

Finding your Inner Knowing

**How to Make Confident Decisions
About Your Healthcare**

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*I*f you are reading this, you probably have a health concern.

You want real solutions that will improve your health. You want to feel good. Of the myriad of options out there, both conventional and alternative, how do you choose? How do you know if a therapy or a practitioner is right for you? How do you know what the next step is?

When we are faced with a health challenge, or any challenge really, it is tempting and common in our culture to search for answers in the external environment. For many of us, this takes the form of turning to our old friend the internet. A helpful tool, yes, but not a particularly wise guide. Used without a connection to our inner knowing, it can be a dangerous and damaging tool.

True confession- I used to have a horrible time making decisions! People always said “trust your gut.” I never really knew what that meant. My gut felt squirmy and unsure of itself. Not to be trusted. I finally understood what “Trust your gut” meant and how to make decisions in a confident manner when I learned about connecting to Divine guidance and my inner knowing. This has been tremendously helpful for me, and I would like to share it with you.

This process is not an abandonment of your mind. Your mind is extremely important in decision making, but it is most useful when fully in service to your heart. Think of your heart as the emperor and your mind as the first minister. The heart, the emperor, is ultimately the one who makes decisions. It requires the mind, the first minister, to give it counsel, and to figure out the nuts and bolts of a decision once it is made.

You are probably very good at gathering data with your mind and figuring out how to do things. However, you might be struggling with confusion about what to do with all this data. You can see a number of different courses you could take. Or you just see a jumble of data and can't seem to make sense of it. This is not a bad thing. It is good that you have so much data; you just need an emperor, a heart, to make sense of it all.

The heart knows things by sinking into silence, and connection with something greater. You can call this Source, Love, God, Allah, Hashem, the Universe, Tao, etc. This exercise is designed to help you drop into your heart, and then allow your heart to connect to this greater knowing.

I'd like to take you through a step-by-step process that will teach you how to access this inner knowing and guidance and how to use it to make decisions regarding your health care or anything else in your life. It is best to read through the entire exercise first, and then begin.

EXERCISE: ACCESSING YOUR INNER KNOWING

STEP ONE: REMEMBRANCE

The first part of this exercise is a practice called Remembrance. It is from the Sufi tradition, but you do not need to be of any particular faith to benefit from it. It is called Remembrance because it is a remembering and a coming home to your own connection with the Divine.

First, find a quiet space where you will not be disturbed for 15-20 minutes. Sit down in a comfortable chair. Take a few deep breaths and maybe let out a few sighs. Sink into the chair and feel that your weight is supported by the chair. Check in to see if you are trusting that the chair will support you. Can you trust it even more? Really allow yourself to be supported. This gets easier the more you practice it.

Once you feel supported, put your hand over your heart in the upper part of your chest. This helps to move your consciousness towards your heart, and your inner knowing. Breathe into that heart space. With your intention, connect to whatever it is you connect with that is greater than yourself. It is best if you can come up with a name, so that you can call that name. It is like calling an old friend. As you breathe, with your hand on your heart, say the name you have chosen (Source, Love, Universe, Allah, Hashem, God, Tao, etc.). If you are uncomfortable with any name for the Divine, repeat the sound, "Ahhh"; it opens the heart. Repeat the name of the Divine under your hand. Do this for 2-5 five minutes.

STEP TWO: FINDING GUIDANCE

Ok, now it is time to get to the specific challenge or question that you are working with. In the space below, write down the question or issue that you have been struggling with.

Example: What should I do about my chronic fatigue? How can I have more energy?

Now write down the various options if you have them. You can have as many as you'd like, and you may need to do this exercise a number of times crossing options slowly off the list or combining them. Or just one time might be enough.

Example:

- 1) Order the nutritional supplements I read about online*
- 2) See another rheumatologist for a second opinion*
- 3) Try the diet my friend recommended*

After you have written down your options, sink back into your chair. Check to see how much you are trusting that your chair will support you. See if you can trust it even more. And now imagine what it would feel like to be healthy. This may be difficult. For many people with chronic conditions it is hard to even imagine being free of suffering from health concerns. Be gentle with yourself. Try remembering a time when you felt good and bring that feeling to your heart. It is helpful to place your hand over your heart while you are doing this. You may want to do a few more minutes of remembrance; say the name of the divine while imagining yourself well.

Now, go over the different options slowly, saying one at a time. This exercise is even better if done with someone else, who can say the options out loud to you. Bring each option to your heart, to the emperor who is connected with Source, for consideration. Notice how you experience each option. You may experience a sense of contraction or expansion; see light or more shadow. Listen to your intuition. You may just feel a "yes." Things that feel good (expansion, a feeling of lightness, seeing light, a feeling of "yes") generally indicate that you are on the right track.

In the space below, write down what you experienced.

Example: I felt a sense of contraction when I said "Order the nutritional supplements." I felt a little bit lighter when I said "Try the diet." I felt nothing when I said "see another rheumatologist."

Based on what you experience, you may have the answer that you are looking for. You may also need to repeat the exercise again, either now or at a later time. In the example above, an answer seems clear. The diet is a good next step for this fictional person; the feeling of lightness that she experienced indicates that. The supplements are probably not a good idea at this time because they brought up the sense of contraction. The rheumatologist is neutral. Sometimes things work out this easily, but often they require a little more time to gain some clarity.

As with any new skill, learning this process takes practice. It is a lot like learning to play an instrument or speak a new language. No one would expect you to play sonatas after completing an introductory piano workbook. You start with a few songs and keep practicing. The more you do it, the easier it becomes. Eventually it becomes second nature.

Here are some stumbling blocks that you may run into:

- I can't connect to my heart; I don't really know what you mean by this.
- I get caught up in the "connect with Source" thing. It brings up a lot of negative associations that I have about religion and spirituality.
- I feel nothing with any of the answers.
- I can't imagine feeling healthy.
- The multiple options overwhelm me.
- I get confused when I write down the options- they all seem connected.
- I feel anxious doing this exercise.

Let's go over these situations one at a time.

I can't connect to my heart; I don't really know what you mean by this. A common problem. Connecting to the heart can be very difficult for many people, especially in our culture that seems designed to pull us out of the deep, quiet listening in our hearts. So, what to do? The answer is to spend some more time in Remembrance. But don't try too hard. This is not about striving. It takes some effort, yes, but it is a homecoming and it should be more of a letting go. You are letting go into the divine love that surrounds you. The Source of Love. So, as you sit, imagine that you are sinking back into warm arms or floating on a warm pool of water or any other metaphor that helps you let go and sink into the love that is surrounding you. This gets easier to with practice. The more time you spend in Remembrance, the easier it gets to "feel connected."

I get caught up the in the "connect with Source" thing. It brings up a lot of negative associations that I have about religion and spirituality. This is also very common. So many of us grow up with an experience of religion and spirituality as oppressive. The term God is a trigger for people because they were taught the concept of a vengeful and wrathful god out to punish you if you do not follow the rules. I fully support you in not connecting to such a thing. See if you can drop these negative pictures and masks and see God/Source/Unity for what it really is - an incomprehensible, indescribable, loving, unifying force that, as the Sufis say, is closer than your own jugular vein. If the concept of God is troubling, sometimes the Source of Love or the Real helps. See if you can come up with a name that does not trigger you. Also, in terms of physically connecting to your heart, it is very helpful to have a hand over your heart. This is not necessarily your anatomical heart, but your energetic heart on your upper chest, just below your collar bones.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, be gentle with yourself. Don't try to force anything. You can't pop open your heart like a can. There may have been some very good reasons why you decided a long time ago to close your heart to protect it. So just be with your heart and sit with the question of whether there even is something greater to connect to. Something loving. Something you can trust. Just sit there with your hand on your heart repeating the name you have chosen. You can make a practice of doing this while lying in bed at night; it is a lovely way to go to sleep

I feel nothing with any of the answers. Try re-doing the exercise, but first spend some extra time in Remembrance. If you have not done so already, find someone else who can do the exercise with you.

I can't imagine feeling healthy. Think about the last time you were happy or a time when your illness was not troubling you as much as it is now. Use the space below to write down what you imagine for yourself. You can also try saying these possibilities out loud.

Example:

I can walk my dog without pain

I feel happy in my every day life

I can sleep through the night and wake rested

The key here again is to be gentle with yourself, and not try to force anything. This may take longer than you think it should. In general, most things in healing take longer than you'd like but not as long as you fear.

The multiple options overwhelm me. Repeat the exercise using only the options that create some kind of feeling. See if one or two feel better than the others.

I get confused when I write down the options- they all seem connected. Do more Remembrance, and while you are doing this, ask for clarity about what your options are. Give yourself permission to think outside the box.

I feel anxious doing this exercise. There are many different reasons why anxiety may come up during this exercise. Connecting to our hearts and our inner guidance is not something that is supported in our culture. What would happen to our consumer culture if all little children were taught to access their own guidance and inner knowing before purchasing something? Society as we know it would be very different! And probably wonderfully so. Yes, connecting to our heart is scary because we haven't done it before and because we probably closed up a long time ago for a good reason.

Remember that opening up to Source is not the same thing as opening up to a person, and trusting in It is not a blind trust. Many of us are just now exploring the idea of Source, and it is important to take as much time as we need. Take some time to play around with these ideas and concepts. Be gentle with yourself. A good first step towards developing trust, and decreasing anxiety, is working on trusting your chair. You can read about this in the beginning of the Remembrance exercise. Before we can trust the Universe/Tao/God/Source or the guidance we receive, we need to first develop

a basic sense in our body of what it feels like to trust. It's a big leap to jump right into trusting God. Try first to trust the support of your chair and learn what that feels like.

Anxiety during this exercise can also occur because we begin to access places and touch wounds that we haven't thought about in a long time. Many of us have deep trauma at the roots of our health issues; we have been covering it up with our pain, shame, depression, etc. Again, be gentle. Spend time in Remembrance asking for help, and only move as fast as is healthy and comfortable for you.

I hope that this has been helpful for you. If you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to email me at Dr.RebeccaShwartz@gmail.com.