

THE
DAVIS FOUNDATION

FOR PROVIDING
EMOTIONAL COMFORT

Letter of August 13, 2003

Dear Reader,

What is competition? How does it develop? Every organism strives to meet its needs. When there are inadequate supplies to meet the needs of a group, individuals will attempt to out-do each other in an effort to get what they need...and what they want. Many children are raised in homes in which they are well provided for: they always have enough to eat, comfortable clothes to wear, and a roof over their heads. They also need love and attention in order to develop, and many children are blessed with that, as well. Their parents try to give them ample stimulation with conversation, toys, books, games, and trips; and also, to protect them from danger and overstimulation. Despite all this, every child has known moments of deprivation, and so is aware of the feeling, and the possibility, of need. They develop the means for satisfying these needs. Babies learn to get what they need by crying, toddlers by talking, and older children by learning the art of persuasion.

Children also discover the possibility of taking things, from siblings and playmates, and of attempting to take back when someone takes something from them. Having something taken evokes anger and aggression, which may be reciprocated, and a fight may develop. In our culture, an attempt is made to teach children not to take, but to take turns, or share. These lessons are incompletely learned, and many adults, and indeed, nations, take things that belong to others. Competition for supplies can result in war.

In addition to acquiring their material needs, people strive to maintain an optimal stimulus level in other respects. Does a person who is driving a car need to turn on the radio? If he would otherwise suffer from understimulation, yes. If his capacity for internal stimulation with thoughts and feelings is insufficiently developed or blocked, he may need external stimuli most of the time.

One way of maintaining an optimal stimulus level is by seeking more of something, because any stimulus weakens as its novelty wanes. Collectors find that as the novelty of a new possession wears off, its capacity to stimulate diminishes. Thus, they acquire more of the same, and upgrades of their possessions. For example, a collector of coins, stamps, or butterflies delights in acquiring a large collection with increasingly rare specimens. Another way of maintaining an optimal stimulus level is by elaborating or further developing an activity. A chef may feel a drive to create ever more exotic entrees. A musician will strive to increase his repertoire. A golfer will try to improve her game.

Whether it is collecting, creating, or improving a skill, the prospect of competition increases the strength of the stimulus. At times, this can be pleasurable, as during a game with friends where exercising one's skills and socializing are enjoyed and



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winning is not the major goal. Even an Olympic contender can get great pleasure from the stimulus of the competition, which may, in fact, outweigh the disappointment of not winning a medal.

Often, however, competition results in overstimulation. This occurs when the prospect of losing has distressing additional meanings, such as the loss of financial reward or self-esteem. At times a loss may result in genuine hardship, as when a person can't get a job that pays a living wage, or isn't chosen for a scholarship that would pay for college tuition. But much more often, the pain of a loss is due to maladaptive overinvestment in an activity.

When people respond to distressing stimuli, their responses become locked in and can only be changed under special circumstances. Often, a response that is initially optimal under the circumstances becomes maladaptive later. For example, a child who receives inadequate appreciation from a parent may compete with his siblings for attention, with some success. But the parent's lack of interest will become internalized and associatively related to many other situations. The child, and later the adult, will respond with the locked in habit pattern, and his tendency to compete will become generalized. To the extent that it doesn't solve his problems, it may intensify, as well. He will compete in situations where cooperation would be more useful. When golfing with friends, he may focus on winning and miss out on enjoying their company. Indeed, he may become focused on winning in every situation, contaminating all of the pleasures that he would otherwise enjoy, and at times damaging or destroying his relationships. Competition will also interfere with his ability to produce at work, and with his potential for creativity. He isn't aware of the source of his maladaptive competitive strivings. More often than not, he isn't even aware that they are maladaptive.

The Inner Guide perceives the sources of chronic disequilibrations, such as memories of parental inattention. It identifies true solutions. In the case of early deprivation, the true solution is the knowledge that, as an adult, one has the ability to provide for one's needs, both material and emotional, once maladaptive habit patterns are unlinked from their stimuli. With self-hypnosis, the Inner Guide is able to bring true solutions into awareness, allowing their fulfillment. Thus, maladaptive competition gradually disappears, but the enjoyable competition that enhances one's stimulus level remains.

QUESTION:

A reader asks, "What will my Inner Guide look like?"

ANSWER:

Remember, some Inner Guides choose to work silently, and will not provide an image of themselves. Others will. Occasionally, an Inner Guide may initially provide a temporary image to make a certain point. However, the image most often provided, the true image of the Inner Guide, will be a representation of your ideal self.

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,

Judith M. Davis

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