

Transcendental Meditation

by Marty Butz

Founder: Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

Founding Date: 1955

Official Publications: *Science of Being and Art of Living, Maharishi's Absolute Theory of Defence, Maharishi's Absolute Theory of Government, Introduction to Maharishi Vedic University*

Organizational Structure: Operates through various centers in Europe and North America

Unique Terms: Maharishi Effect, Science of Consciousness, Yogic Flying

Other Names: World Plan Executive Council, Natural Law Party, Society for Creative Intelligence

HISTORY

TM, which is advertised as a meditative method of obtaining 'serenity without drugs,' was brought to the West in 1959 by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who had been a devotee of Swami Brahmanand Saraswati Maharij, a well-known and highly respected Indian guru. From his master he not only acquired a distinctive outlook on life and meditation technique, but he also was inspired to take the message abroad. ¹

Arriving in California, "the appeal of [the Yogi's] new religion came in its offer of peace, happiness and spiritual growth through a system of deep meditation." ²

By the late 1960's, the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi had already become popular "by acquiring a celebrated following," including such famous names as the Beatles, Mia Farrow and football star, Joe Namath. ³ However, "Maharishi's popularity sagged" and he "moved back to India in 1970 to reconsider his entire strategy..." ⁴

By 1972, The Maharishi had revised Transcendental Meditation to fit his new strategy called the "World Plan." Its goal was to "take the movement's comprehensive understanding of knowledge and life to the entire world." ⁵ In this near missionary endeavor, the World Plan applied Maharishi's ideas to the "personal, political, educational, ecological, social, economic, and spiritual aspects of life." ⁶ Through this adaptation, Maharishi "shrewdly shifted the emphasis in the presentation of TM from the spiritual to the practical and scientific to evade both materialistic and religious resistance to his spiritual teaching." This strategy also "permitted TM to obtain government support and a place in the curriculum of public schools that would probably be denied to it if it were presented in its former, spiritual terms." ⁷ "Maharishi now promoted TM as a science, not a religion, more in psychological language than in spiritual terms. He desired to avoid conflict over church-versus-state issues..." ⁸

Maharishi's World Plan strategy secularizing TM successfully worked to establish TM beyond the pale of a passing fad. Within a few years, "six public schools in New Jersey obtain[ed] a \$40,612 grant from the Department of Health Education and Welfare for experimental classes." The "Illinois House of Representatives pass[ed] a resolution

encouraging schools to offer TM courses. “The federal government fund[ed] 17 TM research grants.”⁹ When the Maharishi appeared on the “Merv Griffin Show” in 1975, TM was personally and positively endorsed by the show’s host and other guests to almost 30 million viewers. Merv Griffin’s comments that TM was being taught in many public school systems and used by businesses, hospitals, athletic teams and the military did much to promote TM’s image.¹⁰ By the end of 1975, two books on the best seller list were about TM and TM had entered “a new era of respectability as professionals, business people, professional athletes and members of Congress” became meditators.¹¹

However, after 1975, TM’s fortunes took another turn. The “number of new people taking TM courses dropped significantly.” In response, “the TM leadership announced an advanced program which purported to teach meditators to levitate and to vanish at will.” Such outrageous claims “tarnished the scientific image of TM” which TM had strived to create and, as a result, the organization lost credibility.¹² When “a federal court ruled that TM was a religious practice,” and the ruling was upheld in the U.S. Court of Appeals 3rd District,¹³ TM was then made “subject to the establishment clause of the U.S. Constitution,”¹⁴ not only denying TM the privilege of receiving federal funds, but preventing it from being taught in public schools, one of the key markets for TM.¹⁵

In addition to these setbacks, TM began to become criticized as actually being harmful, rather than beneficial, to some TM practitioners. In 1978, *Psychology Today* magazine reported that a “substantial number’ of meditators developed anxiety, depression, physical and mental tension and other adverse effects.”¹⁶ “In 1980, the West German government’s Institute for Youth and Society produced a report calling TM a ‘psychogroup’ and saying that the majority of people who went through TM experienced psychological or physical disorders.”¹⁷

The TM organization responded to the critical reports and studies by citing other research studies indicating the beneficial results of meditation. However, many of these same studies also came under criticism, being observed that they often lacked credibility from not being “independently established through rigorous scientific testing.”¹⁸ Beyond TM’s frequent failure to cite research maintaining high scientific standards, it was observed that the “TM movement’s marketing practices” suggested “a widespread pattern of misinformation, deception, and manipulation of lay and scientific news media aimed to earn both respectability and profits.”¹⁹

Along those lines, some former practitioners of TM, those who took advanced courses or studied to become teachers, began suing the organization in the late 1980’s. Accusations that TM and its associated organizations were “organized as a cult,” “implement[ed] a fraudulent scheme involving thought-reform techniques” and “swindled” members of their “money,” “labor” and a significant portion of their lives were typical of some of the charges made by those suing the organization.²⁰ One former member, Robert Kropinski, charged that the TM organizations “falsely promised he could learn to fly,” but in reality taught students to “hop with the legs folded in the lotus position.” Though he eventually lost the case on appeal, he was originally awarded \$137,890 by a federal court after the TM organizations were found guilty for “fraud and negligence.”²¹

Transcendental Meditation ventured into the political realm when, in 1992, the Natural Law Party was founded on the property of the Maharishi International University’s campus in Fairfield, Iowa. The creation of “the U.S. party, one of about 40 similar parties in countries around the world, followed a directive from the Maharishi in the early 1990’s that his followers get involved in politics.”²² Using “TM-based ideas to advocate solutions for improving people’s health, fighting crime, cleaning up the environment, balancing the budget and a flat tax,” the Natural Law Party has established a broad political platform. Many Natural Law Party candidates, including the party’s past presidential candidate, John Hagelin, have denied any formal connection between the party and the TM movement. Nevertheless, there are an abundance of “informal ties” and the Natural Party’s spokesman himself, Bob Roth, has stated that “There has been extensive coverage about TM and the party. It’s no secret that this is the TM party.” In 1995, “virtually all of the

dozens of candidates for Congress and the state Legislature in California ... [fielded were] practitioners of Transcendental Meditation.”²³

Today, while “dozens of studies [have shown] the harmful effects of meditation,”²⁴ TM continues to be “the most widely practiced form of meditation in the country. Thousands of schoolteachers have become meditators through this system and many have encouraged their students to practice TM as well. Although TM has legally been expelled from the classroom... in some school systems its procedures continue to be taught.”²⁵ In the late 1990’s, it was estimated that the “Maharishi Mahesh Yogi’s TM enterprise was worth between three billion and four billion dollars...”²⁶

DOCTRINE

Transcendental Meditation (TM) is the offspring of Hinduism, an eastern religious tradition. On a personal level and in a practical sense, TM “is a spiritual practice called yoga which is presented to the Western world as a ‘scientific’ way of reducing stress and finding peace within oneself.”²⁷ It promises “ultimate results with minimal effort,”²⁸ requiring just 20 minutes of meditation twice a day. Yet, on a cosmic level, TM’s “World Plan intends to...relieve problems that have plagued humankind for centuries. In its embrace of these utopian objectives TM can legitimately be regarded as a type of millennial New Age movement.”²⁹

While the TM movement strives to couch its concepts in scientific language or neutral terms, and while it promotes “its medicinal benefits as a form of relaxation,” TM nevertheless “incorporates clearly pantheistic ideas into its approach. Though the techniques can be learned in a purely mechanical way, answers to ‘How?’ and ‘Why?’ inevitably take the novice into the realm of Eastern philosophy.”³⁰

God: The Maharishi taught “The one eternal unmanifested absolute Being manifests itself in many forms of lives and existences in creation,”³¹ Hence, it is easy to conclude with Elliot Miller that “The God of TM is...pantheistic...”³² (pantheism being that view which “denies the personality of God and equates God with the forces and laws of the universe”³³).

Man’s Nature: Maharishi teaches that human nature is basically good and unblemished, declaring that “Simplicity and innocence are already deeply rooted in the very nature of each individual.” When he also says, “The impersonal God is the Being which dwells in the heart of everyone. Each individual is, in his true nature, the impersonal God,”³⁴ one cannot doubt that Maharishi views man as essentially good.

Man’s Problem: As Gordon Lewis has observed, “Man’s ultimate need, according to TM, is for...a state of consciousness called Unity” and specifically that, “According to the diagnosis of the Maharishi, man’s deepest difficulty is his lack of consciousness of his own divine Being. Instead of attaining consciousness of God, people try to be good or merely think about God.”³⁵ To quote Maharishi himself, “All misery in the world is due to missing this one point.”³⁶

Man’s Salvation: Maharishi has taught others to “be still and know that you are God and when you know that you are God you will begin to live Godhood...”³⁷ As it has been observed, “According to Maharishi, man has forgotten his inner divinity through the loss of the simple technique of experiencing it. The lost technique is TM.”³⁸

Through the Puja, an “initiation rite...where the meditation is taught,” one goes through a “a Hindu ceremony worshiping the Hindu deities and offering them sacrifices of fruit, flowers, and cloth.”³⁹ As Miller notes, “It is only after this ceremony has been performed that one may receive his mantra to meditate upon.”⁴⁰ The mantra is “given by the master to a follower...as a kind of weapon to ward off reasoning, thinking, and conceptualization and unite the meditator with the divine within him. It is a sound without meaning, like OM, the vibrations of which lead to union with one’s Source,” writes Lewis.⁴¹

Significantly, "Maharishi himself admits that the use of the mantra invokes gods and spirits from the spirit world."⁴²

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Because Maharishi and the TM movement have claimed that TM is not a religion, "Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic leaders have endorsed TM to their congregations, and many practice it themselves. But TM is Hinduism. Its origin, initiation rite, nature, practice, and theory are all religious at the core."⁴³ "Contrary to TM's current claims, TM is a Hindu religious system and is not compatible with Christianity. It denies the central doctrines of the Christian faith and asserts the futile Hindu system of monism and maya,"⁴⁴ where monism asserts that there is "no ultimate distinction between...good or evil, or Creator and creature,"⁴⁵ and maya asserts that "the world...is not what it appears" to be.⁴⁶

It is clear that, within the TM movement, the idolatrous pagan rite of the Puja (contrary to Exodus 20:2-5), the failure to see, much less honor, the clear distinction between creature and Creator (contrary to Romans 1:25), and the assertion of the basic goodness of all men (contrary to Luke 11:13) are sufficient proof, but by no means are the only proof, in demonstrating TM's incompatibility with Christianity and its rejection of Christ as the true God, the true salvation and the true hope for mankind.

RECOMMENDED READING

Encyclopedia of the New Age, Ankerberg & Weldon. This comprehensive work on New Age spirituality includes a twenty page chapter on meditation. There are other chapters on Eastern Gurus, Enlightenment, Mantras and Mandalas, etc., all of which are closely related to TM. There are also various other indexed cross references to TM found in other sections of the book. Bibliography, index, 670 pages, paperback.

Notes

- ¹ Ruth A. Tucker, *Another Gospel: Alternative Religions and the New Age Movement*, 1989 382.
- ² Richard Kyle, *The Religious Fringe: A History of Alternative Religions in America*, 1993, 205.
- ³ Gordon R. Lewis, *What Everyone Should Know about Transcendental Meditation*, 1975, 3.
- ⁴ *The Religious Fringe*, 205.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ David Haddon and Vail Hamilton, *TM Wants You!: A Christian Response to Transcendental Meditation*, 1976, 20.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ *The Religious Fringe*, 205-6.
- ⁹ Leslie Goldberg, "Meditation movement: From levitation to litigation," *San Francisco Examiner*, September 10, 1989, E3.
- ¹⁰ *Another Gospel*, 382-3.
- ¹¹ *San Francisco Examiner*, September 10, 1989, E3.
- ¹² *Religious Fringe*, 206.
- ¹³ *Malnak v. Yogi*.
- ¹⁴ *Religious Fringe*, 207.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ *San Francisco Examiner*, September 10, 1989, E3.
- ¹⁷ Edward Epstein, "Politics and Transcendental Meditation," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 29, 1995, A1.
- ¹⁸ John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 1996, 438.
- ¹⁹ *The Cult Observer*, vol. 8, no. 9, 1991, 3.
- ²⁰ Kenneth Pins, "Tranquil state of TM shaken by former meditators' charges," *The Des Moines Sunday Register*, Nov. 18, 1990, 1A.
- ²¹ "Man Who Said He Didn't Get to Fly Awarded \$138,000," *Washington Post*, January 14, 1987, B04.
- ²² *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 29, 1995, A1.
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 438.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ Walter Martin, *The New Cults*, 1980, 91.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 91-2.
- ²⁹ *The Religious Fringe*, 209.
- ³⁰ David K. Clark and Normal L. Geisler, *Apologetics in the New Age: A Christian Critique of Pantheism*, 1990, 10.
- ³¹ *The New Cults*, 96.
- ³² *Ibid.*
- ³³ *What Everyone Should Know...*, 88.
- ³⁴ *TM Wants You*, 149.
- ³⁵ *What Everyone Should Know...*, 23, 25.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ *TM Wants You*, 150.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 150-1.
- ³⁹ *The New Cults*, 95.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ *What Everyone Should Know...*, 86.
- ⁴² *The New Cults*, 96.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁵ *What Everyone Should Know...*, 87.
- ⁴⁶ *Apologetics in the New Age...*, 239.

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