

THE
DAVIS FOUNDATION
FOR PROVIDING
EMOTIONAL COMFORT

Letter of June 18, 2003

Dear Reader,

Some of you are going through major life events. Any change causes a disequilibrium; that is, a disturbance of one's equilibrium. A major change, whether positive or negative, provides a special opportunity for mental development. How can this happen? As you know, three steps are necessary for a habit pattern to change.

Step One: A new solution for a problem must be available and registered by the mind. For example, a young child raised by an overly demanding parent is caught in a bad situation. What are his choices? If he strives to meet the demands, he will disappoint himself as well as the parent. If he rebels, or just gives up, he will disappoint the parent even more and sabotage his own healthy development. Any of these choices will result in chronic distress. As he develops and attains autonomy and independence from the parent, a new solution will be available: that it is not necessary to over-achieve. He doesn't need to try for the impossible, and he doesn't need to rebel or give up. If he works at a comfortable rate, that will be just fine. He may or may not realize that this is the case. But even if he does, he still doesn't change. Why?

Step Two: It is not sufficient to perceive a solution, because the mind has formed a habit pattern in which a specific response has been locked in to a stimulus. In order for it to be replaced by a new solution, the link between the problem and the old solution must be broken. This can happen only if a complex stimulus occurs, a stimulus that has two contradictory meanings, causing a pause in the person's capacity to act. Suppose that, as the overachiever begins an extra assignment, his computer breaks. For a split second, he is beginning the task yet he is not beginning it. He is startled, taken aback, and pauses for a split second. This moment provides the opportunity for the new solution to be matched with the problem: he doesn't really need to do this assignment! (The mind performs these operations very rapidly, out of awareness.) Or, as the rebel determines to skip the staff meeting and go home early, he discovers that he can't find his car keys. For a moment, he is going yet he isn't going. This moment provides the opportunity for his feeling of being pressured to be matched with the true solution: the boss isn't pushing him the way his father did, and the staff meeting isn't really a strain to attend. The one who gives up may prepare to hand in a mediocre report, but as he accidentally drops it, and is handing it in yet not handing it in, his mind can match a new solution: this report wasn't so hard, and in fact the topic was quite interesting. He would have enjoyed researching it in more depth.

Step Three: When a new link has been formed, the consequences can be overwhelming. Imagine not having to work so hard anymore, or to be able to give up rebelling and enjoy the work, or to discover how interesting one's job may really be. The new solution must be replayed in the mind many times until its novelty wanes; only then can it enter awareness. It is repeated each time that its stimulus recurs. Under normal circumstances, this may or may not occur often enough to allow change during one's lifetime. How many overachievers have found relief? How many rebels have reformed? How many of the dispirited have become optimistic?

One does hear of hard-driving personalities who change their ways after having a heart attack, and prisoners who find religion. In each instance, the change occurs after a major disequilibrium (having a heart attack, being imprisoned). In these situations, not only do crucial complex stimuli occur, they are repeated many times. The executive in the hospital bed will, at many moments, be experiencing an impulse to work, yet not working. The prisoner will have frequent impulses to misbehave, yet may not be able to. When the repetitions are sufficient, a new solution can enter awareness and be acted on.

Positive major changes, such as special achievements, promotions, marriages, and so forth, can also provide the necessary complex stimuli and the requisite number of repetitions to bring about changes for the better. An overachiever who wins a championship may find that there is no longer an impossible goal to strive for. A rebel who attains a position of leadership may no longer have a superior to resist. An overjoyed newlywed may find it difficult to view the world pessimistically.

As you know, your Inner Guide works systematically to identify new solutions, create complex stimuli that interrupt old responses and replace them with new ones, and provide enough repetition for the new solutions to enter awareness and be acted on. Although it will not cause you significant discomfort itself, it will take advantage of any major disequilibrations that occur in order to accelerate the changes that will bring you the highest level of comfort. So, if adversity strikes, you will know that there is a silver lining.

QUESTION:

Several readers are unsure whether they are achieving self-hypnosis, because their minds remain busy.

ANSWER:

You will continue to think during self-hypnosis, because you and your Inner Guide are both aware. In *its* mental pathway, the Inner Guide is feeling real because, having been evoked by your wish, it has become dominant and is experiencing sensations. It is also at work repeating new solutions in its mind, to decrease their novelty so that they can enter awareness and be acted on. In *your* mental pathway, you are thinking and feeling as you usually do. If your thoughts and feelings become insufficient to maintain awareness, you will “go deep” until a stimulus occurs that ends the self-hypnotic session. The reason it is different than sleep is because part of you, the Inner Guide, is still awake.

The Letter extends its heartiest congratulations to D. M. and L. M. on their upcoming major life change. It also wishes L. V. a very speedy recovery!

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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Volume 1 Number 13

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