

THE
DAVIS FOUNDATION
FOR PROVIDING
EMOTIONAL COMFORT

Letter of March 9, 2005

Dear Reader,

As we strive to attain emotional comfort by using self-hypnosis to develop our Inner Guides, we are confronted with a possible stumbling block: "The Status Syndrome." Described by the epidemiologist Michael Marmot in his new book of that title, this syndrome refers to one's place in society's pecking order and its influence on health. Through many carefully controlled studies in a variety of countries, he and his colleagues have demonstrated that the degree of health corresponds to a social gradient: the higher our status in society, the healthier we will be and the longer we will live. We all know that the conditions of poverty breed illness, but Sir Michael demonstrates that a gradient exists throughout the span of education, income, and stature. A person with a Ph.D. lives longer than one with a master's degree, and he lives longer than one with a bachelor's degree. An actor who wins an Academy Award lives longer than one who is nominated but doesn't win. As it seems impossible to eliminate these distinctions, are those of us who are not at the "top" doomed to less than optimal health and life span?

Why does health vary with the social gradient? One factor is the degree of autonomy afforded an individual. Each descending employment level offers less autonomy than the preceding one. Lack of autonomy is associated with increased stress that, in turn, affects the physiological processes that lead to a number of illnesses. The perception of autonomy can vary depending on who is determining it. An employee may feel that he has more, or less, autonomy than his employer judges. Both measurements correlate to some degree with health.

Another factor is the degree of connection with and participation in one's social milieu. The higher our occupational status, the more opportunities we have to participate in the organizations and activities of our culture. Deprivation leads to isolation, which also causes increased stress.

Sir Michael urges that we press for political and societal changes that will assist all members of society to develop to their fullest. If we can lessen the social gradient, our society's health will improve.

An Inner Guide's goal is to help one attain emotional comfort by ending chronic disequibrations and handling new ones expeditiously. As people develop, there are many instances in which they experience disequibrations for which there is no *true solution*. These disturbances are matched with the best *partial solutions* available and they become locked in and form habit patterns. When subsequent disturbances occur, they are automatically matched with the previously chosen partial solution even if a better solution has become available.

What habit patterns might cause us trouble as we live in our level of the social gradient? When we were young, our autonomy was limited. On many occasions, we



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were told to do things that we didn't want to, or not allowed to do things we did want to. Our responses may have included feeling sad or angry, expressing those feelings, rebelling, avoiding, passively complying, passively not complying, or attempting to manipulate the situation. Our responses became locked in and, unless changed by special circumstances, continue to be matched with new stimuli that represent challenges to our autonomy. These partial solutions have become second nature and, although we take them for granted, they cause ongoing disequilibrium that contributes to our stress level.

What habits contribute to isolation? In order to connect with and participate in our social milieu we need to be open to intimacy and interested in our surroundings. Children who suffer at the hands of unempathic parents chose the partial solutions that best decrease their distress, sometimes erecting protective barriers that preclude intimacy. And some individuals are burdened with a number of maladaptive habits that cause them to feel depleted and to be self-absorbed.

Locked-in habits can be changed only in the presence of a *complex stimulus*, one that signifies two contradictory meanings simultaneously. The resulting pause in response allows a new solution to be locked in. Complex stimuli occur spontaneously, but an Inner Guide creates them systematically and efficiently to end discomfort.

Sir Michael quotes Amartya Sen in *Inequality Reexamined* as explaining that the "space" in which one measures equality can vary and can be chosen. We can compare ourselves with others in terms of income or of various capabilities. But as we develop our Inner Guides, we find that we have stopped comparing ourselves with others altogether. As our unwanted habits disappear and our problems are solved we will be able to develop our capabilities to their fullest. We will have attained emotional comfort and, with it, the pleasure of entering a new social space that has no gradient. We will take pleasure in our own uniqueness and in the uniqueness of all of those around us.

QUESTION:

People talk about certain illnesses or conditions being psychosomatic. Could one's inner guide make him or her physically ill to disrupt a locked in pattern of behavior?

ANSWER:

An Inner Guide would not want to make you sick. Even if it wanted to, all it could do would be to influence you to stay up too late or work too hard so that you would become run down and vulnerable to illness. It doesn't have the power to directly cause an illness. Some people find that an Inner Guide may cause minor injuries (like a stubbed toe or a slightly pulled muscle) for the purpose of creating complex stimuli, so that habit patterns can be changed. But although we may occasionally be subject to such manipulations, our Inner Guides' intent is not only to ultimately end all discomfort, but also to enable us to feel increasing comfort and pleasure all along the way.

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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