

TM

The Answer? Or Just One More Headache?

By MARTIN TOOMBS

Transcendental meditation, rapidly becoming one of the most discussed issues in American life, has been called immoral idolatry by opponents and the solution for the world's problems by its supporters.

Even as 600,000 American TM adherents meditate for 15 minutes twice each day, attacks on the practice increase. The religious question causes the greatest discussion, critics call TM a form of Hinduism which shouldn't be practiced by anyone professing Christianity or Judaism. Others, including Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the "guru" responsible for its introduction into the United States, insist that it is not a religion, but a mental exercise.

Just what is transcendental meditation? TM proponents theorize that the mind operates on seven levels, from the conscious to the deep subconscious. Meditation is an attempt to transcend, or go beyond, the conscious to the subconscious, creating greater clarity and power of thought.

A person meditating looks much like he's asleep. To achieve the meditative state, a person relaxes, closes his eyes and repeats his own "mantra." The mantra is a Sanskrit word, selected for each meditator individually, which is kept secret.

What happens during meditation depends on the person; the results receive the attention. TM enthusiasts relate improvements in their disposition, energy level, personal relationships and feeling of well-being. Success stories come from people of many different backgrounds.

TM has been applied to many activities. The Institute for Fitness and Athletic Excellence is an arm of TM designed for athletes; Joe Namath of the New York Jets is a graduate. Four professional teams subscribe to their services: baseball's Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Detroit teams, the New York Islanders hockey team. The ability to relax and concentrate resulting in improved athletic performance is the aim.

Maharishi has traveled around

the world to lecture on TM since he introduced the practice in 1956. As the movement has grown, so have his holdings; he now controls a business empire of hotels, schools, and mountain retreats used for TM instruction. A Los Angeles TV station, Channel 18, which broadcasts only what it considers good news is an example of TM's growing influence.

Those seeking formal instruction in TM will find 370 centers around the country, and 6,000 teachers. Rochester's "International Meditation Society" reports that more than 5,000 have received training locally. The charge is \$125

for a working adult and \$65 for a student. The \$12 million raised nationally each year pays for continued education efforts, including Maharishi International University in Iowa, once Parsons College. Books on TM have been best sellers, but they do not tell the reader how to meditate; most are compilations of success stories and studies done by TM centers.

TM instruction consists of two introductory lectures, personal instruction, and the initiation ceremony. TM proponents and critics agree that Maharishi's own Hindu education is the reason for the Hindu basis of the ceremony; the controversy occurs over its function. Instructors claim it is merely a ritual, critics say it is part of a plan to convert the world to Hinduism.

Church leaders differ on TM and the Hindu influences. Father Richard Mangini, editor of the Catholic Voice newspaper of the diocese of Oakland, Calif., warns that it "embraces a whole new kind of religious faith" and is in "conflict with basic Christian teaching and Christian religious experience." In his editorial, he questioned the motives of those seeking self-improvement through TM, recommending that Catholics "first explore the richness of their own mystical traditions, place full trust in Jesus Christ and truly learn how to pray."

On the other hand, Archbishop Jean Jadot, the apostolic delegate in the United States, greeted the trend with optimism, commenting that interest in TM "implies to me that we are on the eve of a new revival of the spiritual life, preponderantly among young people who wish more personal contact with God and the spiritual realities."

Father Joseph Occhio, Ph.D., a Salesian who teaches at Don Bosco College, Newark, N.J., has stated that "as a technique TM cannot possibly be a religion and need not be linked with any particular religion." While wishing that the Hindu aspects of TM were removed, he supports the practice of TM: "Speculatively speaking, I am convinced that our world would be a much better place to live in if everyone were taught TM."

The physical effects of TM have been demonstrated. Lower blood pressure, lower oxygen consumption, and a brain wave state indicative of relaxation all occur during meditation, according to several studies, including those by Harvard and UCLA. Studies also have revealed that meditators tend to discontinue use of cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs.

Cardiologist Herbert Benson of the Harvard Medical School approves of the physical benefits of meditation, but questions the need for TM instruction. In his book, The Relaxation Response, he claims that repeating any one syllable word or short prayer and relaxing the muscles will produce the same effects TM users strive for. TM advocates disagree, insisting that meditation must be learned from a qualified teacher to be done properly.

Analysis by objective researchers is needed before questions about the exclusive claims of TM and the necessity of the Hindu trappings can be answered. Possibly the positive and negative elements can be separated, making the positive benefits available without controversy. In any case, TM will continue to grow, as more and more people seek relief from the strains of modern living.

TM — 'Not a Religion'

By FATHER WILLIAM GRAF

Perhaps the greatest crisis in modern technological society is noise. Most homes have at least one radio or television set playing during the day. It is not uncommon to see a teenager walking along the beach or street, listening to a transistor radio, or tape player. Streets are echo chambers for screeching tires and brakes, horns and running motors. Jet planes fill the air. Our churches were, at one time, silent havens. Now hymns, common responses and running commentaries can interrupt the mystery of silence in which God often speaks.

At the same time, perhaps the greatest phenomenon of modern technological society is the search for inner silence. There is a peace and an "at-onement" when two people listen to each other in the silence of each other's presence. Many are realizing that "getting it together" does not take place after swallowing a pill or sipping a drink before each meal. "Getting it together" is not something one learns in a classroom or even in a church. It is a gift that comes if one is open to receive it.

For the past few years there has been a growing awareness that no thing brings peace. The United Nations, foreign aid, summit conferences, and jet diplomacy banner newspapers, but do not bring international peace. Within our own country, urban development programs, health laws and services, educational grants, loans and excessive budgets are debated constantly.

Encounter programs, yoga, zen, prayer groups, individual and group therapy all seem to guarantee peace sooner or later. Religious leaders are rediscovering their role as leaders of prayer and gospel ministry, prompting liturgies that allow for moments of silence and reflection.

One of the most popularized techniques for bringing peace of



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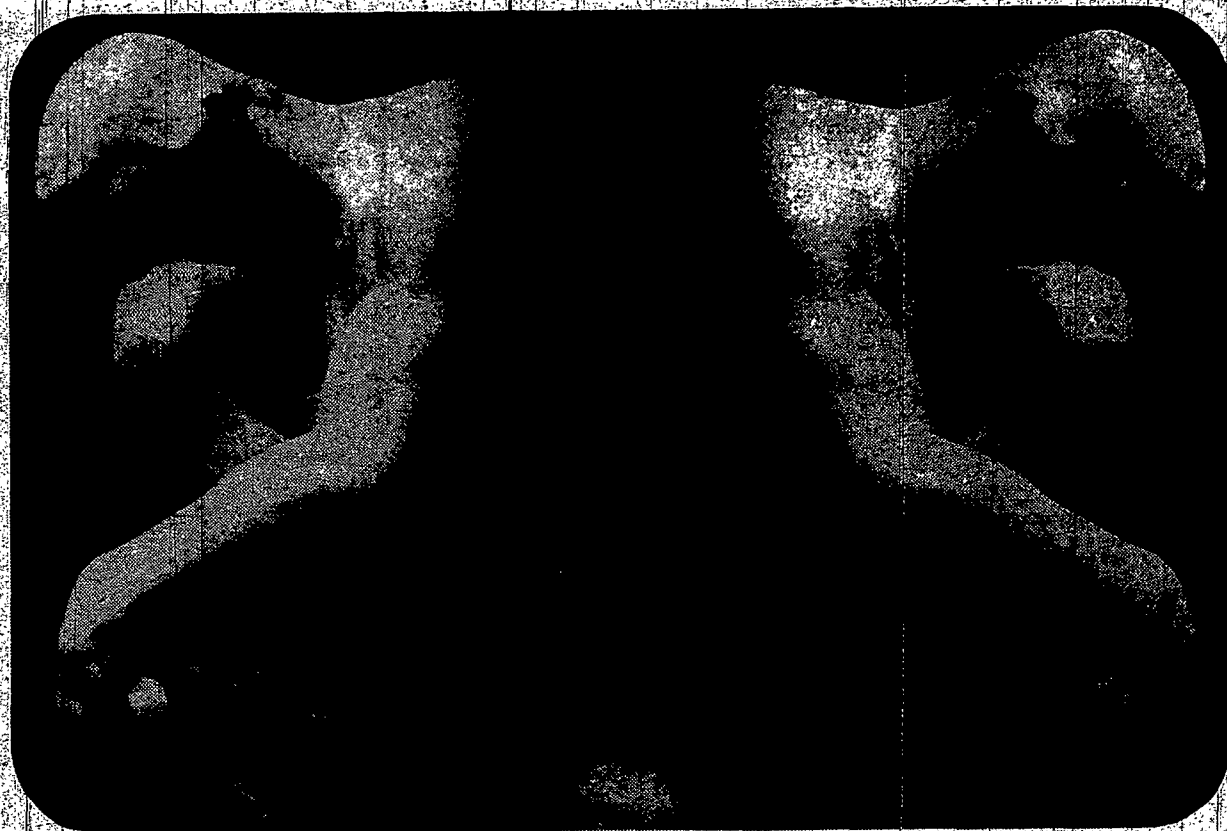
mind to the struggling American has been Transcendental Meditation (commonly called TM). Its history and methodology have been covered in other places. Basically, the use of the mantra (a short Sanskrit phrase or word repeated over and over for a twenty-minute period) can be used in any position, at any time and in any place. It is the keynote to TM. A young psychologist, after doing his twenty minutes of TM on a noisy bus from the airport, said enthusiastically, "It is a great relaxer for entering tense situations."

In the strictest sense of the word, Transcendental Meditation is not

meditation. It is a technique to allow one to be in touch with an inner source of peace. By consequence however, it can well lead to a positive religious experience if one believes that the source of that inner peace is God. Although the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi is a religious person, the technique he teaches is not a religion. It is merely that a technique. Similar techniques exist within the Christian milieu: the Jesus Prayer, the rosary, and aspirations, for example. These techniques are not a religion in themselves. They prepare one for the deeper encounter with God called contemplation. The frequent repetition of the mantra slows a person down to give him or her an opportunity to discover peace, "at-onement" with self. This is an end unto itself. Certainly what one does with this new found peace is open to further discussion. Hopefully, the "together" person is now capable and ready to share this new found peace with others. There is no built-in socially redemptive program with TM. It should not be faulted for this. TM is not a religion nor a social reform movement. As a technique, it should not be required to guarantee more that it promises. A Christian might well accept the religious consequences of the discovery in the "at-oneness" a man or woman finds in the fruits of contemplation, not in the technique itself.

TM is fulfilling the needs of many people sincerely searching for inner peace. Some have found it through the technique of TM. It has led some to a greater appreciation of their own religious training. There have been some who were not ready nor able to use the technique. However, the technique should not be blamed. There are those in our Christian fellowship who are not sufficiently prepared for the technique of a prayer group.

One may endorse or condemn Transcendental Meditation. If it is one way that will open a person to the peace that only God can give, it is worth investigating.



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