

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

60 Should Christians Practice Transcendental Meditation?

Scripture: Psalm 119:145-152

I cried with all my heart; answer me, O Lord! I will observe Thy statutes. I cried to Thee, save me, and I shall keep Thy testimonies. I rise before dawn and cry for help; I wait for Thy words. My eyes anticipate the night watches, that I may meditate on Thy Word. Hear my voice according to Thy loving kindness; Revive me, O Lord, according to Thine ordinances. Those who follow after wickedness draw near; They are far from Thy law. Thou art near, O Lord, and all Thy commandments are truth. Of old I have known Thy testimonies, that Thou has founded them forever.

This morning we will discuss the movement which is sweeping America known as Transcendental Meditation. Within the last decade more than half a million people living in the United States have been trained in TM, as the exercise is known in ordinary conversation. Followers have developed a world scheme of outreach and it is claimed that with each passing month, 15000 converts are added to their number. There is no question that millions of people around the world are daily exposed to this powerful meditative technique which promises peace of mind, relief from depression, fulfillment of one's personality, physical wellbeing, and other most desirable realizations. People from all walks of life speak of the benefits of TM which is now being offered to high school and college students throughout the country by the Students International Meditation Society. Now, what are some of the facts concerning Transcendental Meditation?

I. WHAT IS T.M. OR TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION?

The dictionary defines meditation as ability "to consider thoughtfully; to ponder, esp. on religious matters." The thought is to exclude other interests and to zero in on some specific interest or concern, to concentrate on a given subject or thing. The word "transcend" means to go beyond, to excel or to surpass. It has to do with supremacy in theological matters so that we speak of the transcendences of God inasmuch as He is supreme in all of His excellencies and beyond human knowledge. Transcendentalism is not a new philosophical theory. It has had a place in American history as a cultural movement which was popular here in New England in the nineteenth century. Men such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, George Riply and Amos Bronson Alcott were

transcendentalists and members in the Transcendental Club. In 1893 at the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago, a man by the name of Narendranath Datta Vivekananda (1863-1902) spoke eloquently of the divinity of the soul, the harmony of religion, and the possibility of apprehending realities beyond the range of both the senses and the understanding. They may be tracked by the mind intuitively. T.M. is a form of concentration by which a person goes beyond what is known consciously by the mind and by a series of progressions is able to eventually touch ultimate reality which for the transcendentalist is a degree of unity with Brahman, the Hindu source of all existent thought. Whatever Vivekananda did or did not accomplish is not known, he certainly did plant some Eastern seeds of thought in fertile Western soil.

II. HOW DOES TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION WORK?

In order to grasp the mechanics of T.M. it is necessary for us to know something of the metaphysics of the system. Metaphysics is that branch of philosophy which deals with the nature of ultimate reality. We will have more to say about Maharishi Mahesh Yogi the Hindu monk who is the founder of T.M., but in several of his writings, particularly **Meditations of the Maharishi**, and **Transcendental Meditation**, he describes understanding of reality upon which T.M. is built. In a word there are three assumptions which are made about reality: **(1)** There is first the conviction that all is one, there is the unity of all things. Everything is an emanation of Being, although spiritual disharmony exists. **(2)** The nature of ultimate reality is Being which is impersonal yet underlies and encompasses all that exists. **(3)** Mans purpose is to raise his consciousness to the level of Being by means of meditation. The following key words will help us to better understand these presuppositions which come from ancient Hinduism of the Vedic synthesis of Shankara.

1. **Being:**

Being is the supreme power of the universe. Being is formless, eternal, unchanging, impersonal, and the origin from which everything else is come. Being can be understood as omnipotent, omniscient, and immutable. Being underlies all that exists. (**Transcendental Meditation**; pp. 22; 23-25; 33-34; 265-266)

2. **Emanation:**

The world in which we live is an emanation or extension of the divine Being. It flows out from and back to Being, yet it is different from Being. Emanations

are not the real, they are the less real. Thus the world in which we live is the furthest removed from Being. It is a very relative thing, it is a world of appearances, illusion and "mirage." (pp. 61-62; 271; 276; 283)

3. **Man:**

Man is an extension of Being who resides out in the relative existence of the world. Man possesses all the manifestations of Being from the absolute to the relative. Man is constituted of three dimensions: **(1)** the outer, **(2)** the inner and **(3)** the transcendent. These have to do with body, personality, and Being. Since body and personality belong to relative existence, the emphasis in man should be upon the Absolute or Being in man. Thus man is divine, and it remains for him to quest for Being which is within him. (pp. 63; 251)

4. **Separation:**

The difficulty is that man is separated from Being by levels or consciousness. Man lives on the outer relative existence of Being which is in the world, and must return to the place of perfect union with Being.

5. **Union:**

It remains for man to make his way through seven distinguishable states of consciousness in order to attain the consciousness of unity with abstract Being. Many ways have been suggested. Certain breathing exercises are used to expand or provoke Prana, the vibrating nature of Being. Reincarnation is a way to return to being through many lifetimes. But the best method according to Maharishi is by meditation. Existing on the lowest level, level "z", of man's unconscious mind are tiny thoughts which can be likened to bubbles. They go back to prenatal days. Through meditation these rise on a scale of z to a, only to surface on the conscious level a.

It is the teaching of the Maharishi that man's greatest problem is the loss of the awareness of his own divine Being. When we are born and even before, we are closest to unity with the Being of which we are an extension. With the passing of, time we learn to think certain things about God instead of enjoying a consciousness of God within himself. In order to come again to a place of the enjoyment of pure Being man needs to expand his consciousness. T.M. claims to be the most effective road to pass from the personal self and the relative world of illusion to being absorbed in the impersonal Essence, Brahman. Discovering his own divinity, the problems of the self are past. The Maharishi has written,

“I have discovered the fact that you can reach into the unconscious and bring these bubbles of the past up through the levels of consciousness to the top level, which is the conscious mind, and then you are able to recognize them and be reinforced by them in your daily life. It will enable you to eat better, to sleep better, to be able to concentrate on things better. It will improve your educational work. It will improve your interpersonal relationships. It will help you in your religious experience, and it will be a constant source of calming you down in a hurried and chaotic world.”

III. IS TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION A RELIGION?

T. M. was developed by an Indian physicist named Maharishi Mahesh Yogi who was born in central India about the year 1918. He was graduated from the Allahabad University in 1940 with a degree in physics. “Maha” means great and “rishi” means sage or seer. “Mahesh” is the family name, and “Yogi” means a master of the mental and physical control which is necessary for a union with the Absolute. Following a stint as a factory worker he made his way into the Himalayan Mountains following World War II to meditate. For thirteen years he studied under a Hindu Swami by the name of Brahmanada Saraswati Maharij who challenged Maharishi to dedicate his life to the spiritual renewal of the World. In 1961 he began his T.M. exercises with about 40 students at UCLA with the appeal that we are only using six percent of our abilities whereas 100 percent was entirely possible through the proper meditative techniques. The Maharishi insists that T.M. is not a religious practice and all of the instructional literature is equally as insistent. However, it can be easily seen that T.M. complies with the five categories of religious function. There is the adoration of God, there are forms of worship, sacred writings, recognized teachers, and the knowledge or hope that we are of more importance than the dust from which we are made in terms of an afterlife. Actually, students of comparative religions need exercise no imagination in seeing T.M. as an extension of an ancient Indian Brahmanism and Hinduism, and that its teaching emerges from the sacred texts of Hinduism, mainly The Vedas, Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita. Furthermore, that it employs an initiation ritual from the Hindu devotional, and that many practices are out of the mystical Advaita school of Yoga. T. M. is a sect of the Hindu religion and it cannot escape that classification. We must remember on the same token that the Maharishi is sincere when he claims religious immunity. You see, from a philosophical standpoint, he is a paradoxist. This means that he operates from a premise which is contradictory, and it doesn't concern him. There is

a radically different way of thinking in the East. The Easterner can say it is a wet-dry day today. That's just the way it is. The law of noncontradiction does not apply. Here in the West we have been reared on the Aristotelian logic that conclusions are reached from premises which are not self-contradictory. Indian philosophers thus are free to teach contradictory truths without twinge of conscience. This is a very helpful stance to assume when your goal is to become part of a public school curricula.

IV. SHOULD CHRISTIANS PRACTICE TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION?

Long ago a sincere believer offered the sincere prayer that the *“Words of his mouth and the meditation of his heart would be acceptable to God.”* (Psalm 19:14) Everyone meditates who is in control of the reasoning processes God has given. We all spend some time thinking, wondering, dreaming, and contemplating on any number of things which concern us. We ought to be concerned that our meditations are acceptable in the sight of the Lord who is our strength and our redeemer, not our guru or swami, but our redeemer. The Scriptures speak again and again of a transformational meditation. (Psalm 1:2; 77:12; 119:148; 143; I Timothy 4:15) Psalm 19 speaks of the natural revelation of God to meditate upon (19:1-6) and a Scriptural revelation to meditate upon (19:7-13). Because the law of the Lord is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true and righteous, it is well to meditate upon. Such ponderings will convert the soul, make wise the simple, rejoice the heart, enlighten the eyes, endure forever, and be more desired than gold.

When it comes to a Christian practicing the brand of transcendental meditation I have been talking about, it must be noted there are several differences which are hardly reconcilable. The Christian metaphysical system declares a God who is at once a personal and infinite Spirit, complete in Himself who eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In terms of the eternal Being, the Christian God is personal and can be known because He has revealed Himself. **Secondly**, the Christian God is separate and distinct from His creation. He created everything from nothing, and the universe is not an emanation from Himself or His essence. (Psalm 33:6; Romans 4:17; Hebrews 11:3) **Thirdly**, man was created in the image of God, but not as a part of God. Man is not divine by any matter of means. God, working outside of His creation took dust and gave it life. God placed the man He had made in a garden paradise and there He met with man. (Genesis 1-2) **Fourthly**, man's problem is not separation from God by levels of consciousness, he is separated from God by sin. His problem is

alienation and he needs to be reconciled. (Romans 5:15-17) **Fifthly**, if man's problem is alienation because of sin, payment must be made. Inasmuch as man is unable to do this, God took it upon Himself to make the payment by incarnating Himself to die as a ransom upon a cross in the person of Jesus Christ. The strong resurrection of Christ from the dead declares to the whole world that God has redeemed man from the dreadful effects of sin. Man is brought into fellowship with the living God through faith in the person and work of Christ. This is a mysticism which goes much beyond trying to find God within oneself. T.M. does not lead anyone into contact with the living God. There may be a peace that comes, but it is not the peace of the Lord who said, *"...not as the world gives do I give you."* Because T.M. does not share this metaphysical perspective, the experience it offers cannot be the experience of the Christian God.

What are the alternate explanations for the T.M. experience. Gordon R. Lewis has written a book entitled, **What Everyone Should Know About Transcendental Meditation**, in which he makes the following suggestions regarding T.M. experiences which are allowed by its metaphysical framework: **(1)** Deceptive self-hypnosis, **(2)** simple self-deification, **(3)** nonredemptive natural religion, and **(4)** demonic deception. (pp. 63-67)

T.M. is not compatible with Biblical Christianity. Transformation results from Biblical meditation. The benefits which come are based upon objective fact not upon feeling. Christian meditation exalts the Savior, not self. May we be as the Psalmist who said, *"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God."* (42:1)

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