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Filmmaker Starts Foundation to Help Students Chill Out -- with Transcendental Meditation

By Eric Hoover

In the late 1960s, college students closed their eyes, expanded their minds, and made meditation popular on campuses. Now filmmaker David Lynch wants them to do it again.



Mr. Lynch is scheduled to announce today the establishment of the David Lynch Foundation for Consciousness-Based Education and World Peace, an organization that will promote the mental and physical benefits of Transcendental Meditation.

Mr. Lynch, who says he has shut his eyes and entered the "field of oneness" twice each day for 32 years, plans to begin a speaking tour of 50 colleges and universities this fall to tout meditation as a tool for overcoming anxiety and stress. "It's an ingredient that's missing from education," says Mr. Lynch.

The Indian guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi introduced Transcendental Meditation, known as "diving within," a half-century ago. The mental technique is practiced silently for 15 to 20 minutes twice a day. Researchers have found that it can reduce high blood pressure and improve brain function, among other health benefits.

Proponents of the practice say that meditating also can improve students' academic performances and foster their creativity. Students who meditate achieve a state of "relaxed alertness" that helps them complete assignments more easily, according to William R. Stixrud, a clinical neuropsychologist based in Silver Spring, Md., and a member of the foundation's Board of Advisers.

Mr. Lynch's own descriptions of Transcendental Meditation are no less imaginative than his films, in which time does strange things and symbols leap out of the unconscious. Meditating, the director says, is a "dive into pure creativity" that has helped him realize his artistic potential, a portal to the source of "love, consciousness, creativity, and power" that, in a mere two weeks, transformed him from an angry man to a happy fellow.

"It is this light you turn on," he says, "that gets rid of negativity."

Mr. Lynch believes that frazzled high-school and college students are in need of such a light because of academic pressures, fatigue, and stress. He imagines a world in which each student has a class period a day to experience silence and bliss.

His foundation, which he is establishing with his own money, intends to finance meditation classes for students, as well as institutional research on the physiological effects of the technique.

Bob Roth, the foundation's program director and a meditation instructor, says the group will seek to raise additional funds from the entertainment industry and philanthropic groups to help fulfill its mission: to ensure that every child and young adult who wants to learn Transcendental Meditation can do so. The foundation will provide funds for some students to learn the technique and receive follow-up training, Mr. Roth says.

Even more ambitious is the foundation's plan to raise \$7-billion to help establish seven affiliated Universities of World Peace that would train students to become "professional peacemakers." But that is a long-term goal, Mr. Lynch concedes.

Closer to the present, he predicts that college campuses are primed for a Transcendental Meditation revival.

"Some students will say, That's baloney, but others will say, I've got to have that," Mr. Lynch says. "But first they have to hear about it."

College students, who already possess an array of pharmacological treatments for depression and anxiety disorders, may need convincing that taking a timeout twice a day could help them overcome such problems -- or that sitting quietly might do more to soothe them than their favorite alcoholic beverage could.

Then again, a generation that grew up to believe in "the force" from Star Wars may just warm to the message that they can influence their own destiny by looking inward.