We’re the first species to use our consciousness to evolve the anatomy of our brains. It’s our superpower, and it’s also evolving our world.
Evolution by natural selection proceeds slowly. For instance, it took about 1 billion years for the earliest ocean-dwelling life forms to evolve into land dwellers. It took another 250 million years before the first mammals appeared.

But there are exceptions—times when evolution takes swift and enormous leaps forward. Futurist Jean Houston calls these periods “Jump Time.”

A famous jump called the Cambrian explosion occurred 535 million years ago. In a very brief period of time—by evolutionary standards—every major body plan in the fossil record appeared. Before the Cambrian period, there were no starfish, lice, jellyfish, or clams on earth. Then, suddenly, there were.

Some jumps are biological, while others occur in consciousness. When the consciousness of groups of people changes, tectonic shifts in religion, society, art, and culture can occur. This usually begins with just a few individuals, but when critical mass is reached, an entire civilization can change its collective mind quickly.

In 1890, the number of countries in which women were able to vote was 0. Then in 1893 the first country, New Zealand, gave women the vote. Within 40 years, after thousands of years of political suppression, women could vote in virtually every democracy. We as a human species changed our collective minds. Consciousness shifted, and the social wisdom of 50 percent of the human race came online.

There are many other examples. Only in relatively recent history did the human race change its collective mind about child labor. In 1800, child labor was not controversial. In the coal mines of Britain, 8-year-olds pushed heavy tubs inside underground tunnels. Sweating and breathing black coal dust, they emerged from the pits black with grime. They died young.

Then we changed our minds, and in just a few decades, child labor was banned.

We changed our minds about slavery, and even though it had been around since the dawn of society, it virtually disappeared in a few decades.


Each of these is an example of mass human consciousness changing. Here I use the word consciousness in the sense of the collective picture of reality we hold in our heads as a species. In my book *Mind to Matter*, I summarize more than 400 studies showing that when consciousness (our internal reality) changes, the material world (external reality) changes along with it.

It’s also noteworthy that each of these historical changes involved people becoming more compassionate. We began to care about the well-being of people rather than ourselves—in these instances children, slaves, and disenfranchised women. People in power, with no incentive to relinquish it, were able to mentally place themselves in the shoes of those less privileged than themselves. They then voluntarily shared their power.

Empirical analysis shows that we are in the midst of an explosion of spiritual, physical, and material well-being, though you can’t detect this jump by reading the news. In fact, you’d be misled into missing it altogether. An archive of the frequency of words used by the media in 130 countries finds that between 1979 and today, words with negative connotations (like horrific and terrible) steadily increased. At the same time, positive words like improve and good declined, as did the happiness level of U.S. citizens.

The media depicts the opposite of what’s actually happening, which is an upsurge in human flourishing. It coincides with massive global changes in consciousness, like the abolition of slavery, regulation of child labor, and the rise of democracy and women’s rights. For the past 300 years or so, the human collective consciousness has been
changing its mind about all kinds of things. Many of these changes were driven not by self-interest, but by compassion for others.

We now have the scientific tools to measure what happens inside the brain when consciousness changes. We know that it produces brain change. Therefore, it is likely that the brains of human beings have been changing for the past 300 years as well. The above radical changes in material reality may be external evidence of radical changes in consciousness, our collective internal mental reality, as well as parallel changes in brain anatomy.

Has Compassion Been Driving Brain Evolution?

Was there an uptick in meditation 300 years ago? Not that we can measure. But there was a steady increase in social reforms that give evidence of compassion for others. Research on the different types of meditation shows that compassion moves the needle like nothing else.

It is therefore possible that compassion has been changing the brains of human beings little by little for centuries. We obviously can’t go back and conduct MRI scans on abolitionists or suffragettes, but the rapid shifts evident in social norms suggest that brain change on a large scale may have been occurring.

As societies have become much more compassionate in the past few decades, brain evolution might have picked up speed. Tantalizing evidence for rapid change found in metrics like Google searches for racist and homophobic terms—which have gone down 80 percent in less than 20 years—suggests this possibility.

If this hypothesis is true, social change will continue to accelerate, as compassionate brains create ever-more-compassionate brains. Human society could look completely different in a matter of years, not decades. We could be on the threshold of the most compassionate and enlightened civilization in history.

The idea that emotions like compassion might be driving evolutionary change is not new. Charles Darwin became interested in emotions later in his career. In his 1871 book *The Descent of Man*, he wrote: “[Sympathy] will have been increased through natural selection; for those communities, which included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members, would flourish best . . .”

A large-scale scientific review identified several ways in which compassion has played a role in human evolution. It suggests that our distant ancestors “likely preferred mating with more compassionate individuals—a process that over time would increase compassionate tendencies within the gene pool.”

The review also points out that compassion confers an evolutionary advantage to a society because it “enables cooperative relations with nonkin.” Compassionate societies flourish more. The process might have been nudging evolution along since prehistoric times.

We’re not simply in Jump Time. With our compassionate new brains, we may actually be creating Jump Time. In my next book and a series of scientific papers, I will be exploring the implications of this hypothesis for every facet.
of human endeavor, from education to medicine to law to science to business to technology to art.

The Breakneck Pace of Evolutionary Change

The time frames for evolution and social change provide a context for how extraordinary your brain-remodeling superpower actually is. The Cambrian Explosion took more than 12 million years from start to finish. That's quick in evolutionary terms.

The size of the human brain tripled in the 3 million years between the invention of the first Stone Age tools and today. That's lightning-fast in contrast.

It took 40 years to get women the vote. And here you are, you super-manifestor you, able to produce major change in your brain in just eight weeks.

This is an event unparalleled in evolutionary history. Never before has a species been able to change the anatomy of its own brain with its consciousness. This superpower is unique to Homo sapiens, and it is changing the world.

So how many human beings are engaged in this grand experiment? What percentage of the population are Bliss Brainers, and how are they contributing to Jump Time?

What Percentage Are Meditating Today?

Throughout history, around one percent of people have actively sought enlightenment. In Tibet, the most spiritual region on earth, the number is 12 percent. What's the comparable number for Western societies today? And for the world as a whole?

One answer comes from a large-scale survey undertaken by the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics. It found that the number of meditation practitioners tripled between 2012 and 2017, going from four percent to 14 percent of the population. That's a huge increase in a very short period. It continues to rise. Not only adults but also children are increasingly practicing. Among 4- to 17-year-olds, the percentage rose from fewer than one percent to more than five percent.

According to the European Values Study, almost half the population prays or meditates at least once a week. Meditation has long been a cornerstone of religious practice in China, India, and other Eastern countries, which together make up half the world's population.

These trends are likely to accelerate in the decades ahead. People in Bliss Brain feel good, their brains awash in pleasurable neurochemicals. These drugs motivate them to get more. This makes them feel even better, so they expand their practice. Others notice the happiness of Bliss Brainers and try meditation too. It spreads throughout society in a self-reinforcing virtuous cycle.

Yesterday, Bliss Brain was the exclusive domain of the One Percent. Today, it's spread to the Fourteen Percent. Tomorrow, the majority. That's how we reach the tipping point of history. 😊