

TM again: 'hairy guru' called East's most successful con man in history

To the Editor:

Thank you for publishing Suzanne Mills' rejoinder to my letter on Transcendental Meditation. Your doing so illustrates your even-handed policy, and — from my standpoint — provides documentation for my accusations (1) that TM is indeed a religion rather than a "science" and (2) that it is no longer an academic matter precisely because, as responses directly to me from your publication of my letter indicates, it has become an academic matter: as a missionary form of Hinduism it is invading the American public schools under a false guise.

Let me sketch some responses to the Mills letter, to extend the discussion:

1. No argument against Miss Mills claim that TM benefits children. For a quarter century my older sister began her elementary school day with Bible reading and prayer; and when she was forced by the school system to give it up, the quality of her relation with the children, and consequently the peace and value of the children's educational experience, declined. Either Western or Eastern religion, practiced in the public schools, would be good for kids: almost all Americans would agree on that. But the Supreme Court has ruled out the practice of all religion, not just Western religion, in the public schools. For us now to let in Eastern religion would be a ludicrous and illegal discrimination against Western religion. "Meditation" is in Eastern religion precisely what "prayer" is in Western, and each conjoins a particular way of seeing and living in the world — i.e., a "religion." If TM continues to make its way into public education, in New York's Westchester county as it has in Illinois, it will be because of the ignorance of public-school authorities, or worse.

2. The trappings of Hinduism surround those who get into

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Brahman

TM, as I know from direct experience with the hairy guru himself. You may be asked to be secretive about the fact that you pass a floral-bedecked altar with the guru's picture, and you may not know that flowers in Hinduism are the most common offering to the god: altar, offering, mystery, devotion, god — and this is not religion? Somebody must be kidding! Or worse. Worse, I think: that hairy guru is the East's most successful con man in American history. And I do not mean he's a 100 percent fraud; he's really selling something basic (meditation, which I believe in and practice in Western forms) through tricky rhetoric which means one thing in an Eastern ear and another in a Western ear (let's call that persuasion) in order to subvert resistances to his message (that's where the public-school fraud comes in).

3. Miss Mills' elastic use of "science" has traditionally included theology, "the queen of the sciences" as the Western Schoolmen called it. But the common American street-meaning of "science," as now a dying god among us, is implied in the Maharishi's and her use of the term, and this is fraudulent in his case and ignorant (I think: I'm generous with her) in her case. Any disciplined religious praxis, Western or Eastern, will produce "results" such as are detailed in *ALTERED STATES OF AWARENESS: READING FROM SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN* (W.H. Freeman and Company, 1972): that fact eliminates such data from partisan use in cultic competition.

4. After telling us that TM offers "no values of a religious sort . . . nothing to believe in," Miss Mills details precise values and particular beliefs held by TMers. These include egocentricity (the objective being "individual" "full potential . . . the potential of the mind is great . . . everyone desires happiness . . . improvement of health . . . deep rest . . . more creative, more intelligent"), which in Hinduism

is worship (atman, the individual soul, through meditation appearing in one's consciousness as ~~braham~~, God) but in Judaism and Christianity is blasphemy against God. Yet she says that in TM "there is no worship of anything." Her semantic problem is that, I believe unknowingly, she defines worship in a way that excludes it from ~~Brahmic~~ Hinduism and thus from TM — not realizing that the hairy guru has played this verbal trick on her. Brahmanic

5. Miss Mills has displaced my argument in accusing me of saying that TM is "negative." My concern is precisely that it is positive, that it is a positive secular missionary form of a particular religion, and should be — as all particular religions should be — excluded from our public schools. My letter made clear that we must find a way to expose school children to the whole world, including the world of religion — and avoid sectarianism, giving advantage to one religion over the others.

6. I entirely agree with Miss Mills: "I want those children to experience learning in the way that is best for them and for our future society," and I rejoice — I who am giving my life primarily to education — in her saying, "I want to be the best teacher possible." In my work I give much time to helping public school teachers make up their deficiency in religion-teaching, a deficiency for which American history, and not they personally, is responsible.

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PS: If readers of these letters want a reliable, scholarly, objective presentation of Transcendental Meditation, see pp. 3f and 231ff of Robert S. Ellwood, Jr., *RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL GROUPS IN MODERN AMERICA* (Prentice-Hall, 1973). (At my suggestion, French television used this book as base for a five-part TV series now being shown throughout France on Paris Television.)