

Enlightenment, DP/DR & Falling Into the Pit of the Void ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 What is DPDR?

00:00:06 DPDR. It's an abbreviation for Depersonalization Derealization Disorder.

00:00:17 And it is a subject that I am very interested in as a teacher of meditation.

00:00:25 I sometimes refer to it as enlightenment's evil twin.

00:00:33 As the result of successful practice with classic mindfulness,

00:00:43 a person comes to an experience of the no-thingness of themselves

00:00:51 and the no-thingness of their world.

00:00:57 And that is for that person the most fulfilling and empowering event of their life.

00:01:10 It allows them to live ten times the size that they would have lived otherwise.

00:01:17 It frees them from fears and concerns.

00:01:23 It meaning the emptiness, the nothingness, the paper-thinness of the world,

00:01:31 and the non-existence of self as thing.

00:01:37 Those fulfill that person.

00:01:40 They give that person a sense of absolute freedom.

00:01:47 They give that person a sense of profound repose

00:01:56 and direct contact with their spiritual source.

00:02:00 So it's a kind of rich and wonderful and empowering nothingness.

00:02:07 The evil twin of that is DPDR.

00:02:14 It's also an experience of the nothingness of self

00:02:19 and the paper-thinness and insubstantiality of what you formerly thought was the world.

00:02:28 However, the effect on the person that has this condition

00:02:33 —and by the way, it is a recognized psychopathology,

00:02:39 it's a diagnosis, it's in the manuals, in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual—

00:02:46 the effect of this experience of emptiness and nothingness

00:02:52 on a person that has DPDR is the diametric opposite.

00:02:56 It is the exact opposite of the effect of enlightenment.

00:03:03 And it is possible that the nothingness is the same nothingness.

00:03:11 So then, what's the difference?

00:03:15 To me this is a huge, huge question,

00:03:19 both a theoretical question and a practical question.

00:03:23 The theoretical question asks us to look in a new way

00:03:29 and in a deeper way at what enlightenment is.

00:03:35 Why can it be so empowering and fulfilling,

00:03:42 the it meaning this nothingness, for one person

00:03:46 and have the opposite effect on another?

00:03:48 So that's sort of the theoretical question, and no one knows the answer to that.

00:03:54 There's also the practical question, because every once in a while
00:04:01 —I want to be very clear in my use of language—
00:04:06 very, very occasionally it happens that people that are doing a meditative practice,
00:04:14 their experience moves in the direction of DPDR.
00:04:19 Now, why I have to be very careful about saying that is,
00:04:23 of course, people are afraid, right?
00:04:27 Because meditation is not something that's known to most people.
00:04:33 So it's like, oh my God, I don't think I want to try that
00:04:36 if I could end up in the pit of the void and in this horrible, nihilistic, dysfunctional state.
00:04:41 So please listen carefully.
00:04:45 In my entire career of teaching, which is long, decades,
00:04:52 into my fourth decade now, I have encountered this in students only a few times.
00:05:01 In the few times I've encountered it, with maybe one or two exceptions,
00:05:07 I've been able to cure it.
00:05:09 In other words, through giving the right direction,
00:05:15 it ended up eventually becoming the empowering and fulfilling experience.
00:05:23 So the chances that you're going to develop this bad effect that I just described
00:05:31 as a result of doing mindfulness under a competent guide,
00:05:37 the chances of that happening to you are very remote.
00:05:43 I mean, yes, there's a non-zero probability,
00:05:47 but there's also a non-zero probability that you're going to be killed
00:05:53 in a terrorist attack in North America, but it's really not highly probable.
00:06:00 So this is not something to worry about from a practical point of view
00:06:04 for someone that's considering the meditative path,
00:06:08 assuming that they have a senior, competent guide
00:06:11 that has dealt with this problem successfully
00:06:14 and has some idea of how to work with it,
00:06:17 which I'll talk about in a moment.
00:06:20 What I have never done is attempt to cure somebody
00:06:25 that developed this condition spontaneously using mindfulness methods.
00:06:30 I don't know if that's possible.
00:06:31 I don't know enough about the nature of it.
00:06:35 In other words, most people that develop depersonalization,
00:06:39 derealization disorder do not develop it as the result of having done a meditative practice.
00:06:46 It just happens to them one day.
00:06:49 Suddenly the somethingness of the self is gone,
00:06:55 and the world is paper thin,
00:06:57 and everything that ever gave them meaning has now vanished,
00:07:02 and they flail for the rest of their lives trying to get back to normalcy,
00:07:07 unable apparently to do so from what I can tell.
00:07:12 And I could be wrong about this, and I sort of hope I'm wrong about this,
00:07:16 but I have the impression that there's not a drug-based or therapy-based cure for this.

00:07:24 It might be interesting to attempt a homeopathic cure.

00:07:29 By that I mean to use the strategies that people like me use with meditators when this happens,

00:07:37 see if they work on the general population.

00:07:40 I have no idea whether it would or not,

00:07:43 although I've sometimes entertained the notion if I had another lifetime

00:07:47 that I would work with some of these people

00:07:50 and see if the methods that usually work on meditators

00:07:56 would actually work on the non-meditators.

00:07:59 So what usually works for meditators if their practice starts to move in this direction,

00:08:04 which by the way is traditionally in Buddhism called falling into the pit of the void,

00:08:09 and can be found, descriptions of it can be found in the classical Buddhist literature,

00:08:16 including the Pali Canon.

00:08:17 Well, in any event, what I usually do is two things.

00:08:22 If they're freaking out because of the emptiness,

00:08:27 then there's something that's not empty.

00:08:29 What's not empty is the freak-out.

00:08:31 So I have them see that their freak-out reaction is itself empty,

00:08:36 so that's sort of negating the negative.

00:08:39 And then the other thing is systematically develop the positive.

00:08:42 So you just use your concentration skills and so forth

00:08:48 to do a lot of creating of positive field image talk.

00:08:53 And you basically, I actually put it in a positive framework for them.

00:08:57 I say, okay, good, now you have nothing,

00:08:59 and from that nothing, that's the ideal place to reconstruct a completely new self.

00:09:08 You can still at will create positive field image and talk,

00:09:13 and now like a physical therapist would exercise atrophied muscles

00:09:20 and in a systematic way rebuild that person's ability to move.

00:09:24 So I sort of push them, very much like a PT,

00:09:30 push them to develop positive field image talk over and over and over again

00:09:34 until they literally build a new and indeed better self.