

Right Brain/Left Brain

Of the twin human hemispheres, the right side is the elder sibling. In utero, the right lobe of a human fetus's brain is well on its way to maturation before the left side begins to develop. The right hemisphere integrates feelings, recognizes images, and appreciates music. It contributes a field-awareness to consciousness, synthesizing multiple converging determinants so that the mind can grasp the senses' input **all-at once**.

The right brain is nonverbal; it comprehends the language of cries, gestures, grimaces, cuddling, suckling, touching and body stance. It's emotional states are under little volitional control and betray true feelings through fidgeting, blushing, or smirking. The right brain, more than the left, expresses BEING – that complex meshing of competing emotions that constitutes our existential state at any given moment. The right brain, more often than the left generates feeling states, such as love, humor, or aesthetic appreciation, which are **non-logical**. They defy the rules of conventional reasoning.

When Pascal wrote, "*The heart has its reasons which reason knows not of,*" he was referring to the kind of knowing that goes on in the emotional right brain, and distinguishes it from that which occurs in the cerebral left. Feeling states do not ordinarily progress in a linear fashion, but are experienced **all-at-once**. "Getting" the punch line of a joke results in an explosion of laughter. An intuitive insight arrives in a flash. Newton and Einstein both reported examples of what the poet Rilke called, "conflagrations of clarity." Love at first sight, such as Dante experienced when he encountered Beatrice, happens in an instant. Religious conversions, such as the one that overwhelmed Paul on the road to Damascus, strike like lightning.

A feature of nonverbal communication is that no symbolization interferes with the direct appreciation of reality. The right brain perceives the world concretely. For example, a facial expression is "read" without any attempt to translate it into words. The right hemisphere is also the portal leading to the world of the invisible. It is the realm of altered states of consciousness where faith and mystery rule over logic. There is compelling evidence that dreaming occurs primarily in the right brain. The right brain does not speak, yet it actively participates in the comprehension of the spoken word. By listening carefully to the forms of speech while the left brain is deciphering speech's **content**, the right hemisphere is expert at ferreting out hidden messages by interpreting inflection and nuance. It is aware of the speaker's posture, facial expression, and gesture. Just below conscious awareness, it registers pupil size and hand tremors.

Since it is virtually impossible to describe how the right side deciphers nonverbal language, most people refer to this skill as "intuition." The right brain is better than the left in perceiving space and making judgments as to balance, harmony, and the composition of gestalts, from which we make aesthetic distinctions between ugly and beautiful. Since the right hemisphere processes input instantaneously, it is the better side for appreciating dimensions and judging distances. Driving, skiing, and dancing are its

province. The right brain's principal attributes concern **being, images, holism, and music.**

The left brain's primary functions are opposite and complementary to the right's. The right side is concerned with **being**, the left with **doing**. The left lobe knows the world through its unique form of symbolization – speech. In right-handed people, 90 percent of language skills reside in the left hemisphere.

Speech gave the left brain the edge to usurp the sovereignty of the mind from its elder twin. Speech and action are closely related. Words are tools: the very essence of action. We use them to abstract, discriminate, analyze, and dissect the world into pieces, objects, and categories. But speech is not only outer directed, within the self, words are the implements of thought. Analysis – reducing the components of sentences into their separate parts – is essential to understanding speech, especially if the content of the message concerns objective facts. This key left brain task depends upon linear progression, in contrast to the holistic perception of the right brain. Speech itself is also **abstract** and depends upon the left brain's unique ability to process information without the use of images.

The mind arranges words, as children assemble Legos, as image substitutes, building concepts that allow us to think about **freedom, economics, and destiny** without needing to conjure images for these words. The ability to conceptualize that the abstract words **crime, virtue, punishment, and justice** are all related is supremely human. To be able to leap from the particular to concrete to general and abstract has allowed us to create art, logic, science, and philosophy.

But this skill tore us out of the rich matrix of nature. The part torn away became the ego. The left brain cleaved the right brain's integrated sense of wholeness into a duality that resulted in humans creating a distinction between **me-in-here** and **world out there**. The ego requires duality to gain perspective. Dualism also enhanced the human penchant for objective thinking, which in turn increased our reasoning skills and eventually led to logic. Logic is not holistic, nor is it conceived as a gestalt. It click-clacks along the left brain's linear railway of sequence.

If-then syllogisms, the basis of logic, have become the most reliable method of foretelling the future, all but replacing omens, visions, and intuition. The rules of logic form the foundation of science, education, business, and military strategy. The dichotomy between the left and right hemispheres mirrors the differences between hunter/killer and gatherer/nurturer strategies. Metaphorically, time is the masculine coordinate, and space is the feminine one. The poet William Blake wrote, "***Time & Space are Real Beings, a Male & a Female. Time is a Man and Space is a Woman.***" Any particular society can accentuate one or the other of these two ways of interacting with the world, depending on the demands of the environment or the shaping influences of its inventions.