

THE
DAVIS FOUNDATION
FOR PROVIDING
EMOTIONAL COMFORT

Letter of November 16, 2005

Dear Reader,

Thanksgiving Day will be here soon. It is a time when we can be especially aware of the things we are thankful for. Hopefully we feel thankful all the time for the good things we have but the cues of this special day should serve to intensify the feeling.

Unfortunately some people are unable to feel thankful. They may be focused on the things that they don't have. Bitterness over perceived deprivation or envy of those who have more may monopolize their awareness. Why is it that many people with less are more able to feel thankful than some who have much more?

The mental apparatus strives to maintain an optimal stimulus level. Every stimulus causes a disequilibrium and is matched with the response that most effectively ends or diminishes it. A *true solution* is one that ends the disturbance completely. If there is no immediate true solution, the mind chooses the *partial solution* that will most effectively diminish the disturbance. Feelings such as bitterness and envy are partial solutions.

Feelings are among the first partial solutions that we learn at the beginning of life. Some feelings are innate responses: they originate as automatic reactions to distress. As time goes on they are chosen by the mental apparatus because it has learned that they diminish discomfort. The hungry infant cries reflexively but soon learns that crying brings food.

Other responses are learned from the people around us, especially our parents. Our minds register their solutions to problems, which we then adopt, as we need them. But how is it that siblings can be so different? Each sibling has his or her own unique environment: birth order, changing family circumstances, shifting moods of parents, different sets of friends, and different experiences at school. Thus one person may develop into an optimist while his brother becomes a pessimist. One may be able to enjoy the feeling of thankfulness whereas the other is preoccupied with unmet needs.

A loss evokes feelings of depression or sadness, and an attack evokes anger. Although these feelings are uncomfortable themselves, they nevertheless diminish the disequilibrium that is caused by a painful stimulus. They become habit patterns. Over time we develop elaborations and intensifications of these feelings because if they remained static they would lose their stimulatory capacity and their effectiveness in diminishing discomfort.

We may experience depression over abstract losses as well as concrete ones. Losing a job or being demoted may be upsetting due to the loss of income but it will also cause depression because of the loss of status. We will respond with anger to symbolic, as well as real, attacks and we may develop varieties of anger: irritation, resentment, hatred, and bitterness. These feelings may become generalized over time so that they are evoked by a wide variety of situations.



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

These habit patterns, once locked in, can be changed only in the presence of a *complex stimulus*: one that signifies two contradictory meanings simultaneously, causing a pause that allows a better solution to be locked in. Many complex stimuli occur spontaneously; hence many habit patterns do change over time. But habit patterns that have become intensified and generalized require many complex stimuli to unlock the network of pathways. It is unlikely that an entrenched characteristic such as bitterness or envy will change spontaneously.

Because habit patterns of feelings become engrained very early in life, they persist regardless of external circumstances. I have known poor people who are blessed with a buoyant mood and wealthy people who are pessimistic, bitter, and envious.

Although undesirable mindsets are locked in, an Inner Guide can alter them by creating complex stimuli that will allow new attitudes to replace them. Some people are overly optimistic and unable to perceive potential dangers that they should attend to. An Inner Guide will help them become more realistic without destroying their positive feeling about life. And those who are unable to enjoy life or to appreciate the good things they have will find that these problems gradually disappear as they do self-hypnosis regularly. Happy Thanksgiving!

QUESTION:

Can I do self-hypnosis while I swim laps? It's a monotonous activity and may be conducive to entering the self-hypnotic state.

ANSWER:

You can try it and see whether you feel you are entering the state. Some people are able to do self-hypnosis while engaging in monotonous forms of exercise.

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