

THE
DAVIS FOUNDATION

FOR PROVIDING
EMOTIONAL COMFORT

Letter of April 20, 2005

Dear Reader,

A recent article in *The New York Times* reports that many people are not saving enough for a comfortable retirement. Of all workers, over half have saved less than \$25,000. Of those over 55, less than 20% have saved \$250,000 or more. One survey found that 68% of respondents reported saving too little and, of those, only 24% said they would increase their savings. Only 3% actually had done so four months after the survey.

Experiments show that people tend to favor immediate rewards. They would rather enjoy what their money can buy now than enjoy the prospect of a comfortable future. Brain scans show that this behavior is controlled by the hippocampus, which is said to respond to immediate stimuli, whereas thoughtfulness about the future emanates from the prefrontal cortex.

Another determinate of behavior is the principal of inertia. Workers who are offered the chance to opt in to a savings plan tend not to, whereas if workers are offered the chance to opt out of such a plan, they also tend not to. Whatever the design, workers tend to stick to the default choice.

The article suggests that efforts to help will involve tinkering with the hippocampus or developing new pills that will help shun temptation. But we know a more “natural” method for taking good care of ourselves.

We understand why many people tend to spend rather than save. They have become subject to locked-in spending habits that persist even though they are maladaptive. Early in life people experience disequibrations for which there is no *true solution*. Perhaps their parents were unloving, unempathic, or inattentive, causing them to seek material possessions as substitutes. Or perhaps their parents favored a sibling, causing them to feel envious and to compete by becoming acquisitive. Sometimes an unresolved Oedipal complex will cause a person to strive to acquire wealth in an attempt to become important and powerful. These responses, *partial solutions*, become habit patterns that are locked in and matched automatically with new associatively related stimuli. They tend to become generalized and intensified over time, causing affected people to feel a need to use all of their financial resources for these purposes.

Some who have experienced early trauma have utilized the *false solutions* of amnesia or denial. These, too, can generalize so that affected people become oblivious to many dangers. They will deny the possibility of insufficient retirement funds.

The mind responds to disequibrations by striving to end or diminish them. The strongest disequibrations have priority because their solution will make the greatest contribution toward re-establishing an *optimal stimulus level*. Worry about retirement is



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rarely foremost in one's mind (before retirement is at hand!) and more immediate concerns usually take priority. How is it that anyone is able to save?

Some are fortunate enough to have their lives so in order that they are able to plan beyond their immediate concerns. Others have acquired various habit patterns which, though maladaptive partial solutions, do result in focus on the future. People who are excessively conscientious, compulsive, or anxiety-ridden may save for retirement to quell their discomfort. While the result is beneficial, the habit pattern is not because the maladaptive response does not solve the original problem for which it was created, and it creates new disequilibrium, itself.

What about the principle of inertia? Why do workers select the default choice? Variation from a standard creates uncertainty, which causes a disequilibrium. Many workers who are entering a new employment situation are already confronted with uncertainty and don't want to add to it. Even if the choice is presented to them at some other point, when they have been with the company for a while, they will find it disequilibrating if they aren't familiar with it.

An Inner Guide is aware of the need for retirement savings and, because it feels no discomfort, does not need to use partial solutions. Nor is it disturbed by varying from a default position. Our Inner Guides will see to it that we are adequately prepared for retirement.

QUESTION:

Can self-hypnosis prolong my life?

ANSWER:

Yes. We feel intuitively that stress is hard on us and may wear us out, but now there is scientific evidence that this is the case. As we age, the telomeres on the ends of the chromosomes in our cells shorten. When they disappear, the cells die. A well-controlled study, reported in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, found that the telomeres of women under stress were shorter than those of others. The longer a woman had been under stress, the shorter her telomeres were. Some women's telomeres reflected up to seventeen years of aging beyond their chronological age. As you continue with self-hypnosis, you will eliminate more and more sources of tension and will reach a state in which stress is negligible.

Also, over time your Inner Guide will help you achieve the most beneficial lifestyle with a healthy diet, enjoyable exercise, and maintenance of an optimal weight. And it will monitor your health, alerting you to early signs of illness so that you can take prompt action when necessary.

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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