

NEWS FEATURE

TM: Does it live up to its claims?

by Mary Ruth Olson

Find a quiet place and sit down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes. For thirty seconds don't think of anything. Then start repeating the word 'one' to yourself for twenty minutes. There. You've just meditated for the first time. Feel relaxed? If you did it twice a day you should reap the same benefits as a student who's paid \$150 to attend seven lectures with a specially trained instructor of Transcendental Meditation (TM) - a calm and coherent mind throughout your day.

TM claims that following their technique a student will automatically receive higher grades, an increased intelligence level, improved coherence, and added ease in coping with the world, people and one's own emotions.

So what's so different about the TM technique? Stuart MacKay, a former ten year TM meditator, says there is no real difference between the do-it-yourself method and the TM technique, except for TM's initiation ceremony and their advanced courses that lead into things like levitation and 'flying'.

After the introductory class for TM, you are instructed to: "bring in a handkerchief and some fruit for your initiation ceremony. Your instructor will ask you some personal questions, sing a song and give you a specially selected word (mantra) which you are not to tell to anyone," says Stuart.

Following the initiation you are free to meditate at your every whim; no subsequent classes are necessary but there are free lectures every week at the TM centre for those who wish to

maintain a link with the group.

Courses for advanced levels (sidhis) and teacher training for the TM technique are also available for a fee. At the local level, the advanced courses are usually week-end retreats offering films and speeches. Some of these students meditate up to four or six times per day to gain a higher level of consciousness.

Stuart says the 'sidhis' courses are very expensive. "Some people work for six months and then go away on another course."

Students can take the sidhis course in Edmonton or at the TM Academy in Huntsville, Ontario. The price for the six week course: \$3,000 (which includes room and board of course).

Sidhis students learn new mantras and mind/body control that leads to levitation and flying.

"We called it the TM Olympics - the 100 yard dash in a sitting position," says Stuart.

This whole technique of TM was developed by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, a self-professed 'master' from India. He graduated from Allahabad University and later took vows as a disciple of Guru Dev - a leader of Vedantic Hinduism. Following Guru Dev's death, the Maharishi withdrew to the Himalayas for two years to meditate, returning to the world with a new self-proclaimed title: Maharishi (master) Mahesh (family name) Yogi (one who gains union with God). He had also formed the basic ground rules for TM. However, after gaining little success in India, where meditating has been around for thousands of years, he packaged his concepts and brought them to the open-minded West.

One would surmise that,

following the Maharishi's background and beliefs, TM should have religious tendencies. However, one of the first points made at any TM introductory lecture is: "TM is not a religion."

Upon closer analysis, there is proof that the basic fundamentals of TM are entrenched in the Hindu religion. The Sanskrit hymn, for example, that is recited at the Student's initiation ceremony, praises the creator-gods of TM, offers goods to these gods accompanied by 'bowing down', and gives praise and

adoration to the Guru Dev as a type of deity. Reference is made to Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva; three major deities in the Hindu religion.

Following this recital, the instructor bows before an altar which bears the pictures of the Maharishi and Guru Dev, and instructs the student to follow suit. The student is then given a mantra and allowed to meditate for the first time.

In the book *Snapping*, a former TM instructor stated his misgivings about telling his

students that 'mantras' are just "meaningless sounds" when, in fact each word is the name of a Hindu demi-god.

Dr. Ralph Moellering, clergyman and current U of A professor of Ancient and Modern Gnosticism, says that TM definitely has a religious background.

"The controversy is whether it is carried over into practise. Some aspects of religion are strong in TM."

Stuart agrees that the roots of TM are religious but he does not see it as a form of religion.

"When the mind is clear you can get closer to the divine. There were some religious people on the retreats I attended and they found TM compatible with the Christian faith.

"The one thing I have against TM is the way some people use it; seeing it as a real panacea," says Stuart.

He joined TM while he was in university.

"I was looking for 'something' and I was in love with a girl that was into TM," he said.

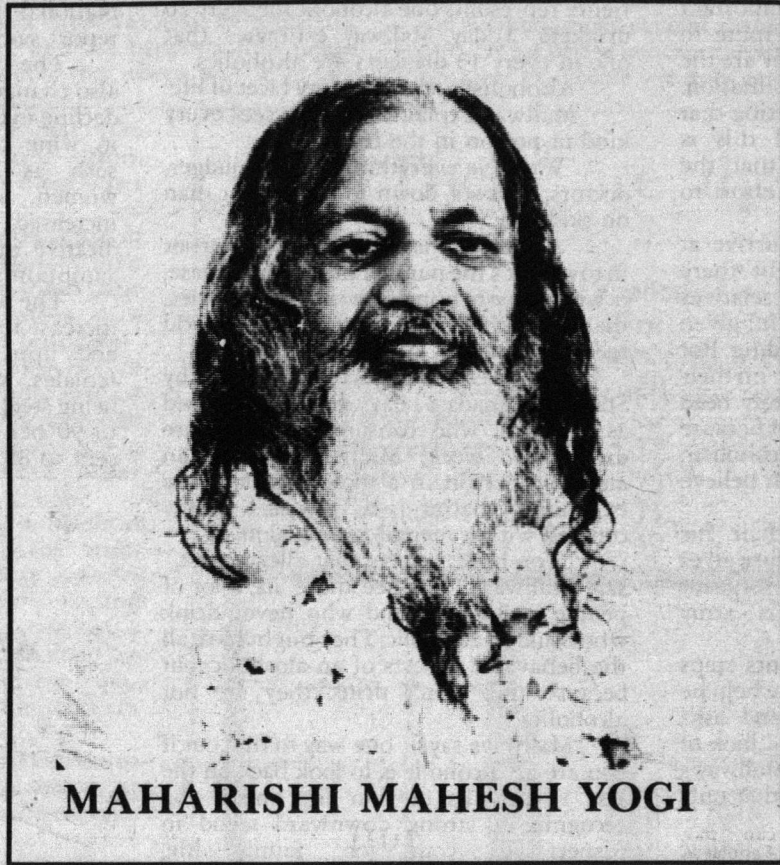
Universities seem to be prime sales targets for TM; many students are confused or depressed and they want to get involved and be a part of a group.

After joining TM, Stuart moved into a house with some fellow TMers and genuinely felt his life was on the upturn. He was more ambitious and energetic and

he felt that his home atmosphere was great. The bubble burst when

he moved out of town and suddenly became extremely depressed. He hadn't realized the

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