An Open Letter To Maharishi Mahesh Yogi
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Dear brother Mahesh, namaste! Along with tens of millions of Americans, the staff of Hinduism Today just saw a popular national television talk program, the Phil Donohue Show, which featured your Transcendental Meditation (TM) movement. We are disturbed and dismayed. An old Hindu verse says only a man's true friends will speak frankly about difficulties, so kindly let us explain.

When our paths first crossed on the Ganges that clear November day in 1969, you seemed to embody qualities of the Hindu dharma which we have always held dear-cheerful inwardness, soulful compassion and a crisp, intuitive intelligence. We can still vividly see your hands fingering a freshly cut flower and your eyes twinkling in the morning sun. We can still hear your serene, high-pitched voice urging devotees gathered nearby to "Be happy, happy, happy."

It is not easy to be happy with the TV program we just witnessed. In fact, our erstwhile radiant impressions of TM have been suddenly tarnished by the September 9th program recorded in Connecticut. The program started off well, with the pure dharmic wisdom being presented to those who had "tuned in." There were valuable discussions about stress and its deleterious effects on the body's natural immune system, insights that the world needs with all the dreadful statistics that bombard us about cancer, AIDS and heart failure. People do need to take charge of their own health, to understand the value of the vegetarian diet TM recommends, to learn the simple science of well-being. How eloquently Dr. Chopra was in explaining Ayurvedic principles of wellness and balance and mental harmony. Promote him to Minister of Global PR. He's clearly a gem.

Alas, all this elation was soon shattered. As the program reached what should have been a peak, it stumbled into a quagmire. Two young TMer's were introduced, athletic youths (one black, one white) dressed in yellow gym shorts and shirts. They were, as we soon discovered, your "Siddha flyers," among the best in the movement. Seated in lotus on a long, thick gymnasium mat, they proceeded to

"hop" energetically back and forth, left and right, now in formation, now solo, now in opposite directions. The audience, which had heretofore thoughtfully listened and learned, tittered nervously-embarrassed not by but for these sincere boys.

But their embarrassment was a mustard seed beside our Himalayan humiliation. We who had seen the earlier ebulient upliftment on eager faces when hearing the traditional Hindu teachings so beautifully espoused now hung our heads in silent shame. Words failed at first, then slowly crept into our consciousness: "Silly...childish...hoax...flimflam." When Phil Donahue, an otherwise very open human being, added "Snake oil salesmen," our mortification deepened.

Certainly this is not how you want the good American people-and all the world's peoples for that matter-to think of the Sanatana Dharma. Believing this gives us the boldness to write and share all this with you and your competent followers.

Dr. Chopra proceeded to add salt to our wounds-obviously not an Ayurvedic remedy for what ailed us-by struggling to "explain" that what we were all witnessing (two youths in the cross-legged yogic posture hopping 10-15 inches up and down in a TV studio) was, in fact, "the mechanics for world peace." No one really heard Chopra's strained rationalization about "maximum brain wave coherence." It was just too incredible to think that world peace and this eccentric exercise were somehow mystically linked. To put it alliteratively, no amount of cryptic cant could caulk the convocation's cracked credulity.

The real harm is that these people do not know that such "hopping" is not part of the Hindu spiritual tradition. They assume you are presenting something that is known and practiced in India. Until this show, many of them probably looked upon the yogic powers, siddhis, in awe. People everywhere believe in mystic powers, and Hindu yogis elicit great respect here in the West. But this was a mockery of true levitation (underlined when Mr. Donahue took off his jacket, sat in lotus and competently "flew" across the mat with your men, proving it mere physical acrobatics.) Suddenly the genuine, profound and supremely lofty yogic attainments were reduced to vaudevillian theater, and by no less a leader than Mahesh Maharishi Yogi. Your stock fell that day, and further plummeted when the flyers admitted on television that no one in TM had ever really levitated.

On behalf of millions who know and love you and admire your achievements, we beseech you to stop this foolishness. Let the siddhars practice in private, and desist from publicizing "flying" until you or one of the TM'ers really levitates. Then we will all join in joyous celebration of the accomplishment. Until then, let "maximum brain wave coherence" remain where it belongs, inside the meditator.

Your work and the Sanatana Dharma are not one whit better off by this "flying" business. Be courageous, brother. Ground your "flyers." I doubt that anyone will miss their curious aerobatics. Return TM's emphasis to soaring within.