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THE TORONTO STAR

# LIFE



ANDREW STAWICKI/TORONTO STAR

**In the lobby of the Royal York Hotel, Ron Robins takes time to recharge his energy through transcendental meditation.**



# Executive *meditation*

By Janice Turner  
TORONTO STAR

**T**HE GENTLEMAN on the other end of the phone is speaking quietly, thoughtfully, frankly. Then he pauses. He isn't going to be *identified* is he?

As president of a Toronto investment house, he isn't eager to be publicly known as a meditator, a longtime practitioner of transcendental meditation (TM). At least not yet.

Every morning and every night as he commutes on the GO train, George sits up comfortably, closes his eyes and meditates for 20 minutes.

"I can't imagine not doing it," says the sixty-something investment counsellor. "I *wouldn't* not do it."

Unbeknownst to his fellow commuters, George has moved into a state of restful alertness; a state of both deep relaxation and heightened consciousness.

Don't misunderstand. TM practitioners aren't sitting there, eyes closed, in a trance. They in-

The '60s may be a distant memory, but transcendental meditation is still around, and some of its most loyal practitioners are from the stressed-out Bay Street crowd

sist their minds are lively, yet undirected, and that they are fully aware of what's transpiring around them.

"People sleep on the train all the time, so I don't look at all unusual," George says. "None of the noise bothers me. It's terribly convenient."

He chooses his words carefully. He doesn't want to overstate the benefits of TM. But it has personally made him more relaxed, more alert

and more creative. In short, he swears by it.

On airplanes and trains, in homes and offices and hotel mezzanines, that's where growing numbers of corporate Canadians are getting recharged, through TM. Since 1961, more than 20,000 people in Metro have taken up TM, about 60 per cent of them business executives and professionals.

Ron Robins, a TM instructor and executive vice-president of the Toronto Association of Professionals Practicing The Transcendental Meditation Program, says more and more executives are shedding their "cultural blinkers" and are using TM to boost their performance and alleviate stress.

He points out that there have been more than 400 published scientific studies, from over 160 independent research institutions around the world, to back up assertions that TM can improve a person's mental, physical and social health.

Indeed the Japanese are so convinced that more than 100 major Japanese companies have established corporate meditation programs, Please see TM/page B2



# TM: Recharging your batteries

Continued from page B1

with some even providing meditation rooms.

Among Robins' clients count senior executives from every major Canadian bank as well as a slew of investment firms. The Toronto professional association, started just three years ago, now boasts more than 500 members.

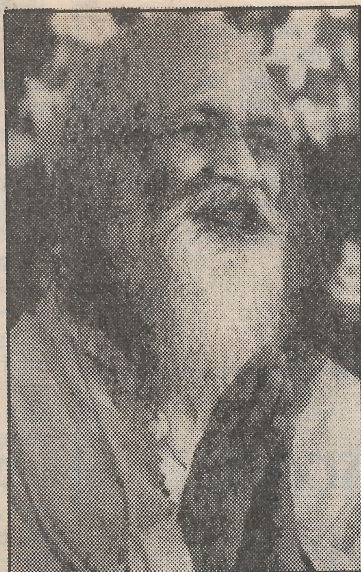
Robins, who holds an MBA, also runs a TM corporate development program.

"When companies tell me that it doesn't fit into their priorities, then they haven't got their priorities straight," says Robins, dressed in a dark gray pinstripe suit, crisp white shirt, fashionable burgundy tie and jet black banker's shoes. "The number one priority today has to be employee performance."

People who practise TM often say they feel more alert, can think clearer and have more energy. In general they say they feel more ease and more positive about life.

TM isn't a religion, Robins says. You don't have to change your eating habits or your dress.

It does require formal training



**MAHARISHI YOGI**

than a little skeptical about TM when Robins came to talk to her in her job as an employee benefits consultant.

"I was one of his toughest critics," she says. "But my mind is less cluttered as a result of TM. I have greater clarity and focus."

George emphasizes that it's not that all of your troubles disappear overnight. But feelings of calm and well-being do seem to take over.

TM, he underlines, is highly personal and individual. He believes it helped him to quit smoking and he has found he doesn't drink as much alcohol as he once did.

"Most people in the business community, for obvious reasons, don't like to talk about it. Some of them are total closets and won't even admit to it," George says. "I'm not trying to make a statement or draw attention to myself, but it works for me. It suits me to a T."

"It's preventive, as much as anything," says Nancy Fox, a bank executive who travels frequently.

Fox, 35, took up TM about 18 months ago after attending an introductory seminar held at her fitness club. She says she now thinks more clearly and is more relaxed.

"I also find I'm more open to other people's ideas, I can communicate better . . . At times you almost feel like you're an observ-

tate?

"You just kind of see what floats or doesn't float through your mind. You tune into yourself."

It was after a year-long recovery from a horrendous car crash that Drena Nielsson decided to get in touch with her inner self and to learn to cope with chronic pain.

"I had read a little bit about it, but not a lot," she recalls.

Not only did TM help her look inward, it almost invariably relieves the otherwise constant pain in her feet.

"I don't know how it works or why it works, all I know is that most of the time when I meditate I cannot feel my feet, which means that I'm totally without pain. I know it's bizarre and I can't explain it."

At another level, "I've really come to terms with things, I'm much more understanding, more tolerant and more accepting."

Nielsson, who works in the education field of labor relations, gets up at 5:30 each morning so she has enough time to meditate.

"I never thought in my whole life that I would get up at that



TM isn't a religion, Robins says. You don't have to change your eating habits or your dress.

It does require formal training by a TM instructor. One-time fees are \$400 for the general course, \$600 for the extended corporate program. The fees are eligible for a tuition tax credit.

As a monk in India during the 1940s and '50s, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi developed a form of meditation that could be easily practised by people in the modern world. He made his first tour of the West in 1959.

Transcendental meditation uses a mantra, a sound that has no meaning, that when repeated is said to allow the mind to settle into profound state of relaxation. It does not involve concentration or contemplation, or, for that matter, any real effort at all.

"All it takes is the simple ability to think a thought," says Robins, who's been teaching TM for more than 20 years. "If you can do that, you can do TM successfully."

"You're fully aware of what's going on. It's not like you're losing control or anything like that . . . In all of my years of teaching I've never had anyone who has not been able to learn it."

Simple yet effective. That's how Daphne Woolf describes transcendental meditation.

"Just don't paint me as some kind of flake," says Woolf, a 32-year-old principal with William M. Mercer Ltd. in Toronto.

Woolf admits she was more

"I was one of his toughest critics," she says. "But my mind is less cluttered as a result of TM. I have greater clarity and focus."

Woolf says she tried other relaxation techniques but none worked as well. Although she has to get up earlier to squeeze TM into her day, she isn't bothered. Because of TM she finds she doesn't need as much sleep.

"It is absolutely natural and the less you do (while you're meditating) the better it is," she says. Quoting another practitioner she adds: "It's like leaves falling off the trees, the tension falls away."

"It's mind-settling. You just let your thoughts wander and when you're finished you feel refreshed. It's wonderful."

George's colleagues at his investment firm know he meditates. He has meditated on airplanes and once, when pressed for time, at a restaurant table.

"I do it as regularly as cleaning my teeth," he says. "My friends could care less when or where I do it but one doesn't usually go off announcing it."

George embraced TM after seeing a videotape of the Maharishi.

"Apart from everything else (including one extraordinary flash of higher consciousness), it is the greatest stress reliever I've ever known. I can block anything out, anywhere."

"The moment you get the clenched teeth feeling out of your system you have more time for everything else. Everything else looks and gets easier."

relaxed.

"I also find I'm more open to other people's ideas, I can communicate better . . . At times you almost feel like you're an observer to what's going on. You can put some distance between yourself and what's happening around you. There's not all that other sort of junk and noise interfering with the decisions you have to make."

That isn't to say that Fox doesn't experience stress. She does. But she finds that she is much better equipped to handle it.

How does she fit it into her busy schedule?

"Basically I just decided that I was going to get up 25 minutes earlier in the morning."

After her morning shower she sits down in a comfortable chair in her living room and meditates.

"It's my highest priority each day."

If she can't find another convenient time, she meditates on the subway on her way home from work. She's meditated on airplanes "tons of times."

"And if I'm working late at the office I'll take a (meditation) break about 6 o'clock. It's an incredible recharger."

What do her co-workers think?

"Most people are curious about it, in a positive way. I don't go around flaunting the fact that I do it, but I don't hide it either. The people I work with know that I find it very helpful."

What is it like for her to medi-

itates? Robins gets up at 5:30 each morning so she has enough time to meditate.

"I never thought in my whole life that I would get up at that hour," she says. "But it becomes a habit and because it does so much good you just don't stop."

"There is nothing mystical about it at all. Your thoughts bubble to the surface. You don't control anything . . . You're calming the mind, calming the body. It's such a simple, practical exercise and it's got nothing to do with anything but yourself."

□ For more information on the Toronto Association of Professionals Practicing The Transcendental Meditation Program, call 925-9380.