

THE  
DAVIS FOUNDATION  
FOR PROVIDING  
EMOTIONAL COMFORT

Letter of February 22, 2006

Dear Reader,

The winter Olympics are currently being held in Italy and we have the opportunity to see the best athletes in the world perform. Some do so flawlessly while others err under pressure after having performed perfectly during practices. Their faulty performances are attributed to “pressure.” Yet some athletes like pressure. What is pressure and how can it interfere with their activity? And with ours?

Every stimulus that is registered causes a disequilibrium and the mental apparatus accesses the best solution for it. A *true solution* ends a disequilibrium but, if no true solution is available, the mind matches the stimulus with a *partial solution*: one that diminishes but does not end the disequilibrium. The discomfort that remains causes “mental static” that interferes with the ability to think and act clearly.

An Olympic athlete is bombarded with stimuli: the thrill of performing at the most prestigious games, anxiety about performing well, fear and possible envy of fellow competitors, concerns about the performance facilities and conditions, worries about living up to expectations, concern about staying well, fear of potential injury, hopes for financial rewards through endorsement opportunities, and, in some instances, anxiety about keeping promises to win (e.g. for an ill or deceased relative). There are no apparent true solutions for these stimuli before the outcome of the competition and so the mental apparatus matches them with partial solutions.

Before the performance the athlete engages in thoughts and activities that discharge some of his tension or create distractions. He may think about aspects of his performance, daydream that he has won, pace about or exercise, talk with his peers, listen to music, or play computer games. But some degree of disequilibrium remains.

Once his event begins, he must focus on his performance. Through practice he has developed a mental pathway of the task and now the stimulation of the event evokes that pathway. Accompanying pathways will include all of his fears and concerns and also, hopefully, the feeling of pleasure at exercising his skills, heightened by the presence of an appreciative audience.

When errors occur they are often attributed to a “lapse of concentration.” A competing stimulus has entered awareness and interferes with the task. But the interference occurs not because a stimulus has entered awareness but because it has momentarily become the most intense stimulus. (The strongest stimulus at any given moment enters awareness and remains there until a stronger one displaces it.) The strongest stimulus is the one to which the athlete responds most intensely. Fears of failure or of injury can cause misjudgment or evoke excessive caution. Untimely thoughts of victory may result in recklessness.



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Athletes who are undone by pressure are those with intense levels of anxiety and concern. Those who enjoy pressure are those whose performance is augmented by the heightened stimulus of competition, exhibitionism, and pleasure in executing skills. Intense overstimulation, even if positive, will interfere with an ideal performance. How does one develop an optimal stimulus level?

Some athletes have used “visualization” to improve their performance. They repeatedly enter a feeling state like an intense daydream during which they visualize performing their routine perfectly. They are using self-hypnosis to develop a mental pathway that can be evoked at the time of the event to enable them to perform optimally.

People use self-hypnosis for a variety of purposes: providing anesthesia during medical or dental procedures, ending unwanted habits, or attaining relaxation and peace. In each instance, the individual creates a new mental pathway that fulfills the wished-for function.

An Inner Guide is a mental pathway that will provide all of these benefits. It consists of three things: the pathway of all past experiences of comfort, a wish to be helpful, and a sense of its own identity. Its goal is to make us comfortable in every way. When we create an Inner Guide and do self-hypnosis regularly to facilitate its work we will gradually shed uncomfortable feelings and unwanted habits. But constant peace would become uncomfortable; it would be boring because it would not provide an optimal stimulus level. For that we need new challenges. Our Inner Guides will provide these, too. And by titrating their level and eliminating the sources of mental static it will enable us to perform them optimally.

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*QUESTION:*

Does a major stressful episode interfere with the Inner Guide’s work?

*ANSWER:*

No, it actually enhances it by providing intense disequibration. The uncertainty that one experiences while disequibrated provides *complex stimuli* that allow maladaptive habit patterns to be unlocked.

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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*