

THE
DAVIS FOUNDATION
FOR PROVIDING
EMOTIONAL COMFORT

Letter of April 4, 2007

Dear Reader,

Often people have difficulty letting go of something they no longer need. Habits, possessions, ideas, and attitudes often outlive their usefulness. All of these are habit patterns that have become locked in but even after they have become unlocked they may persist. Why does this occur?

A woman who overeats because of loneliness may come to realize that her wish for food is associatively related to her unfulfilled wish for an empathic mother. Yet she continues to overeat because despite her intellectual realization this *partial solution* remains locked in. It can only be unlocked during very specific circumstances. First, a *true solution* must be available. She must realize that, as an adult, she no longer needs her mother and will be able to find love from others.

Second, an associatively related *complex stimulus* must occur. A complex stimulus is one that conveys two contradictory meanings, causing a pause before the mental apparatus matches a response. If she were to sit down to eat and realize that she had forgotten to set the table, she would simultaneously think that she could eat and that she could not yet eat. This pause would allow the mental apparatus to match the true solution.

Finally, a repetition of the true solution must occur repeatedly until its novelty wanes and it can enter awareness and be acted on. But sometimes even after all this has happened an individual remains unable to change a habit.

A hidden *false solution* has complicated matters. When the mental apparatus is traumatically overstimulated it creates a double pathway: in one arm the disequilibrium continues, out of awareness, while in the other arm a person experiences an alternate perception, such as a hallucination (or lack of perception, as with denial or amnesia). While a partial solution decreases the disequilibrium caused by a stimulus, a false solution does not. The distress continues in full force out of awareness. It creates a reservoir of discomfort.

Young children are very vulnerable to being traumatically overstimulated for several reasons. Because they are young everything that happens seems new and therefore more stimulating than if it had become commonplace. Also, young children feel more vulnerable than adults because of their relative helplessness. And because of their limited knowledge and experience they are more likely to misjudge benign situations as dangerous. The great majority of dissociations occur during childhood.

In a double pathway created by traumatic overstimulation the arm in which the disequilibrium continues out of awareness is associated, as all pathways are, with a



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sense of its own identity. Because it is split off from one's own pathways its identity is different. If the trauma recurs, new instances of distress experienced by this identity cause the pathway to grow. However the pathway's identity remains limited because it is aware only during the traumatic moments. It knows only discomfort. Because it has almost no access to all the other aspects of life experience it doesn't grow up but remains stuck in childhood. When a current stimulus resembles a past traumatic one it evokes the attention, and the response, of the young pathway: fear, pain, rage, or depression that is disproportionate to the present situation.

Although the woman who overeats may overcome her own need for that partial solution she may have a young part who still needs it. That problem, too, must be solved before the woman can eat healthfully. The young part needs to learn that the past is over, that current stimuli which resemble past traumas don't have the same significance, and that life is much fuller and more pleasant than she had previously realized. Only then can she let go of the need to overeat. This change is very difficult to effect without special help.

A person may cling to a possession, an idea, or an attitude in order to maintain comfort. He might carry a talisman, such as a rabbit's foot, for good luck even though he knows that it has no power. He has a young part that still uses magical thinking. He might hang on to the erroneous idea that he could succeed at some unlikely ambition, a false solution to a young part's traumatic feelings of defectiveness. Or he may view the world through rose-colored glasses, denying all danger, as the result of many early traumas that have caused this false solution to generalize.

Some of these erroneous ideas and behavior are trivial but others can deprive a person of comfort and effectiveness. Fortunately our Inner Guides know how to resolve these difficulties so that we can let go of unnecessary habit patterns as whatever young parts we have relax and mature.

QUESTION:

I have been skimming books that I want to know about such as parenting. My understanding is even if my conscious mind is missing the words my Inner Guide is taking it all in. Is this so?

ANSWER:

Yes. The mental apparatus registers all of our perceptions and they are all stored in our memory banks. An Inner Guide can access that store of memories for whatever knowledge will be helpful in any given situation.

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

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