

THE  
DAVIS FOUNDATION

FOR PROVIDING  
EMOTIONAL COMFORT

Letter of October 5, 2005

Dear Reader,

Is giving always a good thing? The mind matches every stimulus with the solution that best resolves the disequilibrium. A *true solution* will end a disturbance completely but, if one is not available, a *partial or false solution* will be chosen. Giving, whether a positive or negative action, is often a partial solution.

A girl whose mother frequently criticized her for being “selfish” developed the partial solution of giving as a way of coping with this disequilibrium. While giving she felt unselfish and thought that she appeared so to her mother as well. She experienced momentary relief at these times. But because her mother had a need to view her daughter as selfish, that opinion remained and the girl was aware of it. And despite her efforts to be giving, the girl felt guilty for continuing to have “selfish” wishes. The response of giving was locked in, as all responses are, and became a habit pattern. Because it didn’t completely end her distress, it became elaborated and intensified and she became compulsive in her giving.

This pattern continued in her adulthood. She remained chronically distressed because she wasn’t able to satisfy her legitimate wishes and her giving never felt like enough. The recipients of her giving were made uneasy because they sensed that it didn’t come from a genuine and accurate appreciation of their needs but rather from a need of her own. When giving is done for this reason it often misses the mark. The gift is not necessarily what the recipient most needs. This kind of giving is unhealthy for the giver and often unpleasant for the recipient.

Another girl, whose parents viewed her as inadequate, matched her distress with the response of working very hard to disprove it. This overwork was also a partial solution. It didn’t change her parents’ view of her and, in fact, she internalized their opinion. As she labored to disprove it her exertion stressed her and deprived her of enjoying leisure pursuits. As an elaboration of overworking she developed the habit of giving to others to prove that she was more competent than they were. These recipients, too, were made uncomfortable by her giving as they sensed that it was an expression of her competitive feelings toward them.

A man whose parents had viewed him as bad was chronically distressed and, out of awareness, felt very angry. He developed a habit pattern of giving as an angry response to his parents. His giving meant, “I’m nice, unlike you.”

Another man whose parents had neglected him denied his deprivation but, out of awareness, felt very needy. He projected this neediness onto others and attempted to give to them so that he could vicariously feel given to. Here, too, giving was a partial solution. The denial was a false solution. The mental apparatus responds to a stimulus



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by creating a double pathway. In one arm, out of awareness, the unbearable distress continues while, in the other arm, a false solution is experienced.

All of the giving described above originated in response to an individual's distress and occurred as a partial solution to that distress. Although it may have been elicited by a recipient's need, it was colored and influenced by the giver's need.

Giving also occurs when an individual is disequibrated by positive stimuli. When a positive event causes overstimulation the individual must repeat various partial solutions until the novelty wanes and equilibrium is restored. Someone who wins a lottery or receives a large inheritance may give financial gifts as one partial solution. A person who earns very good grades may help others with their studies. And a person who develops a relationship with a very loving partner will re-establish equilibrium by returning that love and perhaps by loving others as well. Here, too, there is the possibility that the giving is driven more by the giver's need than by the recipient's.

Can giving ever be a true solution? When a person is emotionally comfortable he can accurately perceive the needs of others. These needs will disequilibrate him because they signify distress. By giving help he solves the recipient's distress and also his own. This giving is a true solution because it ends his disequilibration.

As our Inner Guides solve our chronic disequilibrations we will no longer need to give in order to cope with those discomforts. We will be able to perceive our surroundings accurately and we will enjoy giving in a way that truly meets recipients' needs.

*QUESTION:*

Is anger at someone necessarily a negative thing? Can it sometimes serve as a protection? If so, I suspect it should be followed up with more assertiveness toward the other person as opposed to "stewing in silence."

*ANSWER:*

Anger can be a very positive thing. If someone is abusing you, it is normal to feel angry. This is a partial solution. The way not to be consumed by anger, however, is to deal with the situation as soon as you start to feel angry. There are several ways to do that. In some situations, all that is required is to give a "non-response," that is, silence or the most minimal comment. If that doesn't suffice, you can then make a gentle but firm comment to the effect that you don't agree with her and don't want to discuss it any more. If that doesn't suffice, if she hounds you, you can break off contact with her (temporarily or permanently). By dealing with the situation, you will stop "stewing" and actually feel empowered.

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](mailto:info@davis-foundation.org). If you would like to be anonymous, just let me know.

Cordially,

*Judith M. Davis*

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