

Transcendental Meditation, Vedic Science and Science

Scott Lowe

ABSTRACT: Science—in the forms of Western theoretical science, empirical research, and revised Vedic teachings—has played at least three different roles over the last fifty years in the evolving public and internal teachings of the Transcendental Meditation Organization (TMO) of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. The first phase, starting in 1957, emphasized the power of Indian spiritual teachings to transform the world, and science was downplayed. The second phase, beginning in 1970, was marked by a sudden transformation of the TMO from a small, exotic Indian-based meditation movement to an aggressively modern, science-based, crypto-spiritual business dedicated to bringing optimal physiological and psychological functioning to the world. In the third phase, from the 1980s, a self-selected, relatively small group of dedicated followers entered an enchanted land in which cutting-edge theories from quantum physics were employed creatively to bolster Maharishi's extensively reinterpreted Vedic sciences. It seems likely that this third stage, in which Western science is useful and valid only to the extent that it confirms the ancient Vedic truths, was the destination toward which Maharishi was heading from the inception of his movement. While it is possible that these stages reveal the gradual evolution of Maharishi's thought, it seems more likely that they are the expression of a deliberate strategy of progressive revelation.

The Transcendental Meditation Organization (TMO) began with the inauguration of Maharishi's Spiritual Regeneration Movement (SRM) in 1957. From the very start, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1917–1990) emphasized the power of Indian spiritual teachings to transform the world, and science was downplayed. The second phase, beginning in 1970, was marked by a sudden transformation of the TMO from a small, exotic Indian-based meditation movement to an aggressively modern, science-based, crypto-spiritual business dedicated to bringing optimal physiological and psychological functioning to the world. In the third phase, from the 1980s, a self-selected, relatively small group of dedicated followers entered an enchanted land in which cutting-edge theories from quantum physics were employed creatively to bolster Maharishi's extensively reinterpreted Vedic sciences. It seems likely that this third stage, in which Western science is useful and valid only to the extent that it confirms the ancient Vedic truths, was the destination toward which Maharishi was heading from the inception of his movement. While it is possible that these stages reveal the gradual evolution of Maharishi's thought, it seems more likely that they are the expression of a deliberate strategy of progressive revelation.

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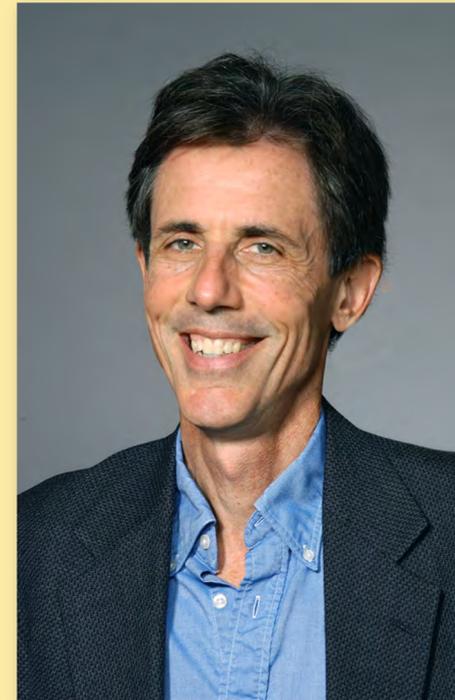
A Maharishi Sthapatya Veda House (June 2009). Photo courtesy of Lucy Lowe.

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