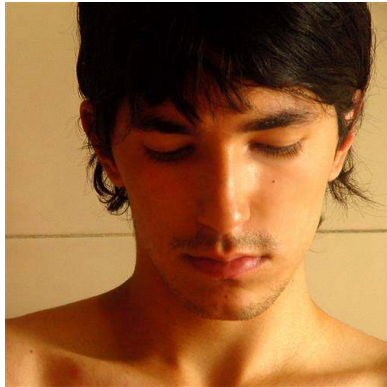


The Nature of Habit



The nature of habit is that it fills your life (or at least, the part of your life with which it is associated) so fast and so stealthily that pretty soon, it's hard to remember life without it. You are denied the opportunity to compare it objectively with old behaviours. A habit isn't just a finite occurrence that has clear "before and after" stages. It sneaks up on you and welds itself onto your personality. It is something that is learned; and once something is learned and practiced, it is extremely difficult to forget. My old habit of thinking negatively and anxiously was learned in the moments of panic attacks, and practiced in every subsequent fearful thought. Before I knew it, I'd been habituated entirely with constant fear and anxiety, and a terrifying (but false) feeling that I may never recover, and if I did, it would take years and years of therapy and medication.

Once I managed to gain a little bit of perspective and objectivity, I started a strict regime, based on what I knew aggravated and calmed the anxiety (and therefore, depersonalization). I didn't know if or how much the medication would help, but one way or another, I was determined that I would get out of this condition. And thankfully, about two months later, there was a marked improvement. I began to read again; though I had to do so out loud to regulate my concentration. I forced myself to walk into town, though the DP and anxiety was insisting that I stay 'safe' at home. I began to watch and enjoy television and films again, forgetting myself by concentrating on the storylines. I spoke to people without thinking that any minute, I might start to panic. I started to experience very brief periods of time in which I felt

completely fine, in which I forgot about the condition altogether.

And eventually, the DP began to leave me completely. Wait, let me rephrase that: *The mental training regime I had used on myself had replaced the thought-habits of anxiety.* Though I was still vaguely aware of the memory of it at times of stress, it became something I could control – and once I knew that, it ceased to have any power over me. I could just read a book, flick on the TV, chat to someone – the smallest distraction helped me forget about it.

During my recovery, I noticed positive changes in myself. One of the mantras that I had while sick was, “If I ever get out of this, nothing trivial will ever really bother me again – how could it?”

And for some time, I did feel gratitude for normality. But you know what? After a while, you just get back into the swing of things, and you get completely back to normal. I mean, 100%, just interested in your hobbies, your passions, the little dramas that make life so interesting and so frustrating, What I mean to say is that once you get rid of the anxiety, you will get back to your normal self almost without even noticing it.

And yet, though it’s difficult for me to remember just how tough the whole experience was (as you will too, because of another mental phenomenon known as “State-specific memory”, which I’ll explain later!) I do feel a sense of gratitude for what I went through. Firstly, it has helped me to meet, via the Internet, literally hundreds upon hundreds of people who have been affected by anxiety and dp, and who have made full recoveries. I have also had the pleasure of meeting some of these wonderful people in person.

But it also brought into my life a deep sense of empathy that I think most people may never experience. I never really knew how difficult things could get for people with “anxiety”, and I am thankful for having that knowledge now.

The whole thing taught me a lot about one’s values in life, too. I know it’s a cliché, but really, what importance do money or material possessions truly have if you’re not essentially happy? If you can’t

connect with your family or friends, if you are cut off from everything that makes you human, that gives life meaning, that tells you in your soul that this is all worthwhile? Never before has the importance of connection in life been made so clear to me. Connection is all there is, it is the ultimate motivation in life, to know and more importantly, feel, that we are part of something. As the Desiderata says, and you should never forget:

'You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.'

Ok, now I know that my story might have been difficult to get through in places for some readers with DP. And I don't want to get too heavy with regard to interpretations, or my life being changed afterwards or anything like that, because the fact is that I, like everyone who has recovered from an anxiety disorder, is just... back to normal.

But I really need you to understand just how bad my anxiety and depersonalisation was. I mean, I've heard a lot of accounts of peoples' experiences, from all walks of life, all around the world, and I would still consider my own time with anxiety to have been fairly severe.

I need you to understand that I absolutely had what is considered "chronic" DP; that is, it was totally relentless (I had it 24/7) and it was utterly debilitating. It was absolutely horrendous, to the point where I had weeks and months of it with *not a single moment* of relief whatsoever. At one point it had even invaded my sleep!

But the point of my story is this:

I got better.

I recovered completely.

I got back to normal.

AND SO WILL YOU.

Yes, my recovery was long, slow and extremely tough at times – and I still got through it. And I firmly believe that that process can be greatly expediated by simply having someone explain to you why you're having these strange thoughts and feelings, and how to deal with them.

So yes, I am completely better now, and the only anxious thoughts that come into my head are normal ones – like hoping you're going to like this book!

Throughout my research of the condition, both during and after my DP, I couldn't help but notice the lack of general guides on the Internet for specific ways of dealing with this temporary illness (and remember – it *is* temporary). However, as I've already said, I knew that certain actions would almost invariably make it better or worse.

These actions would sometimes be discussed - in positive terms - in various places on the Internet. But these discussions or articles were often wedged between other, truly horrible reports that would grab your attention, scare you, aggravate the DP and leave you feeling even worse than before!

And even in spite of any general tips I did come across, I could find no set list of recommendations for how to deal with DP; nowhere was there any sort of specific plan for it, for dealing with it with precise goals in mind. So, I set up my own personal goals. I decided to myself that I would win this thing out, little by little, no matter how long it took. I began to think carefully about what could have caused it, what it actually *was*, and how I would train myself out of it.

And that's essentially what this book is: A training program. During my recovery, I vowed that if I could find ways to deal with depersonalisation, I would

collate all of the information I came across, every email I sent and received about it, every single method and medication I tried - and put them all together to help people with the problem. This book is a detailing of the regime that, through much trial and error, I found was most effective in coping with, and eventually, alleviating and ending the condition.