


# UNITY MAGAZINE

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JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2018

UNITYMAGAZINE.ORG

SUGGESTED RETAIL \$4.50



TRAINING  
YOUR BRAIN FOR  
*Inner  
Peace*

FEATURING  
*Jill Bolte Taylor*

**HEALING ISSUE**

SHAKTI GAWAIN ON HOW SHE DISCOVERED CREATIVE VISUALIZATION



*Listening in With ...*

**JILL  
BOLTE  
TAYLOR**



TRAINING YOUR  
BRAIN FOR

*Inner Peace*

AT 37, HARVARD-TRAINED BRAIN SCIENTIST **JILL BOLTE TAYLOR, PH.D.**, EXPERIENCED A MASSIVE STROKE IN 1996 WHEN A BLOOD VESSEL ON THE LEFT SIDE OF HER BRAIN EXPLODED. THROUGHOUT THE NEXT FOUR HOURS, HER LEFT BRAIN GRADUALLY SHUT DOWN UNTIL WALKING, TALKING, AND READING WERE IMPOSSIBLE AND SHE WAS UNABLE TO REMEMBER ANYTHING ABOUT HER LIFE. WITH A LOT OF NONTRADITIONAL REHABILITATION, SHE MADE A COMPLETE RECOVERY IN EIGHT YEARS. THE INSIGHTS SHE GAINED FROM THIS EXPERIENCE HAVE RADICALLY SHIFTED HER PERSPECTIVE OF WHO WE REALLY ARE. HER 2008 TED TALK WAS THE FIRST TO GO VIRAL. HER BOOK, *MY STROKE OF INSIGHT* (INITIALLY SELF-PUBLISHED IN 2006 BUT REPUBLISHED BY VIKING IN 2008) BECAME A *NEW YORK TIMES* BEST-SELLER. HERE, TAYLOR EXPLAINS TO *UNITY* MAGAZINE EDITOR **KATY KOONTZ** THAT DEEP INNER PEACE IS A REALITY WE CAN ALL ACCESS AT ANY TIME BY SHIFTING INTO RIGHT-BRAIN CONSCIOUSNESS.

**KATY KOONTZ:** You describe the right-brain perception of yourself and everything else during the stroke as being “fluid.” Can you elaborate?

**JILL BOLTE TAYLOR:** The consciousness of my right brain did not recognize the boundaries of my body at all. The left parietal region of the brain, in what’s called the orientation association area, holds a holographic image of your body so that you know where you begin and where you end. When those cells went offline after the stroke, I no longer had that perspective. I felt as big as the universe! My body was attached to me, but I didn’t experience it as my essence. Instead, I was the collective whole, connected to everyone and everything—I was completely fluid. Our right brain doesn’t see the artificial division of individual bodies that the left brain places on us. We’re actually all energy. Our bodies are just energy compacted into a dense form.

**KK:** So from a right-brain perspective, everything is just energy.

**JBT:** Right. If you look at the dust particles floating in a beam of light and shift your focus away from the detailed boundaries between things, everything becomes blended, and you can sense that you’re part of that blending. That’s what it feels like to truly be in the present, where everything is connected. Or look at water that has a glassy surface with just a little ripple in it and allow yourself to become mesmerized and shift into the flow.

**KK:** How else might we make this shift in perspective?

**JBT:** I focus on the space right in front of the leaves on a tree. All the leaves become a little blurry, and they have a motion. I allow myself to become the

energy that creates that motion. I shift out of my detailed, specific “everything has a boundary, everything’s separate” perspective into seeing that everything is part of a collective whole.

You could also look at the energetic wiggle rising above hot pavement. It’s like the pavement is alive. Allow yourself to shift into that flow. Or gaze into a fire—a campfire is constantly changing—it’s mesmerizing. Anything that allows you to bring the magic into the moment is a great tool.

**KK:** Staring into a fire is one of my favorite things.

**JBT:** Oh, it’s magnificent. Taking that blind leap into the present moment is divine, but it doesn’t have to be woo-woo. It’s just half of what we are, and I am more because I claim all of me, rather than only half of me by using only half my brain. True science has to accept all that is. It can’t say, “Those mysterious things we don’t understand don’t exist.” That’s bad science, denying something instead of exploring it.

The TED Talk was the first thing that legitimized these two very different ways of being from a scientific perspective. And now, of course, we know about neurogenesis (the brain’s ability to make new neurons or brain cells) and neuroplasticity (the brain’s ability to change and rearrange their connections). We’ve gone through a complete paradigm shift in how we look at the brain and what we are as individuals. Part of that is looking at our relationship to religion and spirituality and at what parts of us are participating in which pieces of those behaviors.

**KK:** In that TED Talk, you said: “My spirit soared free like a great whale gliding through a sea of silent euphoria, nirvana.” Had you ever felt that before?

**JBT:** Never quite like that. During the stroke, I felt enormous, like a genie who had just come out of its tiny, little bottle. That's the power of what we really are. That's why my energy is probably blending with yours as we talk on the phone, even though you're 100 miles away. We are all this enormousness that gets squeezed inside these tiny little bodies and we think this little, tiny body is what we are. But it's really just the tool we use to do stuff in this physical world. I tend to live in that expanded state, and then I come back to tiny, little Jill when I need to talk to people.

**KK:** I love that rather than seeing yourself as a stroke victim, you say you're a "stroke triumphant," capable of seeing the gifts in that experience.

**JBT:** When people look at those who are disabled or recovering from anything, they look at what they lost instead of what they've gained. If your cells are no longer performing what's normally defined as the regular job of the brain, consider what those cells might actually have been inhibiting before. That is now the gift that becomes available.

For example, if you lose your sight, your hearing often improves. Those cells that would normally process vision aren't getting any input, and so they send their little dendrites next door to the auditory cells and say, "What are you doing, and can we help?" And then hearing improves. Then if the sight comes back, the cells and their dendrites perform vision again. So imagine what insight they might have now. All they knew before was vision, but now they know vision and hearing. The possibilities are just remarkable.

**KK:** There's a great metaphor about unity and oneness in that.

**JBT:** Exactly. As humanity, we are one animal. We all play different roles, but how well do we support each other? The body's cells cooperate; humanity does not. That's why we're in the situation we're in today.

For me, this becomes the relationship between the microcosmic world of our internal structures, all the cells that make up the individual, and the macrocosm of the greater human population in relationship to the planet. On top of that, we have created this magnificent internet that has become the nervous system of the planet. This evolution is fascinating—and terrifying.

**KK:** Do you believe that we were actually *designed* to work together?

**JBT:** The brains of humans from 2,000 years ago differ in biological structure from our brains today. We had spoken language then, but the priests used to read to the people; the average person didn't have reading language in their left brain. And we didn't have sophisticated mathematics, either. As a species, we were more right-brained. We were living in the present moment. We were concerned with acquiring food, shelter, and a mate. Everything was much more spontaneous and less planned.

Since then, we've become much more left-brained. We started caring more about what is outside of us instead of what is inside of us. The values that go with the left-brain materialistic focus of "me" and "mine" became more prominent, shifting from wanting to be kind to wanting to have more money or status than others. We became more competitive instead of cooperative. Both our brains and society now emphasize a different value structure than our divine self emphasizes.

**KK:** So in some ways humanity is evolving, and in other ways, it seems we're devolving.

**JBT:** Well, we're still evolving, and that evolution will continue. We have lost our collective whole. As the portion of our brain that is focused on intuition or divine caring is devolving, our left-brain portion is evolving, but I do have hope that we're going to settle ourselves out evenly. I'm a true advocate for the whole brain. Now that we have these magnificent left brains, let's figure out how we can use them to truly be in service to the right brain.

That's the conflict for most people: *In any decision that I make, is it my right-brain value structure making that decision, or is it my left-brain value structure?* I think we will find more peace in the world and become a better humanity when we allow our right brain to lead that conversation while allowing the skillset of the left brain to be of service in manifesting it.

**KK:** How can those two hemispheres work more cooperatively?

**JBT:** Generally, the right brain is pretty happy. It's present. It's aware. It giggles. It cares. It's kind. It's compassionate. Then there's the left brain, which generally doesn't like our right brain at all and thinks it's frivolous because it cares about things with no real value, like art and music. But when I do my glasswork or my stone carving, I'm using my whole brain. That allows me to escape the routine circuitry of my left brain so that I can come back with a bigger-picture perspective, allowing me to make better decisions. It also has physical benefits because everything flows better inside our cells. Healthy attitudes result in overall health.

**KK:** What about left-brained people who really make an effort to be more



right-brained—say with meditation—but they feel as though their right brain won't talk to them?

**JBT:** Everybody meditates differently. For some, the silencing of the mind is never going to happen, but that's not really the point. The point is not to care about the chatter and to focus instead on the present moment. That's the domain of the right brain, and you don't have to quiet that.

Personally, I don't like to quiet my mind. I almost died with a really quiet mind. What I do want is to bring my mind to the present. We have the power to choose the temporality of our minds, moment by moment. When I bring my mind to the present, I care about different things. I think about different things. I worry about different things, if I'm worrying at all. I shift my awareness. So you don't have to meditate in order to be in your right brain. Actually, meditation is more an action of the left brain trying to quiet itself so that you can have the experience of the present moment.

**KK:** You teach that we have more power over our thoughts than we know, but what happens when our surroundings work against that?

**JBT:** I think you've already mastered that because I've noticed you laugh a lot. Isn't that the key to life, being able to laugh about things, whether we like them or not? Allow your sense of humor to come in and see that everything is pretty ridiculous. The fact that we even exist is pretty amazing. I mean, it is an absurd concept that I exist at all, but it seems that I do, so I'm going to laugh about it, and if you're going to take it way too seriously, I'm going to laugh about that too.

**KK:** What's the 90-second rule you talk about?

**JBT:** At any moment, only three things are going on inside of our brain. We're thinking a thought, we're feeling an emotion, and we're having a physiological response. So if I think of my mother, who I lost unexpectedly two years ago, I automatically stimulate the circuit of grieving, and I might tear up. Anything we think and anything we feel is just circuitry, just a bunch of cells performing their function.

It takes only 90 seconds from having a thought and triggering a chemical response for that chemical to surge through my body and then totally dissipate from my blood. That's it—in 90 seconds, from a biological/physiological perspective, my automatic response is totally finished. If I'm still feeling emotion, it's because I've made the choice to let that circuit continue to run—I'm holding on to that emotion, and therefore it escalates and lasts longer.

So the next time you feel angry, look at your watch, because just by doing that, you are observing yourself in this action instead of going through it, and it's a different kind of experience. That makes it easier to simply allow those emotions to naturally pass through your body and flush themselves out.

**KK:** Are there any advanced techniques you've incorporated into your spiritual practice?

**JBT:** Anat Baniel, who worked with Moshe Feldenkrais, has intuitively created a technique called the Anat Baniel Method (or NeuroMovement) that is an evolution of the Feldenkrais Method. It's a movement pattern built on neuroplasticity. I have a practitioner work on me once a week, and now I'm actually going to train in this myself. This will infuse my writing, my view of us as human beings, what I believe to be true, and my work helping others become healthier people.

**KK:** How powerful do you think we can be? Are we gaining momentum, or are we actually spitting into the wind? Some days the headlines would indicate the latter.

**JBT:** For life to be interesting, you have to have a this and a that. That's why our brain has two hemispheres. It's the nature of how we are to have two sides in combat. Sometimes it goes one way, and sometimes the other way, but in the big picture, we're all fine. As awful as things seem to be in the physical world, you and I are as big as the universe, and we're just fine.

**KK:** That's comforting.

**JBT:** That's really how I feel. I live on a boat, and when a big storm hits and my mooring ropes threaten to bust, it doesn't matter. If they break, I deal with them. I move into the present moment. I raise my engines, and I do this and I try that, and I laugh a lot. It will be what it will be. In the big picture, I'm as big as the cove—bigger, even—so it doesn't matter. Even if I die in the storm, it doesn't matter. We are all this enormousness, part of the flow, always and in all ways. 🌊

**Jill Bolte Taylor, Ph.D.,** is the CEO of My Stroke of Insight, Inc., and chair of the not-for-profit Jill Bolte Taylor BRAINS, Inc., which promotes whole-brain awareness on all levels. Taylor is also a national spokesperson for the Harvard Brain Tissue Resource Center (Harvard Brain Bank). Harpo is adapting her best-selling book, *My Stroke of Insight*, into a motion picture. Visit [drjilltaylor.com](http://drjilltaylor.com).