

Is TM really the "miracle cure"?

by Phyllis Boosalis

Feeling overworked, stressed-out or nervous?

Every student wants a sure cure for stress and a relaxation technique that works. Late nights, boring classrooms and social pressures cause unnecessary stress for many of us.

Transcendental Meditation (TM) has the miracle cure for all these problems for a mere \$155. You'll be more attentive, more focused and have more energy after those late nights. If it sounds too good to be true, it is.

The TM organization has had two introductory lectures at York. One was January 30 (with about 15 people in attendance) and the other was February 1 (only three people showed up).

TM is a non-profit organization, yet they charge \$400 for adult memberships, \$155 for university student memberships, and \$85 for high school students memberships. Does it really cost that much to teach TM, especially when over three million people have joined and all they each go through is a seven-step process?

According to TM representatives, the learning process is easy. Anyone can learn TM, regardless of their political, cultural or religious beliefs. (There are many contradictions found within TM literature. For instance, the claim that TM is not a religion even though it stems from the ancient Veda tradition.)

Scientists hired by the TM organization claim that it helps to slow and even reverse the aging process. It improves physical and mental health, relieves tension, anxiety and stress. Also, it supposedly helps to improve job and academic performance. It is inter-

esting to note that the scientific data in support of TM is usually done by the group's own scientists.

However, other studies have been done by scientists, who do not work for TM, which have had negative findings (refer to Michael A. Persinger's *TM and Cult Mania*). These statistics won't be found at any TM lecture.

The Council on Mind Abuse (COMA) carries literature stating that TM causes memory loss and erratic behaviour in individuals who practice it. (For more information call COMA at 944-0080.)

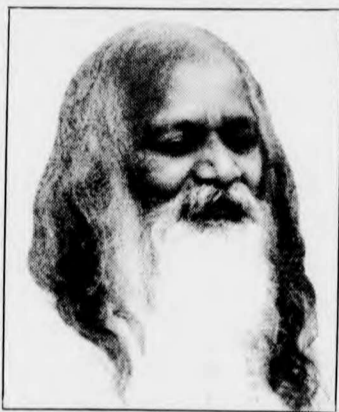
According to Marilyn Pepper, the TM instructor at the February 1 seminar, the activity of the mind becomes more peaceful and settled during the meditation state, and afterwards you are more alert and energetic. Those in attendance were told that TM could not be learned from a book because every person responds differently. Therefore, a teacher must be there to help the individual handle the TM experience.

There are seven steps to joining TM. The first is an introductory lecture, where the programme is sold to the eager and stressed out student who wishes to improve his or her existence. Scientific findings showing the advantages of doing TM are brought to the lectures. The data is very impressive, with creative charts and surveys of people who practice TM. One chart suggests that persons who have been practising TM for quite a while are much healthier. An added benefit (which is praised by the TM organization) is cheaper health and life insurance.

At the second lecture, the Preparatory Lecture, the teacher was very evasive and questions such as, "What is the sound (mantra)

that is given to individuals?" were avoided. The instructor did not answer the question, other than telling the audience to wait until he or she registers for the fourth class: Personal Instruction in the TM Technique. At this point, a fee of \$155 is collected and an initiation ceremony takes place.

According to the instructor, the student is required to bring fresh flowers, fruit and a new white handkerchief as part of the ceremony. Again, the teacher would not elaborate on why and how these "presents" (as she called them) are going to be used. If this organization is not religious, and if what they say is true, then why the ceremony? Anyone interested in TM should question the initiation process, and if they find that the teacher avoids answering, the individual should question the validity of an organization that does not have answers.



The TM founder, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

The teacher hand picks an appropriate sound for each individual to suit the individual's personality and needs. A TM teacher has the foresight to pick a sound

in a couple of minutes, however, a trained psychologist may take months of therapy to diagnose an individual's personality. How can a teacher of TM, who has only gone through three years of training with the movement's founder and leader, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, be able to evaluate a person's personality in a short interview? The audience was informed by Pepper that teachers are not at liberty to disclose their training, but she did urge everyone to practice TM. In other words, put your faith blindly in their hands and allow a complete stranger, with a training you know nothing about, to lead you down the road to recovery.

There have been studies done which show that the same effects caused by TM can be achieved by a constant repetition of a single word. A "special" sound is not needed. (Refer to Persinger's book mentioned above.) TM's uniqueness should be questioned by any individual thinking of becoming a TMer.

In addition, an individual is asked to sign a contract with TM upon joining. TM's contract stipulates that a person is not to reveal his or her sound, nor try to teach anyone else how to do TM unless he or she is a qualified teacher of TM. Why is it so important that this "sound" is kept a secret?

How does this sound work? Well, according to a TM representative, the mind is structured in layers. At the bottom layer of the mind is the transcendental, the pure consciousness. The Maharishi Mahesh Yogi believes that this source of thought has a great amount of energy and creativity. The intelligence found here is infinite. Through TM, a person transcends to this lower state of

consciousness, using his or her mantra to relax and reach a state of tranquility.

If there are as many positive aspects as TM claims, then why all the secrecy? Perhaps it is because the first two lectures were free, and after all, \$155 will get you all the answers. (Such a small price to pay!)

According to Debbie Glass, assistant director of special services at student affairs, the TM organization is not an official York club yet, but an application form to apply to be one has been picked up. TM supporters will only need 10 student signatures to become a recognized organization at York. The advantages of being an official York organization, as stated on the application form, are as follows:

- access to university space/facilities;
- ability to apply for contributions from university funded sources;
- listing in university publications; and
- ability to use the name of the university or one of its sub-units.

Furthermore, it will sound very official if TM recruiters could tell York's students that TM is recognized by York University. Student affairs can only slow down the process of TM's access to York, said Glass.

As a concerned student, it is important that other students become more aware of the negative aspects of TM before such an organization infiltrates our campus. Our library contains many books that praise TM, all written by person's practising TM. But to every positive, there is a negative: a fact that most TM followers fail to admit.

German nationalism spawned by intolerance of other cultures

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West Germany. This group ceased to exist when all the organizers received their passports and left the country.

Recently, there has been a trend towards setting up German schools and institutions on foreign soil rather than leaving. This new policy is being promoted by Jan Krol from Gogolin, Poland. Since the recent political changes in Eastern Europe, new governments are looking more favourably at such minority group actions.

During the last two decades, West Germany has taken in a large number of immigrants. Nevertheless, German nationalism is being spawned, in part, because of the intolerance for other cultures. An example of this is the treatment of immigrants in West Germany. For instance, immigrants are obligated to remain within a specific city or town for about two years while their applications for residency are processed. If an immigrant is fortunate enough to get this residency permit, he or she still has to wait for additional five years in order to apply for German citizenship. However, even after 15 years in West Germany, it is highly unlikely that citizenship will be granted to an immigrant or his or her children, even if they were born there.

Sometimes immigrants attempt to get even with the German system. One instance of this retaliation can be found in the city of

Bochum near Bonn. In that city, one huge apartment building has been designated to house immigrants from all over the world. Due to the high cost of electricity, most German apartment buildings look dark at night. One exception is this immigrant's apartment building, which is always brightly lit and has consequently earned the name "the burning tower." This building can also be distinguished as an immigrant's residence during broadcasts of popular soccer games on T.V. Cries in support of the German team come from Germans living in the area, but not from the "burning tower." Instead, the immigrants living in the "burning tower" cheer for the opposing team.

The resurgence of the neo-fascist and anti-immigrant groups in West Germany is worrying many segments of the population. Nowhere else in Europe have similar extreme groups received such strength in the polls. Since West Germany has these groups which do not, in such strength, exist in other countries, one must be concerned that they may have a stronger impact on West German politics in the future.

Historically, Russia and Germany have often reached agreements over military and political issues. The U.S.S.R., at present, appears to be moving away from communist ideas, yet is reluctant to embrace capitalism while searching for some new, third

option. Gorbachev has indicated that the U.S.S.R. does not wish to adopt the Western style of government but it does desire Western technology. Today, the reunification of Prussia with West Germany could work as a catalyst that might stimulate changes in the rest of Europe.

Quite often in the past, Russia has had a strong impact on the political events taking place in German society. Thus, the U.S.S.R.'s (and Eastern Europe's) search for an alternative to orthodox socialism and capitalism could also become Germany's. Already, an indicator of Germany's political unpredictability (according to Western standards) is becoming evident through the strength of the Green Party in the West German polls.

Before the opening of the Berlin Wall, an East German citizen could not travel to any Western country unless he or she was over 55 years old. Gorbachev's new travel policy, through the East German government, is one of the best indications that the Cold War is over. Now, through reunification, the East Germans have a democratic system of government.

In the past, the German question had been a nightmare to France, Great Britain and Poland. Recently, East Germany's former chancellor Helmut Kohl's hesitation to guarantee the Polish west border indicates that the Germans have not yet come to terms with the loss of those territories.

Presently, West German business bestrides its European partners and the West German mark has the most powerful influence of all the European currencies. The European partners want to see a unified Germany as a European Germany, not a German Europe.

I have noticed a sense of

euphoria in the general public over the opening up of the Berlin Wall. Perhaps this euphoria should now be replaced with extended caution over the prospect of a reunified Germany. It is true that this process is inevitable, but it is also true that the world should look at the new situation with greater caution.

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