



*Section One, Lesson Six:
The Million Dollar Question, Red
Flags, and Understanding Fear*

Table of Contents

The Million Dollar Question

Relationship Anxiety: Clear Eyes or Fear Eyes?

Part One: Red Flags

Red Flags

Are Religious Differences a Red Flag?

Living God's Will

A Healthy Relationship Defined

Core Values Questionnaire

Part Two: Understanding Fear

The Faces of Fear

False Evidence Appearing Real (F.E.A.R.)

If It's Fear, Why Doesn't It Feel Like Fear?

When There is Cause for Concern, It's Obvious

Doubt and the Drug of Happiness

The Million Dollar Question

It's the question I'm asked more than any other when people first find my work. It's the question that jolts people up in the middle of the night and keeps them spinning on the hamster wheel and spiraling deeper into the rabbit hole of anxiety. It's the question that our culture tragically fails to answer accurately, which causes countless people to walk away from loving, healthy relationships.

The question is: How do I determine whether these feelings — my doubt, anxiety, fear — are a sign that I'm with the wrong person or if they're a sign that I need to turn attention to myself? In other words, if I'm feeling this much doubt, doesn't that mean there's something terribly wrong with the relationship?

As you probably know from reading my work, my answer is this: if there are real, here-and-now red flags in the relationship, then the feelings are true warning bells that are telling you to stop and get help. Barring that, if you're in a loving, healthy relationship with a basically loving, healthy person (keeping in mind that everyone has their issues), chances are quite high that what you're experiencing is classic projection and an invitation to turn inward to learn innumerable gifts: to meet yourself with compassion and curiosity, to trust yourself, to become the source of your own aliveness and fulfillment, to grieve and shed old pain and beliefs, to learn how to de-fuse from thoughts and feelings so that you don't act on every single one as truth, to name a few.

So let's get the red flags out of the way first, and then address the different faces of fear and how they show up through this process. I will start this section by sharing a bit of my own story, which many of you have read on my site. It's one of

the highest-read articles in my work because it speaks directly to the million-dollar question, the question that you are probably desperate to answer at this very moment.

Relationship Anxiety: Fear Eyes or Clear Eyes

The power of fear never ceases to amaze me. When I initially entered the fear forest after my first panic attack at age 21 (three months before graduating from college), I prostrated myself at fear's feet. I handed over my thought processes and became a complete victim to whatever fear told me was true. For several years, most of this occurred unconsciously as I hadn't found my way to the right support. Until I learned how to challenge fear's arguments, I was a helpless pawn under its rule, a victim in a dark forest. It was, in short, misery.

Eventually, gratefully, I found my way to the couch of a brilliant and compassionate psychotherapist. He was the first to say things like, "You're a victim to your feelings. They rule your life." Huh? Of course I listened to my feelings. They had been my guideposts my entire life, the clues by which I made my decisions. It took me months to assimilate the concept that feelings are just feelings and not necessarily the truth. This isn't to say that we shouldn't listen to our feelings and attend to them daily (if not hourly). But I had not comprehended the difference between feelings that were created by my thoughts which then created massive amounts of anxiety and feelings that were a response to the natural rhythm of life.

The concept didn't really take hold until I met the man who would become my husband. After the initial free-ride of relationship bliss wore off and fear grabbed me in a stronghold of epic proportions, (yes, everyone who finds their way to me thinks that their relationship anxiety is manifesting as a worst-case scenario, but I promise you I've been there), I was dragged into the underworld and forced to examine the level to which I handed fear my power. When fear said, "You don't really love him," I believed it. When fear said, "He's just going to engulf you and

steal your life force," I believed it. When the critical part of me went into overdrive and picked him to shreds, I did nothing to stop it. Just a few months after we started dating, our tender relationship was hanging on by a thread. We even broke up (for 24 hours), but something in me couldn't let him go. Some part of me knew that he was everything I had ever wanted in a partner, and if the relationship was going to last, I was going to have to fight.

Under the guidance of my therapist, I slowly learned to challenge fear and call its lies out onto the mat. In a life-changing session with my therapist, I learned that fear was actually distorting my perceptions of my partner. This was astonishing to me! Fear was so powerful that it could actually alter the way I was physically seeing him! I learned that when we see life through fear-tinted glasses, it's like walking through a fun-house where everything becomes distorted. Except that it's not fun at all; it's torture. Fear wanted to convince me to run because in fear's mind, love is dangerous. Love means loss. Love mean losing myself or losing the other person. Love means risking my heart and breaking down the layers of control. Real love means that I have to be accountable and vulnerable and, since I had never met someone with whom I felt safe enough to do this, almost every fiber in my body and soul wanted to run.

But I didn't run. Thank God, I didn't run. I worked my tail off every day and wrote hundred of dialogues between the various characters of my mind, with the voice of my Higher Self or God responding (more on the dialoguing process in Lesson 4. And if you don't consider yourself spiritual, don't worry; it works no matter what your belief system is). There were many moments when fear would dissolve and I would see my partner through clear eyes, standing before me with the beauty of his soul radiating out like the rays of the sun. I would see his kindness that runs through him like a river and emanates out of his warmest eyes. I would see his

acts of caring, which are too numerous to list here. I would see his creativity, his soulfulness, the poetry of who he is. I would see that he's everything I've ever wanted and needed, and I would be flooded with love and gratitude. Fear might rear its ugly head the very next hour, but those windows of clarity are what gave me the inspiration and the knowing that I had to keep battling through the fear voices and fighting for love.

It's now one of my greatest joys to help others work through their fear voices and learn to choose love. When clients email me their daily dialogues, I analyze them line by line, helping them see where fear has taken hold and how they can challenge it. I hold out a lifeline for them, a context that says, "I know it's horrible right now, but if you stay with this you won't regret it. There is nothing more worth fighting for than a shared life with a loving partner. If it's possible for me and the hundreds of people I've counseled, it's possible for you.

I'm in awe of fear but I no longer allow it to rule my life. I won't lie to you: Fear still occasionally takes hold and I still have to work with it until it releases its grip. But it doesn't happen daily or even weekly. For the most part, I live my life with immense amounts of gratitude and a solid knowing that none of this would be possible — not our two boys, not our home and land, not my thriving counseling practice, not the inner hum of peace that permeates most of my days, not the sweet and enduring love in our marriage — had I not said no to fear and yes to love.

Red Flags

Now let's talk about red flags. Here's the master list. And remember: doubt is not a red flag. Struggling to connect is not a red flag. Questioning the relationship is not a red flag. Having differences is not a red flag. When you can identify clearly what are red flags and what are not, you will have an easier time unhooking from the ego's attempts to convince you to walk away.

- Emotional, physical, or sexual **abuse** currently occurring in the relationship.
- Any **addiction** which includes alcohol, drugs, gambling, sex, and in some cases, work and media.
- Unhealed issues around **trust** and betrayal.
- Your partner displays tendencies characteristic of **severe narcissism and sociopathy** (habitual or compulsive lying; rarely shows empathy, remorse, or shame; overinflated ego). http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/23/11-signs-dating-a-sociopath_n_3780417.html. One in twenty-five people are sociopaths, so it's essential to rule this out!
- Severe issues around **control** – keeping in mind that everyone has control issues but what I'm talking about is deep control issues where one person feels consistently trapped or unsafe by the other's need for control.
- Your partner shows strong signs of **not being ready to give up being single** (would prefer to spend time “playing with the boys” or “shopping

with the girls” than be with you). Keep in mind that it’s extremely healthy for both partners to have an active and nourishing social life, but there’s an important distinction between enjoying being with friends and making friends a number one priority, above one’s primary partner.

- Irreconcilable **differences around core values** like religion or having children – i.e. one of you definitely wants to have kids and the other definitely doesn’t. Let me say here – because I’ve been doing this work for so long and I can hear when an anxious spike might arise – that having *differences* is NOT a red flag issue! Everyone has differences, and many couples have vast differences around things like how they like to spend their time. You’re not meant to partner with your clone. Differences are to be expected and even valued. But I’m talking about core differences where there is simply no way to compromise without one of you sacrificing a deeply held value.

Let me also say there that having religious differences is NOT a red flag. I’ve worked with hundreds of people who practice different religions or fall on completely different pages about the same religion and, as long as they speak openly and honestly with each other regarding their expectations, the role religion will play in their life, and how they plan to raise their children, they can find their way through. However, if one partner expects the other partner to conform or convert in a way that isn’t comfortable, it’s probably time to put on the brakes and seek couples’ counseling to see if it’s a workable issue.

Living God's Will

Along the lines of the question, "Are religious differences a red flag?", I often receive some version of the following email from clients and course members:

"I'm with a loving, wonderful partner but my anxiety started a few months into the relationship (once I realized that it was serious). We've been together for five years and I've been struggling with anxiety the entire time. Is my anxiety a sign that God doesn't want me to be with this person? I can't figure out what else it could be - although finding your site has helped me start to put some pieces into place. I'm so scared that I'm not following God's will by staying with my partner but the last thing I want to do is leave him. Help!"

Again, if there are any of the red-flags I shared above, your anxiety may, indeed, be carrying a message that it's time to get out or, at the very least, telling you to put on the breaks and seek counseling. But of the thousands of people who have found their way to my work over the years, only a tiny percentage of them fall into this red-flag category. The rest of them invariably describe their partners as honest, loving, caring, kind, and available. When that's the case, the anxiety is not a sign from God to get out, but a sign from the soul to go inside and address the fears and false beliefs that are trying to prevent you from [making yourself vulnerable by taking the risk of loving](#).

If you've been raised in organized religion, you likely developed a belief that God exists outside of you as an all-knowing and guiding force, and your job is to determine God's will and allow God to lead you to your destiny. While this belief may have helped as a child to create a sense of safety and predictability, as an adult in a relationship with a present, available partner, this belief abdicates your

responsibility and, consequently, leaves you disempowered. In other words, it puts you in a childlike position where God is the all-knowing parent who holds the cards about what's best for you — and you, by some unknowable method, need to divine the "right" answer.

Let me break this down according to another belief system:

God, in a word, is love. If God is love and we were created in God's image, then God wants us to manifest love on Earth. What better way to manifest love than through choosing a loving, supportive partner with whom you share values, vision, and connection? Are you with a loving partner? Do you support each other's highest good? Then choosing to marry this person is what God would want for you.

God lives inside of us. God is also around us all the time, like swimming in a pool of invisible love, but the essence of God lives inside each of us. When you ask the question, "Is it God's will that I marry my partner?" — what you're really asking is, "When I'm most connected to my loving and truthful self, do I believe it's a loving choice to stay with my partner?" I understand that when you're in an anxious state your fear-based self will try to undo this deeper sense of knowing and convince you of all sorts of lies, (you never loved him enough, you're settling, you're just staying with her because you're scared to be alone), but if you think back to times when your fear isn't in the driver's seat of your mind, you'll quickly remember that inside of you lives the knowing that you're making a loving choice.

God gave us free will, which means that each one of us has the power to make choices for our lives. God is not your parent; God is a source of guidance, truth, and love. Because most of us were raised by parents and educational systems

that failed to nurture our innate sense of self-trust but instead encouraged us to abdicate our authority and knowing to the big people, as adults we naturally attribute God as another "big person" and assign the same belief that "God knows best" (just like Father knows best). This isn't what free will means. Free will mean you have the will to choose. As one of the my E-Course members shared:

One thing I have really been touched by is the idea that God blesses your choices but doesn't force you down only one path. God can work within you wherever you are. What would be the point of grace (and free will as you point out) if there is only ONE path? If a person walked away from a loving, caring relationship, that doesn't mean God would never give them the chance again. And if a person chooses a relationship that needs some work, that doesn't mean it is doomed.

This brings up another challenging and interesting point: many people don't want to choose! Many people, because their innate self-trust was annihilated in their early years, haven't learned to trust themselves, especially when it comes to big decision. They struggle with where to attend college. They agonize about which job to accept. And they constantly bring these choices to their parents or friends with the hope of being told what to do. So when someone is hooked on the thought that their anxiety is a sign that they're living out of alignment of God's will, I point out that, as long as they're in a loving relationship, the anxiety is more likely a sign that it's time to grow up, which means learning to take full responsibility for their choices, beliefs, and actions.

And that's one of the many gifts of going through relationship anxiety consciously: if you embrace the invitation to grow, you learn how to step into your

adulthood. You learn how to trust yourself. You learn that there are no mistakes and no right or wrong choices but only opportunities for growth and learning. And hopefully you learn how to relate to God not as a an authority outside of you but as a loving source of wisdom and guidance, a piece of which lives inside of you.

Core Values

People often ask me, “What are these core values that you’re always talking about? How do we know that we’re on the same page regarding the important issues?” In response, I’ve created the following simple worksheet to assess your core values and determine whether or not you’re basically in agreement.

Please print out two copies the following worksheet so that each of you can fill it out. Then sit down together to review your answers.

Having kids:

- We both want to have to kids.
- Neither of us want to have kids.
- We’re both undecided.
- One of us wants children and the other doesn’t.

Once we have kids we’re in agreement that:

- The woman will stay home for ___ months/years while the man works.
- The man will stay home for ___ months/years while the woman works.
- We’ll both work.
- We’re in conflict about it.

Religion:

- We have the same religious faith.

- We're of different faiths but we're supportive of the other's beliefs and practices.
- We're of different faiths and it's a source of conflict.

Once we have kids:

- We're in agreement about how we'll raise them regarding religion.
- We're in disagreement about how we'll raise our kids regarding religion.

Regarding money:

- One of us is a spender and one is a saver.
- We're both spenders.
- We're both savers.
- Even though we haven't different money styles, it's not an area of conflict.
- We have a lot of conflict around money.

Spending time with family:

- We're on the same page regarding how much time we spend with family.
- We're not on the same page and it's an intermittent source of conflict.
- We're not on the same page and it's a frequent cause of conflict.

Household chores:

- One of us likes a neat house and the other doesn't care, but we're in alignment regarding the distribution of household chores.
- We're aligned regarding household chores. ○ It's a source or a potential source of conflict.

Managing Conflict (check all that apply):

- We handle conflict well. When we disagree on something, we find a way to talk it through and arrive at a healthy compromise.
- We have trouble working through conflict. I withdraw when I'm triggered and resist opening back up until my partner approaches me with an apology.
- We have trouble with conflict. I flare up with anger and won't open my heart again until my partner approaches me with an apology.
- I have a hard time apologizing and seeing my part in a conflict.
- I have a fairly easy time apologizing and seeing my part in a conflict.
- If there came a time in our marriage when we reached an impasse, I would have no problem seeking help from a third party.
- I don't believe in therapy and believe that we should be able to solve our own problems

If you're in disagreement about any of the above issues, I strongly encourage you to seek couples' counseling until you find resolution. Also know that having conflict is a part of every relationship. Even if you don't work through conflict very well, it's not a reason to walk away.

Please note that there's nothing on this list about enjoying the same activities or being the same personality types (introvert/extrovert; thinking type/feeling type) as this is not a prerequisite for having a healthy marriage. For more on this, please read my article called "I'm Tigger and He's Eeyore," which you can find here: <http://conscious-transitions.com/im-tigger-and-hes-eeyore/>.

The Faces of Fear

Now let's go back to the million-dollar question and ask it in a slightly different way: *What's the difference between intuition (gut) and fear?* It's crucial to learn to distinguish between the faces of fear so that you start to develop discernment between healthy fear and anxious fear.

Healthy Fear

Healthy fear arises when we're on the precipice of any major life change, before a large event, facing the unknown or in the presence of real danger in the here-and-now.

On the precipice of major life change: Transitions activate fear. They are times when we symbolically die and are reborn, and nothing triggers fear for humans more than death, even metaphoric death. As we separate from our old life during a transition, we experience a deep, existential separation. This is scary. It was scary to be born, scary to go to your first day of school, scary to fall in love for the first time, scary to become a sexual person and navigate the hormonally out-of-control stage of adolescence, scary to graduate from high school, scary to graduate from college into the new, extended adolescence of our 20s, scary to get married, become a parent, become an elder, die. These transitions would be a lot less scary if we were guided culturally by elders and mentors, held in the embrace of those who passed through these thresholds before us. But, sadly and with dire consequences, that's not the culture we live in, so we're left to walk through these passage alone.

Before a large event: If you've ever acted in a play or performed for a group of people in any capacity, you know how scary it is. If you've ever presented a

thesis or defended a dissertation, you know the familiar tummy-flopping experience of fear. Before I was on *Oprah*, I was terrified. I remember sitting in my therapist's office telling him how scared I was and him saying, "Of course you're scared. Why wouldn't you be scared? This is huge!" He then told me a story about a famous basketball player who was so scared before every game that he would throw up. Literally, he threw up before every single game. And then he was fine and would go out and play a brilliant game. It made me feel better. Fear is normal when you're on the threshold of a major event.

Facing the Unknown: Many people, especially those on the anxious-sensitive-creative spectrum, feel scared in a new situation and with new people. We like to know where we are, who we are going to be with, and what it's going to be like. In short, we like the familiar and resist change! Sound familiar? The action here is not to indulge in our fear or judge it, but to bring great compassion to ourselves and then to take the action that will ultimately serve us.

Real Danger in the Here-and-Now: If you're with someone and there are true red-flags present, it's time to listen to the warning bells as true signs of warning. That's real and present danger. If you're hiking in the woods and you sense that there's something lurking around the corner and then see a mama bear and her cubs, your healthy fear/intuition is working beautifully. Time to stop, back up slowly, and leave as safely as possible. Keep in mind that even red-flag issues in a relationship can be worked on provided that both people are willing to do the work.

Anxious Fear

Anxious fear is the "what-if" thoughts that are plaguing your mind. Unlike healthy fear, anxious fear isn't rooted in the present tense but is always past or future

based. That's not the say it isn't real – because I know how much you're probably suffering right now – but it isn't the truth. The anxiety-based mind tells you lies over and over again to keep you separate from love and try to protect you from taking the risks inherent to intimacy. Any time your fear begins with “what-if” you know you're in the anxious mind, which means you're telling yourself a lie that will only increase your anxiety.

Please keep in mind that what-if fear don't always start with the words “what-if”. The fear-based self can be very tricky, and the deeper you dive into its world, the trickier it becomes. So what starts off as, “What if I don't love my partner?” often morphs into a clear and definite statement of, “I don't love him/her.” Fear states it as fact, which can throw you off balance if you're not on to its tactics. Now that you know that this is one of fear's maneuvers, you'll be able to call it onto the mat much more easily.

The problem arises when healthy fear born of acute intuition goes into overdrive, and the hypervigilant scout is surveying the horizon reading every nuance of thought, feeling, and behavior as a sign of danger. Is there real danger even in a healthy relationship? Yes: there's the risk of being hurt. The risk that comes from entrusting your vulnerable heart to another human being. The risk and vulnerability of loving. It's like the hypervigilant scout doesn't know what to do with itself and so it over-reads and mis-reads everything as a “sign” that something is terribly wrong and it's time to run. It's not time to run. If you're in a healthy, loving relationship that works well most of the time (not perfectly — we all have issues — but good and loving), then it's time to learn about fear, and that's why you're here.

A Few Words About Gut:

So is there actually a place inside of us called our gut that knows things on a subconscious level? Yes, it's what I'm calling intuition, but it's in response to subtle clues that exist in the here-and-now. For example, if you're walking on a dusty path and you suddenly stop because you sense that there's a snake close by, then see one curled up on the side of the path close to where you were just about to step, is that your gut? Yes, you had a sense that there was a snake, and I would venture to say that, because you're also highly sensitive, a subconscious part of you registered the slight movement of the grass, perhaps a nearly silent sound, and these heightened awarenesses led to a healthy fear response, which then caused you to stop.

And yet — and read this closely — how many times have you had a “sense” that something was going to go wrong and it didn't? I often use this example with my clients: How many times have you been about to board an airplane and you've had an “intuition” that the plane is going to crash? Did you cancel your flight and go home, or did you say to yourself, “Okay. I suppose there's a chance that this plane could crash, but I have this thought every time I travel so I'm going to take my chances.” Most clients laugh when I share this because it's a familiar scenario, and it illustrates clearly that what we often call intuition is actually fear.

The challenge is to learn to discern between healthy intuition/gut/fear and anxious fear. This isn't an easy task and often requires years of knowing yourself and developing a consistent practice of self-trust. And in the end, it requires acting against that feeling of doubt or fear more often than our culture tells you you should, especially when it comes to your relationship. The bottom line is that for the anxious mind, doubt is inevitable. For the mind that examines every decision under the highest resolution microscope possible, that asks important questions like, “How do I know that I love him? What is real love anyway? How

do I know that we're not going to end up like my parents or as part of the 50% divorce statistic?" doubt is actually another word for fear. And since fear's entire mission in life is to keep you protected from the possibility of getting hurt, it will naturally make a strong appearance at some point in your relationship.

Should you listen? Again, that's the million-dollar question. In the wise words of my client speaking about every area of her life (not just relationship anxiety), "If I listened to doubt, I would never get out of bed in the morning." In other words, doubt is a normal part of the terrain of the anxious mind. When you learn to deal with anxiety effectively, you hear fear's lines but you don't heed its advice; it will always shoot its darts into your brain but you learn not to take the poison. So to buy into the cultural lie that "doubt means don't," whether you're in a relationship or starting a new job, is like laying yourself prostrate at fear's feet and saying, "You win. You rule my life." And, as my client said, you would never get out bed. You live without risk in the safety of a carefully controlled box. You're alive, but you're not really living.

False Evidence Appearing Real

Somebody once left these four words as a comment on my site. I looked at the words for a minute then spelled out the acronym: F.E.A.R. Oh, yes. Yes yes yes. Fear is certainly False Evidence Appearing Real. It's often extraordinary how much fear distorts our perception of reality. I'll give you an example from my own life and then some current examples from my clients and e-course customers.

Years ago, I found myself somewhat over-focused on a mole on my older son's back. Now, he had always had a constellation of four moles that create a perfectly straight diagonal line from his left shoulder blade to his lower back. I have loved those moles since he was a baby and have often marveled at the fact that they seemed to foreshadow his passion for science and outer space. Seen through the lens of love, my husband and I often smiled at the moles throughout the years and named them "Constellation Everest." In short, they had always been a warm source of joy.

Then a friend of mine went to see her dermatologist to have her moles checked. She has a family history of skin cancer so she's vigilant about checking her moles. I didn't think much of it until she told me that she was taking her young son in as well and, as it turned out, the doctor expressed some concern about one of his moles. It had never occurred to me that a child could develop skin cancer. My radar just wasn't attuned to that topic. Until then.

The next thing I knew, one of Everest's moles looked bigger. Really, much bigger. Every night when he and his brother took a bath, the second mole in Constellation Everest blared out at me and seemed just a fraction of a millimeter bigger than it did the night before. It was no longer beautiful and sweet; it had

turned menacing, a harbinger of doom. There were nights when my stomach literally dropped in panic at the sight of it. I even went so far as to measure it so I would have a baseline from which to check my observations. My fear-mind was absolutely convinced that there was something wrong. And when I shared this on my blog (this was back in January 2011), I had to keep my fear-mind in check, as it popped up saying, "Well, now that you've written about this in your blog, it probably means it's true. It's not fear; this is reality."

False Evidence Appearing Real.

Breathe. Wow. Sometimes I can really scare myself. Especially when it comes to the health of my kids.

It took me some time, but eventually I worked enough with the fear-mind to be able to pull myself out of it. When I breathed into my deepest self and connected to truth, I knew he was fine. My fear had attached onto the mole as its latest place to hang its hat. Fear has to hang its hat somewhere; it doesn't like floating in amorphous space, untethered from its space pod.

My anxious clients hang their fear on the questions of, "Am I making a mistake? Do I love him/her enough (or the right way, or at all)?" My pregnant and new motherhood clients hang the fear on, "What if something is wrong with my baby?" My married clients, who haven't quite taken the leap from attaching their joy and aliveness onto their partner to taking full responsibility for their own well-being, hang the fear on, "It would be better with someone else. Someone else would make me feel passionate and happy." Fear likes the tangible. It also likes to project onto somebody else. This gives us the illusion of control.

What is it that we're so desperately trying to control? We will dive into this in depth throughout this course, but the basics are: loss, feeling out of control, the unknown of the future, taking full responsibility for our well-being. The fear-mind says, "If I'm hyper-vigilant about my son's mole, I can control the future. I can avoid unbearable loss. If I let go, something bad will happen."

It's a lie, of course. It's pure fantasy and illusion. The truth — the difficult yet ultimately liberating truth — is that the future is out of my hands. The fear-mind says, "If I analyze my partner to death, I can avoid making a mistake. If I walk away from love, which is a risk, I can avoid the possibility of loss." Again, it's pure illusion, but fear's mission is to keep you separate from the risk of love. Love is vulnerable. Fear, as awful as it feels to be in its grip, is safe.

I'll say it again: Fear distorts reality. Seeing life through the eyes of fear is like walking through a fun house with wavy, distorted mirrors. One of my clients, who has been struggling to remove his negative projection from his wife, spent several months thinking that she was fat. The ironic truth was that she was actually thinner than she had ever been since he met her, but his fear eyes added fifteen pounds to her frame. Isn't that extraordinary? That's how powerful fear is.

The antidote to the fear-mind is the faith-mind. The faith-mind says, "I surrender to the future which is out of my hands. I surrender to this moment and to accepting that which I cannot control. I let go of negative thoughts and anything that prevents me from living each moment as fully as possible. I choose to see the reality of now, what is only before my eyes. I choose to see this moment through the eyes of love. What does love see?"

Ask yourself right now. Wherever you are, close your eyes and ask yourself, "What does love see? What is fear trying to protect me from feeling?" Spend some time there, removing the projection of whatever your anxiety has hung its hat on and find the courage to turn inward. Thus begins the journey toward healing.

If It's Fear, Why Doesn't It Feel Like Fear?

This is one of the most common and frequent questions I'm asked: So if this all really my own fear, why does it come out as irritation, lack of attraction, and perseverations and projections of every kind? Why is this all so confusing? Wouldn't it be easier if my mind was saying, "I love my partner but I'm scared of love"?

Yes, that would be tremendously easier. But, not only does our culture fail to educate us about the link between love and fear, it's also not how fear works. Fear is the great protector, and when this fear is coming from the most primal need to keep you safe from the risk of getting hurt, it knows that if it appears in pure form as straight fear, it's not likely that you'll run.

This is why fear has to be so convincing, and why it's so tricky to name and deal with effectively. It has to trick you into believing that the problem is your partner so that you'll leave. The ego thrives on certainty and control, and the only certain outcome that it can control is whether you stay or leave. You can't control whether or not this relationship is going to work out. You can't control if you're going to get hurt or not (at some point in a long term relationship, you inevitably will). But you can control leaving. If you believe that the problem is that you don't know how to work with fear then you will stay. But if you believe that the problem is that you're with the wrong partner, the only reasonable response is to walk away.

Naming it is KEY. If you believe fear's lies, you're dead in the water, and well on your way to becoming trapped down the rabbit hole of anxiety. But if you name

fear by calling it by its true name, you've taken the first step toward de-fusing from it and, thus, diffusing its power.

Therefore it's essential that you're able to lift the mask off of fear, which means identifying all of the ways that it manifests.

Fear can feel like:

Irritation

Indifference

A wall

Doubt

Ants crawling on your skin

The desire to run

Fear can sound like:

I don't love him/her.

I don't want this.

I'm not in love.

I'm not attracted.

S/he isn't smart enough.

We're too different.

See what happens when you name fear by all of its tricky but true names. The more you de-fuse from its grip, the more you will find your way to clarity and freedom.

When There is Cause for Concern, It's Obvious

I'll share another story that illustrates the difference between true, red-flag fear and projection-fear:

When I was 24 I was convinced I had a brain tumor. I was in a particularly anxious period of my life and was fixating on a series of perceived physical issues: I had already had my heart checked because of palpitations (it turned out to be a benign and common diagnosis called premature ventricular contractions), and now was obsessing on a tender spot on the top of my head. I went to see a doctor and what he said has been one of the armor phrases that I've used to combat anxious thoughts ever since. He said, "If it's a brain tumor, it will continue to get worse."

As I'm prone to anxiety, I've had my share of physically-inspired anxious thoughts over the years. I remember once when I was putting my baby to bed and my pinkie started twitching. My first thought was, "Wasn't that the first symptom for Michael J. Fox? What if I have Parkinson's?"

My rational mind stepped in immediately and said, "Well, if I have Parkinson's, it will become apparent soon enough."

This might not seem like a calming thought, but one of the keys to working with anxiety is recognizing where we have control and need to take action and where we don't have control and need to surrender. I could have taken action and scheduled a doctor's appointment, but I chose to trust that I was healthy and that, if I wasn't, my symptoms would increase to the point where it was obvious.

My point here is that if you're prone to anxiety you'll always be prone to anxiety. It's like an alcoholic who hasn't taken a drink in years but still refers to himself as a "recovering alcoholic." So our addiction is anxiety and we'll always have to

work with it. When you find ways to work this through you can think of yourself as a recovering anxiety addict.

Here's one of the keys to recovery: it's not the thoughts that are a problem but how we respond to the thoughts. Furthermore, we can't control when and how the thoughts arrive. They come unbidden, but we *can* and must control how we respond to them. So the anxious thought arrives in my mind: what if I have a brain tumor? I respond with, "If I do, it will become obvious," and I leave it at that. I don't give it a moment's more attention. It doesn't deserve further attention at this point, and frankly, I'm too busy to indulge it.

But I'll also say that there are two roads to managing anxiety: on-the-spot management and long-term management. The two work in conjunction, meaning that the more you fill up your reservoir of spiritual and emotional work, the less the anxious thoughts will take hold. And the less they take hold, the more freed up you feel internally. We will be working with both methods throughout this course. I had my first panic attack when I was 21 years old and have been working on my anxiety ever since. So I've had a long time to fill up my spiritual reservoir. When the reservoir is full enough, the anxious thoughts can't grab hold and they just leave as quickly as they arrived. We will explore this in depth in Section Three.

How does all of this relate to your anxiety about your relationship? In a nutshell, if there was cause for concern, it would be obvious. If you were really making a mistake, you would have known by now. If you weren't with a good partner, you would be able to point to concrete issues in the relationship that were dysfunctional enough to warrant calling it off. You would be able to point to concrete areas of concern about your partner – he's an addict, she's emotionally abusive, he's more interested in controlling you than loving you, she's lied to you repeatedly – and you wouldn't be able to stop talking about those issues. If

you're like my clients (which I would bet money you are), you would spend our first session talking about your anxiety, not about what's wrong with your relationship. Said another way, *my clients who end up leaving their relationships can't stop talking about the negative aspects of their relationship.* The problems are glaring and obvious and they warrant putting a halt on moving forward.

So when there's cause for concern, it's obvious, and it becomes increasingly more obvious and time moves on. Real problems in a relationship don't diminish over time without real attention; in fact, they get worse. They would become so obvious that anyone hearing about your relationship would say, hmmm, maybe you two need some help to deal with that issue. And I'm not talking about getting help because you're anxious that there *might* be a problem or you *might* be with the wrong person. I'm talking about getting help because there *is* a problem that you can actually point to.

But again, most likely this isn't your case. Most likely you're obsessing on the *what-ifs* and are having a hard time pointing to something real and concrete that has progressively gotten worse over time. Most likely you're worried about making a mistake and grasping at irritations with your partner as reasons why this isn't right. If that's the case, it's time to grab the anxiety by the horns and employ every single technique that you will learn in this course. Over time, as you grow your loving, inner parent — the part of you that can confidently offer reassurance — and learn how to work with your thoughts effectively, you will break free from the stronghold of fear and see more of your life through the lens of clarity and love.

Doubt and the Drug of Happiness

With grateful permission, I'm sharing this post from my e-course forum. This will give you just a taste of the brilliant wisdom that often passes through the virtual doors of this very special forum via the words of the compassionate, supportive, wise women and men that are working their tails off to break through their relationship anxiety.

I had these two MAJOR REVELATIONS running through my mind as I went to bed last night, and I forced myself to remember them! So I thought I would share: (sorry to soapbox, it's just a major mental breakthrough for me!)

1. You know the "doubt means don't" thing — well I was thinking about what all these experts and 'people' are saying and what Sheryl has just posted about in her blog / Oprah's response, etc. Well, maybe there are two kinds of people: people who are unaware and people who are fully aware. The first kind are the people for whom doubt SHOULD mean don't. These people may actually need to be hit on the head by a 2x4 to stop them making a bad decision — people who cannot see what you are on about and are hell-bent on doing something that IS actually bad for them — red flags and all and even make excuses for them. People who are on the less intuitive side, perhaps less conscientious, immature, less aware. It's not a criticism, I was that kind of person.

When I was 10 years younger, I had absolutely NO clue about what real love was. I knew what it was supposed to feel like, though. I was 'in love' with this guy who never thought about coming over to see me (I used to drive an hour to see him all the time). I never questioned his bad moods and it was only in realising he made me feel like crap about myself (why didn't I doubt? duh!!) and was not

committed to us at all that I finally got the idea of wedding bells out of my head. Seven years ago (2 years before I met my now *husband* – love saying that! :), I met the man I thought I would marry. He, too, was someone I was totally into, never ever a doubt in my mind. I told everyone, "this is the guy I'm going to marry" – and the same thing happened again. Do you think a doubt entered my mind about the relationship? No. Did anyone warn me about these guys – mum/family/friends etc? No. It hit me that no one questions you when you say you are 'in love' – they just go along with you, trusting when you are right for each other, no, they are damned HAPPY for you. No one questions your feelings of 'love' and yet they are all over you like a rash when you say you are having doubts – and even when you explain there are no red flags, no, still 'doubt' seems to mean 'don't' to these people.

Well, I think this confusion is messing with the second type of person — HSP and intelligent / introspective / anxious people's heads – I think, like Sheryl always says, the whole 'doubt means don't' advice actually excludes people who are looking deeply at their relationship before marriage – i.e., (us) people who don't need to be told that doubt means don't.

So yeah: Say 'doubt means don't' to a conscientious person is like a fricken red flag to a bull, we will go for it – looking (and finding) reasons to assume it applies to us.

Say 'doubt means don't' to a person who isn't aware and they will make excuses for the person's behaviour and their own doubts.

Just my two cents here but I'm totally over these blogs about marriage that say these blanket statements to everyone and assuming everyone is the same.

Moving on...

2. I also has this thought about the influence of the myth that meeting the One has on our modern culture (ruminating on Sheryl's books here) but finally 'getting it' that people in Western culture really do cling to fairytales to give their lives meaning. As a single person I LOVED travelling alone, just the excitement of having the world open to me was addictive. The fairytale of 'The One' was indefinitely suspended when I was single because this intangible hope still existed that my life could suddenly change and become awesome/more fulfilled. I would go out to see romantic movies & buy magazines about people who made it clear that 'the dream' existed. When someone wins the lottery it entrenches the thoughts that instant 'Happiness' CAN exist and be 'solved' by this magical meeting of 'THE ONE' or by money. (Few people go beyond the happily ever after story into the aftermath of many lottery winners – there is often a lot of heartache there too that proves money, like another person, does not automatically bring happiness).

So to crush the myth that 'love' can 'happen' in our popular mythology is like saying to an addict that there is no more drug left, that you have to make your own happiness from your head, that the stimulus, the panacea to your LIFE, isn't something you GET but something you create yourself. I reckon this fits in very well with our fast food – fast everything culture – the idea that love can suddenly hit you on the head and your life changes. If we didn't have myths like that, god help us, we may have to find happiness from within, and like cooking vs fast food that takes time and patience.

Combined, (and I'm only really just getting my head around it and probably not expressing it very clearly), these are really important revelations for me right now

because I have been questioning WHY I have held onto the 'dream' in my darker moments of anxiety about past unavailable people and questioned the shit out of the amazing guy I have. I'd bought into the myth — hook, line and sinker — that a man, full of red flags or not, SHOULD just come out of the blue and make my life feel better. The idea that my feelings of 'love' = real love, and that doubt = don't. It's all opposite. No one can make me feel happy except for me, due to my own background, my feelings alone are a terrible indicator of what real love should be like and doubt DOESN'T mean don't!

Spoken like a true conscious bride, now conscious wife. THANK YOU.