

MAHARISHI MAHESH YOGI

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi can be considered one of the most well-known practitioners of yoga not only in the eastern world, but in the west as well. Having studied under a Hindu guru in the 1950s, he has now come to represent an industry that is estimated to be worth over \$3 billion (Economist 95). Some have come to know him as a “modern Vedic scholar and educator” (Riedesel 332). [The Vedas are the prominent set of texts found within the Hindu tradition, and are said to be divinely revealed; for more information about these scriptures see Rodrigues(2006)]. In 1959 his influence in the west became apparent when he immigrated to the United States and founded an “impressive” number of associations dealing with meditation (Aravamudan 33). Maharishi Mahesh Yogi’s status rose when he received a two-month visit from the famous band, the Beatles, in 1968 at one of his sites in Rishikesh, India (Platoff 242). Perhaps one of the reasons why he has gained recognition in the west is a result of his fusion between eastern philosophy and western science. In 1972 the yogi aimed to take his views worldwide through the establishment of the World Plan Executive Council (Aravamudan 35). Here, the issues of politics, the economy, and existing social situations would be addressed on a global scale (Aravamudan 35).

Yoga is considered by Hindu philosophy as a *darsana* or an “event of ‘seeing’”(Burley 1). Basically, it is understood as a method for discovering the true reality of the universe. The term yoga is derived from the Sanskrit word *yuj*, which can be translated as “to yoke or harness” (Whicher 7). Some say that this unification is between the self (*Atman*) and the universe (*Brahman*) (Wilson 304). Nevertheless, there have been numerous philosophers and publications attempting to provide insight within this broad philosophy, one of which is known as the *Yogasutra*. Written between the third and fourth century, it is classified as a set of teachings aiming to provide followers a release from “sin, pain, and ignorance” (Burley 4). Compiler of the text, Patanjali, uses the term *yogas cittavrttinirodhah* to say

that in order to achieve this union with Brahman, we must first end the misidentification of our thoughts with our mind (Whicher 1).[For more information on the philosophic literature of yoga, see Burley(2007) and Whicher(2000)]. Many people, including Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, have applied the practice of mediation to cease this confusion. Nevertheless, just as extensive as the concept of yoga is the phrase yogi. This word is the nominative term for the term *yogin*, which is used to describe a student of yoga (Whicher 31). Therefore, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi has come to represent a practitioner under the vast Indian philosophy of yoga.

One of Maharishi's main innovations is the Transcendental Meditation technique. This form of meditation is intended to be practiced twice a day for fifteen to twenty minutes while in a comfortable, closed-eyed position (Riedesel 333). The yogi describes this activity as "turning the attention inwards towards the subtler levels of a thought until the mind transcends the experience of the subtlest state of the thought and arrives at the source of the thought" (Wallace 1752). What the yogi means by this is the ability to concentrate on a single feature that will eventually lead a higher realization or state of consciousness, and thus connect back to who we are as a person. This process is explored further through the concept of the four states of consciousness (which are expressed within the Maharishi Vedic Science): Transcendental Consciousness or *Turiya Chetana*, Cosmic Consciousness or *Turiyatit Chetana*, God Consciousness or *Bhagavad Chetana*, and Unity Consciousness or *Brahmi Chetana* (Nidich, Nidich and Alexander 143). From a cosmic standpoint, it is said that the purpose of these higher states of awareness are to merge the person with the universe. In the first state, Transcendental Consciousness, the awareness of the "unbound self" appears (Nidich, Nidich and Alexander 143). It is here where the body's stress is "naturally dissolved" and the instability of emotion is stabilized (Riedesel 333). This first state is the main level that is achieved in Transcendental Meditation, and has been noted by Mahesh that through regular experience of this awareness, the conflicts that arise in life do not inflict on the "eternal freedom" of the self, or in other words, "Life is not lost to itself" (Nidich, Nidich and

Alexander 143). [For more information on the states of consciousness see Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1969)].

Along with the spiritual components of Transcendental Meditation, there is said to be physiological effects that accompany the practice. Studies have indicated it has the ability to decrease tension both mentally and physically (Wallace 1974). Furthermore, biomedical researchers assert that the ability to relieve certain nervous and cardiovascular conditions such as hypertension, asthma, epilepsy, and hypertension looks promising (Holden 1976). The type of relaxation produced by this technique is different from what is found while sleeping, being awake, or under hypnosis (Wallace 1974). [For information on specific EEG readings see Wallace (1970)]. In fact, Maharishi points out that it is a pulsation between deep rest and activity within the entire nervous system; one he says that mimics the natural “expansion and contraction in the physical universe” (Holden 1977). Due to its ease of use and the ability for beginners to achieve this relaxation quickly, there are currently over half a million Americans practicing Transcendental Meditation, and over three million worldwide (Holden 1976 and Aravamudan 34). With the physiological research in place, it has even been implemented in prisons and rehabilitation centres since the 1970s, with the aim of helping at-risk people realize the possibility of voluntary control over the automatic nervous system (Holden 1976). Although there are traces of Hinduism behind the philosophy of Transcendental Meditation, the yogi is compelled to make it compatible with all faiths, and even takes this notion one step further by attempting to establish an alliance between religion and science (Aravamudan 33).

Transcendental Meditation is housed under Maharishi Mahesh Yogi’s objectively philosophic framework of the Science of Creative Intelligence (SCI). With the purpose of attaining world peace, the yogi has fused together the conceptual ideas of religion including “ancient Indian Vedic wisdom,” with pragmatic elements of science such as psychology, in order to create this system (Holden 1976). The

basis behind SCI is the ability to demonstrate how a set of fundamental principles- creativity and intelligence- permeate the biological world, which in turn, are reflected within the mind (Holden 1177). He describes creativity as the reason why change occurs, and it is constantly being reflected within the universe (Riedesel 332). Intelligence on the other hand, is the essential quality of our existence. It is a part of creativity since it is here that intelligence becomes illustrated. Both of these are what Maharishi Mahesh Yogi combines to form a science in the sense that they have ability to be verified through experimentation (Riedesel 332).

Within the Science of Creative Intelligence lie a few basic hypotheses. First, is the belief that every individual contains an “unlimited reservoir” of creative intelligence which is expressed through the human nervous system (Riedesel 332). However, Maharishi Mahesh feels that this expression is inhibited when a person is under stress. In other words, the physiological effects we feel when we are under pressure obstruct our ability to connect with the true and beneficial qualities of the universe. However, he proposes a solution to this obstruction through the practice of Transcendental Meditation. SCI purports that creative intelligence is experienced in this technique because it takes a person to the higher levels of consciousness, eliminating the stress, and as a result, allowing his or her “biomachinery” to function properly again (Riedesel 333). The yogi goes on to state that the aim is to maintain this increased level of awareness in order to establish “greater achievement and fulfillment in life;” to him, it is here where an individual has attained enlightenment. In the final hypotheses, we see that the influence of science in his philosophy has been fully integrated in his claim that these enlightened qualities are not only definable, but able to be scientifically investigated (Riedesel 333).

The contributions Maharishi Mahesh Yogi has made towards spirituality positions him as one of the most globally recognized yogic practitioners. Through the development of Transcendental Meditation and the Science of Creative Intelligence, he has been able to bridge subjective philosophy

with objective science. Although Transcendental Meditation explores the deeper levels of consciousness and connection with the universe, it is also seen as a practical aid in decreasing stress and creating positive physiological responses (Wallace 1975). As a result, he has attracted both the spiritual seekers and the worldly dwellers alike. The Science of Creative Intelligence fuses this bridge stronger by making breaking down what can be considered a highly metaphysical process, enlightenment, into scientifically observable traits (Riedesel 1979). With his appeal to both eastern philosophy and western science, there is no question as to why Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's insights have become so successful.

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<http://www.maharishi.org/>

<http://maharishi-programmes.globalgoodnews.com/publications/books.html>

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