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## Top Research Psychiatrist Promotes Meditation for Healing and Transformation

*By Jeanne Ball, writer for the David Lynch Foundation*

Occasionally, an important scientific discovery comes along that surprises the scientists themselves. A world-renowned psychiatrist is speaking out about just such a discovery -- or rather, *rediscovery*: a powerful antidote, he believes, for many of our modern woes, a way to help overcome stress and stress-related disorders while opening a new window to the potentialities of the human brain.

It is not a new drug or nanotechnology, but a simple, mental technique from an ancient tradition of meditation, revived by a yogi and taught quietly to millions around the world for the past 50 years.

Norman E. Rosenthal, M.D. is a celebrated author and professor of psychiatry at Georgetown University Medical School. For 20 years he was a senior researcher at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). He has spent three decades conducting medical research, first at Columbia University and then at NIH. He now heads his own research organization, specializing in pharmaceutical trials. Famous for pioneering the study and treatment of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), his focus recently turned to the Transcendental Meditation technique.

Believing that millions of people could benefit from this meditation if only they knew more about it, Dr. Rosenthal has written the book "Transcendence: Healing and Transformation Through Transcendental Meditation."

With a forward by Mehmet Oz, M.D., this gracefully narrated, reader-friendly account takes a subject that is subtle and, for many, elusive and renders it simple, clear and vitally relevant.

In addition to exploring the scientific documentation of healing and transformation through TM practice, the book features case studies and interviews with meditators -- including Paul McCartney, Russell Brand, Martin Scorsese, Moby, Laura Dern and David Lynch -- who share with us their life-changing experiences.

Dr. Rosenthal learned this meditation practice himself when he was a medical school student in South Africa during the 1970s. Due to time demands, meditation -- "a brief fad of my medical school days" -- soon slipped from his life all together.

Thirty years later, a patient diagnosed with bipolar disorder told Dr. Rosenthal that TM practice transformed his life. Thanks to meditation, the patient said, he is not just happy "but *really* happy 90 percent of the time." Thus began Dr. Rosenthal's rediscovery of Transcendental Meditation. After resuming the practice himself, with good results, he began recommending it to patients and delved into the scientific literature on the technique. To his surprise, scientific investigation of TM had produced a body of compelling evidence in many fields, from mental health and brain function to anxiety reduction and addiction.

Especially impressed with studies showing reduced heart attack and stroke, Dr. Rosenthal asserts, "If TM were a new prescription drug, conferring this many benefits, it would be a billion-dollar blockbuster."

### **Interview:**

**Me:** The book's mission is to bring Transcendental Meditation to a new generation. Why?

**Dr. Rosenthal:** TM has kind of fallen off the map of a lot of people's awareness. I saw there was so much research out there on TM that wasn't well known. In many cases, alternative health options are not well documented, and natural cures often turn out ineffective when the research is done. When you dig into the studies on TM, you find, wow, this lowers blood pressure, this does good things for cardiovascular health, and it extends life. TM is the only meditation technique that shows decreased mortality in randomized controlled studies. You don't find that in an alternative treatment. Then of course as a psychiatrist, seeing how it helps people with anxiety and various other psychiatric problems, it's a pleasure to come out swinging for something where the data is so strong.

As a scientist with over 30 years of clinical and research experience, I have found that once in a great while something comes along that truly surprises. TM is one such thing. I have examined the data -- the literature, my patients and myself -- and am persuaded that something very special is going on here.

**Me:** What is transcendence?

**Dr. Rosenthal:** We all know about waking, dreaming and sleep. To me, what is so fascinating is the idea that there is actually a *fourth* state of consciousness, called Transcendental Consciousness. This fourth state is very novel. I think that mystics have known about it for many years. If someone were to ask me, what does it *feel* like, I can say you're very calm but also very alert. You're completely conscious, so if a pin dropped, you would hear it. But at the same time you're not thinking of anything in particular. The overriding feeling is blissful. It's very familiar to those who experience it. I experience it every day, if I'm lucky, and I wouldn't want to

do without it. The important thing about transcendence is that it is very likely the main reason for the transformations you see in people practicing TM.

**Me:** Is this state scientifically measurable?

**Dr. Rosenthal:** Yes, when a person attains transcendence, body and brain undergo predictable changes that have been carefully studied. Research has shown that transcendence brings with it a special way of breathing. The breath slows down so much that sometimes when watching others in this state, you almost wonder whether you should give them a shake. Happily, they will soon enough take a long, slow breath, then once again appear to stop breathing.

Experiments on people practicing TM show that brain waves change during transcendence in a highly significant way. TM practice increases brain wave *coherence*, which is an area of growing interest among neuroscientists. Brain wave coherence is generally a good thing. It correlates with high levels of intelligence and competence.

Even novice TM meditators show these brain wave changes, starting within weeks or even days after they begin to meditate. Where you see EEG differences between novices and seasoned meditators is when the people are awake but not meditating. In seasoned meditators, more brain wave coherence can be seen throughout the day.

**Me:** Is this a handbook for physicians as well as the general reader?

**Dr. Rosenthal:** On one hand, I've tried to fill it with interesting stories; on the other hand, every important article is referenced in the footnotes for people who want more. For example, I mention in the main text that there are six ways that stress can kill you, and I name those six ways in a footnote. This might be too much information for the general public, but a physician reading this might want to know. And by the way, not everybody knows this, by any means. I asked several physicians, "Can stress kill you? Can stress give you cardiovascular disease?" They didn't know.

The potential clinical power of this technique is amazing. It offers the promise to transform the lives of millions who suffer. At the same time, I hope the practice will not be confined to spiritual seekers or people so afflicted that they come to medical attention. It can also relieve stress and maximize the potential that resides within each and every one of us.