

Is it just me, or does 2026 feel like an “in-between” year that is flying by? Why stillness may be the secret to a more sustainable 2026.

É só eu, ou 2026 parece um ano de ‘transição’ que está voando? Por que a quietude pode ser o segredo para um 2026 mais sustentável.

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Abstract

This text invites a reflection on the relationship with time and the anxiety it generates, urging a more intentional approach to daily life. By examining daily habits, individuals can slow down, shift direction, and start fresh with greater awareness.

Keywords

Burnout culture. Mindful pause. Intentionality. New start.

In a year that feels increasingly fast and noisy, many of us are left overwhelmed. Perhaps slowing down is one of the most radical choices we can make. Here are a few informal, practical ways to begin building a more sustainable rhythm.

- *The Novelty Rule*: Take a different route to work, wear your watch on the opposite wrist, or try a new hobby. It gives your brain a healthy dopamine hit without anxiety.
- *Digital Silence*: Protect your first ten minutes in the morning from screens. It prevents high blood pressure and sets a calm tone for the day.
- *Sensory Focus*: Engage in slow, tactile activities like baking or gardening to ground yourself in the present moment.
- *Intentionality*: Use your evenings to set just three key goals for the next day to reduce racing thoughts.

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Why this more informal voice?

You may be wondering whether this is the kind of piece one expects to find in a dependable and well-known institutional publication. Technically, academically, maybe not.

I say that as someone who spent decades in academia, teaching Linguistics and English to undergraduate and graduate students and spending time as a visiting scholar/lecturer at places like Harvard. I have deep respect for research and empirical knowledge. But sometimes wisdom, too, deserves a place in the conversation. As the great poet Rumi once wrote:

"The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you. Don't go back to sleep."

So why choose a more accessible register here? Because some ideas ask not only to be understood, but to be felt. This is not better or worse than academic prose—only different. And in writing, as in life, variety is part of what keeps the world alive.

So, why poetry? When Rumi tells us, *"Don't go back to sleep,"* he is urging us to wake up from the trance of our daily, overly rational routines. The intellect categorizes, labels, and worries about the past or future; poetry invites us, instead, to pause and encounter life more directly—through the senses, the imagination, and the heart.

For those of you, like me, who also value scientific evidence, there is important context here: slowing down is not only a philosophical choice; it is also a neurological necessity. Neuroscience suggests that tactile activities such as gardening or baking can quiet the amygdala and stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, helping lower cortisol levels. In a similar way, protecting the first moments of the morning from digital intrusion allows the brain to move more gently from sleep into wakefulness, without being pushed immediately into vigilance. Wisdom and science ultimately agree: to sustain our mental energy, we must intentionally pause.

If all of this sounds familiar, it may help to turn to three thinkers who, in very different ways, have tried to understand what time does to us: Heidegger, Bergson, and Byung-Chul Han.

You know that feeling: your schedule is packed, your to-do list never ends, and even on the days when you manage to do it all, something in you still whispers that you are behind. Maybe that feeling is not just about poor time management. Maybe it comes from something deeper—from the way we live time itself.

That is where Martin Heidegger comes in. He suggests that this quiet anxiety appears when we try to squeeze life into the logic of the clock. In *Being and Time*, he reminds us that anxiety is not just everyday stress. Sometimes, it is what pulls away the noise and shows us something more honest about our existence.

Heidegger helps us see three simple ideas:

- *Care (Sorge):* Heidegger sees us as beings always leaning toward the future. Life is never neatly finished; it keeps unfolding. That may be one reason the feeling of being behind never fully goes away.
- *The “They” (Das Man):* So much of our anxiety comes from trying to keep up with what everyone else seems to expect from us. In doing that, we can slowly lose touch with what actually matters to us.
- *Existential Guilt (Schuldig):* For Heidegger, guilt is not simply about doing something wrong. It is also the quiet truth that every choice leaves other lives unlived. We cannot do everything, be everything, or become every version of ourselves.

If Heidegger helps explain why we so often feel behind, Henri Bergson helps us remember something gentler: lived time is not the same thing as clock time. For Bergson, real time is something we feel from within. It flows, stretches, folds into memory, and refuses to behave like a neat row of identical minutes.

Bergson invites us to notice three simple things:

- *Duration over measurement:* time, as we actually live it, is not just something counted by hours and minutes.
- *Flow rather than fragments:* our inner life moves more like a stream than a set of separate moments.
- *Memory within the present:* the past does not disappear; it stays with us and shapes how the present feels.

And then comes Byung-Chul Han, who gives this conversation a very contemporary twist. If Bergson reminds us that time can flow, Han shows what happens when that flow breaks apart. In modern life, he says, time gets scattered into restless little pieces, and that makes it harder to linger, reflect, and truly be present.

Han’s point becomes clearer in a few familiar patterns:

- *From narrative to fragments:* life can stop feeling like a story and start feeling like a pile of disconnected moments.
- *The loss of duration:* when time breaks apart like this, it loses depth, and reflection becomes harder.
- *Dyschronicity:* the problem is not just speed; it is the feeling that time has lost its natural rhythm.

- *Information overload*: constant updates pull our attention in every direction and leave little room for deeper thought.
- *The disappearance of rituals*: without small, shared rituals, time can start to feel shapeless, scattered, and strangely empty.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest something important: our difficulty with time is not only a matter of schedules, deadlines, or poor organization. It is also about the way contemporary life draws us away from depth, continuity, and presence.

That may be why modern life so often feels breathless. When everything is organized around productivity, speed, and constant response, time begins to lose its texture. Perhaps the way back is simpler — and gentler — than we imagine: to slow down, make room for deeper time, and return, as often as we can, to the present.

A few gentle ways to return to your own time:

- *Be fully present*: Instead of splitting your attention in ten directions, try giving your attention to one thing at a time. Sometimes that is enough to make a moment feel real again.
- *Create daily rituals*: Small rituals can give shape to the day. A quiet breakfast, a short walk, a cup of tea without your phone — these simple acts can anchor you more than you might expect.
- *Remember your mortality*: Not in a dark way, but in a clarifying one. You are a living being, not a machine for output, and remembering that can gently reorder what matters.
- *Log off sometimes*: Step away from the endless stream now and then. A little boredom, a little silence, can open the door to deeper thought and a steadier sense of self.

This short article is an invitation to reflect on our relationship with time, and on the role we ourselves play in the anxiety it can generate. It asks how we are spending our days, and whether a more intentional way of living might open another path. Perhaps the questions below — or the ones you begin to ask yourself — can help us slow down, shift direction, and begin again with greater awareness.

Questions to sit with:

- *Does the way I spend my days reflect what matters most to me?*
- *If I say “yes” to this, what am I also saying “no” to?*
- *Am I anxious about a real, present threat, or a perceived one?*

- *What stories am I telling myself about being “too busy” that I may be ready to let go of?*
- *What is this moment asking of me, if I stop worrying about what comes next?*
- *What is one small thing I can do right now to bring a little more ease into my day?*

Conclusion:

Perhaps that is the real invitation of this strange, fast-moving year: not to race harder against time, but to meet it differently. To live a little less mechanically and a little more awake. To remember that a life is not measured only by how much it contains, but by how deeply it is inhabited. And perhaps that is where a more sustainable year begins—not in doing more, but in noticing more; not in mastering time, but in learning, gently, how to belong to it.

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