

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 4 P. 4

Volume 4 • Number 1 • April 1980

Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews selected from publications
worldwide for an international readership,
interpreting the Christian faith for contemporary
living.*

EDITOR: BRUCE J. NICHOLLS



Published by
THE PATERNOSTER PRESS

Transcendental Meditation: Profile of a Westernized Eastern Religion

Joseph H. Hall

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Within the past decade, traditionally Protestant and Catholic America has faced an unprecedented challenge with the deluge of eastern religious cults. While these cults find some adult adherents, the most vulnerable age group are the white, educated, middle and upper middle-class youth. Both Professor Harvey Cox and the Gallup Polls indicate the seriousness of purpose of these cults as well as tell why they are growing.¹ Therefore, for the sake of both Christian adults and youth, full exposure of these cults is necessary.

The question must be asked, why are our youth so susceptible to eastern religious cults? Various answers have been given, ranging from dissatisfaction with a technological materialistic society to a drug-induced acceptance of these cults. Several key reasons are worth mentioning.

One is the proposed novelty of experiencing firsthand the ground of one's being. Each of these cults basically teaches that God and creation are one. Therefore, they are pantheistic to the core. Another reason for this wide acceptance is their claim to authority. Each of the cults has a master teacher who serves as the authority for the initiate. In a relativistic society such as that in which we now live, such devious authority meets with much acceptance. Finally, there does exist "community" within most of these eastern cults. Ostensibly, the leaders care for their members and are able thereby to draw others into their group by this apparent concern.

As Christians we must be alert to the wiles of the Devil in his trading on weak aspects of American Christianity. If we are honest we will confess that there is something lacking in many of our churches in the three areas of the Christian's relation to God, authority, and community. By building a strong Biblical basis for assurance of our relationship with God and fellow Christians we will provide the best remedy against eastern religions for ourselves and for our children.

The eastern religious cults are basically of two varieties, either of Hindu or of Buddhist origin. Examples of the newer Hindu variety are Transcendental Meditation, the Krishna Consciousness Movement and the Divine Light Mission. From the Sino-Japanese Buddhistic [p. 41](#) legacy various types of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism such as Soka Gakkai and I Ching are gaining young American devotees. For our purpose Transcendental Meditation will serve as a model for the eastern religious cults.

Transcendental Meditation (hereafter TM) is one of the most successful of the contemporary eastern religions. Indeed, its success can hardly be overestimated. TM has by far the most American adherents, the largest exposure via the media, and the greatest influence with the federal, state, and local governments.² It has made great inroads on

¹ Harvey Cox, "Why Young Americans are Buying Oriental Religions," *Psychology Today* (July, 1977), pp. 36-42.

² John Weldon and Zola Levitt, *The Transcendental Explosion* (Irvine, Ca.: Harvest House, 1976), pp. 12-32. A New Jersey District Court Case (Fall, 1977) affirmed that TM is a religion. This will, if upheld by the Federal Supreme Court, certainly have negative implications for continued government support.

college campuses, having established meditation centers in over 1,000 colleges and universities.

Famous entertainment and sport celebrities are TM practitioners—Merv Griffin, Peggy Lee, Stevie Wonder, Joe Namath and Bill Walton, to mention a few.

Federal, state, and municipal governments have furthered the progress of TM through either monetary grants or free access to public property such as schools and libraries. TM has been taught as an officially sanctioned course in Dade County, Florida; Louisville, Kentucky; Eastchester, New York; Hartford, Connecticut; San Lorenzo, California; and until recently a number of New Jersey schools.³

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder of modern-day TM, has as one of his goals nothing less than total allegiance to TM during this present generation. Maharishi's "World Plan" lists seven goals, six of which are general and difficult to fault. However, the seventh states the following as a goal: "To achieve the spiritual goals of mankind in this generation."⁴ For the leaders of TM the realization of such spiritual goals means nothing less than a total embracing of TM.

TM'S HISTORY

TM finds its origin in the Hindu Scripture called Bhagavad Gita. The Hindu deity, Krishna, revealed the teaching to a nobleman P.42 warrior, Arjuna, as tradition has it about 5,000 years ago. TM was lost within 2,000 years only to be restored by a famous Hindu teacher, Shankara, around the ninth century A.D. The teaching endured for several centuries only to become obscured once again. In the previous generation the method was rediscovered by Swami Brahamananda Saraswati Jagaduru, now often referred to as Guru Dev (Divine Teacher) and worshipped by TM devotees.⁵ Guru Dev taught the principles of TM to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Maharishi therefore continues the Hindu teaching that is, by tradition, seven millennia old and fully revealed by supposed divine revelation to man in the Bhagavad Gita. The Bhagavad Gita is a philosophical dialogue probably written around the second or third century A.D.

After spending a couple of years in a Himalayan cave (after the death of Guru Dev in 1953) Maharishi began teaching TM to the people of India. Then he established the Spiritual Regeneration Movement (hereafter SRM) in 1958.

Believing the West to afford better opportunities, Maharishi travelled first to England where he successfully persuaded the Beatles to practice TM. Maharishi then proceeded to California where in 1959 he chartered the Spiritual Regeneration Movement. The incorporation papers clearly reveal the religious nature of TM:

The primary business ... is to promote the Spiritual Regeneration Movement ... and to offer to all persons ... a means and method of developing latent faculties, vital energies, spiritual growth, peace and happiness through a system of deep meditation⁶

The SRM was unabashedly chartered as a religious movement. Its founders and teachers freely used the words "God" and "religion" in its teaching. However, the

³ John E. Patton, *The Case Against TM in the Schools* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), pp. 64–65.

⁴ Anonymous, *An Address to Governments*, p. 24, quoted in David Haddon, *TM Wants You* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 38.

⁵ Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *On the Bhagavad Gita* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1974), pp. 10–17; Jack Forem, *Transcendental Meditation* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), pp. 195–99.

⁶ Certificate of Incorporation of the Spiritual Regeneration Movement, quoted in Patton, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

movement made little headway for some nine years. Then significant changes were made in the framework of the TM movement. Various other organizations such as the Affiliated Organizational Conglomerate, the Student's International Movement, and the American Meditation Society were formed in the years 1967–1968. In 1972 Maharishi International University was formed on the site of the former Parson's College, Fairfield, Iowa. The public relations p. 43 materials, teachings and doctrines, moreover, showed a conscious effort to exclude terminology such as "God" and "religion". Instead such words as "science" and "creative intelligence" were used to replace these terms.

So important is this shift that now the theoretical foundation of TM is referred to as the "Science of Creative Intelligence," while the practical techniques are named TM. The reference has now become SCI/TM. The Spiritual Regeneration Movement has not been eliminated. It still exists for the deepening of the TM adherents in its foundational religious principles. However, for the uninitiated, the beck and call is to engage in a wholesale, scientific, non-religious program that will relieve stress and bring happiness. As one proceeds in the practice of TM, he is introduced to the theory of "creative intelligence," in reality a pantheistic religion.

PRACTICE OF TM

Popular materials today bill TM positively as a technique that is "simple, natural, easy, effortless, effective and fun."⁷ Negatively, TM is advertised as not "a religion, a diet, a life style, concentration, contemplation, or difficult."⁸ Moreover, the materials claim a scientific basis for TM and go into elaborate detail in their effort to prove TM a science.

These consumer materials are directed to a tension-filled, contemporary society to whom TM promises relief from these stresses by the simple, practical method of meditating twice daily in two twenty-minute sessions.⁹

Interested persons are directed to a local teaching center where they are given an introductory lecture on the nature and purpose of TM. If one is still interested he is invited back to a further lecture. The next step is a personal interview. The fourth step in the progress is very integral to the process of becoming an initiate into TM. This step includes personal instruction and the initiation ceremony.

The initiation ceremony involves elements that are directly related to the ancient Hindu practice of TM. Therefore, the elements of this ritual are central to the practice of TM. The initiate p. 44 is required to bring as an offering to this meeting three pieces of fresh, sweet fruit, several freshly-cut flowers and a clean white handkerchief. The initiation ceremony takes place in a small dimly-lit, incense-filled room containing for furniture an altar table and picture of Guru Dev. Upon entering, the initiate is asked to remove his shoes. The teacher proceeds to sing a hymn of praise, called Puja, in the Sanskrit language. This hymn of praise contains a recitation of various Hindu gods concluding with Guru Dev. During the hymn the offering is given to Guru Dev who is made the object of worship. This is the active part the initiate plays. But there is also a passive aspect he plays. The hymn of praise is viewed by the teachers of TM as a means of setting up a sympathetic relation with and revelation of Hindu deities to the initiate. Thus the

⁷ Denise Denniston and Peter McWilliams, *The TM Book* (Anderson, In.: Warner Books, 1975), back cover advertisement.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Forem, *op. cit.*, pp. 240ff.

initiate, unknown to himself, supposedly passively receives “benefits” from Hindu deities during the Puja.¹⁰

Following the recitation the initiate is given a Sanskrit word, called a mantra, the sound of which he is to meditate upon. TM proponents currently claim that mantras are sounds which have no meaning to the meditator but which is conducive to producing deep relaxation and refined awareness.¹¹ However, in his *Meditations* (published nearly ten years ago) Maharishi plainly teaches that mantras produce certain vibrations for each individual which not only link one up with all of creation but also with the “Source of all vibration,” who very obviously is Maharishi’s Hindu god Brahman.¹²

Linking mantras still further with Hindu religion, Maharishi views the hymns of the Hindu sacred Vedas as mantras about which he states:

“The entire knowledge of the mantras or hymns of the Vedas is devoted to man’s connection, to man’s communication with the higher beings in a different strata of creation.”¹³

Thus the purpose of the mantra in TM, given at the initiation ceremony, is nothing other than that of relating the initiate to a Hindu deity.

This purpose becomes even clearer when Maharishi speaks of meditation upon the mantra as [p. 45](#)

“A very good form of prayer. A most defined and more powerful form of prayer is this meditation which directly leads us to the fields of the Creator, to the sources of Creation, to the field of God.”¹⁴

The object of TM is to transcend the world of phenomena in which we live (Maya, or illusion, in Indian thinking) by going into our inner being. By faithfully spending twenty minutes twice daily meditating on the sound of one’s mantra one supposedly will experience a deeper level of consciousness as one proceeds. The object of “diving in” to a deeper consciousness level is to create a more harmonious vibration between oneself and the universe and ultimately between the person and god.

Maharishi teaches that there exist seven levels of consciousness. The first three are very obvious: sleeping, dreaming and waking. The fourth level Maharishi teaches is transcendental consciousness, that is, a state of deep rest in which one’s metabolism is greatly lowered. This is due to the fact that human consciousness has, according to Maharishi, realized its connection with Being and is at that moment in a state of bliss. Therefore, Maharishi can declare that “the essential nature of Being is absolute bliss consciousness,”¹⁵ and “transcendental consciousness is bliss consciousness.”¹⁶ Maharishi proudly claims that such teaching is found in the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita.¹⁷

¹⁰ Brooks Alexander, “Penetrating the Veil of Deception,” a taped lecture published by Spiritual Counterfeits, Inc.

¹¹ Forem, *op. cit.*, pp. 40.

¹² Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *Meditations* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), pp. 106–07.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹⁵ Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *Transcendental Meditation*, p. 22.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

There exist yet three higher levels of consciousness in TM. They are cosmic consciousness, God-consciousness and unity-consciousness.

Cosmic consciousness is that level, according to Maharishi, in which one gains an awareness of both transcendental consciousness and ordinary waking consciousness simultaneously. Once gained it is said to be permanent and spontaneously maintained throughout waking, dreaming and sleeping consciousness.¹⁸

God-consciousness, the sixth state of consciousness, is said to follow cosmic consciousness and is a permanent awareness of the “Absolute” on the subjective level. It is a point at which the TM views all things, including himself, as overflowing with the p. 46 divine being. However, the tension between the relative and the absolute is never completely resolved.¹⁹ Yet it is certain that Maharishi’s pantheistic views disallows the existence of a personal God.

God-consciousness finds its fulfillment in unity-consciousness. This last state is said to be the finest level of relationship between relative existence and the absolute God. It is a point at which an individual becomes one with God, according to Maharishi.²⁰

The grand object of TM then, in summary, is unity and oneness with God. This is achieved by extended meditation and teaching, both of which enable one supposedly to delve down into the states of consciousness and finally to arrive at total awareness of one’s unity with God. This is done at least initially under the guise of the subject’s achieving a much needed “deep rest” and “relaxation”.

PRACTICAL EVALUATION

TM may be scored on both practical and theological grounds.

The first practical criticism is that the practice of TM can lead to occult spiritism. Maharishi is aware that TM can lead to encountering spirits in the spirit world.²¹ While, in fairness to Maharishi, he counsels to avoid spirits, the practice inevitably leads to spiritism. For example, the TM movement is now encouraging the practice of levitation, the raising of objects by spiritual movement.

While one cannot generalize the experience of one person, the citation of one former practitioner may be useful to show the dangers of spirit or demon possession through TM usage. Vail Hamilton, a Christian convert from TM tells of a mind-blowing experience when she was in what Maharishi describes as cosmic consciousness:

*Once, while in this state, I felt a spirit resting on my stomach while I was lying on my back. Immediately, I felt and saw a luminous part of my hand slip out of its denser fleshly covering. I probably would have come entirely out of my body if I hadn’t sensed a danger in it. Now that I think of it, if I had left, perhaps someone else would have come in.*²²

We are warned in Scripture to stay away from mediums, witches, p. 47 and occult experiences lest we encounter great damage and sin against God.

¹⁸ Anthony C. Campbell, *Seven States of Consciousness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 68.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 95–98.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 106–09.

²¹ Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *Transcendental Meditation*, pp. 97ff.

²² Haddon, op. cit., p. 56.

THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

In addition to the danger of spirit possession, there is the more basic criticism that TM teaches a false theology that is Hindu to the core. Space permits us to treat this topic, only briefly, in the following four areas: God, man, the world, and ethics.

While Maharishi feigns an attempt to present TM users with a personal God he cannot successfully sustain this position. He wrestles with what he calls the paradox between the absolute existence and the relative existence. In the final analysis Maharishi defines God as Being-which-encompasses-all-of-reality. Taking his cue from the Bhagavad Gita, Maharishi declares: "I am that eternal Being, thou art That and all this is That eternal Being in its essential nature."²³ The verdict is clear: TM teaches nothing less than pantheism.

But Maharishi is faced with the task of explaining how Being, which comprises everything and never changes, can include natural phenomena which are always changing. He answers this in a way that rivals the most prominent dialectical theologians of our day. God must create, says Maharishi, because of an inner urge. The purpose of creation is eudaemonistic, that of happiness. Therefore, the eternal Being, moved by this urge to create, spills out its being and forms the natural order, or the "gross level" or relative existence:

*The unity of Beingness, without undergoing any change in Itself, assumes the role of the multiplicity of creation, the diversity of the Being. The absolute assuming the role of relativity, or unity appearing as multiplicity is nothing else but the very nature of the absolute Being appearing in different manifestations. That is why, while the absolute is eternal in Its never-changing status, the relative diversity of creation is eternal in its ever-changing nature.*²⁴

Maharishi continues this dialectical nonsense by stating: "The reality of duality is unity. Even though different in their characteristics, the absolute Being and relative creation together form the one reality."²⁵

The natural order, says Maharishi, is relative and a "gross p. 48 level" of existence. It is really illusory (Maya), and real existence (Being) lies beyond.²⁶ Hence the necessity of descending the levels of consciousness. How markedly different from the Christian doctrine of creation which declares that the heavens and earth are revelatory of God's glory ([Psalms 8, 19](#))!

Man is viewed also as an emanation from God. Man's basic problem is not the Christian doctrine of sin. Rather, it is ignorance of his own divinity. Salvation or "self-realization," to use Maharishi's term, is the recognition of one's essential divinity and ultimately the unity in consciousness with the all-pervasive being of God.²⁷

Man's purpose in life is to enjoy the "bliss consciousness" essential to the nature of being and finally to enter a state of eternal liberation. This state is called Moksha or Nirvana. The only way for man to escape reincarnation and karma (the inexorable judgement upon man's action) is to have experienced this state of eternal liberation at

²³ Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *Transcendental Meditation*, pp. 21–22.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 65–67.

death. In this experience the person would lose all individuality and become swallowed up in the Hindu god Brahman, the All.

The Christian must counter TM with the doctrine of man as created in the image of God. Man must be seen as ontologically separate from God, but created to know God and to live in fellowship with Him, now possible only through redemption in Christ.

Concerning Christ's redemptive work, Maharishi speaks of our Lord as only an exemplary teacher and his atoning work as futile: "I don't think Christ ever suffered or could suffer ... It is a pity that Christ is talked of in terms of suffering.... Those who count upon suffering, it/*sic*/is a wrong interpretation of the life of Christ and the message of Christ..."²⁸

It is not correct to say that TM is completely without any ethics. Maharishi does indeed posit a pragmatic ethic for our everyday existence. However his ethic has no absolute right or wrong: "Certainly right and wrong are relative terms, and nothing in the field of relative existence could be said to be absolute right or wrong."²⁹

There exist, however, according to TM, certain relative standards p. 49 for right and wrong, namely, scriptures, and elderly and great men who teach us.

On the other hand, as one proceeds in the activity of TM and reaches the level of cosmic consciousness, the individual becomes his own standard of right and wrong: "In the state of cosmic consciousness ... the intellect could be taken to be an adequate standard for right and wrong."³⁰ Here Maharishi is faithful to the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, which justify even killing if one is in the correct state of mind. Killing really does not matter according to Hindu thinking because whether one lives or dies is one and the same, due to karma and reincarnation. Should one die he will be reincarnated according to the judgement of karma, the inexorable judgement of reaping what one has sowed.

TM must be denounced for both its practice and its theology. It is a satanic, delusive religion operating under the guise of a scientific method of relaxation. Its god is not the holy, righteous Creator and redeemer God of the Bible. Rather, its god is the fabrication of man's mind. TM knows nothing of sin and therefore has no need of a savior. Ignorance on man's part in realizing his supposed oneness with God is defined as sin. How vastly different is this understanding of sin from the biblical depiction of sin as man's failure to obey and to conform to God's righteous law.

It should be quite obvious that the Christian can have no part in the dangerous, insidious teaching and practice of TM. Should one think that he can slough off the Hindu excrescences and simply use it as a system, much as Yoga physical exercises, let him beware. One cannot play with fire and fail to be burned. TM both in teaching and practice is Hindu to the core and is therefore *completely* incompatible with Christianity.

Let us find our rest, relaxation, and peace by continually coming to the fountain of peace, Jesus Christ, who has bidden us come to Himself. Let us meditate on God's goodness in saving us from our sins, and then let us translate meditation into obedience. It is in both knowing and doing the will of God that we shall find our peace. Finally, let us teach these great truths to our children and, by God's grace, save them from the clutches of one of the most insidious of the westernized Eastern religions. p. 50

²⁸ *Ibid.*, *Meditations*, pp. 123–24.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, *Transcendental Meditation*, p. 220.

³⁰ *Ibid.*