

Transcendental Meditation - A Christian Perspective

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What is transcendental meditation (TM)?

TM is often referred to in our culture as a relaxation 'technique' that consists of controlled breathing, emptying one's mind of thoughts, repeating a mantra, sitting still in a certain position, among other things. In actuality, it is Hinduism and Eastern Mysticism repackaged for a Western culture as a methodology for relieving stress.

Definition of transcendental meditation terms

The following definitions are taken from Webster's New World Dictionary-1982:

- 1. guru:** a Hindi (see definition #9) word referring to a Hindu's personal spiritual adviser or teacher.
- 2. lotus position:** in yoga (see definition #7), an erect sitting posture with the legs crossed and with each foot, sole upturned, resting on the upper thigh of the opposite leg.
- 3. mantra:** a Sanskrit word referring to a Hindu hymn or portion of text especially from the Veda (see definition #6) that is chanted or intoned as an incantation or prayer. Typically, the mantra used is the name of a Hindu god.
- 4. Sanskrit:** the classical Old Indic literary language, as cultivated from the 4th century BC onward and still used in the ritual of the Northern Buddhist Church.
- 5. swami:** from the Hindi word 'svami' which means lord or master, a Hindu title of respect especially for a Hindu religious teacher.
- 6. Veda:** any of 4 ancient sacred books of Hinduism, consisting of psalms,

chants, sacred formulas, etc.

7. yoga: in Hinduism, a mystic and ascetic (see definition #13) discipline by which one seeks to achieve liberation of the self and union with the supreme spirit or universal soul through intense concentration, deep meditation, and practices involving prescribed postures, controlled breathing.

8. yogi: a Hindi word referring to a person who practices yoga.

9. Hindi: the main language of India.

10. Hinduism: the religion and social system of the Hindus, developed from Brahmanism (see definition #11) with elements from Buddhism, Jainism, etc. added. [A pantheistic(see definition #14) system of beliefs].

11. Brahman: a member of the priestly Hindu caste.

12. Jainism: a Hindu religion resembling Buddhism, founded in the 6th century BC emphasizing asceticism (see definition #13) and reverence for all living things.

13. asceticism: the religious doctrine that one can reach a higher spiritual state by rigorous self-discipline and self-denial.

14. pantheism: 1. the doctrine that God is not a personality, but that all laws, forces, manifestations, etc. of the self-existing universe are God 2. the worship, or toleration of worship of all gods of various cults.

15. mysticism: 1. the doctrines or beliefs of mystics; specifically the doctrine that it is possible to achieve communion with God through contemplation and love without the medium of human reason 2. any doctrine that asserts the possibility of attaining knowledge of spiritual truths through intuition acquired by fixed meditation 3. vague, obscure, or confused thinking or belief.

What is yoga as compared to TM?

TM is more of a subset of yoga. Yoga includes more physical motion and physical exercises than TM. Both are derived from Hinduism.

What is the significance of the 'lotus' position?

The lotus position is one of the many positions or postures used in yoga. It is the primary posture used by practitioners of TM. The various yoga postures have religious significance, usually relating to animals that the Hindus consider to be gods (cobras, etc.).

What kind of meditation is TM?

"The technique of TM renders the mind *passive* as one seeks to turn off all thoughts and images, but Christian meditative prayer and reflection makes the mind and spirit *active* as the believer seeks to deepen his appreciation of, and commitment to, Christ as Lord. The Christian's meditation is part of a *personal* relationship with the Lord, while TM is *impersonal* in nature." [Ref. 1]

What kind of meditation does the Bible recommend?

Joshua 1:8 - "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt **meditate** therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."

Psalms 1:1-2 - "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he **meditate** day and night."

Psalms 119:15 - "I will **meditate** in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways."

Psalms 143:5 - "I remember the days of old; I **meditate** on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands."

Is TM a bad thing and if so, should Christians avoid it?

If indeed TM is grounded in a religious system, we need to know the basic premises of this religion and how they relate to the beliefs of Christianity.

A. The beliefs of TM's Hindu gurus and swamis are contrary to those of Christianity.

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"In dealing with man's greatest need, Christianity says that man's greatest need is to be rightly related to God. TM says that his greatest need is to be happy and that happiness comes as he learns to relax and thus improve himself. Christianity does not frown on happiness, although it is concerned with a state of being that is far deeper and that is probably better portrayed by the word "joy". But even concerning happiness, that which keeps anyone from being truly happy is the sin problem. Any system that emphasizes happiness without dealing with the sin problem is building a superstructure on a shaky foundation. True happiness is the result of knowing that one is in

right relationship with God [knowing that you are on this earth to glorify God and are prepared to spend eternity with Him]. Since the cause of unhappiness is sin, to be effective in helping others to be happy it is necessary to deal with the cause, not the effect." [Ref. 2]

B. TM advocates are deliberately deceiving people so that their world view can be propagated.

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"Transcendental Meditation's venerated guru, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi has said: *'whenever... religion dominates the mass consciousness, Transcendental ... meditation should be taught in terms of religion. Whenever metaphysical thinking dominates ... [it] should be taught in metaphysical terms, openly aiming at the fulfillment of the current metaphysical thought. Whenever ... politics dominates ... [it] should be taught in terms of and from the platform of politics, aiming at bringing fulfillment to the political aspirations of the generation.'*

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The psycho-occult philosophy of the human potential movement is wrapped in scientific and therapeutic terminology. The saffron robes, shaved heads, and incense are replaced with three-piece suits, pseudo-scientific [terminology], and an emphasis on human potential." [Ref. 3]

How should a Christian cope with stress?

1. Pray to God for peace.

Spend quite time alone with the Lord. *"Be still and know that I am God."* Psalm 46:10, *"Casting all your care upon him for he careth for you."* [I Peter 5:7]

2. Praise God.

By praising God we focus our attention on the one who has power over everything, even life and death. *"Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee."* [Psalm 63:3]

3. Meditate on scriptures.

Many verses in the Bible will remind you that you are not alone in your struggles, God is with you. You will also see how other great men and women in the Bible faced difficult situations in their lives. *"I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me."* [Philippians 4:13]

4. Enjoy God's creation.

Take a break, go for a walk, go for a ride in the country. *"O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches."* [Psalm 104:24]

5. Fellowship with other believers.

Confide in someone who is a good listener and has the gift of compassion. *"And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself."* [Acts 27:3]

6. Deal with sin your life that you have not dealt with yet.

Many times, we have stress in our lives because of sin. Sin causes stress in many ways. Perhaps we are not spending enough time with God in prayer or not studying the Bible as we should. This can cause us much anxiety as we try to take on problems in our own strength and in our own wisdom. Perhaps we have not made peace with someone that we have had an argument with or who we feel has wronged us. By forgiving others and by making restitution to those we've wronged, we will receive peace from God, knowing that our consciences are clear in the sight of our Lord and Master. *"Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit."* [Psalm 51:9-12]

REFERENCES

1. Kenneth Boa, "Cults, World Religions, and You", Victor Books, Wheaton, Illinois 60187, p 166.
2. Harold J. Berry, "Transcendental Meditation - Is It Meditation?", Back to the Bible, Lincoln, Nebraska 68501. p.6.
3. Kerry D. McRoberts, "New Age or Old Lie?", Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts 01961