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F O R T W O R T H

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Filmmaker Lynch finds peace with Transcendental Meditation

By MICHAEL KRESS, Religion News Service

David Lynch, who has practiced Transcendental Meditation for years, says he wants to raise money for consciousness-based education. How much? "I say \$7 billion would get a real good start," he says.

In works such as *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks*, filmmaker David Lynch has explored the darker side of human nature. In his personal life, though, Lynch has found contentment and balance by practicing Transcendental Meditation.

Popularized by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Transcendental Meditation involves twice-daily sessions in which practitioners meditate on a specific mantra. Lynch has worked to publicize scientific research on the benefits of TM, and his David Lynch Foundation for Consciousness-Based Education and World Peace works to bring TM into schools to reduce student stress.

Lynch recently spoke about the effects of TM on his life and his plans for bringing the Maharishi's teachings to a much broader audience.

Question: You've been meditating since 1973. What effect has it had on your life?

Answer: It had an effect right away, and that right-away effect was this anger lifted away from me. I knew I had this anger, and I'd take it out on my first wife. Two weeks after I started meditating, she came to me and said, "What's going on? ... This anger -- where did it go?" And I honestly didn't know that it had lifted.

Q: What is involved in practicing Transcendental Meditation?

A: You're given a mantra, and Maharishi did not make up these mantras. They're ancient. Transcendental Meditation is an ancient teaching. It works if you're a human being.

You sit comfortably, you close your eyes, and you start your mantra. And that mantra, word, thought, vibration, turns the mind within, and you start to experience subtler levels of mind, intellect, and then, there, at the source of thought you transcend, you experience that ocean of pure consciousness -- sometimes called "pure bliss consciousness" or the "absolute" or "being" or "divine being."

In Vedic language, that pure consciousness -- that ocean of pure consciousness -- is called "atma," meaning the self, the self of us all. And when you experience this pure consciousness,



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you enliven it, you unfold it, and it starts to grow in the individual. So whatever consciousness you had when you start this process, now that consciousness is growing.

As Maharishi teaches, mankind was not made to suffer. Bliss is our nature. Life should be blissful, and blissful doesn't mean just a small happiness. It's huge. It is profound. It's like totality. This atma becomes brahma, totality. It's there, it's our potential, it's our birthright to enjoy enlightenment. You just need to unfold it.

Q: How do you take that sense of bliss and transcendence that you achieve beyond the 20 or 40 minutes a day that you're meditating and make it really part of your life?

A: On the EEG machine, Dr. Fred Travis [a professor at the Maharishi University of Management] was showing the brain waves of a beginning meditator and a meditator of, I think, eight or 10 years. The experience of transcending is exactly the same. Transcending is transcending.

The difference is, the beginning meditator doesn't carry that inactivity in waking, sleeping or dreaming. Whereas the 10-year meditator, they see that even engaged in activity; the total brain, more and more, is holding that transcendence. And cosmic consciousness is when you have that 24/7, locked in.

It's not like you have to wait and wait and wait and suddenly you get the full present on Christmas -- it gets better and better and better on the way to the full enchilada.

Q: Do you feel like that highest level is something that you will achieve at some point in your own life?

A: I doubt it. I just know things are getting better.

Q: Do you have other spiritual practices in addition to TM or religious affiliation that you also follow?

A: Well, I was raised Presbyterian, but I'm not really going to church. I think the experience in meditation is pretty much where it's at for me.

Q: Do you have a favorite prayer or mantra?

A: The mantra that you're given in Transcendental Meditation you keep to yourself. The reason being, true happiness is not out there, true happiness lies within.

Q: If somebody wants to start TM, what's the first step they should take?

A: The first step is to go to a TM center, find a legitimate teacher of TM. There's apparently a lot of rogue teachers out there who will teach you for less money or for this or this or this, or they say it's Transcendental Meditation and it's not. Get a legitimate teacher; make sure of that.

Then it's a seven-part process, starting with an introductory lecture and then learning it, and then having your first meditation, and then follow-up lectures. Know what it is and have your questions answered, know that you're meditating correctly, and then off you go.

The big thing that stops people is \$2,500. And that is an obstacle for people. Some of that money goes to the teacher, and some of it goes toward world peace, and it's a big chunk.

A lot of times those people who say they can't afford it, you go in their house and they've got lots and lots of toys that cost more than that. It's with you for the rest of your life. It takes you to your full potential, and it's a gift.

Q: Why is TM education such a big focus of what you're doing now?

A: The idea [was] to see if we could get 10,000 students meditating, to create a wave of peace. We're like light bulbs, and the more we glow with this consciousness or unity, the more we project that. We affect our environment.

And we can affect it in a negative way, a neutral way almost, or a super positive way. And the more of this light we project, the more positive it is. And it transforms life.

Q: What is the significance of 10,000 people meditating?

A: Ten thousand people meditating scattered about is a good thing, but 10,000 people meditating as a group is, they say, "quadratically more powerful."

Real peace is not just the absence of war. Everybody knows there have been times where there have been no wars, but the seeds of war, the negativity, is still there. So real peace is, believe it or not, the absence of negativity. It's a positive world. It's real peace.

So I would like to raise money to get consciousness-based education going and to get these large peace-creating groups going. And one idea is a university of peace, where you can kill two birds with one stone -- have consciousness-based education in a university of 8,000 or more students, and as they're learning, they're also doing their program as a group, which would be so powerful.

Q: How much money are you looking to raise, and how confident are you that you'll be able to do that?

A: I say \$7 billion would get a real good start. They say about three or four B-1 bombers would get peace on Earth. Instead of building those bombers ... put seven peace-creating groups of 8,000-plus together and watch the need for B-1 bombers disappear.

On the individual level it's a lot of money. There's not that many people that could make it happen, but I sure would love to speak to Bill Gates about it.

Q: How has TM influenced your filmmaking and creative life?

A: I love ideas, and everything starts with an idea -- a piece of furniture, a painting, a piece of music; it's ideas, ideas, ideas. And if you could expand your consciousness, you can catch ideas at a deeper level. That means that there's more in that idea. There's more understanding of that idea. There's more spark of inspiration in that idea.

Q: You've talked a lot about this state of peace and transcendence that TM brings you. Is there any sort of disconnect between that and the darker aspects of life that you depict in so many of your films?

A: I think you don't need to suffer to show suffering. And that's sort of what happens. You still fall in love with certain ideas, and stories will always have contrast, conflicts, highs and lows, goods and bads. It's just a way a story is supposed to be. But the storyteller does not have to suffer or have those same things that the characters have.

IN THE KNOW

Transcendental Meditation is still alive

"TM? Is that still around?" That's the immediate reaction of many to the mention of Transcendental Meditation.

After a bright turn in the psychedelic limelight of the 1960s when it was embraced by celebrities such as the Beatles and Donovan, it seemed to go the way of bell bottoms, flower power and love beads.

But others maintain that it has never gone away. Even in the years when TM "was not so popular in the United States, it was extremely popular in other areas of the world," says Bill Sands, director of the Maharishi Enlightenment Center in Paoli, Pa.

An estimated 1.5 million people in the United States practice TM twice a day. Repeating a mantra given by a teacher, they settle into a quiet and relaxed state.

"It's as if you are a deep-sea diver with lead boots on," Donovan says. "You dive immediately and deeper than ever with TM."

Adherents describe a blissful state. Their well-being is echoed in medical study after study, about 700 in all, attesting to the benefits of meditation, specifically TM.

There has been a surge in recent planning for 3,000 "peace palaces," centers for meditation, incorporating spa treatments and holistic health approaches.

Construction and placement of the pre-engineered peace palaces are according to ancient Vedic tradition of natural balance with an entrance facing north or east.

It all stems from the work of a gentle Hindu monk who in the 1950s began teaching the way to enlightenment with what he called Transcendental Meditation. As it was taken up by countercultural icons of the '60s and '70s, photos of the mystical Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's grizzled locks and flowing robes appeared regularly. Those images and the alternative nature of TM may make it seem cultish.

"There can be that impression," Hamilton says. "People will make of it whatever they will."