

It may be asked, "What is wrong with artificially altering consciousness?" By itself I do not think there is anything evil in an altered state of consciousness. Madness, sleep-walking, and hallucination are all "altered" states of consciousness that are not morally evil, even though they are undesirable, unless one does something evil while in that state. However, it is certainly evil to consider your own altered consciousness to be "God" from the biblical viewpoint, since there is but one God (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 43:10). Furthermore, to ascribe spiritual significance to physical exercises opens the mind, body, and soul to deceptive experiences by Satan, that may seem very real to the initiate.

Japa Yoga:

Mechanical Path to Salvation

Japa⁴ is the repetition or chanting of a mantra (usually a name of a god or an evil spirit). The Hare Krishna movement chants the names of Krishna and Rama. The monistic gurus prefer to use a symbolic name of God, such as "Om," or a mantra whose meaning the mediator does not know, so that name or mantra may not create any thoughts or images in the mind by association.

Constant repetition of a sound eliminates all other stimuli, thus concentrating the mind and eventually itself becoming a non-stimulus. This induces a state where the mind is aware or conscious, but is not aware or conscious of anything or any thought. One may say that it is only conscious of consciousness. This is what is called Pure Consciousness or Transcendental Consciousness.

In order for this technique to be effective in "God-realization," one has to practice for 3 to 4 hours a day. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who popularized Transcendental Meditation in the West, prescribes it only for 40 minutes a day to the new initiates. This is meant to give them a taste for it and to help them obtain a "vision of possibilities." In advanced stages the Maharishi prescribes as much as one full week of silent meditation.

An initiate is asked to bring flowers, sweets, a white handkerchief, camphor, *et cetera*, along with a fee for a *puja* ceremony. During the ceremony the teacher worships a photograph of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's own guru and also asks the initiate to bow before the guru's photograph. The teacher invokes the blessings of various gods and goddesses and then gives a *mantra* to the initiate. Usually the *mantra* is a short word, a name of some deity, such as Ram, Om, Hrim, Sring, or Aing. The disciple is asked to sit in a comfortable position, close his eyes and silently repeat the *mantra*, like "Ram . . . Ram . . . Ram . . ." for 20 minutes. He is told that he will first

forget the rest of the world and be aware only of the mantra. Then he will forget the mantra too and transcend all thoughts and feelings and becomes aware of awareness. This is the *Transcendental* state of consciousness.

After some time, the mediator reaches a higher state of consciousness, called *Cosmic Consciousness*, in which he is aware both of the world and of the Pure Consciousness. After years of meditation, one can attain God Consciousness, in which he comes to perceive the subtler levels of the objective world, which appear as personal. In this state, it is said that one can even communicate with birds, animals, plants, and rocks. The final state is *Unity Consciousness*, in which one perceives oneness of himself with the universe. This is called liberation.

Mahesh Yogi calls this path the "Mechanical Path to God-realization." He says that it is possible to realize God in a mechanical way because "God-realization" is a matter of perception and "the process of perception is both mechanical and automatic" . . . Perception in the outward direction is the result of a progressive increase of activity of the nervous system. And perception in the inward direction is the result of diminishing activity . . . until the entire nervous system ceases to function and reaches a state of stillness, a state of restful alertness. This brings the realization of 'Be still and know that I am God.'⁵ Mahesh Yogi misused Psalm 46:10 here.

The Surat-Shabd Yoga:

The Path of Sound and Light

"God is Light," many gurus affirm, and add that this light is within us. "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God," declare many sects. They add that this word is within us. When the soul establishes a contact with this word, the word takes it back to Godhead, its original home.

The Divine Light Mission⁶ and Radha Soami Satsang Beas' (RSSB) have been chiefly responsible for popularizing Surat-Shabd yoga in the West. *Surat* means soul and *Shabd* means Word or Sound; so Surat-Shabd yoga is union of soul and the Word.

The sects that teach this path try to keep their techniques completely secret. The techniques are called by various names, such as *Nam* (name) and *Updesh* (knowledge), to deliberately mislead non-initiates. The "name" and "knowledge" actually refer to techniques of physiological manipulation of the senses and meditation on one's breathing.

Unlike TM, the sects that teach the path of sound and light do not initiate everyone who asks for it. One has to be spiritually "ready" for initiation. There is no definite criterion for judging whether or not a person is

ready; it depends on the arbitrary feelings of the initiator. Some sects stipulate a few objective conditions, too, such as giving up liquor, non-vegetarian food, drugs, or other items.

After one has been chosen for initiation, he is taken into a closed room, where the initiator explains the importance of the "knowledge," Satsang (the weekly gathering for fellowship and teaching), and the Satguru (the True Teacher). The would-be initiate takes a vow of secrecy and to follow no other guru except his own. Then he bows, kneels, or generally prostrates before the guru or his photograph and worships him or it. The initiator teaches him the techniques of meditation.

Sects that teach salvation through this path describe their experiences differently. According to some sects, such as the Radha Soami Satsang, during meditation the "third eye" is opened, the soul leaves the body through this eye with the Sound Current (Word or Logos), and travels up to heaven. On the way it has many wonderful experiences, and finally it merges into God.

Kundalini Yoga:

Salvation Through the "Serpent Power"

Hindu psychology teaches that in the human body, three centimeters above the rectum and three centimeters below the genitals, at the base of the spine, is a beautiful triangle in which lies the *Kundalini Shakti*, or the "Serpent Power." What Kundalini really is, nobody knows, but it is supposed to be red and white in color. It is also described as "coil power" or the "creative sex energy." Normally, it is taught, the Kundalini lies coiled and dormant, but when it is awakened, it arises and begins to travel upward. In its journey from the base of the spine to the top of the head, it passes through six psychic centers called chakras. When it passes through a chakra, it gives a various psychic experiences and powers. When at last it reaches the top chakra, called the *sahasrara chakra*, one can supposedly attain the power to perform miracles and achieve liberation.

Many means are used to awaken the Kundalini. They range from breathing exercises, like *Pranayam*, to the homosexual handling of the genitals. The most influential guru in the last decade who preached Kundalini yoga was Swami Muktananda of Ganeshpuri, near Bombay (now Mumbai). He described Kundalini yoga as "Maha yoga" (Great yoga) or "Siddha yoga" (Perfect yoga), for he said it was the only yoga in which the aspirant does not have to do anything. He just surrenders to the guru and the guru's grace does everything for him.

Thousands of people have testified that Muktananda had awakened their Kundalini, but the

method he used is still secret. Often it gives the impression of being demonic. Kundalini yoga has not been very popular in India because many of the experiences it gives are what the philosopher and psychologist William James calls "diabolical mysticism." It gives pain, makes people depressed, and even produces madness.

Tantra:

Salvation Through Sex

Tantra is often said to be the opposite of yoga, but they both aim at the same end. It is opposite of Hatha yoga because the latter is the path of great discipline and effort, whereas Tantra is the way of free indulgence. The tantrics claim that Tantra is the original and easiest way of salvation. The possibility of Samadhi or Unity Consciousness must have appeared to sages during sexual intercourse, for in an orgasm you transcend rational consciousness in a pleasurable experience of oneness. Tantra is, in part, a system of techniques of prolonging orgasm in order to experience "God" or Unity Consciousness.

In the Bible, Saint Paul writes that when men suppress the truth in unrighteousness and begin to worship the creation instead of the Creator, God gives them up to a base mind or, "in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves" (Rom. 1:24). The chapter continues to show that their base minds and lusts lead them to unbelievable depths of filth and foolishness.

Before the spread of Christianity in India and the consequent Hindu renaissance, Tantricism had sunk to such levels of crudity and cruelty, witchcraft and superstition, that in any sophisticated society the descriptions would appear unthinkable. But now that the Christian influence has diminished in India, the old Tantric cult is coming back openly on the surface. The number of centers in India where Tantra is being taught and practiced is rapidly increasing. In its crudest forms it includes worship of sex organs, sex orgies which include the drinking of blood and human semen, black magic, human sacrifice, and contact with evil spirits through dead and rotting bodies in cremation grounds.

In its more sophisticated forms it is being advocated by the gurus like Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and authors such as Professor Aghenanda Bharati, an Italian convert to Hinduism who lectures in anthropology at Syracuse University in New York.

Both Rajneesh and Professor Bharati are among the most brilliant of Hindu thinkers. Before becoming a guru, Rajneesh was a professor of philosophy for nine years. His writings have been at the top of the best sellers' list in India for many years, and he