

Managing the Spiritual Neighborhood
How to Restore the Conscience of America's Communities
A Grass Roots Approach



Alexander Gabis

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Epilog

Below is a letter that the author recently addressed to His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. You might well wonder why I would append such a document to a book like this. The answer is that we're living in an age that demands a new paradigm – that calls for a complete overhaul of our thinking about the structure of society. No other person or group has shown the broad social vision that you find in the programs that Maharishi is offering. To my knowledge no one but Maharishi has gone to such great lengths to revive the knowledge of an indigenous culture in order to solve the problems of the modern world. Through the application of this ancient system – the Vedic tradition of India – he is attempting the gargantuan task of developing collective consciousness on a global scale – to bring enlightenment to the whole world essentially. Over the centuries indigenous cultures on every continent have been wiped off the map by the relentless march of Western civilization. The vast knowledge of the Vedic tradition was scattered as a result of foreign invasion and subjugation. By Maharishi's efforts people fortunately still have access to the key element, the kernel, that sits at the heart of the Vedic practices – the experience of our own cosmic nature through the practice of [Transcendental Meditation](#) (TM) – a technique that Maharishi has been teaching for close to 50 years. With TM the Vedic system has the potential to solve the unsolveable ... the intractable, perennial problems of conflict, crime, poverty, disease, and environmental destruction that have plagued mankind for so long.

Before I continue, let me tell you that I am not a spokesman for TM or Maharishi. I don't have any official connection with the TM organization and I have not sought approval or review by Maharishi or his staff for any of the information presented in this book or on the associated website. However, I do believe that it's all reasonably accurate and should be useful to many folks.

If you are not yet practicing TM, my advice is that you don't bother reading the open letter, but simply pay the money and learn the technique. Otherwise you won't appreciate the points that I've brought out. If you can afford it, take the TM-Sidhi program as well (you'll have to practice TM first for a period of time). If you don't have the money to learn TM (in the US it currently costs \$2500), try to find a sponsor who will pay for all or part of the course. The idea is to use the techniques and programs for your own benefit. Put the ancient knowledge to work for you, in your life, today.

If the price of TM is prohibitive, you might look at alternatives listed on the resources page on the website – www.SpiritualNeighborhood.org. I can't say that I know much about the other practices listed there. Some may be effective, some may not. One point to keep in mind is that it appears that no other technique has

been as thoroughly researched as TM. I'm speaking of published research by credentialed scientists and scholars. That's the big advantage that TM has over other meditation techniques: Maharishi has attracted highly qualified people to work with him over the years, and they've really done their homework in documenting the benefits of the practice, particularly with regard to the benefits for individual health.

The most encouraging aspect of TM and the other Vedic programs (Maharishi Ayurveda, Jyotish, etc.) is that they are designed to bring about the complete fulfillment of your desires. Happiness, good health, good fortune, success, prosperity: this is what the programs promise. The theory is that as you progress towards higher states of consciousness, you will find that you get everything you want, when you want it. No hardship or suffering is involved. It's all effortless. Maharishi is always speaking in these terms, and it's uplifting to hear it.

Having said all this, I must tell you that grass roots activists and would-be Garden Zone Managers should not expect to receive any kind of support from Maharishi. As far as the official TM movement is concerned, there won't be any involvement in what you're doing and it's unlikely that your outreach activities will even be acknowledged. Now hopefully, there will be individuals locally who learn TM, who refine and develop their awareness, and subsequently provide you with support and encouragement. That's the theory that was set forth in the book: that refined awareness creates a more responsible, more civic-minded person. But if you glance through the questions below, you'll see that there is still some question about whether this theory holds in every case.

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An open letter to His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

Boone, North Carolina, USA
4 June 2004

Maharishi,

You have been holding press conferences for some time now, taking questions on deep topics of life and existence, and bringing to light the timeless knowledge of the Vedas of ancient India. In addition, those of us who follow your Transcendental Meditation and TM-Sidhi programs have been privileged to hear you speak at greater length by way of the numerous recordings that were preserved over the years by your many followers. In the spirit of these open forums, I would like to raise a few questions, some of which I have not heard addressed in your presentations, but which I believe merit discussion. These questions require a bit more time to explore, so I'm posing them in the form of an open letter. I'm hoping that

I can perhaps draw a response not only from you Maharishi, but from my fellow TM practitioners. Moreover, there are those among the general citizenry, who, though they are not connected with your TM movement, nevertheless display an enlightened concern for the quality of life in their communities, and in the world at large. I'm addressing my questions to those folks as well. Some of my questions are rather lengthy, so I will list them all briefly in this introduction, and expand on them in the paragraphs that follow.

Allow me to offer a bit of background first. I am a long time practitioner of TM and the TM-Sidhi programs, going back to the 1970s. I'm writing this letter as an epilog of sorts to an essay I published reporting on my activities as a grass-roots activist in suburban Washington, D.C. My report suggested that the problems we were seeing in my community could be solved with a preventive approach. A key element of my proposal was the development of collective awareness in the community, something that the TM technique is specifically designed to accomplish. Since I first published the report three years ago, we have witnessed some striking events on the global stage: the World Trade Center incident of September 11, 2001, the anthrax poison attack shortly afterwards, the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan, followed by the overthrow of the Iraqi government and the on-going occupation of Iraq by U.S.-led forces, the deadly train bombing in Madrid earlier this year, all this against a backdrop of a marked increase in security and police presence at government facilities, airports and other public places. Over the past couple of years there has been a growing fear of terrorist attacks and the potential use of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, such that even benign, cooperative events like the Olympic games are taking place in a militarized atmosphere.

These developments are disturbing to say the least, but I would like to suggest that our biggest concern should not be with global and national incidents that grab headlines, but with the multitude of local events – activity in the neighborhoods and communities – that occur below the radar of the international press, but which have much greater impact on one's life by virtue of their taking place close to home, closer to your personal space. Such has been the case in the communities where I have resided, where one could witness bad management, backward thinking and life-damaging activity all the time, everyday, all around you, yet see no one, no socially conscious individual, stepping forward to correct the situation, or even speak up about it.

It is with deep respect for you, for your TM program and your great achievements in putting humanity back on the spiritual path that I submit these questions. My hope is that there are folks out there who will follow your lead; to come together and apply the knowledge you have brought out in a practical way in order to fashion a better world and further the evolution of mankind.

Questions for Maharishi

1. Why no interactive discussions
2. Why no follow-up for TM-Sidhi?
3. Why no panel discussions with scholars?
4. Why no discussion with other quantum physicists?
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18. Promoting inaccessible programs – what value?
19. Presenting inaccessible people – what value?
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21. Does enlightenment produce disillusionment?
22. Why no alliances, no referrals?
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1. Why no interactive discussions?

Since I've been practicing TM and the TM-sidhi programs, I have attended numerous advanced lectures and in-residence courses. What I've noticed is that in these courses, though we are presented with knowledge on various topics, mostly through tapes, there are seldom any opportunities to ask questions. Of course, you can't pose a question to a video player, but even on those occasions when a lecturer was making a live presentation, there was limited opportunity to discuss the points of the talk. Moreover, there were times when I sensed that the speaker was frowning to hear a pointed question – as if to discourage you from asking it, and hence, to discourage you from becoming too analytical. Thus it seems that the TM program is structured around one-way communication, with not much indulgence for an individual's need to hear some clarifying words, or help in connecting the knowledge with his or her personal experience. Is there some benefit to be derived from holding students at a distance like this? Would it not be better to use a more personal, more interactive style of instruction?

2. Why no follow-up for TM-Sidhi?

Those who learn the TM-Sidhi program – sidhas – receive instructions in a mental technique that has its origin in the ancient Vedic texts of India. Folks who stay on the program find that it becomes an important part of their schedule, and indeed of their lives – taking up a good amount of time during the day. When I learned TM-Sidhi over 20 years ago, I was presented with a certain amount of information about the practice – a brief discussion of the mechanics along with a small taste of the Vedic foundation for it – basically enough to perform the technique correctly. Maharishi talks about the TM-Sidhi program as the most powerful thing an individual can do to bring about his own enlightenment, and furthermore, to bring about enlightenment for the world. Indeed, it is the group practice of TM-Sidhi that is proposed as the solution to age-old problems of crime, conflict and war. Given the importance of this technique for individuals, and for society, why are there not any follow-up classes or review sessions for those who are practicing it? Is it correct to send a novice practitioner out with this world-transforming technique without providing some way to check up on him periodically?

3. Why no panel discussions with scholars?

We have on many occasions heard Maharishi invite scientists and world leaders to take advantage of the programs he is offering. Wouldn't it make sense to occasionally gather some of these leaders together with Maharishi and hold an open forum? Thirty years ago Maharishi presided over sessions of this type with scholars and philosophers. Now that you are holding public press conferences, why not revive the practice by inviting some astute figures in the fields of religion, government, health or education and engage them in a round-table discussion, allowing the public to listen in via satellite, radio or internet broadcast? I'm thinking especially of people who are highly educated in the field of Vedic studies, and also some of the recognized religious leaders of the world – Christian, Buddhist, Moslem, etc.

4. Why no discussion with other quantum physicists?

John Hagelin, the quantum physicist who has worked closely with Maharishi over the years, often speaks on the topic of the deep connection between the latest findings of objective science and the subjective science of the ancient Ved. Dr. Hagelin has conducted sophisticated statistical studies that illustrate the effect that groups of people practicing the TM-Sidhi program can have on the quality of life in an area. For example, the global demonstration project in 1993 where a group of 4000 TM-Sidhi practitioners (including myself) was assembled in Wash-

ington, D.C. with the expressed intent to reduce crime there, achieved striking success in lowering the incidence of crime in that city over the duration of the assembly. For those folks who are not well versed in modern physics, or higher mathematics, one would naturally expect some skepticism when results like this are presented. Wouldn't it bolster Hagelin's stature and improve the public's perception of these programs if he invited other educated physicists and mathematicians – including those not associated with Maharishi's spiritual regeneration movement – to participate in open discussions about these deep topics in physics and the results of studies like the D.C. project and others?

5. What good is it to speak of complex math?

Quite often Maharishi, John Hagelin and others expound on topics in modern science. The theories of relativity and quantum mechanics developed over the past century have produced an understanding of the deepest principles that underlie the structure of the physical universe. With my own limited knowledge of these fields, I can appreciate, but not always clearly follow Hagelin's presentations on these topics. Mathematical terms like "lagrangian", "symmetry breaking", "super string" and "unified field" are well beyond the comprehension of most folks. I'm guessing that not more than one in a million people understand the complex theorems where such concepts come into play. And even fewer have the knowledge (and experience) of the Ved required to connect modern physics with the ancient texts. What good does it do to speak to the general public about such rarified topics as quantum mechanics? For most of us it's tricky enough to comprehend things like transcendental consciousness, spontaneous right action, natural law, and so forth. If we must speak of physics, can't we simply point to the "big bang" theory, which shows that the universe originated in an abstract "point of singularity", or to the existence of "black holes", where stars collapse into an infinitesimal nothingness, as evidence that the material universe – including the human form – is fundamentally transcendental and non-material?

6. Does anyone understand the Vedic texts and commentary?

Those of us who have learned TM and followed Maharishi's programs have come to understand that these techniques have their origin in the ancient Vedic texts. Maharishi refers frequently to those texts, and describes them in terms that indicate they are not merely Sanskrit poetry. Rather, we're hearing that the Vedas are expressions of a divine intelligence – the underlying intelligence of the cosmos. The same intelligence that sends the earth and moon racing around the sun, that formed the stars and planets, and that governs everything from subatomic particles to DNA replication to the formation of galaxies. Moreover, we've learned that just the hearing of the sounds during the recitation of the texts

has the power to transform a person's physiology. This description is bit overwhelming for the average student of literature. And when you actually read some of the texts, you wind up even more confused – at least that was the case with me. Looking at the Rig Veda for example, the English translation is replete with references to odd and mysterious activities, entities and concepts: rishis and deities, oblations and offerings, worlds beyond this, and so forth. Who, if anyone, has made sense of this? Who can explain how these poetic hymns from an ancient civilization can have anything to do with the movement of galaxies or the laws of physics? Or, for that matter, what they have to do with the mundane activity of a person's everyday life.

7. Can't we formulate precise definitions?

There are certain key terms and phrases that Maharishi often uses in his lectures and conferences. Some examples are: "total knowledge", "natural law", "evolutionary", "organizing power", "full potential", "holistic" and others. Reading some translations of the Vedic texts and also Maharishi's books, we find other terms that crop up in various contexts: "celestial", "gods", "hell", "sin", "demons", "nymphs", "classes of beings", "highest heaven", "dwells in heaven", the "two worlds", the "three worlds", the "descendants of Brahma", the "twice-born". Then there are Sanskrit terms like: "atma", "richa", "dharma", "purusha", and names of specific "devatas" (forces?) such as "Indra", "Shiva", "Agni", etc. The fact that these names and terms are often repeated shows that they are important, and that we should probably try to comprehend them. It's all quite abstract, but we're given to understand that this represents reality. For example, there is a verse in Rig Veda that we're told describes the mysterious dark energy recently discovered by cosmologists. The verse says that it (the term used is "purusha ascended") occupies three-fourths of the universe, which corresponds to the observations of the expanding cosmos – three-fourths is dark energy. If there is such a direct correspondence between Vedic texts and objective reality, and if these terms are so integral to the understanding of this correspondence, shouldn't there be precise definitions for them? Shouldn't we be able to treat them with the same exactitude that mathematicians treat the terms of their theorems? Perhaps there should be a dictionary for these expressions. I would like to be given an example or two of a natural law, or a full potential. If dark energy is in the Vedas, is gravity also described? Electromagnetism? What does it mean to "dwell in heaven"? What are these "other worlds"? What about social forces – human relations – what words in the Vedas describe them? On the Maharishi Open University satellite TV broadcasts we're shown pictures of devatas superimposed on diagrams of the human brain. Is it not possible to point out a devata in reality – not a picture, but a physical thing? For example, can someone show me Shiva?

Or Indra? That is, show some empirical evidence? Can't we measure the manifestation of a devata – quantify it somehow? Moreover, we're told that the Ved is structured within the human DNA (or, more precisely, DNA is structured after the Ved). If that's the case, shouldn't people be able to somehow sense Shiva, Indra, etc. on their own, in their own bodies?

8. Jyotish doesn't fit with objective science – comment?

The science of jyotish, or Vedic astrology, is pretty astounding in its methods and its accomplishments. Using nothing more than the positions of planets and the birth time and location, it can determine everything from a person's body type, to what his next career move should be, to his relationship with his family. It is a predictive system – literally foreseeing the future, so that one can make better decisions and avoid problems. Having had some exposure to the subjective side of knowledge, I think I've at least glimpsed how this might be possible, and I did have a reading of my birth chart, the results of which were indeed amazing. But it's easy to understand why a purely objective scientist would be skeptical of this system. It seems that any clear thinking individual *should* be skeptical about it, and should ask for evidence to back it up, or a very good explanation of how it works. I haven't seen either the former or the latter from Maharishi or anyone else since I've been following Maharishi's programs. I don't even hear folks *requesting* a clear explanation. Does Maharishi have any desire to satisfy the skepticism of objective scientists? Moreover, are you not concerned that most TM meditators simply accept jyotish without expressing a desire for deeper understanding?

9. Has anyone ever tossed bones?

Some months ago in Fairfax, Virginia I attended a lecture by an expert in Maharishi jyotish. He related a story about a tribe in Africa that performed an unusual ritual before they embarked on a hunting trip. The hunter would gather up some dried bones, toss them on the ground in front of him, and then read the results in order to determine where to find his prey. The pattern of the tossed bones was apparently a roadmap of sorts that directed the hunter to the best path. There is a certain similarity between African hunters tossing bones and jyotishis reading planetary formations. In both cases it's clear that the techniques have been handed down through hundreds of generations. But surely there must have been a first bone-thrower, and a first stargazer. Some person or persons at some time in the past must have been inspired somehow to toss bones; he or she must have felt from within that it was an effective thing to do. Who today has been similarly inspired? Who has been able on his own, without prompting, to notice the effect of, say, Mars, on his emotional state? Who, if anyone, has been able to actually

detect that a pattern of bones, or an east entrance, or a pungent taste, or a libation of milk, meant thus and such, or produced this or that effect, without having been given the information beforehand? This is a key question that applies to essentially all of the practices and performances that have been brought out by Maharishi. Surely some clear thinking individual has given thought to this. Why aren't we hearing more discussion on this point? Truthfully, I have not heard a discussion about it at all, which I find surprising, given the level of education and intelligence among the folks I know who teach and practice TM.

10. Super radiance, yagya, jyotish, vastu – why no systematic studies?

We've learned from listening to John Hagelin and others that the physical world doesn't necessarily behave in a rational way. The laws of modern physics produce results that defy our attempts to explain phenomena by way of logical cause and effect. Nevertheless, the effects of such practices as super radiance (yogic flying), jyotish, and other techniques of Vedic science are so dramatic that one would naturally want to investigate them further – to make an attempt at least to systematically categorize the results. For example, to investigate the Maharishi effect, where a group of TM yogic fliers doing their program together can, say, lower the crime rate in a city, would it not be reasonable to set up a study where we vary the number of yogic fliers and measure the results? You could do this for the same city at different times, or simultaneously in different cities with similar demographics. What about varying the distance from the city where the group does its practice: zero miles, ten miles, fifty miles, ...? Also, you could vary the length of time that they practice together, the number of practice sessions each day, the number of weeks they remain in one place, or even the specific technique that they use. For example, a group in one city could do the flying technique, and a group elsewhere could do, say, the technique for omniscience, or no sidhi at all, just the TM program, or even something totally different – prayer, chanting, music, etc. You could also vary the amount of publicity the group receives, and the amount of information they themselves have about the purpose of their program – a blind study of sorts. It's easy to come up with systematic ways to test not just yogic flying, but all of the Vedic techniques and procedures. Jyotish in particular should lend itself quite well to systematic studies. Why hasn't such research been attempted? We're told that there are hundreds of scientific studies verifying the effects of TM and TM-Sidhi, but it seems that for super radiance at least, these have not been conducted in a systematic way. Rather, there have been distinct and unconnected tests performed at widely different times in widely different circumstances: the Middle East, Central Europe, Central America, etc. Isn't anyone curious about what a series of systematic tests

would reveal? And wouldn't it strengthen the public acceptance of these programs if the tests proved successful?

11. Shouldn't the intellect be satisfied?

I've come to understand through my practice of TM that it brings out the distinction between two different mental faculties: the intellect, and another capacity, for which I'm not sure there is a name – let me call it the non-intellect. It appears they are connected, yet they are definitely distinct. They both have something to do with knowing and understanding. I can't say much about the non-intellect, because it's a bit slippery to describe, but I can tell you that the intellect seems to have the quality of curiosity and a desire to investigate. It seems that it needs to be satisfied, and the only way to make it happy is with logic. Any phenomenon you can mention, in whatever area, stimulates the intellect and draws it into creating logical explanations. I don't see any way to get around this requirement. Actually, I believe it's a natural characteristic of the human mind. There is much about Maharishi's programs that seemingly hasn't been settled from an intellectual standpoint. Why should there be such a large intellectual gap in the understanding of these programs? Do other people sense this gap as acutely as I do?

12. Moving among criminals – who's doing it?

The jyotish expert whose lecture I attended in Virginia used a phrase that I found particularly interesting – he said something about "moving among criminals". I gathered that the idea is that folks who are more enlightened, more developed in their awareness, can radiate a positive influence on the people around them. My thought is that one doesn't even need to preach at folks, or recite doctrines, but that simply by interacting with one's neighbors, this radiating effect can take place. By "criminals", I believe he meant not only actual wrong-doers, but the general public, from where potential wrong-doers arise. But I don't see many people setting out to do this. I don't encounter very many folks, meditators or otherwise, who make it their business to engage the community around them, including the criminals. Rather, most TM folks are on a typically self-centered road. They measure their progress in life by how successful they are personally, financially, careerwise, etc., and employ their techniques of meditation to further this personal success. Moreover, a goodly number TM folks actually withdraw from the criminal public, moving to insulated, exclusive communities like Fairfield and Vedic City, Iowa, where they never have to encounter unenlightened people at all. It would seem that we can't all retreat to a mountaintop. Shouldn't some of us be out here in the real world, interacting with real people?

13. Ideal government – who's taking the next step?

It seems clear that an ideal government must have a bottom-up structure. The people who are governed must also be the ones who do the governing. If I understand "natural law" correctly, I see bottom-up government as the extension of natural law. Maharishi frequently points out that more people need to meditate and practice the sidhis, so that their actions will be spontaneously correct, and communities will have fewer problems. We're told this is ideal administration. A number of folks have taken the first step. They learned TM and are dissolving stress, and improving relations with those around them. But meditation is an inward technique. At some point a person needs to take outward action. Has anyone thought about what needs to be done in order to apply the abstract notion of ideal government to the real world, in the cities and towns where we live and raise our children? Is there anyone who has assumed some civic responsibility at the grass roots? For that matter, does the TM movement encourage or support people who are active in community outreach? I myself have not seen much support coming down for this sort of activity. As for the Global Country of World Peace, from my vantage point in the American suburbs, it appears to be another form of top-down, rather than bottom-up government. Raja Nader Ram is so remote to my community that he might as well not exist. But where are my meditating neighbors? I'm thinking specifically of the meditating stock brokers, bankers, developers, real estate agents, lawyers, engineers, designers, contractors, tradesmen and other working professionals. As far as I can tell, these folks live in the same fashion as any typical middle to upper class American – paying more attention to their golf scores and the size of their estates than to the needs of the community. And God knows there are huge needs in our communities these days. Yet it seems that few, if any, are speaking up and getting involved at the local level. Am I wrong in this assessment?

14. Are volunteers really appreciated?

I'm asking this question partly because my own thought is that society has a great need for cooperative, voluntary participation if we are ever to overcome the isolated way of life that has developed in the modern age. But the feeling I get is that volunteering is not something that the leaders of the TM movement appreciate very much. I have done a good amount of volunteering for my local (D.C. area) Maharishi Vedic Centers, the Natural Law Party, and most recently at a Maharishi Vedic Organic farm. From the indifferent attitude of certain individuals you encounter, you get the impression that people expect things from you; that it's your duty to work, or to donate your resources. In my case, I enjoyed helping folks who were friends of mine and who were inspirational on some level – and I put in enough time to feel that my contribution was more than just a

token offering. But I did not make it my vocation to volunteer. However, I do know people who have essentially made TM their job. There are those who have spent years in some cases working for Maharishi's projects. Yet I'm wondering how much their work is appreciated. Especially now, when the emphasis is clearly on courting the wealthy. It's a bit troubling to see how there are a few fortunate individuals who haven't done much of anything as far as we know, yet who receive special treatment – courses and such – because of their wealth, when other, perhaps more deserving folks, are overlooked. It's easy to see how people could be discouraged from contributing to such a system. You want to help those who need help and who appreciate help, not some elite group who would never return the favor. Would Maharishi like to comment about this?

15. Brusque manner of sidhi administrators – why?

Since I learned the TM-Sidhi program twenty years ago, there have been few opportunities to interact with sidhi program administrators. I gather that there aren't many of them anyway, but on those infrequent occasions when I heard a sidhi instructor speak, I was struck by the harsh tone. This was even the case when I first learned the sidhi technique. I recall that there was at least one student who was asked to step out of the class (a CIC held in Washington, D.C.), and his only apparent transgression was that he questioned the instructor about something that he didn't understand – something about the effects of the practice. Nothing more than that. Years later, on a course at the Heavenly Mountain Spiritual Center in Boone, North Carolina, I posed what I considered to be a reasonable question to a TM-Sidhi instructor there, and his response was to brush me off. He didn't reply, but instead turned away and asked if someone else in the audience wanted to answer. I don't think I was being impertinent, as we had been invited to ask questions, and later a couple of my course buddies remarked that I had indeed made a good point. So why the brush-off, and why the disdainful attitude from this guy, and the others? Where is the cordiality that Maharishi so frequently speaks of? Is there not any indulgence for folks who are perhaps still progressing on the path of knowledge? Does gaining enlightenment require that you become unfriendly and intolerant? Or perhaps these kinds of people – these rough personality types – are specifically chosen to administer the sidhi program, although I can't say I understand why.

16. Can we in good conscience promote day traders?

We have on several occasions heard John Hagelin, M.U.M. President Bevan Morris and others lauding the success of students who came out of Maharishi University of Management's business program. Recently there was an article in *Baron's* magazine where a 29-year-old meditating day trader – a graduate of

M.U.M. – was interviewed. The same article quoted a stock trader who lives on Heavenly Mountain – also a TM practitioner. You don't need a degree in business to see that that the modern economic system is flawed. It's fundamentally predatory, where the winners walk away rich and losers poor. But more than that, it's clear that the vast majority of those who play the market, in whatever way – whether with day trading or long term investing – are not at all concerned about the social conscience of the companies whose stock they trade. They are far more interested in amassing a personal fortune than in improving the quality of life among the family of man. You need only to switch on the television and watch five minutes of any show that reports on business to see this. The focus is exclusively on the ebb and flow of money, and there is no consideration for the benefit to mankind – or lack thereof – inherent in the business activities that underlie a person's investments. Given this fact, is Maharishi comfortable in promoting the success of people – M.U.M. graduates or not – whose vocation is so directly connected to this conscience-lacking system? Isn't this a contradictory position to take for folks in the meditating community, who are ostensibly engaged in a life-supporting program – one that aims to alleviate poverty rather than continue it?

17. Any examples of poverty reduction working?

We've been hearing for some time about Maharishi's plan to eliminate poverty in the world. Much money has been donated and resources allocated towards this effort. The aim is laudable, and from what I understand of the plan, there is a good chance that it can succeed. The notion of teaching farmers in developing countries to grow and export organic produce for profit is very appealing and perhaps represents the only real hope for creating self-sufficiency among the poorest nations. But we're not getting much information about progress in this endeavor. The training of the young pandits in India who specialize in the performance of the peace-creating yagya, "ati rudrabhishek", along with the imminent arrival of a group of 500 pandits in Vedic City, Iowa has been well publicized. Has there been any other progress towards actual poverty reduction elsewhere in the world?

18. Promoting inaccessible programs – what value?

There is an apparent inconsistency with Maharishi's program to eliminate poverty that I believe needs to be addressed. One can't help but notice that there are grand private, Vastu-design residences and other luxurious facilities – hotels, clinics and so forth – being constructed in Iowa and elsewhere. At the same time, the price of Maharishi's programs and services has increased steadily over the past several years. That's the case here in the U.S. at least. It has gotten to the

point where only the wealthy can take advantage of services like Maharishi Ayurveda treatments, Vedic Vibration Technology, advanced techniques, etc. At 2500 (US) dollars, even the price of TM itself has become prohibitive for most people. There is a definite widening of the gap between the rich and poor in terms of the availability of Maharishi's programs, and it seems directly at odds with the overall philosophy that guides these programs. Yet we keep on hearing about the importance of TM, TM-Sidhi, and the other techniques for the welfare of humanity. So one needs to ask, whom are these programs really for? Has Maharishi decided that only those with money should have access to these Vedic techniques and treatments, and if so, do you think that it is sufficient to have a few wealthy individuals on the path to enlightenment, while the rest of us can do nothing but wait around for things to change?

19. Presenting inaccessible people – what value?

There are certain folks working closely with Maharishi – doctors, scientists, Global Country ministers – who appear regularly in the various broadcasts and conference calls, giving out information about new programs and initiatives, and reporting on the state of the world from a transcendental perspective. It's inspiring to listen to these astute individuals. They all speak eloquently, and all seem well versed in Vedic teaching. But when we switch off the TV, those folks recede quickly into the background. They have no connection to the reality of our individual existence – the everyday activities that occupy us. We have no access to them, nor they to us. At the local level they're invisible. It's the same with the pandit project, where it seems that Maharishi is moving even further away from accessibility. It's my understanding that the pandits will not be accessible even to the people living right there with them. This inability to receive personal attention or advice from someone you trust, who lives locally, is not only a shortcoming in Maharishi's programs, but in society as a whole. For example, where I lived in suburban Washington we had no one at all local to us who had any training whatsoever in alternative or preventive medicine, let alone the Maharishi Vedic Approach to Health. To be fair, even if there had been a vaidya, say, living in my neighborhood, it probably wouldn't have mattered because of the isolated lifestyle of the community. There was so little communication among households that we could have had the greatest doctor in the world living among us, and no one would have noticed. What, if anything, can be done to overcome this problem?

20. TM improves one's character – or does it?

One of the fundamental principles of the TM program is that society becomes better when there are more people who meditate regularly. A better society

means that folks are acting better and getting along better. This would indicate that the individuals in the society are more developed in some way; that their character has improved through the practice of TM. Logically and also from personal experience I can see that TM should indeed result in growth of character over time. Growth of character means that the better qualities of an individual come out: compassion, generosity, patience, friendliness, etc. I have certainly encountered some incredibly kind meditators and sidhas over the years – folks who appear to have grown through their TM practice. But recently I had an unusual opportunity to work closely with some TM folks, and I was taken aback by the inconsiderate, even insulting, behavior of certain individuals. The rudeness of these people was surprising. But the biggest surprise was that these were TM teachers (governors) who had meditated twenty or thirty years! Given that these individuals had meditated for so long, and had taken advanced courses, and yet were so boorish in their behavior, I could not help but think that they would never change. Thus it seems that for some folks at least, it doesn't matter how long they meditate, or how many courses or programs they take. They will always retain certain undesirable qualities of their character – discourtesy, heartlessness, etc. – regardless of how enlightened they are supposed to be. Would Maharishi like to comment on this point? Also, could you explain how folks with such undeveloped character can find their way into positions of authority in the TM movement? Wouldn't it be better to have true leaders and teachers in managerial positions – folks who inspire you with their kindness rather than repel you with their rudeness?

21. Does enlightenment produce disillusionment?

We have heard Maharishi say that all negativity is due to a lack of the "administration of natural law" from the silent, transcendental level of life. I take this to mean that each individual can dissolve negativity by contacting that silence within himself with TM. The phrase you often hear is that we each make the world what it is – a heaven or a hell. However, I have noticed that after so many years of TM practice, my outlook on the state of the world has not really changed for the better. On the contrary, there are many problems in society that I would have probably overlooked in years past, but which are now so blatantly apparent that I feel surrounded by negativity. I've come to realize that there is ignorance at every turn, everywhere you look: in government, in schools, in communities. It has been suggested that we try to locate the good in the current events of the world – the things that show that progress is taking place. Yet the overwhelming impression I get is that of a world society in bad shape. I can appreciate Maharishi's hopeful proclamations about the imminent dawning of a new age of peace and prosperity, but when I switch off the television, the reality

of life sinks in again. TM is supposed to alleviate anger, but sometimes it seems that one's anger has actually increased after so many years of practice. You have to ask yourself, would it not have been better to live in ignorance, rather than deal with disappointment and disillusionment? Would Maharishi like to comment on this?

22. Why no alliances, no referrals?

I am only a casual student of Vedic science, but even with my limited knowledge of the field, I've come to understand that Maharishi is the acknowledged world's expert on the Ved and the science of consciousness. Clearly no one has achieved what Maharishi has in making this knowledge available in the West. Nevertheless it seems that there ought to be at least a few other Vedic masters in the world today. Indeed, we saw that in the past you had associated with some well regarded Indian doctors and vaidyas, some of whom worked for your movement for a while and then left to continue their consulting independently. I realize that there must also be a good number of misinformed Vedic teachers who work with the public, but it's tricky for a non-expert to sort out which teachers are truly steeped in the ancient knowledge, and which are pretenders. Given that Maharishi's programs are no longer affordable for many of us, perhaps you could set up some informal alliances with teachers and scholars that you know are legitimate, so that you can refer us to them if we aren't able to take courses that you offer. I'm thinking in particular of ayurveda treatments, jyotish consultations and other teachers of meditation – perhaps even those from other traditions. Wouldn't it be to your advantage to establish alliances with legitimate, non-TM movement professionals, in order that folks might perhaps be more at ease about the TM program itself? They wouldn't feel that you are out to monopolize the market for Vedic knowledge, so to speak.

23. Is survivalism the only alternative?

Maharishi speaks of enlivening natural law to achieve success, good health and freedom from problems. We've learned that our desires can be fulfilled by putting natural law to work for us. It's encouraging and hopeful to hear this, but from what I've seen, most of the successful folks who practice TM are succeeding in a typically selfish way. They achieve personal wealth and security, but don't really accomplish much in the way of improving the lot of their neighbors. It seems not much different from the way things already are in the modern world – whether an individual meditates or not, his activity is aimed primarily at benefiting himself, and not the community. Each of us is on his own, and what cooperation there is among people only goes so far. You may declare that the world is your family, but there are limits on whom you allow at the dinner table. This

survivalist style of life is troubling, but there doesn't seem to be an easy way around it. The cards are stacked against you, both with the economic system and the social structure. Add to this the prevailing lack of heart in society, and you come up with a pretty gloomy picture. So I'd like to ask you, is it time to consider adopting our own sort of survivalism? Perhaps groups of concerned, like-minded folks ought to simply disengage, create their own quiet, self-sufficient enclaves and forget about trying to change a non-caring world. I think this is a key question that every concerned citizen needs to ask: are we wasting our time with a public that doesn't want or appreciate help or advice? I had formerly thought that it's our duty to make an effort regardless, but I'm not so sure about it anymore, and wondered what conclusion others have reached on this point, if indeed they have considered it at all.

Jai Guru Dev

Sincerely,

Alexander Gabis Jr.