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## HIGHER LEARNING MAHARISHI PREP



Ben Pollack is a preternaturally self-possessed eleventh grader from Fairfield, Iowa, who is considering a career in public relations, because, he says, "I love speaking to people about what I feel, and what I believe in." Such a misapprehension of the publicist's usual relationship to sincerity will not get young Pollack very far at some of New York City's better-known public-relations establishments; but it stood him in good stead last week when he was flown into town to appear at a press conference advocating the use of Transcendental Meditation among schoolkids. Pollack has been a practitioner of Transcendental Meditation since he was ten years old, and he, along with a handful of other junior meditators, had been drafted by the New York Committee for Stress-Free Schools to demonstrate just how fantastically healthful and helpful a state of what was described as "restful alertness" could be for the city's teen-agers—who, New York parents will have observed, are more typically prone to a state of restless lethargy.

The press conference included testimony from a variety of educators and scientists touting the virtues of TM: Gary Kaplan, the director of clinical neurophysiology at North Shore University Hospital, on Long Island, spoke of the "coherence of activity between the hemispheres and the front and the back of the brain," while Jane Roman Pitt, a senior fellow at the Institute of Science, Technology and Public Policy, in Fairfield, Iowa, described benefits more easily comprehended by a layperson. "To walk into a room and see a hundred middle-school students in a state of silence—

deep, pure silence that you can feel as well as hear—is wonderful," she said.

The highlight of the morning, though, was the demonstration by Pollack and half a dozen of his peers, who, on command, folded their hands in their laps, shut their eyes, and did a few minutes' worth of meditation in their chairs. All of them appeared immediately to achieve a state of restful alertness—except for one small boy who kept rubbing behind his eyeglasses and snatching quick squints at three TV cameramen who were circling the meditators, shining bright lights in their faces and trying to eke some B-roll dynamism out of the scene.

Afterward, the schoolkids attested to the transformative powers of TM—which, if their testimony was to be believed, was a treatment not just for stress but for the traumas of adolescence itself. Riva Winningham, an eleventh-grade student from the Maharishi School of the Age of Enlightenment, a high school named for the founder of TM, in Fairfield, Iowa (also the location of the Maharishi University of Management, which offers a curriculum based on "Higher Consciousness and Professional Excellence"), said that after she took up meditation her grade-point average increased substantially. Sixteen-year-old Leala Omansky, who is a student at Lawrence Woodmere Academy, on Long Island, said that TM "makes you more relaxed and, I have to say, friendly—you just attract people." Omansky's facility for attracting people may also have had something to do with the fact that, with long dark hair and perfect skin and shining eyes, she was transcendently pretty and uncannily composed, as if she were about to apply not for college but for a job on the "Today" show.

Ben Pollack, also of the Maharishi School, who wore a gold mezuzah around his neck and a beatific look on his face, likewise testified to meditation's ameliorative effects on the usual unpleasant-

nesses of teen-agerdom. TM got rid of cliques—"I used to have very few friends, but at this school everyone is friends with everyone," he said—and homework-induced exhaustion. At the suggestion that one way to reduce stress in students might just be to cut down on the size of homework assignments, Pollack said, "Transcendental Meditation makes my thinking clearer, so now I can get through any amount of homework. I can do five hours if I need to." While Pollack allowed that TM could not actually eliminate acne, he pointed out that it had been shown to have physiological benefits, such as reducing high blood pressure.

And Pollack showed an ability to stay



on message which boded very well for his future career. Had the television-camera lights presented any obstacle to his achieving meditative transcendence during the demonstration, earlier? On the contrary. "I didn't even feel the cameras around me," he said. "In fact, it felt more like an inner light than an outer light."

—Rebecca Mead