

Magazine

Accredited Bliss

By CHARLES WILSON DEC. 11, 2005

If you think financing a motion picture is difficult, consider for a moment the fundraising benchmark that the filmmaker David Lynch set this year for his new David Lynch Foundation for Consciousness-Based Education and World Peace: \$7 billion. The director of "Mulholland Drive" hopes to finance seven "universities of peace," with endowments of \$1 billion each, where students would practice Transcendental Meditation.

Developed by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in the late 1950's, T.M. is a technique whereby individuals repeat a mantra to themselves during two 20-minute sessions per day. Lynch began practicing it 32 years ago as a student. T.M. rid him of his deep anger, he says, and enlivened his creative process. "When you dive within," Lynch says, "you experience an unbounded ocean of bliss consciousness."

Lynch says he believes that undergraduates today -- 3 of 10 of whom say they suffer from depression or an anxiety disorder -- need to find that unbounded ocean even more than he did in 1973. To that end, he has recently offered to help underwrite for-credit "peace studies" classes, which would include T.M. instruction, at a number of universities. Pending approval, American University will offer one of these classes next year. Researchers there will also begin studying the technique's effects on student grades, I.Q.'s and mental health.

Drawing on the work of John Hagelin, a quantum physicist and T.M. practitioner, Lynch harbors broader hopes that the seven universities of peace could enable the square root of 1 percent of the world's population -- about 8,000 people -- to simultaneously do an advanced version of the T.M. technique called "yogic flying."

Lynch and Hagelin say that a mass meditation of this size could have a palliative effect upon the "unified field" of consciousness that connects all human beings and thereby bring about the conditions for world peace.

This fall, Lynch toured 13 schools across the United States to promote his plans. Skeptics might wonder how a filmmaker renowned for his dark visions could devote so much energy to the cultivation of happiness. Lynch, however, sees no contradiction. "You don't have to suffer yourself to portray suffering," he says.

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