

The Physiology Of Nirvana: Jill Bolte Taylor's Stroke Of Insight

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At 37, Harvard-trained anatomist Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor, Ph.D., was enjoying a very successful career when a blood vessel exploded in her brain's left hemisphere, and everything changed. A true scientist who was fascinated by the breakdown of her brain functions, Taylor became the witness to her stroke, which initially left her unable to talk, walk, read, write or remember anything prior to that occurrence.

As her left brain shut down, Taylor lost her processing capacity for all language. With her mind suspended in newfound silence, she experienced a sense of deep peace, along with an inability to visually distinguish edges and boundaries between herself and the outer world. Taylor, who will speak locally at the Celebrate Your Life conference this month, recounts many profound realizations and intimate understandings about the left

and right halves of the brain in her personal memoir, *My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey*. This inspiring story not only demonstrates that it is possible to rebuild the brain after trauma, but also that anyone can tend the garden of the mind to maximize their quality of life.

What was one of your most profound realizations?

In the absence of the normal functioning of my left orientation association area, I could actually see that my skin was not my physical boundary. As a result of such a glorious state of blissful realization that I am—as we all are—connected to everything and everyone around me, I no longer see myself as a single, solid entity, separate from I also now wholeheartedly believe that the feeling of deep inner peace, which we often seek for outside ourselves, is neurological circuitry located in our right brain. This circuitry of deep inner peace is constantly running and always available for us to hook into. To do that we have to be present—right here, right now. The feeling of peace is something that happens in the present moment—not something that we bring with us from the past or project into the future.

The more aware we are of this right-mind inner circuitry of deep inner peace, the easier it becomes to purposely take a breath and choose it over other response. Don't criticize yourself when you have difficulty accessing the consciousness of your right mind circuitry, because you are simply doing what you learned as a child. Simply be good to yourself and remember that, "Enlightenment is not a process of learning, it is a process of unlearning," which is what my good friend, Dr. Kat Domingo, proclaims.

Both of our hemispheres work together to generate our perception of reality on a moment-by-moment basis, which means that we are exercising our right mind all the time. However, when we learn to recognize the very subtle feelings running through our body when we are connected to the present moment, we can begin to train ourselves to activate it on purpose.

Give an example of how you do this.

Remember that you are part of a greater structure—an eternal flow of energy and molecules—from which you cannot be separated. Knowing that I am part of the cosmic flow makes me feel safe, and my life as heaven on Earth. It's impossible to feel vulnerable when I cannot be separated from the greater whole. Although my left mind thinks of me as a fragile individual capable of losing my life, my right mind realizes that the essence of my being as eternal life. Someday, when I may lose these cells and my ability to perceive this three-dimensional world, my energy will be absorbed back into the tranquil sea of euphoria. Focusing on this leads me to feel grateful for the time I

have here and committed to the well being of the 50 trillion brilliant cells that are all packed together and working to bring the essence of who I am into the world.

Does this mean that we have the autonomy to choose our thoughts in response to our visceral emotions?

I've learned to make my decisions based upon how things feel inside. There are certain emotions, like anger, frustration or fear, that feel uncomfortable when they surge through my body. I now have a relationship with what is going on inside my head. I use my left mind, through language, to talk directly to my brain and tell it that I don't like a particular feeling and don't want to hook into the neural loop that keeps it on continuous play. Essentially, I now have much to say about how I feel and for how long.

Celebrate Your Life Conference, June 8-12, Westin Lombard, 70 Yorktown Center, Lombard. Visit CelebrateYourLife.org.