

**END
ANXIETY!**

END ANXIETY!

*Proven Benefits of the
Transcendental Meditation Program*

James G. Meade, PhD

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Author's Note

I am not a medical doctor, and teachers of the TM® program do not give advice on medical matters. I am a teacher of the TM® program and recommend the practice. This book is my own and does not speak officially for the Transcendental Meditation® program and the Transcendental Meditation® movement. This book has been written and published for educational purposes to enhance one's well-being. Information given herein is not intended to be a substitute for an individual's prescribed medications or psychological treatments or therapies. Reliance on any information provided herein is at your own risk. The publisher and author will have no responsibility to any person or entity with respect to loss, damage, or injury claimed to be caused directly or indirectly by any information in this book.

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*In memory of my dear friend and mentor,
Marty Zucker, 1937–2020*

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Foreword

I am amazed by the volume of scientific research—close to 700 studies and counting—that has been done on the Transcendental Meditation® program since my first paper was published by *Science* magazine in 1970. When Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder of the Transcendental Meditation® program, came to the West, meditation was commonly regarded as something mystical and impractical. Today our understanding is completely transformed. The change began when Maharishi introduced a meditation technique that was natural, easy, and something anyone could practice, regardless of their religious or cultural background. He also encouraged scientific research and taught that higher states of consciousness are based on neurophysiological refinement and are innate in each of us.

My first study, using measurements of oxygen consumption, heart rate, skin resistance, blood lactate, and EEG or brain wave activity, verified Maharishi's description of the physiological changes that occur during the Transcendental Meditation® program. The results showed that a unique state of restful alertness is produced by TM—different from our usual states of consciousness, waking, dreaming, and sleeping. These findings suggest the existence of a fourth major state of consciousness, which was described thousands of years ago by many ancient traditions, especially the Vedic tradition of India.

End Anxiety! draws on recent studies, and it is written by a humanist rather than a scientist. As you might expect, the book focuses on human beings instead of data. It examines changes in the lives of people who come to TM® centers suffering from anxiety and other personal problems.

The narrative does not resort to rhetoric or imaginings but uses the language of our time, the language of science. Among other things, it deals with EEG research which indicates that not all meditation techniques are the same. For example, what are the differences in the

EEG and brain imaging findings between Mindfulness and the TM[®] technique?

End Anxiety! is an engaging read that highlights decades of practical scientific research on the TM[®] program, presenting it in a simple, interesting, and mercifully short volume. I hope that it will help you to empower and improve your life. Enjoy.

DR. ROBERT KEITH WALLACE

Trustee and Founding President of Maharishi International University,
Chair of Department of Physiology and Health

Preface

Anxiety. Things are going bad, you worry. Things are going okay, you worry. Things are going great, you worry. Worry, fear, depression, angst—they're pretty much the human condition. Sure, there are periods of respite, but not most of the time, not for most of the people. How do you fix it? Success? Family? Sedatives? Therapy? Cognitive behavioral psychology? Religion? What is it with anxiety? What *is* it? It's relentless. Seemingly incurable.

Once upon a time, long ago in the mid-1970s, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi told me something as he was ushering me toward activity away from him and among the rest of humankind. He said: "It will be inspiring to be in the field teaching Transcendental Meditation® [instead of at international headquarters]." For decades, before becoming a full-time teacher, I wondered at that prescription. Perhaps it would be inspiring to my writing, which surely it was. In 2005, when I began point-of-contact teaching with the general public, I learned over and over what in fact he meant. It is inspiring to see from the results of the Transcendental Meditation® program how quickly and completely people recover from even the most crippling stress and anxiety.

Sometimes it seems as if nobody knows how powerful the TM® technique really is. You can't grasp it intellectually, and none of us can fully express it, because the power of the Transcendental Meditation® technique comes "from where speech returns" as Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the TM® program founder, has put it. The ground state. The infinite. The source.

People who do not actually practice the Transcendental Meditation® technique these days can be especially at a severe disadvantage because of all the talk of many kinds of meditation. The airways are clogged with "meditation" and "yoga" and "being present" until you don't know where to turn for good advice and may just want to shut down the pursuit of this life enhancement altogether. When I

was younger and knew little about these practices, I was at a disadvantage, too, before I learned this practice of meditation. Of course I was. Never, until we have tasted it, could we have the slightest idea of the power of the Transcendental Meditation® technique. Once having experienced it, the wonder doesn't cease; at the least, we find possibilities open before us more and more each day.

Doing the Impossible. Instantly.

I wrote this book to toss in my two cents about that power, the unimaginable power, the mind-boggling, totally unexpected and transforming genuine, train-wreck-correcting power of the Transcendental Meditation® program. I started out wanting to write about anxiety—and this book did become a book about anxiety—the bane of mankind's existence from the lowliest among us to the most exalted in the halls of power. But I found as the pages accumulated that what I wrote was above all a display of the power of the TM® program, which simply could not be confined to the task of dealing with anxiety alone. (Nevertheless, the recovery from fear and loathing and stress and worry that defines anxiety is a dramatic turnaround, a true display of power.)

What is the nature of this power that I want people to know about? It's the power to fix them: I mean to genuinely make them whole in a way they've never imagined, something they've never found in all of the methods that were claimed to make them well. Then, when they are fixed, like a repaired car leaving the shop, they are ready for the true journey that the TM® program provides. We give a vision of the journey, too, the possibilities that come to us as we emerge from the fog of apathy, doubt, and fear.

Helping Train Wrecks

Modern humans can be, without necessarily admitting it, gravely discouraged. Clueless. Hung out to dry, in spite of our best efforts. The beginning of our approach here is to lay down a groundwork based on real people, genuine hat-in-hand visitors to the center for the TM® program, to give a picture of their needs. This is the “before” in the

“before and after.” We are bound to give a picture of these seekers—so often disillusioned, angry, frustrated, and tired. They are completely fed up with their lives and the attempt to have more joy and satisfaction. These are people, too, who tend not to believe a word of what anyone promises them. “I’m skeptical,” they’ll say, as if we as teachers would be hearing it for the first time. But the people are real, and their genuineness is engaging. When I tell their stories here, I have of course changed their names. People don’t want to remember their pain or be recognized for it.

Also, we look to show the path to recovery, often an instantaneous turnaround but a long-sought journey nonetheless. People come to us covered with the dust of their travels—trips through books of advice or other means of shedding their fear and doubt. They may visit skilled therapists who definitely help them and often send them to learn the TM[®] technique or perhaps prescribe sedatives. They go wherever their desperation and need to escape may lead them, possibly to drugs and alcohol and unprescribed Adderall, too. You can follow their travels in these pages.

The TM[®] program is so much more than a stress buster. So much more. Infinitely more. But it’s the stress-busting that people want, and this is the book that goes straight to the nub of the matter—their anxiety—and then continues on to the shimmering possibilities that lie ahead for the meditator using the TM[®] technique.

There is only one better way to experience the transforming effect of the TM[®] program than to hear the stories of seemingly impossible results of what happened to real people. What is that one way? To experience the TM[®] technique yourself. In this book we want you to glimpse the potential of a unique procedure for accessing the power of the universe and bringing it into your daily activity. Having glimpsed it, we hope you’ll consider engaging in it.

About Science

We tell stories here—success stories. People love these stories but don’t always believe them. They view them as fantastical fictions, thinking the writer must have told them selectively, or the featured people must

have changed their minds by now, or the writer embellished key points to exaggerate how quickly people transformed. They don't believe the stories, and for that matter, they don't believe much in scientific explanations, either. But science is the best proof we have.

So we talk about data, but in just an easy way. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder of the TM[®] program, recognized that we live in an age of science. Science is the one language we can believe and not exactly trust but grudgingly accept when we can't find any deep-seated flaw in it. So, not in isolation and not in a mind-numbing reiterative style, we share with you scientific research supporting the stories of remarkable turnarounds. We've got to. I'm sorry. We try to make it painless, like dentists who try not to hurt us. The experience is not too bad, and it's much needed.

We do the same with documentation, the sometimes mind-stultifying reference material that must accompany the scientific studies so that we know the data is real and not made up. We place brief captions and sources under each chart. But when this doesn't seem enough oomph to satisfy the most demanding readers (since credibility is at stake), proud scholarly readers can turn to additional details about some of the studies in the reference section in the back matter and dive in to their heart's content. But don't feel pressured to go there. It's half intended to be overlooked. For most, it's probably enough that it's written there.

Start Anywhere, But at the Beginning Is Good

So how do you read this book? Dabble around in it. Check out a chapter or two that seem to be in your wheelhouse, namely something that is an issue of your own or a pet peeve or just an area of curiosity. I'd like to suggest that you start with the first chapter where people moan about their aches and pains. You can get a sense of the problem we're looking to address. If you get drawn in, read a little more. The hope, of course, is that you get swept in altogether and slide through page after page, enthralled with the notion that perhaps there truly is a way out of human misery after all.

Eventually, you might come into a center for the TM[®] program and learn the technique. Once you've done that, you're at the goal, and then you can just enjoy the book and read it to reinforce what you are doing with the meditation. Or, just grumble about something. That's cool, too. We live in a stressed world. We grumble a lot. But thumb around in these pages a little. Why not? You're here, after all. And I have good stories to tell.

Introduction

It was a Sunday in mid-December in the late afternoon at the Hotel Crillon in Paris in 1967. Maharishi had just performed a ceremony in Sanskrit he called The Holy Tradition and taught us to do TM. The purpose of this ceremony (or puja) is to raise the consciousness of the teacher, and from that heightened state a word or sound called a mantra is given to the initiate. The fact that Maharishi himself gave us our mantras was a blessing. I count it as the most special Christmas present I could ever have gotten.

The feeling was one of the deepest relaxation I'd ever experienced, all from a simple, natural, mental technique that was so simple, yet so profound. No wonder research has shown that the metabolism can go down to a level of rest deeper than deep sleep. The effect of this on mind and body is profound.

Life has never-ending challenges, ups and downs, individually and globally. TM is the best way I know of to help you not only to survive but thrive and meet life's challenges with increased intelligence and creativity while benefiting your health and well-being.

Maharishi, in fact, has provided a formula for world peace which can be possible if enough individuals were to practice TM. The group practice of the TM Sidhi program creates enough positivity in the atmosphere to create world peace.

Love, Mike Love
Incline Village, Nevada
May 2022

PART I

Believing Anxiety Is Unfixable

“Hellp!!” Real People, Real Anxiety

“This is what I’m seeing all the time. Anxiety. Panic attacks. Particularly with the autism kids, because they don’t have the filters to deal with the stresses. Anxiety is just all over out there. It’s a big, BIG problem.”

GARY MCCARTY, School Psychologist, Los Angeles Unified School District

I am a teacher of the TM[®] technique. One evening I’m in a roomful of people who have come to our center to hear an introductory talk about the Transcendental Meditation[®] program—there are about a dozen of them. They express interest through our website, www.tm.org, and we invite them to come in for an introductory session. Nowadays, thanks to Covid-19, we do introductory talks on Zoom, too. “What brings you here?” I ask. We’ve passed out a list of possible reasons, or they can make their own choices. You know, “better brain functioning,” “more self-fulfillment,” “greater creativity”—things like that.

“I’m depressed,” announces a nicely dressed woman sitting in the front who would make a perfectly good candidate for “nice, regular person of the month.” You’d be happy to sit next to her on the bus. You’d happily strike up a conversation and expect to be uplifted. But she’s miserable underneath that carefully maintained exterior. Her troubles are anything but ordinary. She has left her job. Her children, though politely supportive, have distanced themselves from her. She’s in a complete funk and can barely drag herself through the day or, in this case, to this talk.

Unbearable Grief and Sorrow

“Who’s going to top that?” I ask, quite confident that this room of polite, efficiently dressed grown-ups will not be surpassing her reasons for her low spirits. But I am wrong. “The depth of my grief,” says the

woman next to her. “My son was killed in the crash of a commercial airliner.”

In a single day her life went from pride and steadiness with the usual jolts and headaches to post-traumatic stress, sadness, and irreparable regret. I knew people with that kind of loss suffer a gnawing inner wrenching that just never lets up. Many others in a state of grief have shown up for one of our introductory talks—teenagers who have lost a dad, a devoted wife who lost a husband and was depressed for months before she came to one of our introductory meetings on the TM[®] technique. Among the grief-stricken have been those who lost a cherished dog or cat. They reach a point of feeling that nothing can help them.

“Who would like to speak next?” I ask. A wealthy accountant in his fifties claimed he had no internal sense of who he was. He said he spent his life handling the wealth of others, being their pillar of strength, while having really no idea what his life was about or where it was going. He told us that in spite of appearances to the contrary, he sometimes felt he was a cipher. A fraud. A rich guy living a good life, putting on a front of being reasonable while wondering how his life had slipped away and what to do to become something more than the nicely-decked-out empty shell he felt he was.

And who was sitting next to him? A medical doctor. But he wasn't currently working as a doctor because he had left the profession to find himself and get himself in order—a burned-out doctor. I contemplated about why we have so many of them. Doctors are the royalty of the modern world, with everyone unquestioningly attributing to them all the knowledge and skills and abilities they often think they don't truly have. But, gosh, this perception of them is so great. I couldn't help thinking that all they have to do is accept the adulation and paychecks and move confidently through the world. Instead, the doctor was clearly miserable and had an enormous gap in his life without the least idea of how to fill it. His therapist wasn't helping him—or not enough.

And so it goes in the life of the instructor of the TM[®] technique with nearly impossible problems laid at our feet to be repaired more or less instantly. Who are we, you must wonder. What training could we have that would qualify us for that? Perhaps you are thinking,

“Shouldn’t psychiatrists be helping these people? Or social workers with lots of experience? Or medical doctors—psychiatrists especially?” Those professionals do help, of course. But still people come to our center to find out about the TM[®] technique. They are looking for something more.

Phobias, too. Yikes. Can I really help them?

My list of needy folks goes on, not necessarily the people I met at that meeting, but those who attended other meetings. I remember the mindfulness instructor in his seventies who was completely unaccustomed to sitting in the audience instead of teaching everyone else what to do. He was a master of being “present.” And besides, he had been “meditating” for thirty years. He was there only because his wife dragged him, and she (also a mindfulness instructor) was there because, in spite of having all the trappings, she wasn’t happy. She was anxious, and if you asked her about it, she said her husband was, too.

Occasionally there have been therapists in the audience. One, a paragon of knowingness, felt inside a certain non-knowingness. “If I hear one more person say he wants to be ‘present,’ I think I’ll”—she said, catching herself before finishing the sentence. Or the successful grip (a mechanic who works in the movies) might be there because she knew so many people she admired who did the TM[®] technique. She would sign up and reserve a spot, only eventually to disappear without starting the program. She made good money, was reasonably comfortable, and wasn’t particularly stressed. She wasn’t convinced she needed the TM[®] technique, and she wasn’t convinced she didn’t, either. She just wasn’t as anxious as most of the others.

“I haven’t slept for nine years,” interjected a participant during a recent meeting. How many things had he tried in that time? How skewed does your physiology become if you don’t sleep for so long? Was he exaggerating? He was a successful film producer. A little bit famous. Living the dream.

One wealthy business owner came in, prevailed upon by his wife to attend. Not in his first meeting, but after a few times of being with

his teacher of the TM[®] technique, he stated his main problem. “I can’t stand to sit in the window seat on a plane,” he said. It made him feel trapped. It brought on a panic attack. He had long since resolved that he simply, under no circumstance, would sit in that place on an airplane. And of course as a CEO he had to travel a lot.

One 22-year-old came in marshalled by his dad. He was a freelance illustrator who was educated and personable and working at home. He wouldn’t drive because his anxiety was just too much for him. Hence the presence of his dad, who did the driving.

“My husband is in hospice at home,” another confessed. Her shining star, her long-term partner, had been struck with a cruel form of dementia. Have you been close to spouses of people dying from dementia or Parkinson’s or late-stage cancer or whatever else might be afflicting their partner? I find that the dying person has often come to terms with this and is relatively at peace. But the supportive partner is exhausted and in torment. The man’s wife was there to be helped by me, the teacher of the TM[®] technique with five months of training. By the way, this is a good time to note it’s the technique, not the teacher, that is the main instrument of the change that people come in to find.

But I want to continue with my list of people who attend these meetings. It includes rich realtors. Beautiful people. TV stars. Movie stars. Wait, let’s go on. Car salesmen. Car lot owners. We’re talking luxury cars, Mercedes and Lexus and BMW. Some teenagers have come to these talks. A polite transsexual came in whose pronoun was “they” and whose mom was very solicitous and understood her child and wanted to ease “their” path in life. Both had some anxiety, but that was understandable given the societal challenges they faced. Builders come to the meetings. Set finders. Set builders. Haberdashers. Used clothing haberdashers. IT specialists. Overwhelmingly rich people. Overwhelmingly broke people. The occasional homeless person. Anybody can suffer from anxiety.

Desperate and Sleepless

Here they were, all on this earth, and aside from the occasional exception of a person who probably wouldn't decide to learn the TM[®] technique anyway, they were desperate to find a solution. They were pleading, “Someone please help me,” hoping against hope that maybe this thing called the TM[®] technique would bring them some relief. Or, check that. They did not truly think it would help but had enough gas left in the tank to keep trying things, howsoever half-heartedly. Their collective misery was barely concealed, and they had (even the ones who were sometimes happy and well-adjusted) this one thing in common.

And usually they had side effects that went with their stress and anxiety. Insomnia was rife. Occasionally a person arrived who slept well, but this was rare and usually half-hearted; that is, someone might sleep fitfully and not deep enough to have a restful sleep. At other times they slept too deeply, using sleep as an escape from depression. Meanwhile other things in their life lacked attention as they slid further and further into a sinkhole of despair.

Physical challenges were commonplace. Some people were just simply in pain and had sometimes been like this for years. Perhaps from an aching back. Or from headaches. Digestive problems. Lupus. Early onset signs of dementia. Oh, and cardiovascular problems. And cancer, often as a one- or two-time “survivor.”

And the many addictive habits of the American middle class were on display. Alcohol was the most common addiction but far from the only one. For some it was marijuana. Cocaine had a few adherents. Most didn't want to own up to it publicly, but a sex addict would show up now and then. Workaholics and tireless overworked people going nowhere in particular were there. An entertainment lawyer, successful (as in having many clients and a good income) was trembling and distracted and seemed to be searching everywhere for a way out. He didn't start the program, so I couldn't help him. He was completely overburdened and miserable in what you would think is a dream job for an attorney (and I did think that because I have a son who's an attorney).

No wonder people complain about the traffic on the freeways in LA. It's not the congestion. It's not the glut of cars that turn the road into a parking lot where people inch along. It's the barely contained fear and outrage and despair of the drivers. On the freeway there it is, all that stress compressed into a paved area 100 feet wide and stretching interminably into the future. Sometimes it seems that the congested traffic itself could just erupt, inexplicably erupt.

In the time we live in, there are many reliable sources to confirm what we all know anyway: that stress is bustin' out all over, and for most people shows no signs of letting up. Facts and statistics in the chart below show that anxiety is rampant in our country.

As a teacher of the TM[®] technique, I often hear troubled people describe their suffering. The plea for help is laid at my feet, but to look to me as a source of healing seemed absurd in the sense of the extremity of the demand and the hopelessness of a cure coming from anyone with just five months of training as a teacher of the Transcendental Meditation[®] program. How was I to help these people? And, if I could help one of the admittedly depressed men, could I then turn around

Anxiety The Scope of the Problem

- Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health problem in the United States.
- Anxiety afflicts 40 million U.S. adults—about 18% of the population.
- Anxiety disorders develop from a complex set of risk factors, including genetics, brain chemistry, personality, and life events.
- Anxiety costs the U.S. more than \$42 billion a year, almost one-third of the country's \$148 billion total mental health bill.
- Anxiety increases the risk of chronic diseases, such as coronary heart disease.
- Anxiety motivates people to smoke and drink, which further impairs health.

Reference: Anxiety and Depression Association of America. Facts and Statistics, 2015; Available from: <http://www.adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics>.

and help the woman who was grieving for the loss of her partner or the one in the full throes of an identity crisis? I knew perfectly well it was not “I” (not me at all, really) but this TM[®] technique that would help them, even transform them. But seeing the complexity of their problems and their history of failed attempts to solve them, I thought it seemed downright grandiose to think (as I did and as every teacher of the TM[®] technique does) that I could be of real help.

Anxiety. Oh, my God. It’s everywhere. People have tried everything, and the only reason they try the next thing and the next is that in spite of everything life tends to have a slight upward trajectory even if it often carries us, relentlessly, to more and more disappointments, fear, pain, and anxiety. Do we just put on a face, live the lie, and ride things out for the day?

What would happen to these people when they learned the TM[®] technique? I’ll tell you in a bit, but seeing them when they come in, a little reluctant, almost sheepish, you have to wonder what anyone can do. Does anyone completely escape from this condition? Is there any way out? Or did Kafka have it right? We’re cockroaches, hiding in the dark, living in fear, holding out against that inevitable moment when a foot appears out of nowhere and squashes us. I mean, let me tell you about Samuel Johnson. Oprah. Abe Lincoln. People report seeing Lincoln’s ghost around the White House. That’s how bad things must have gotten for him, if ghosts are perhaps earthbound spirits consumed with stress. And he’s probably the greatest historical figure in the history of the nation. Even the great can’t seem to sidestep anxiety.

No One Escapes Anxiety

“Abraham Lincoln fought clinical depression all his life, and if he were alive today, his condition would be treated as a ‘character issue’—that is, as a political liability.”

JOSHUA WOLF SHENK, “Lincoln’s Great Depression,”
The Atlantic, October 2005

One day, when I was being a good PhD in English and simply wanted to round out my education and continue it, for that matter, I thought I would read on my Kindle (for free, as it turned out) some works of the Dean of English Letters, the honorable seventeenth century icon, Samuel Johnson, and in the process read the greatest single biography ever written—Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*. Now Johnson, you have to understand, is an ultimate figure. A God. You don’t just read him as a student, you pore over him, memorize him, assimilate him as entirely as you can into your own life, knowing you can never attain his stratospheric stature. Of course not.

Legendary Anxiety

What tormented this living treasure throughout his life and took away so much of the pleasure of his lofty station in life and in letters? Mr. Boswell called it “hypochondria,” but this has a different meaning today; specifically, it’s an “illness anxiety disorder” when a person is overly concerned about health and imagines physical ailments that don’t exist. Today we refer to the mental condition that was so familiar to Boswell as a general anxiety disorder (GAD), commonly described as “intense anxiety often accompanied by severe depression.”

What hope is there when our ultimate role models, our highest achievers, the standard setters and standard bearers, are themselves

victims of the relentless, harping demons that we, their students, are trying through them to avoid?

Realistically, we can infer that anxiety has always been there, if we want to think of anxiety as the fear we experience when there is no immediate threat. Nah, let's go all the way. It's the fear we live with intermittently or on a daily basis depending on our circumstance.

How did cave men keep from living in constant fear when there could have been a hungry saber-toothed tiger in the neighborhood and diseases like cholera and pneumonia and smallpox could strike unannounced and wreak havoc? In any case, they knew they weren't going to live very long, and everyone is likely to be a bit anxious as they live out their final days on Earth. How about Greek and Roman periods? There is speculation that Julius Caesar, Emperor of Rome in the first century before Christ, may have had epilepsy and certainly had plenty to worry about in a life that ended with his dear and trusted Brutus, of "et tu, Brute" fame, orchestrating his stabbing.

What about the lives of ordinary people living at that time? There was the threat of invasion by the Romans, generally carried out before too long, and the fear of a life as a slave to the Romans. How about the conquering soldiers themselves? They lived a rather dangerous life, had to be away from their families for long periods, and worked under imperious and demanding leaders. Surely anxiety came into their lives, followed after a battle with growing post-traumatic stress.

What was the life of a serf in the Middle Ages? Barely enough to eat. High rates of infant mortality. Thoughtless and cruel managers. Dysentery, malaria, diphtheria, flu, typhoid, smallpox, and leprosy striking out of the blue with no effective treatments. Many on the planet were threatened with invasion and a life of slavery. If they weren't fearful, they should have been. It wasn't called "The Dark Ages" for nothing.

How were things for those romantic pirates on the high seas? Danger lurked from every mast coming up over the horizon and every bit of land they might sight, not to mention the risk of peril from their comrades and leaders and from the formal military of those countries like England that they preyed on. Ah, the life of a pirate was no field day.

In Shakespeare's time, Bedlam was the name of the London lunatic asylum, and it certainly did not lack for occupants. "As flies to wanton boys are, we to the Gods," laments King Lear in the play of his name, and he surely suffered from depression no matter how much circumstance may have made his reactions quite appropriate. I mean, you take care of your daughters, and they take you for granted and leave you to rot? He should have expected it, and his anxiety was hardly baseless, but it was dramatic and real. Hamlet? Lady Macbeth? Othello? Pain and misery. Cruel fate.

Later scholars and researchers look at our greatest geniuses and see clouds of trouble. Take Van Gogh, of course. Every schoolchild learns that he cut off his own ear, and he ended his life at age 37. Both Beethoven and Mozart had difficulties; Mozart possibly suffered from Tourette syndrome. In his *Leviathan* in the 17th century, Thomas Hobbes describes human life as solitary, nasty, brutish, and (the greatest hurt of all) short. The specter of death hangs over us the entire time.

Even Lincoln?

Abraham Lincoln, possibly the most idolized of all American presidents, reportedly suffered long bouts of depression even before the trauma of the Civil War. And what about ordinary people alive at the time of Lincoln? They faced conscription into a bloody war against people who looked and thought much like them at a time when a large population of Americans was living as slaves. Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* memorializes the plight of the Civil War soldier caught in brutal, meaningless conflict. Mortality struck on the battlefield, and it struck in childbirth. Families had to endure not only the loss of infants; their children often died.

Charles Dickens (say it isn't so) reportedly suffered depression, even severe depression and perhaps bipolar disorder. While he was enthralled by the world with *David Copperfield* and *A Tale of Two Cities* and the transformative story of Ebenezer Scrooge, he apparently was not living without disturbances in his own mind that interfered with enjoying the pleasure of his fame and fortune.

Jump to modern times. It is not wholly surprising, I suppose, that clinicians would conclude that the hero to so many alternative thinkers, author Jack Kerouac, had mental disorders. Perhaps the mental conditions prompted him to go “on the road” himself and later create the classic with that name. Please, not Jack Kerouac as an example for anxiety disorder. But alas, probably he, too, was afflicted.

And the one other most beloved book of the time, *The Catcher in the Rye*, came from the author J.D. Salinger, who certainly did not come out to participate in a public life to enjoy the adulation so many had for him. J.D., the great, who broke down centuries of pretension with remarks like Holden Caulfield’s observation that “He started handling my exam paper like it was a turd or something.” If Mr. Salinger was comfortable within himself, then where was he? Of course, no one maintains that he was comfortable. He was a veritable misanthrope.

Ernest Hemingway, whose old man at sea sees his great capture devoured before his eyes before he reaches shore, put himself out of his misery with suicide. Later on, so did the admired writer Hunter Thompson, a journalist and bestselling author who loved drugs and rode with the Hells Angels but whose suicide told his fans that perhaps he didn’t have the answer, either, and must have been miserable.

And what about anxiety for the ordinary person of the 1950s when conformity was the norm, a nine-to-five job was sheer necessity, and staying in a marriage you disliked and a job you hated was what people would describe as “just how it is done”? *Peyton Place* pictured the best you could do to escape that captivity of everyday life in conformity. *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* did the same. Good luck. Out of the frying pan and into the fire. You might escape all the rest of it, but you couldn’t hide from your own tormenting brain. Well, books like Dale Carnegie’s *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* were bestsellers for a reason.

And what dominated the academic and philosophical thinking of the time? Existentialism. Camus treated audiences to the vision of a world where the plague had struck and pain and misery were the rule of the time. Camus’s hero in *L’Étranger* refused to go to his mother’s funeral. Sad. Extreme. The son probably brought her a lot of angst. But

she probably expected it. Sartre underlined his countrymen's thinking and assured all that there was just "No Exit." Meanwhile, off stage, the Beatniks were howling, pretty much in despair, the only break being the sardonic witticisms of a cynical Lenny Bruce. It doesn't seem right to mention him without quoting him. I found this joke on funnycomediansquotes.com:

"I won't say ours was a tough school, but we had our own coroner. We used to write essays like: What I'm going to be if I grow up."

Oprah, the Rock

Now, a more contemporary list on the website WebMD highlights its collection of anxious famous folks with none other than the rock for the rest of us, the counselor Oprah Winfrey. Who else does it offer up to disillusion and disturb us? Stephen Colbert, a great source of escape through laughter, knows something firsthand about panic attacks. Howie Mandel, who judges others in *America's Got Talent*, apparently is more than familiar with the agony the show's candidates are going through. Whoopi Goldberg, whose fame and acting career I once read came with little effort, nevertheless suffers pangs and doubts during her life of great success.

And we think of the brilliant, enigmatic Brian Wilson, the cofounder of The Beach Boys. Maybe life isn't always a beach. Kevin Love, the nephew of Mike Love, another Beach Boy, came out to the National Basketball League and his fans about his problems with anxiety. I saw it on camera. In the midst of a game this goliath of a man puts his palm on his head and kneels down, overcome by anxiety. The other team can't get him, but his inner demons can bring him down. Wait. This next one can't be right. I'm adding here "Barbara Streisand." She's our comfort. Our assurance. When the going gets tough, we turn to her music to reaffirm that "the way we were" was once idyllic and grand and remind ourselves it could be that way again.

What am I saying here? Am I saying that that a roomful of stressed-out, sometimes desperate and hopeless people who might show up for

an introductory lecture on the TM[®] technique are a microcosm of human life, and not just life as it is today but life a thousand and ten thousand and a hundred thousand years ago? Am I saying basically that if I could fix the broken people who had come to me that night of the lecture I would be righting the human condition, now and for all time?

Yes, in a sense, I would be saying that, except that it wouldn't be *me* doing it. I'd be just the instrument, the middleman, applying an ancient knowledge discovered and rediscovered by fully enlightened sages who from time to time grace the Earth with their presence and save us from the misery we've fallen into.

But, yeah, as the instrument, I would be offering a simple practice that I was saying would fix them by eliminating whatever was wrong. Depressed? Maybe you can turn on the lights inside. Grieving? Maybe you can be happy again someday. Sick? The body heals itself, even when we don't know what's wrong, as in the case of fibromyalgia and the sweepingly named "chronic fatigue syndrome," which often seems to translate as "We don't know what's really wrong, but you're very tired."

And what if this one over here is an addict—to alcohol or drugs or sex or, as some would say, to just about anything and everything. Am I telling them I would fix that, too? (No, not me. Not me. But what I'm saying would work is this ancient, funny-sounding, frequently overlooked method—the Transcendental Meditation[®] technique.)

In my all-encompassing statement, am I saying that I will teach something that, whatever is wrong, will fix it no matter how extreme the problem is or how long it has been there? Well, let's not go completely overboard. The distressed woman whose her husband was in the late stages of dementia wouldn't allow me to attempt to teach him the TM[®] program. She was so upset about his decline that she couldn't visualize how this might comfort him. Of course, incurable conditions like extreme dementia, severe lupus or Parkinson's disease, and cancers at late stages are not suddenly going to abate. But the TM[®] technique, for absolutely any adversity, will make very ill persons feel more upbeat, sleep better, and have more strength to handle their difficulties. And it can also fix a lot of things.

And I am definitely saying that it will help with anxiety. In cases where the worry is completely unfounded, it just may eliminate the severe feelings of stress altogether, removing an ongoing source of torment in the person's life and, as someone said after two months of practicing the TM[®] technique, "giving them their life back." In instances where there is a long-term source of the anxiety, such as a surgery looming or a diagnosis of an incurable illness, the source of stress is likely to keep renewing the anxiety even as the TM[®] technique helps it. Fear in this situation is natural and serves a purpose. Sometimes we should be scared. Real danger does lurk out there, but usually not most of the time. And it's been proven that practicing the technique can help to bring calm and even some peace to a person who has been devastated by a terrible experience.

Putting aside the most extreme situations, yeah, that's what I definitely want to say: "You've come to the right place to get help for your anxiety. Schedule a session on Saturday, bring in some flowers and a couple pieces of fruit, and finally you will get relief." The look on their faces tells it all. "And you're going to sell me a bridge, too, right?" Nobody believes it from just hearing about it. Besides, they've been scouring the web and doctor's offices and the bookstores and everything they can bring up on their Kindles. Nothing has worked. It seems *unfixable*.

It's Obviously Unfixable

“He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision—he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath—‘The horror!’”

(Kurtz’s final words in JOSEPH CONRAD’s *Heart of Darkness*, summing up his view of the nature of life. This was repeated by MARLON BRANDO in the movie *Apocalypse Now*.)

There are lots of reasons that people would doubt that meditation can work as an elixir for anxiety, many reasons why people who come for help would expect they’d end up walking away feeling disappointed. Consider the magnitude of the challenge. If everybody has anxiety (okay, almost everybody), and if everybody has always had it, and if everybody has been trying to fix it every day of their lives, then face it—it’s unfixable.

1. **First of all, it’s just the way life is. It’s not always great. Stuff happens. We’re not static.**

Yes, stuff happens. The first time I saw that phrase in its more vulgar version was on a bumper sticker in Davenport, Iowa. Middle America. Vanilla life. Leave-it-to-Beaver land, where you might think nothing much happens. Maybe you lose your pen. Maybe school closes for a day because of the snow. Yet there was a haunting certainty about that phrase on the bumper sticker. In Davenport, or anywhere else, you don’t just get a free pass and go happily on your way.

There’s your family. Just when you were going to reach for the last brownie, someone else is eating it. Your dog dies. Your father dies. A tree branch falls through the back-porch roof—your roof, not the neighbor’s—*yours*. You don’t get promoted and have to struggle along as an assistant HR Manager in the packaging company instead of the

manager. You do get promoted, but packaging hits a serious lull as everyone starts selling their products open to the air; and your assignment is to lay off one third of the staff, most of whom you love dearly and see at the supermarket frequently.

Life is always progressing, which means it is always throwing stuff at us, both good and bad, and it isn't just small bad stuff either but death and firings and disabilities and unwanted pregnancies and tax audits and dented fenders and home break-ins and behind-your-back cavil from the girl you thought was your best friend. Challenges. Failures. Bankruptcies. That's the first reason that worry is unfixable. Stuff happens. Get used to it.

2. Second of all, you can't always put the whole mess on someone else.

Finger pointing can seem a great idea. Just blame somebody else. Government officials love to do that. "I know that the water supply is exhausted, and we have to ration. But it's not my fault. My predecessor did not plan properly." The trouble with finger pointing is that the other person points back. "I have always had a wonderful record of water management, and I cautioned you about electing somebody who didn't." The first finger pointer replies, "Oh, no you didn't." And the mudslinging continues, contaminating everyone and getting nowhere.

It's the old tar baby story. You slap the tar baby to fix the problem. You're stuck with one hand. You strike with the other hand, with your feet, with your head. You are stuck, and the problem is not the least bit ameliorated. It's worse. You had a problem, but still have the problem after you went after it. Even if you sometimes fix a problem, soon it's just back to point one. New stuff happens.

3. Third, you hate the things everybody recommends for fixing it.

They go prancing around offering advice, and then you find out that they don't really follow it themselves. There are names for it. "Mansplaining" is one of them. People pose as experts, but half the time they don't really know anything. The other half of the time they are almost

as capable as you are. They just happen to be lucky this time that something happened to you and not to them.

“Oh, you got audited by the IRS. No big deal. That happened to me once. Just hire H&R Block.” “I already tried that—” you start to retort, but what’s the use? They don’t care. They aren’t listening. “Not my problem,” they’re thinking. Advice is cheap and worth what you pay for it. So, we get in the habit of not listening to what might be helpful advice. And the time we did decide to listen, we got in deeper and deeper and at the end found out we have to pay for it one way or another. By now we are inured and just let all the advice bounce off us like little nerf balls.

4. Fourth, you just don’t have time to drop back and try to fix it. You’re *in* it.

You are too busy. You’re working. You go to your job and do your assignment (at this time evaluating loan applications and making recommendations). You do this all day and get really tired and feel fed up. At evening time, you need a break. You have a small cocktail, a diluted Manhattan (and this is not at all because you’re addicted), and then you want dinner, and then there’s an episode of *Real Housewives* you think will give you a little respite before you fall asleep in front of the TV, and soon it’s morning and you have to go to your job. Since there’s no time to find a solution to the problem that’s worrying you, it seems better just to accept that you’re going to go on worrying. Even if you did happen to fix the problem, something else will come up. If you weren’t so busy, maybe, yes, you could fix it. But you don’t have the time, and the more you put it off, the worse it gets and the more it weighs on you.

5. You don’t think the precedents for fixing the problem work for you.

We almost always feel like the problem is our particular problem and not something where we can study the precedents. But your situation no doubt has earlier occurrences of similar happenings. There is nothing new under the sun. But somehow we tend to feel that our particular instance of a dilemma is ours alone. Maybe it’s something simple,

like you need \$220 for a car payment. What do other people do in this circumstance? Well, they borrow from a friend. Or they borrow on a credit card. Or pick up an odd job that pays that much. Sure, there are precedents, but in the heat of the moment we don't tend to seek them out. You've exhausted financial support from your friends. You dread adding to credit card debt. Whatever good options you may have you are too stressed out to see.

6. Fixing it often backfires. Better to just leave it alone.

People aren't grateful. Suppose your son accidentally broke another 14-year-old's glasses, and the mom of the other child asks you to pay the \$160 for the glasses, and you do it. You pay it. Is everything then all better? Not necessarily. First of all, the mom will think that you are a pushover for other demands and may make them. You may very much need the \$160 yourself to help pay off the income tax penalty you know you have to pay, and if you don't pay it you face fresh penalties and more worry. In any case, whether or not there are any other repercussions, the person will not be grateful for what you did. You are out the \$160, and you have scored no points with anyone else by doing it. The great Dale Carnegie himself, author of *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*, says it flatly. "Expect ingratitude." Or, to fill out this sixth point even more fully, expect repercussions that may be worse than the problem you were deftly looking to fix in the first place. Just leave it, go to work, come home to dinner, and worry about it all day.

7. Nothing has worked so far.

Because nothing seems to work, the smart thing is just to become cynical and plan for the worst. You keep your dignity, and you are right as far as anyone can tell. Maybe you can get some mileage out of being cynical about the whole thing. A tree fell on your house. There are a lot of comic possibilities in that. "I was planning to take that tree down anyway. Good riddance." "I need the firewood." "I hated the squirrel living in that tree. Serves him right." "The kids wanted a treehouse in it, and I didn't." "I needed a remodel in that part of the house. Now I have no choice but to do it." "This is a great story to tell my sister in

San Francisco. Pass me my phone.” Maybe that’s it. Smoothly make light of the problem, and just go back to the office and pore over some loan applications all day.

Having problems is a permanent state that’s just unfixable, and deep down inside we know that and hence we worry about them. Oh, sure, you think you can solve your problems, and maybe sometimes in some instances you can a little bit, but then there will just be new problems to send you into another round of worry and self-doubt and depression. On their own level, on the surface, problems beget problems beget problems. You’re hamstrung, and you know it. Of course they’re unsolvable. And if they’re not they might as well be, because life is sure to throw another obstacle your way that’s even bigger. And probably even more unfixable.

And all those difficulties exacerbate the most unfixable problem of all: the worry itself. Don’t even bother to try to make it better. If anyone wants to tell you they have a way to stop the worrying, don’t listen. If someone tells you they have the only way to solve worrying, especially don’t listen to this. Life has a certain momentum. Inertia really. It holds us back from changing things. We just would rather not go there, thank you.

