

# Memory Source Sheet

Matthew Miller

## The Blessing of Forgetting

### Sichot HaRan, Ch. 26

*Most people think of forgetting as a serious drawback. But to me it has a great advantage. If you did not forget, it would be utterly impossible to serve God. You would remember your entire past, and these memories would drag you down...*

### David Robson (BBC)

#### Professor Charan Ranganath:

*An analogy I like to give is to imagine that I went to your house, and asked: why aren't you a hoarder? ... If we didn't forget anything, we'd be hoarding memories, and you'd never be able to find what you want, when you want it.*

## Divine Memory and Forgetting

### Job 11:6

וַיֹּגֵד־לְךָ | תַּעֲלֶמֶת חַכְמָה כִּי־כַפְלִים לְתוֹשִׁיָּהּ וְדַע כִּי־יִשָּׁח לְךָ אֱלֹהִים מֵעוֹנֶךָ:

*He would tell you the secrets of wisdom... And know that God has overlooked for you some of your iniquity.*

- **Ibn Ezra:** ישח - ישכח (forgets)
- **Steinsaltz:** God can forget your sins, that is, forgive you for them.

### Rosh Hashanah, Zichronot

כִּי אֵין שְׂכָחָה לִפְנֵי כִסֵּא כְבוֹדְךָ. וְאֵין נִסְתָּר מִנֶּגֶד עֵינֶיךָ

*for there is no forgetfulness before the throne of Your Glory...*

### Marc Zvi Brettler

*Zichronot: Asking an Omniscient God to Remember*

*We are asking God to use selective memory, a feature that is well-documented in scientific literature, where it is sometimes called "selective forgetting."*

## Memory and Mourning

### Rashi on Genesis 37:35

וַיִּמָּאן לְהַתְנַחֵם. אֵין אָדָם מְקַבֵּל תְּנַחוּמִין עַל הַחַי וְסָבוּר שָׁמַת. שֶׁעַל הַמֵּת נִגְזְרָה נִגְזְרָה שִׁישְׁתַּכַּח מִן הַלֵּב וְלֹא עַל הַחַי

*A person does not accept consolation for one living whom he believes to be dead, for with regard to the dead it is decreed that he be forgotten from the heart...*

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## Selective Memory

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### Genesis 41:51 - The Naming of Menashe

וַיִּקְרָא יוֹסֵף אֶת־שְׁם הַבְּכוֹר מְנַשֶּׁה כִּי־נִשְׁכַּח אֶת־כָּל־עֲמָלִי וְאֵת כָּל־בֵּית אָבִי:

Joseph named the first-born Manasseh, meaning, "God has made me forget completely my hardship and my parental home."

**Q: How could Yosef have forgotten his parental home?**

**R. Yisrael Salanter:** Yosef could never have forgotten. Even by naming his son this very name makes him remember. This is a classic case of selective memory.

## Technology and Memory

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### Hard Fork Podcast

| *What I do worry about, though, is, I actually think it's a good thing that we can forget some things... I found a floppy disk that contained logs of a lot of my old instant message transcripts from middle school.*

### James Poulos, The Technology of Memory

**Gordon Bell:**

| *I feel much freer about remembering something now. I've got this machine, this slave, that does it.*

## Literary and Educational Perspectives

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### Alexander Pope, Eloisa to Abelard

*How happy is the blameless vestal's lot!  
The world forgetting, by the world forgot  
Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind!  
Each pray'r accepted, and each wish resign'd.*

### B.F. Skinner

| *Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten.*

