

Facilitator Notes for Left Brain / Right Brain

Before the Meeting

At this session, members take a “Left Brain / Right Brain” test as they arrive – the test is included with the Facilitator Notes. Take the test yourself ahead of time and score it so that you can help others at the gathering. Make enough copies for each member and bring extra pencils and pens for this activity. Another option is to email the quiz to members before the session.

Members also do the Words of the Day as they arrive and mark responses as “Left” or “Right.”

Words of the Day

Write “Left” or “Right” at the top of the slip to indicate which sentence you are completing.

“Left” at the top. I use the “left brain” (rational, organized, story-telling) when I ...

“Right” at the top. I use the “right brain” (visual, creative, embodied) when I

Activity

As members arrive, they should take the paper-copy Left Brain / Right Brain test and score it.

Chalice Lighting

We light this chalice to shine on our time together. In its light we celebrate the relationships and understanding we are creating in this place and time. May our sharing be deep. (*Light chalice*)

The Basket

Sharing of Joys and Concerns

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support

Shared Readings

Our [meditation] practice is to correct this tendency to discriminate and think dualistically, so that reality will have a chance to reveal itself. *Thich Nhat Hanh*

The main theme to emerge ... is that there appear to be two modes of thinking, verbal and nonverbal, represented rather separately in left and right hemispheres respectively and that our education system, as well as science in general, tends to neglect the nonverbal form of intellect. What it comes down to is that modern society discriminates against the right hemisphere. *Roger Sperry*

You have two hemispheres in your brain – a left and a right side. The left side controls the right side of your body and the right controls the left half. It’s a fact. Therefore, left-handers are the only people in their right minds. *Bill Lee (left-handed pitcher & writer)*

If you use only one facet of your perception – either just your mind or your gut – then you will only ever see half of the picture. *Brendan Foley, The Yin Yang complex*

The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know ... We know truth, not only by the reason, but also by the heart. *Blaise Pascal*

[By] coming to know a place where the common elements of life are understood differently one has the advantage of an altered perspective. With that shift, it is possible to imagine afresh. *Barry Lopez*

The ... charts [left/right brain, enneagram, Jungian temperament types] ... all have one thing in common. They are all attempting to provide us with models of brain-mind functioning while giving an account of our irreducible differences in how we process experience and perceive the world. *Rich Lang*

Harry is young enough both to adapt to altered realities and to observe them with a minimum of preconceptions. *Paul Gray, article on Harry Potter in Time Magazine*

The kind of thinking that makes a distinction between thought and feeling is just one of those forms of demagoguery that causes lots of trouble for people. *Susan Sontag*

Knowledge, gleaned from within these processes and within an Aboriginal context, includes other ways of knowing, i.e. dreams, visions, insights, and teachings that validate one's sensory intake. *Dr. Leroy Littlebear*

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

Round 1: Share your reflections on left brain / right brain and the preparation materials.

Round 2: Share additional thoughts or reflect on what others have shared.

Closing Circle

Extinguishing the Chalice

We extinguish this flame and we remember the warmth of our community, the light of our wisdom, the generosity of our sharing. We keep these in our heart until we meet again. (*Extinguish chalice.*)

Song/Chime

Announcements

The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to let the facilitator know if I will be absent or need to quit
- to share with the facilitator the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others
- to do the reading and thinking about the topic ahead of time
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and tell only my own story to others
- to honor the safety of the group by listening to what others share with an open heart
- to refrain from cross-talk, judging, giving advice, or advocating a specific view
- to share as deeply as I can when it is my turn and to stay on the "I-message."

Left Brain / Right Brain Quiz (not scientific, just for fun)

In the list below, mark “Y” for each characteristic that applies to you. Leave blank ones that don’t.

	1. I constantly look at a clock or wear a watch
	2. I keep a journal or diary of my thoughts
	3. I believe there is a right way and a wrong way to do everything
	4. I find it hard to follow directions precisely
	5. The expression “Life is just a bowl of cherries” makes no sense to me
	6. I frequently change my plans and find that sticking to a schedule is boring
	7. I think it’s easier to draw a map than tell someone how to get somewhere
	8. To find a lost item, I try to picture it in my head where I last saw it
	9. I frequently let my emotions guide me
	10. I learn math with ease
	11. I’d read the directions before assembling something
	12. People tell me I am always late getting places
	13. People have told me that I’m psychic
	14. I need to set goals for myself to keep me on track
	15. When somebody asks me a question, I turn my head to the left
	16. If I have a tough decision to make, I write down the pros and the cons
	17. I’d probably make a good detective
	18. I learn music with ease
	19. To solve a problem, I think of similar problems I have solved in the past
	20. I use a lot of gestures
	21. If someone asks me a question, I turn my head to the right
	22. I believe there are two ways to look at almost everything
	23. I can tell if people are lying or guilty of something, just by looking at them
	24. I keep a “to do” list
	25. I am able to thoroughly explain my opinions in words
	26. In a debate, I am objective and look at the facts before forming an opinion
	27. I’ve considered becoming a poet, a politician, an architect, or a dancer
	28. I always lose track of time
	29. If I was trying to remember a name I forgot, I’d recite the alphabet until I remembered it
	30. I like to draw
	31. When I’m confused, I usually go with my gut instinct
	32. I have considered becoming a lawyer, journalist, or doctor

source: adapted from <http://www.angelfire.com/wi/2brains/test.html>

To Score. Look at each line that you marked as “Y.” Find its number in the Key below and circle it along with the L or R next to it. Then count your L and R choices to determine whether you are more L (left) or R (right) brained.

1. L 2. L 3. L 4. R 5. L 6. R 7. R 8. L 9. R 10. L
 11. L 12. R 13. R 14. L 15. R 16. L 17. L 18. R 19. R 20. R
 21. L 22. R 23. R 24. L 25. L 26. L 27. R 28. R 29. L 30. R
 31. R 32. L Total L: _____ Total R: _____

Preparation for Left Brain / Right Brain

Are you left-brained or right-brained? You may have been told by an internet quiz that you are more “left-brained” (logical, organized) or “right-brained” (creative, visual). Were you intrigued?

Scientists have long known that the brain’s physical division into left and right hemispheres reflects processing divisions – for example, language is processed in the left hemisphere, for most people. In the 1960s, scientist Roger Perry studied brain function in epileptic patients whose two hemispheres had been surgically “split” to reduce seizures. These and subsequent studies revealed surprising hemispheric differences, a physiological and a psychological dualism.

Our right brain processes vowels, follows contours, judges spatial relationships, is experiential, creative, and finds connections, while the left processes mathematics, time, consonants, creates stories and explanations, and moves strongly in direct lines. The left hemisphere is attracted to machines and abstract concepts, and prefers static relationships and a narrow focus. The right brain is alert for change and keeps a broad focus while remaining concrete and embodied.

Left-right brain dualism is common in pop psychology, perhaps because oppositions – typically “reason” and “passion” – are a theme in Western philosophy and religion. Plato described the soul as a charioteer trying to control opposing “horses” of reason and passion, an idea carried on in Christian theology and morality. Western notions of scientific progress also privileged logical thinking (“left”) over sensory processing or intuition. Research on right-brain strengths – creativity, intuition, spatial processing – seems to provide a welcome counterbalance to left-brain dominance.

Eastern philosophies acknowledge similar dualisms: yin (traditionally female, passive, dark) and yang (male, active, light). There is an important difference, however. In Taoism the yin/yang symbol, with black yin and white yang twirling about each other, each with a drop of the other in its center and together making a circle, is perhaps a better representation of how duality makes a whole.

Subsequent brain studies have shown that an oppositional understanding of left- and right-brain functions does not reflect our brains’ actual behavior. Both hemispheres are always active. Emotion and rational thought are more intertwined than opposed. Yet the oppositions have an intuitive appeal, and perhaps being aware of this dualism can help us think about ourselves and the world.

Consider a brief example – our UU principle respecting the interdependent web of all existence – an idea that works scientifically, metaphorically, and experientially. Our left brain can process data about climate change, computer models of sea level rise, and Gaia theory, and can correlate data sets for observations that tell us that spring is earlier each year. Our right brain can look at a photo of the Amazon jungle and see that the trees are literally breathing out the clouds that will become the rain nourishing that jungle; our right brain can remember sitting under a tree in a grove of trees with the sunlight and soft wind encircling. The left brain organizes the scientific details while the right brain perceives the embodied reality and the bigger picture.

We need both ways of knowing to address the reality of the interdependent web and our place in it.

There is no logical way to the discovery of these elemental laws. There is only the way of intuition, which is helped by a feeling for the order lying behind the appearance. *Einstein*

Close both eyes to see with the other eye. *Rumi*

Indigenous ways of knowing accept both the physical and the nonphysical realms as reality. In accepting the nonphysical, one must accept that reality cannot always be quantified.

Dr. Lynn Lavallée

You get your intuition back when you make space for it, when you stop the chattering of the rational mind. The rational mind doesn't nourish you. You assume that it gives you the truth, because the rational mind is the golden calf that this culture worships, but this is not true. Rationality squeezes out much that is rich and juicy and fascinating. *Anne Lamott*

We do not describe the world we see. We see the world we can describe. *Descartes*

The left-brain right-brain myth will probably never die because it has become a powerful metaphor for different ways of thinking – logical, focused and analytic versus broad-minded and creative.

Christian Jarrett

Duality is found in many belief systems, but Yin and Yang are parts of a Oneness that is also equated with the Tao. *Wikipedia*

Questions to Ponder

1. Try a left/right brain quiz. Search for “sommer-sommer brain test” or put this address into your browser: <http://braintest.sommer-sommer.com/en/>. You can also take a printed quiz at the Gathering, or get a copy from your facilitator beforehand.
2. If you tried a quiz, did you find yourself more on one side or the other? What activities might you engage in to explore some aspects of that “other” side?
3. Think of a time when you had an “aha” moment and everything just seemed to click into place, or you “knew” something without any rational data to support it. How did that moment feel?
4. Have you made decisions by gathering data, categorizing choices, and listing the pros and cons? How did that process feel to you?
5. Recall the “Amazon” example from the essay, and the ways in which both “left” and “right” approaches can be helpful in understanding. Describe another example in your experience where both “left” and “right” approaches might be useful to fully comprehend a situation.
6. Our education and our work life often emphasize “left-brain” activity – rational, organized, linear. Have you had any experiences with other cultures, groups, or activities that involve a more “right-brained” approach?

Words of the Day

Before coming to the gathering, think of a few words, phrases, experiences or metaphors that describe ways that you have experienced different ways of knowing. There will be two prompts:

“I use the ‘left brain’ (rational, organized, story-telling) when I”

“I use the ‘right brain’ (visual, creative, embodied) when I”

Gathering for Left Brain / Right Brain

Words of the Day

Write “Left” or “Right” at the top of the slip to indicate which sentence you are completing.

“Left” at the top. I use the “left brain” (rational, organized, story-telling) when I ...

“Right” at the top. I use the “right brain” (visual, creative, embodied) when I

Activity

Take the Left Brain / Right Brain test and score it.

Chalice Lighting

We light this chalice to shine on our time together. In its light we celebrate the relationships and understanding we are creating in this place and time. May our sharing be deep. (*Light chalice*)

The Basket

Sharing of Joys and Concerns

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support

Shared Readings

Our [meditation] practice is to correct this tendency to discriminate and think dualistically, so that reality will have a chance to reveal itself. *Thich Nhat Hanh*

The main theme to emerge ... is that there appear to be two modes of thinking, verbal and nonverbal, represented rather separately in left and right hemispheres respectively and that our education system, as well as science in general, tends to neglect the nonverbal form of intellect. What it comes down to is that modern society discriminates against the right hemisphere. *Roger Sperry*

You have two hemispheres in your brain – a left and a right side. The left side controls the right side of your body and the right controls the left half. It’s a fact. Therefore, left-handers are the only people in their right minds. *Bill Lee (left-handed pitcher & writer)*

If you use only one facet of your perception – either just your mind or your gut – then you will only ever see half of the picture. *Brendan Foley, The Yin Yang complex*

The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know ... We know truth, not only by the reason, but also by the heart. *Blaise Pascal*

[By] coming to know a place where the common elements of life are understood differently one has the advantage of an altered perspective. With that shift, it is possible to imagine afresh. *Barry Lopez*

The ... charts [left/right brain, enneagram, Jungian temperament types] ... all have one thing in common. They are all attempting to provide us with models of brain-mind functioning while giving an account of our irreducible differences in how we process experience and perceive the world.
Rich Lang

Harry is young enough both to adapt to altered realities and to observe them with a minimum of preconceptions. *Paul Gray, article on Harry Potter in Time Magazine*

The kind of thinking that makes a distinction between thought and feeling is just one of those forms of demagogy that causes lots of trouble for people. *Susan Sontag*

Knowledge, gleaned from within these processes and within an Aboriginal context, includes other ways of knowing, i.e. dreams, visions, insights, and teachings that validate one's sensory intake.
Dr. Leroy Littlebear

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

Round 1: Share your reflections on left brain / right brain and the preparation materials.

Round 2: Share additional thoughts or reflect on what others have shared.

Closing Circle

Extinguishing the Chalice

We extinguish this flame and we remember the warmth of our community, the light of our wisdom, the generosity of our sharing. We keep these in our heart until we meet again.
(Extinguish the chalice.)

Song/Chime

Announcements

The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to let the facilitator know if I will be absent or need to quit
- to share with the facilitator the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others
- to do the reading and thinking about the topic ahead of time
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and tell only my own story to others
- to honor the safety of the group by listening to what others share with an open heart
- to refrain from cross-talk, judging, giving advice, or advocating a specific view
- to share as deeply as I can when it is my turn and to stay on the "I-message."