

Dear Reader,

Each of us strives to maintain an optimal stimulus level. When we are understimulated, our minds seek additional stimuli in order for us to regain comfort. For example, when sitting in a doctor's or dentist's waiting room, we will probably read an available magazine (no matter how old!) unless we have had the foresight to bring our own reading material. When we are overstimulated, on the other hand, our minds work to dissipate the overstimulation by repeatedly thinking about it until its novelty wanes. If we have seen a great movie, for instance, we tend to replay the most dramatic scenes in our minds; and when we receive a piece of good news, we enjoy savoring it. Unfortunately, the mental apparatus needs to replay unpleasant stimuli, as well. Our minds will dwell on insults we have received, and agonize over faux pas we have made. Though distressing, these drawn out thinking processes are necessary in order to put the upsetting stimulus to rest.

What level of stimulation provides the greatest comfort? This varies markedly from one person to the next, and appears to be genetically determined. Studies have shown that babies who are highly excitable at birth continue to be sensitive as they grow up, while babies who are placid remain easygoing as they develop.

People who are more sensitive are often unaware that they are; they assume that others feel the same way that they do. Likewise, those who are easygoing may assume that their state is the natural one, and view sensitive people as "over-reacting" to situations.

Being highly sensitive has its pluses as well as some minuses. Those who are highly sensitive can feel pleasures more intensely, and because of their ability to discriminate between small differences, can better appreciate subtleties and complexities. For this reason, they have great potential to appreciate and create art; and to excel in situations that involve perceiving and understanding the feelings of others. However, they will be more distressed by a wide variety of unpleasant stimuli: physical, cognitive and emotional. Yet paradoxically, they tend to have a high tolerance for pain. How can this be?

A stimulus is a change. Being jostled while walking on the sidewalk, taken aback by recognizing a mistake or criticized by an acquaintance are all changes. Chronic pain, once begun, becomes a constant (until it increases, decreases, or ends). Even an intermittent pain, if it forms a pattern, loses its stimulatory capacity. Patterns are not changes. This explains why sensitive people are not *more* sensitive to pain. But why are they *less* sensitive?

When a stimulus of unbearable intensity occurs, the mental apparatus matches it with a *false solution*. This causes a mental split, or *dissociation*. The false solution doesn't end or diminish the distress; it simply provides an alternative experience in awareness. Out of awareness, the unbearable stimulus persists. This double pathway continues until the stimulus ends. A common example is denial, or negation, of acute, intense pain. Out of awareness, a mental pathway experiencing the pain continues. Within awareness, the pain is not felt. (Often, the negation is partial; the individual still feels some pain, but not its full intensity.) I know some highly sensitive people whose doctors have been amazed at their tolerance for pain. But do they access a false solution more readily than an easygoing person exposed to the same level of pain?

Yes. They access false solutions more *often* because of their greater sensitivity to intense stimuli; and the pathways that, out of awareness, experience the stimuli full force will be stored in the memory, forming a reservoir of distress. When new stimuli occur that are associatively related, they will evoke the stored distress, thus causing the individual to "over-react." This augmentation can heighten the intensity level to the point where a false solution is necessary. When this occurs, the individual *appears* more tolerant of distress, but her stimulus level is far from optimal, and she feels a non-specific discomfort.

The Inner Guide, by integrating split-off pathways, causes the "over-reaction" to distressful stimuli to end and the reservoir of distress to be emptied. It also helps the individual to handle or avoid noxious stimuli. The sensitive person is then left with the advantages of sensitivity, but without the disadvantages.

What about the easygoing individual? He is spared the discomfort of reacting to unpleasant stimuli as strongly as a sensitive person, and in fact, his even-tempered nature helps him feel enjoyably mellow. But is he destined to enjoy pleasure less intensely? The Inner Guide can help him, too. As true solutions for his disturbances are identified and implemented, the “static” caused by these disequilibrations will dissipate, allowing him to more easily access what were previously subliminal perceptions, thus increasing his sensitivity to pleasurable stimuli.

Wherever you fall in the sensitivity spectrum, your Inner Guide will work to solve the discomforts caused by unpleasant stimuli, and will enhance your capacity for enjoying the pleasures of life.

QUESTION:

As we know, when one enters the self-hypnotic state, the body typically relaxes. That is because the Inner Guide, a comfortable, serene entity, is dominant. One of our readers, however, reports that when she enters the self-hypnotic state, she sits up very straight. Why might an Inner Guide wish to sit up straight?

ANSWER:

Our Inner Guides often communicate with us non-verbally, by presenting mental images to us, causing us to move in certain ways, or causing us to position objects in particular configurations. For instance, my Inner Guide led me to hang some pictures on the wall in a specific pattern; and the Inner Guides of some people I know have communicated to me through visual cues. An Inner Guide might wish to sit up straight in order to communicate her nobility, power, and high ideals.

Why do our Inner Guides sometimes address us in this way? Sometimes a non-verbal communication is more powerful and effective than a verbal one. (Sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words.)

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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