



Spirituality, the Body, and Veganism

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"You're Already Hypnotized: A Guide to Waking Up"

A human being is a part of the whole, called by us "Universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest — a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security. — **Albert Einstein**

Spiritual circles seem to be divided on the body. Some say it's an illusion; others say it's a holy temple. (There is a third less popular opinion: that it's sinful, but that's more of a traditional religious tenet, so I'm going to skip it.) Illusion and holy temple are pretty disparate theories. Basically today's spiritualist is left to believe the body is either unholy or holy. So which is it? Are we to disregard the body, if it's an illusion, or are we to worship the body, if it's a holy temple? I believe the truth lies somewhere in-between.

Quantum physics has shown that without consciousness there is no physical matter. Einstein's protégé, physicist David Bohm, after a lifetime of meticulous research, came to the conclusion that the entire universe is a product of thought. Meaning, everything is consciousness-dependent. It (whatever "it" is) does not stand on its own. There needs to be a perceiver in order for "it" to exist. That's what is meant when it's said that the external world and body are illusions. Despite what our physical eyes tell us, nothing is a real, lasting thing, external to us. As physicist Neils Bohr once said, "Everything we call real is made of things that cannot be regarded as real." Nor can the separation between those things be considered real, as Einstein theorized. Mystics, philosophers and spiritual thought systems, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, have been declaring this before quantum theory came on the scene. Even modern spiritual paths like A Course in Miracles teach that the world is an illusion—it appears real, but, on some level, it's not.

"On some level" is key here. It's safe to say that we don't view the world as unreal. In our day-to-day life, we are not consciously aware of that other higher level in which we, but not our bodies, exist. To us, the

world and the body are very real. Oaks trees are real to us; seventh grade was real; the car parked in our garage is real; our utility bill due date is real; death is real because that person or animal isn't here anymore, and our physical pain is real because it hurts. Those who steadfastly believe the body is an illusion might quickly change their mind if forced to jump out of a burning building.

So we can theoretically wrap our heads around the idea that the body may be an illusion, but, experientially, the body is real to the perceiver. It's our experience. And if that's true for us, then it's true for others, as well. We are all attached to our bodies.

If we stopped with the idea that the body is just an illusion, we would only end up depressed. "What's the point? Why get up in the morning? Why not eat cupcakes for dinner? Why do Pilates or go jogging? Nothing matters!" our ego would exclaim. I'm pretty sure the ultimate intention of life and existence is not to feel hopeless. But if we believe the discoveries of scientists and the perspicacity of mystics, then what are we suppose to do with this illusion information?

It's a fair question: If the body is an illusion does it matter what we do with it? Or to it? Or to others' bodies? I contend that it deeply matters. What we do determines if and when we wake up to these noble truths set forth by scientists and sages: That oneness is our highest perception, and that love is the most

important thing, as physicist Richard Feynman noted.

Trace most spiritual paths, and even traditional religions, back to their origin story and you'll find a version of the idea of oneness. And then after that part in the story comes a fall or split into separation. And this is where we currently find ourselves—you are now outside of me and I am outside of you. No longer do we remember that we are one.

No one here feels like my brother or sister. Race, nationality, gender, religion, sexual preference, and species divide us. People, animals, clouds and bees are clearly outside of me, doing their own thing. We can see that the world is divided and fragmented again and again. But this point of view hasn't gotten us very far up the enlightenment ladder, instead it has led to isolation, sickness, suffering, internal conflict and external war.

As far as I can tell, there is only one problem in the world: the belief in separation. This separation takes many forms—from each other, from other living things, from our own highest self, and from our Source; some call that source God.

The loftiest purpose of religion and spirituality is to change our hearts and minds to turn away from the ego's limited version of reality and instead recognize a greater, more expansive vision. Essentially, the goal of each path (or story) is the same: To return to oneness.

But how do we get back to that awareness if we are stuck in a world of separate bodies? It can start with asking ourselves a simple question: "What is it for?" In other words, what purpose is it (whatever "it" is) serving? As a hypnotherapist, I've looked into thousands of subconscious minds and I have learned that if you follow a behavior into the recesses of the subconscious mind, you'll wind up at either a thought of fear or a thought of love. Every choice everyone is making at every moment is reflecting one or the other.

We have the freewill to choose either thought system. The problem with choosing fear, however, is that it keeps us asleep, stuck in separation and sickness, and all the messes that come with that. Love, on the other hand, awakens us. With love as our guide, we heal. We



transcend a perception of separation, and live with the true empathy and power that we were meant to extend. The world becomes gentler and more beautiful because we have chosen a thought system that is gentle and beautiful.

Our actions then matter, because they reflect the love or fear in our mind. Our thoughts matter, because they influence the collective unconscious. And, it could be argued that we are at a point in our evolution where what we choose is a matter of urgency for the planet. Each of us, just by the mere act of being born into this world, has a responsibility to choose the perception of oneness and love over separation and fear.

I've always liked how *A Course in Miracles* defines teaching as "to demonstrate." We are all teachers by what we demonstrate in the world. We can demonstrate that we believe the illusion to be true, that we are separate from others, that life has no meaning, that we don't matter and neither do our choices. Or, we can demonstrate another way of living—that only love and kindness are real, and that despite what our physical eyes tell us, everyone and everything is one with us. Therefore what we do, and think, and feel affects the entire universe.

Asking the question "What is it for?" helps us to make conscious choices in alignment with our higher purpose. Is this choice loving or fearful? Is this keeping me and the world asleep? Does it contribute to the idea of separation? Or does it join me with other humans and nonhumans? Does it lead to sickness in my mind and in my body? Or does it keep me healthy? Is this reflecting my self-love? Does it demonstrate life rather than death? Kindness over greed? Does it bring light into the world or add to the darkness? What is this thing, this event, this book, this house, this relationship, this body, this food, for?

If our lives serve the purpose of learning our lessons of remembering that

only love is real, and our ultimate goal is to return to oneness, then the body becomes an important tool in helping us achieve that. We can use this "illusion," so to speak, to help us out of the illusion of separation.

The body, in and of itself, isn't holy, just like nothing in this world is holy. Only love is holy. But the body can serve a holy purpose of awakening to what is truly holy: our relationship to each other and all living things.

The problem with seeing the body as holy is not that we disregard the body, like we might if we're told it's an illusion, but rather we subconsciously overvalue the body because we believe it is God's temple. The mental dilemma in glorifying the body is that the body isn't perfect, it breaks down. Some people are born with broken bodies, other bodies aren't functioning well or are sick. And, most people hate their body, all of this can lead to unconscious guilt, as I've seen with clients in my office: "I must be bad because I have this imperfect body. God is punishing me."

Thinking the body is holy only leads to unholy thoughts of fear and guilt. A more helpful perception is that the body becomes a device in learning to love ourselves and each other. And because it's serving that important and worthwhile purpose, we need to take care of it. I see the body like renting a house. The house isn't my permanent home, but it's where I'm living now. So it's my responsibility to keep it tidy, appealing, functional, and clean. Living in filth isn't serving me or anyone else. So it is with my body. If we want our lives to have meaning, then we have to take care of the tool that helps us achieve that.



We can't transcend what we hold in contempt. You're not going to become enlightened if you hate your thighs. You're not going to treat others kindly if you treat yourself poorly. Feeding your body unhealthy food and negative thinking is not loving. I've helped many clients with body issues, and the maladaptive behavior is never fueled by love, but a version of fear: shame, guilt, sadness, despair and the like. Making healthy choices with regard to your body is serving your Source, because it's serving love.

I have been on a conscious spiritual journey since I began Transcendental Meditation at seven years old, 43 years ago. I have also been a vegetarian for 28 years, right around the time I became an animal rights activist; and eight years ago I finally gave up what was keeping me from strict veganism: the occasional bite of cheese and random pair of suede boots.

My spiritual practice and my commitment to veganism naturally deepened concurrently, to the point where I can no longer separate the two. Spirituality in its highest form, like veganism in its highest form, is ultimately about love. Spirituality and veganism are both an evolution to a greater awareness and consciousness. Spirituality, like veganism, is inclusive rather than exclusive. Both spirituality and veganism honor everyone's right to live a life of freedom, peace, and wellbeing. (And that includes most plants, because when you eat a plant's leaves, fruits, vegetables, or stalks, you don't kill it. It regrows and replenishes.) For me, spirituality ultimately represents the idea that another's interests are not separate from my own. And veganism demonstrates that beautifully.

Though our bodies may be illusory, let us walk this earth knowing our physical eyes deceive us; I am one with you, joined in love. Only then will we change this dream of separation into a happier, and healthier, reality for all.

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