

“*Super Mind* is a wonderfully practical exploration of the benefits of Transcendental Meditation that reveals how the technique is not a belief or faith but a simple tool that, in my experience, can improve your life in ways you never thought possible.” —**Hugh Jackman**

SUPER MIND

HOW TO BOOST PERFORMANCE AND LIVE
A RICHER AND HAPPIER LIFE THROUGH

TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION

LIVELIHOOD • RELATIONSHIPS • PURPOSE

NORMAN E. ROSENTHAL, M.D.

New York Times-bestselling author of *TRANSCENDENCE*

SUPER MIND

How to Boost Performance and Live a
Richer and Happier Life Through
Transcendental Meditation

NORMAN E. ROSENTHAL, M.D.

A TARCHERPERIGEE BOOK



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FOR BOB ROTH

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Our normal waking consciousness . . . is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality, which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded.

WILLIAM JAMES

Through the repeated experience of settling, a continuum of calmness develops.

PATANJALI

PART I

DEVELOPMENT OF CONSCIOUSNESS

1

A NEW BEGINNING

In my end is my beginning.

T. S. Eliot

Have you ever concluded a project—or thought you had—only to change your mind later? All those feelings you had at the time—premature in retrospect—were genuine: typically relief, mixed (one hopes) with a measure of contentment, though mingled with sadness. It can be hard to say good-bye to ideas and characters with whom you’ve shared so many hours. Conclusion and closure bring rewards, but also a sense of loss. That is how I felt when I completed *Transcendence*, a book that—like the present one—deals with the Transcendental Meditation (TM) technique and its effects. I thought I had said everything I had to say on the subject.

But I was wrong. T. S. Eliot, quoted above, was wiser: “In my end is my beginning.” Exactly so.

I had come full cycle once before with regard to TM. I first learned the technique back in South Africa in the early 1970s, but in the helter-skelter of daily life I let it fall by the wayside. Thirty-five years later (in 2008), challenged by a young patient to renew my TM practice, I did so and have been meditating regularly ever since. After observing beneficial effects of meditation in myself—such as decreased anxiety and reactivity—I began recommending the technique to some of my patients. Many experienced results that were equally impressive—or even more so. After delving into the literature on TM, I was so impressed with its many benefits that I felt compelled to write about it—and do so, once again.

Although both *Transcendence* and *Super Mind* explore the effects of TM, the earlier book dealt mostly with its documented benefits on physical and emotional health, especially in people with problems such as anxiety, depression, addictions, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In contrast, this book explores not only the advantages that TM can bring to your task-driven life, but how it can actually result in a new state of consciousness—a word that may seem troublesome to a scientist, but seems perfectly apt for the experiences I will describe.

The founder of TM, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, outlined several states of consciousness—the three widely acknowledged states (waking, sleeping, and dreaming), and four others, which are summarized in table 1 below and presented in more detail in the notes.¹

Table 1: The Four Higher States of Consciousness (According to Vedic tradition)

Stage 4: Transcendence—the experience of the Self in the silence of meditation.
Stage 5: Cosmic Consciousness—the experience of the transcendent in activity—traditionally used to express the state in its fully realized, continuous form.
Stage 6: Refined Cosmic Consciousness—a state in which the development of the senses and emotions are at their maximum.
Stage 7: Unity Consciousness—a state in which you experience the transcendental reality not just within yourself, but also within everyone and everything.

I will discuss transcendence (the fourth state) in some detail in chapters 4 and 5, and Cosmic Consciousness (the fifth state) in its fully realized form in chapter 18. When it comes to stages of consciousness beyond stage 4 (transcendence), however, I will speak of them collectively as “Super Mind”—a term that seems well suited to our present frenetic and interconnected era. Indeed, in these stressful times we need to have all our neurons, synapses, and brain circuits at our disposal. I selected the term “Super Mind” because it describes an experience of not only heightened aptitude and problem-solving ability but also a state of emotional sensitivity, empathy, perspective, and diplomatic skills. It is the mind in peak condition, not just momentarily—as we have all experienced—but with a consistency that tends to grow over time.

* * *

I first began to get a glimpse of this state in myself and some of my patients soon after publishing *Transcendence* (in 2011). I continued to meditate, and after some time, a new and utterly unexpected set of developments began to unfold, both within my meditating patients and myself. These developments fell roughly into two categories. The first I can best describe as everyday changes in awareness or consciousness: Feelings of stillness, expansiveness, boundlessness, and peace, formerly confined to my meditation sessions, began to seep into my daily life. For a while after meditating, I would sense a pleasant glow about me—and others would notice it.

“You’ve been meditating, haven’t you?” one knowledgeable friend remarked. Or, as I would talk with a patient or colleague about feelings that arose during meditation, I would feel myself slipping into that state of inner expansive calm, often at the same time becoming even more engaged in the conversation. As with so many other experiences I have had that seemed at first unique to me, I later found that this phenomenon—stillness in the presence of activity—is commonplace among long-term meditators.

In tandem with the development of expanded consciousness, my life started to improve in many ways (the second set of changes). And once again, these shifts turned out to be typical in people who have been meditating for months to years—although, as you will see, dramatic changes sometimes occur within days of a person’s very first TM session. I will elaborate on this subject later. At this point, let me say simply that life became easier and I became happier—both of which were apparent not only to me but also to my family, friends, and even colleagues. *It is these two sets of changes—developments in consciousness in tandem with improvements in many aspects of a person’s life—that I am collectively calling the Super Mind.*

It occurred to me that since the two sets of changes both appeared after I started to meditate, they might well be related. Might developing consciousness—an advanced form of which has traditionally been called Cosmic Consciousness—in and of itself be an agent of change? I wondered. Might the presence of stillness and silence that infuses the daily lives of meditators influence their well-being, and thereby their activities and connections with others? Such ideas are hardly new. They have been suggested by sages for centuries, but now they were arising from my own experience, and I have noticed that one’s own experience often overshadows the wisdom of sages and the opinions of experts. Also, we now have tools, in the form of technology and

a better understanding of the mind, that can lend solid data to the ineffable wisdom of the ages.

I have always viewed my own mind as a sort of laboratory where novel observations (novel to me, that is) throw me into a fever of curiosity, which has been a driving force throughout my life. That's how it was for me as a young man, when I first noticed my energy and good humor draining away in the short, dark days of winter, then resurging in the glorious light of spring. I had never had such experiences in my native sun-drenched South Africa, and the dramatic contrast between my seasonal responses in the old country and the new one were instrumental to my first description of seasonal affective disorder (SAD).² It turned out that I was just one of millions of people who suffer from this condition.

In an analogous way, I became aware that meditation had induced in me alterations in the quality of my everyday consciousness—and all sorts of good things started to happen. Once again, like an explorer who stumbles upon a wonder of nature, I was possessed to find out all I could about it and to share my observations in the hope that they would be of interest and value to others.

So here goes.

CAN IT BE TRUE?

The subtitle of this book makes a grand promise: that TM can boost your performance and help you lead a richer and happier life. I don't know about you, but when I see such claims, I am immediately suspicious, as was a favorite cousin, Lois, who attended a talk on TM that I gave in London. She came mostly out of family loyalty, I suspect, but was sufficiently impressed that she learned the technique herself. When I saw her a year later, she was delighted. She was meditating regularly and credited the practice with helping her get out of a toxic long-term relationship. "I was so surprised," she said, "to find out that you were telling the truth. To be honest, I thought it was just a publicity stunt." (That's what I love about family. They tell you things that others are too polite to say.)

In this book, I will describe many instances of people who have enjoyed the transformative changes that accompany expanding consciousness. These people include superperformers in their chosen field, which I would claim is no accident. I now think that all high performers have in common, knowingly or unknowingly, qualities and characteristics of the Super Mind. That is, they are calm under pressure and uncannily resilient to stress. They take care of their

health, set high standards of innovation and creativity, and are not only intensely engaged in their actions but also capable of detaching when need be. They choose their projects carefully, keep the big picture in mind, and ignore trifling details. It is not necessary, however, to be a superperformer in order to develop your Super Mind. What matters is to reach your own potential, not some idealized standard.

I will also present for the first time the findings of a survey of more than six hundred TM practitioners who were asked about the quality of their consciousness and their lives since starting to meditate. I recognize that even if you accept that such beneficial changes can and do occur, you may well ask why they have to come about exclusively through Transcendental Meditation. The answer is, they don't. There are many ways to reach the same destination. I am convinced that almost anybody has the capacity to experience transcendence—that inner awakening of the Super Mind. It is a natural state of the brain, reported by people from many cultures throughout recorded time (as we will discuss). For now, however, let's address an obvious question: if it is possible to access these states by many routes, why do I recommend TM in particular?

Before I answer that question, let me tell you about a series of events that occurred when I was a first-year resident at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in New York City. Once a week, first thing in the morning, I would have a regular session with my “long-term psychotherapy” patient. These sessions were meant both to help the patient and to teach the resident how to conduct therapy based on psychoanalytic principles, which discourage providing direct advice. My analytic supervisor had been quite stern on the subject. “Don't tell the patient what to do or how to do it,” he admonished. “Help him figure it out *by himself*.”

Now, I should mention that these early morning sessions took place in a clinic on the fifth floor of a building in which the elevator only started running later. There was a work-around, however, as one faculty member explained: I should take an elevator up to the fifth floor of a *neighboring* building, where elevators *were* in early morning service. Then, by a labyrinthine route through various corridors, I could connect to the clinic building by an inconspicuous passageway. That made life much easier—at least for me. I would be in place, fresh and ready for the session, as my patient—a middle-aged man—arrived, red faced and panting, after clambering up five flights of stairs. It seemed unfair. Yet I had been sternly instructed not to tell patients what to do or how to do it. So what was I to do?

A common strategy, adopted by any bright three-year-old when an authority figure says no, is to seek another authority. That is exactly what I did. I took the question to a different supervisor—one less impressed by psychoanalysis, and in fact rather hostile toward it. I explained my predicament and described the secret passageway. “What should I do?” I asked him. “Tell him, of course,” the man replied. “He’ll never find it on his own.”

Although I agree that it is good to help people find answers for themselves, I also know that there are passageways in life—including the life of the mind—that one is unlikely to stumble on alone, and since that early lesson I always point them out when it seems useful. And so it is with Transcendental Meditation—the simplest and most effortless way I know to access transcendence, the royal road to the Super Mind, and all the benefits that flow therefrom. It is, accordingly, with delight and enthusiasm that I share with you what I have learned about TM, in the hope that you may benefit as much as my patients and I have done.

WHY THIS BOOK AND WHY NOW?

I thought I had said everything worth saying about TM when I wrote *Transcendence*, so you might well ask, what’s left to say? *Transcendence* focused on TM as a powerful technique for helping people with problems—for reducing stress and its related ailments. In contrast, the goal of *Super Mind* is to help anybody—including healthy and successful people, and even superperformers—who want to live a richer, more creative, and more fulfilling life. It shows how TM can influence brain functioning beyond mere stress reduction—and open the door to new possibilities.

In these challenging and ever-more-stressful times, we are called upon to navigate a complex world while maintaining our inner equilibrium, a task in which we often turn for help and comfort to the many technological wonders of recent decades. These devices continue to proliferate, giving us unprecedented access to information and a certain type of connection. They can also overwhelm us, however, and gobble up the internal space and quiet in which happiness and creativity flourish. Now more than ever it is time to find a way to expand our internal space, to instill a joyful silence alongside the frenetic activity of our daily lives. It is my hope that *Super Mind* will provide a road map toward that goal.

HERE ARE SOME OF THE KEY QUESTIONS THAT WE WILL CONSIDER IN THIS BOOK:

- What is “consciousness” anyway?
- Can consciousness be developed and how does that relate to the Super Mind?
- What is the Super Mind and how does it relate to Cosmic Consciousness?
- How does it feel when consciousness develops?
- What are the physical signs of such development?
- What scientific evidence do we have for it?
- What value does the development of consciousness have beyond the experience itself? What are the gifts of the Super Mind?
- Can it help you become more effective, creative, and successful, personally and professionally?
- Can it help you become rich?
- How about greater fulfillment and happiness?

MAHARISHI AND THE BEATLES

The fully realized Super Mind—a state in which transcendence infuses one’s daily life in an unbroken flow—has been called Cosmic Consciousness in traditional Vedic teaching. I first heard this term in a rather magical setting—a concert at Radio City Music Hall, where former Beatle Paul McCartney talked about Cosmic Consciousness and incorporated it into a lilting melody, both haunting and uplifting. It was a simple song based on an invitation given by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi directly to McCartney: “Come and be cosmically conscious with me.”

McCartney was reminiscing about 1968, when he and the other Beatles went to visit Maharishi in Rishikesh, India. It was a time of turbulence and intergenerational strife but also, in the words of Simon and Garfunkel, “a time of innocence.” Back then, “make love not war” and “flower power” were ubiquitous slogans that captured key elements of the era—the increasingly unpopular Vietnam War, the sexual revolution, and the idea that something as innocent as ideals of peace and love may ultimately have more impact than guns and grenades.

From these roiling social currents iconic figures emerged, of whom the Beatles were perhaps the most famous. It was fortuitous that these revolutionary young musicians found their way to an eminent spiritual figure who is key to our story—Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, a man of slight build with a gentle face and long flowing locks. He dressed in the traditional garb of a Vedic monk—white flowing robes—and often wore a garland of flowers round his neck. Maharishi had studied for thirteen years in the Himalayas as the principal student of the great sage Brahmananda Saraswati, known as Guru Dev, from whom he had learned an ancient Vedic technique of meditation

Maharishi called the technique Transcendental Meditation, and he believed it had so much potential to help people that he was determined to teach it throughout the world. In this mission, he was surprisingly successful, in large measure due to his personal qualities. Those around him talked often about his keen intellect (he was a physicist by training), his charismatic personality, his seemingly endless energy and tireless work ethic (he needed just a few hours of sleep a night), the bliss he brought to his work, and his fascination with everything around him. He had thought deeply about the nature of consciousness, both personally and professionally, and was an authority on Vedic teachings. In short, he was both an innovator and a consummate marketer, who brought to both East and West not only a powerful, ancient technique but also a compelling combination of artless innocence and the artful skills of a man of the world.

In retrospect, it makes perfect sense that these iconic figures from two different worlds—the Beatles and Maharishi—would meet up. The Beatles were searching for answers to questions that arose from the conflicts of the times, and Maharishi had an appealing answer. In summary, the message was simply this: Meditate, dive within, and expand your consciousness. In so doing, you will change, and the world around you will follow.

METAPHORS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Fleshing out abstractions such as consciousness invites the use of metaphors as a way to lend shape and substance to concepts that can seem all too vague. A wise mentor of mine once took this approach in explaining the power of *unconscious* processes in shaping our lives. “The unconscious is like the wind,” he said. “You can’t see it, but you can tell its effects by the way it moves the branches of trees and scatters the leaves across the lawn.”

In considering the conscious mind, we are on somewhat sturdier footing in that, by definition, conscious thoughts and feelings are accessible to us—if we choose to attend to them. But, like unconscious processes, conscious ones also blow around the branches. So another important way to assess our conscious mental processes is by examining what we do with our lives. As the saying goes, “By their fruits you will know them.”³

This biblical quote brings to mind one of Maharishi’s favorite sayings: “Water the root, and enjoy the fruit.” He was offering Transcendental Meditation as a way to water the root—to nurture the psyche at its deepest core—while the fruits were the prize that would result from the process. To derive the benefits of TM, that may be all you really need to know. “Meditate and act,” Maharishi used to say—and the benefits will emerge in the quality of your life.

If we wish to extend this metaphor further, however, we could consider the development of higher consciousness as all the intervening steps between the root and the fruit. It is these experiences of higher consciousness (which are a joy in themselves), plus all the benefits they bring, that I am collectively referring to as the Super Mind.

Another way to think of consciousness is as the medium through which we move and experience our lives, almost in the way a fish swims through water. And whether that water is clear or murky, fresh or brackish, makes a big difference! Both the quality of our consciousness and the way it affects us are keys to a good life.

Some have also compared our different states of consciousness to wearing different-colored glasses. Red glasses will make the world look red, blue glasses blue. According to this metaphor, the Super Mind allows you to wear colorless glasses—so that you see everything clearly, *in its actual color*.

Given our high-tech environment, it is natural that the effects of TM are often described in terms borrowed from the world of computers and cell phones. People talk about meditating to “reboot” or “reset,” and I know what they mean. Often, when feeling stressed and depleted, a single TM session can “recharge my batteries.” But over time, two new (and larger) computer-related metaphors have occurred to me—that TM gives me a “systems upgrade” or, better still, a “more powerful computer.” In short, a Super Mind. When I think of meditating, I’m not expecting just to relieve the stress of the moment but to nurture the growth of consciousness and to improve the functioning of my mind and the overall quality of my life.

Before going any further, let me clarify a few points about the Super Mind. First, I'm not suggesting that everyone can do anything they want. We all have limitations, which differ from person to person. Rather, I'm referring to an ability to live up to your potential—something that successful people strive to do. Second, I do not see the Super Mind as the end stage of a process, as in: “Now that I have attained a Super Mind, I have arrived!” Instead, I see the Super Mind as a process of continued growth in which the development of consciousness evolves together with increasing success and well-being.

DEFINING THE SUPER MIND

Since I am going to use the term “Super Mind” frequently in this book, it may be useful to define what I mean by it right up front, so here goes: *the Super Mind is a mental state that consists of the development of expanded states of consciousness and that occurs in tandem with reduced stress, better physical health, and the emergence of life-enhancing personal qualities.* Growth of the Super Mind occurs commonly but by no means exclusively in those who practice TM, and can be measured and characterized by the Consciousness Integration Questionnaire (CIQ) (see [chapter 7](#)).

A GUIDE TO THIS BOOK

This book is organized into three parts: In part 1, after this introductory chapter, I will tell you about the new science of consciousness (chapter 2)—a set of intriguing developments that have transformed what used to be philosophical conjectures into measurable phenomena, such as EEG (electroencephalogram) tracings. We will consider these new findings alongside ancient wisdom about the growth of consciousness, for which we now also have scientific data.

In chapter 3, I will describe the technique that is, in my opinion, the surest way to expand consciousness—namely, Transcendental Meditation. Chapter 4 deals with the subjective experience of transcendence, and chapter 5 addresses the physiological basis associated with that state.

In chapter 6, I will introduce the Super Mind by describing the mysterious process through which the “repeated experience of settling” develops into “a continuum of calmness,” phrases derived from an ancient text, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, quoted in the epigraph to this book.

I will then, in chapter 7, introduce you to the Consciousness Integration Questionnaire, developed by my colleagues and me to measure the components of the Super Mind in the same way that researchers measure psychological functions such as depression, happiness, resilience, and anxiety. We administered this questionnaire to more than six hundred TM meditators, with results that are revealed for the first time in this book.

In part 2, I will show you how the gifts of the Super Mind occasionally occur soon, but generally develop over time. These gifts include better physical well-being and mental functioning (chapters 8 and 9), the joys and rewards of being in the zone (chapter 10), and accelerated internal growth (chapter 11). In many situations we are called upon to balance two emotional forces that appear on the surface to be at war with each other—remaining engaged with the world without being overattached when it is healthy to let go. I hope to show you how this delicate balance naturally unfolds as part of Super Mind development (chapter 12). I will then describe the curious way in which people feel luckier after starting to meditate, as though they are being supported by the world around them (chapter 13). Many people are unclear about the distinctions between transcendence and mindfulness—another widely popular and influential form of meditation. In chapter 14, I will compare and contrast these two different types of meditation. In the last two chapters of this second section, I will explain how as consciousness grows, people can almost automatically attain happiness and sometimes even wealth—two things for which so many strive (chapters 15 and 16).

By then I hope your curiosity will be aroused to learn more about how consciousness expands in such a way as to offer these seemingly miraculous gifts. Enter part 3, in which I will also show you how the developing Super Mind can transform people’s lives, and how the Super Mind develops to such an extent that they experience this state of consciousness and its benefits continuously through the twenty-four-hour day (chapter 18)—a state that has traditionally been called Cosmic Consciousness. Although this degree of expanded consciousness is by no means necessary to enjoy the huge benefits of the Super Mind, the fully developed form is fascinating to contemplate.

Chapter 19 introduces you to a less typical way in which consciousness may develop—by “transcendent surprises,” intense mystical experiences that arise unbidden (and therefore cannot be planned), but that can have powerful long-term consequences. In the final chapter, “Toward a Connected Universe,” I will briefly discuss how the Super Mind keeps growing beyond our individual

concerns, thereby providing a channel for greater connection between and among individuals, their fellow human beings, and the universe as a whole.

Without further ado, let me welcome you to our journey into developing consciousness and the Super Mind.

THE SCIENCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Consciousness is the only real thing in the world and the greatest mystery of all.

Vladimir Nabokov

At the time when the Beatles were visiting Maharishi, I was plowing through medical school. As most medical students can testify, there was and is a great deal to learn, not all of it interesting or even relevant to one's later professional life. Many details that I learned I have long since forgotten; others, no more important, tenaciously stay put. I enjoy, for example, strange-sounding words—so I may never forget the zonule of Zinn or the canal of Schlemm, both obscure but important structures in the eye. Likewise, Latinate terms seem to cling to my neurons—the “substantia nigra” and “locus coeruleus,” for example, meaning, respectively, “black stuff” and “purple dot,” both small but crucial regions of the brain.

But when I ask myself, what did I learn about *consciousness* at medical school? the answer is, not very much. Our generic patient was either conscious, unconscious, or somewhere in between—concussed, stuporous, obtunded. My psychiatric training was likewise lacking. We did, of course, learn about sleep with its various stages and maladies, and we attended lectures on hypnosis. We also learned about mood, anxiety, and other disorders listed in the latest manual of psychiatric ailments. We were taught to inquire about people's thoughts, dreams, and feelings, and even to make some attempt to understand where they came from and how best to deal with them. As I think about it, though, all of this learning involved the *contents* of consciousness—the subject matter, if you will

—not consciousness itself. Consciousness as a topic for study and understanding was not on the menu.

MODERN SCIENCE

In reading the excellent comprehensive review *Consciousness and the Brain* by neuroscientist Stanislas Dehaene, professor of experimental cognitive psychology at the Collège de France, I found that my South African colleagues and I were not alone in those benighted times. According to Dehaene, the word “consciousness” was banned from scientific discourse when he was a student in the 1980s. At that time, as Dehaene put it, “I was surprised to discover that, during lab meetings, we were not allowed to use the C-word. . . . And then in the late 1980s everything changed. Today the problem of consciousness is at the forefront of neuroscience research.”¹

A great deal has been written about consciousness, much of it of a speculative and philosophical nature, asking questions such as “Who exactly has consciousness?” Daniel Dennett raises this question in his encyclopedic book *Consciousness Explained*: “Do newborn human babies?” he asks. “Do frogs? What about oysters, ants, plants, robots, zombies . . . ?”² In this book I will avoid venturing into such heady terrain. As a psychiatrist and researcher, I am more inclined to the empirical approach adopted by Dehaene and his colleagues.

Dehaene summarizes three fundamental elements that have enabled the transformation of consciousness from a “philosophical mystery into a laboratory phenomenon.” These elements are: “the articulation of a better definition of consciousness; the discovery that consciousness can be experimentally manipulated; and a new respect for subjective phenomena.”

Let us say that an image is flashed on a screen in front of you—very briefly, so it’s below your detection threshold; you will (by definition) be unable to see it. Another way of masking an image so you cannot detect it (even though it is flashed in front of you) is to pair it with distracting images. In contrast, as you can imagine, that same image could be flashed in front of you for a longer duration or without distraction, in such a way that you could both see it and report on its presence.

Researchers have in fact conducted studies in which they presented images in these various ways and measured people’s responses, both in terms of subjective reports (what people say they saw) and specific brain changes (for example, EEG and imaging methods). Then, by correlating subjective reports

with brain measurements, scientists have been able to establish four EEG signatures that signal consciousness. These are shown in table 2 (below).

As for Dehaene's third element—a new respect for subjective phenomena—most psychiatrists would probably say, “About time.” Clinicians have depended on patients' reports of their conscious experiences since therapy (or medicine, for that matter) first began—sometimes with excellent results.

The table below details four signatures of consciousness, EEG patterns showing that a person's response to a stimulus is consciously experienced.³ The researchers have a simple way of determining whether subjects experience stimuli consciously or not: they ask. The resulting EEG tracings are measured by electrodes glued to the scalp.

Table 2: Four EEG Signatures of Consciousness

1. The EEG response becomes amplified and involves many brain regions. Based on the differences between EEG responses to a subliminal stimulus (one that is registered unconsciously) versus a consciously perceived stimulus, researchers have compared the impact of these two events to that of a snowball (the unconscious stimulus) versus an avalanche.
2. The EEG response to stimuli exhibits a wave form with several bumps in it, rather like a row of rolling hills. Only during conscious trials (where the subject is aware of the stimulus) do researchers observe an especially large third hill—the so-called P300, which often starts around 300 milliseconds after the stimulus is presented.
3. During conscious trials, the EEG shows “a massive increase in gamma-band power starting at around 300 milliseconds.” During unconscious trials, this fast-frequency wavelength generally fades within 200 milliseconds after the stimulus.
4. When stimuli are consciously registered, there is invariably a “massive synchronization of electromagnetic signals across the cortex.” Information that reaches the level of consciousness is judged by the brain to be especially important. It therefore makes sense that different brain regions shout out to one another at the same time.

ANCIENT WISDOM: STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Although most scientists ignored the study of consciousness until the late 1980s, sages from many traditions have contemplated the subject for thousands of years. In general, different states of consciousness have been defined in terms of subjective experiences—for example, feelings of stillness, boundlessness, and bliss. Now scientists are using modern technology, such as EEGs and brain-imaging techniques, to try to understand the physiological underpinnings of these states.

While this book focuses primarily on meditation derived from the Vedic tradition of ancient India, including brain changes that occur in TM practitioners, other forms of meditation have also been associated with measurable brain changes. For example, Sara Lazar, assistant professor of psychology at the Massachusetts General Hospital, and colleagues have measured the thickness of the cerebral cortex in twenty long-term practitioners of Buddhist “insight meditation” and fifteen nonmeditating controls by means of magnetic resonance imaging. They found increased cortical thickness in brain regions associated with attention and other mental faculties central to this form of meditation.⁴

There are also many other studies of brain changes associated with different types of meditation, which deserve consideration but fall outside the scope of this book. Aside from a chapter in which I compare and contrast mindfulness and transcendence (chapter 14) and a few paragraphs at the end of this chapter, I have for the most part left the rich and extensive literature on meditations derived from the Buddhist tradition to those far better qualified to write about them than I am.

I will tell you about the brain changes associated with TM in detail in chapters 5 and 18, and also report on my own experiences of being hooked up to an EEG machine, meditating, and seeing—to my delight—that the predicted alpha waves had rolled off my brain and onto the recording paper.

Despite technical developments, I have to say that in our current state of knowledge, subjective reports remain the most precise way to characterize states of consciousness. Technology has yet to catch up.

Three states of consciousness are self-evident: waking, sleeping, and dreaming—though there can be huge variations even within these separate states (for example, efficient and restful sleep versus broken, disturbed sleep). These states of consciousness are accompanied by specific physiological and brain changes. For example, dreaming is marked by REM sleep, a state in which the body is still except for the eyes, which dart rapidly from side to side. The other sleep stages are accompanied by specific EEG patterns.

Beyond the three ordinary stages of consciousness, other states have been observed by practitioners from different cultures and by scientists alike. The eminent psychologist William James, for example, explicitly recognized such different states without which “no account of the universe in its totality can be final.”

The history of expanded consciousness in different cultures has been elegantly reviewed in Craig Pearson’s *The Supreme Awakening*. In several cultures there is a recognition that expanded states of consciousness can be classified according to increasing degrees of complexity, refinement, or purity. Here is one colorful example featured in Pearson’s book:

*Daoist literature refers to states known as High Pure, Most Pure, and Jade Pure, corresponding to different degrees of consciousness development.*⁵

I have alluded here mostly to Eastern traditions, but there are also many Western traditions that incorporate meditative elements into their prayers and spiritual practices. Although I will not detail them here, it would be an omission not to acknowledge them.

In this book I have focused on the expanded states of consciousness that arise through the practice of TM according to Vedic teaching for a few reasons: First, TM is a method that I know personally and through direct observation, and also one that science has shown can reliably induce these states. Second, expanded states of consciousness have been a major focus in the ancient Vedic study of consciousness, which has acknowledged and analyzed them for centuries. Third, I have been fortunate enough to have the present-day cooperation of a large number of TM meditators. They have provided me with both crucial data and excellent stories that support and illuminate the observations on which this book is based. Finally, TM is taught in a standardized and reproducible way throughout the world. This enhances my confidence that the progression of consciousness described by TM practitioners in different parts of the world is in fact the outcome of a shared practice, and therefore likely to represent shared brain mechanisms.

According to Vedic tradition, as transcendental consciousness extends beyond the experience of meditation, it enters the waking state where it unfolds progressively.⁶ It is this unfolding of consciousness—along with its accompanying benefits—that we are calling the Super Mind. Although this

unfolding occurs progressively over time, it may start surprisingly soon after a person begins to meditate, as we shall see.

Before proceeding further, it may be useful to clarify some differences between TM and popular forms of Buddhist meditation, especially with regard to the development of consciousness, which is our focus here. Certain key elements of three major types of meditation are show below (figure 1).

Figure 1

Category	Focused Attention	Open Monitoring	Automatic Self-Transcending
Vehicle	image or profound emotion	breath, body sensations, thoughts, feelings	mantra
Example	loving kindness	Buddhist-style mindfulness (Vipassana)	Transcendental Meditation
Predominant EEG wavelength (cycles per second)	gamma (20–50)	theta 2 (6–8)	alpha 1 (8–10)

As the above figure shows, modern meditation scholars have classified various forms of meditation into three categories: focused attention, open monitoring, and automatic self-transcending.⁷ TM falls into the last category. The other forms of meditation generally involve either focus (for example, on an image, the breath, or a thought) or open monitoring (in which the mind is directed to focus on specific stimuli that arise from the senses, the body, or the brain). These latter techniques (both of which fall under the category of mindfulness) differ from TM, in which a special sound, a “mantra,” is used in a systematic manner to slow down and refine mental activity—a more automatic type of process than focusing or open monitoring.

According to meditation expert Chris Germer (a clinical psychologist affiliated with Harvard Medical School), altered states of consciousness (known as the *jhanas*) have been part of Buddhist meditation in the past, but this element has been de-emphasized in the last century. Nevertheless, the *jhanas* continue to be taught and practiced. Leigh Brasington, a Buddhist meditation teacher and author of *Right Concentration: A Practical Guide to the Jhanas*,⁸ explained to me that these states of consciousness can be accessed by concentrating on as many as thirty different stimuli, including the breath, mantras, or thoughts of compassion and loving kindness. According to him, however, none of them fully coincides with the state of transcendence as I described it to him.⁹

TO SUMMARIZE WHAT WE HAVE DISCUSSED IN THIS CHAPTER:

- Modern neuroscientists have defined consciousness in such a way that it can be studied experimentally.
- Using scientific methods, especially EEG measurements, four specific “signatures of consciousness” have been defined.
- According to ancient Vedic tradition, there are stages of consciousness beyond the three traditional stages (waking, sleeping, and dreaming), which have been described.
- The science of these “higher states” of consciousness development will be detailed in later chapters.
- Elements of three major forms of meditation are presented.

The next chapter provides an introduction to TM—a simple passageway to transcendent consciousness.

TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION: THE SECRET PASSAGEWAY

Science isn't about authority or white coats; it's about following a method.

Ben Goldacre

In the introduction I related a minor anecdote involving a secret passageway in a hospital complex. Once I'd been told about it, I was able to breeze into my office for an early morning session, with no need to climb five flights of stairs.

We learn about such secret passageways from our childhood storybooks. In Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books, for example, the young heroine falls down a rabbit hole and finds a key, or steps through a looking glass, each of which gives her access to an absurd wonderland. More recently, consider the magical transitions in the Harry Potter series, where the students of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry step through a special portal in King's Cross Station—unknown and invisible to ordinary Muggles, who see only a brick wall—to board the Hogwarts Express. It seems to be an enduring part of human fantasies that somehow, by acquiring some special knowledge or ability, we can slip through an ordinary-looking object and pass, as if by magic, into an alternative reality.

I would suggest that the real world is also well populated with secret passageways. It would be an enjoyable exercise to inventory them all, but for now, let us consider just one—the telescope. By turning the telescope toward the heavens and observing the moons of Jupiter, Galileo helped upend the prevailing geocentric theory of the universe, according to which all heavenly bodies were considered to revolve around Earth. By developing a method, a truth was revealed. In a more modest but analogous way, a method is needed to reliably

access higher levels of consciousness. The method we are principally exploring here is the technique of Transcendental Meditation.

WHY DO TM IN THE FIRST PLACE?

Before considering how to do anything, it is usually worth asking why one should do it in the first place. Here is a list of potential rewards that I have seen in myself and my clients. In several instances, these observations are supported by published scientific studies, which I look forward to sharing with you in the chapters that follow:

- Better physical health (see [chapter 8](#)).
- More efficient cognitive functioning—including creativity (chapter 9).
- Improvement in many personal attributes
- Better interpersonal relationships (chapters 11–13)
- Better performance and greater success professionally and financially (chapter 15)
- Greater happiness and self-actualization (chapter 16)

With these benefits in mind, let us consider what learning TM involves.

THE PRACTICE OF TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION

Reduced to its basic elements, TM consists of the following:

1. Learning the technique from a qualified teacher. You start by attending an introductory educational session, answering some basic questions about yourself, and meeting with a teacher on four consecutive days for up to ninety minutes on each occasion.
2. Sit comfortably in a chair twice a day with your eyes closed for twenty minutes each time.
3. Think of the traditional mantra that your TM teacher provides for you, in the prescribed way.

That seems pretty simple, doesn't it? Well, it is and it isn't. Let's look deeper.

WHY DO I NEED TO LEARN FROM A QUALIFIED TEACHER?

Like many practices in which precision is important—such as ballet, playing the piano, or martial arts—TM needs to be taught by a qualified teacher. TM teachers have undergone extensive training and are credentialed to help all different types of people acquire the technique as effortlessly and enjoyably as possible. Some people are surprised at how easily they can learn a technique that can rapidly lead to profound effects. Actress Cameron Diaz, for example, says that TM is not only the easiest form of meditation she has ever learned but the easiest *thing* she has ever learned. But since each person has different life experiences, a different brain, and learns at a different pace, the teaching process will proceed differently, depending on the individual—and some people do not get the hang of it quite so easily as Ms. Diaz did. I fell into that category.

The art of properly teaching this subtle form of meditation has been handed down from teacher to teacher over centuries, and modern teachers continue to take their work seriously. I have regarded it as a privilege to be able to learn and benefit from this technique at the hands of some very fine teachers, and would wish the same for my family, friends, patients, and for you, the reader. So I should make it clear at this point that you will not learn how to practice TM from this book—or any other book.

After talking with the student and providing background information, the teacher assigns the student a special sound or mantra. The mantras, which have no meaning, are ancient and traditional to the practice. Over the centuries they have been found to have soothing, positive (the TM teachers describe them as “life-supporting”) qualities that are conducive to transcendence. Once learned, the student's practice is checked several times until both student and teacher are confident that the technique has been properly established. The entire course can be accomplished in the span of four days, and then you're good to get started. Periodic check-ins, however, are strongly recommended to make sure that the technique is working well for you. And certainly if you feel yourself struggling with the technique or not getting the desired results, the student should not hesitate to get back in touch with the teacher.

Sometimes the question about why one needs a teacher, which arises frequently, is a polite way of asking, if the technique is so simple, why should I

spend the time and money to learn it?

Yes, the technique is simple and effortless, but for many people, learning it can be—at least initially—complicated and confusing! I myself have been guilty of underestimating its subtlety. A central goal of TM is to help the meditator enter a state of transcendence, the key to the Super Mind. In order to do so, proper technique is necessary, and this is acquired by learning from a trained teacher and then checking in with that teacher periodically until a regular and effective practice is established. I have heard many stories from intelligent and sophisticated people who, despite having learned, were not achieving their desired results. A brief consultation with their TM teacher often revealed the source of difficulty, putting the meditator back on track. Sometimes meditators are pleasantly surprised at how a mere canny suggestion (or two) can make all the difference.

Despite having meditated for seven years, I too have been surprised at how much value I invariably find in having my technique refreshed. A few years ago, I had a wonderful experience in this regard. My son, Josh, and I were visiting South Africa for a family wedding and had occasion to stay in Johannesburg for a few days. I visited the TM center there, which is run by Vicki and Richard Broome. (It was Vicki who had first taught me to meditate some thirty-five years earlier and whom I will mention again in chapter 19 when I discuss sudden, dramatic transcendent experiences.) The TM refresher session that she conducted with Josh and me was deep and powerful. In addition, Vicki emphasized an element that had been glossed over in earlier teachings.

“Take a full three minutes to emerge from your meditation session,” she counseled. “It is very important, and do so even if time is short and you have to take that time away from the mantra.” That seemed like strange counsel to me. Surely the mantra was key to transcendence—and transcendence was the goal! Although I had heard about people occasionally getting headaches if they emerged too quickly, was the three minutes really necessary? And why did she emphasize it so? Only once I began to think more deeply about the Super Mind did I realize that its development depends in good part upon the carryover of the transcendent state into daily life. By allowing a certain amount of overlap between the transcendent and the ordinary waking state, we may foster the easy mingling of these states and promote the growth of the Super Mind. Yet even knowing this, I too often jump up at the end of a session to get on with my tasks. That brings to mind another important role of the teacher: not only to provide us

with new information, but to remind us of things we already “know” but may tend to ignore.

Nowadays it is an occasional treat for me to meditate with my friend and TM mentor Bob Roth. When we meditate together, he goes through a special checking procedure in which he assesses my technique. He has me open and close my eyes, and inquires about my state of mind before we launch into our twenty-minute session. Sometimes he is almost apologetic about going through these steps, as if to say, “You know this all already. I hope you’re not offended by my reviewing it with you yet again.” I’m never offended. I am always grateful. Small elements of the technique can easily slip away through carelessness or distraction. How good it is to be reminded of them. As we begin to meditate, Bob typically says, “Remember, every meditation is different. Each meditation is a new experience because each time you sit to meditate your body is different—tired, fresh, agitated, calm. So take your experiences in meditation easy and take them as they come.”

* * *

Bob’s instructions remind me of “beginner’s mind,” an expression that comes from Zen Buddhism. “Beginner’s mind” refers to looking at a situation with fresh eyes—like the eyes of a child, unencumbered by memories, expectations, aspirations, or other distractions. In the words of the Zen teacher Shunryu Suzuki, “In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities. In the expert’s mind there are few.”¹ So, in his instruction, Bob is encouraging me to leave behind the prejudice and expectation that comes with experience. And somehow the meditation that follows when I do is deeper, quieter, and easier than ever.

Let’s consider two important words that Bob uses when he reviews my technique.

“EFFORTLESSLY”

How can something that promises to transform be effortless? An image used by many meditators to explain this idea is a sled or toboggan ride. For the experienced sledder, slipping down a gentle slope may require little effort because the basic driving force is gravity. But learning how to make small, moment-by-moment adjustments that will see you successfully down the hill does require attention, and the body needs to be engaged. Once mastered,

however, sledding is sheer joy, a seemingly effortless slide—as is the case when you meditate. As one experienced meditator described it, “I just close my eyes and go for a long, smooth luge ride.”

It is true, however, that practicing the technique does require a different kind of effort—blocking off time in your schedule and setting aside the many competing claims on your day. Having done so, once you sit down and access the mantra as you have been taught to do, you will enjoy an easy ride to wherever the mantra takes you.

Paradoxically, forcing the mantra (“mantra bashing,” as one TM teacher-friend calls it) or pushing yourself to get the technique exactly “right” is often counterproductive. Effortlessness, as you will learn in personal instruction by your TM teacher, is the key to successful transcendence.

“INNOCENTLY”

When Bob first said “innocently” in advising me how to approach my meditation, I thought it a strange word to use in that setting. It did, however, resonate with “beginner’s mind” in conveying a sense of purity and freshness. It took me a while to understand the meaning of the word when used in the context of TM. Essentially, it means “without expectation as to the outcome.” In this regard, TM differs from most forms of therapy, where a goal is identified and efforts are made to attain it. TM can help people in many different situations (as we will see), but only if it is approached innocently—without expecting anything in particular.

As we sit down to practice TM, there will no doubt be many problems percolating away at different levels of our mind, much unfinished business. As these thoughts mingle with the blissful peace of transcendence, they become less bothersome, disturbing, or problematic. The transcendent state experienced during meditation—along with its settling effects on body and mind—will if repeated regularly move into the person’s daily life, which will automatically become easier and more fulfilling. What the word “innocently” signifies to the meditator therefore is that it is not necessary to burden one’s session with goals or expectations, because you can trust the process.

WHY DO I HAVE TO MEDITATE FOR TWENTY MINUTES EACH TIME?

This is a trick question. You don't have to meditate at all. Many of us have a skeptical or even an oppositional streak (I say that from both personal and professional experience). Why twenty minutes? I have asked myself. Why not fifteen? Or even ten? The simple answer is that over centuries, the twenty-minute duration has empirically been found to work, not only during meditation itself, but in the intervals between sessions. I have often contemplated with appreciation the intelligence of those who figured out the optimal duration for the basic TM technique—long enough to accomplish its goals but not so long as to disrupt the day of a busy person.

We have a tendency to think arithmetically. For example, we might conclude that fifteen minutes would be three-quarters as good as twenty minutes, therefore no big deal. But this thought could be altogether incorrect, for in my experience it often takes the first five or six minutes of a TM session for my mind and body to settle down. (Of course, I speak for myself here; other meditators often have very different experiences.) Then comes a period of stillness, and only in the last third of the session do I enjoy the full bliss of transcendence. Imagine if I were to clip off the last five minutes of a session. It would be like missing the last quarter of a ball game, play, or concert. I'd be missing the best part, which would hardly yield three-quarters of the enjoyment.

Many others have reported a similar need and appreciation for the entire duration of the session. Consider, for example, the comment of movie director Martin Scorsese with regard to his longtime TM practice: "It creates a sense of order, of priority as to what we really should be thinking about . . . finally, in the last six minutes or so, there is a kind of peacefulness that I don't think I've ever achieved before."

But what if it's absolutely impossible to devote twenty minutes to a session? The answer is, of course, to do the best you can. Any amount of meditation is better than none at all.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO MEDITATE TWICE A DAY?

"Why not once a day?" my patients often ask. Of course, that's better than no meditation at all, I concede, but I also echo the sentiments of many experienced teachers who agree that meditating once a day is less than half as good as meditating twice a day. It's almost as though the effects of morning meditation (which is usually the easier of the two to accommodate) wear off by late afternoon. Also, results from our survey of TM practitioners support the

value of more frequent meditation in promoting the development of the Super Mind (see [chapter 7](#)).

Famous comedian Jerry Seinfeld has practiced TM for forty-one years, and has derived great benefit from it. As he puts it, “I’ve explored a lot of different things and gotten a lot from all of them, but nothing compares to what TM has done for me . . . especially lately.” Seinfeld went on to say that for the first forty years of his TM practice, “I would just do one in the afternoon . . . and that was a very sustaining thing in my life.”

“I immediately stopped doing the one in the morning. Couldn’t understand why you needed to get out of bed and rest,” the comedian observed. Then he met with Bob Roth, who suggested that Seinfeld add a second session in the morning. He did, and according to Seinfeld it has changed his life.

I have interviewed Bob Roth for this book about several aspects of TM and the Super Mind, and those of you who are interested in our conversation can find my questions and Bob’s answers in appendix 1 at the end of this book.

Often it is the afternoon TM session that falls victim to the pressures and commitments that pile up as the day proceeds. I remember one occasion when I was visiting a TM teacher on the West Coast of the United States. He and his partner and I had been traveling that day, and we arrived at his home a few hours before dinner. His partner, a delightful woman and a retired pediatric surgeon, was bustling about, taking care of chores, when she turned to me and said, “At the end of the afternoon there are always so many things that seem urgent that I feel inclined to put off my meditation. But what I’ve realized is that if I meditate first, everything gets done more easily.” Her words have returned to me many times, especially as my patients tell me how difficult it is to squeeze in their afternoon session, and I pass on her good advice. I have learned never to miss my afternoon session if at all possible. I feel as though the second session gives me a whole new start on the day, so that I stay fresh and clearheaded throughout the evening. Moreover, by logging in the second session, I maintain the regularity of my practice and reap the benefits of the Super Mind.

Another perspective on the benefits of twice-daily sessions was offered by Elaine, an old friend and fellow meditator (you will meet her again in chapter 17). “It feels like there is much more energy to my meditation when I do it twice a day,” she said. “I just can’t wait for my next meditation. It’s the way I used to feel about sex when I was younger.” I could hear the giggle in her voice, and we both laughed long and hard.

CONCLUDING WORDS

According to the classic Sanskrit text the *Bhagavad Gita*, “You have control over action alone, never over its fruits.”² What this means for our present discussion is that if your actions are practiced and correct, the desired results are more likely to follow. Specifically, if you meditate in the right way, for the right amount of time and with the right frequency, that is all you can control. But in most cases that is enough to enable you to reap the fruits of expanding consciousness—fruits that can sustain you for a lifetime.

4

TRANSCENDENCE: BEYOND WAKING, SLEEPING, AND DREAMING

Become totally empty
Quiet the restlessness of the mind
Only then will you witness everything
unfolding from emptiness
See all things flourish and dance
in endless variation
And once again merge back into perfect emptiness—

Lao-Tzu¹

Consciousness has been compared to the ocean—vast and deep, almost boundless. According to this analogy, the ordinary waking state is like the surface of the ocean, which may be joyful and lively, as when sunlight sparkles off the ever-moving waves. But the sea's surface can also be menacing, roiling with breakers, powerful and dangerous. So it is with our waking state and all its moods and contemplations, hopes and fears, triumphs and disasters. It varies! And of course, when we sit down to meditate, wherever we are is always the point at which we begin—our waking state, whatever it happens to be on that particular day, at that particular moment.

So now it is time to meditate, and we sit down comfortably and prepare to take time away from the ocean's surface with all its turmoil. We think our mantra as we have been taught to do, and like a diving bell, the mantra takes us deeper and deeper into our innermost self—at depths to which we may never have given much thought. Down there it is utterly still, and the agitations of