

Excerpted from Chapter 16: BIBLE BELT MEDITATORS

Among the first group of people to be instructed that day was Mike, a classic New York hippie (there were hardly any indigenous hippies at U.Va.) who, with his long hair and fringed leather jacket, looked more like Wild Bill Hickock than a U.Va. student. As soon as I gave him the mantra during the initiation ceremony he was gone! After letting him meditate for about five minutes, I had a hard time getting him to come out of meditation. Finally I was able to get him to understand that he was going into the kitchen to continue his meditation. He was so zonked out he could hardly walk, so I had to gently take him by the arm and lead him through the living room to the kitchen. As he stumbled out of the initiation room on my arm, I thought, *This is not going to look good to the people waiting to be initiated.* As we entered the living room, Dr. Brawley, a physiology professor, looked up at us with an expression of confusion and panic on his face. He had read about the physiological benefits of TM in *Scientific American* and thought he would give TM a try. He had concerns about bringing fruit, flowers and a handkerchief to this little cottage and participating in a Sanskrit ceremony, but we had reassured him this was a simple physiological technique for gaining deep rest and clarity of mind. We also convinced him there was nothing weird or flaky about the initiation ceremony.

As the incense billowed out of the initiation room, I helped Mike stagger into the kitchen under the wary eye of Dr. Brawley. I left Mike on his own to meditate in the kitchen for fifteen minutes, and returned to the living room. While I was waiting for Mike to finish meditating in the kitchen, I made small talk with Dr. Brawley, who looked as if he was about to bolt for the door. I tried to create the impression that everything was normal and there was nothing unusual about Mike's difficulty with walking after being initiated. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, Mike's fifteen minutes were up. I returned to the kitchen, sat down and meditated with him for a few minutes. I then whispered to him to slowly open his eyes and to be sure to take plenty of time coming out of meditation so as not to jolt him with an

abrupt change from the deep rest of meditation to the activity of the waking state. After a few minutes went by, I noticed that Mike was still in a state of deep meditation so I whispered again for him to slowly open his eyes. Again no response! I knew if I raised my voice in my increasingly desperate attempts to bring Mike out of his meditative state, Dr. Brawley in the living room would hear and probably run out the door.

Finally, I was able to get Mike to come out of meditation, handed him a questionnaire to fill out about his experience in meditation and told him I would be back in a few minutes to discuss it. I zipped out the kitchen door to see if Dr. Brawley was still there and found him all set to go into the initiation room with his little basket of fruit and flowers. Suddenly the kitchen door slammed open and Mike staggered out with his questionnaire in his hand and began mumbling, "Man, this is too much - I can't handle this!" I could see Dr. Brawley's facial muscles tighten up, but before he had the chance to bail out, Linnea ushered him into the initiation room and off he went into the transcendent. By now there were a couple of typical U.Va. students in the waiting room/living room who were doing fine until they saw Mike burst into the room wearing his Wild Bill Hickock costume with his disheveled long hair covering his face. Sensing the fear and tension building up in the room, I grabbed Mike in a manner that was wholly inappropriate for a peaceful meditation center and sort of pushed him back into the kitchen. He explained that he just couldn't focus on answering the questions and that he felt-disoriented. I asked him if he had taken plenty of time coming out of meditation and he replied that as soon as he heard me ask him to come out of meditation, he opened his eyes and picked up his questionnaire. I then explained to him that it was very important to take at least two or three minutes to come out of meditation—if we come out too fast we can become disoriented and feel "rough." We then sat and meditated for five minutes and then I made sure he came out slowly. He was like a different person: clear minded, energetic and feeling very relaxed.

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some estates, and large, well-manicured horse farms, which reflected a social atmosphere that was stratified and calcified. Even the university exuded a formal stiffness that seemed antiquated and out of touch with the waves of anti-establishment fervor sweeping college campuses across the country. Fortunately there was a small group of dedicated meditators at U.Va. who had set up an official chapter of the Students International Meditation Society on campus. In addition to reserving rooms for TM lectures and helping to publicize them, they found a great house for a TM center. It was a fairly large, traditional two-story brick house with six rooms downstairs and a separate two-bedroom living quarters upstairs that we rented out to some of the meditators to help pay the rent. We soon found ourselves teaching or lecturing six nights a week. The only time we had off was after the initiations on Saturdays until we met with the students on Sunday evening. As soon as we finished teaching on Saturday, we would jump in our car and head out of town for our farm in the mountains.

The summer quickly went by with this hectic but fulfilling routine. As the students began returning to the various colleges in the central Virginia area for the fall semester, our mentor from the Washington center, Bob Cranford, suggested that we travel around to all the colleges within a hundred mile radius and teach TM to the students. Most of the schools were embedded deep in the Bible Belt and had a reputation for being bastions of traditional southern conservatism. Almost every week we traveled to small colleges in central Virginia, ranging from Sweet Briar College near Lynchburg to Madison College in Harrisonburg and as far west as Washington and Lee in Lexington. We even lectured on TM at Virginia Military Institute. By the fall of 1971, TM had gained national recognition and even at these small southern schools there were always a few students interested in learning meditation.

Most of the time there were only ten or twenty students at our lectures and usually about half of them would want to actually learn TM. The biggest challenge was to find some private rooms on campus for initiations. The average southern college was not equipped for private