty said: ***‘I am as my servant expects me. If he expects good, he will have it. If he expects evil, he will have it.’***” — [Source: Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān 641.](#)

So, while in a state of sadness our hearts may be inclined to only focus and stare at darkness, we should instead snap out of those states and remind ourselves of the

mercy of Allah and how He has the power to turn sadness and gloom into joy and happiness. Yes! He can from His mercy, and let's only expect that from Him.

5. Cultivating the garden of optimism in our hearts

We can also remove the feelings of sadness by working to invoke feelings of optimism and happiness within ourselves. Sure, it can be difficult to dream up a sense of optimism at a moments notice, especially when we need it the most during those gloomy times. But with some practice, we can cultivate that attitude in our being and cultivate that garden of optimism in our hearts where we can take refuge when we find those feelings of sadness start to creep in.

We can cultivate that garden of optimism by reminding ourselves frequently of the promise of Allah and His beloved messenger (s.a.w.s.). Quran is filled with those messages of optimism and glad tidings. Frequent recitation of those verses can help us build that sense of optimism over time and can help in bringing peace and joy to our souls. Consider some of those Quranic verses below:

“...and glad tidings for the believers...” — Surah An-Naml, 2.

“And announce to the believers the glad tidings, that they will have from Allah a Great Bounty.” — Surah Al-Ahzab, 47.

“For them are glad tidings in this world and in the Hereafter.” — Surah Yunus, 64.

“It is He who sent down tranquility into the hearts of the believers that they would increase in faith along with their (present) faith.” — Surah Al-Fath, 4.

This garden of optimism is the one that Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah have mercy on him) referred to when he mentioned the hardships that his captors inflicted upon him by imprisoning him for extended periods of time. Ibn al-Qayyim reported that Ibn Taymiyyah told him once,

“What can my enemies do to me? My paradise and my garden are in my heart wherever I go and they are never separated from me. If I am imprisoned, then it is seclusion for worship. If I am killed, then it is martyrdom. If they expel me from my land, then it is tourism.” –

Source: al-Wābil al-Ṣayyib 1/48

So, let’s cultivate that garden of optimism in our hearts based on the messages of the Quran and Sunnah. This garden can be our refuge when going through challenging and sad times of our lives. In fact, the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) told us to stay optimistic in all times. Consider the following hadith:

“If the Day of Resurrection were established upon one of you, while he has in his hand a sapling (small plant), then let him plant it.” –

Source: Hadith of Ahmad.

What other proof do we need to stay optimistic?

6. Taming our inner voices

All of us carry various types of inner voices within ourselves, which we develop and / or acquire through our upbringing and other life experiences. As these voices have the potential to guide our thinking and behaviors, we should especially become aware of any negative ones as they may be the ones fueling our negative thoughts, which in turn may be exacting a toll on our emotional and physical wellbeing. Scientific research tells us that negative thoughts can actually diminish our ability to think clearly and to carry out day to day activities.

Constantly thinking negatively about our problems not only may not resolve anything but it can further exacerbate our frustrations and get us stuck in this negative cycle where we can stay trapped for a long time unless we intervene and take steps to pull ourselves out from it.

From an Islamic standpoint, the Quran uses the term ‘waswas’ for bad thoughts, which essentially refers to Satan’s whispers that he inspires in our hearts and minds. These thoughts in turn can evoke negative emotions within ourselves causing further sadness and gloom. Allah tells us in the Quran how Satan actually evokes those emotions within us. Consider the following verse:

“Satan threatens you with poverty and orders you to immorality, while Allah promises you forgiveness from Him and bounty.” —
(*Surah Al-Baqarah, 268*)

One of the Quranic remedies to fight against these negative thoughts, which in turn may be causing our sadness and other negative emotions, is in **Surah An-Naas**. The meanings of this Surah clearly tells us that it’s about asking Allah’s protection from Satan and his whispers (waswas). So, the prophet has advised us to frequently recite this Surah along with Surah Al-Falaq, which also asks Allah for His protection from other types of evils that could inflict us.

7. Taking the time to think and reflect

regularly get trapped by the spells of unexplained sadness and gloom, then we need to also try to take a more objective look at the problem, especially when we are not in those moods. We can do this by taking the time to think through the thoughts that may be evoking those feelings of sadness. If they are related to the past, then we need to find ways to make peace with our past. We understand that one can’t forget the past but we do need to keep it in the right perspective and shouldn’t let it stop us from moving forward. As Umar Ibn Khattab said,

“Sometimes the people with the worst past, create the best future.”

If it's something that's current, then we need to find ways to address them more constructively. Instead of jumping to make decisions in a bad state of mind, we need to think through the issues more rationally and objectively. Sometimes, it can also be useful to discuss such situations with close friends and family as they may be able to provide a more objective view on things. For challenging situations, it's also recommended to [seek professional help](#) if we are unable to get a control of those feelings.

The idea is not to sit idle and let random thoughts and emotions beat us down. Rather, we need to get clarity on the root causes behind our emotional states as that can help us become aware of the emotions that may be triggering the sadness and gloom.

8. Making a lot of Du'as

Trials and challenges are part of everyone's life. But to help us counter these, Allah has provided us with the tool of making Dua to Him. Allah tells us in the Quran,

“And your Lord said: Invoke Me (and ask Me for anything), I will respond to your (invocation)...” – (Surah Ghaafir, 60).

“And when My slaves ask you (O Muhammad (s.a.w.s.)) concerning Me, then (answer them), I am indeed near. I respond to the invocations of the supplicant when he calls on Me. So let them obey Me and believe in Me, so that they may be led aright” – (Surah Al-Baqarah, 186).

The Prophet (s.a.w.s.) said:

“Your Lord, may He be blessed and exalted, is characterized by modesty and generosity, and He is so kind to His slave that, if His slave raises his hands to Him, He does not let him take them back empty.” — Source: Narration in Abu Dawood, 1488).

The message is clear in that [Allah always listens to our du’as](#). If they are not accepted at the moment, then there may be specific reasons for it. These could be because of the burden of the sins that we may be carrying, or that it may be better for us that our du’as are not answered at that time. Regardless, we should stay persistent in asking Allah and not lose hope in our du’as that we make to Allah and eventually He will provide us a relief from the sadness and other problems that may be haunting us.

9. It’s all temporary anyway

In times of sadness, we should remind ourselves that all this ‘dunya’ (world) is temporary anyway— let alone our sadness. In fact, this sadness will eventually go away. We learn both from the Quran and Hadith that the value of this life compared to the hereafter is miniscule. In a famous hadith, the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) mentioned:

“What is the example of this worldly life in comparison to the Hereafter other than one of you dipping his finger in the sea? Let him see what he brings forth.” — Source: Sahih Muslim 2858.

The hadith essentially compares the water that’s left on one’s finger after dipping it in the sea (worldly life) to the water that remains in the sea (the hereafter). Keeping this in perspective and the fact that we are all on a journey to a destination where the current life and situation will not matter at all, should give

us some relief. So, let's be patient and pray to Allah that He guides us to a way of ease from the current (and temporary) predicament.

10. Leaving it to Allah

Let's face it. There will be times when things still may not go our way. It happens. May be more often than we would like sometimes. But let's also recognize that our preferred way may not be what's in our best interest in the long run. We may not understand it at that moment but Allah in His infinite wisdom may have things planned for us in a different and better way. Allah tells us in the Quran:

“But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah Knows, while you know not.” — Surah Al-Baqarah, 216.

We also know this from the stories narrated to us in Surah Al-Kahf, especially the incidents that transpired between Prophet Moosa (Moses) and Khidr. Prophet Moosa (A.S.) (being a Prophet) tried to argue with Khidr about the wisdom of his decisions, which Khidr was taking on behest of Allah. However, that wisdom didn't become evident until later when Khidr explained them to Prophet Moosa. We should, therefore, study that Surah in detail and try to understand its meanings. That's probably the reason that the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.s.) instructed us to recite this Surah weekly on Fridays as a reminder and to help us get a wider perspective of things in life.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, let's try to use the above guidance to help us start looking at things a bit differently. Let's be on guard and not let Satan's whispers fool us in believing that the above is somehow nothing but about instilling a false sense of optimism. **It's not.** Rather, it's based on something real that both Allah and the Prophet told us about. Islam and its teachings are glad tidings for all of humanity

and provide us a path to peace and happiness. But that doesn't come automatically. Rather we have to strive for it. Let's, therefore, continue to fear Allah while having complete hope and trust in Him. We learn from verse 2 of Surah At-Talaq in the Quran,

***“...And whoever fears Allah — He will make for him a way out.” —
Surah At-Talaq***

Let's start a new day believing in the opportunities that we have available to us to be good and to offer good to this world with our positive attitude. Let's ensure that we fill our days by praising and remembering Allah, asking for His forgiveness, sending blessings on the Prophet, being good to our families and neighbors, doing acts of charity, and the list goes on. And if we did so, it can go a long way in helping us to remove all the sadness and gloom from our hearts and lives.