

THE
DAVIS FOUNDATION

FOR PROVIDING
EMOTIONAL COMFORT

LETTER OF FEBRUARY 26 , 2003

Dear Reader,

Why do some people wish to be surrounded by activity and sound, whereas others prefer a quiet environment? And why, in recent years, has there been an increase in the deliberate creation of external stimulation? Boom boxes have proliferated, TV screens are often filled with multiple scrolling messages, and many restaurants are now designed with hard surfaces to amplify the ambient sound in order to create “energy.”

Each person’s mind strives to maintain an optimal stimulus level. We are uncomfortable when we are either overstimulated or understimulated. A higher level of external stimulation may be sought when there is inadequate internal stimulation from thoughts and feelings. Some people have a significant, on-going deficit of internal stimuli because they haven’t had the opportunity during their upbringing to develop a rich network of mental associations. With such a network, an internal stimulus (a thought, a feeling), as well as an external one (a sight, a sound), evokes a host of associated thoughts and feelings, most of them subliminal, which contribute to maintaining the optimal stimulus level. Why have some people failed to develop an adequate internal network of associations?

Some children, especially those with very restricted experience, have had very limited exposure to the wide variety of experiences that will contribute to the inner network of associations. For instance, if they have never been to a zoo, the sight of a dog will not stimulate associated memories of the many animals that are similar; and if they have never had the opportunity to paint, the use of a crayon will not evoke memories of other artistic media.

For many others, however, a relative paucity of associations may arise from a different source. Significant disturbances early in life may have been dealt with by the *partial solution* of displacing focus onto a related thought or activity. For example, a child who has suffered abuse or neglect may find partial relief by listening to music that expresses similar pain or that suggests aggressive responses. As has been described in a previous Letter, when a partial solution is repeatedly used, it loses its novelty and therefore its capacity to serve as a stimulus. It will continue to be effective only if it is intensified (by listening for hours on end, or turning up the volume). The increasing focus on one type of stimulus diminishes the network of mental associations; hence that individual needs an ever-increasing degree of external stimulation.

People who need external stimulation, whether by seeking “energy” in noisy restaurants, keeping the TV on non-stop, playing video games for hours on end or talking constantly with friends on the cell phone, are trying to cope with inner disturbances by the partial solution of distraction. These coping mechanisms attempt to keep the disturbance at bay, but they do not solve it. The Inner Guide, by solving the root causes of disequilibrations, frees people with this coping mechanism from their addiction-like need for noise. They can then choose their activities for their pleasure rather than as a crutch.

QUESTION:

A reader asks, “How soon after beginning self-hypnosis does one make contact with one’s Inner Guide?”

Some people’s Inner Guides work silently and never make contact with them. Others’ Inner Guides may contact them by hand signals, automatic writing or inner thought. The timing of this contact varies greatly from one person to another. Be assured that if your Inner Guide chooses to remain silent, it has determined that this is the most efficient way for it to help you.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

In response to the discussion of exercise and Pilates in the last issue, we have received an eloquent Letter to the Editor from Katherine Davis, a movement professional, in

which she compares the benefits of Pilates with those of dance and yoga. Because of its length, it is included as an addendum to this Letter.

I welcome your questions and comments, and will publish as many of them as possible. I look forward to hearing from you, either by post or at info@davis-foundation.org. If you would like to be anonymous, just let me know.

Cordially,

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

As has been the case every week, I enjoyed the last newsletter (of February 12th) very much! I thought that your description of the link between physical pathways and mental pathways was very interesting. I have thought and experimented around similar concepts for years, but was fascinated by your particular take on this concept, your articulation of it, and your application of it to your theory. As a dancer and something of a movement expert (I teach dance, Pilates, and assistant-teach yoga; I have been seriously involved in such pursuits for 14 years), I wanted to expound on your letter.

I am compelled to point out that Pilates does not truly exercise as many parts of the body as possible simultaneously, especially when compared with dance. Pilates is a series of exercises, and each one is designed to have a few specific focus points. A good Pilates instructor (or student) will find ways to integrate more and more muscle groups, to milk the exercises of every bit of potential good. But by their nature, many of the exercises place people in positions where certain muscles can relax, so that others may work (and this is a great aid towards teaching the body to focus only on what it needs to, or towards safe rehabilitation). In dance, however, because you don't get to lie down or sit, or have springs and straps providing you with resistance, you are truly using your whole body all the time (in performance, even the parts of your body that are still need to be alive and to speak, all the time). Dance is also more aerobic and therefore exercises your smooth muscles--the muscles of your lungs and heart--at the same time as it works and tones everchanging striated muscles groups in the body. As Romana [a Master Teacher of Pilates] likes to say, an advanced Pilates practitioner should make the flow of Pilates from one exercise into the next "like a beautiful dance," because it is only in dance that you are truly working all the muscles simultaneously. I agree with you that one's concentration in a dance class can become contaminated by all sorts of other things--what's seen in the mirror, competition, the quality or type of instruction and how much one responds to that particular teaching style or that choreographic style. On the other hand, in dance class you *are* learning choreography, which is unique, artistic, and different week to week, and this opens up more possibilities for more diverse varieties of mental and physical pathways to be stimulated and connected. So there are more

distractions, more possibilities for contamination, but there are also, by that same token, more possibilities for learning as well. And it should be noted that Pilates also uses mirrors, can be quite competitive, and leans heavily on quality of instruction to be effective.

One thing you did not mention is yoga. On the one hand, you do not have the same personal experience with yoga that would enable you to address it in the same depth as you addressed Pilates. On the other, yoga has a very important place in this discussion, which is why I wish to mention it. Yoga is very similar to Pilates in many ways. Actually, since yoga existed thousands of years before Pilates, and since Pilates imitates numerous yogic positions, one should reverse the order of my last sentence, and say that *Pilates* is very similar to *yoga*. In yoga, as in Pilates, you learn by doing one exercise (or pose) at a time. Later, when you are advanced, you flow through poses seamlessly. Each exercise has a handful of focal points that are key, but the potential for a good instructor or a good student to increase the focal points is endless. I would venture to say that the potential for a good teacher or student to increase the focal points of any given exercise is probably much greater in yoga (infinite potential) than in Pilates (great potential)--but because the vast majority of people who undertake yoga will go nowhere near fulfilling that potential--to some of them, this may seem a moot point. Nonetheless, the potential is there, and many people find it an inspiration towards continuing to develop their practices. Yoga is extremely non competitive. Yoga classes are taught without mirrors, which softens the mind's sense of competition with others, with the self, and also helps people avoid some of the more superficial distractions that often accompany any form of movement training (i.e., "do I look fat?"; "do I look silly doing this?"; "there's a stain on my shirt!"; "the guy to my left keeps scratching his nose!"). Ultimately yoga becomes a daily private practice, when you are seasoned and know what you are doing. Like all things, however, yoga is initially learned in classes or private lessons. In group classes, instructors teach a couple of partnering poses where students pair up, helping one another to get more out of a pose than he or she could have gotten alone--the act of interacting briefly with another student in class tends to dispel some of an individual's competitive nature. It is a short lived distraction, and one finds that right after a partnering pose, one returns to one's own mat a bit more at ease with the group, and then one is able to forget the group more easily

as one continues on with his or her own work. The goal, of course, is a daily private practice (which is the only way we can ever concentrate completely, distraction free), which can be supported by attending classes for input, learning, and connection with other humans, as wanted or needed. It is absolutely true that one cannot do the poses of yoga absolutely correctly without complete concentration, but I suspect that this is true of most things when one is shooting for excellence (i.e., if I went running I would think how much I hate it and worry and fantasize and distract myself endlessly, but an Olympic sprinter must hit that level of complete focus in order to succeed).

As a Pilates instructor and enthusiast, I enthusiastically endorse Pilates as a great form of exercise, particularly pertaining to rehabilitation and/or core conditioning. In response to The Davis Foundation's goal (development), and particularly The Davis Foundation's letter of February 12th, I wanted to call attention to yoga as a similarly engaging alternative.

Katherine Davis