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IS IT MY INTUITION OR *Anxiety?*

*How to tell the difference between
the voice of your soul and fear.*





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The question I get more than any other

In all of my teaching on intuition development, this is the one. My clients bring it into sessions. I get asked about it in every podcast interview. I cannot remember speaking to a group where someone did not raise some version of the same question. And it is probably a question you have had too.

How do I tell the difference between my intuition and fear?

We have all had the moment. You are nervous about getting on a plane, or going to a meeting, or going on a date, and you are stirred up about it, and suddenly you are wondering: is this a sign? Is my soul, or my spirit guides, or source, or God, telling me this is not safe? Telling me not to do this? Help.

Chances are, in that circumstance, it is not.

But before I explain why, let me tell you a story.



The parking lot

I was visiting my kids in Connecticut, staying in an Airbnb. My son was in from New York and had a doctor's appointment early on a Sunday morning. I wanted to rest, and I did not really want to drive him. He said, don't worry, Mom, I will take an Uber. And my daughter, who lives nearby and has a car, generously offered to pick him up afterward and drive him back so the three of us could hang out for the rest of the day.

Sweet, right? But when she made that offer, I got a strange niggling worry. An irrational little fear. Here are my two favorite people in the world getting in a car together. What if something happened to them on the ride home? How would I deal with that?

It was probably mama guilt, because I did not feel like driving my son. Whatever it was, it popped into my brain and I discarded it. Just one of those random intrusive fear thoughts. All is well.

Then here is what happened. The next morning my son checked the wait time on Uber. Ten minutes, which was fine. So he made breakfast, took his shower, did his thing. But when he actually called for the car, the wait had gone from ten minutes to twenty-five, and that threw his timing off enough that he was not going to make his appointment. So he knocked on my door and pulled me out of bed. Mom, can you drive me?



After much grumbling and grouchiness, I got in the car in my pajamas and drove him.

And then I was sitting in the parking lot, and those fear-based thoughts came back. I remembered the thought from the night before. My daughter was still planning to come get him. What I wanted was to go home, shower, have my green tea and my breakfast, because I had just driven twenty-five minutes straight out of bed and did not want to sit in a parking lot for an hour.

But then I started spinning. Maybe this happened for me, so that I could save my son and save my daughter by keeping them from riding together.

And I went into a full-on panic.

Now, I know something about the way intuition works, and I know something about the way fear works. Those two things feel very different in the body. A fear-based thought is revved up. I was freaking out. Intuition is calm, clear, emotionally neutral. It sounds like maybe you just want to stay. It does not sound like oh no, oh no, no, no, oh my god, oh my god.

So the first thing I knew was that what I was feeling right then was definitely not my intuition.



And yet I am human, and I love my children, and I was still spinning.

So the second thing I did was remember what I actually believe. I love these two and I want them on the planet, because I enjoy them enormously. And I also understand that the soul is eternal, and that you cannot stand between someone and their next step. Sometimes we do get the intuitive ping that saves a life. I have had clients who have had exactly that experience. But everyone has their own point of attraction, their own energy. If they need support and it is not you, they will attract someone else. It is not all on you, even if you are Mom.

And if it were their time, it would be devastating. Not something I am inviting. But something I would learn to work through. I would love my children in spirit, and I would survive, and I would thrive.

Knowing that let me release them, without feeling like I was fully responsible for their well-being, or like I needed something from them in order to be all right. The true heart of unconditional love is allowing things to be as they are.

I had two choices. Give in to the fear and stay, just in case. Or make the love-based choice.



Staying would have been easy. I had an ebook on my phone. No tea, but I could manage. I could sit in that parking lot just in case the fear turned out to be right.

Instead I made myself a deal. I would drive home, and once I had calmed down, if a ping came telling me to turn around, I would turn around. No ping came.

The true heart of
unconditional love is
*allowing things to be as
they are.*





What fear is actually for

I made my tea. Then I decided to take my paddleboard out. As I was pushing off, I looked over at the canal, which runs parallel to the road my kids had to take back to the house, and I watched their car go by. My human part felt a wave of relief. My soul self gave me a loving I told you so.

And then I had a magical paddle. The ospreys were out. It was beautiful. And my kids got a stretch of time alone together, which they rarely get and deeply cherish.

Everything worked out. But that is not really the point of the story. The point is what happened while I was still spinning.

It was hard to discern in that moment. Not because I do not know what my intuition feels like. I do this for a living. It was hard because I was asking a frightened mind to trust, and trust is not what that system has been programmed to do.

But I knew enough to know that what I was feeling was not my intuition. And that turned out to be enough. I did not need certainty about the outcome. I only needed to be clear about which voice was talking, and then choose not to follow fear.



Fear is a human experience

The voice of your soul comes from a place where there is no fear at all. Fear is human. It comes from the belief that we have to avoid, or control, or resist the things we do not agree with and do not think are okay. It has been baked into our culture and our way of being for millennia, and it is reaching the end of its usefulness, particularly in the way the mind spins with it.

Fear serves a basic purpose. If you smell smoke in a building, get out. Figure it out later. If a car pulls out in front of you, you slam on the brakes and your whole body reacts. Those systems are doing their job.

Under real threat, the amygdala takes the wheel, and activity in the prefrontal cortex, the deliberating part of you that weighs and plans and second-guesses, is suppressed. You stop thinking and you start knowing. It is why people so often say that in the worst moment they simply acted, and only afterward wondered how they knew what to do. Your intuition is not offline in an emergency. It's often crystal clear.

What happens when it is not an emergency

What most of us call fear is something else entirely. It is overthinking. It is trying to work out how to prevent every bad thing that could ever happen from happening.



That same alarm system fires when there is no fire. The threat is a thought about something that has not happened, so there is nothing to run from and nothing to do. The energy has nowhere to go. And the mind, which is very good at its job, picks up the work instead.

This is where overthinking comes in, and it is convincing. Spinning feels like problem-solving. It has the texture of doing something. You are generating scenarios, weighing options, and none of it moves you an inch, because there is nothing in front of you to act on. I was not solving anything in that parking lot. I was going over and over something that had not happened.

Spinning also feeds itself. Every scenario you imagine lands in the body as though it had already happened, and the body responds, and that response becomes evidence that the danger must be real, which produces more scenarios. Around and around it goes.

And fear generalizes, which the mind experiences as learning. One near miss becomes a rule you carry for years. Sometimes an adjustment like that is genuinely wise. But most of the time you are not gathering wisdom. You are building a smaller life.

A real emergency ends. Overthinking does not. If there is nothing in front of you to act on and the thought is still going, you are not receiving information. You are in a loop.



What fear makes of it

Your fearful mind was designed to generalize. That is its whole method. Something happens once, and fear turns it into a rule. From now on you watch for the same thing to happen again, and you start arranging your life around making sure it doesn't.

Here is what that looked like for me. I was driving too fast on the highway one afternoon and I got a ping. *Maybe you want to switch lanes.*

That was all of it. Four words and no explanation. I did not act on it, and a moment later a truck swung out in front of me. There was no time to brake. I switched lanes just in time and was totally fine. But I would have saved myself a shock had I followed my intuition.

And here is what my mind did with that afterward. For a long time, every single time I drove that road, I heard, You have to avoid that lane. You have to avoid that lane. You know what could happen. That was not an intuitive ping anymore. That was a rule, a generalization my mind had made out of one experience.

Notice the difference between the two voices. The ping came once, said what I needed to know, and was done. The rule came every time, said more than it actually knew, and delivered a jolt of dread I did not need in order to change lanes. One was information. The other was a story, replayed again and again.



The promise fear makes

Fear tells you that if you think hard enough about everything that could go wrong, you can keep it from happening. That is the deal it offers, and it is why we put up with how exhausting it is. We believe we are buying safety.

But look at what it actually delivers. All the times someone worried about the plane going down did not stop the one time it did. Hearing you have to avoid that lane on every drive did not keep me any safer than the one calm ping had. What the vigilance produced was dread. Not protection.

And it's tempting to apply that same lens to our intuition. To ask it fear's question. What could go wrong, and how do I keep it from happening?

**But your intuition is offering something completely different.
And it is way more powerful.**

The voice of your soul
comes from a place where
there is no fear at all.





What your intuition is designed to do

Your intuition's job is not to protect you from bad things happening.

I want to say that again, because it's such a common confusion. Your intuition's job is not to protect you from bad things happening.

Your intuition is not a shield. It's a navigation system.

Intuition is your spiritual GPS. It is always telling you what is most aligned, what is true, what is the next best step for you, given whatever you are asking, whatever you are intending, whatever you are desiring, in the now.

When you ask the GPS in your car for directions, it gives you a route relative to two things, where you are now and where you want to go. It does not hand you a map of every road you might ever drive on. It gives you the next best step, and the next, and the next, and it updates as you move, because what was true at mile zero is not true at mile twelve.

But unlike the GPS in your car, your intuition is not guiding you through a fixed network of roads. Your life is unfolding as you live it. What you choose, what you believe, what you focus on, and how you respond all help shape what becomes possible next. You are not simply following a map; you are co-creating it as you go.



That is why your intuition usually gives you the next step rather than the entire itinerary. Each step changes where you are, and from that new place, different choices and possibilities may appear.

It is also why intuitive guidance can change. Tomorrow, your intuition may tell you something different about what seems to be the very same situation—not because the earlier guidance was wrong, but because something has shifted. You have changed, the circumstances have changed, or new possibilities have opened. Intuition doesn't follow fixed rules or rely only on what was true in the past. It responds to what is true and aligned for you now.

Don't expect intuition to work like fear

Trying to plan your way around every hard thing is itself an act of fear. And what we focus on is what we draw toward us. So all that careful listing of everything you want to avoid does not take you to the easy road. It takes you away from it.

Fear does not just fail to protect you. It works against you.



Will your intuition sometimes move you away from something that is not resonant for you? Yes, and I am grateful every time it does. But that is not its purpose. That is something that happens along the way while it is doing the actual work, which is guiding you toward the life your soul came here to have.

And when life gets lifey, when something happens that would reasonably leave you afraid going forward, your intuition can help you out of that conundrum. It can help you see the meaning in it. It can help you work your way through, and show you what the path forward looks like, not from the lens of fear but from the energy of love.

Fear is about resisting and controlling what is happening.
Love is about flowing with what is.

Fear wants to control the outcome. Your higher guidance wants you to flow with what is here, and then become a conscious co-creator of your life.

Understanding more. Growing more. Expanding more. Enjoying more. Loving more. And releasing expectations about how the whole thing needs to play out.



Your intuition is not a shield.
It's a navigation system.



How to tell the difference

Now that you know what intuition is for, what fear is for, and how differently they work, here are five clues that can help you tell them apart in the moment. These come from my personal practice, and from years of sitting with people asking this exact question. The more familiar they become, the faster you will recognize which voice is talking.

1. Intuition is emotionally neutral.

Emotions are your body's reaction to your thoughts. They are part of the human experience. Your intuition comes from the spiritual realm, where there is no body and there are no thoughts, so there is no emotional charge there at all.

Let's go back to the highway example for a moment. I got a gentle nudge, maybe you want to switch lanes. It was not oh my god, get over. There was no dread in it and no urgency, and it did not care whether I obeyed. It was a piece of information, delivered calmly, about what was happening in that moment.

Occasionally the nudge arrives neutral and your mind grabs it a moment later and starts to spin, so the two feel like one thing. You do not need to sort that out in the moment. If there's something you need to hear, it will ping you again when your mind quiets down.



2. Intuition speaks through the body.

Fear and intuition feel completely different in your body. Fear is loud. Revved up, heart racing, muscles tight, dripping with sweat. It is fight, flight, or freeze time.

Intuition is calm, quiet, subtle. When something isn't resonant, it isn't a five-alarm fire. It's more like ah, that doesn't feel so good right now. A nudge.

Once you know that difference, you can start to notice your own intuitive markers. We all have them, and they're different for everyone. Mine is the feeling that I'm about to start crying, and it's not sadness. It's more like an exaggerated welling in the eyes, and it arrives when something is deeply resonant. Other people get the chills. Some feel a tingle in the middle of the forehead.

The reason markers are worth learning is that you cannot manufacture one. You can talk yourself into almost any belief, and your mind will supply the reasons on request. But you cannot force a tingle between your eyebrows.



Most children have these bodily signals, but most of us were conditioned early to discount them. You had a gut feeling that you shouldn't do something, and you were told to do it anyway. The message was clear: your deep knowing could not be trusted. So you learned to unplug from your intuition.

The way back is to start paying attention again. The more you notice what is happening in your body, the easier these signals are to recognize.

3. Intuition doesn't nag.

You might ask yourself, if every time I get on a plane I worry about it crashing, is that my intuition? Probably not. If it is something you worry about all the time, across different contexts, it is far more likely to be a conditioned fear response than guidance.

We usually learn these thoughts from past experience, from a loved one who worried about the same thing, from a movie we saw, or from something scary we read in the news. Intrusive thoughts and rumination typically have nothing to do with your intuition.

Fearful thoughts are insistent. They will do whatever it takes to get your attention and keep you hooked, because the agenda is to keep you engaged with them, and to keep you in fear.



Your intuition is patient. It gives you the nudge and then waits. It trusts you. It knows all is well. It wants you to feel good and loved and never afraid.

4. Intuition is always kind.

The voice of your intuition is always loving. It comes from your higher self, source, your guides, the part of you that is unconditionally loving. You are the energy and frequency of love having a human experience. You are love incarnate.

So if the voice in your head is beating you up, it is not your higher guidance. If it is telling you how badly you messed up, or that you should have known better, or that you are never going to figure this out, that is a clear sign it is coming from your mind and not from your inner wisdom.

If it's unkind, it's your mind.

That doesn't mean your guidance will always tell you what you want to hear. It won't. But it will always deliver it kindly, and it will always hold the truth that everything is working out for you, even when your human self has both hands over its eyes.



And your intuition speaks from love—not only for you, but for everyone and everything. It is not going to tell you that the man you are thinking of dating is a jerk who will let you down. It is more likely to give you an icky feeling, or a quiet nudge away from him. It is not going to tell you that the plane is going to burst into flames. It will say, maybe you want to wait and take the next flight.

Your intuition is not judging the path. It is suggesting that you may be more satisfied if you move in a different direction.

5. Intuition tells you what you need to know right now.

Your intuition speaks to this moment. It isn't legislating your life, and it isn't explaining itself.

It doesn't tell you what's right or wrong, good or bad, or what you should and shouldn't be doing. What fear wants to do is generalize every experience and tell us what we should be afraid of and what we should avoid. Your intuition is more nuanced than that. It will just ping you in the now, when you could avoid something that's potentially uncomfortable.



And it rarely gives you all the information at once. Not the what, the where, the why, the how. It gives you breadcrumbs. Nudges. Little pieces. On the highway, my intuition said maybe you want to switch lanes. That was all I needed to know. If it had said switch lanes because a truck is about to swing out in front of you, that would have been TMI.

The deeper reason is that a lot of the time it cannot give you the whole story, because the story is still being written. What you receive from your intuition is true for exactly how things are right now: you, your intention, the people around you, and the terrain as it exists today. Change any one of those and the next best step changes too. That is not a flaw in the system. That is the system working perfectly.

So we have to learn to honor the nudges, trust them, and know that they're enough. Don't use your mind to fill in the gaps. Wait for it to unfold. Get curious.

Curiosity is a beautiful energy. Trying to figure it out, not so much.

If it's unkind, it's your mind.





Intuition or Fear? A Quick Reference

YOUR INTUITION	FEAR
Calm, clear, emotionally neutral	Strong emotional charge
A quiet signal in the body	A body in full alarm
Patient	Relentless
Always loving and kind	Judgmental
Breadcrumbs, about right now	The whole story, forever

When fear is too loud

One last thing, and it is an important one. The moment you most want an answer is usually the moment you are most stirred up. And from that place, the answer is not going to reach you.

Once fear takes hold, the shades on your intuition have gone down. Fear is simply too loud, and we are all too practiced at tuning into it. While that channel is blaring, you will not hear anything else for a while, and that is okay.



The move is to soothe yourself. Be present with the fear as a neutral and loving observer. I can see you are uncomfortable. I can see you are stirred up. This is a scary thought. Let yourself have the human experience. Give yourself a hug.

If the building is on fire, get out of the building. Otherwise, you can wait until you calm down. The answer will become clear, and the ping will come again. Maybe in a moment, maybe in a couple of days. But it will come. It always does.



Reflections & Exercises

Your turn. This is where you get to put it all into practice and develop your felt sense of the difference between intuition and fear.

Print these pages, or keep them in a notebook. They are meant to be used again and again, whenever you need them.



Getting Settled

Fear is loud, and when it has your attention, there isn't room to hear anything else. So before you go any further, let's get settled.

Put both feet on the floor. Put one hand on your heart and the other on your belly.

Take a few slow breaths, and let the exhale be a little longer than the inhale.

Now feel your body from the inside out. Notice what it feels like to be embodied. The tickle of the air as it enters and exits your nostrils. The gentle rise and fall of your belly and chest. Feel the weight of your feet on the floor, and let each breath support you in becoming more grounded and centered.

Stay here a minute or two. There is nothing to change and nothing to fix. Allow yourself to be present with what is.

When you feel settled, turn the page.



Which voice is talking?

Start with the thought that brought you here. Take a few moments to write it down in your own words.

Now check it against the five clues.

1. Intuition is emotionally neutral. Is this thought calm, quiet, emotionally neutral, or loud and laden with emotion?

2. Intuition speaks through the body. How does this feel in my body? Revved up and tight, or settled and relaxed?



3. Intuition doesn't nag. Is this repetitive and insistent, or did it come once and then wait?

4. Intuition is always kind. Is the tone of the message judgmental or loving?

5. Intuition tells you what you need to know right now. Is this giving me information about the present moment, or telling me a story about the past and future?

If it still isn't clear, you don't have to decide today. It will ping you again when your mind quiets down.



Fear or love

There is no wrong answer on this page. Sometimes you will choose the reassuring thing, and that is fine. What matters is that you know which one you are choosing, and that you choose it on purpose.

What would fear do?

What would love do?

What am I choosing, and why?



The nudge log

Write down the small intuitive nudges as they come. Notice how they arrived. What did you do? What happened afterwards? You are not grading yourself. You are collecting evidence, and after a few weeks of evidence, you stop having to ask the question so often.

Date	What came, and how	What I did	What happened



Closing

Your intuition is always with you. The more you relax out of fear and into trust in yourself and in the divine, the more clearly you can hear it and the more easily you can follow it. Knowing the difference does not mean you will never feel afraid. It means fear no longer has to lead. Life has been supporting you all along.

About Victoria

Victoria Shaw, PhD, LPC, is an intuitive counselor and spiritual guide who brings something rare to her work: Ivy League training in psychology alongside a deep, lifelong connection to intuitive wisdom. She holds a PhD in cognitive psychology from **Princeton University**, completed her postdoctoral training in developmental and educational psychology at **Columbia University Teachers College**, and earned her master's in counseling from **Fairfield University**.

Victoria has helped thousands of people awaken their natural intuitive abilities, connect with their spirit guides, and learn to trust the deep inner knowing that is available to all of us. She has a particular gift for working with those who are committed to using their life experiences, including their struggles, as fuel for their own spiritual awakening.

Victoria is the host of the **Intuitive Connection** podcast, the star of **Living in Alignment** on Soul Search TV, and the author of **Your Intuitive Connection: Everything You Need to Know to Hear, Trust, and Follow Your Inner Guidance**. She is the founder of **Cactus Blossom Retreat in Hidden Meadows, California**, a property she found by following her intuition, where she hosts retreats and private intensives.



Connect with Victoria

Private sessions. By Zoom, by phone, and in person in San Diego. A session is for exactly the kind of thing this guide is about: getting clear on what your guidance is actually saying, and learning to trust what you hear.

Retreats and private intensives. At Cactus Blossom Retreat in Hidden Meadows, California.

The Intuitive Connection podcast. Available wherever you listen.

Living in Alignment on Soul Search TV.

For more, go to

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