

Stress Reduction

Mind Over Markets

Meditation is helping millions get focused, stay healthy—and make money

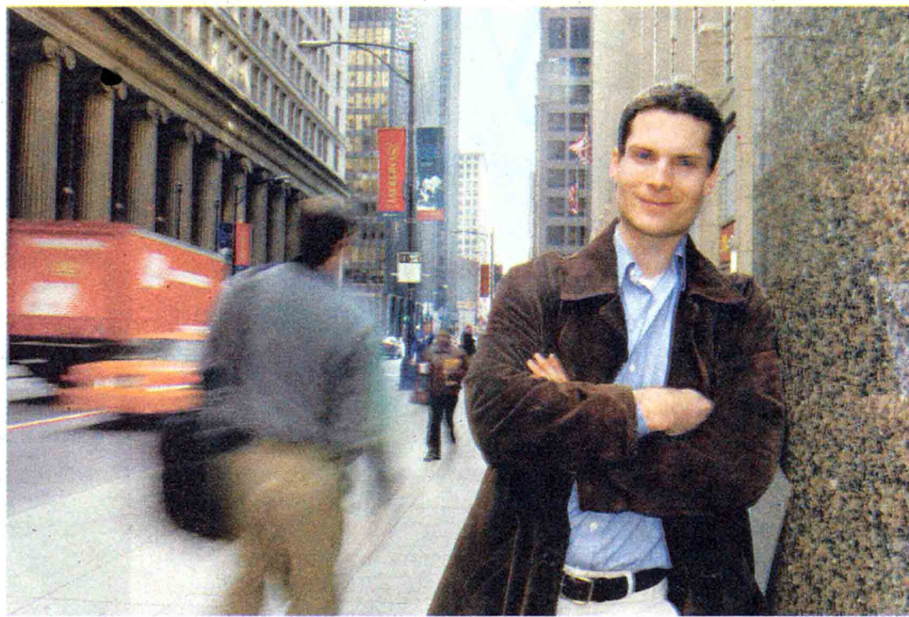
BY ROBIN GOLDWYN BLUMENTHAL

CLOSE YOUR EYES—AND IMAGINE what it would be like to be one with the market, any market. See the numbers flash on a screen. See yourself smoothly executing trades. See the profits piling up, effortlessly.

Now open your eyes. Wouldn't it be nice if it were that easy all the time? For some traders and corporate professionals who have been practicing meditation techniques, conjuring inner markets—and then winning in real ones—it isn't just a dream.

"If your mind is clear, you're going to be able to get into the rhythm of the market better," says Arjuna Martlin, 29, a successful day trader in Chicago and an ardent practitioner of Transcendental Meditation, one of the most popular forms of meditation in the U.S. "It allows you to enter the 'zone.'"

If the idea of a meditating day trader sounds conspicuously counterintuitive and anti-frenetic, it is. Yet, improving trading is just one of the many new uses people are finding for a practice that was once the province of hippies and enlightenment seekers.



Soothing his inner wheeler-dealer: Trader Arjuna Martlin meditates twice daily; it helps him keep a clear head as he navigates the German futures market.

The practice of all "mind-body therapies," including meditation, yoga and hypnosis, has skyrocketed in the past few years, as evidence grows that the techniques may be useful not only in helping

people cope with stress and become more focused, but also in preventing disease—enough to spur some insurers to look at whether meditators should be considered at lower risk for certain illnesses.

Nearly 20% of Americans now practice at least one mind-body technique—and meditation tops the list of those techniques, according to a Harvard Medical School study, published in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*. Yes, meditation is even more popular than yoga, now a staple at health clubs and spas across the country.

The Transcendental Meditation program, brought to the U.S. in 1959 by the Indian teacher and physicist Maharishi Mahesh Yogi—the same fellow who taught the Beatles to meditate—has been growing in leaps and bounds. In the past 10 years, organizers say, some two million people worldwide learned TM, matching the numbers of the previous 20 years.

In meditation, you typically focus on breathing or on silently repeating a specific word or sound—a mantra—for 20 minutes or so. The idea is to put your attention on something beyond the surface static of daily life, thereby tapping into a deeper part of consciousness. Although the approach grew out of ancient religious practices, meditation experts say TM and other programs can be used without any religious framework.

"We've kept the heart of the Buddhist practice, but removed the Eastern trappings—not because we think they're bad,

but because for some folks it gets in the way," says Larry Horwitz, director of outreach at the University of Massachusetts Center for Mindfulness in Medicine.

Proponents say daily meditation can be a tremendous help in earthly realms like business and finance. The practice allows you to "see openings where other people don't," says Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the UMass center and a professor emeritus at the university's medical school. "People say that if the Buddha came back today, maybe he'd be a scientist or a businessman."

Or a trader. Most people make their trading moves emotionally, says longtime meditator Charles Lieb, a hedge-fund manager who times the S&P futures market from a TM-oriented retirement community called Heavenly Mountain in Boonton, N.C. "They should be doing it through unemotional analysis, but it's very difficult to ignore what emotions are telling you."

That's where meditation comes in. It helps you become disciplined and detached from the rush of trading, he says.

Len Oppenheim couldn't agree more. Once an institutional salesman at Montgomery Securities, he now trades for his own account from his home in Fairfield, Iowa, near the Maharishi University of Management, an accredited liberal arts and sciences university with a consciousness-studying and stress-reduction bent.

Oppenheim, who has been practicing TM since 1975, says meditation gives him the perspective he needs for investing.

"Every investing system tells you that you have to be disciplined, to cut your losses and maximize your profits, but

it's a very difficult thing to do in the heat of battle," he says. He recommends reading *The Bhagavad Gita*, a sacred Hindu text that he calls the best trading tool ever.

Indeed, some business heavyweights have become meditation fans. The UMass Center for Mindfulness conducts an annual retreat for business leaders, and the program to be held later this month in Phoenix, N.Y., includes glowing testimonials from the likes of Jeffrey Walker, a vice chairman of J.P. Morgan Chase.

The center also takes its training on the road, to the staff at organizations like BASF, a German chemicals company, and even the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Of course, better business and investing skills aren't meditation's only lures. Its mainstreaming can be explained largely by the apparent health benefits.

Observes Gregg Jacobs, assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and author of *The Ancestral Mind*, "There are hundreds if not thousands of studies showing meditation-based relaxation techniques are effective for treating a variety of health problems," from hypertension to arthritis and other chronic pain.

Gary Kaplan, a neurologist who is director of clinical neurophysiology at North Shore

University Hospital in Manhasset, N.Y., says he's been "more and more impressed by the recent research" showing the effects of TM on hypertension and hardening of the arteries. For instance, studies in several American Heart Association journals have shown that even after a few months, new practitioners of TM have exhibited significantly reduced blood pressure, and a reduction in a measure of hardening of the arteries.

Kaplan, who started practicing TM in college in the '70s, says he often recommends meditation to patients "who are receptive to trying something else" besides traditional therapies, like medication. He says it is becoming more accepted in the medical community, with insurance companies agreeing to pay for it on a limited basis, and some even considering reduced rates for meditators.

Some of the most convincing research has come out of the Institute for Natural Medicine and Prevention at the College of Maharishi Vedic Medicine in Fairfield, Iowa, part of the Maharishi University of Management. It has received more than \$20 million in grant support over the past 15

years from the National Institutes of Health to study what its director and dean of the medical school, Robert Schneider, calls "using the mind-body connection or the body's inner intelligence to have a complementary and preventive effect" on health, particularly hypertension and heart disease.

Still, experts caution that all meditation is not the same. Some forms of meditation can bring about mystical experiences that can disturb and baffle the inexperienced, says Gutman Locks, author of *The Raging Mind*, a book on Jewish meditation. He says a good teacher is essential. Others have criticized many meditation techniques because they say they're inextricably tied to Eastern religions—despite the denials of proponents.

Fans like Martlin, the Chicago trader, have no plans to stop. He was introduced to meditation at the tender age of five, while growing up in Fairfield, Iowa—TM country. He now meditates every morning and evening for 20 minutes a sitting, and insists it helps him during the six hours a day he spends in the market, specializing in German futures. Whatever it takes. ■

Nearly one in five Americans engage in a "mind-body therapy" ... And meditation leads the list.*

