

How to Fight Against the Distractions of the World October 23, 2025

wa-`lamū anna l-laha ya`lamu mā fī anfusikum fa-h`dharūh wa-`lamū anna l-laha ghafūrun ḥalīm (sadaqallah) (Surah al-Baqarah 2:235)

Remember that God knows what is hidden in your hearts, so be mindful of Him.

We live in the most distracted age in human history. We are buried under an information overload, which makes us lose our ability to focus, and causes us anxiety. Our senses are constantly stimulated from every direction, to the point that finding a simple, quiet moment of stillness and mental pause now feels impossible. In today's world, the assault on our attention is relentless. We are constantly bombarded by buzzing phones and a cascade of notification alerts, distractions that often even violate the quietness of Friday prayers. Research shows the average person unlocks their phone over 150 times daily. We reach for our phones the moment we wake up, before even getting out of bed. That's how deep the habit runs. We stress over every little problem. We drown ourselves in distractions. This continuous agitation hinders us from experiencing the fullness of each moment, severely diminishing the quality of our prayers and our ability to remember Allah.

What is distraction? It is the agitation of the mind and emotions. It is anything that prevents someone from giving attention to something else. It is the interruption of our attention. It draws us away from doing the right thing at the right time and place. Distraction fragments our attention, dividing it across countless stimuli. When our attention is broken into pieces, we find it almost impossible to devote ourselves completely to our core responsibilities. Most people let their attention get hijacked: by the news, social media, and pointless worries. We sit down to work, but one notification leads to thirty minutes of scrolling. We open our phone for a quick check, and suddenly, we find ourselves in an argument about something that won't even matter tomorrow.

Attention shapes reality. Our focus isn't just a mental state; it is the lens through which we construct our world. Since reality is defined by what fills our minds, we must be very selective about where we direct this energy. Like a flashlight, attention amplifies whatever it illuminates: shine it on problems, and they grow; focus it on solutions and possibilities, and they expand. Our attention is an indication of devotion and consumes our most valuable asset: time. Therefore, the deliberate placement of our focus is the ultimate act of self-determination; otherwise, it is heedlessness.

Learning to control our minds and intentionally focus our attention on what truly matters is the essence of mindfulness. Within the Islamic tradition, this concept is embodied by the virtue of Muraqaba. The word muraqaba is rooted in the meaning, "to watch, observe, [or] regard attentively." It is a state of constant self-awareness in one's relationship with Allah: in heart, mind, and action.

The basis of muraqabah is our knowledge that Allah is always watching us, at all times, and, as a consequence, we develop greater attention and care for our own actions, thoughts, feelings, and inner states of being. As Allah said, "Remember that God knows what is hidden in your hearts, so be mindful of Him."

Muraqaba is not merely a recommended character trait; it is the practical realization of spiritual excellence, known as Ihsan (إحسان). The Prophet Muhammad (saws) defined Ihsan in the Hadith of Gabriel as: "It is to worship Allah as if you see Him, for if you do not see Him, He certainly sees you."

Ultimately, muraqaba represents the realization of Ihsan, or spiritual excellence—a state of continuous and complete awareness of Allah. It is the practice of living every moment with an attentive heart, knowing we are under divine regard. Ibn al-Qayyim says *"The heart is tarnished by two matters: unmindfulness (al-ghaflah) and sin. And it is polished by two matters: seeking forgiveness and the remembrance of Allah"*

Ghaflah, unmindfulness, is the failure to perceive something when it is necessary. It is wasting time by indulging in the desires of the selfish ego. Sin and ghaflah are the causes of the heart becoming covered with the dust of this world. Mindfulness, on the other hand, cultivates remembrance of Allah. Abu al darda (ra) said "Verily, everything has a polish and the polish of the heart is the remembrance of Allah Almighty."

In order to increase mindfulness, we need to practice it. Reflecting about the magnificence of creation and countless blessings of Allah is an excellent mental activity to increase mindfulness. It is said that, "Speaking in remembrance of Allah Almighty is good, and thinking about the blessings of Allah is the best act of worship." Accordingly, we should make a quiet time for reflection upon Allah and the Hereafter.

Silence is related to muraqabah in that observing silence in seclusion for a regular period of time cultivates presence, the mind's quiet awareness of the here and now. "It is to abandon preoccupation with the past and the future." When engaged in silent reflection or a mindfulness exercise, we create the opportunity to simply *be* in the moment, without worrying about what is past or future or elsewhere in creation. It is an

opportunity to nourish presence before Allah (al-hudur). This is the same type of presence that we are required to have in ritual prayers that Allah obliges us to practice five times a day.

Our reality and spiritual state are determined entirely by where we place our attention. Attention is what we give to those we love. If our focus is upon Allah, we are, in effect, with Him, as our devotion is to Him. If our attention is fixed on the world, we are with the world, and our devotion is to the world. Since the mind cannot simultaneously focus on both, as a heart cannot have two loves in it, excessive and unnecessary worldly thought inevitably weakens our mindfulness. All obligatory acts of worship, from offering ritual prayers and fasting, to the giving of charity and performing Hajj, are fundamentally designed by divine Wisdom to increase this very awareness, enabling us to consciously conduct ourselves as the supreme creation of Allah.

Yurdaer Al Latif Al Jerrahi