



LIFE & SOCIETY

Can We Please Pause?

By: **Fatimah Al-Attas** July 13, 2026

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In a world where we can expect an instantaneous response to the most complex questions-albeit one that may not be fully reliable, though its mimicry is enough to fool most of us-what is the price of slowing down and pausing? We have allowed machines to mimic the intellect, but mimicry requires no time.

A soul, on the other hand, demands a pause, it requires reassurance. As I am writing this, I paused wondering if you paused earlier at my use of the hyphen and wondered if it was AI-generated.

The human attention span today is measured at its

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get here. Shorter than the time it takes for a child to share about her day with her parents. Too short for us to share our troubles with our best friend. I need longer than that to think about a decision that will affect someone's life. I need more time to craft a reassuring sentence for my struggling students.

Surely it takes more time to listen, to understand, and to solve human problems. Do we have the attention to do so? Or do we need to speed things up just to capture the most basic ingredient of human interaction: the attention we give to each other?

In this world of the attention economy, what is the price of slowing down?

Why is it considered too costly of my time to sit down and draft a thoughtful sentence? Or read a full paper? Or structure my own email or a piece of writing? And when it is done, sent, and published, will there be another soul on the other side reading it? Or is it simply being summarized again—a response already prompted, the summary chosen? If the tone of my words and the care in my crafting are bypassed, what was the value of that effort?

Are the sentences I am writing here only worth their summary? If so, then why do we write and publish so many papers? By bypassing the depth to save a few seconds, are we actually gaining efficiency, or are we stealing the very substance of our lives?

act of reassurance and love? Is the rereading of a text, or careful writing of a sentence not a passion for truth? These moments of slow pauses between reading sentences, the rereading of lines to allow them to make sense, the careful consideration of their meaning; are these not acts of care? More often than not to read a sentence twice is to honor it, to let it settle.

This piece of writing is a creative act of disruption of the speed in which things are moving. A call to pause. A call for reflection. I am not proposing that we make do without these technologies, but I am calling for the return of pausing, of giving value to the pause, of understanding that *tama'ninah* is a foundational part of our faith. That intentional pause, the reflective exercise we do while pausing, is part of our worldview.

In our prayers, *tama'ninah* is not optional; it is mandatory. It refers to a required pause, a moment of complete stillness between two motions. It is an intentional halt. Fourteen hundred years ago, long before smartphones and algorithms, human beings were already rushing. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ taught us this by instructing a man who was rushing through his prayers to repeat them, doing so three times over: "*Go back and pray, for you have not prayed.*" He called the one who rushes a thief who steals from his own prayer.

The remedy taught by the Prophet ﷺ was *tama'ninah*, ordering the body to a complete, dead stop until every bone and vertebra settles back

momentum of the world, and grounding itself in the present.

Just as the rereading of a beautiful sentence allows its meaning to settle into the mind, *tama'ninah* allows the soul to settle into the body. If *salah* is considered invalid without this stillness, should we not consider the implications of the loss of *tama'ninah* in our daily interactions and actions?

Allah says that in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest (*tatma'innul-qulub*). The remembrance of Allah achieves this profound state of the heart. The world we live in today demonstrates anxiety as one of its main challenges; perhaps, then, a call to pause is not optional. It must be intentional, and it must be mandatory for the soul to arrive at reassurance as its final state.

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