ASTRA TIMES

KNOWLEDGE • WONDER • A BRIGHTER TOMORROW

OCTOBER 2026

How Much of the World Do You Miss While Looking Down?

ATTENTION • PERCEPTION • THE EVERYDAY

THE WORLD IS NOT SHORT ON WONDERS. IT IS SHORT ON ATTENTION.



Most of us move through the day surrounded by information that we never consciously experience. There are sounds happening behind us, movements at the edge of our vision, distant conversations, passing expressions, shifting light, birds overhead, and hundreds of small details that never really become part of our awareness. They are there. We simply do not notice them.

This is partly because attention is limited. At any given moment, your brain is receiving far more sensory information than you could possibly process in detail. Your eyes are constantly moving. Your ears are collecting sounds from multiple directions. Your body is registering temperature, balance, pressure, and movement. Yet your conscious experience feels relatively simple. The brain has to decide what deserves your attention, and that decision is happening constantly.

You might notice your phone vibrating in a crowded room while failing to notice someone walking past you. You may hear your name immediately in a conversation across a room while ignoring dozens of other words being spoken nearby. You can walk the same route every day and only just notice the building, tree, or doorway that has been there all along. The world did not suddenly become more detailed. Your attention simply changed.

Psychologists use the term *inattentional blindness* to describe situations in which people fail to notice something visible because their attention is occupied elsewhere. One of the most famous demonstrations involved people concentrating on a task while an unexpected event occurred directly in front of them. Many participants simply did not see it. This sounds strange until you notice how often it happens in your own everyday life.

You can continue searching for your keys while looking directly at them. You can walk through a familiar neighbourhood without remembering what you passed. You can spend an entire evening with other people while remembering almost nothing about the room you were sitting in. Attention is selective because it has to be, and the things competing for our attention change dramatically over time.

A phone can provide a new message, image, headline, video, or notification every few seconds. The information is immediate, portable, and designed to be noticed. We can spend hours looking at things that are nowhere near us while, at the same time, barely registering the environment we are physically inside.

There is nothing inherently wrong with using technology. Our devices allow us to communicate, learn, navigate, work, and discover things that would have been impossible for previous generations. But what is really happening to us when an increasing amount of our attention is directed towards information that has been selected for us?

When you scroll, you are given the next thing to look at. When you search, you are given results. When you receive a notification, something else has already decided that this moment deserves your attention. Meanwhile, the world around you continues to exist without announcing itself. A cloud changes shape. A bird crosses the sky. Someone laughs several houses away. The light on a building changes as the sun moves. A plane passes overhead. None of these things sends a notification. They simply happen.

This is why looking up can be more interesting than it sounds. For one evening, take a break from scrolling, messaging, gaming, or online shopping, and see what happens when you have to choose for yourself.

Do not try to have a profound experience. Do not search for something extraordinary. Instead, notice what is already there. Listen for three sounds. Find three stars. Notice one moving object. Find one thing you normally tend to overlook.

You may notice that the sky contains more movement than you expected or hear sounds you normally ignore. You might discover that the same street looks completely different after dark or finally register a building, plant, or piece of architecture that you have passed by hundreds of times. Who knows, you might discover something even more interesting. Or perhaps you will simply realize how quickly your attention wants to return to a screen. That is also useful information.

Attention is one of the many ways we construct our knowledge of and experience of the world. We cannot notice everything, and we would not want to. But what we repeatedly choose to notice in our lives becomes part of the world we experience.

So, this month, try looking up. Not because the sky is going to provide you all the answers you've been searching for, but because there is already a great deal happening all around you that never asks for your attention. Sometimes the first step towards being able to see more in life, is simply giving your attention a chance to discover what amazing wonders have been right in front of you all along.

THE MOST AMAZING WONDERS ARE OFTEN THE HIDDEN GEMS WE WALK PAST EVERY SINGLE DAY.

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ASTRAEA'S CHALLENGE

THIS MONTH LOOK UP

Spend 10 minutes outside on one evening this week. Use your phone **only** to record your observations.

Find a comfortable spot outside, open your phone's notes app or voice recorder, and document:

- ✦ Three sounds (e.g., distant traffic, crickets, a rustling tree)
- ✦ Three stars (or constellations, planets, or distinct points of light)
- ✦ One moving object (e.g., a passing car, a satellite, a blowing leaf)
- ✦ One thing you normally overlook (e.g., the texture of the pavement, the temperature of the breeze, the shape of a shadow)

YOU CAN STILL CATCH THE MOST IMPORTANT DETAILS WHEN YOU JUST STOP AND LOOK AROUND

After collecting your observations, write a brief reflection on how this experience connects to the concepts of attention and perception. Consider how actively focusing on your environment changed what you noticed, even while holding your phone.

