

Contact: Jennifer Levy
Jennifer.Levy@us.penguingroup.com
212-366-2851

THE MAHARISHI EFFECT

A Personal Journey Through the Movement That Transformed American Spirituality

by Geoff Gilpin

When the Beatles adopted Maharishi Mahesh Yogi as their guru in 1967, he was transformed overnight from an obscure Indian Yogi to a worldwide New Age spiritual sensation, introducing Transcendental Meditation to thousands of idealistic followers and forever changing the landscape of American spirituality.

Geoff Gilpin was one of those who turned his back on convention and careerism and joined the TM Movement in hopes of finding the inner bliss it promised.

In *The Maharishi Effect* (a Tarcher/Penguin hardcover, October 19, 2006, 1-58542-507-9; \$24.95) Gilpin offers an insightful, wryly humorous, and at times wistful account of his experience as a student at the Maharishi International University in Fairfield, Iowa during the mid-1970s and his return twenty years later to find out where the Movement went wrong.

Gilpin's return is prompted by the Maharishi's increasingly odd bulletins, where he has, for example, denounced NATO, the United Nations and American foreign policy. Previously he had not involved himself with politics. He also proposed bizarre fundraising schemes, including a pitch calling upon the world's wealthiest individuals to donate 1% of their wealth to support a group of 40,000 Yogic Flyers who would levitate together and generate the "Maharishi Effect," a cosmic wave that, supposedly, would eliminate crime, war, and suffering forever.

Gilpin feels compelled to examine the extravagant claims coming from a spiritual community he once loved. "The more I read about the 'Maharishi Effect,' the more uncomfortable I became. Cutting edge physics or delusional bullshit, I had to know one way or the other..."

In Fairfield, Gilpin sees major changes in the Movement that once inspired him. Maharishi University, in his student days a relaxed campus of former hippies focused almost exclusively on meditation, has become a rigidly structured "facility" offering a program, product, or service for virtually every aspect of human life, from Maharishi Vedic Astrology and the

Maharishi Vedic Approach to Health to Maharishi Vedic Management and Maharishi Global Construction.

He talks with friends, some still in the Movement, some who have left, and some who have been excommunicated from it; he interviews physicists John Hagelin and Victor Stenger, who argue for and against the ability of group meditation to affect such things as the crime rate; he talks with director and long-time TM practitioner David Lynch; and he frequently tests his impressions against his wife Sarah's trusty crap-detector.

Gilpin is stunned to find that costs in the Movement have risen to transcendent levels. The TM course he paid \$35 for now costs \$2,500. The fee for the TM-Sidhi course, which teaches Yogic Flying, among other things, has soared to \$5,000. The Enlightenment Course, a month at Maharishi's house in the Netherlands, is also known as the "millionaire's course" because of its \$1 million price tag. Most revelatory of all is the guru's plan to raise \$10 trillion to purchase 5 billion acres of the earth's surface.

Money can't buy you love, as the Beatles once sang, but in Maharishi's Movement it can, apparently, buy you enlightenment.

And yet in spite of these troubling changes, Gilpin still finds much that is positive in the Movement. He starts an Ayurvedic diet that is time-consuming, foul-tasting, and remarkably effective. He renews his own spiritual practice. He attends a discussion meeting with "awakened" TM practitioners and experiences a profound sense of connectedness and peace that nearly convinces him to stay.

Both an intimate, bittersweet portrait of one man's personal spiritual journey and a penetrating critique of a movement that followed the all-too-familiar path from lofty idealism to savvy marketing, *The Maharishi Effect* is essential reading for anyone who wants understand spirituality in America today.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Geoff Gilpin, who lived inside the Maharishi's movement for five years in the seventies, lives in Wisconsin.

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