

My Stroke of Insight ~ Jill Bolte Taylor

Having a brother suffering from schizophrenia, the author always wondered what is it that makes him incapable of distinguishing dream and reality and making him delusional. This inspired her to study the brain. The author describes an incidence of her suffering from brain hemorrhage and in 4 hours, she lost her ability to walk, talk, read, write or recall. The two brain hemispheres are almost inseparable from each other. Right and left hemispheres work like parallel and serial processors in computer analogy. The two hemispheres are connected through the corpus callosum which is made of around 300 axons. The right hemispheres are involved in conscious processing, everything that's involved in the present, it thinks in pictures and learns through body movements as well. It sorts of gives a sense of what we're seeing, listening to, tasting, or smelling in the present as well as spatial interpretation of the present. Left hemispheres connect all the information from the past and give us a prediction or picture of how future would look like, this hemisphere thinks in the language (as we know the Broca's and Wernicke's area in the left hemisphere as well), It gives us a sense of ourselves having a physical body distinguishable from everyone's else. During the phase of the stroke, the author describes how it felt like, not being able to distinguish between body's boundaries and background, and then she would feel her left brain completely silent, her being coalesced with the surroundings, she was captivated by all of these happening, felt enormous and expansive, like a genie escaped from the bottle, feeling detached to all the emotional baggage, being into euphoria. She decided to drive but then her right limb became paralyzed, eventually she realized that she had a stroke. She went to her office, tried to read business cards but the pixels of the card seemed to blend with the background, she'll suddenly lose touch with reality then and now, then tried to call her colleagues but couldn't interpret the voice on the phone as well, becoming delusional now and then, soon she realized that she's in an ambulance and the doctors had to take all of her experiences away to keep her alive. Having being detached from reality, the sufferings and attachment in that experience, she wonders that she'd achieved "Nirvana" and she's still alive. Maybe everyone can achieve this beautiful experience of "Nirvana" driven by the left hemisphere and the world will become so peaceful if people would've been able to achieve the detachments from suffering and themselves even for a short time. So, we've two cognitive minds, the left, and right hemispheres, and it would be beautiful if at each moment we've the capability to choose which one to experience, the former where we're aware of our present, aware of our surroundings, of our boundaries and senses or the later one where we become completely indisputable from the universe and feel enormous and expansive. It took her 8 years to completely recover from her stroke. But this has left her with loads of inspiration about the wonders of the universe that resides between our two ears- the human brain.