

Review of Transcendental Meditation

REVIEW OF TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi was born Mahesh Prasad Warna in Jubblepore, India in 1911. He graduated at the age of 31 from Allahabad with a degree in Physics. He then worked in a factory for five years during which time he developed an interest in Vedic scriptures.

When he was about 36 he met his Guru Dev, also known as Swami Brahmananda Saraswati, and became one of his followers. Guru Dev died in 1953 and according to legend directed Maharishi to go to the Himalayas and evolve a short cut to the knowledge of ultimate reality.

Maharishi went into seclusion for two years and then started to teach at Rishikesh, at the foot of the Himalayas. After two years he adopted the name Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. He first visited the U.S.A. in 1961. In the following ten years he fulfilled 13 world tours and visited 50 countries.

By the end of 1965 he had given initiation to just 220 people. At this time he had been teaching for 10 years and touring around the world for 4 years. Three years after the Beatles became linked with Maharishi, at the end of 1965 the numbers initiated had sharply risen to 12,000.

By the same time, 1968, he had built a fifteen acre, 58 room air-conditioned palace at Rishikesh. In 1969 the first T.M. university course, called the Science of Creative Intelligence was on the curriculum at Stanford University. And then when it seemed that everything was going right for T.M. with vast publicity, a university course, fast growing membership and more money than they knew what to do with, the Beatles suddenly dropped out denouncing Maharishi and publicly stating that they had made a mistake.

Other celebrities who had joined because the Beatles had, now also began to drop out claiming that Maharishi was a Hindu con-man. The tour of the U.S.A. failed and he returned to Rishikesh saying that he had failed and that his mission was over.

In 1970 his financial dealings were officially scrutinised and he left India for Italy.

However, the establishment came to Maharishi's rescue in 1971 with the publication in the American Journal of Physiology of a report by two Harvard scientists, Wallace and Benson. Wallace and Benson had carried out some tests on T.M. meditators and then listed eight distinct changes that occurred while they were meditating. All subsequent T.M. claiming that their method was scientifically verifiable and that the technique had the support of the body of U.S. scientists, in general, stem from this period.

As it was these first scientific investigations into T.M. were subsequently attacked by scientists on both sides of the water, primarily, because they had lacked proper control groups

Review of Transcendental Meditation

Cont. 2

and were generally not carried out on a sufficiently scientific basis. Later scientific studies reached quite different conclusions to the first investigation. Tests were carried out in the U.K. showed that the deep state of relaxation reached by some meditators can also be reached by using other methods such as using relaxation techniques, listening to classical music and so on. In America research indicated that T.M. produced its effects upon people who are expecting something to happen to them and works best with certain personality types, but it does not alter basic personality characteristics.

By October 1972, 10,000 people were being enrolled into T.M. each month. In the U.K. alone the figure was 500 a month. What they cannot tell you in T.M. is how many drop out and stop practising the technique. Some ex-teachers of T.M. estimate that the figure may be as high as 50%. There is no T.M. follow up of after-care service after the first week. But those that stay are eventually encouraged to proceed to other programmes and seminars that cost a great deal more than the weeks salary paid out for the mantra. The World Plan Executive Council admits to grossing £1.5 million each month. T.M. has become a very successful and wealthy business concern.

T.M. has been made available to the U.S. army. It has been adopted as an official course by over 25 universities and examined for its potential in combating drug addiction. T.M. is taught in high schools right across America and T.M. has established two university campuses in the States. There are even T.M. television stations opening. On this point it should be realised that there are thousands of T.V. stations in America and the religious bodies of all sorts have got hundreds of T.V. and radio stations. You would not see T.M. getting a T.V. station in this country.

The growth of T.M. in Europe and the U.K. has been slightly less spectacular but by 1979/80 some 75,000 Britains had been initiated into T.M. and it is growing at the rate of a 1000 a month. It has considerable support from among M.Ps, diplomats and the clergy. It is even being taught to some school pupils.

Maharishi makes enormous claims for T.M. He sees it as the missing link between science and religion. He welcomes scientific investigation though gives publicity only to that evidence that is generally supportive of the technique. He claims that his teachings fulfill economics, humanities, political science, natural science, sociology, psychology, religion, philosophy, world peace and law. He has a world plan which provides for one teacher to every 1000 people on earth. This world plan objectives are,

1. To develop the full potential of the individual
2. To enhance governmental achievements
3. To realise the highest ideal of education
4. To solve the problems of crime, drug, abuse and all behaviour that brings unhappiness to the family of men

Review of Transcendental Meditation

Cont. 5

5. To maximize the intelligent use of the environment
6. To bring fulfillment to the economic aspirations of the individuals and society
7. To achieve the spiritual goals of mankind in this generation.

The full potential of the individual is God-realisation and the repeating of a mantra, no matter how assiduously practised, will not realise that lofty ideal. Maharishi does not lack for ambition or belief in his system. That is an admirable trait particularly as none of his achievements are realisable. Only those disciples with Ishvara as their guide and loving mentor can bring about such ambitious ideals.

The core of Maharishi's teachings is Bhakti yoga. Closeness to God is achieved by devotion to God and devotion to God is shown through meditation. T.M. claims that the meditator will transcend ordinary waking consciousness. There are five states of consciousness in addition to wakefulness, dreamless sleep and dreaming sleep in the T.M. programme. These are, in order of importance, transcendental consciousness, cosmic consciousness, God consciousness, unity consciousness and finally Brahman consciousness. Unfortunately his programme is philosophically unattainable and anyone with the most superficial understanding of discourse will see that it is absurd.

To undertake T.M. one has to abstain from taking drugs for at least 15 days, agree to the fee (an average week's wages) and sign a document. There is then the Puja or initiation ceremony to which one would take the traditional gifts of flowers, fruit, the fee and a white handkerchief. These are dedicated in a ceremony of thanksgiving to the tradition of teachers who have passed down the secrets of meditation. A mantra such as the name of a Hindu god is given to the initiate who is taught how to repeat the sound. The puja ceremony involves chanting. The chanting is all in Sanskrit and initiators are not told the meaning. In fact the chanting involves 17 offerings to Guru Dev, each including "I bow down to him", and a hymn of praise to Guru Dev hailing him as God incarnate.

T.M. draws from a list of 16 mantras, the election being made on the basis of age. Maharishi has stated that there are thousands of mantras to choose from and any wrong choice of the mantra is sure to create an unbalance in the harmony of the man's life.

Some meditators have in fact experienced bizarre visions. These have been described variously as demonic ghoulish creatures and also as creatures of light. Meditators experiencing these visions have been warned that they are demons and they must not on any account look into their

Review of Transcendental Meditation

Cont. 4

eyes. Other meditators have seen large pairs of green eyes floating around, have been thrown bodily across rooms and suffered involuntary twitchings of the head. These are explained away as signs of "unstressing". Other signs of "unstressing" include violent angry rages, deep depression, heart attacks, seizure, loss of control of ones bodily functions, sheer fright and attacks of terror, black outs and so on. There is an exceptionally high suicide rate among T.M. teachers which T.M. just cannot adequately explain away.

T.M. claims not to be religious in any way. it insists that it is just a neutral technique for relieving stress and achieving relaxation and yet Maharishi has stated that transcendental Meditation is a path to God. The religious attitude has been suppressed in favour of the 'neutral technique' to make it more universally appealing. Maharishi has said, if T.M. were a religion it would be meaningful only to a small segment of the world and Charles Lute in 1975 stated "the popularisation of the movement in non-spiritual terms was strictly for the purpose of gaining the attention of people who would not have paid the movement much mind, if it had been put in spiritual terms." Those who have paid a week's wages for the name of a Hindu god and have praised Guru Dev as God incarnate might just start wandering what they have got themselves into.

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Bibliography T.M. a cosmic confidence trick by John Allan