Levitation—is it possible? Can human beings really leave the ground through the power of the mind alone? How can this extraordinary defiance of gravity be induced at will? These are some of the questions answered in this epoch-making book, one of the first ever to lay bare the occult meditational techniques by which the mind can lift the body off the ground.

The secrets of levitation are centuries old, but they have remained in the hands of a few adepts—until now. This book gives you the facts, the history, the controversies, the theories, and, above all the techniques—everything, in fact, you should know about meditation.

Among the topics covered here are:

- Transcendental Meditation™ and levitation
- Science and levitation
- Famous fakirs and fakers
- The connection between levitation and the chakras
- Astral power
- The power of the mind—how to harness it

This is an essential guide for anyone interested in the power of the mind, the legends of the East, Transcendental Meditation™, occult and metaphysical practices, and of course, anyone interested in a good giggle.
The Madras Brahman who claimed to sit in the air by Yoga powers.

Reward of Rs. 1,000.

The above sum is offered to any one who, by yoga powers, will raise himself three feet from the ground, and remain suspended for ten minutes.

Levitation! Is it for real? Students of psychic phenomena have been asking that question for centuries, and not getting many answers. Levitation is a rather unique kind of psychic phenomenon. It is not like astral projection, or psychometry, or precognition. It is the sort of thing Joseph of Cupertino might have done three centuries ago, or that some mahatma in India or Tibet might do today. But it is not the kind of thing an ordinary person would expect to do. And certainly not in the Western World.

That is why a lot of eyebrows were raised in mid-1977 when the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi announced that not only could he levitate; he could teach others to do it, too. After all, the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi is famous for his Transcendental Meditation (TM) technique. He has a reputation for methods that are not only simple to teach and easy to learn, but also that work—and work well.

‘Levitation is the most profound of the siddhis yet available,’ a TM instructor told me. ‘Maharishi says it’s all a matter of mind-body coordination. Tell your body to walk and it does it. No problem. But tell it to rise into the air “by mere intention” and it doesn’t. Improve your mind-body coordination and you can do that too.’

It all sounded familiar. Since the early seventies TM people have been amassing study after study, showing that meditators have better memories than other people, sleep better, run faster, make better grades in school, even see better. One TM instructor I interviewed even says meditators have fewer cavities. But levitation?
‘It’s not so strange,’ was the reply. ‘In the Vedas, which are the oldest records of human achievement, there are stories of people doing these things. These abilities were heretofore considered to be “supernatural,” but they are now being found to be within the range of normal human potential.

‘The emphasis of the programme is not an isolated demonstration of powers, but rather an accelerated growth towards the state of Enlightenment through the development of special abilities which enliven consciousness in the field of all possibilities.’

I was told that the programme is called the TM-Sidhi Programme, ‘sidhi’ being the preferred TM spelling of the Sanskrit word *siddhi*, which means ‘accomplishment,’ or occult powers. There are Eight Great Siddhis in the yogic tradition, from which TM is ultimately derived, and probably even more in the Sidhi Programme. Levitation is only one of them.

‘You mustn’t think in terms of flying for long distances,’ I was told. ‘Our people are flying only a few feet at a time now. It’s a progressive development. Take, for example, the siddhi of unlimited strength. The first time you do the siddhi you may feel only a slight sensation. But each time you do it you get stronger and stronger, until finally you do have unlimited strength.

‘Maharishi says that there are sixty-four channels of Enlightenment in the human body through which the siddhis manifest themselves. You perform certain exercises and the siddhis emerge from out of the Absolute.

‘There are about seventy of these siddhis in all, but we don’t practise all of them. Maharishi has found some of them to be more beneficial than others.’

Among those Maharishi has found to be more beneficial are Strength, Friendliness, Omniscience, and Invisibility, as well as Levitation. There are rumours that some meditators are even walking through walls.

Maharishi mentioned the siddhis as early as 1962, when he wrote *The Science of Being and Art of Living*. But in the early years
of the TM movement there was too much to do just promoting the idea of meditation and the basic TM technique to worry much about powers. The channels of communication were kept open, though, and advanced meditators were encouraged to tell of their experiences at teacher training courses.

They had plenty to tell. Some felt that they had become invisible or that they could see through other people. Still others had visions of spiritual beings. One instructor, now out of the movement, recalls:

‘I frequently experienced the sensation of becoming gaseous, first filling the room, then expanding over the Mediterranean Sea (while in Spain), and finally extending throughout the universe.’

These experiences are of course known to Western scientists. In *The Relaxation Response*, Dr. Benson of Harvard University says that ‘from our personal observations, many people who meditate for several hours every day for weeks at a time tend to hallucinate.’ But these scientists tend to write the experience off. The theory is that meditation causes sensory deprivation, and that in turn causes the brain to create its own excitement in the form of ‘siddhi’ experiences.

There is not much doubt, though, that the siddhis experienced by advanced TM meditators are the very same siddhis described in ancient yogic texts. And that raises a serious question. If the siddhis are not real—if they are in fact mere symptoms of sensory deprivation—an important part of the yogic tradition is called into question.

As a yogi, and a yogi who had access to large numbers of devoted siddhi-experience experiencers, Maharishi felt the need to determine the truth. He purchased two old hotels in Seelisberg, a little town in Switzerland overlooking Lake Lucerne, and founded the Maharishi European Research University (MERU).

The hotels were the Kulm and the Sonnenberg. They were restored at a cost of about two million pounds and painted in TM’s favourite colours: cream and yellow. Finally, in April 1975, MERU was dedicated.
At first, the rooms were rented out to advanced meditators who wanted to meditate for extended periods in a semi-monastic environment. But in 1976 Maharishi started investigating the siddhis themselves.

He started out with just a few people who had been meditating for an extraordinarily long time—fifteen or twenty years. Basing himself on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, Maharishi worked out simple exercises, or ‘formulas,’ to encourage the siddhis to manifest themselves. The first siddhas were not told what to expect, and some of them were startled when they found out. As one of them put it:

‘Everything happened so fast that before I knew it, I was breaking boundaries that I had never experienced before in my life.’

Subjective siddhis, such as the ability to see hidden things and techniques for ‘refining intuition,’ were included. But the emphasis was on objective siddhis—things that could be noted—especially levitation and invisibility. There is hardly any way a person can hallucinate himself into the air. He either levitates or he does not. And if he does, that proves that something significant is happening. It also proves that the person has reached a certain state of what TM people call ‘Enlightenment.’ A person who rises three feet into the air is said to be more enlightened than a person who only rises two. And a person who can levitate a foot in the air is more enlightened than a person who cannot levitate at all.

The first small group of siddhas was asked to help train others, and so it went. All throughout 1976 siddhi instruction was given to advanced meditators. When the students graduated, they were dubbed ‘executive governors of consciousness’ because they had acquired the ability to ‘govern the trend of time.’

In December, nine hundred TM instructors from all over the world converged on the Seelisberg campus for six months of intensive instruction in the siddhis. According to one of their number, 40 per cent of them levitated, and a few even...
disappeared. All of those who disappeared reappeared eventually, we trust, and in May of the following year the class graduated.

Until then, the course had been called the ‘Governor Training Course of the Age of Enlightenment’ and had been open to teachers only. Stage magician Doug Henning was the only non-instructor allowed to take the course. But starting in May, a new and simplified version of the course was offered to the public—the TM-Sidhi Programme. The new siddhas were organized into promotional teams and sent into the world. Thirty of these teams were sent to the United States alone.

The TM-Sidhi course was offered in two stages: Phase I and Phase II. Phase I was conceived as a ‘preparatory’ programme—four to eight weeks spent at a ‘Capital of the Age of Enlightenment’ in order to ‘stabilize pure awareness.’ Phase II included actual instruction in the siddhis themselves and was organized into four two-week blocks, all to be taken in residence.

I was able to find out about the content of Phase I from one of TM’s dissatisfied customers. Mr. Stephen Rozman is chairman of the Department of Political Science at Tougaloo College in Tougaloo, Mississippi. He was also one of the very first enrollees in the prep course when it was first offered in the United States. I asked him what the course consisted of.

‘Just a lot of long hours of meditation,’ he said. ‘We didn’t get any new techniques except for a pranayama technique. And the instructors did lecture, but it was nothing startling.’

‘What most troubled me at the prep course was the constant change in the programme and the waiting until the last moment to tell us that levitation was an “advanced siddhi” which would demand fifteen hundred extra dollars and four more weeks of time.’

‘I don’t want to come down too hard on them because it seems to me sometimes that I don’t see the whole picture. People who have been through the courses at later dates and other sites have told me that their experiences were more positive.’
Mr. Rozman did not stay for the siddhi programme itself, because he had enrolled initially with the understanding that he would receive levitation instructions within six weeks.

Phase I was later phased out. Then the requirement that potential siddhas had to be meditators for six months was relaxed. Now a meditator is eligible for the siddhi course three months after he learns how to meditate. After that, Phase II was replaced temporarily with a forty day ‘accelerated’ programme, all in an effort to make it easier for people to take the courses. Finally, a part-time siddhi programme was worked out, which requires attendance at a TM centre for two nights a week for six weeks, followed by two weeks in residence to learn the ‘flying siddhi’—levitation. ‘Maharishi’s making this available to everybody,’ an instructor told me.

The irony of it is, though, that Maharishi is not making it available to everybody. The greatest single deterrent to would-be siddhas is not the time required to take the course but the price. And the price has yet to come down.

The prices seem to vary from one country to another. In the United States, Phase I, when it was being offered, cost $245 per week, which brought the total price of the prep programme alone to from $980 to $1,960, depending on whether you were required to stay for four weeks or eight weeks. That is $35 per day, and includes room and board as well as whatever instruction is offered. Not much more than one would expect to pay for a good hotel room, but a hefty sum none the less.

After Phase I came Phase II, at slightly higher prices. The entire Phase II programme costs, at the time of writing, $3,000, or $750 per two-week block. If you take the programme in residence you are allowed to pay for it $750 at a time, at the beginning of each block. But if you take the part-time six-week version, you are required to pay the entire $3,000 at once in advance.

In Canada the prices are somewhat higher. Mr. Bob Pepper is quoted by the Vancouver Sun as saying that the prep course alone would cost ‘a minimum of $3,430’ Canadian. In Britain,
Michael Hellicar of the *Daily Mirror* quotes a price of something over a thousand pounds. The prices are all roughly comparable if one considers the exchange rates and the differences in wages and living costs from one country to the next.

Even at those rates, I am told that twenty thousand people have signed up for the siddhi courses since they were first offered in 1977. That is a lot less than the two million or so who have taken the basic course. But in purely financial terms, twenty thousand siddhas represents the same income to the movement as four hundred thousand meditators.

When the courses were first offered, they were promoted in a vigorous advertising campaign. Display advertisements appeared in the *Village Voice* and the *Montreal Star* promising free lectures on ‘the ability to levitate by mere intention through the Transcendental Meditation Programme.’ According to *Newsweek*, though, when people arrived for the free lectures, ‘many were sorely disappointed and at some centres there were shouts of “put up or shut up” from the audience.’ The lectures did not include any of the secrets whereby levitation was to be accomplished. And they did not include demonstrations.

In an interview with the *Washington Post*, Baltimore lawyer David Sykes explained that ‘we don’t want to get into a circus demonstration type of environment.’ But he did say that ‘if a maximum of ten people, but no more, donate a minimum of $1,000 to the programme, then we’d show them.’ There is every reason to believe the offer was made in good faith because in a statement to the *Los Angeles Times*, printed on 29 November 1977, Mr. David Verrill repeated and clarified it. According to Mr. Verrill, the ten spectators would have to pay $1,000 each.

That is not such a high price to pay to see a man levitating, and on 16 December 1977, an attorney in Los Angeles wrote to the World Plan Executive Council in Pacific Palisades, California, to announce that the terms could be met. The money was raised by the ‘Committee for the Sincere Practice of Yoga,’ which was organized by the Swami Vishnu-Devananda. The
Swami is the author of *The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga* and *Meditation and Mantras* as well as the founder of the International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres, with world headquarters in Val Morin, Quebec (Canada). He feels that as one of the world’s most prominent yogis, he is the conservator of the true yogic tradition, and his attitude toward TM’s levitation claims is—well, sceptical.

His scepticism may well seem justified. Despite the two offers from Mr. Sykes and Mr. Verill and his own response, not one TM instructor has yet given a public demonstration of levitation to date. *Time* magazine intimates that a demonstration might have been forthcoming, but that word came down straight from the Maharishi’s headquarters in Switzerland that such things were ‘undignified.’

It is worth saying, though, that there was one demonstration—at the Maharishi International University in Fairfield, Iowa, in May 1977, when the courses first came out. Four young men did the levitating, and twenty-two people were invited to watch—all but two of them meditators.

‘Witnesses believed that the hopping they saw could be accomplished by experienced gymnasts,’ writes reporter Aubrey Haines.

‘Not so, says the directors of the National Academy of Gymnasts in Eugene, Oregon, who denied that skilled athletes could duplicate the feat, for “there’s no means of gaining thrust with the full lotus.”’

Swami Vishnu would disagree with that last statement, though. He claims there is a means of gaining thrust with the full lotus. In fact, he teaches one.

What you must do is sit in the full lotus, then rock back and forth on your haunches. The first few times you do this, you will find it difficult to maintain your balance, but balance comes in

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* Since the first publication of this book in 1980, public demonstrations of the first stage of flying have been held.
time. When it does, try to acquire momentum by rocking, and then push off from the ground at just the right moment. You will be able to ‘hop’ about a foot into the air.

If a photographer takes your picture with a high-speed camera, it will appear that you are suspended in the air.

This yogic technique is used to bring the energy to the brain preparatory to meditation, but it is considered to be an advanced exercise. In *Meditation and Mantras*, Swami Vishnu says that ‘some spiritual groups teach the exercise to beginners. However, this is physically and psychically dangerous and is not recommended, for it causes the *prana* to move too quickly in the body. Problems can result for those who have not been practising *asanas* and more simple *pranayamas* for a number of years.’

One problem can be a premature arousal of *Kundalini*, an almost mystical energy in the human system that can be extremely beneficial if aroused properly, and extremely dangerous if not. But our problem is a little different.

Swami does not say in *Meditation and Mantras* just who he means by ‘some spiritual groups,’ but in interviews he and his disciples have been more explicit. As I said, he is sceptical that the TM meditators are really levitating, and he suspects that the levitation photos that the TM organization has published were taken as previously described in this chapter.

Not that he is sceptical about levitation *per se*. In *Meditation and Mantras*, he says that ‘these siddhis do exist,’ but in a later interview with the *News World* he added certain qualifications to that statement: ‘To do certain feats such as levitation takes many years of practice in breathing exercises, and diet, and no smoking or drinking or drugs.’

If that is true, then obviously no one could learn to levitate in eight weeks.

But with all respect due to the Swami, and he is due a very great deal of respect, the rock-and-push ‘hopping’ technique is not the technique that was used for making the TM levitation
photos. The Swami’s photographs are ingenious, but they leave the mystery of TM levitation unsolved.

In the first place, anyone who has ever tried the Swami’s hopping technique knows that a good deal of physical effort is involved. And if you look closely at his photos, you can see that the people shown ‘levitating’ in them are working very hard. There is a certain tension and in some cases contortion of the body that gives it away. TM meditator-levitators in the photos released by the TM organization are always shown in a relaxed position. And another point: anyone who uses Swami’s methods must use his hands to push off from the ground. Otherwise he cannot rise very high. All three of the Swami’s people are shown with their arms extended. That is a giveaway that would appear in any faked photo. Yet in the TM photos, the levitators usually have their hands clasped, or else they leave them drooping loosely in their laps.

There is one other thing that is not objective, but that one picks up in interviews with TM levitators and instructors, and that is their apparent sincerity. Rick Fields captured it best in his article for the New Age magazine. When he expressed his own doubts to New York TM instructor John Macey, Mr. Macey replied:

‘But—it’s—it’s—I was there, and there were hundreds of people who were levitating and disappearing and just having the ability to know anything on the level of inner sense awareness—just because this pure consciousness is operating from this infinitely conscious level.’

It is hard for anyone who has sensed it to set this kind of sincerity aside. It’s obvious these people believe they are levitating, whether they are or not. All that remains for us is to determine whether or not their beliefs are correct.