

# INTUITION: ITS POWERS AND PERILS

Book By: David G. Myers

## EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY

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I cured with the power that came through me. It was the power from the outer world, and the visions and ceremonies had only made me like a hole through which the power could come to the twoglegged. If I thought that I was doing it myself, the hole would close up and no power could come through. Then everything I could do would be foolish.  
(Black Elk Speaks) Black Elk (1863-1950)  
Sources: [www.nativevillage.org/images/](http://www.nativevillage.org/images/)

## Introduction

The things you know, but don't know you know, affect you more than you know. That's the bottom line of hundreds of experiments on the powers of intuition according to Psychology Professor David G. Myers. Guided by this research, Myers shows that the proper use of intuition can help. On the other hand, freely followed gut feelings can get us into serious trouble.

Myers explains in his book, *INTUITION: ITS POWERS AND PERILS* (Yale, 2002), that while intuition can provide us with incredible-and often astounding insights -it can also dangerously mislead us. He shows through psychological experiments the powers and perils of intuition when: judges and jurors determine who is telling the truth; mental health workers predict whether someone

is at risk for suicide or a crime; which baseball player has the hot hand or the hot bat; personnel directors hire new employees; and so on.



David G Myers



Source: [www.psychologicalscience.org/convention/program/search/viewProgram.cfm](http://www.psychologicalscience.org/convention/program/search/viewProgram.cfm)

## Intuition: Brief Overview

Myers argues that experimental evidence has deflated people's intuitions that quartz crystals uplift spirits, which subliminal self-help tapes reprogram the subconscious mind, and that "therapeutic touch" has curative effects.

However, Myers says that, placebos demonstrate the same results. "Science", Myers remarks, "is a long history of learning how not to fool ourselves." We often place our fortunes, relationships and our very lives at the mercy of a hunch.

Therefore, Myers believes that it is worth using the scientific method to explore the powers and perils of intuition and to sift fact from fancy for self-preservation. (Myers p.10)





Realize that intuition is the subconscious that can help guide crucial decisions, not to override other thinking patterns but to compliment them.

<http://images.google.ca/imgres?imgurl=http://ericarenson.com/colophon/>

## Part I: Powers of Intuition

Myers states that "recent cognitive science reveals some phenomenal powers and notable unpredictability of intuition." It discovers that there is an unconscious mind where thinking, memory, and attitudes operate on two levels-conscious and deliberate, and unconscious and automatic. This dual processing capability leads research-

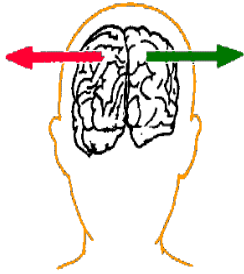
ers to conclude that we know more than we know we know. Modern studies of "automatic processing", "subliminal priming", implicit memory", "heuristics", "spontaneous trait inference", right-brain processing, instant emotions, non-verbal communication, and creativity unveil our intuitive

capacities interfacing, but often conflicting, with objective reality. (Myers p.4-5)



[www.santoshaserenitywear.com](http://www.santoshaserenitywear.com)

### Left Brian/Right Brain



[HTTP://MEMBERS.OPTUS-NET.COM.AU/CHARLES57/](http://members.optus-net.com.au/charles57/)

Much like looking at a tall tree, we regard what we "see" as consciousness to rule our lives through intentions and deliberate choices. We often neglect to consider the larger invisible part of the number of things we have learned to do without thinking about them-such as; without coordinating muscles to catch a ball, tie shoe-

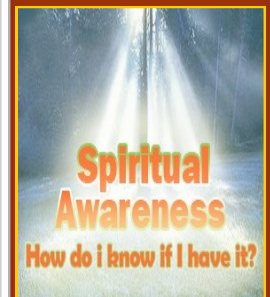
laces, or play a musical instrument and talk while doing so. We also know that our brain has two sides that serve two different functions: one that talks to us for direct observation of reasoning and the silent partner that excels at piecing together puzzles. One part seems to rationalize and brims with intelligence, whereas the

other part engages life spontaneously without critical reflection. Each half of the brain seemingly has a mind of its own, yet the two work harmoniously to re-create a holistic vision. Somewhere within the collaboration of these parts lie the mental fabric of what is real and the departure to self-delusion. (Myers p.18-20)

### Knowing Without Awareness

Employing cognitive science, Myers explores the workings of the unconscious with greater objectivity than through the older psychoanalytic methods. The differences between conscious and unconscious processes are readily demonstrated in a few simple experiments. For example, consciousness selectively

focuses our attention in order to stop us from thinking everything at once. We can smoothly move one foot counterclockwise and write figures on paper but not usually at the same time. Attending to one task diminishes concentration on another. (Myers p.23-28)



<http://lazerbrody.typepad.com/photos/uncategorized/sa.jpg>

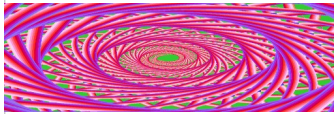


[www.ra-horakhty.co.uk](http://www.ra-horakhty.co.uk)

## Subliminal Influence

The unattended ear in "priming" experiments awakens associations of hardly noticeable words that provoke emotional interpretations of ambiguous statements. The words *river* or *money*, when paired with the statement "We stood by the bank", demonstrates that a thought, even outside of awareness, influences another thought or action. In a

real life situation, watching a scary movie alone at home can prime our thinking, activating emotions that cause us to interpret furnace noises as those of a monster. (Myers p.26)



[www.fractalartcontests.com](http://www.fractalartcontests.com)

[www.cgjung.net/oeuvre/textes/psychisme/mandala\\_psychisme.jpg](http://www.cgjung.net/oeuvre/textes/psychisme/mandala_psychisme.jpg)

### *Subliminal Influence:*

*Information that influences our behaviour without our being consciously aware of this influence.*



[http://www.3dnews.ru/documents/windows\\_vista/logo.jpg](http://www.3dnews.ru/documents/windows_vista/logo.jpg)

Myers cautions us through the above subliminal influence experiments that we learn from more than just selective awareness. We often overlook our ability to learn through unattended stimuli that can subtly affect us. Ideas and images that we are not necessarily attuned can automatically-

unintentionally, effortlessly, and without awareness can determine how we interpret and recall events.

Logical thinking and trusting hunches are not always compatible. Sometimes they conflict, particularly in social situations where we know how we are supposed to feel about others. Social psychologist Timothy Wil-

son's findings, for example, show that our social intuitions may lead us elsewhere. (Myers p.28)



<http://faimg1.forum-auto.com/mesimages/>

"For all of history, our ancestors daily observed the sun cutting across the sky. This had at least two plausible explanations: a) The sun was circling the Earth, b) the Earth was spinning while the sun stood still. Intuition preferred the first. Galileo's scientific observation demanded the second" (Myers p. 9)

## Two Ways of Knowing

Myers says that our two ways of knowing-automatic (unconscious) and controlled (conscious)-integrate seamlessly throughout all aspects of mental life. Citing researcher John Bargh, Myers writes, "The purpose of consciousness is to connect a parallel mind to a serial world. And the unconscious, intuitive inclinations detect and reflect the regularities of our personal history." Our storehouse of experience allows us to strike a golf ball deliberately while at the same time we unconsciously coordinate our acquired muscular-skeletal patterns to guide our swing. Practical experience, in Bargh's mind, cultivates the root of intuition. (Myers p.29-30)



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## Part II: Perils of Intuition

### Constructing Memories

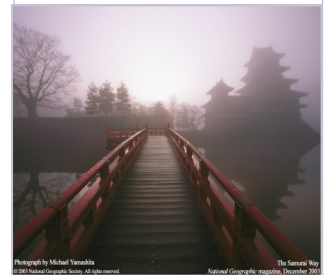


<http://www.williamycooper.com/images/Memory.jpg>

Myers explains that we consider memory to be like a storage chest in the brain into which we deposit material and from which we can withdraw it later if needed. According to a 1988 ad in *Psychology Today*, "Science has proven the accumulated experience of a lifetime is preserved perfectly in your mind." Yet, sci-

ence has proven the opposite to be true. In fact, we tend to embellish the facts by revising our life histories. In one University of Michigan study for reconstructing memories cited by Myers, a national sample of high school seniors reported their attitudes toward minorities, the legalization of marijuana, and equality for

women. Nearly a decade later their attitudes have changed, but they now recalled earlier attitudes akin to their current sentiments. (Myers p. 68-75)



Photograph by Michael Yamashita  
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National Geographic magazine, December 2001

### Mispredicting Our Own Feelings

**"NO MAN, DEEP DOWN IN THE PRIVACY OF HIS HEART, HAS ANY CONSIDERABLE RESPECT FOR HIMSELF"**  
MARK TWAIN (MYERS P.93)

Sometimes our intuitions are on target, says Myers, when we anticipate situations that excite or disappoint us. But intuitions more often fail when predicting an emotion's intensity or duration. Obstetricians report, for example, that women in labor occasionally reverse their stated

preference for anesthetic free delivery. In other studies, people would overestimate how much better off they would be in warmer winters, relocations, losing weight, more variety, and so on. Our intuitive theory suggests that when we get what we want we are happy. Myers disagrees:

"When we focus on a particular event, we forget about everything else that matters and over predict our endearing pleasure or pain." (Myers p. 78-82)

<http://www.art-of-symbols.de/pic/power.jpg>



[http://www.fda.gov/cdrh/present/dia\\_jan\\_2000/DIA-Jan-2000-3.gif](http://www.fda.gov/cdrh/present/dia_jan_2000/DIA-Jan-2000-3.gif)

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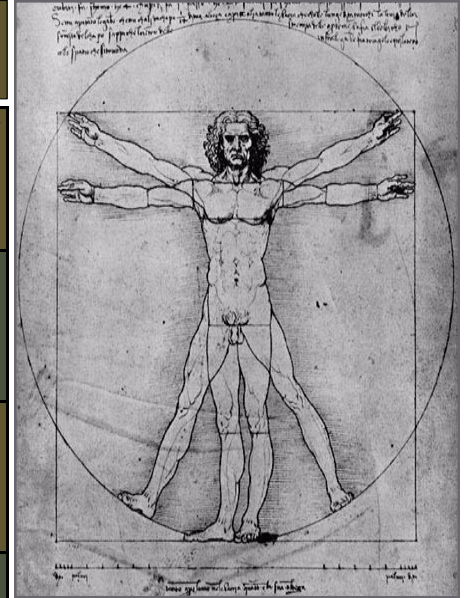
<http://www.geocities.com/nosefanfiction/guestbook.jpg>

### Self Serving Bias

Self-serving bias makes us believe that we outperform others. We are better drivers, better housekeepers, more intelligent, better looking, healthier, more ethical, and so on. We also behave as if others think as we do. These self-deceptions may bolster self-esteem, but they also exaggerate our intuitive understanding of our place in the world. (Myers p.93-98)

# Intuition's Dozen Deadly Sins

Memory Construction— Influenced by our present moods and by misinformation, we may form false memories and offer dubious testimonials.	<b>Overconfidence</b> — our intuitive assessments of our own knowledge are routinely more confident than correct.
Misreading our Own Minds— Often we don't not Know what we are doing.	<b>Fundamental Contribution Error</b> — overly attributing others' behaviour to their dispositions by discounting unnoticed situational forces.
<b>Mispredicting our Own Feelings</b> — we badly mispredict the intensity and duration of our emotions	<b>Belief Perseverance and Confirmation Bias</b> — thanks partially to our preferences for confirming information, beliefs are often resilient, even after their foundation is discredited.
Mispredicting our Own Behaviour— our intuitive self predictions often go astray,	<b>Representativeness and Availability</b> — fast and frugal heuristics become quick and dirty when leading us into illogical and incorrect judgments.
<b>Hindsight Bias</b> — looking back on events, we falsely surmise that we knew it all along.	<b>Framing</b> — judgments flip-flop depending on how the same issue or information is posed.
<b>Self Serving Bias</b> — in various ways we exhibit inflated self assessment.	<b>Illusionary Correlation</b> — intuitively perceiving relationships where non exist.  (Myers p. 128)

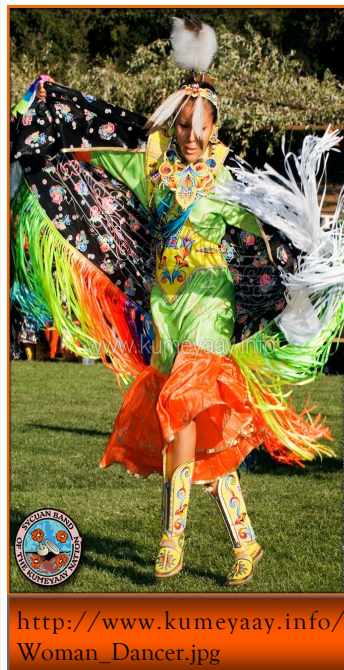


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# Belief Perseverance

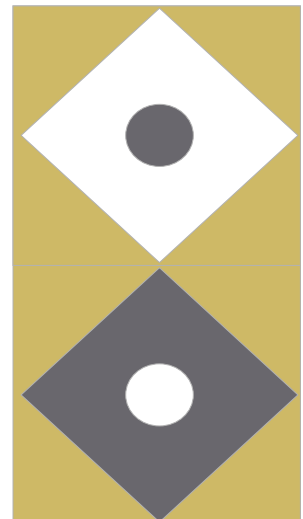
Belief Perseverance is another way that we use intuition to interpret information in order to support an established way of life. In a now-classic study of "behavioral confirmation," social psychologists Mark Snyder, Elizabeth Tanke, and Ellen Bersheid asked University of Minnesota male students to talk with women over the telephone that they thought, having been shown their picture, were either attractive or unattractive. When

asked about the way that the women responded, the students deduced that the supposedly attractive women spoke more warmly than the supposedly unattractive women. The men's erroneous beliefs had become a self-fulfilling prophecy by leading them to act in a way that influenced the women to fulfill their expectation that beautiful women are more desirable. (Myers p.115-118)

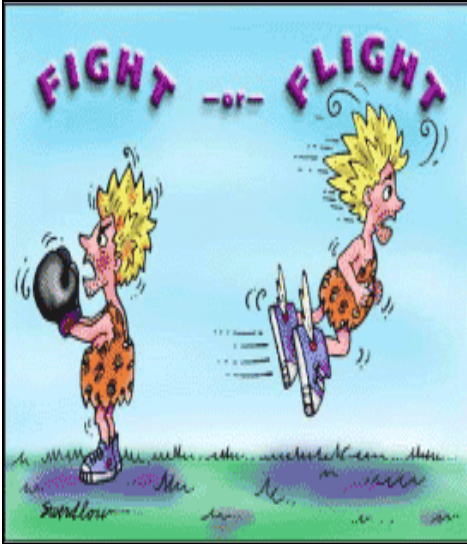


[http://www.kumeyaay.info/Woman\\_Dancer.jpg](http://www.kumeyaay.info/Woman_Dancer.jpg)

**“WHEN YOU KNOW A THING, TO HOLD THAT YOU KNOW IT; AND WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW A THING, TO ALLOW THAT YOU DO NOT KNOW IT; THIS IS KNOWLEDGE.”**  
**CONFUCIUS 2500 BCE**  
**(MYERS P. 103)**







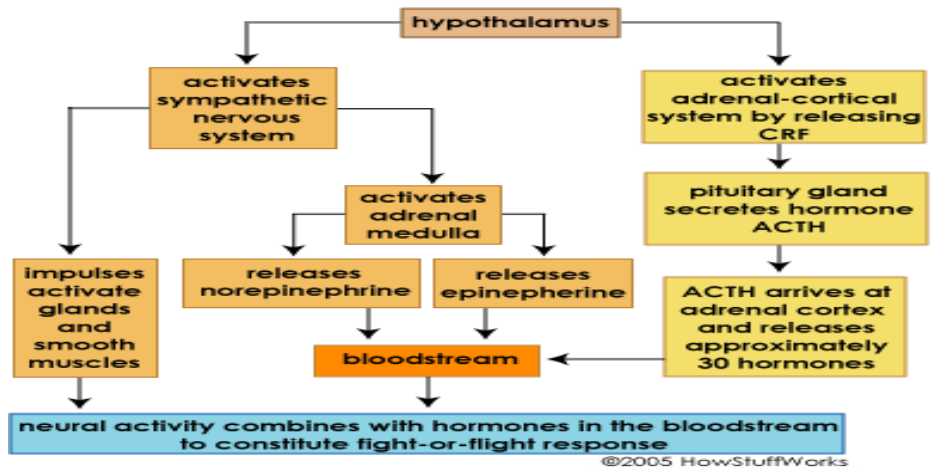
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## Heuristics: Fast and Frugal Thinking

Myers adds that our tendency for jumping to conclusions is rooted in the early evolutionary mindset for survival, "to do or die, not to reason or know why." However, this intuitive response is misapplied in our modern technological society. We employ fight or flight gut reactions according to baser animal instincts and expect this imprinted conditioning to provide "quick and dirty" mental shortcuts to resolve more complex problems. Our mental maps for the way we read and respond to a particular situation, called heuristics in this context, can be misleading when we expand typical concepts to fit other circumstances. For example, one study of heuristics tells us that we will choose an Ivy League classics professor over a truck driver when asked to guess which one is likely to be short, slim and likes to read poetry. Our tendency to judge something in terms of how well it fits our preconceived notions of how it should look oftentimes pre-empts our reasoning ability to arrive at a completely different outlook. (Myers p.119-125)

## Fight or Flight Response Model

### Fight-or-flight Response



<http://images.google.ca/imgres?imgurl=http://static.howstuffworks.com/>

THE MIND WORKS: "TO DO OR DIE, NOT TO REASON OR TO KNOW WHY" OBSERVES ROBERT ORNSTEIN. (MYERS P. 1 19)



[www.inspires.uk.co](http://www.inspires.uk.co)

## Framing

"Intuitive responses are fast and frugal, but irrational," writes Myers. This is clearly illustrated in the way that information is framed. Consumer behaviors are driven by marketing ploys where huge markups on regular prices make sale prices

seem like huge savings. Or, in another example, we would rather buy meat that is 75% lean than that with 25% fat. The order of framing above exemplifies the limits of our intuition. (Myers p.125 -126)



Clipart MS-Office

## Part III: Practical Intuition

### Anomalies of Our Economic Intuition

When investing hard earned cash we frequently make instinctive decisions quickly, often smartly, but sometimes stupidly, says Myers. Throughout examples of loss aversion, the endowment effect, the sunk cost effect, anchoring, and overconfidence, Myers shows us that, more often than not, we think more irrationally when we stand to lose rather than gain something. "We're therefore conservative when given a chance to lock in a win, but daring when given a chance to avoid a loss." (Myers p. 153-161)

*"Randomness is a difficult notion for people to accept. When events come in clusters and streaks, people look for explanations and patterns—which frequently occur. Random data—could equally well be derived from tossing a coin. So it is in the Stock Market as well."*

*Burton G. Malkiel, A Random Walk Down Wall Street, 1989. (Myers p. 152)*



**Listen Herman, there is no strategy to this...just call it, "head's" or "tail's"**

<http://web.princeton.edu/sites/opplab/coinflip%20cartoon.jpg>

### Risk Intuition (Questions?)

Time for one more chance to let your intuition point you to the truth:

I The terror of September 11, 2001, claimed two-thirds as many lives in one day as the Continental Army lost (4,435) in the entire Revolutionary War. In all of the 1990's, how many people were killed by other acts worldwide? How many in the year 2000? (Terrorism includes such acts as the bombing of the destroyer *Cole* in Yemen, bombings in Northern Ireland, and other lethal acts in undeclared wars.)

II. In the United States, which more frequently causes death? What's your hunch?

- All types of accidents, or strokes?
- Motor vehicle accidents (car, truck, and bus combined), or cancer of the digestive system?
- Homicide, or diabetes?
- Commercial air crashes, or rail-crossing accidents?

III. Which country has more people?

- Australia or Burma
- Iraq or Tanzania?
- Mexico or Brazil?

IV. In recorded history (since 1867), about how many people have died, worldwide, from unprovoked attacks by great white sharks? Answers on p.199. (Myers p. 198)

***"THINK OF IT THIS WAY: ANY STOCK PRICE IS ROUGHLY THE MIDPOINT BETWEEN THE WEIGHT OF INVESTORS AND BROKERS SAYING SELL AND THOSE SAYING BUY. THUS WE CAN KNOW THAT BROKERS WHO WANT US TO PAY THEM COMMISSIONS FOR THEIR STOCK PICKING ADVICE ARE COUNTED BY OTHER PAID BROKERS GIVING OPPOSITE ADVICE"***

**(MYERS P. 163)**

It's as if we incarcerated every petty criminal with zeal, while inviting mass murderers into our bedrooms.

K.C. Cole, *The Universe and the Teacup*, 1999. (Myers p. 198)





<http://www.circlinghawk.com/o-035.jpg>

## What Influences our Intuition about Risk

On risk intuition, Myers invites us to explore why we so often err. What influences our intuitions about risk? How might we think smarter about risk?

Four factors mislead our judgment when assessing risk:

- 1) biological predisposition;
- 2) the availability heuristic;
- 3) lack of control; and,
- 4) immediacy.

Myers says that we are biologically prepared to dread dangers faced by our ancestors, and therefore, concern ourselves with primal fears. Consequently, we tend to dread snakes, lizards, and spiders more than the more modern terrors of human evolution. We are thus better wired to avoid yesterday's risks than to anticipate today's technological dangers. (Myers p. 202-206)

**“GAMBLING TO  
 LOSE RATHER THAN  
 GAMBLING TO WIN  
 REFLECTS PEOPLES  
 ILLUSIONARY  
 INTUITIONS, NOT  
 ECONOMIC  
 MASOCHISM.”**  
 (MYERS P.225)

## Gamblers Intuition

The thrill of the play and greed are obvious motivators, but Myers uncovers deeper reasons for gambling addiction. To start with, we have a poor intuition for probabilities. As bettors, we are more likely to overestimate the chance of a big payoff having low probabilities of success. Mass participation in lotto tickets, horseracing and Publisher's Clearing

House, and now Texas Hold'em poker - show that the odds of winning, say one in a hundred million, don't deter those who believe that they could be the next one to win unfathomable riches in return for a minuscule investment. (Myers p.117-



**Got a bad  
poker face?**

[www.online-poker-rules.net/images/partyFaceBox.gif](http://www.online-poker-rules.net/images/partyFaceBox.gif)

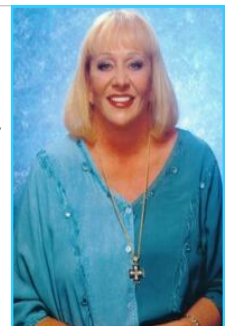
[www.justthechips.com](http://www.justthechips.com)



<http://www.choiceshirts.com>

## Psychic Intuition

Why are we so captivated the in psi phenomena, according to Myers, is that we tend to look for connections and seek explanations for unlikely events. The perils of intuition discussed earlier make psychic intuition believable whether it is genuine or not. To reiterate these perils: we invent false explanations to justify our actions; we incorrectly judge our reasoning powers; we take intuition for granted as being accurate; we dwell on events that meet our expectations; unrelated and often miniscule events seem to grab our attention away from the more important issues; and we overlook the idea of chance. (Myers p.226-



[www.psitalk.com/guests/browne.jpg](http://www.psitalk.com/guests/browne.jpg)



## Summary

To briefly summarize a tantalizing viewpoint and thought provoking book, Myers' book poignantly tells us that "psychological science reveals some astounding powers and notable perils of unchecked intuition, and that creative yet critical thinkers will appreciate both." Believers and skeptics can test spiritual issues-of reincarnation, of near-death experiences, of the powers of prayer-in order to winnow genuine from pseudo spirituality. Conceding that there is no perfect vision for ultimate reality, Myers advocates that we anchor our lives "in a rationality and humility that restrains spiritual intuition with critical analysis, and in a spirituality that nurtures purpose, love and joy." (Myers p.242-246)

## Critical Evaluation

With the greatest of respect, I humbly challenge the position that Myers has taken in his book, *Intuition: Its Powers and Perils*, although I am intrigued by the overwhelming evidence presented on the perils of intuition. I believe intuition plays a greater role and has more far reaching consequences than Myers claims. Myers makes a half hearted effort to document actual cases of unexplained phenomenon to counter his position and give a semi balanced presentation on his research on intuition. Myers further neglects the role the ethereal plays in our daily lives, Myers insists on hard data, clinical findings and hard numbers. It is my opinion that intuition is, by in large, varied from person to person; and even from race to race.

For countless centuries, the Woodland Cree of northern Saskatchewan have relied on intuition, and a whole host of other incorporeal faculties for their survival. Cosmologically speaking, much of the Cree's daily existence was fed by intuition; reading the weather, when to go on a hunt, what kind of medicine to pick and use on a certain type of illness, and so on. Ceremony was another dictating factor on how the Woodland Cree would live; the naming, fasting, rites of passage, marriage, and death, all these practices were, without exception, tied to human intuition.

All around the world, people from all walks of life, in one time or another, have relied on a gut feeling or intuition and have made critical decisions based on it. I personally believe that science will never be able to explain everything. I believe, we as human beings will continue to utilize intuition, accurate or not, it will continue to work in the background along with sound reasoning. Black and white, the yin and yang, good and evil, all these notions must exist; I believe one cannot exist without the other. We are humans-not machines, we need to be in the middle somewhere, we are a species that thrive on being in a state of flux, and intuition has certainly allowed us to be in a state of flux.



<http://homepage.mac.com/j.monro/ReligionVsScience>

**"THERE IS GROWING EVIDENCE THAT, WITH NOTABLE EXCEPTIONS, FAITH IS INDEED ASSOCIATED WITH INCREASED HEALTH, HAPPINESS, COPING, CHARACTER, GENEROSITY, AND VOLUNTEERISM"**

**(MYERS P.245)**



**"GREAT SPIRITS HAVE ALWAYS ENCOUNTERED VIOLENT OPPOSITION FROM MEDIOCRE MINDS"**

*Albert Einstein*

[www.northernsun.com](http://www.northernsun.com)

<http://www.cacradicalgrace.org>