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TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM Part Two: Does TM Really Work?

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SYNOPSIS

The Transcendental Meditation (TM) movement routinely claims scientific validation for the benefits of its meditation program. It alleges that some 500 studies, including those from leading universities, have confirmed the positive benefits of TM for individuals and society. TM promoters, for example, often speak of the “Maharishi Effect,” which they say improves the quality of life in many locations by reducing crime and conflict while increasing various collective health benefits. These claims, however, have never been proven. In fact, the evidence suggests no such “effect” exists or could exist. Part of the problem stems from the definition of “science” endorsed by Maharishi (leader of the TM movement), which is so broad that almost anything can be proven “scientifically.” Of greater concern than the movement’s faulty definition and false claims are the negative effects of TM, which may include a variety of adverse physical and psychological consequences for meditators. There are also various issues concerning Maharishi himself, such as his apparent lack of authoritative support in disseminating TM theory and practice. The current leader in Maharishi’s own Hindu religious tradition, in fact, has declared that when Maharishi violated his own family *dharma* (i.e., social class duty) as a young man, he became spiritually unfit to engage in the activities that he has practiced for some 50 years. Finally, additional deceptions by the movement suggest that TM is rarely what it claims to be.

There has not been and there will not be a place for the unfit.¹ – Maharishi

I’m establishing a government in the world which will disallow the sprouting of negativity in any country, in any country.² – Maharishi

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, leader of the Transcendental Meditation (TM) movement, contends that Harvard Medical School, Princeton University, University of Chicago, University of California at Berkeley, and other prominent universities have verified TM’s benefits and that their studies published in *Science*, *Lancet*, *Scientific American*, and other prestigious journals prove Maharishi’s claims concerning TM.³ He asserts that these are not fly-by-night studies. Referring specifically to the alleged “Maharishi Effect” (see below), he states “These studies have utilized the most advanced and rigorous research designs in statistical methodologies.”⁴ The “Maharishi Effect,” “Extended Maharishi Effect,” and “Global Maharishi Effect,” he claims, “have been more extensively documented and thoroughly established than any other phenomenon in the field of scientific research.”⁵

Wow! That sounds impressive; and of course, it must be, since the TM organization asserts, “His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh Yogi is widely regarded as the foremost scientist in the field of consciousness, and is considered to be the greatest teacher in the world today.”⁶ His noble worldwide goals, moreover, “place Maharishi on a most supremely exalted level of *rulership*, which far surpasses the wisdom or administrative skill of any sovereign ruler in the world that history has ever recorded” (emphasis added).⁷

“Five hundred studies have proven TM” has been the mantra of TM enthusiasts for many years. TM promoters “often attempt to parlay such [alleged scientific] recognition into research grants, influence upon public policy-makers, and influence with the public at large.”⁸ That is why this issue is so important: if TM’s claim to scientific validation is not laid to rest, the public will continue to waste resources and be deceived.

Do these 500 studies really confirm TM’s claims? TM, like any relaxation program, can produce some relatively minor physical and psychological changes. The question, however, is whether these detected effects are significant. In a critique of TM research up to 1980, Michael A. Persinger, coordinator of the behavioral neuroscience program at Laurentian University, noted, “*Frankly, the reported effects of TM upon human behavior are trivial.* Considering the alleged potency of the TM procedure, the changes in physiological and behavioral measures are conspicuously minute.”⁹ The extent of what is claimed and the often poor quality of the research are also important issues when evaluating the significance of these 500 studies.

RESEARCH PROBLEMS

Questions regarding independent validation and impartiality must be raised because, as one researcher notes, “the studies...have been performed primarily by the TM Organization or by people they sponsor at Maharishi University of Management and at other universities.”¹⁰ Several independent investigators, in fact, confirm numerous problems with the studies TM cites, having examined the studies, used stricter controls, and found different results.¹¹ Such study problems include “allegations of suppression of negative evidence, of fraud and of ‘gross scientific incompetence,’ lack of double-blind controls, refusal to submit raw data, failure to control for set effects, failure to control for expectancy of relief, failure to control for placebo/suggestible-prone subjects, and others.”¹² TM-EX, a group of former TM practitioners, concludes that “Maharishi affiliated researchers consistently use selection bias in collecting their research data...selecting only data that is favorable to the movement claims.”¹³ In *American Behavioral Scientist*, distinguished social scientist Daniel Druckman of George Mason University and the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution noted that research indicates TM is *ineffectual* for improving human performance and found that the often-cited meta-analysis TM researchers put forth as evidence was flawed in its methodology.¹⁴ Even Dennis Roark, the former dean of faculty and chairman of the department of physics at Maharishi University of Management (MUM), speaks of the university’s “crackpot science” protocols, it’s meritless claims concerning the relationship between physics and consciousness, and the suppression of negative data in movement-sponsored research that is widely quoted as “scientific” proof of the benefits of TM.¹⁵ Chemist and Nobel Prize winner Melvin Calvin of the University of California at Berkeley concludes: “Maharishi’s principle business is collecting money from new acolytes. He doesn’t know anything about science; but does know that cloaking his dogma in scientific jargon is the only way to gain legitimacy.”¹⁶

A MAHARISHI EFFECT?

Many of the studies deal with the so-called “Maharishi Effect” that is based on Maharishi’s Hindu theory of consciousness and is further developed and defended by physicist John Hagelin in various articles of *Modern Science and Vedic Science*, a TM publication. Advocates of the Maharishi Effect allege that crime, sickness, and accidents will be reduced if one percent of a population (city, state, nation, or planet) meditates and “spontaneously” spreads its “enlightened” consciousness to others. The “Extended Maharishi Effect,” Maharishi says, has “a more powerful effect,” allegedly proven by the fact that in 108 countries the “crime rate was reduced everywhere.”¹⁷ His “Global Maharishi Effect” is alleged to be the most powerful of all and “was created by the group practice of 7,000 Yogic Flyers [i.e., advanced TMers who supposedly levitate] — 7,000 being approximately the square root of 1 percent of the world’s population.”¹⁸ This supposedly affects the entire world. According to Maharishi, “The greatest demonstration of the Global Maharishi Effect so far was evidenced when the enmity between the two super powers (Soviet Union and USA) ended in a friendly handshake (1998).”¹⁹

Maharishi is very clear that independent studies confirm these three effects: “Over 40 independent research studies on the city, provincial, national, and international levels confirm that the Maharishi Effect, the Extended Maharishi Effect, and the Global Maharishi Effect improved the quality of life in society

and trends of life in the entire world.”²⁰ The benefits claimed by the guru include: (1) significantly decreased crime, (2) improved collective health and decreased fatalities, (3) decreased inflation and unemployment, (4) reduced national and international conflict and terrorism (claimed five full years before 9/11), (5) improved East-West relations, (6) “increased EEG coherence during Yogic Flying,” and (7) reduced recidivism in prisoners (i.e., the tendency to return to criminal habits), and (8) decreased incidence of disease.²¹

It is not surprising that none of these claims are true. In a compelling analysis, Evan Fales and Barry Markovsky of the University of Iowa examined the Maharishi Effect theory and commented, “The theory receives low marks for meaningfulness. Key terms are undefined or only roughly characterized using other complex, undefined terms or metaphors.”²² They concluded that the theory’s claims “do not merit being taken seriously by the scientific community. The theory motivating the research is ill-constructed and not compelling in view of prior knowledge; the evidence offered is not impressive and mundane alternative hypotheses offer plausible explanations for the findings.”²³

The best “controlled test” of the Maharishi Effect, in fact, has already been conducted, although the movement seems peculiarly silent on the subject. Maharishi’s university is located in Fairfield, Iowa, a city with 2,000–2,500 active meditators in a population of 10,000, a perfect “laboratory” for testing TM claims. Fairfield has 20–25 times the amount of the mere one percent of a population needed to create an ideal society, and this has been true for many years. The social statistics of Fairfield, however, do not indicate a Maharishi Effect. In fact, if the statistics show anything, it seems that TM may actually *increase* violent behavior in society: “An objective analysis of crime data for the period of 1991–1998, based on the Iowa Uniform Crime Reports, shows an overall increase in violent crime and property crime for this period, both for Fairfield/Jefferson County and for Iowa.”²⁴

Finally, if the Maharishi Effect were true, it would have been proven long ago in India where there have been millions of alleged god-realized souls throughout the millennia. Few nations, however, have more poverty, disease, suffering, and other social problems.

PROVING TM THROUGH THE SPIRITUAL SCIENCE OF EVERYTHING

A major problem with TM’s scientific claims is that Maharishi has conveniently redefined science so that bad science and even occult science are deemed legitimate. In his 1955 lecture in Kerala, India, for example, Maharishi declared, “India always regarded the science of the soul as the best and most useful of all the science.”²⁵ It’s no wonder, then, that in TM, things tend to be filtered through this “spiritual” science so that even the Hindu scriptures — the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gita, and Brahma Sutras — are declared to be “scientific documents.” The Hindu gods themselves, such as *Indra*, are described in scientific terms.²⁶

The following examples illustrate how Maharishi’s colorful descriptions of science make it easy to prove any TM claim: “My Vedic Science...is the science of objectivity, which is nothing other than the expression of subjectivity....My Vedic Science, being the science of everything, can be defined in terms of anything and everything....My Vedic Science, being the science of everything, opens a wide gate of all possibilities to every Vedic scientist.”²⁷ Maharishi’s science gives students “the spontaneous ability to know anything, do anything, and accomplish anything.” It “is the science of the Self of everyone. Its scope ranges from the individual Self (ATMA [Atman]), to the Cosmic Self (BRAHM [Brahman]).”²⁸ Not surprisingly, *everyone* is a bona fide scientist: “My Vedic Science is not foreign to anyone....[It] makes everyone knowledgeable about everything.”²⁹

Maharishi’s writings contain literally hundreds of pages of scientific nonsense; for example, “Transcendental Meditation... is...the technology of the Unified Field in Physics, the technology of the Transition State in Chemistry, technology of the Quantum Regime of Cosmology, the technology of the Null Set, the source of all sets, in Mathematics, and the technology of the Integrating Centre in Regulatory Physiology.”³⁰ The “seed of Vedic Mathematics,” he asserts, is found in the “self referral state of consciousness” (achieved by TM) and the “thousand-headed Purusha, the administrator of the universe is the ‘Cosmic Mathematician’...with the ability to handle all the different values of Vedic Mathematics simultaneously with absolute precision and order.”³¹ Thus, “Vedic Algebra [and calculus, geometry, logic, statistics, trigonometry, etc.] is the algebra [etc.] involved in the structuring dynamics of the Veda.”³²

In light of such statements, it is hardly surprising that Maharishi's university is *primarily* concerned with ephemeral states of consciousness: "Study of consciousness and research in consciousness is the most vital aspect of a university" so that "Maharishi Vedic University is the university of pure and applied knowledge of everything in the universe."³³ Perhaps this explains the nature of some of its quaint awards. In 1998, it awarded Tony Nader "his weight in gold for his historic discovery that the totality of Veda and Vedic Literature, along with all the Devatas [i.e., Hindu gods] and the whole cosmos, is located in the physiology of every human being."³⁴

PROFANE EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

According to TM, *all* non-Vedic education, whether scientific or not, is profane and meaningless, and students who attend other universities besides MUM are only increasing their ignorance.³⁵ Indeed, "As there is no [other] university in the world that offers study of consciousness and research in consciousness, *university education is baseless everywhere*, and baseless education can only produce disintegrated, stressful, and frustrated individuals, and *a society full of problems and suffering*. This has been the sad picture of education in the world throughout recorded history" (emphasis added).³⁶ Thus, without the "intellectual understanding of consciousness," that is, TM, "the expressions of the field of consciousness [i.e., all 'profane' knowledge] are *meaningless, baseless and fruitless*. All the universities in the world have proved this" (emphasis added).³⁷ Maharishi proudly asserts, "My Absolute Theory of Education...does not *permit* education to be a path of gaining knowledge...my Absolute Theory of Education, *eliminating the path of gaining knowledge*, delivers total knowledge" (emphasis added).³⁸

Maharishi's claim, in essence, is that all scientists of the world must realize that they have been deluding themselves in how they practice science.³⁹ Their work, apart from TM, is worthless and, worse, socially destructive. Maharishi concludes: "The education in every country is inefficient, is cruel to life, and can even be labeled as 'fraud.'"⁴⁰ This conclusion is ironic given the deceptive claims of the TM movement.

THE DANGERS OF TM

TM promoters claim the practice is "perfectly safe," but this is not the case: "Warnings have been issued about the dangers of TM by the German government, the Vatican, the Cult Awareness Network, the Task Force on Missionaries and Cults, the Interfaith Coalition of Concern about Cults and various professional organizations."⁴¹ Anthony D. DeNaro, former professor of economics and business law at Maharishi's International University (MIU, now MUM), recalled a private meeting with the Maharishi in a sworn court affidavit: "Maharishi had a very cavalier, almost elitist, view about very serious injuries and trauma to meditators."⁴² (It should be pointed out that the potential dangers mentioned here regarding TM are also true for New Age/Eastern/occult meditation as well, which I have documented elsewhere.⁴³)

There is evidence, which is documented in my earlier book on TM and in the research of others, that TM may lead to serious maladies such as mental illness, suicide, seizures, and demon possession;⁴⁴ unfortunately, space permits discussion of only mental illness. Even Maharishi gently counsels, "In the absence of a proper interpretation of this expression of non-attachment, one might become bewildered, and this great blessing of life might become a liability."⁴⁵

Harmful effects have occurred since the beginning of TM. John Parks, former manager of the Beach Boys, for example, was initiated into TM by Maharishi himself. He was therefore in a position to know the inside story. Parks personally reported the following to me concerning a 1969 teacher training course: "Maharishi had not put a time limit on meditating and quite a few people ended up in the mental hospital. Some are still there."⁴⁶

In many cases the propensity for causing mental problems almost seems built into the TM procedure. A review of 75 articles in the *International Journal of Psychotherapy* noted the positive and negative effects found in studies of relatively small numbers of people. It reported that negative side effects were encountered by more than 62 percent of the meditators studied. The authors did not restrict their study to TM, but the side effects reported were similar to those found in the "German Study" (see below) of TM meditators: relaxation-induced anxiety and panic, paradoxical increases in tension, less motivation in life, boredom, pain, impaired reality testing, confusion and disorientation, feeling "spaced out," depression,

increased negativity, being more judgmental, feeling addicted to meditation, uncomfortable kinaesthetic sensations, mild dissociation, feelings of guilt, psychosis-like symptoms, grandiosity, elation, destructive behavior, suicidal feelings, defenselessness, fear, anger, apprehension, and despair.⁴⁷

In a study of 221 college students (65–70 percent TMers), Michael A. Persinger of Laurentian University reported: “Meditators displayed a significantly wider range of complex partial epileptic-like signs. Experiences of vibrations, hearing one’s name called, [and] paranormal phenomena,...were particularly frequent among meditators.”⁴⁸

According to TranceNet, an extensive analysis of a small sample of meditators done by Germany’s Institute for Youth and Society found that 76 percent of long-term meditators experience psychological problems. The report also notes that 26 percent experienced nervous breakdowns, 63 percent experienced serious physical complaints, and 70 percent recorded a worsening ability to concentrate.⁴⁹ Researchers, ironically, also found “a startling drop in honesty among long-term meditators.”⁵⁰ TranceNet supplies a table of about 10 independent studies that measured the negative side effects of long-term TM practice and which confirm the above conclusions and more.⁵¹ A *TM-EX Newsletter* also lists about 40 studies that further support this finding.⁵²

COSMIC MIRROR

What Maharishi claims for himself or allows his meditators to claim for him is absolutely astounding. Consider a few examples: “Maharishi in the world today is a cosmic figure, caring for the well-being of all mankind....Maharishi...a quiet guardian of all nations”⁵³; “Maharishi’s achievements...are unequaled today or at any other time in recorded history.”⁵⁴

It should be noted, however, that Maharishi was born Mahed Prasad Varma around 1917 into a working class and *not* into the Brahmin class, the highest Indian social class, or *caste*. Swami Swaroopanand Saraswati is known throughout India as a genuine disciple of Guru Dev, Maharishi’s master. He sits in two of the four “seats” of Shankara (i.e., four monasteries through which living gurus pass on the advaita Hindu tradition) and is considered to be one of the most respected spiritual leaders in India. Saraswati says that Maharishi was merely a servant who received no instruction from Guru Dev; that Vedic law forbids Maharishi to teach mantras or instruct in meditation; and that attachment to the siddhis (psychic powers), which automatically attend Hindu meditation, is dangerous and useless.⁵⁵ He explains, “Preaching, initiating, guiding people engaged in spiritual pursuits is the duty of those who are born in a Brahmin family. If he [Maharishi] is a follower of Sanatan Dharma (the Hindu religion), he should not do what he is doing. This is *against* the orders of his Guru.”⁵⁶ The commentator in *Beacon Light of the Himalayas* asserts, “The Maharishi may never teach in the name of Shankara...since his low-caste birth blocks him from following this tradition.”⁵⁷ Finally, Saraswati says, “He, himself (Mahesh) is in darkness.”⁵⁸

Maharishi himself, meanwhile, in no uncertain terms, warns against the grave consequences of violating one’s family *dharma* (i.e., the duty of one’s *caste*, or social class), saying it leads to personal and spiritual regression and has a hellish effect on one’s family: “One who has lost his caste represents the lowest in human life, a man living in complete ignorance, who has lost the path of his evolution.”⁵⁹

IT’S NOT WHAT IT SEEMS

The following are some additional bits of information that demonstrate that TM is rarely what it claims to be:

- In his 1955 Kerala lecture, Maharishi denied what he subsequently taught for 50 years about the special nature, importance, and uniqueness of the TM mantras: “For training the mind through sound, we can take *any word....any sound* can serve our purpose” (emphasis added).⁶⁰
- Maharishi charges money for Vedic instruction, which, according to his tradition, is a sin.⁶¹
- The TM movement claims that yagyas are not religious ceremonies while Maharishi knows they are ceremonies dedicated to Hindu deities. The commentator to *Beacon Light of the Himalayas* noted, “There is no doubt here that the Maharishi is indicating that chanting vedas and mantras while performing yajnas (yagyas) are for the express purpose of summoning the Veda Gods.”⁶² In fact, in a secret videotape used in a civil suit against TM, Maharishi offers a rather spine-chilling

explanation of the meditator's relationship to the Hindu gods, which TranceNet summarizes as follows: "TMers produce the magical chemical Soma in their gut — but it isn't something they can use directly. The Vedic Gods, principally Indra, descend from Heaven and feed on the Soma in the TMers' belly. In return for this primitive relationship, the Gods grant all manner of boons. TMers become successful, happy, prosperous, and develop supernormal abilities."⁶³

- TranceNet points out, "Selections from the *Tantra of the Great Liberation*, the *Mantra Sastra*, and *The Garland of Letters* show that TM's supposedly meaningless *bija* (seed) mantras invoke Hindu gods. For example, 'AING' is a name for Saraswati."⁶⁴
- What Maharishi knows and what TM teachers don't tell the initiate is that their worship of Maharishi's dead master Guru Dev in the initiation ceremony is literally devotion to Shiva and other Hindu gods.⁶⁵ DeNaro, the former MIU professor mentioned earlier, "alleges that the Maharishi was very clear, in private, that TM meditators *are initiated into Hinduism* during the puja."⁶⁶
- DeNaro stated in a 1986 affidavit presented to the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, "It was obvious to me that [the] organization was so deeply immersed in a systematic, willful pattern of fraud including tax fraud, lobbying problems and other deceptions, that it was ethically impossible for me to become involved further as legal counsel."⁶⁷ DeNaro further characterized MUM (formerly MIU) as having a "disturbing denial or avoidance syndrome....even outright lies and deception are used to cover-up or sanitize the dangerous reality on campus of very serious nervous breakdowns, episodes of dangerous and bizarre behavior, suicidal and homicidal ideation, threats and attempts, psychotic episodes, crime, depression and manic behavior that often accompanied roundings (intensive group meditations with brainwashing techniques)."⁶⁸

Let me see if 34 years after my initiation by the guru I have this right: TM still isn't a religion, is perfectly safe, has endless scientific proof, is the friend of Christianity, will bring world peace, and is the only institution in all the earth that is not practicing deception. Finally, I'm enlightened.

NOTES

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3. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *Maharishi's Absolute Theory of Government*, 2nd ed. (Delhi, India: Maharishi Prakashan, 1995), 321–22.
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5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, 545; see also "Maharishi Mahesh Yogi," The Transcendental Meditation Program, http://www.tm.org/main_pages/maharishi.html.
7. Yogi, *Maharishi's Absolute Theory of Government*, 553.
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17. Yogi, *Maharishi's Absolute Theory of Government*, 316.
18. *Ibid.*, 317.
19. *Ibid.*, 318.
20. *Ibid.*, 316.
21. *Ibid.*, 328–32.

22. Fales and Markovsky.
23. Ibid.
24. Barry Markovsky, "Behind the TM Façade," under "Maharishi Effect," http://unstress4less.org/Maharishi_Effect-mdefect.htm (not accessible November 2004).
25. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *Beacon Light of the Himalayas* (Kerala, India: n.p., 1955), 9; available online at TranceNet, <http://www.trancenet.org/secrets/beacon/beacon2.shtml>.
26. "Soma and the Gods, 3," TranceNet, <http://www.trancenet.org/secrets/soma/soma3.shtml>.
27. *Maharishi Vedic University: Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Delhi, India: Maharishi Prakashan, 1995), 157–59. No author is listed for this book; however, the quotation on page III seems to imply that it is Maharishi.
28. Ibid., 163–64.
29. Ibid., 163–64, 166.
30. Yogi, *Maharishi's Absolute Theory of Government*, 286–87.
31. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *Maharishi's Absolute Theory of Defense* (India: Maharishi Vedic University, 1996), 364–65.
32. Ibid., 385–86.
33. *Maharishi Vedic University*, 9, 11.
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35. *Maharishi Vedic University*, 13.
36. Ibid., 15.
37. Ibid., 8.
38. Ibid., 325.
39. Ibid., 106.
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44. See John Weldon, *The Transcendental Explosion* (Irvine, CA: Harvest House, 1976); "Independent TM Research Archive," TranceNet, <http://www.trancenet.org/research/index.shtml>.
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60. Yogi, *Beacon Light*, 12 (<http://www.trancenet.org/secrets/beacon/beacon2.shtml>).
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67. Carroll.
68. Ibid.