



April 2018 Church & State Magazine | Books & Ideas by [Rob Boston](#)

* In the late 1970s, Americans United joined forces with a conservative group in a legal challenge to the teaching of Transcendental Meditation (TM) in a New Jersey public school. AU and its allies, which argued that TM is an offshoot of Hinduism, won the lawsuit.

That should have ended the matter. But TM adherents retooled their belief as a “science” and, backed by filmmaker David Lynch, have been pushing anew to get it into public schools. Several in California have taken the bait.

Aryeh Siegel, who practiced TM from 1971-81, argues in his new book *Transcendental Deception* (Janreg Press, 222 pp.) that the use of TM in public schools presents a serious church-state violation.

Siegel notes that TM is anchored in what he calls a “watered-down” version of Hinduism practiced by the late Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. He asserts that this “simplified” version was subjected to a “slice and dice” by the Maharishi while still retaining some core rituals of that ancient faith.

Over time, TM advocates began making extravagant claims – that they could teach people to fly, become invisible and have “supernormal” sight and hearing. They began calling the movement a “science.” (For a time, TM even had a political arm called the Natural Law Party.) Practitioners insisted that TM could end all crime and terrorism, as well as bring world peace.

Siegel’s beef is not with meditation. That practice, he notes, can be very helpful as a stress-reduction tool, and students can benefit from it. But, as Siegel points out, there are many truly secular meditation techniques that don’t come saddled with TM’s baggage.

Adults have the right to join whatever religion they want, even ones with unusual or esoteric beliefs. But when religious movements attempt to clothe themselves as science to sneak into public institutions and target kids, there’s ample cause for concern. Siegel makes a strong case that TM doesn’t belong in our public schools.

ISSUES:

FOUNDATIONS OF CHURCH-STATE SEPARATION

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