

The Maharishi Effect  
Questions for Discussion

1. Why did Transcendental Meditation attract millions of Americans in the 1960s and 1970s? What features of that period make it especially vulnerable or receptive? What has been the lasting impact of TM on American culture, if any?
2. Gilpin's story has been called an allegory for the baby boom generation. Do you agree? Or is nostalgia for the lost idealism of youth a more universal theme?
3. On returning to the center of the Movement, Gilpin finds things he admires and things that worry him. Do you agree with his assessments? Is it possible to have the good without the bad?
4. Is Maharishi's Movement a religion? Why or why not? Is it a cult? What are the arguments for and against teaching meditation in public schools or to public servants in high-stress occupations, such as police officers?
5. Why does Sarah encourage Gilpin to move back to Fairfield? What risks is she taking in doing so? What might she hope to gain?
6. Some "fringe" groups become mainstream, some go quietly about their business, and some eventually commit violent crimes or mass suicide. How can you evaluate whether or not a group that is merely "different" is also dangerous?
7. Is it possible for scientists to investigate claims about consciousness without bias? Or do expectations, attitudes, and assumptions inevitably influence their findings?
8. What roles do love and fear play in Gilpin's decision to seek out his old friends? How do they influence his choices at other points throughout the book? Are they ever in tension?
9. Near the end of the book, Gilpin finds hope for the future in the children at the Movement school. Is that hope realistic? How might the experience of the second generation differ from that of their parents, who chose TM rather than inheriting it?
10. At the end of the book, does Gilpin return to everyday life changed in any way? How might his life be different after his final return from Fairfield, if at all? If the book continued, what do you think would happen in the next chapters?