

## First Cues: Making Friends with Your Reptile Brain

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Ask people how they recognize intuitive guidance and some will say they depend on their sense of good or bad "vibes," while others swear by their "little voice." Many suddenly have a "flash," "get the picture," or "see the light." Still others, though more rare, rely on their sense of taste, like the chairman of the board of Sony Corporation, who solves problems by pretending the potential solutions are pieces of food, then tries to "eat" them. Though receiving insights via the five senses is a large part of intuitive perception, you can pick up cues from your internal and external worlds much earlier in the game. When intuition first speaks to us, it's in a language that is preverbal, nonlinear, and often so deeply sensual that we can't even hear the little voice or see visual images. Just as animals sense an imminent earthquake, your body knows what's happening in the world long before your mind does and it transmits instinctual signals directly to your reptile brain. Learning to recognize these primitive body messages can give you the edge in knowing who to trust, what's true for you, or when it's time to take action.

Intuition, contrary to popular belief, doesn't usually descend from above. I experience it almost always occurring in the body first, then percolating up into consciousness. I jokingly tell the people in my classes that "your mind is the last one to know"! So if you're boxed in by rational thinking, as I was a couple years ago when I was writing my book *The Intuitive Way*, you may need to look to your deeper animal nature to jumpstart your creative, intuitive process. Back then, I needed a snappy anecdote to open a new chapter, something that would demonstrate the body's important link to intuitive ability. My impatient mind wanted the perfect story to instantly appear out of the recesses of my brain and march in an orderly progression onto the page. After a prolonged period of staring blankly at my computer monitor, I realized I was actually daydreaming about a special hiking trail near my home. Managing to overcome my "shoulds," I took a break to play hookey for a few hours.

It wasn't until I was three quarters of the way through what had become a truly magical nature walk that I realized I was once again totally alive and absolutely involved with my world. By noticing my body's immediate responses to the environment—sometimes attraction, sometimes repulsion—and by allowing myself to become engrossed with the elements of nature I encountered—the delicately-marked baby snake on my path, the regal, high-stepping waterbirds, the sound of the dry grasses in the wind—my body was giving me a message. It is only through deep connectedness and a personal, physical resonance with life that we know what is real and true for us, that we derive our sense of direction. Lose your body's live connection to the world and intuition and creativity stop. No wonder my creativity was blocked sitting at my computer—my body was literally bored to abstraction!

As you begin to open your intuitive perception, or your "direct knowing," the first rudimentary messages will always come to you from your body, your instinct, and your reptile brain. Learning to pick up data at this earliest stage of perception can save you time, energy, and worry. When you learn to trust your first responses to new people, situations, places, and ideas you'll discover an important truth: your body never lies to you. "First thoughts," as writing teacher Natalie Goldberg calls them, are fresh, accurate, and full of genius.

#### *PRACTICE: LET YOUR BODY DECIDE*

*The next time you go out to dinner, pick three or four different possible restaurants. Head off in the general direction of food, without deciding which one you'll go to. Let your body and natural instinct make each choice along the way. If one restaurant is to the north and the others are south, when you get to the intersection where you must turn, see which way your body wants to go. At the next juncture point, perhaps you'll find yourself not being able to get off the freeway at the exit that would take you to the Chinese restaurant. Continue on, realizing that it's probably the Mexican restaurant downtown that your body prefers tonight. Yet, as you park the car and start toward the restaurant, you might happen to notice a cozy little cafe down the block that you've never seen before, and as you do, your body perks up with enthusiasm. Go for it! And thank your intuition for leading you to a brand new experience.*

#### **TRUTH AND ANXIETY SIGNALS**

How do you know when something is really right for you? Or when you hear the truth? How do you know that you want to do something, and that you're actually going to do it? Conversely, how do you know when someone's lying to you? Can you tell when timing is off? When a situation is being forced? When there's a high possibility of failure or danger?

Your body communicates with you constantly, giving you feedback about the relative safety and appropriateness of every option you consider. Its messages contain either survival information that comes from the body's rapport with the natural environment, or higher guidance about your optimal self-expression that comes from your soul and the collective consciousness of the planet. Most of us never take the time to know how we know or what we know; we just act. Yet our bodies are speaking volumes—just not in a language we immediately recognize. To develop intuitive skill, we need to be able to decipher our body's information cues, to know quickly and directly, without taking time to "figure things out."

The body's language is a simple binary one—there are only two modes, two "words": yes and no. You will recognize these messages through feelings of expansion or contraction in your body. When a choice or action is appropriate and safe, you'll experience expanding energy: you may sense energy rising, becoming active or bouncy, or perhaps you'll "warm" to an idea, get "light-headed," or feel flushed with enthusiasm. Have you ever had the "hots" for someone, or had "butterflies" of anticipation, or been "up" for a new adventure? Perhaps you've felt magnetically drawn toward someone or a new situation. Have you ever said, "I'm leaning toward this option"? The body's yes often feels like health and vitality, even good luck: "I'm rarin' to go; let me at it!"

When I ask people how they know something is true for them, and exactly where they

experience the feeling in their body, many describe a warm, spreading sensation across their chest. Others feel energy bubbling up from below their diaphragm into their chest, or from their chest into their throat. Some even feel it bubble up further, resulting in tears of happiness. Some feel the blood rush to their neck and face, making them blush. Still other people describe a variety of "clicks and clunks" as if something out of alignment suddenly snapped or dropped back into its rightful place. These feelings most often occur along the vertical center line of the body and seem to be related to that other oft-described sensation of something "ringing true," where the body silently "gongs" like a huge reverberating bell. One of the other most common truth signals is the sudden movement of energy up the spine or along the arms and shoulders, giving the sensation of "chills" or gooseflesh.

But what about when something is not true or not appropriate for you? When the body answers no, the message is unmistakable. In fact, most people are more aware of their anxiety signal than their truth signal. When an option or action is unsafe or inappropriate, you'll experience contracting energy: you may feel energy drop, recoil, darken, or tighten. Maybe you'll act coolly, even coldly, to someone, or get a sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach. When something is not true for you, your body will try to withdraw and back away. You may feel repulsed, or become "leaden" or "turn to stone." Instead of blushing, you may blanch as the blood drains from your face. You may get tired, feel gray, blue, even depressed. You may actually feel pain in a specific area of your body. Common anxiety signals are: a stomach ache or nausea, a "pain in the neck," chest pain, headaches, or a feeling like a tight fist in the solar plexus area. Yet another anxiety signal is a prickly feeling of the "hair rising" along the upper spine and neck.

Why is it important to know your truth and anxiety signals? First, you need a fail-safe way to discern which options in life are best for you, to be able to make authentic choices, straight from your soul's wisdom. Truth and anxiety signals are your inside pipeline to the highest knowledge. Second, by learning to discriminate clear answers more quickly and directly, you won't waste so much time, energy, and so many opportunities for happiness. Third, by learning to absolutely trust your body's first response, you will impatient and jump ahead. You're not there yet. Anticipating future choices is a fruitless waste of time. When you need intuitive guidance, relax. Ask soon find the guidance you get is of a very high quality. Goethe said these deceptively simple words: "Just trust yourself. Then you will know how to live."

#### *PRACTICE: YOUR TRUTH AND ANXIETY SIGNALS*

*1. Start a journal or diary, and write about the different ways you know when something or someone is true, safe, or purposeful for you. Where in your body do you experience the signal? Does the signal move from one area of the body to another? 2. Write about the different ways you know when something or someone is false, unsafe, or not purposeful for you. Where in your body do you experience the signal? Does the signal move from one area of the body to another? 3. Notice the truth and anxiety signals you get today and write about them.*

#### **MAKING AUTHENTIC CHOICES**

Tonight you may make dinner for yourself, or go out and choose food from a menu. What will you eat? How will you know what to pick? Perhaps instead of having what you usually

have, you might question your body. "Body, what's your feeling tonight about fresh lettuce? Tomato soup? Pasta with cream sauce? Steak and potatoes?" Let your truth and anxiety signals inform you of your body's preferences, and see if you can pick up on the most subtle signals. Maybe your body would prefer a handful of crisp, cold radishes or half a grapefruit.

Perhaps you're thinking that you "should" move from an expensive house you're renting, and 1) find a less expensive neighborhood locally, 2) move out of state, 3) get a roommate, 4) get a studio apartment, 5) try to buy a house, 6) move back in with your parents. As you ask your body about each option, your stomach contracts, you get a headache, you want to take a nap, you get nervous and irritable. What is your body telling you? Perhaps it's not time yet to make a decision. Can you let it be for now?

Maybe you're job hunting and you've turned up several possibilities for work. Each one looks feasible to your mind, in a variety of ways. One job will let you use your people skills, another will pay more but you'll be stuck at a computer all day, a third option will give you a chance to be innovative and work with a team of creative people. When your body responds, it gives you instant feedback: imagining sitting at a computer gives you a pain in the neck. The job with people skills feels lukewarm; there's no tension yet no real excitement either. The third choice, working with the creative team, makes your body sit up at attention and almost salivate. What are you going to do? Will you override your body's direct knowing with "yes, but's" about not making enough money, or not knowing anyone there, or never having done this before, or not thinking you have enough talent? Or can you trust that your body will give you an answer that's just right?

#### *PRACTICE: VALIDATING YOUR BODY*

*Several times this week make a point of noticing when your body sends you a message. Maybe you instinctually pulled over to a slower lane on the freeway and just ahead in the fast lane is the debris from a blown-out tire. Or, perhaps you got a sense to leave the house ten minutes earlier than you normally would for an appointment, then encountered an unexpected delay on the way--and were right on time for your meeting! Thank your body out loud, and pat or stroke it tenderly, like you would a favorite pet.*

#### **DISCRIMINATING NONVERBAL INFORMATION**

Nothing in life is really that complicated, especially from your body's point of view. For the body, it's always just a matter of one moment, one piece of information, one motivation at a time. And in each moment, there is just one choice, one solution that's a perfect fit. In the next moment the choice may be different, so don't be the body's key question: What's most interesting and crucial for this moment? Let that answer lead to the next most interesting thing. Choosing to work with the creative team might lead you to take a new training program the company offers, which gives you a new skill set, which leads you to greater confidence, which leads to a promotion, which brings you new clients, who offer you an opportunity to start your own business. . .

#### *PRACTICE: YOUR BODY'S KEY QUESTIONS*

*1. Get quiet, centered, and breathe. Ask your body: What are you most worried about right now? What would you like to feel reassured about? Wait expectantly, and a "knowing" will*

*begin in you, perhaps with feelings, sensations, images. Write about your body's preoccupations and what you can do to help relieve these concerns. In what specific ways did your body make the answers known to you?*

*2. Ask your body: What are you most excited about right now? What activities would feel the most rewarding and engrossing? Wait expectantly, and a "knowing" will begin; notice feelings, sensations, images. Write about your body's most real motivations and what you can do to help manifest these experiences. In what specific ways did your body make the answers known to you? s*

You may have noticed in the previous exercise that as you paid attention to your body you became aware of subtle sensations and perhaps had fleeting, ghostly images that all blended into an instinctual "knowing" that couldn't be traced by logic. The answer just popped up into your awareness like the answers in the window on one of those magic eight-ball toys for children: "By all means," "Highly unlikely," "Try again later." Perhaps your body was concerned about having enough protein to function properly, since you'd only had coffee and a sweet roll for breakfast, and during your morning meeting it gave you an image of a chicken breast sandwich, complete with the experience of smell and taste. You got a strong hankering and couldn't wait to take an early lunch break and rush over to the fast food restaurant.

Or your body may have transmitted to you that it was most excited today about creating a new flowerbed, and it released to you a feeling of "hunger" for the feel of soft, well-turned dirt, for the moist smell of the nursery where you'd go to buy plants, for the thrill of the colors you would combine, and for the pure enjoyment of being in the sunshine and fresh air. You might even have had glimpses of the design of the bed, the placement of the flowers and how they might look in a year's time. And yet, all this probably came to you in such rapid sequence that it seemed almost simultaneous, with little separation between ideas, sensory triggers and images. Because of the body's shotgun-style, nonverbal way of communicating, we often miss its messages, especially if we're caught up in purely mental preoccupations.

To help make your body's intuitive messages more conscious, you might develop the habit of talking with your friends about "interesting perceptions I had today" or "interesting similarities I found between experiences I had this week," or asking, "What do you think this means?" Assume that you have the right to feel "at home" in your own body, that you do not have to live with even the most subtle levels of discomfort. You might become conscious of the data in the tissues of your body by simply having conversations in your imagination with various parts of your body. Personalize your belly, or the bottoms of your feet, or your thyroid. Let them tell you what they know about life. Make an agreement with yourself that the moment you notice an anxiety signal, you'll stop and discover what the message is. Make it a way of life to keep your body clear of blockages, ignorance, and negativity. Follow your truth signals!

Practice dropping below the surface of your normal daily distractions to find a deeper, more direct experience of knowing. Cultivating the habit of including your body in every decision-making process, even trying to feel your cells talking, will help you honor your body as a living being. By respecting its innate consciousness, and "conversing" with it, you'll have a reliable source of intuitive guidance and a new best friend.