

A SUMMARY OF 11 POINTS FROM THE REBBE'S REQUEST FOR A CLINICAL MEDITATION SIMILAR TO TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION (TM)

In the 60's and 70's, Hindu-based, Transcendental Meditation (TM) hit the West like a scourge. At that time, the Lubavitcher Rebbe pleaded with individuals and groups, to create a religiously neutral format of meditation to help people "calm their nerves." Below is a digest of the ideas presented in the various communications. Thanks are due to Rabbi Y.H. Greenberg of Buffalo, NY for assisting me in compiling this summary.

1. Regarding TM, the Rebbe is emphatic that he must speak about this "timely" matter of pikuach nefesh - to save (spiritual) lives. (Public address - 13 Tammuz, 5739 - July 1979)
2. Meditation is not foreign to Judaism. The shepherds were "merkavos - chariots" to G-dliness and chose the pastoral setting to meditate in the fields, staying away from the "hubbub" of the "city life." One should not erroneously think that meditation began with Eastern religions, nor that people will get more involved in idolatry if they take an interest in practicing or helping promote this.
3. The meditation should not contain additional carryovers from Eastern worship such as: gongs, chimes, incense, postures, offerings, statues, etc. To this end, Herbert Benson's "Relaxation Response" formula fits the Rebbe's request: 1) quiet environment, 2) focal, mental device (sound, word, phrase, etc.), 3) passive attitude, 4) comfortable position. Later, Dr. Benson simplified it to 1) Repetition of a word, sound, phrase, prayer, or muscular activity, 2. Passively disregarding everyday thoughts that inevitably come to mind and returning to the repetition.
4. Professionals have a "holy obligation" to create a neutral, clinical alternative so those involved in other methods, or who are interested have a kosher option.
5. Not only should the format not contain Eastern religious elements, it should not be Jewish either. The Rebbe uses the expression "inyonei r'shus - value free, or secular" for the focal device. (See #3)
6. Anything that is not therapeutic should be removed to avoid the innocent confusion that extraneous (seemingly "mystical") elements are creating the beneficial therapeutic effect. Thus, the request is to only use elements beneficial to the person's health and wellbeing - medical and clinical, as per the doctor or therapist's recommendations.
7. This is considered a medical or therapeutic treatment. The Rebbe likens 'meditation to 'medication,' and thus should be titrated like medicine. The practice should be not too little, and not too much.
8. Even if the professional is also a rabbi, knowledgeable about halacha - Torah law, he needs to take an unbiased Rabbi, proficient in these areas to expertly advise him.
9. This is a matter of health and "menuchas hanefesh." To remain emotionally regulated, a person may need to disengage, and clear his mind and "to calms his nerves." This does not require leaving his physical surroundings to attain this peace of mind.
10. Practicing meditation should not be emphasized other than as a tool for stress reduction, not as a "lifestyle." It should be used by those who need it, for improving daily functioning and wellbeing.
11. It is especially important to create and disseminate a neutralized version to those who are already practicing a forbidden format as well as for those who don't know which format to use.