

# The Trickle-Down Paradigm of Transformation

## ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 How do you deal with the fact that you forget things?

00:00:06 Sometimes while you're practicing meditation or as the result of practicing meditation,

00:00:13 you remember things from the past that you completely forgot.

00:00:20 And sometimes those are emotionally charged.

00:00:25 So when they come up in the present, you greet them with equanimity,

00:00:30 and there's a sense of what in therapy is called catharsis or releasing.

00:00:37 You've heard of economizing. Well, let's start talking about equanimizing.

00:00:42 Equanimizing means bringing equanimity, which is non-self-interference, to a sensory event.

00:00:53 So something may percolate up from your biography.

00:00:57 You greet it with equanimity, you equanimize it, and you get a sense that it's being released.

00:01:03 This is sort of in a sense in the classic mode of psychotherapy.

00:01:08 Specific biographical material has been uncovered and has been accepted and integrated, and that's catharsis.

00:01:20 However, I would say that the bulk of the catharsis, the bulk of the integration,

00:01:28 the bulk of the purification in the depths of our consciousness that comes about through mindfulness practice,

00:01:38 does not take the classic form of specific memories or other material percolating up.

00:01:52 Most of it happens without us knowing that it's happening.

00:01:57 The classic example in my case is I did a ten-day retreat in the U Ba Khin tradition,

00:02:07 which involves sweeping the awareness through the body.

00:02:10 About halfway through the retreat, I noticed that there was a little bit of congestion in my lung area and so forth.

00:02:20 Nothing all that big a deal, just some slight discomfort.

00:02:25 And I remember briefly thinking,

00:02:28 oh, that must be the effect of all the smoke that I've put in my lungs from the last ten years of smoking marijuana every day.

00:02:38 There was no thought of, oh my God, I've hurt my lungs, or gee, I should stop smoking marijuana.

00:02:44 Nothing like that at all, just this awareness.

00:02:49 And then the retreat went on.

00:02:52 But when I got back, a day passed, I didn't smoke any grass, another day passed, I didn't smoke any grass.

00:03:03 Finally, many days passed and I realized I just wasn't going to do it anymore.

00:03:09 And there was no conscious decision, there was no weighing of cause and effect,

00:03:16 there was no on the wagon, off the wagon, there was no struggle, there was no nothing.

00:03:21 The part of my body that was enjoying getting high and the part of my body that was not enjoying being damaged

00:03:35 apparently were allowed to talk to each other without my knowing it

00:03:40 and come to a conclusion that radically, effortlessly, unexpectedly changed a deep-seated behavior pattern.

00:03:52 So something happened and the subconscious rewired itself.

00:04:00 Sometimes there can be changes that you don't even get a hint of.

00:04:06 At least I had a hint in this case.

00:04:09 A lot of times you do a retreat and mostly what you're aware of at the retreat is you're physically uncomfortable,

00:04:17 you can't concentrate, you are in emotional turmoil, you're judging yourself, you're judging others,

00:04:30 and all that goes away only because you get sleepy.

00:04:35 And that's mostly what your experience was, but then you leave the retreat

00:04:41 and you discover that something in your fundamental alienation,

00:04:49 your separation of inside and outside is gone forever,

00:04:54 your neighbor's been blasting the stereo half the day,

00:04:58 you realize it used to drive you crazy and it doesn't and it's not going to.

00:05:03 And changes take place.

00:05:07 While you were doing the practice, you might not have had any hint at all that anything productive was going on.

00:05:14 It's just you were uncomfortable, your mind was wandering,

00:05:17 but in that environment you created a situation where those circuits could communicate with each other

00:05:29 and rewire themselves.

00:05:33 I make the claim that the bulk of the transformation of the subconscious or depths of our being

00:05:45 typically takes place unconsciously.

00:05:49 I call it the trickle-down paradigm for working with the subconscious.

00:05:55 We shine the flashlight of mindfulness on the surface of sensory experience

00:06:00 and a certain number of photons go down to the very bottom of the lake

00:06:08 and give the circuits down there what they need to rewire themselves

00:06:15 with the surface either knowing very little or often knowing nothing of the rewiring process.

00:06:25 Now, a person might well challenge this point of view, saying,  
00:06:30 well, how do you know that's happening?  
00:06:32 You're saying something happens but we're not consciously aware of it.  
00:06:38 I can say there are pink kangaroos in this room but only I can see them.  
00:06:46 Could you disprove that?  
00:06:48 Well, it's non-falsifiable, so it's a meaningless statement.  
00:06:52 A person might say, well, that the subconscious rewires itself when you're  
doing meditation  
00:06:57 is a meaningless statement because how do you know that's happening if you're  
not aware of it?  
00:07:04 Well, you're not aware of it at the time. You don't know what's going on  
necessarily.  
00:07:10 But you are aware of significant permanent positive changes in perception and  
behavior  
00:07:18 after you have left the retreat, and therefore you can hypothesize  
00:07:25 that something like this is going on.  
00:07:28 We can't see electromagnetic fields, but we look at behavior on the surface  
00:07:35 and we hypothesize, okay, something like the Maxwell field equations describe  
what's going on.  
00:07:43 Even though we don't see it, we can hypothesize that from the effect.  
00:07:48 So we can hypothesize reasonably, I would claim,  
00:07:52 from the changes in perception and behavior that people experience from the  
retreat environment  
00:08:02 that something like this rewiring is occurring.