

# BRAIN EXERCISES ASSOCIATION

*Explore the Boundless Potential of Your Mind!*



## In This Edition

Our Attention and Focus are Diminishing – Zehra EMRE

Miracle Emerging from the Right Hemisphere – Şule ALPALTAY

## Workshop on Creative Thinking Skills

The "Creative Thinking Skills" workshop, led by Psychological Counselor Beyza Özoğlu, engaged participants in a vibrant and enjoyable setting.



**BULLETİN**  
**JUNE 2024**  
**FOUR**



**Questions for your Mind**

# HELLO

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As the Brain Exercises Association, we present our fourth newsletter.

In this edition, we are pleased to present Zehra Emre's piece on "Attention and Focus." The article delves into the challenges posed by contemporary distractions and strategies to combat them.

Şule Alpaltay's article "Miracle Rising from the Right Hemisphere" explores the functions of the right hemisphere of the brain and its significance in healthy aging.

Mind Burning Questions enables you to assess your logical reasoning skills.

Our newsletter is currently on hiatus for the summer. We will return in September with fresh association events and projects. Wishing you a restful holiday for your well-being.

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## Association of Brain Exercises

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# Our attention and focus are diminishing.

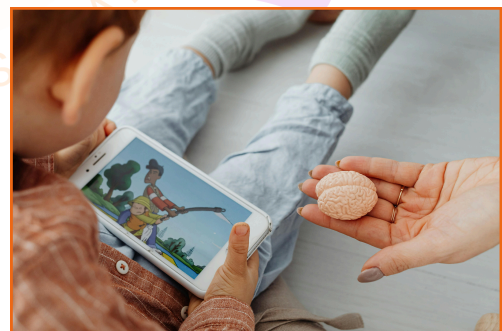
**Zehra Emre**

Enhancing attention and focus are crucial mental abilities that can be cultivated through practice, promoting the advancement of our cognitive and emotional functions in various domains such as education, professional endeavors, and personal relationships. Vigilant attention and unwavering focus serve as fundamental elements for achieving fulfillment and contentment across all spheres of life.

Attention involves concentrating thought and emotion on a specific area, subject, or object while excluding distractions. Focus is the act of narrowing and holding attention on a singular entity.

In every moment of our lives, our goals, responsibilities, plans, and processes require our attention and focus. To succeed in school, we need to attentively listen to lessons and study diligently. In the business realm, success entails executing tasks meticulously, focusing on relationships and procedures to address challenges, listening attentively to comprehend and articulate accurately, and being mindful of our emotions and thoughts to grasp our own and others' feelings.

Given the significance of attention and focus in our lives, why do distractions frequently arise, leading to a decline in our ability to maintain focus? Why has distraction emerged as a prominent issue in our current era?



Our lives are evolving swiftly due to advancing technology and internet usage. We find ourselves in a race against time that often eludes our grasp. Prior to having the chance to introspect, we forfeit our most precious asset – our attention and focus – succumbing to detrimental internal and external influences that weaken us.

Distraction and lack of focus can lead to significant challenges in various aspects such as learning, planning, goal achievement, decision-making, exploring and utilizing creative outlets, fostering effective communication, comprehending and regulating emotional responses, and more.

In our individual and group studies, we frequently observe that children and young clients experiencing attention and focus issues encounter challenges not only in academic achievement but also in communication, empathy, emotional regulation, and self-management.

Distraction and lack of focus pose challenges not only for children and young individuals but also for adults. It is crucial to enhance our cognitive abilities, physical well-being, and emotional stability to secure our future by reclaiming our scattered focus. It is evident that individuals and communities plagued by distractions struggle to identify effective solutions to their issues. Societies comprising individuals with sharp focus, robust drive, productivity, and capacity to make sound choices for themselves and their surroundings are pivotal to achieving mental, physical, and spiritual well-being.



We are experiencing greater mental, physical, and spiritual fatigue than in the past fifty years. Our ability to focus is diminishing rapidly. We are sleeping less, working more, eating improperly, feeling more stressed, and becoming less tolerant. Our capacity to attend to our thoughts and emotions is compromised, making it challenging to break free from negative feelings and thoughts. We develop dependencies that hinder our freedom of movement and thought, leading us to procrastinate. The speed at which we consume information online is astonishing.



We engage in the digital realm, inundated by notifications from social media and online stores. Juggling multiple responsibilities simultaneously, whether at school, home, work, or during leisure time, we subject our minds, bodies, and spirits to detrimental influences. Whether knowingly or unknowingly, we contribute to cultivating an unhealthy, unhappy, and unproductive environment for ourselves.

Who among us has not experienced their mind wandering into dreams, thoughts, and emotions during crucial moments like an important meeting, a job interview, reading a book, studying, taking an exam, listening to a friend, or handling a significant task? Who among us has not struggled with moments of stagnation, confusion, unproductivity, lack of planning, perpetual procrastination, and difficulty initiating and completing tasks?

### **Regarding our focus;**

- External voices, dreams, inner thoughts, and emotions that compel us to reread a page repeatedly while immersed in a book.
- Excessive notifications from platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp can lead to prolonged periods of distraction, hindering productivity, disrupting sleep patterns, and resulting in a negative impact on the following day.
- We observed the intricacies of significant artworks at the museum we explored, the melodic chirping of birds in the forest, and the blossoms adorning the trees. The series of cheerful selfies we captured one after the other distracted us from the soothing sounds of the waves and seagulls by the seaside.
- Unwanted emails and social media posts that require immediate attention,
- Perils encountered while driving, such as insomnia, phone calls, etc.
- The misplacement of keys and credit cards, the sudden disappearance of intended sentences or thoughts, the fleeting retention of information we believed we comprehended, and the communication mishaps resulting from an inability to concentrate on spoken words often lead us to ponder, "What was I about to do?" Delaying tasks with the excuse of "later, later" prompts reflection on unfinished and postponed matters.



## **OUR CAPACITY FOR ATTENTION AND OUR BRAIN'S LIMITATIONS**

Our attention span is brief, and our brain's capacity is limited in this respect. Optimal brain performance is achieved when focusing on a single task. Prolonged work without breaks can lead to inevitable distractions. Engaging in multiple tasks hinders the proper functioning of attention and focus areas. According to Oregon professor Micheal Posnel, regaining focus after a distraction takes approximately 23 minutes, with individuals focusing on a single task outperforming those juggling multiple tasks. The repercussions of distractions and transitions on our brain become evident when considering the 23-minute regrouping time for a single task focus. Professor of Learning Sciences, Guy Klaxton, advises that rushing leads to skill overload and deterioration. Establishing a pace aligned with human nature and integrating it into our daily routine will cultivate our attention and focus abilities.

Attention and focus are crucial components for fostering creativity. Professor Earl Miller, a neuroscientist, posits that an undistracted mind reevaluates information, forms new connections, extends the brain's associative pathways, and generates innovative and original ideas. Miller's insights underscore that creativity is a gradual and deliberate process.

## **There Are Numerous Ways to Enhance our Focus.**

Identifying and removing distractions is essential for maintaining attention and focus. Distractions can stem from both internal and external triggers.

To eradicate distractions, it is essential to identify both internal and external triggers that divert our attention. These triggers may include noise, workspace environment, multitasking, lack of planning, absence of goals, social media, computer games, emails, messaging apps, as well as emotional factors like stress, anxiety, fear of failure, and procrastination, along with physical ailments.

Working in a serene environment with a composed mind involves disabling phone/computer notifications, concentrating on a single task, and taking breaks. Substituting detrimental distractions like television, computer games, and social media with beneficial activities such as reading, writing, socializing with loved ones, walking, and spending time outdoors during breaks can help us reclaim our focus.

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, in his book "Flow," asserts that individuals experiencing attention disorders, unable to avoid distractions, often perceive themselves as disconnected from the rhythm of life. They find themselves vulnerable to the wandering stimuli that capture their minds. When attention is involuntarily diverted, it indicates a lack of control over the circumstances. Csikszentmihalyi highlights the significance of directing attention deliberately, noting the surprising lack of effort people invest in enhancing their attentional control.





Sufficient and high-quality sleep is crucial for our physical well-being, emotional equilibrium, and cognitive performance. Insomnia impairs mental function, diminishes learning effectiveness, and leads to academic deterioration. Research indicates that a single night of sleep deprivation results in a 30% decline in cognitive abilities, while two consecutive nights lead to a 60% decrease in cognitive skills.

While we sleep, our brain's energy resources are balanced, unnecessary information connections and metabolic waste are cleared, learning connections are reinforced, and information is consolidated. Individuals, both young and old, who lack sufficient and restful sleep may encounter issues with attention, mental clarity, comprehension, and decision-making abilities.

Eating nutritious foods is advantageous for our mental and physical well-being. Complete focus is also integral to our body's execution of its functions in a healthful way.

With the advancement of technology, the quality of our food and our eating habits have undergone a transformation. In previous generations, our diet primarily consisted of food sourced from clean, natural origins. However, contemporary food products often contain undisclosed additives that are far from natural and have the potential to adversely affect our physical and mental well-being. Consuming junk foods laden with sugar, chemicals, and trans fats, fast foods preserved with additives, and processed foods commonly ingested by individuals of all ages can have detrimental effects on our cognitive, physical, and emotional health, disrupting our body's natural balance. According to experts, the consumption of high-sugar and high-carbohydrate foods leads to fluctuations in blood sugar levels, resulting in periods of heightened alertness followed by crashes in energy. Consequently, individuals may experience difficulties in concentration, mental fatigue, and a recurring cycle of energy fluctuations.





In 2009, researchers separated 27 children struggling with focus issues into two groups. 15 children received nutritious meals free of artificial dyes, additives, and preservatives, while the remaining 12 children maintained their typical western diet. The observation period lasted several weeks. The study findings indicated that 70% of the children who avoided preservatives, dyes, and processed foods experienced improved attention skills.

It is crucial to prioritize the brain development of children by fostering social awareness regarding artificial and packaged foods that include sugar, trans fat, undisclosed chemicals, and unknown origins.



Engaging in brain exercises and activities helps to train and enhance our cognitive abilities. Similar to how we build physical strength through exercise, we can also boost our mental acuity through brain exercises. Consistent practice of these activities allows our brain to optimize its current capabilities and expand its capacity.

Routine cognitive workouts:

- Facilitates the formation of fresh neural connections in the brain.
- Enhances attention and focus capabilities.
- Enhances memory.
- Boosts motivation and self-assurance.
- Enhances creativity.
- Enhances emotional intelligence.
- Promotes mental and physical equilibrium.
- Provides equilibrium of thoughts and emotions.
- It decelerates the decline in cognitive functions associated with aging.



The impact of reading books on attention and focus surpasses expectations. The advent of the internet has led to a decline in reading habits worldwide, particularly among children and young individuals who now gravitate towards online publications. Unlike printed books that offer a tangible presence and enjoyment, digital books fail to deliver the same level of satisfaction and advantages. In the digital realm, attention and focus are diminished, superficial eye scanning and emotions prevail, and recalling content specifics post-reading becomes more challenging.

The training, workshops, and consultancy we offer demonstrate that children who read books exhibit more advanced attention, focus, motivation, and empathy skills compared to those who do not. Therefore, our focus is on activities such as reading-writing, storytelling, and auditory-visual-mathematical exercises. These activities are carefully crafted to facilitate deep attention development in various cognitive domains.

Reading books offers numerous benefits and is highly valuable for cultivating attention, particularly deep attention. The most profound level of focus and concentration is often achieved while immersed in a book. When engrossed in reading, our eyes, thoughts, emotions, and even our entire body are dedicated to absorbing the sentences and meanings within the text.



The mental processes engaged during reading are truly remarkable; external and internal awareness evolve in tandem. Delving into the realms of the author, characters, and our personal universe leads us to profound insights. As we read, our thoughts meander through the narrative and our inner landscape. Our cognitive faculties and pertinent neural pathways are stimulated, linking information and interpretations. By engaging with characters, plotlines, sentences, and interpretations, our cognition, perception, concentration, mindfulness, intuition, comprehension, and empathy are enriched.

Meditation and mindfulness aid in sustaining attention and focus by filtering stimuli, slowing aging, addressing age-related challenges, managing stress, promoting mental and physical calmness, sharpening the mind, preserving emotional equilibrium, and fostering conscious awareness.

Research indicates that individuals new to meditation can experience benefits from just 30 minutes of daily practice. A study conducted over eight weeks revealed significant enhancements in attention, focus, task performance, efficiency, and stress management among those who meditated for half an hour each day compared to non-meditators, even under high-pressure conditions.



Mindfulness, rendered in Turkish as conscious awareness, involves consciously focusing on the current moment; it entails recognizing emotions, thoughts, and bodily sensations, and calmly acknowledging the present without haste, adopting a non-judgmental, receptive attitude.

Practicing mindfulness involves training the mind to enhance focus by eliminating distractions and concentrating on key aspects.

Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn emphasizes the importance of incorporating mindfulness into contemporary life. He highlights the significance of engaging our entire being in the practice, emphasizing that the mindset we cultivate to focus and remain present "in the moment" plays a crucial role. This approach serves as a foundation that soothes the mind, relaxes the body, enhances concentration, and promotes clarity of perception.

Scientific research indicates that mindfulness practices impact the brain.

- It reduces the amygdala, responsible for regulating emotions like fear, anger, and anxiety, thereby aiding in alleviating depression and stress through decreased activity.
- It enhances the functions of the frontal cortex, where the brain engages in careful thought, logical reasoning, analysis, and creativity.
- It decelerates cellular aging.
- It enhances sleep issues.
- Enhances attention and focus.
- It aids in treating conditions like depression, stress, and panic attacks.
- He has demonstrated the ability to establish a state of peace and happiness.

Physically active individuals who engage in exercise, walking, spending time in nature, tend to concentrate better than sedentary individuals.

Studies have shown a notable enhancement in the attention abilities of children who engage in physical activity and play. Physical exercise, particularly in children during developmental stages, has been linked to heightened brain connectivity, improved frontal cortex functionality, and enhanced brain chemicals that aid in cognitive processes. Conversely, impeding children's inclination to move and play can lead to brain impairment and a decline in attention skills.



Exercise helps to stabilize our mood and support our mental well-being. It is also beneficial in managing conditions like depression and anxiety through the regulation of serotonin, dopamine, and noradrenaline release.

Walking is more than mere physical activity; it serves as a source of pleasure for both physical and mental well-being. Annabel Streets, in her book "52 Ways to Walk," delves into the transformative effects of a twelve-minute walk on our cardiovascular system, respiratory function, neural pathways, vital organs, memory, creativity, mood, and cognitive abilities through the intake of oxygen.



## Sirens and Odysseus

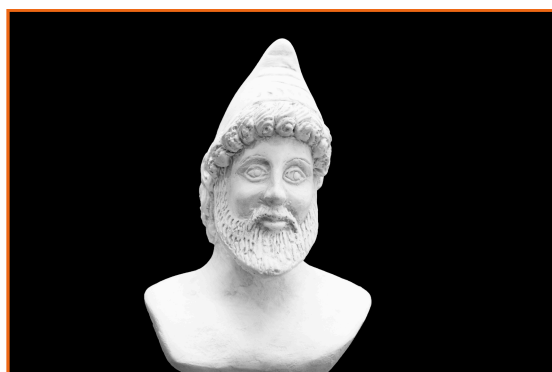
Homer's epic *Odyssey* recounts King Odysseus' return from the Trojan War.

According to legend, Odysseus approaches the island of Sirens, located off the coast of Phocaea in the Aegean Sea. The beauty, captivating voices, and songs of the sirens residing on the rocks of this island captivated passing sailors. Those who heard their enchanting melodies were lured to their demise on the rocks. To resist the allure of the sirens' songs, Odysseus has himself securely bound to the ship's mast with ropes and his ears plugged with wax. He also ensures that the rest of the crew working on the ship have their ears sealed with wax to safeguard them from the sirens' tempting sounds. This way, only Odysseus will be able to satisfy his curiosity by listening to the sirens' melodies.

As the ship navigates through the treacherous rocks, the captivating melodies of sirens quickly reach the crew's ears. Enthralled by the enchanting voices, Odysseus is tempted to command his crew to linger indefinitely. However, he finds himself unable to speak as he is bound to the mast. The crew remains oblivious to Odysseus' desires as their ears are plugged, ultimately averting disaster. The vessel of Odysseus proceeds along its course.

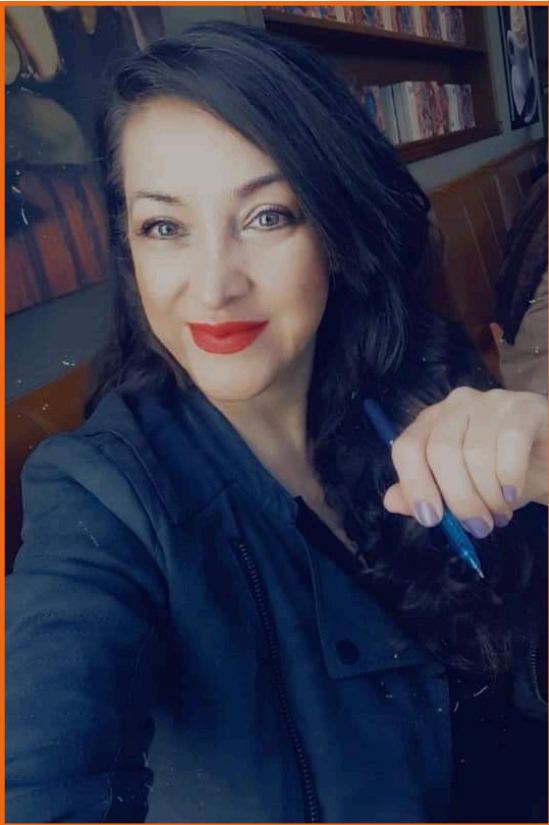
Sirens feature prominently in this epic as a potent and lethal distraction that impedes goal attainment. Odysseus successfully reaches his objective by diverting his attention and implementing safeguards or personal commitments regarding the sirens (a perilous scenario) that pose a threat to both himself and his comrades.

We can establish an Odysseus pact with our future selves to uphold our focus, make sound decisions, and accomplish our objectives.



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## **Zehra Emre;**



She works as a writer/editor, educator, and brain trainer. Education systems focus on emotional intelligence, inspiration, creativity, neuroplasticity, and the link between learning, attention, and focus.

After completing her university education, she held positions as a human resources manager, PR manager, and brand and corporate identity consultant in various corporate organizations.

Areas of expertise include education systems, attention, focus, cognitive and emotional intelligence, the impact of deep reading and writing on learning, and creativity.

She conducts training and workshops on various subjects in both private and public educational institutions. Additionally, she designs and executes personalized and group learning sessions, including training, workshops, and activities, to enhance cognitive and emotional intelligence, boost attention and focus, and improve overall brain function for students and adults.



She possesses three published books (Living in a Book, Magical Reality from Nature to Creativity, You Can Feel Hearts), along with award-winning stories, articles, and an educational project centered on "nature, emotions, and creativity" for children, youth, and families. Additionally, she serves as a writer coach.

She is a co-founder and manager of the Families of Gifted Children Platform (ÜYÇAP).

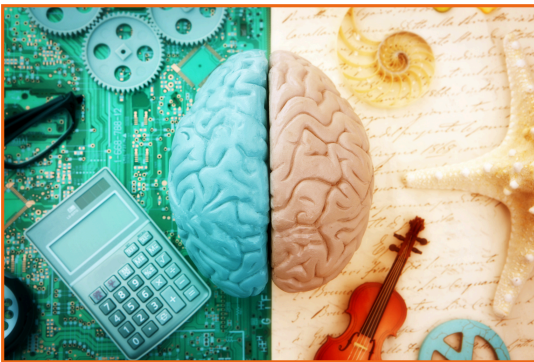
Educational projects are developed and delivered to schools to enhance learning and foster creativity. Articles are authored on art, literature, self-awareness, and creativity. The Harezmi System, established by the Ministry of National Education for public schools, offers teacher/parent academies and Science and Art Centers to students and educators. Training sessions and workshops cover topics such as the role of reading and writing in learning, emotional intelligence, inspiration, creativity, and the significance of nature in education.

Zehra Emre is a columnist at 'Turkey Interactive Columnists Newspaper', where she previously served as the editor-in-chief. She contributes articles on individual awareness, creativity, art, and literature in her column titled 'Dream Trap'.

## Miracle Rising from the Right Hemisphere

### Şule ALPALTAY

Art, in its broadest sense, embodies creativity and imagination. Some dreams materialize into tangible forms; the device you are using to read this article is a testament to that. The transformation from abstract to tangible is pivotal in shaping the concept of life, allowing us to envision the future through remarkable ideas.



Engaging in a system that promotes unidirectional growth throughout our educational journey can lead to imbalance, akin to uneven weights on a scale pulling us down. Therefore, science and art stand as crucial domains that advance through mutual inspiration and must be harmonized.

A creative mind functions akin to a factory, consistently in a productive state. Safeguarding brain health is crucial to sustain creativity, as the brain requires exposure to novel stimuli to foster new ideas and enhance mental agility. Creativity, a fusion of knowledge and skill, flourishes through adaptation.





Art contributes to the psychological, emotional, and cognitive development of both the artist and the art enthusiast. It is crucial to recognize that just as the brain relies on art for advancement, it is incumbent upon us to maintain the vitality of this system, which houses our emotional core, by safeguarding our brain health. It is essential to remember that while art embodies the essence of a pure soul in the world, the brain stands as the primary influencer of our character. To produce art effectively, akin to a vast network of interconnected flight paths in the sky, the brain requires a rich tapestry of connections, which art facilitates. This symbiotic relationship between art and the brain plays a pivotal role in preserving individuals' mental and physical well-being and upholding societal harmony.



### **Şule Alpaltay;**

After graduating from the Department of Turkish Language Teaching, she underwent leadership training in theater and creative drama. She provides guidance to students and adults through student coaching and brain coaching sessions. Alpaltay, actively involved in European Union initiatives, has disseminated her insights on global forums and supported diverse projects.

Alpaltay, who possesses a strong literary inclination, conveyed her emotions and ideas in a poetic manner through his book "Separation in My Palms". She persists in motivating students by integrating her love for art and education through theater and creative drama instruction.

Şule Alpaltay, a member of the Board of Directors of the Brain Exercises Association, actively contributes to shaping the association's mission and vision, as well as promoting awareness of brain health and development.

## QUESTIONS FOR THE MIND

### What day is it?

In a certain tribe, women lie on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, while men lie on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. On the remaining days, they consistently tell the truth. One day, a man from the tribe engaged in a conversation with a woman. Here is what the woman shared with the man.

Woman: I lied yesterday.

Man: Likewise.

Based on this dialogue, ascertain the specific day being discussed. Which day do you believe this dialogue occurred?

### What Is the Price of Chocolate?

Alican and Efecan visit the grocery store with the intention of purchasing a chocolate bar. Upon reaching the store, they discover that Alican lacks 24 kuruş, while Efecan is short by 2 kuruş for the purchase. Alican generously offers his money to Efecan to cover the shortfall. Despite this, they are still unable to afford the chocolate bar. Based on this, what do you estimate is the cost of a chocolate bar in cents?

### Which day?

The grass in the garden of the house doubles its growth rate daily. If the grass covers the entire garden in 10 days, how many days will it take to cover half of it?

