

THE
DAVIS FOUNDATION
FOR PROVIDING
EMOTIONAL COMFORT

Letter of November 1, 2006

Dear Reader,

A tragic event recently occurred in our office building. A dermatologist was found stabbed to death in his office and a man with a bloodstained shirt was seen leaving the building. As of this writing, the police don't think this act was part of a robbery but, rather, they suspect that the perpetrator may have been a patient. This certainly makes sense because a professional thief would strive to be inconspicuous. Why might a patient kill his doctor?

When the mental apparatus registers an overwhelming stimulus it protects the mind by creating a double pathway: a *dissociation*. In one arm the stimulus continues unabated while in the other a *false solution* occurs. False solutions include denial, avoidance, delusions, hallucinations, anesthetics, amnesias, depersonalization (a feeling of being detached from the self), and loss of awareness (fainting).

The intense feeling associated with the unbearable experience is retained out of awareness and can be evoked by an associatively related stimulus. A veteran hearing a car backfire may dive for the ground. This stimulus, associatively related to exploding munitions, is matched with the same response that occurred during battle: fear and a self-protective action. He has experienced a flashback.

When we remember something from the past we are simultaneously aware that we are now existing in the present. But when a stimulus evokes the split-off experience of a dissociated event, an individual isn't remembering: he is reliving. This is a flashback. There is no awareness that this experience occurred in the past and is now over; no simultaneous awareness that he is in the present.

Everyone has had overwhelming stimuli at times. These experiences are especially likely to occur in early childhood when all experiences are more intense due to their newness. Also, because a child is small and vulnerable, many experiences seem more powerful than they would to an adult. Although a current stimulus can sometimes evoke a full flashback, partial flashbacks are much more common. During a partial flashback only a portion of the experience is relived, most commonly just the feeling. Whenever we experience a feeling that is out of proportion to the stimulus, it is a partial flashback.

As you can see, flashbacks may vary in intensity and in consequences. A person at a movie may be so saddened by the story that she has to leave in the middle. The plot has evoked the feeling from a split-off experience that was unbearably sad. She regains her composure later and no one else has suffered. A child who dissociated during a frightening medical procedure may develop an aversion to doctors and hospitals because they are stimuli that would evoke a flashback of terror if they were encountered. This phobia can be dangerous when needed medical assistance is



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subsequently avoided. A person who develops road rage is responding to a perceived slight by another driver with the feeling from a split-off experience that was overwhelmingly enraging. This situation may, rarely, escalate and culminate in violence.

The mental apparatus matches every stimulus with the response that will best diminish the disequilibrium. Sometimes the best response is fight; other times it is flight. A soldier will try to evade an incoming missile but will attack an onrushing enemy soldier. Dangers in civilian life such as muggings and rapes are responded to similarly. Flashbacks will follow the same pattern as the original response because they are relivings of the initial event.

We all have had one or more split-off experiences from our early years that have been expressed as partial flashbacks: exaggerated anxiety, sadness, or anger. Inner Guides eliminate these discomforts just as they do all others: by accessing a true solution, providing a complex stimulus to unlock the previous response and lock the new one in, and then working to bring the new solution into awareness. For most traumas, the true solution is that the experience is now over.

Our Inner Guides can also help protect us, with their subliminal perceptions, from flashbacks that are being experienced by others, by sensing the emotional states and tension levels of the people around us.

QUESTION:

I have unpleasant dreams. Can my Inner Guide cause them to stop?

ANSWER:

Dreams are nocturnal flashbacks. Daytime stimuli don't evoke flashbacks when stronger stimuli occupy awareness, but those flashbacks then occur during sleep when other stimuli are minimal. Your Inner Guide knows the sources of your flashbacks and is working to bring new solutions into awareness. You may or may not recover the original memories but at some point you will no longer be troubled by them. The dreams will end and so will any other types of distress associated with them.

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