

THE
DAVIS FOUNDATION
FOR PROVIDING
EMOTIONAL COMFORT

Letter of December 1, 2004

Dear Reader,

Helping others is thought to be a virtue and not doing so may be considered self-centered, thoughtless, or even mean. But are there times when it's better not to help? What determines whether we pitch in and in what circumstances this is best?

When the mental apparatus registers a stimulus, it causes a disequilibrium that is then matched with the response that will most effectively handle that disturbance. That response gets locked in and becomes a habit pattern. If, in the future, better responses become available for that particular disequilibrium, they cannot be chosen because the previous response has been locked in. Only under certain circumstances can the habit be changed.

A girl has healthy wishes for herself that her mother characterizes as "selfish." There are two disequilibriations: her healthy wishes and her mother's criticism. What are the girl's choices? She may continue to express her wishes and incur her mother's disapproval. Or she may strive to be unselfish in order to meet her mother's expectations but in so doing suppress her legitimate desires. Her mental apparatus will match the solution that best reduces her disequilibrium.

If she works to be unselfish, there will two ongoing disequilibriations: her unfulfilled healthy wishes for herself and her inner feeling that she is "selfish" despite her efforts to be otherwise. As she struggles to remain unselfish, these efforts must become intensified or elaborated over time in order to provide the novelty necessary to maintain their effectiveness. She may even become a caricature of unselfishness.

Is her unselfishness "good?" Should she put aside her own needs to respond to those of others? Doing so would not only increase her disturbance but would create disequilibrium in the recipient, who would sense her distress. She is entitled to take care of herself and, as her own needs are met, she will become able to give comfortably to others, thus providing herself with the necessary new stimulation to maintain an optimal stimulus level.

What about the new mother who, though exhausted, drags herself out of bed to attend to her crying newborn? At that moment, his discomfort is more disequilibrating to her than her own because of his importance to her. There, too, she is attending to her own disequilibrium as she responds to his.

What about a soldier who risks his life in combat? Whether for a wounded comrade or for a cause, he is responding to the credo with which he has been indoctrinated. "You never leave a wounded member of the unit behind." "We are fighting for our country." How can these precepts override the instinct to survive?



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A change constitutes a stimulus and the greater the change the more disequilibrating it is. The threat of death is an extreme disequilibrium because the difference between life and death represents the greatest change that an individual is subject to. In the face of such an overwhelming stimulus the mental apparatus matches a false solution. In one arm of the double pathway the soldier is terrified of dying while in the other arm he denies the possibility of death. He may be aware of danger and feel frightened, but that portion of the disequilibrium which is overwhelming does not enter awareness.

As with the woman who helps others either laboriously as a partial solution or freely as a true solution, the soldier may follow orders because he is compelled to or because he accepts their value. A soldier who believes in what he is doing may have a shorter life, and may suffer the disequilibrations of hunger, fatigue, and fear, but his bravery will constitute a true solution to the challenges that he is confronted with.

A soldier who risks his life because of peer pressure or coercion carries a greater burden. Like the girl who labors to be unselfish to avoid criticism, he utilizes the partial solution of compliance in addition to his denial of danger.

How can you know whether you are burdening yourself with compliant responses to the expectations and requests of others? If helping has become a maladaptive habit pattern you will do it automatically. It will seem like second nature and you probably won't realize that it isn't good for you. Fortunately your Inner Guide has identified this problem and the solution for it, and is working to bring this knowledge into your awareness.

QUESTION:

Why do I fall off my schedule for doing self-hypnosis?

ANSWER:

Pavlov found that unrewarded behavior becomes extinguished. Often the rewards for doing self-hypnosis are not immediately apparent. Sometimes changes don't occur for days, weeks, or months. And sometimes changes occur early but don't appear to be directly related to self-hypnosis.

Also, many of us have found that there are times when we are simply too busy to do self-hypnosis for a day or even a week. The most disequilibrating stimulus at any given moment enters awareness and remains until a greater disequilibrium occurs. Whenever a stimulus that requires our attention, action, and time overrides the wish to do self-hypnosis, it will prevail until it is dealt with. You should not feel guilt or regret if you find that other activities temporarily put self-hypnosis on the back burner. You can resume as soon as conditions allow.

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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