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REAL LIFE STORY

Find your own MEDITATIVE path

Susan Shumsky tells us what 20 years in the Transcendental Meditation Movement taught her

In the 1960s, I was attending art college in the San Francisco Bay area, counterculture central, where I fully embraced the hippie lifestyle. But it wasn't only about sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll. We Flower children were seriously seeking higher consciousness. Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert (a.k.a. Ram Dass), authors of *The Psychedelic Experience*, advised us to "Turn on, tune in, and drop out". On my continued quest for higher awareness, I read every spiritual book I could find. Alan Watts emphasized the importance of a "meditation guide" in his books. But good luck finding that in the telephone directory in 1966 Berkeley, California.



Real meditation

Finally a friend took me to the Transcendental Meditation (TM) center in late 1966. When I saw a photo of Maharishi beaming from the wall, I knew this was where I would learn real meditation. At age 19, in August 1967, during the Summer of Love, I was initiated into TM. I was so impressed by TM, which restored my sanity and transformed my life, that at age 21, in December 1969, I travelled to Rishikesh, India, to attend Maharishi's TM Teacher Training Course in the Himalayan foothills on the Ganges riverbank. There were about 100 students at the ashram and as many monkeys, peacocks, crows, centipedes, and scorpions. We stayed in the jungle in basic cinderblock and concrete rooms with a cot, table, and chair. Toilets and showers were outdoors, where we bathed in cold to lukewarm water. But I was bathing in bliss as I meditated up to ten hours a day and attended Maharishi's lectures.

The Giggling Guru

Maharishi was the happiest man I'd ever met. Because he was always cracking jokes and laughing at them, reporters dubbed him the "giggling guru." Charismatic to the point of hypnotic, he exuded a powerful love energy. His glance transmitted



waves of bliss that wafted over me, elevating my consciousness. While in his presence, I felt I was the only person, and now was the only time that existed. I stayed on in Rishikesh for six months in 1970, and subsequently ended up serving on his personal staff in Austria, Mallorca, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland from 1971 to 1976. In the unbelievably intense atmosphere around Maharishi, I endured an emotional rollercoaster. It was heaven when he blasted me with divine love and made me feel special and important. I decided to leave for various reasons, but I now have a more balanced perspective.

What I learned from TM:

1 True spiritual masters

have only one goal — to lift their students' consciousness. They don't follow social conventions, and their actions can't be judged, measured, or fathomed. If you could truly understand a spiritual master, you'd be one. So don't be hasty when deciding what teacher to study with. The one who flatters your ego might not be your best choice.

2 I developed so many skills under my guru's guidance:

not only teaching meditation, but also many other practical skills. In addition, I developed patience, concentration, perseverance, unwavering focus, and relentless optimism — skills I draw upon every day of my life. If a spiritual master is worth his/her salt, you can gain a lot from studying with one.

3 Just like a hen that forces its fledglings out of the nest,

a true spiritual master will encourage students towards independence. Maharishi once said, "You are too dependent on me as a person. I won't always be here." We're all independent learners.

4 One day Maharishi walked up to me out of the blue and said,

"Don't look to anyone. When you don't look to anyone, then everyone will look to you." Decades later I realized what he'd meant. When he said, "don't look to anyone," he was referring to everyone — including himself. Don't follow any teacher that seeks adulation.

YOU'RE THE GOAL

Once I left the ashram behind, I found the precious jewel of spiritual awakening I'd been seeking. I found myself. Whether you study with a guru or not, you'll eventually find within yourself all the answers and all the love you'll ever need. The path to enlightenment isn't a path. It's a realization that you are already the goal.

Meet Susan...



Maharishi & Me: Seeking Enlightenment with The Beatles' Guru by Susan Shumsky is out now, priced at £19.99 and is available on amazon.co.uk

