

Rising above illusions

Some religious and spiritual traditions guide you to withdraw from the world and to hide yourself in a cave or go to a mountaintop where you can escape the illusions of life. This approach can help to keep your mind and heart focused on greater matters, however it is not always the most practical approach, nor is it the only way to become free from the bindings of illusion.

You may renounce your home, family, friends, job, clothes, and anything and everything else that you own, however this kind of outer renunciation does not guarantee spiritual liberation or freedom from illusion.

What needs to be renounced is the ego, the self-interest, the petty desires, and sense of ownership. What needs to be renounced are the false ideas about who you are – thinking that all you are is an individual body with a mind that is separate from the universe, from God, and from everyone and everything else. This limited identification is the main illusion that keeps you from entering into higher spiritual awareness.

If you have a luxurious mansion with several expensive cars, closets full of clothes, and all the fortune anyone could want, and you remove your attachment and identification from all these achievements and objects, knowing that they are just flickers on the screen of supreme universal Consciousness – then you are able to rise above illusion even while enjoying all the benefits and blessings of an abundant life in this world.

Why God created the world

Okay, I'll admit it. I thought it would be fun to make a sidebar called "Why God created the world." Nevertheless, one reason proposed by spiritual sages is that God separates from His own eternal oneness and becomes you so that He (or, if you prefer, It or She) can love Himself, experience Himself, and create amazing worlds within Himself.

That one divine light not only appears to become separate from its own profoundly perfect self, but it also creates all these different forms, like you and me, so there are many others to love – or in some cases, to learn to love!

Or maybe, like this sidebar, He creates it all just for fun.

Spirituality in Action

The following exercise can help you to rise above the illusions of your own life-movie by giving you a way to practice controlling your levels of absorption in the illusions of a theatrical movie.

- 1. Go to a movie theater and watch a movie — with friends or alone.** Intense dramas are especially good for this exercise, but any movie will do.

2. **Let yourself settle in as the movie begins.** Enjoy your popcorn or soda as you would on any movie occasion. Watch the opening credits and the set-up scenes.
3. **Ten minutes into the movie, close your eyes and gently pull your conscious awareness away from the story you've been watching.** Take the reins of your mind into your conscious control. Instead of just letting go into wherever the movie has been guiding your mind, use the power of your will to become consciously aware of who and where you really are.
4. **Take a moment to remember whatever events have just happened in the past hour or so — how you arrived at the theater, any interactions you may have had with your friends or other people, and so on.** The idea behind this part of the exercise is to reaffirm who you are in the nonmovie reality, even while the movie is playing.
5. **Now open your eyes and let your awareness go back to the movie.** Sorry if you missed an important clue for the surprise ending, but it's worth the sacrifice to know how to do this!
6. **Let yourself become fully absorbed in the movie for 30 or so more minutes.** A particularly dramatic moment during this part of the film is the best time to go to Step 7.
7. **Right in the middle of a dramatic moment, pull your attention away from the movie again, but this time, look around the theater.** See the forms of people sitting in the audience. Listen to the crunching and sipping sounds and people shuffling their feet around. Smell the air in the theater. Take a sip of your drink and let all your senses take root in the reality that you're sitting there in the movie theater. You can do this for a few minutes or however long you'd like.
8. **Go back to watching the movie with the goal of enjoying it fully, but at the same time, consciously remembering throughout the rest of the movie that you're sitting in a theater watching a movie.** To do this step, you have to access two different mental viewpoints at the same time. You may find yourself bouncing back and forth from awareness of the movie to awareness of sitting in the theater, which is fine. You're exercising your mental muscles of staying in witness consciousness during dramatic events.
9. **When you leave the movie theater, you can take this exercise to the next level.** Remember the feeling of having the two co-existing viewpoints, and apply that sensation to the events that unfold around you. Talk with your friends and enjoy your dinner, but keep a simultaneous awareness that you are a seat of divine conscious awareness watching the movie of your life as it unfolds. Even if you don't fully believe or understand that this is what you are, it's still fine to do as an exercise.