

## Where Did My Mind Go?

The Attention Wars · Week One · Rev. Blaine Tinsley

We are living through something no generation before us has ever faced: a war for our attention, waged every waking moment by forces engineered to capture and hold the human mind. The buzz, the ping, the endless scroll—none of it is an accident. Billions of dollars are spent to win the most valuable thing you own: your attention. And the research is sobering. Dr. Gloria Mark of UC Irvine has measured human attention for two decades. In 2004, we could focus on a single screen for about two and a half minutes; by 2012, it had fallen to 75 seconds; today, the average has collapsed to just 47 seconds. So, if you feel scattered, more distracted than you used to be, harder to settle—you are not imagining it, and you are not failing. The water really has gotten faster. This is the current we are all swimming in.

Yet every spiritual tradition has known a truth our age has forgotten: a scattered mind cannot receive what Spirit is endlessly offering. When the mind is somewhere else, we miss the sunset, the conversation, the still small voice that speaks only in the present moment and never in the noise. What we give our attention to, we become. To reclaim our attention, then, is not a productivity tip. It is a spiritual act—the first and most basic act of any life of faith.

### The Big Idea

Here is the reframe that changes everything. The goal of the spiritual life was never a mind that never wanders—that is a war no one can win, and the great traditions knew it. The goal is to become a person who notices when the mind has drifted and gently comes home. The wandering is simply being human; the practice is the return. And the moment you realize your mind has left the room, you are already back—that noticing is itself the victory. There is no failure here, only the grace of coming back, a thousand fresh chances every single day. So we can lay down the shame. Shame only scatters the mind further. What we are after is something gentler and far more powerful: simply to wake up, again and again.

*“The moment you realize you are not present, you are present.” — Eckhart Tolle, The Power of Now*

### The Wisdom of the Traditions

This problem is ancient; only the technology is new. Long before the smartphone, human beings looked honestly at their own minds and discovered the very same restlessness—and every tradition gave it a name.

**Buddhism** — The restless “monkey mind” swings from branch to branch, never still, grabbing one thing and reaching for the next. Twenty-five centuries ago the Buddhists named exactly what we feel today. Their answer was not to shame the monkey but to practice mindfulness: noticing where the mind has gone and gently bringing it back, without judgment, as many times as it takes.

**The Desert Mystics** — The early Christian monks who went into the Egyptian desert to pray named the intrusive thoughts that pulled them away: logismoi. Their hard-won wisdom is the same as the Buddha’s—you do not win by fighting the thoughts. You simply notice, and return. The returning itself was the prayer.

**Neuroscience** — The brain’s Default Mode Network switches on whenever we are not focused, and it wanders—ruminating on the past, rehearsing the future, telling stories about us almost constantly. Brain scans confirm what the mystics taught: the wandering mind is the default setting, not a glitch. The monk in the desert and the scientist with the scanner are describing the same human being.

**Unity** — **Charles** Fillmore understood attention as one of our spiritual faculties, something we are meant to develop and direct on purpose. Attention is the gateway: where we place it, we place our energy, our faith, our very life-force. To take hold of your attention is to take hold of the steering wheel of your soul, and every conscious return strengthens that faculty.

### In Tolle’s Words

**On who you are** — “The beginning of freedom is the realization that you are not the possessing entity—the thinker.” You are not the voice in your head; you are the one who hears it. And if you are the awareness behind the voice, you do not have to obey it or chase it out the back door of every moment. That awareness is where freedom begins.

**On the cost** — “This kind of compulsive thinking is actually an addiction.” An addiction so common we call it normal, so constant we mistake it for ourselves—the very condition the desert mystics and the modern brain scans both confirm. Naming it honestly is the first step toward freedom from it.

### A Story of Return

At a coffee shop, someone lit up with enthusiasm told me about Tolle’s *The Power of Now*—and I nodded warmly, with my most ministerial face, while my mind slipped out the back door. When they asked, “So, what do you think?” I had nothing. I had been completely absent from the conversation about being present. Days later, still a little mortified, I sought them out and asked them to tell me again, because this time I truly wanted to hear. And because I stayed in the room, I met not a book title but a human being, someone for whom learning presence had been a lifeline through an anxious, fearful season. The very gift I almost missed was a story about the gift of being present. I noticed I had been gone, I came back, and the gift was still waiting for me. It almost always is.

### Reflect This Week

**Where does it go?** — When your mind wanders, where does it most often run—into the future’s worries, or the past’s replays? What is it seeking there?

**What am I missing?** — Name one moment this week you were physically present for but mentally absent. What was waiting there that you didn’t fully receive?

### Walk Your Talk This Week

**Notice once a day** — **Once** each day, simply notice where your mind has gone—no judgment, just “Oh, there I am again”—and gently come home to the breath, the light in the room, the person in front of you. Just once, on purpose. That is the whole practice.

**Bless the catch** — **When** you catch your mind wandering, smile instead of scolding. Catching it means you are back. That homecoming, repeated without shame, is how the faculty of attention grows strong.

**Give one full presence** — Choose one conversation this week and give it your complete, undivided attention. Set the phone aside. Notice what you hear beneath the words—the real thing being said—when you truly stay.

#### THIS WEEK’S AFFIRMATION

*I am here. I am present. My attention is a sacred gift—and I choose where to give it.*