Transcendental Meditation (TM) and Other Types of Meditation

Everything we experience in life changes us. Every sensory experience, every thought, every event we go through changes our perception, our thinking, our consciousness. Sometimes these experiences are familiar or routine, sometimes they are monumental (i.e., meeting the person you fall in love with, birth of a child, confronting the loss of a loved one, or experiencing trauma of any kind). But every experience changes us and effects our neurophysiology, our neurocircuitry.

As we live our life experiences we create a worldview that we identify with, a “mode” of consciousness that is uniquely our own. It molds the way we “see” the world and experience. Thus, there as many “modes” of consciousness as there are human beings. And extending it even further, when groups of people “see” things one way, they construct a reality that is a function of their collective consciousness. But is this the whole picture?

Suppose we have never seen an elephant because it is hidden in a large box. And we all get together to try and understand what an elephant is. And so one person sees through a tiny hole and sees the mottled skin of the elephant. And then another sees part of the tusk in another hole. Another person sees the tail of the elephant. And yet another sees the eyelash of an elephant. Each of us sees what their perception, their consciousness shows them. And yet, each of us only sees part of the elephant and not the whole. This is how our “modes” of consciousness constructs our worldview.1

As we live we can expand our modes of consciousness so that we create more holes until the whole elephant is revealed! Or, our modes of consciousness can limit or restrict our worldview. The purpose of meditation is to remove the fatigue and stress in the neurophysiology, the limitations that experience or life have given us, so that we can “see” the totality of reality and not just one small facet of it.

Transcendental Meditation

I began my practice of meditation in 1974 when I learned Transcendental Meditation (TM) brought to the West in 1958 by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.2 Encouraged by the results and benefits of meditators practicing the TM technique, Maharishi said the TM technique should be scientifically validated for its physiological and psychological benefits.3 As a result, TM is the most rigorously researched meditation practice in the world. Hundreds of peer-reviewed studies and numerous books and papers have been published on TM’s benefits. Studies show that TM reduces stress and improves health, decreases use of alcohol and tobacco, increases clarity and intelligence, and improves interpersonal relationships.4

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1 These modes of consciousness are not restricted simply to human beings; consciousness pervades all species and even inanimate levels of existence.
2 “Maha” means “Great,” “Rishi” means “seer” and “Mahesh” is the province Maharishi came from in India.
3 The first study on TM was Wallace RK, Benson H, Wilson AF. “A wakeful hypometabolic physiologic state.” American Journal of Physiology. 1971; 221: 795-9. Maharishi, who graduated with a degree in physics, did not develop TM. Its origin goes back thousands of years in the Vedantic tradition from India.
4 TM has been extensively funded by the National Institute of Health to improve cardiovascular health, for addictive disorders, and for ADHD and PTSD. Because the TM technique is easy to learn and practice, it has been introduced in public schools as an antidote to the environmental stressors confronted by many middle school and
Maharishi said that for hundreds of years meditation was thought to be the sole refuge of recluses, saints and ascetics. Because of this mistaken interpretation, 99% of the world was barred from its benefits. Further, Maharishi’s emphasis on TM being simple and effortless contradicted most interpretations of meditation practice as being strenuous or involving lifestyle changes. Maharishi also emphasized that one doesn’t meditate simply to enjoy the experience of meditating, but to see its effects and improvements in daily life. He also said that when large groups of TM practitioners meditate together, its effects spill over into the environment creating greater coherence and reductions in societal stress.

Some practical information. TM is practiced twice a day for 20 minutes with eyes closed usually in a chair. TM is a technique not a religion or belief system. Nor does it involve control or manipulation. Lastly, it can be practiced irrespective of one’s cultural or individual identification or interest. People from all cultural and spiritual traditions practice TM.

**Pure Consciousness**

In TM we use the natural tendency of the mind to seek increasing charm at subtler and subtler levels of the thinking process. For example, just as it takes no effort to draw the mind towards a more beautiful melody, or a scenic vista, in TM we reverse the thinking process until we reach the finest level of thought and “transcend” and experience “pure consciousness.” Pure consciousness is a fourth major state of consciousness neurphysiologically distinct from waking, dreaming and deep sleep. The body experiences deep rest while the mind is alert without thoughts, feelings or sensory perceptions.

The experience of pure consciousness allows the nervous system to throw off accumulated stress and fatigue so that we “open” more “holes” and expand our modes of consciousness. With TM, our worldview expands. Let’s just say that the elephant in the room becomes obvious.

**Scientific Research On Meditation**

Dr. Travis in his presentation (No.1) shows that meditation techniques are neurphysiologically distinct based on EEG signatures. Some of these distinctions are:

- Tibetan meditation is strenuous, with EEG readings in the 40 Hz range, otherwise known as gamma waves. Neural imaging shows that the brain is very active. This technique concentrates or focuses the brain.

- In mindfulness meditation, EEG readings show considerable activity in the left-frontal cortex – the part of the brain associated with evaluating. One is using the “attention” to be mindful of one’s thoughts, feelings, experiences, etc.
• EEG patterns during the Transcendental Meditation technique shows global coherent alpha waves, which is correlated with the simplest form of awareness or pure consciousness. Similarly, neural imaging of the brain shows that the front and back of the brain, the attentional system, are more awake. The thalamus, the gateway of experience, is less active. EEG and neural imaging during TM indicates that the mind is restfully alert but not engaged in concentration or evaluation. Similarly, there is more blood flow to the frontal cortex and less to the brain steam.

• “Yoga” which is commonly practiced, involves assuming various poses to refine the neurophysiology. Similarly, breathing techniques like prana-yama alternate the “inward” and “outward” breath to refine the nervous system through a gradual reduction of metabolic activity.

What Does This Mean

Every experience we have in the world is through consciousness. Meditation is practiced to expand “awareness” or consciousness. The ultimate goal of meditation is to achieve enlightenment, full potential of the mind and neurophysiology. What does enlightenment mean? It means that irrespective of one’s life experiences, one lives life on a foundation that is supported by evolution. One experiences 100 percent of one’s own unchanging pure consciousness, and 100 percent of the ever-changing field of sensory perception.

There are many meditation practices involving various techniques. I encourage you to begin this evolutionary process for your benefit and the benefit of others.

YouTube Videos on TM and Other Meditation Practices

1. Neuroscientist Dr. Fred Travis on TM & the Brain at the Rubin Museum of Art | David Lynch Foundation: (Note: This is the video I recommend to compare TM and other forms of meditation. The Center for Brain, Consciousness and Cognition below, has a wealth of information on meditation research.)
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pPDm3-Z80w&list=RDLVTO4-nPLRaWE&index=7.

2. Meditation and the Brain | Dr. Stixrud & Dr. Travis | Full Event | David Lynch Foundation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKDDweRVzko. Dr. Travis begins at 5:33.

3. What's going on between your ears? l Dr. Fred Travis, Ph.D.: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6goPT1kPX9Q. How Does Meditation Impact The Brain: February 8th, 2019, at Maharishi University of Management: ChangeMakers event: Is College Bad for your Brain? Full conference video available at: https://www.mum.edu/changemakers-even...

4. THE CENTER FOR BRAIN, CONSCIOUSNESS AND COGNITION – MAHARISHI INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY. https://drfredtravis.com/. The center offers several videos

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7 “Yoga” means union, the experience of pure consciousness. Yoga practitioners who assume physical postures are practicing “Hatha Yoga.” “Hatha” means “force.” During TM as the mind settles down the body settles down, and the breath becomes refined naturally.
on TM and meditation and an extensive lists of books and published papers on Transcendental Meditation and other Meditation practices.

5. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZ-_1FW98XU&list=RDCMUCaYvVQcC-Zk8EFtuTVnp_xg&index=7](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZ-_1FW98XU&list=RDCMUCaYvVQcC-Zk8EFtuTVnp_xg&index=7). Scarlett Johansson shares her great-uncle's story during WWII, and discusses the benefits of Transcendental Meditation for Veterans. [https://www.miu.edu/](https://www.miu.edu/).