



1
Maharishi
on Ideal
Relationships

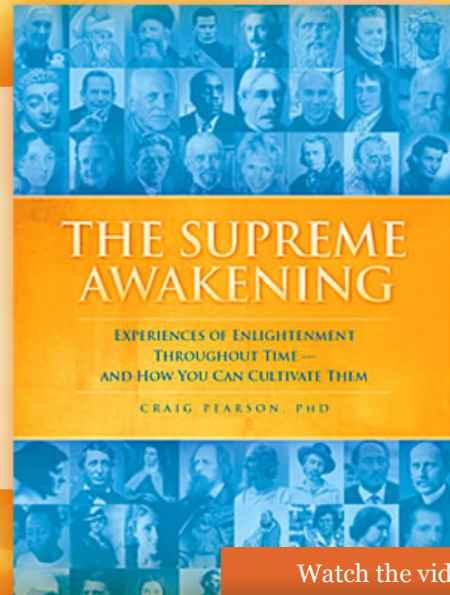
2
Craig Pearson:
The Supreme
Awakening

3
Nourishing
Life from
the Inside

4
An Affordable
Solution to
Healthcare

ISSUE 18

“Imagine being color-blind in a color-blind world, then suddenly, for a few moments, glimpsing color. How can you describe color to someone who hasn’t yet experienced it? And how much more difficult it must be to describe a different state of consciousness.”—Craig Pearson, Ph.D.



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The Supreme Awakening: Experiences of Enlightenment Throughout Time—And How to Cultivate Them

An Interview with Craig Pearson, Ph.D.

BY LINDA EGENES

Laozi, the Buddha, Plato, St. Teresa of Avila, Wordsworth, Emerson, Thoreau, Emily Dickinson, Lucy Maud Montgomery, Black Elk, Einstein—throughout history, great men and women have described sublime experiences of extraordinary wakefulness, freedom, and bliss, as different from our ordinary waking experience as waking is from dreaming.



In his new book, The Supreme Awakening: Experiences of Enlightenment Throughout Time—And How to Cultivate Them, Craig Pearson, PhD, shares transcendent experiences representing a wide range of times, cultures, and religions. The book is one of the most comprehensive anthologies of such experiences ever assembled.

But Dr. Pearson goes further. He explains how they can be understood and categorized using Maharishi Mahesh Yogi’s model of seven states of consciousness. And he shows how

What comes out of the research is that higher states of consciousness are not a matter of some mood or dream or philosophical flight of



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anyone can cultivate the same kinds of sublime experiences celebrated by some of history's great geniuses simply by practicing the effortless technique of Transcendental Meditation.

*Dr. Pearson is the Executive Vice-President of Maharishi University of Management and the author of [The Complete Book of Yogic Flying](#). Here he talks about what inspired him to write *The Supreme Awakening* and his experience along the way.*

Linda Egenes: What inspired you to write this book?

Dr. Pearson: I've always been fascinated by people's experiences of higher states of consciousness. Early in my meditating career, I came across a passage from Wordsworth describing a transcendental experience and found that quite remarkable. I started looking for more, and I found them. I began putting a few of these in University publications—and saw that other people found this interesting too.

I soon realized that there is a scientific hypothesis in this, namely that the capacity to experience higher states of consciousness is universal. If this is true, it should be possible to find descriptions in the writings of great people of different cultures. I pursued it more seriously, and eventually it became the topic of my Ph.D. dissertation and now a book.

Linda Egenes: What was your research method? How did you find the writings of more obscure people such as Dov Baer of Mezericht from the Ukraine, for instance?

Dr. Craig Pearson: It was like panning for gold, sifting through lots of gravel to occasionally find a gold nugget. I've lost track of the countless books I've combed through to find these experiences.

I found ways of narrowing the search. For example, there's the whole field of mystical and religious experience, which includes experiences of the kind I was looking for. Books on this topic yielded more frequent nuggets. Books on the creative process turned up a few.

Other times I would just have a hunch. For instance, I hadn't seen references to Helen Keller in my research, but I thought about the unique life she led, blind and deaf from the age of two, yet rising to become one of the most important people of the 20th century. I read all of her books and found some really beautiful experiences of transcendence. In reading the books by and about these people, and especially reading how they describe these intimate experiences, I felt like they became my friends.

Sometimes I felt that their experiences were trying to find me. I was browsing through a Lands' End catalog, reading a photo essay in the center about the Kashmir goats in Mongolia that provide the wool for the company's sweaters—and suddenly found the writer describing a beautiful experience of a higher state of consciousness. I ended up corresponding with him.

Another time, close to publication, I was walking through the Fairfield Public Library and chanced to pick up a book on a display shelf. I opened to a random page—and there was a statement from Jesus, from the New Testament, clearly describing the experience of a higher state of consciousness. I thought, "How could I have missed this?" I felt as if this passage did not want to be omitted.

While the words of Ionesco and Wordsworth and so many others are glorious, we should not imagine we understand the experience of higher states of consciousness just by reading these words. You have to have the experience.

Linda Egenes: One interesting theme came through in your book, that these transcendental experiences are beyond words.

Dr. Pearson: A number of people said this—even after expressing their experience in the most beautiful, poetic words. The French playwright Eugene Ionesco wrote, "Words can only disfigure" the experience.

Imagine being color-blind in a color-blind world, then suddenly, for a few moments, glimpsing color. How can you describe color to someone who hasn't yet experienced it? And how much more difficult it must be to describe a different *state of consciousness*. Higher states of consciousness entail a completely different mode of experiencing one's self and one's environment.

So while the words of Ionesco and Wordsworth and so many others are glorious, we should not imagine we understand the experience of higher states of consciousness just by reading these words. You have to have the experience.

Linda Egenes: Was this an elusive experience for most people—something they spent the rest of their lives searching for?

Dr. Craig Pearson: I believe that some people in the book—Laozi and Shankara come to mind—were well

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established in higher states of consciousness. Maharishi has made the point that there have been enlightened people in every age. But most people in the book seemed only to glimpse these states. Many wondered where the experience came from and how they could get it back.

Linda Egenes: This brings us to Maharishi's contribution.

Dr. Craig Pearson: Yes. First of all, Maharishi has given us the Transcendental Meditation technique, which is a simple, natural, effortless procedure for cultivating these experiences. This is an incredible gift, because until now these experiences have been extremely rare, fleeting, and unpredictable. Now anyone can systematically develop them.

Second, Maharishi has given us a new model of human development that includes seven states of consciousness altogether—four higher states beyond the three familiar states of waking, dreaming, and sleeping. This gives us a powerful way of understanding and categorizing these experiences.

And finally, we have all the scientific research on the Transcendental Meditation technique, which Maharishi strongly encouraged from the first. Research on the TM technique really means research on higher states of consciousness, higher human development. The findings here have been unprecedented.

And what comes out of the research is that higher states of consciousness are not a matter of some mood or dream or poetic flight of fancy. They are real experiences, contingent on achieving certain thresholds of integration and purification of the brain and body. They have a unique physiological basis.

By higher states of consciousness, we mean more expanded creativity, more expanded intelligence, and even more important, more expanded experience of the Self and the environment—far beyond anything we experience in the ordinary waking state, even on a good day.

Linda Egenes: Can you say a little more about higher states of consciousness and enlightenment?

Dr. Craig Pearson: By higher states of consciousness, we mean more expanded creativity, expanded intelligence, and even more important, expanded experience of the Self and the universe around us—far beyond anything we experience in the ordinary waking state, even on a good day.

Maharishi named these four higher states Transcendental Consciousness, Cosmic Consciousness, God Consciousness, and Unity Consciousness. Each higher state is a progressive stage of *enlightenment*. The fourth state, Transcendental Consciousness, is what we experience during our daily Transcendental Meditation practice. The fifth state, Cosmic Consciousness, is what we are cultivating day by day through our daily TM practice. The sixth and seventh states grow naturally out of these.

Each higher state of consciousness is as different from the waking state as waking is from sleeping or dreaming. Maharishi refers to “the seven worlds of the seven states of consciousness.” That drives home the point that each state of consciousness, starting with waking, sleeping, and dreaming, presents us with an utterly different world of experience from the others. At the same time, each one is completely natural and normal, a quantum expansion of our unlimited potential.

This is a *developmental* model. Maharishi has described the dynamics of how each higher state builds on the previous one. We now have a clear and detailed picture of how human development progresses beyond the adult waking state.

Linda Egenes: So reading this book could be a great way for people who already meditate to understand their own experiences better?


Dr. Craig Pearson: Also a great way to introduce people to the Transcendental Meditation technique. It's important for people to see that the TM technique offers far more than relief from stress and anxiety, or lowering high blood pressure, as important as those things are. Those things are early stepping stones on the way to fulfilling our highest potential as human beings. The ultimate goal is enlightenment.

Linda Egenes is co-editor of Enlightenment: The Transcendental Meditation® Magazine. She is the author of five books, including Super Healthy Kids: A Parent's Guide to Maharishi Ayurveda, co-authored with Kumuda Reddy, M.D.

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written by a guest

wow just wow. and thanks. I didn't know there were so many examples of so many people, some famous and some not, who've had these remarkable experiences and who describe them beautifully, making you want to have them also. Very inspiring.

...

written by a guest

Two of my degrees were in Philosophy and Art History and of course 40 years with Maharishi's teaching. I look forward to reading the book

Author A Symphony of Silence, George Ellis

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