

THE  
DAVIS FOUNDATION

FOR PROVIDING  
EMOTIONAL COMFORT

Letter of May 3, 2006

Dear Reader,

Most of us have had difficulty concentrating at one time or another. For some this is a frequent, or even constant, interference. What causes this?

The mind is constantly bombarded with stimuli, which cause disequibrations. All stimuli are perceived by the mental apparatus which, in order to restore equilibrium, must solve them. A *true solution* is one that solves a disequibration completely. If you are tired and able to go to bed at that moment, the immediate availability of rest is a true solution. If you must complete a task first, you may think about the fact that you can go to bed soon. That thought is a *partial solution* because it partially diminishes your distress.

What if a person is kept awake for an unbearably long time (as in studies of sleep deprivation)? His mind will create a double pathway, a dissociation, during which two mental pathways will exist simultaneously. In one pathway the unendurable distress continues, out of awareness, while in the other pathway a *false solution* occurs: a delusion that he can now sleep and perhaps a hallucination that he is in bed.

The majority of stimuli that are registered by the mental apparatus are subliminal and most of them are of no significance. (It doesn't matter to us whether the room temperature has gone up or down a degree or whether our heartbeat has increased or decreased by one or two beats per minute.) The mind matches these subliminal stimuli with the true solution that they are of no importance and can be disregarded. Of the stimuli that do reach awareness many of those, too, are not significant. For those that are the mind will match them with the best available response.

The goal of the mental apparatus is to provide comfort by maintaining an optimal stimulus level. Overstimulation is traumatic and, when unavoidable, is matched with the partial solution of repetition so that its novelty will wane. When a person commits a faux pas he ruminates on it until the intensity of his embarrassment diminishes. And when a person wins a race she relives the victory until her excitement lessens. When an event is unbearably overstimulating, a false solution is matched. The woman who learns that her children have been killed may lose awareness (she faints). The person who wins the lottery initially denies it ("I can't believe it."). Fainting and denial are false solutions.

Understimulation is also uncomfortable because it results in boredom. The mental apparatus solves this disequibration by matching it with new stimuli. While commuting to work, running an errand, or standing in line many people listen to their iPods. If the music is sufficiently pleasing it provides a true solution. They don't feel bored. But sometimes a person feels trapped in an understimulating situation. Perhaps she is studying for a test and must memorize many facts. She may occasionally pause



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and daydream, or she may take unnecessary coffee breaks. These are partial solutions because they are unsatisfying. She feels she should be studying. When understimulation is extreme, as during experiments on sensory deprivation, the subjects' minds will again create false solutions of delusions and hallucinations, in this instance to provide needed stimulation.

Understimulation is one reason why people have trouble concentrating. If a person is trying to focus on something that is insufficiently stimulating, such as a boring task, it will be hard for him to maintain his focus on it. His mind will wander in order to provide more stimulation. Perhaps the task is genuinely understimulating, as was the student's need to memorize many facts. But often a person finds certain activities boring for other reasons. Perhaps she has made a poor career choice and finds her work difficult because she is ill suited for it. She may be distracted because her passion lies elsewhere. Or she may suffer from unresolved problems for which her partial or false solutions become maladaptive and create "mental static" that interferes with clear thinking.

Overstimulation also interferes with concentration. The mental repetition that it evokes monopolizes thought. Mental repetitions of a faux pas or a victory also constitute "mental static." Even when enjoyable they interfere with concentration.

Of course the quality of a stimulus is important, too. Responses of anxiety, depression, and anger interfere with concentration. Sometimes this is obvious but many people live with chronic painful feelings that they come to take so for granted that it doesn't occur to them that these feelings hinder their concentration.

An Inner Guide can solve all of these problems. It gradually eradicates interfering feelings and it works to minimize variations from an optimal stimulus level. As long as we do self-hypnosis regularly it has the opportunities it needs to solve our problems and end our discomforts.

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*QUESTION:*

Can people with ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) concentrate well enough to do self-hypnosis?

*ANSWER:*

Unless their disability is very severe, yes. I have seen some people with this disorder who are able to do self-hypnosis easily.

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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*

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