

WHOLE BRAIN LIVING, by Jill Bolte Taylor
A Book Report by David G. Schwartz, M.D. Part III
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This part describes the 4 characters in relation to the physical body. I am using the pronoun “it,” because it is not a person like her or she, but a part of the brain. Character 1 is organized, plans regular checkups, is motivated to stay fit and to look good. It exercises, takes supplements, takes care of the body as it would a motor vehicle to keep it in good running condition.

Character 2 is terrified that something will go wrong with the body. It either sticks its head in the sand on one hand, dreads and resists medical checkups, or on the other hand makes mountains out of a molehill, frequently visits the ER, and complains about aches and pains to anyone who will listen. It will do a little with a fitness program, but will stop trying as soon as uncomfortable.

Character 3 enjoys physical activity, checks vital signs as interesting and cool, looks at the body as a toy to enjoy, building its fitness and accomplishing great feats, not in the gym, but doing something adventuresome and fun outdoors, pushing the limits. This character will also have ER visits from accidents and injuries. It will follow a dietary program depending on how it feels, may binge and then do excessive exercise to make up for it.

Character 4 sees the body as the holy temple of the soul and takes responsibility for keeping it well with self-care, is an active member of the community, joins food co-ops, supports farmers markets, goes to holistic practitioners like chiropractors and acupuncturists, takes walks in nature, hugs trees, talks to squirrels. It looks for a healthy balance among work, play, family, friends, and spiritual practice.

In dealing with illness, character 1 will do everything technological to manage or treat it, will monitor glucose and blood pressure with precision, will study its conditions as if becoming a specialist in that.

Character 2 already sees the medical world as bad news, so having an illness paralyzes it with fear. Feeling distraught, it “puts its head in the sand” as long as possible, cannot think clearly enough to fully follow protocols of treatment, doesn’t want to be tethered to monitoring devices, and will try to force the responsibility for managing the illness onto someone else without an ounce of cooperation. Now characters 1, 3, and 4 could each become a character 2, when the stress of sudden illness strikes them.

Character 3 will downplay the seriousness of a condition, but will use technology to do the work to monitor the vital signs without having to put much effort into it, and still see measuring vital signs as interesting and cool.

Character 4 will make friends with the diagnosis in order to take responsibility for managing it, looks at wholeness of body/mind/spirit, visits holistic healers, will do whatever exercise is needed, and looks for the silver lining in the opportunities the illness provides for an important experience.

Our characters in intimate relationships and finding a partner is a more complicated scene. Often left dominant dominant people and right brain dominant people will be attracted to each other, but it may not be a good fit. The “opposites attract” theory often means that each person looks for completion from the other person by complimenting its personality, so each depends on the other person for personal fulfillment. The other person’s qualities may seem cute in the flush of an early

relationship, but it doesn't wear well, and it eventually leads to irreconcilable conflict and annoyance that doesn't make for a happy companionship. So it pays to be circumspect and to know what characters are prominent in the person you meet.

Imagine what an emotional relationship would be with character 1, who values thinking over feeling. Character 1 wants to define the edges of a relationship and define its status. Are we dating, casually, serious, exclusive, headed toward a committed relationship? It wants to put the relationship in a box. Who do you need me to be, playmate, breadwinner, sex partner, co-parent? A date may seem like an interview for a position. Two character 1's may be very compatible with each other, but they have to decide who is more dominant, as they both tend to be alpha characters. One may be a softer 1 and the other a harder 1.

A character 2 may be compatible with a character 1, because the 2 can feel safer and protected by 1's strength, organizational skills, and confidence, and can feel rescued. Character 2 prefers alpha character 1 because 1 is predictable, dependable, helpful. Character 1 also feels good helping others and being in control. Sometimes two character 2's can pair up in shared victim-hood, "You and me against the world," but often they end up bullying, dominating, criticizing each other, even in public, and wonder why they don't have any friends.

A character 2 may be attracted to the fun loving character 3, but the 3 will eventually move away from the negativity and demands on predictability. Character 3's are thrilled by high energy dates, are drawn to variety rather than predictability; and a committed relationship, "till death do us part," feels like a death sentence, so they may engage in serial monogamy. It seems to me that 2 character 3's could be compatible, but it may not be a long lasting relationship.

Character 4 sees beauty in everything, and has an accepting attitude toward anyone, but in order to have a vibrant relationship, the other person has to have some shared experience with character 4, so probably two character 4's would be compatible. Character 1 would be appreciated, but if it can only do and is not able to just be, character 4 will be bored. Character 2 will be comforted by the emotional support, but character 4's insistence on character 2's taking responsibility for its feelings and avoiding codependency, and character 4's positive attitude toward life, all will cause 2 to push away from such an "unrealistically" positive attitude.

How relationships go bad is often when the incompatibility, dissatisfaction or boredom leads to a characters 1, 3, or 4 reverting to character 2. When both people shift their characters to 2, there is usually no hope for recovery. Characters can shift into different numbers to adapt to an unsatisfactory relationship, but the key to remember is that each person needs to do what is possible to shift back out of character 2 and into their original character that was hijacked, in order to work out something positive. The brain huddle can help each person make the shift into a more peaceful stance.

Because we live in a world in which characters 1 and 2 values predominate, (materialism and fear based politics), the lack of meaning in life leads people to turn to alcohol and other drugs, to escape, and to look for happiness in external things. We have the ability to choose between living consciously or to run on automatic. Our neurons are naturally inclined to becoming addicted and it takes a conscious decision to not automatically turn to addictions. If we do turn to addictions, with our brains disconnected from reality, the brain cells disconnect from each other and become rigid in thinking and feeling, and run more on automatic; however, recovery is possible because we have neuroplasticity, the ability of neurons to change and heal.

This becomes possible through recovery programs and methods such as the brain huddle, the 12-step programs of AA, the Hero's Journey, and the story of the Buddha's journey.

When a person is addicted, it is the left and right emotional centers that are hooked, and to succeed in recovery, both characters 2 and 3 have to be willing to do some emotional work. If the person strategizes rehab only with character 1, to do the things that need to be done without addressing the emotional work of characters 2 and 3, relapse is likely. If character 1 is committed because it has a lot to lose, and character 3 is motivated to salvage connections to people, but without the character 2 to be willing to surrender resentments, blame, and shame to character 4, there will be no transformation. A person may try to mimic a character 4, but unless it realizes that we are *feeling creatures who think*, and that characters 2 and 3 need to be engaged in the process, relapse will occur.

This affects the addicted person's family. Since he or she is being irresponsible, they will over react by being more responsible and strict with the person. They enlist their character 1's, maybe soft at first, and turning hard later. They may on the other hand, pretend that everything is OK, which puts the addicted person in charge. If the character 1's hang onto the hope that their strategies will work, the addicted person ups the ante until the family's character 1's become exhausted and their character 2's become anxious, overwhelmed, and depressed.

Several strategies provide options for rehabilitation. The Hero's Journey appeals to characters 1 and 2 with the challenges and quests. Three and four are attracted to the Buddha's story with enlightenment and redemption. The 12 step programs speak directly to 1 and 2, commanding an acceptance of powerlessness over the drug, the need to be open to a Higher Power.

All of the programs lead people out of their left brain characters 1 and 2 and into the peace of character 4. The brain huddle can appeal to all characters simultaneously to collaborate. Regardless of the program, if all characters commit to the process, success is likely. The first thing required is that the small self ego brain must step aside and be willing to shift into the higher consciousness of the right brain. In the hero's journey, one must battle monsters. In the Buddha's story, one must step away from external possessions, knowledge, money, titles, etc. In AA, one must admit powerlessness and must turn one's life over to a Higher Power. In the brain huddle, we must step out of 1 and 2 and enter the present moment consciousness of 3 and 4. Each of these narratives requires a leap of faith, leaving behind what we previously held as true and recognize that there is something greater that can guide us into the unknown. These programs require an ongoing process to maintain sobriety and connection to the Higher Power. The author details each of the 12 steps of AA, but these are also readily available from many other sources.

Dr. Taylor narrates the last 100 years and the influence of technology on the 4 characters. The G.I. Generation that lived through the Great Depression and came of age during WWII, had very low rates of high school graduation and learned life's lessons through hands-on learning, which occurs in the right brain. They had values based on characters 1 and 4, which built a well-balanced economy and society.

The Silent Generation came of age a little later during WWII and after, also had mostly hands-on learning and hard physical labor. McCarthyism discouraged people from speaking out.

These 2 generations lived life at a manageable pace, spent quality time with family, eating together, obeying laws, their character 4's prioritizing home and family, with gratitude for what was, and hope

for a brighter future. They built an economy with unprecedented growth and prosperity. (I would add, mostly for white males.)

The character 1's of these generations got higher education, entered professions, climbed the hierarchical ladder. The character 3's learned skilled trades. The character 4's led innovation, thought systemically, and built the suburban infrastructure.

The next generation, the Baby Boomers, born 1946-1964, had more wealth than previous generations and an abundance of opportunities, embraced consumerism, entertainment, and fashion. The majority of jobs were in manufacturing, and education favored memorization of facts over creativity. This was the first generation that favored the material rewards of character 1 over the character 4 values of relationships and family. More hours were put into work in order to afford expensive things. Rates of divorce rose. They developed a sense of entitlement to what they had instead of gratitude for the opportunities they received from the work of the previous generations, and created the character 1 dominated society we live in today, sacrificing the values of kindness, compassion, honesty, and healthy relationships, for the values of materialism.

Following the Boomers, Generation X, (born 1965 to 1976), children of divorced parents and double income parents, the "Latchkey Kids," came home from school with no adults present, and learned character 1 responsibilities at an early age, taking care of younger children. They learned resiliency, flexibility, as independent character 1 thinkers. They were given electronics more and were given less attention from parents, becoming very electronically savvy. They learned left-brain skills with right brain tools, thinking more spatially and visually. They used technology not only to learn skills, but they creatively played with it fearlessly, using trial and error to create new games, activities older generations would be petrified to do, for fear of pushing the wrong buttons. Generation X'ers were learning how to use left and right sides of the brain simultaneously in constructive ways.

As they matured, they disapproved of the materialistic values of the Boomers that had wrecked their families by caring about superficial things and hierarchies, and they resented Boomers trying to buy them. They created computers to automate work and did not fit into the Boomers' worker-based systems. They valued their unique individuality, tending to live paycheck to paycheck, not trusting the system, some buying risky real estate while living beyond their means, falling into the financial crisis of 2008, losing their homes, and going back to living with parents.

The Millennials, born 1968-1996, sometimes called Generation Y, were the first generation to have their first significant relationship to be with electronics. Their helicopter Boomer parents kept them so busy going to this activity or that, that they felt a lack of control in their lives, having minimal unsupervised time, with highly developed character 3's who gravitate toward packs of others, feeling safer in a collective situation. Their parents rewarded them for trying anything new, and they did not develop the character 2 responses to successes and failures, and so they did not develop their character 1 drive needed to compete in the traditional workforce. In the workplace, they are more committed to the experience rather than to the job, they are creative in solving problems, and when it is no longer satisfying, they are off to another job.

The Millennials who run their own businesses lead with love rather than with the left brained command and control mentality, and are charitable when people make mistakes.

When they look for jobs, they seek work that matches their right-brain character 3 skills and interests. They won't stay in jobs they hate or compromise themselves in the way that the older generation did in order to make the money they wanted.

These sheltered kids now see the world as a dangerous place, having witnessed 9/11/2001 and the 2008 financial crisis, and many are dependent on anti-anxiety and antidepressant drugs. They were reared to believe they could be and do anything, yet being helicoptered by their parents, they never developed that self-reliance that comes with facing adversities. Their parents compared themselves with the people next door for validation, and now this generation defines their self value on how many friends, likes, and clicks they have on social media. They are charming, artful, creative, and want to contribute to the well being of humanity. They are tightly connected to their technology and don't worry about privacy. It seems the worst thing is to be alone. Solitude is not a thing they have cultivated, and feeling alone or not connected to a group can trigger anxiety and depression. This is correlated with drug abuse and suicide.

Then Generation Z, born 1997-2010, many being offspring of the independent minded Gen X, and more whole brained than the previous generations, expressing all 4 characters. Having the independence of character 1, like their left brain dominant parents, and being technology savvy, expressing character 3, blending in with the right brained Millennials, gives a balance. They are enmeshed with technology, not so much for social connectivity as with the Millennials, but having a stronger relationship with technology itself. This can lead to loneliness. With 9/11, the financial crisis of 2008, political polarization, and Covid, these things lead them to view the world as a dangerous place, like character 2, and they keep moving, not settling down, and wanting instant gratification that modern technology provides, according to character 3. They can make big money as computer whizzes and can go for high-end fashion. They also want clean water and air and a healthy planet, and they are very tolerant of multiculturalism, varieties of races, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc., expressing their character 4.

Reviewing the history of technology through the generations, we see that we have billions of brains on this planet and billions of computers linked together via the consciousness of our human brains, ending up with a techno-consciousness never before witnessed.

Biological systems have negative feedback systems so that when we've had enough of something, we stop doing it (most of the time). We stop eating when no longer hungry. Technology is a positive feedback system, encouraging more and more, so that it never stops. The more you browse, the more temptations are set into the system to increase clicks, time, and attention, running 24/7, wearing down our neural networks. Computers drive us to work and play harder and faster, so that the technology is exhausting our biological systems cognitively and emotionally, and leaving us vulnerable to addictions.

So we have to consciously decide to push the pause button, to give the brain a chance to catch up and regenerate itself. Rest, sleep, and use the brain huddle.

To claim our own personal power, we can master strategies that help us shift between the 4 characters. Dr. Taylor makes some recommendations to the reader. The first step is to observe the current patterns of emotion, thoughts, and behavior. Which ones run on automatic, and which ones would you like to strengthen?

When you first awaken in the morning is a good time to observe how the 4 characters are behaving, with eyes still closed, then do the brain huddle to consciously set the tone for the day. Then doing the

brain huddle at night before going to bed is a good way to calm each of the characters to shift into slumber.

Then throughout the day, notice when emotions hit, notice the stereotypical patterns for the 4 characters. Tune in randomly to check on which character is most prominent at the moment. Keep a character log of your observations. Since it is becoming more common to encounter other people's character 2, it is good to plan a strategy on how to deal with them. Your character 4 can be calming, and any of your other characters except your character 2 can be of help. If the person doesn't dissipate the upset feeling within 90 seconds, you may have to take a break and take some space until later.

In the final paragraph of the chapter "Perfect, Whole, and Beautiful," Dr. Taylor reminds us, "You are the life-force power of the universe with manual dexterity and two cognitive minds. You have the power to choose, moment by moment, who and how you want to be in the world...I believe that the more time you spend choosing to run the deep inner peace circuitry of your right hemisphere, the more peace you will project into the world and the more peaceful our planet will be."

This book presents an amazing new look at our brains and how we operate, and it can be a great help if we study the characters and look within ourselves to manage our lives. Several times in the book the author mentions, "Peace is only a thought away." That reminds me that someone said, "Our thoughts are only suggestions, not empirical commands." We have a lot of potential to control our thoughts if we learn the skills.