

Hi Robert, My name is Don and, despite significant academic and social accomplishments, I've been severely troubled and hampered by emotional difficulties. I'm 76 years old (a teenager like yourself!):), and here is my inquiry. The great majority of people whom I know manage to navigate their lives more or less successfully without any knowledge of spiritual and/or esoteric practices. Since I've never been able to function in the "conventional" sense, I've sought relief from dozens of disciplines, running the gamut from nonduality to meditation to rolfing, etc., etc.

Now, since my aforementioned acquaintances have never embarked on these seekings, I must ask? What the hell is wrong with me? Are not my spiritual efforts, considering my inability to function "normally", merely a cop-out or desperate attempt to find peace through an unproven and alternate method? What say you? And whither should I goest? Your response would be much appreciated.

Best, Don

Hi, Don. I am sorry to hear that you feel troubled by emotional difficulties. Since I do not know what those are, I will just reply in general.

If one is not comfortable in one's own skin, it's natural to seek other ways of being and other ways of understanding oneself and the world. Certainly, for many people, what you are calling "spiritual efforts" are part of that seeking. What is being sought is, as you said, peace. That is what I meant by feeling comfortable in one's own skin: one feels equanimous most of the time, or perhaps all of the time, regardless of circumstances which are fluid and ever-changing.

But the question you ask is not simple. When I consider it, it appears vast, like looking into a Grand Canyon of ideas. I cannot tell you wither thou should goest, but I will pose to you a kind of thought experiment that may open your eyes a bit.

Virtual reality now exists and is becoming more and more immersive as technology advances. It's not much of a stretch to imagine that before long there

will be a system that could provide an experience so immersive that, having strapped on the goggles, or whatever, you would soon forget that you were in a computer simulation, but would feel yourself functioning as normal in this simulated world that, to you, would be *the* world.

In this simulated world, you would feel perfectly at peace and you would have no emotional difficulties. Whatever you wanted to accomplish, you could. Whatever you might find gratifying, would be attainable. There would be no guilt, no shame, and no other negative feelings and emotions. And you would not remember that this was a simulation and that your actual physical body was just lying on a bed or floating in a tank.

The question is, would you strap on the headset and live in that simulated reality? Don't be too hasty in replying. It's an experiment, so work it for a while, and then continue reading.

Well, in my observation, a great deal of what we call "spirituality" is like a simulation. Alternate "realities" are set forth and some people choose to live in them because they feel happier or less troubled living in the simulated "reality" than they did before they "put on the goggles."

For example, in the real world, we witness all kinds of horrors: murder and other violence, enslavement, torture, rape, abuse of defenseless animals, etc. These are crimes perpetrated by actual human beings, and witnessing them is a source of discomfort, anxiety, or fear for most of us. Those crimes take place everywhere on this planet and are exceedingly common.

An even more basic source of anxiety is the anticipation of one's own death which could occur at any time--the primal fear of not existing at all. Nevertheless, without acknowledging mortality and, we cannot see things as they are.

As I understand this, some people cannot tolerate seeing things as they are, including death, and so look to "spirituality" to ease their anxiety. One may, for example, enter into an alternate reality in which it only "appears" that this violence and other crimes are occurring, In that simulation, ordinary life is only a

kind of waking dream. Or this apparent suffering is only “the Universe playing out every possible experience so as to know itself fully.” Or one might imagine a so-called “deathless state” to be attained after sufficient meditation. I know people who live in those alternate realities and some of them seem happy.

So my question to you is this: suppose I could now offer you a cure for your emotional suffering and everything that troubles you—a new life in an alternate reality—and all that would be required of you is that you believe what I say (you “put on the goggles”). Would you do that?

If so, your only problem is that you have not found the right “spiritual method” yet.

If not—if living in a simulation does not in your mind qualify as a genuine cure, but only an escape into fantasy--then I advise you to stop the “spiritual search” immediately. Take off whatever goggles you have on your head now, which apparently are not satisfactory anyway, and with open eyes survey the actuality of this moment without any spiritual ideas mucking up the works.

Try to see yourself just as you are right now, warts and all, Accept yourself just as you are and deal with that as best you can. I know that can seem difficult, but it’s the only “cure” I know.

I do not think that adopting an idealistic view of what “I” am (or might possibly become) is much good unless one is content to reject the suchness of this moment and live instead in a simulation.

Understand that nothing is permanent. Everything is always changing. And since you are here only for a brief time, face the suchness of each moment as best you can.

If you need help with this, I advise psychotherapy, not spirituality.

Be well.