

THE
DAVIS FOUNDATION

FOR PROVIDING
EMOTIONAL COMFORT

Letter of September 10, 2003

Dear Reader,

Why do some people behave inconsistently? Such people may seem calm and rational much of the time, yet under certain conditions become irrationally anxious, sad, or angry. Or they may occasionally engage in behavior that is totally out of character, behavior that they, themselves, may find surprising. Or their functioning may be quite mature in most respects, yet at times seem inexplicably wanting. Sometimes they are aware of these inconsistencies, but more often than not, they are oblivious to them.

Incongruous behavior is caused by the splitting off of specific experiences as a result of their traumatic nature. How does this occur? If an experience is extremely traumatic, the mental apparatus provides a false solution to the situation, such as amnesia, or denial. ("It isn't happening.") In this way, the individual is spared from awareness of the traumatic experience. The memory bank then contains a double pathway of the event. In one track, out of awareness, the traumatic experience has been registered; the other track contains the false solution. Subsequently, when a stimulus occurs that evokes the traumatic experience, it is the false solution, the amnesia or denial that is re-experienced. However, under certain conditions, a "flashback" may occur, during which the traumatic situation breaks through to awareness, either partially or in full.

When a full flashback occurs, either during waking hours or during sleep (as a dream), the individual re-experiences the trauma as though it were happening at that moment. This occurs when some perception in the present has evoked the memory. The reason that it feels as though it is really happening in the present is because its pathway has been held separate from the rest of the mind. That pathway doesn't understand that the experience is over.

More often than not, a partial, rather than a full flashback occurs. It contains isolated bits of the experience. Most commonly, the partial flashback contains a portion of the emotion: the fear, sadness or anger. When an individual responds to a situation with an irrational exaggeration of an emotion, this occurs because the situation has stimulated an old memory, and a partial flashback, a portion of the feeling, is experienced along with the current reaction. For example, a young girl, wading in a creek, steps on some broken glass. Blood is everywhere! She is taken for treatment and many stitches are required. Although she feels great distress, a portion of her reaction is too traumatic to enter awareness, and is split off in a sequestered pathway. Later in life, her foot becomes painful, but she insists that she would never have surgery on it. Surgery may not even be indicated for this problem, but the very thought of it alarms her. Anyone might feel apprehension about the prospect of surgery, but the degree of her fear is



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excessive. The stimulus has evoked the split off anxiety and a portion of it has escaped into awareness, augmenting her response.

What about people who have episodes of behavior that are out of character? An example: a middle-aged woman has achieved significant stature in her occupation. She has overcome a number of hurdles and shown great determination to achieve her present position. Highly regarded by her peers and greatly respected by her subordinates, she manifests the highest standards in her work and carries herself with dignity. Yet in the presence of her mentor, the most knowledgeable and acclaimed person in their field, she is excessively deferential. At times, she can view her mentor realistically, and is aware of her imperfections, but nevertheless always takes her word as law. She is unaware that this behavior doesn't jibe with her otherwise mature personality, and that it interferes with her potential for independent development. This incongruous conduct arises from a split off pathway that is evoked when the mentor's presence, or influence, provides the strongest stimulus. An Inner Guide would be aware of the origins of this split off pathway, and would be able to provide a true solution for the disequilibrium that evokes it.

Split off pathways often cause lapses in otherwise effective functioning. A common example is the situation in which an individual is unable to step up to an adult challenge. This occurs when a split off part that originated in childhood is frightened by the demand for adult functioning. It feels, "I'm too little to be able to do that." (When a traumatic situation necessitates a false solution, each arm of the double pathway contains the individual's sense of identity.) The individual, unaware that he or she has this split off part, rationalizes the reluctance to do certain things.

For example, a very bright and dedicated woman had achieved a high level of skill as a practitioner in her field. Nevertheless, she felt anxious about her responsibilities, so much so that she found it hard, on getting up each morning, to face the day. Although she was aware that, with her talent and accomplishments, she could be a leader in her area of expertise, she was reluctant to take on the responsibilities that this would entail. She explained this as a dislike of administration, with its financial and supervisory tasks. A financial crisis and with it, a leadership vacuum, occurred in her organization, putting its survival at risk. Devoted though she was to her work, she was hampered in her efforts to cope with the crisis optimally because she was leery of taking on the responsibilities that would be required. If she had been able to act maturely and assertively, and to lead, she would have been able to turn the crisis into an opportunity to further the goals of her field. Unbeknownst to her, she was held back by a split off part that was afraid of the challenge, resulting in a tragedy not only for her but also for the field that she loved. An Inner Guide can not only solve the disequilibria that stimulate a split off part; it can also greatly enhance one's ability to find creative solutions to problems because of its access to one's entire memory bank and its freedom from contaminating disequilibria.

QUESTION:

"How can I keep my mind clear of thoughts while in self-hypnosis?"

ANSWER:

You don't need to. When entering self-hypnosis, first think a thought about wanting your Inner Guide to grow and develop. (You don't think this thought over and over, just once.) You

then focus on a spot high up on the wall, and think only of the spot. You may think about its color, it's size, it's shape, but you think only of the spot, and at some point your eyes will spontaneously want to close. When that happens, just let them close. As soon as they do, you have entered the self-hypnotic state, during which your Inner Guide is dominant. You no longer have to think about the spot (which you can no longer see), and you don't need to keep your mind clear of thoughts. Out of your awareness, your Inner Guide thinks its thoughts, and simultaneously, you are free to think about whatever you want to. This situation is analogous to those described above in which an individual has a split off part that thinks and feels differently. But rather than feeling young and fearful, your Inner Guide feels absolutely comfortable, and is busy thinking about solutions to your problems and disequilibrations.

QUESTION:

What if I have trouble thinking only of the spot?

ANSWER:

You can modify the procedure. You can imagine the spot to be something else, something that you would be especially interested in looking at... a painting, perhaps, or a beautiful view, preferably something that is stationary (to minimize the stimulation that it provides).

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