

THE
DAVIS FOUNDATION
FOR PROVIDING
EMOTIONAL COMFORT

Letter of November 17, 2004

Dear Reader,

In the aftermath of the election, commentators have been speculating on the extent to which the country is polarized. What causes people to feel strongly about certain issues?

As a person develops, her mental apparatus seeks the best possible responses for disequilibrations and these solutions become locked in as habit patterns. When *true solutions* are not available, as so often is the case, the mind chooses *partial solutions* and, as a last resort, *false solutions* to decrease the disequilibration.

Young children feel most secure when they have reliable adults to protect them from dangers. As they develop they find themselves in situations that require new solutions. A schoolyard conflict may evoke fight, flight, or negotiation. The chosen response becomes locked in and becomes a habit pattern. Future conflicts with similar characteristics will evoke the same response.

Hopefully, each choice will be based on a realistic assessment of the situation and will constitute a true solution. Fighting may be best to subdue a bully and fleeing may be wise in the face of overwhelming force. Non-physical conflict resolution will be best wherever possible. Once locked in, these solutions will be accessed by the mental apparatus when similar stimuli arise.

But very young children may respond with fight or flight to many situations in which negotiation would constitute a true solution, because their skills at negotiation haven't yet been developed. A child discovers that he can seize his younger brother's toy by fighting for it. Is this a true solution? No, because his brother's distress at losing the toy constitutes a disequilibration that affects both of them. Yet fighting has become locked in as a partial response to the stimulus of desired objects. As the younger brother fearfully relinquishes his toy, his surrender is only a partial solution because his brother will now be remembered as, and experienced as, a taker of toys. But yielding has become his locked-in partial solution to threats.

Subsequently, if relevant complex stimuli occur spontaneously, these habit patterns can be altered. If they persist, they will come to be employed in associatively related situations and will become generalized. The older brother will become aggressive; the younger brother timid.

How will they respond to political issues? If the older brother feels strongly about an issue, he will vigorously express his opinion. The younger brother will express his opinion diffidently. The older brother may form or lead a political action committee; the younger brother may join one. Though less assertive, the younger brother may feel equally passionate about the issue.



The Davis Foundation for
Providing Emotional Comfort
30 North Michigan Avenue
Suite 1125
Chicago, IL 60602

Tel: (312) 230-0114
Fax: (312) 230-0168
www.davis-foundation.org
info@davis-foundation.org

Strong feelings and vigorous support of them will result in polarization only when an individual is unable to absorb and appreciate the views of those who disagree with him or to acknowledge the reality of new information that may be at odds with his tenaciously held view of an issue. This will occur when his view has been employed as a false solution to a disequilibrium. Then he must sustain his view no matter what, because it has become a needed protection against an overwhelming disequilibrium.

Young children are prone to employ false solutions because they are easily overwhelmed by strong feeling. A boy who is terrified by a situation that he perceives as dangerous may access a false solution of invincibility. In one arm of the double pathway he feels indestructible. In the other arm, out of awareness, the terror continues until the danger is past. Another boy in a similar situation may access a delusion of escape. When associatively related stimuli occur in the future, the initially chosen double pathways will again be evoked. These false solutions may also become generalized and applied to related situations. The threat of war will evoke in one man the impetus to fight, with the assumption that his side will prevail. It will produce in the other man a denial of the danger and disbelief that action is necessary. Each man will be a captive of his habit pattern and will espouse his position, invasion or appeasement, whether or not it is the most appropriate response to the situation.

An Inner Guide would solve the disequilibria that cause these false solutions and allow these men to perceive dangers realistically and in all their complexity. Our Inner Guides will help us deal optimally with situations that arise when the false solutions of others create difficult circumstances.

QUESTION: I am finding that I am becoming more forgetful and recently there have been instances when I have been looking for something that I just had, but can't find. In one case, I looked through a particular stack of papers two or three times and couldn't find what I was looking for, but when I returned hours or a day later, there it was. And I will momentarily forget why I walked from one room to another. How do you distinguish (know the difference) between memory loss associated with the development of the Inner Guide and that associated with the aging process?

ANSWER: Forgetting due to aging is a gradual process unless a specific disease develops. Your forgetting came on within months. The problems that you describe are often experienced by younger people as well as older people. Momentarily forgetting why you walked from one room to another occurs as a dissociative phenomenon. It can occur when one's mind is intensely preoccupied (whether in or out of awareness) with a different thought. An Inner guide can make that happen by choosing the false solution of blocking a thought. Its purpose is to provide a complex stimulus that will allow a habit pattern to be changed. Try to accept these minor inconveniences. Sometimes you can even find them amusing.

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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