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**Understanding
Cosmic
Consciousness**

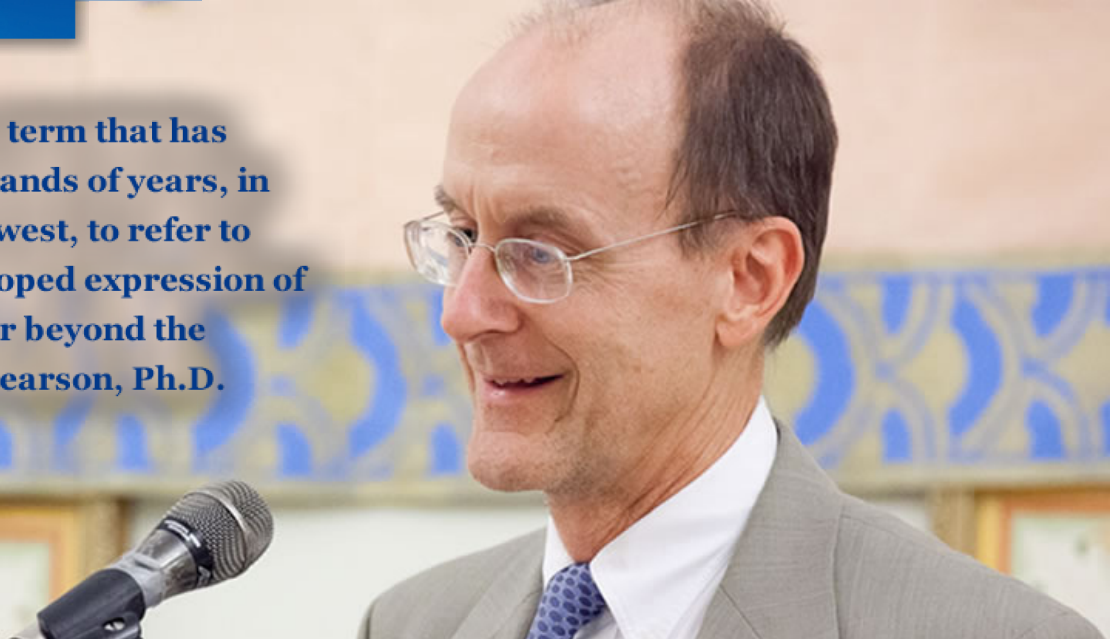
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ISSUE 5

“Enlightenment is a term that has been used for thousands of years, in traditions east and west, to refer to the most fully developed expression of human potential, far beyond the ordinary.”—Craig Pearson, Ph.D.



The Quest for Enlightenment: Transcendence in the Lives of Great Seers and Thinkers

INTERVIEW BY LINDA EGENES

researching the expression of higher states of consciousness in the writings of great philosophers, saints, scientists, artists, and writers. Here Dr. Pearson speaks about humanity’s age-old quest for enlightenment.

Craig Pearson, Ph.D., is the Executive Vice-President of Maharishi University of Management in Fairfield, Iowa, and the author of the forthcoming book, *The Supreme Awakening: Experiences of Higher States of Consciousness—Cultivating the Infinite Potential Within*.

Dr. Pearson has spent many years

Enlightenment: What is the relationship of enlightenment and human potential?

Enlightenment begins with experiencing the reality of your innermost Self as unbounded and eternal and then being established at that level in all phases of daily life. In enlightenment you live in harmony with all the laws of nature, easily fulfilling your desires and

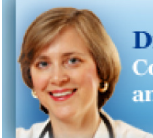
Dr. Pearson: Enlightenment is a term that has been used for thousands of years, in traditions east and west, to refer to the most fully developed expression of human potential, far beyond the ordinary.

Enlightenment: How common is it?

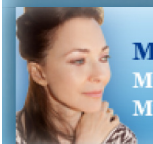
Dr. Pearson: Although this extraordinary experience has been described by individuals in different cultures over the millennia and is celebrated in the world’s spiritual traditions, it seems to be exceedingly rare. But obviously it lies within the realm of human potential.

Enlightenment : What has Maharishi contributed to the understanding of enlightenment?

Dr. Pearson: Maharishi Mahesh Yogi is often credited with reintroducing the concept of enlightenment in a systematic



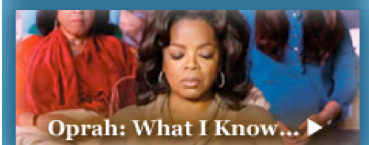
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creating a powerfully
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environment.

manner in our modern age. He has put forward a comprehensive understanding of enlightenment that embraces the great traditions and thinkers who have described this experience across time. Maharishi was also the first to promote scientific investigation into enlightenment, bringing the phenomenon of spiritual development into the arena of modern science.

Enlightenment: How does Maharishi describe enlightenment?

Dr. Pearson: For Maharishi, enlightenment is the ultimate development of one's inner potential as a human being. It means being established in the highest state of human consciousness.

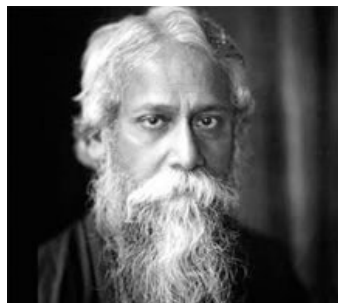
Enlightenment begins with experiencing the reality of your innermost Self as unbounded and eternal and being established at that level. This means the consciousness of an enlightened person is no longer subject to the ups and downs of emotions, mind, and body but steadfast, anchored in inner silence.

Enlightenment brings the ultimate unfoldment of one's creativity and intelligence. It means living in harmony with all the laws of nature and easily fulfilling your desires. It means being of maximum use to yourself and others and creating a powerfully nourishing effect in one's environment.

At the highest stage, enlightenment means experiencing the universe as the expression of your unbounded Self. It is a state of perpetual freedom and bliss, supreme fulfillment.

Enlightenment: Can we relate this in any way to our day-to-day experience?

Dr. Pearson: Although this vision of human development may seem idealistic, we have all had experiences in this direction. Some days we just feel happier inside, more appreciative of others—life is easier, fuller, richer, and more rewarding. We may have moments of enhanced mental clarity or heightened levels of creativity, when we surprise ourselves with how quickly the solution to a problem may come. Athletes sometimes experience *the zone*—periods of peak performance that are effortless and euphoric.



Rabindranath Tagore

At these times we are using a bit more of our potential. But enlightenment is far, far more than this. It goes far beyond just having a good day. People who have had experiences of enlightenment report that words simply cannot capture the sublimity of the experience.

Dr. Pearson reads an experience of higher states of consciousness by the Nobel laureate poet, writer, and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore:

Watch the video ▶

Enlightenment: You have researched how individuals from different historical epochs and different parts of the world have shared this same experience. Can you talk about that?

Dr. Pearson: In traditions throughout time we find remarkably similar descriptions of this extraordinary experience of human life lived to its fullest—in the writings of great philosophers, religious figures, artists, scientists, and writers, as well as in the great religious traditions of the world. The terminology may vary from tradition to tradition and age to age. But when you have the clear and precise description of enlightenment provided by Maharishi, it becomes easy to appreciate what these people are talking about.

Enlightenment: So the experience is universal?

In traditions throughout
time we find remarkably
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philosophers, religious

Dr. Pearson: Yes. And the recognition that many have shared this experience throughout history is not new either. Some scholars have called it the *perennial philosophy* or the *primordial tradition*. The perennial philosophy holds that although various spiritual and philosophical traditions appear different on the surface, at their core all traditions share common, universal principles.

Enlightenment: What are these universal principles?

Dr. Pearson: The perennial philosophy has three basic tenets: (1) Underlying the diversity of the world is a field of

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figures, artists, scientists, and writers, as well as in the great religious traditions of the world.

unity. (2) We can subjectively experience this field of unity deep within us. (3) The purpose of life is ultimately to experience and live this inner, divine reality of life.

This inner field goes by different names. Laozi called it *the Tao*. Plato called it *the Good, the One, and the Beautiful*. Aristotle called it *Being*. The Greek-Roman philosopher Plotinus called it *the Infinite*. In Judaism it is called *Ein Sof*, in

Christianity *the kingdom of heaven within*. In more modern times, Ralph Waldo Emerson called it *the Oversoul*.

These different names are not referring to mere philosophical or spiritual ideals. They point to the inner reality of life—a reality that can be experienced directly and, when experienced, brings fulfillment beyond words.

Enlightenment: How does Maharishi talk about this inner field?

Dr. Pearson: Maharishi characterizes it as an unbounded field of *pure consciousness*, an all-pervading ocean of creativity, intelligence, and bliss, beyond space and time. Maharishi asserts, moreover, that this field of pure consciousness is identical with the unified field of natural law that modern physics describes mathematically. Thus the inner field that gives rise to all our thoughts and feelings is the same field that gives rise to the entire universe.

Enlightenment: And we can experience this inner field of pure consciousness?

Dr. Pearson: Every human being has the natural ability to experience this field. It simply requires “diving within,” allowing the mind to settle inward, beyond the thinking process. This is called *transcending*.

People throughout history have described and celebrated this experience. It is a simple and natural experience—but by most accounts seems to be rare and fleeting. People have lacked a technique for experiencing it systematically. This is the gift Maharishi has given us—the Transcendental Meditation technique, a simple, natural, effortless procedure by which anyone can dive within at will.

Until Maharishi started teaching in the West, the understanding of how to transcend had for the most part been lost. The Transcendental Meditation technique, which has its origin in the ancient Vedic tradition, provides direct experience of pure consciousness. It is easy to learn and practice, validated by hundreds of scientific research studies, and practiced by millions of people throughout the world.

Enlightenment: What happens in the process of transcending?

Dr. Pearson: Maharishi compares the mind to an ocean. Like the ocean, the mind is normally “wavy,” filled with perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. But like the ocean, the mind can become still, while remaining alert.

During Transcendental Meditation practice, our attention settles inward, beyond the noise of perceptions, thoughts, feelings. When this happens, consciousness is left to experience itself alone, in its pure form—silent, serene, wide awake within itself—unbounded pure awareness, the unified field. This is the true nature of consciousness, our inmost Self.

Simultaneously the body becomes deeply restful while brain functioning becomes integrated, suggesting the total brain is awake. In this deeply relaxed state, the body dissolves stress, strain, and fatigue with maximum efficiency—which is crucial, because stress is what inhibits the natural expression of our full, enlightened potential.

This experience during meditation may be fleeting at first, or so natural and subtle that one is scarcely aware of it. But in every case the mind becomes as inwardly settled as the physiology will allow.

Enlightenment: How does the experience of transcending differ from normal waking, dreaming, and sleeping?

All human beings have the natural ability to transcend, to dive within and experience the infinite sea of pure consciousness deep inside—and from there to

Dr. Pearson: Waking, dreaming, and sleeping are the three states of consciousness we are all familiar with. With the very first research studies on the Transcendental Meditation technique, it became clear that people were experiencing something quite different. Their bodies were deeply relaxed, and their minds were settled yet alert. Scientists recognized that this was a fourth major state of consciousness. Maharishi calls it *Transcendental Consciousness* and describes it as a state of *restful alertness*.

rise to higher states of consciousness, to enlightenment, and realize their full potential.

Enlightenment: What role does the experience of transcending play in growth to enlightenment?

Dr. Pearson: Every human being has the natural ability to experience this field. It simply requires “diving within,” allowing the mind to settle inward, beyond the thinking process. This is called *transcending*.

With regular, repeated experience of Transcendental Consciousness, the mind and body become accustomed to this restfully alert style of functioning—one maintains unbounded awareness, the fully expanded state of mind, at all times, along with waking, dreaming, and sleeping. The physiology is now free of stress, and brain functioning remains integrated throughout the day.

This stage of development represents a fifth state of consciousness, which Maharishi calls *Cosmic Consciousness*. With consciousness now fully expanded and open to the unified field, you live in accord with natural law—your actions are spontaneously life-nourishing, and you fulfill your desires without strain.

But growth of enlightenment does not stop here. Maharishi describes the full range of human development as encompassing seven distinctly different states of consciousness altogether. This model of higher human development—seven states of consciousness—is another of Maharishi’s great contributions. (See *Enlightenment*, Issue 6, forthcoming.)

Enlightenment: And you find experiences of these stages of higher human development described in literature throughout the world?

Dr. Pearson: Yes. With Maharishi’s framework of human development in mind, we can look back at records of human history, at the writings of saints and poets and philosophers and the texts of different religious traditions, and we recognize and more clearly understand these exalted experiences.

Enlightenment: Can you give some examples?



Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Dr. Pearson: The great English poet **Alfred, Lord Tennyson** (1809–1892), seems to have had experiences of transcending, the fourth state of consciousness, starting from boyhood and lasting throughout his life. For example, he describes:

When I have been all alone... all at once, as it were, out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this not a confused state, but the clearest, the surest of the sure ... utterly beyond words.... It is no nebulous ecstasy, but a state of transcendent wonder, associated with absolute clearness of mind. [1]



Hakuin Zenji

This next experience comes from Hakuin Zenji, also known as **Hakuin Ekaku** (1685–1769), one of the most influential figures in Japanese Zen Buddhism. Hakuin describes a state in which the silent calm of unbounded pure consciousness (which he calls “the spirit of the Way”) is maintained at all times, even while one is involved in dynamic activity—reminding us of the fifth state of consciousness, Cosmic Consciousness:

The spirit of the Way is never to be lost even for a single moment... What is of absolute importance, is that the two states—activity and calm ... must have the pure, unmixed, complete, and whole truth in the forefront. It must be such, indeed, that so that even if one were surrounded by a thousand or ten thousand people one would be as if one were dwelling alone in a wide open space of thousands of miles.... [2]



One last experience I’d like to share suggests Maharishi’s final stage of human development, Unity Consciousness. This experience was described by a woman who dropped her given name and became known as **Peace Pilgrim** (1908–1981), devoting the last decades of her life to speaking on the need for peace, crisscrossing America on foot seven times. She wrote:

I was out walking in the early morning. All of a sudden I felt very



uplifted, more uplifted than I had ever been. I remember I knew timelessness and spacelessness and lightness.... The most important part of it was not the phenomena: the important part of it was the realization of the oneness of all creation. Not only all human beings—I knew before that all human beings are one. But now I knew also a oneness with the rest of creation. The creatures that walk the earth and the growing things of the earth. The air, the water, the earth itself. And, most wonderful of all, a oneness with that which permeates and binds all together and gives life to all.... [3]

I could give many more examples of such experiences of higher states of consciousness. The point is that experiences of these exalted levels of human development are natural and universal—and they can now be systematically cultivated through the technologies of consciousness Maharishi has brought to light from the ancient Vedic tradition.

Enlightenment: So Maharishi's vision is that enlightenment doesn't belong only to the great seers, it can be experienced by every person?

Dr. Pearson: Yes. All human beings have the natural ability to transcend, to dive within and experience the infinite sea of pure consciousness deep inside—and from there to rise to higher states of consciousness, to enlightenment, and realize their full potential. This, Maharishi emphasized, is the birthright of every human being, the destiny of everyone. And this is why he brought the Transcendental Meditation technique out of the Himalayas and made it available to everyone on earth.

You can read more about higher states of consciousness, as well Maharishi's advanced program for enlightenment and world peace, the TM-Sidhi® program, in Dr. Pearson's book [The Complete Book of Yogic Flying](#).

You can read more transcendental experiences of great people on Dr. Pearson's blog at <http://www.tm.org/blog/category/enlightenment/>

REFERENCES

1. Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred, Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by his Son, Volume I* (London: Macmillan, 1897), 320.
 2. *The Embossed Tea Kettle: Orate Gama and Other Works of Hakuin Zenji*, trans. R.D.M. Shaw (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1963), 82.
 3. *Peace Pilgrim: Her Life and Work in Her Own Words*, compiled by Friends of Peace Pilgrim (Santa Fe: Ocean Tree Books, 1983), 21–22.
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written by a guest

Thank you for such clear explanations of the nature of meditation and enlightenment, and for the wonderful quote from Peace Pilgrim.

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written by a guest

I can't wait to read this. I have been practicing TM for a long time, but I love reading about historical poets and figures who have had experiences that validate my own current practice guiding me towards a more enlightened state.

...

written by a guest

Dr. Pearson has a bestseller on his hands! He is an amazing writer and educator. Totally brilliant at capturing the attention of his readers while broadening their understanding of a state, and experience, that had before seemed completely unobtainable. Anyone can have a shot at enlightenment.

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written by a guest

Dear Dr. Pearson and friends from "TM Magazine" - Thank you for this beautiful material! All the best! Dimitrova (from Bulgaria) JAI GURU DEV

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written by a guest

Beautiful experiences and explanations. The highest knowledge being put in a very simple manner. Blissful to read.

...

written by a guest

Eloquent and Enlightening; My Hope is that everyone; as this really, really applies to every single Human Being on Earth; will have the opportunity to be inspired by the great simplicity and clarity of expression of this great, eternal wisdom of the ages from a truly enlightened professor such as Dr Pearson!

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