



Intuition: Your Still, Small Voice

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Intuition is commonly understood as being an uncanny knowledge that is not easily explained, but that is immediately recognized as true by the person(s) experiencing it. Some believe in intuition, while others are skeptical. Consider these situations which may be familiar to you: you dream about a friend you have not seen in years and the next day that person contacts you; you can reliably tell who is calling you on the telephone before you pick up the phone or look at the caller ID; you have a “funny feeling” to avoid a travel route you frequent, later discovering that a major collision occurred along the route you avoided.

Is intuition at work in these scenarios, operating outside five-sensory awareness, or are these the result of pure chance? This article briefly reviews definitions of intuition as a personal guidance system, explores the purposes it serves, how it operates and offers examples of when intuition trumps logic. Recent research and theories about intuition are briefly reviewed. The applications of intuition in the context of Energy Medicine practice are considered, along with general ideas to ponder.

Intuition Defined

Intuition is the ability to understand or know something immediately, without conscious reasoning (*Compact Oxford English Dictionary of Current English*,

2005). Researchers and theoreticians have not arrived at a uniform definition of intuition, but most concur it involves rapid communication between the right brain and the body, and fosters a compelling sense of truth. Terry Marks-Tarlow, in her review of the research on clinical intuition in psychotherapy, has defined intuition as a natural feedback system, occurring in “the space between conscious and unconscious processes that is often most ripe for change” (pg. 3). Intuition bridges the narrowly focused critical thinking skills of the conscious mind with the quick, flexible and larger processing abilities of the unconscious mind. Often this knowledge is affirmed in the body through sensory signals which can function as a barometer for the truth or falsity of a situation (See Research on Intuition section). This is expressed in the English language idiom describing intuition as having a “gut feeling” that something is true, despite having an apparently rational explanation to the contrary. Likewise, Germans use the word *fingerspitzengefühl*, as knowledge felt at the tip of the finger. If we recognize this common human experience as having some degree of validity, it follows that there must be reasons for its existence.

Purpose of Intuition

The purpose of intuition according to Terry Marks-Tarlow, Allan Schore, and others (See Marks-Tarlow for a review of the literature) is hypothesized to foster



the protection and growth of the individual. Intuition functions as an internal GPS, guiding the individual through life's sudden and unexpected challenges. Intuition can inform decision making when facing uncertainty. Intuitive messages related to self-protection may manifest as a sick feeling in the stomach or "gooseflesh." These messages indicate that something is awry, hence the association of intuition coupled with a sense of foreboding. Popular culture describes intuitive information as a "Spidey sense," a reference to the comic book superhero Spiderman. It is defined in the Urban Dictionary as "a vague but strong sense of something being wrong, dangerous, suspicious, a

logic can exact a cost. A left brain, "rational" style is not always appropriate nor always capable of accurate assessment. At times, unnecessary effort may be spent, and valuable information lost, when logic is favored over intuition. For instance, research by Emma Buchtel and Ara Norenzayan (2008) has shown that when complex situations arise, such as choosing amongst alternatives that have multiple attributes, intuitive thinking has a distinct advantage over conscious, analytic reasoning. Furthermore, neuroimaging research by Bhavin Sheth, Simone Sandkuhler and Joydeep Bhattacharya (2008) has shown that when mentally fixated on solving word puzzles, answers can

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security situation." Since these messages are linked to survival, they are oftentimes compelling, sudden and urgent. They may startle or frighten people, and leave an impression that intuitive information is largely negative, scary or dangerous. Sometimes people avoid intuition out of fear that they may discover something they would rather not know.

Messages of intuition can also foster growth. These types of messages appear as subtle, nuanced and gentle compared to messages related to self-protection, and so require safe environments in order to be perceived. Messages of growth can signal feelings of serenity, peacefulness and bliss. One example is a sense that a person or situation is in deep harmony with you, even upon a first encounter. It may be that "love at first sight" represents an aspect of intuition in action.

A Case for Intuition

The language of intuition speaks in forms of communication including felt sense, associations, memory, dreams and metaphor that are neither obvious nor easily verified. Because of this, the intuitive approach is often second-guessed or ignored in the West, which tends to value material, quantifiable sources of information. However, a predominant reliance on

be blocked by not utilizing intuitive insights. In other cultures much older than those in the West, the still, small voice of intuition is recognized as a valuable tool— for example, when engaging in vision quests, consulting oracles and exploring dream work. Gradually, though, the Western world is paying attention to the power of intuition to uncover valuable truths that logic often overlooks.

Research on Intuition

Although cultures around the world use and value intuition, it is only recently that empirical evidence has provided support for intuition.

Mossbridge, Tressoldi & Utts (2012) analyzed data on the body's ability to detect stimuli before the stimuli were delivered (26 studies between 1978 and 2010, representing seven labs). These "predictive anticipatory activities," taking the form of unconscious physiological reactions, occurred one to ten seconds before the stimuli were presented to the subjects. In order to be included in the meta-analytic review, studies were required to measure physiology at pretest, introduce two or more stimuli, and re-measure the same physiology at posttest. Furthermore, physiological ratings to stimuli had to be in the same direction at both



pre-exposure and post-exposure. Physiological measurements included heart rate, blood volume, pupil dilation, EEG, blood oxygenation and EMG. Most studies contained two types of independent variables: randomly occurring arousing vs. neutral stimuli (i.e. violent vs. emotionally neutral images); and guessing tasks with feedback (correct or incorrect guess: for example, guessing which four cards will appear on a computer screen before the cards are shown). The meta-analysis found that “unexplained anticipatory effects” occurred in the body prior to stimulus presentation and these reactions were consistent with the body’s reaction after stimulus presentation. Statistical results indicated a small effect size with highly significant probabilities, unrelated to gender or practice effects.

More recently, the Institute of HeartMath published a study using a computer gambling game of roulette (McCraty & Atkinson, 2014). Subjects were signaled whether they won or lost a game. It was found that a heart rhythm measure was sensitive to a win or loss of the game, 12-14 seconds before the result was known to the subject. Placing bets on the outcome further affected the heart’s ability to sense wins and losses. Heart rate deceleration predicted future losing trials when placing bets approximately 18 seconds before knowing the outcome of the trial.

Theories of Intuition

Theories abound explaining the mechanisms behind intuitive processing (see Marks-Tarlow (2012) *Clinical Intuition in Psychotherapy* for a review). Intuition is thought to be effortless, quick and automatic, seemingly coming “out of thin air,” happens in the context of ongoing experience and is associated with memories and emotions. In the Embodied Experience Theory, the body is seen as a resonant “tuning fork,” aligning with the emotional and interpersonal world. Subjective experiences of self and environment are mediated through body awareness, primary senses, perceptions and feelings. What is highly relevant here is that embodied learning (such as motor sequences like walking) is based in procedural memory, which is more reliable and less prone to decay than declara-

tive memory (conscious memory of facts and events). In addition, emotional memory is based in relational sequences, such as connecting to others on the first day of life.

The Implicit Knowledge Theory centers on innate knowing. It suggests intuitive development begins in the third trimester of prenatal growth. Implicit learning is seen as “non-conscious,” residing in the subcortical regions of the brain, associative in nature and as being stored alongside nonverbal representations such as images, feelings and physical sensations.

Intuition’s Voice

The voice of the spirit only speaks once. The voice of the mind never shuts up. — Beatrex Quntanna

Scientific and experiential knowledge have identified the conditions under which the accuracy of intuition can be enhanced. Since the language of intuition is quiet, subtle and prone to appear suddenly and briefly, certain attitudes are more likely to bring forth this personal guidance system. A partial list includes: calmness, openness to new experiences, divergent awareness (“out of the box” thinking), trust, non-judgmental attitude, patience, being observant, releasing attachment to outcome, compassion, playfulness, laughter and gratitude. By contrast, certain attitudes can derail or block intuition. These include the tendencies of overthinking and second guessing, overreliance on certainty, exclusive reliance on intuition, being “too close” to the problem, empathy overload, “people-pleasing,” fears of having to change and not liking what intuition reveals. It seems, as well, that timing is a key factor. Even if intuitive information is accurate, if one acts too soon, too late or does not act at all, intuitive information can appear to be false, due to having missed a window of opportunity. With focused practice, messages of intuitive guidance can increase in frequency and intensity.

When Intuition Trumps Logic

Although many situations call for a blending of logical and intuitive reasoning, there are times when the wisdom of intuition outperforms that of logic. For



instance, opening the mind to associations, spontaneous images or hunches can glean data that may not normally arise when applying a logical, systematic and sequential train of thought. History is filled with tales of the so called 'aha' experience, credited as being the brainchild of inventions and innovations. Kirsten Volz and Thea Zander (pg. 26) investigated the role of memory in intuition. They described a real life example of intuition, interviewing Dan Horan, a police officer at Los Angeles Airport who scanned the public trying to identify suspected drug couriers. After officer Horan correctly identified a woman with several thousand dollars of cash in her suitcase, he was asked

In general practice, intuitive information may arise before meeting a new client, during sessions or in between sessions. For instance, a practitioner may dream about an atypical or provocative issue that is not related to the practitioner's life circumstances. Later that day, the same issue may be connected to a presenting problem for a new client. A practitioner may have an "irrelevant" image or association suddenly emerge during a session, yet upon exploration it reveals unexpected and meaningful connections to the process. Likewise, a practitioner may sense "out of the blue" concern for a client's wellbeing in between sessions. Subsequently, it may be discovered that the

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how he arrived at his selection. He stated, "I don't know. I just saw that there was something wrong with this woman." Upon further inquiry, he surmised, "I am looking for someone who is looking for me."

Intuition has been shown to outperform logic in situations involving: uncertainty, ambiguity and/or complexity, especially when people are in the throes of strong emotions; high stakes consequences which require rapid decision-making; the need for novelty, spontaneity or creativity; and accessing the realm of the unconscious with nonverbal (body language) and preverbal (communication prior to language acquisition) processing. A key awareness for energy practitioners is that many, if not all, of these conditions are present when working with clients in a healing modality. This suggests that it is highly beneficial for practitioners and others who work with similar dynamics to develop their intuition as a tool for enhanced outcomes.

How Intuition Can Enhance Energy Medicine Practice

Intuition can inform Energy Medicine and related practices when it is used with discernment and when it is combined with other sources of wisdom, enhancing the practitioner's attunement with the client.

client's close relative passed away simultaneous to the practitioner's felt unrest.

In the case of Energy Medicine practice, unique applications are also possible. Muscle testing, or applied kinesiology, requires a nuanced communication between practitioner and client. Knowing how to approach the client's body, creating an optimal degree of physical contact and sensing when the body is ready to rest are judgment calls that can be supported with intuitive data. Intuition can direct the practitioner in choosing specific overall goals and locations on the body for treatment. It can inform the timing of when to focus on particular aspects of a problem and signal when to stop or dig deeper into an area of concern. When working with the subtle body anatomy including meridians, chakras and the biofield, imagery, body sensations and even olfactory experiences not directly connected to the five-sensory world can emerge. This information can help direct the treatment process and increase its effectiveness.

Ideas to Consider

Although receiving intuitive information may seem to answer nagging questions, more often, such data raises additional questions. For instance, how would



one proceed if intuitive data runs counter to logical reasoning, practice guidelines or ethical mandates? How does one determine if, when and under which circumstances to share intuitive information with clients? How do belief structures, cultural traditions and prior experience with intuition affect the perception of this data? Is intuition seen as divinely inspired, an indication of being “crazy” or promoting fear?

The power differential between practitioner and client can be exploited if the client idealizes the practitioner’s access to intuition and allows it undue influence over his or her life. This dynamic is especially important when working with special populations like those facing illness or death, minors, compromised individuals or those in desperate need. When striving to do no harm, practitioners must evaluate if intuitive data promotes health, empowers the client and enhances life. Used appropriately, intuition’s gifts can alter one’s path in unexpected and transformative ways. €



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