A peace of his mind

Film director David Lynch tells Sharon Krum how meditation keeps him mentally fit and focused

The last time the film director David Lynch practitioner of TM in the global film community attended the Academy Awards, Clint Eastwood approached him, smiled, then leaned in to make a curious confession.

"I just meditated for 30 minutes before I arrived here," he told Lynch. "Great," came the reply. Yet Eastwood didn't seek out arguably Hollywood's most avant-garde director to impress him, he simply wanted to talk to a kindred spirit. Lynch, he knew, had meditated before the ceremony, too.

"I've never missed a day," says Lynch of his 32 years doing transcendental meditation, commonly known as TM. "Twice a day, every day, on planes, film sets, everywhere. Easy, easy, easy. You repeat the mantra and off you go."

With three decades of meditation under his belt, Lynch, 59, is probably the most ardent

— this is no Hollywood fad for him — although, until recently, you might not have known it. With a shock of hair on his head that seems to defy gravity and a predilection for placing the dark side of human nature under the microscope, it's easy to understand why some have referred to Lynch as celluloid's mad scientist.

But meet him in person and suddenly the idea of his meditating presents no difficulty to comprehend. Hardly the tortured soul, he seems remarkably easygoing and unpretentious. With his buttoned-up shirt and pleated trousers, he could be your friendly neighbour.

"It's a personal thing to start meditation and, if people asked, I was always happy to explain it. But I never believed that you had to go into the streets to talk about it.'

However, this month and next, Lynch is that involves silently repeating a Sanskrit mantings to expound on TM and to raise \$7 billion (£4 billion) to provide TM instruction to any school child in America within two years who wants it and eventually, he hopes, in the UK within three to five years.

'Stress is affecting our children earlier today," he says, describing why he recently formed the David Lynch Foundation for Consciousness-Based Education and World Peace.

"Children are filled with anxiety and all kinds of learning disabilities, and difficult family relationships arise out of that. Why not give them a technique that alleviates that suffering? I've seen what TM can do for children. They start flowering, their intelligence grows."

assumptions. Watching films such as The Elephant Man, LYNCH SAYS TM Twin Peaks, Blue Velvet and Mulholland Drive, which explore the dark, dream-like WITH HAPPINESS' underbelly of small towns and

big cities, it's tempting to think that the director and his movies are interchangeable. Certainly a first impression of his office, which is in a building behind his home, just off Mulholland Drive in Los Angeles, might confirm that. Post-modern and minimalist, the walls are painted the colour of concrete a bue that's hardly blissful

So when you meet a man who is so palpably enthusiastic and warm, you need a minute to reconcile this Lynch with the guy whose first film, the cult classic Eraserhead (1977), was about a mutant baby.

"Human nature, the struggle, is there to be examined," he says, when the discrepancy is pointed out. "Stories are all made up of light and dark characters; that's drama. But you don't need to suffer to show suffering. The truth is that you can't create if you are filled with stress or anger. It shuts down your creativity." TM, he believes, keeps his creative channels open. One wag has joked that we can only imagine how Lynch's films would look if he didn't meditate.

"I see TM this way. If you have a golfball-sized consciousness, you will look at everything that way. TM expands your consciousness, so your experiences grow exponentially. As a film-maker, I tell stories and, with expanded consciousness, you catch bigger, deeper ideas. I have found that, with TM, intuition grows, too, and when you're working in film or even in business. intuition is a huge tool that makes it easier to deal with people. The other thing for me is that TM has increased my enjoyment of 'doing'."

Introduced into the West in 1957 by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who famously became the Beatles' guru, TM is a meditation technique

breaking his own rule and going on to the hus- tra for 20 minutes twice a day. It is supposed to settle the mind into a state of relaxation known as "restful alertness", while helping the practitioner "to transcend" to a higher state of consciousness. Though the TM movement, which claims to have taught six million people worldwide, has over the years had to weather allegations of being a cult today meditation in all its many forms, has become as acceptable as yoga and herbal medicine. There is one particularly non-spiritual reason for this: medical science. While claims about its benefits were for a long time purely anecdotal, clinical research is

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health benefits for those who practise. Ironically for someone who meditates ardent-It's hard not to meet Lynch without making ly, Lynch, who is also a painter, writer and com-

HAS HIM 'PUMPING

providing evidence that meditation has real

poser, was once cynical about the practice, "I thought that people who meditated were nut-eaters who were wasting their time," he grins broadly. " just wanted to make pictures.

But in 1973 his sister told him she had started TM and that shifted something in him. "Even though I thought I was happy, I did have a lot of nervous energy and I had this anger, which I guess had been with me all my life, and, suddeny, I heard something in her voice and thought: want that." Lynch found a TM teacher in Los Angeles and had four classes of instruction. "The effects were immediate."

Lynch, a father of three, is twice divorced. "I took out my anger on my first wife but, after two weeks of practising meditation, she said: 'Where did the anger go?" Despite this, Lynch says the marriage was too far gone to be sayed. "I know now that when you transcend, awareness increases and negativity goes away.'

There's no question that Lynch is a true believer, but he doesn't come across as someone so intoxicated with it that he can't see straight Actually it's quite the opposite, Lynch is very

All in the mind

Mantra mellow According to TM teachers. using a mantra to meditate enables your brain to fall deep into a state of rest and to be more at one with the Universe

High spirits Researchers at California University claim to have found the mechanism behind the sense of joy that TM practitioners report. They wrote in Medical Hypotheses in 1995 that TM alters the release of pituitary hormones, and this produces similar effects to endorphins in athletes who experience a "runner's high".

Inner calm Russia's State Research Institute of Physiology reported this year that TM practitioners become calmer. It says in the International Journal of Neuroscience that meditators are less likely to get upset by disturbing films. The institute's earlier study of meditators' brain patterns shows that they switch off brain areas dedicated to external stimuli to concentrate on the inner mind.

Holy impulse A study in 1984 examined a TM teacher's brain while meditating and found elecrical changes in the temporal lobe that have been previously associated with people naving religious experiences.

David Lynch: a closer look at the dark side of

rational and clear-minded when we talk about movies, medical research, or his desire to help adolescents in crisis. Yes, he wants you to know that meditation changed his life, but he is definitely not naive

He points out that he doesn't expect that meditation will erase life's obstacles or hurts like a magic wand. "There will always be disappointments in your life, sorrow, anger ... but what I have learnt is that TM helps you to deal with it differently. It's not that you become insensitive because, for sure, something like a bad review still hurts. But not as much because, with TM, anxieties recede, bliss grows and happiness keeps depression from digging in."

Lynch typically meditates either in his bedroom or office. He admits that despite 32 years of dedicated practice, during a meditation his mind sometimes wanders (new meditators cite this as hardest to deal with) and occasionally he will stop to write down an idea.

"Sure, your thoughts stray, but then you go back to the mantra." And no not every session is bliss-inducing. "Sometimes you have unbelievable experiences; a burst of ideas might come afterwards; sometimes you don't. But you stay the course because things are constantly unfolding."

On Lynch's office desk is a framed picture of the Maharishi and, while he is emphatic that TM is not a religion — "people tell me that meditating enhances their appreciation of their own religions" - he considers the Maharishi, who is not connected with his foundation and has asked followers in Britain to stop teaching TM because of the country's support of the war in Iraq, his guru. "I see an enlightened teacher as a guru, but you don't have to. You can take his eaching and just be on your own." As for the Maharishi's purported wealth (some estimates put it at \$3.6 billion), Lynch says: "The Maharishi has been out there for 50 years teaching and trying to make the world a better place. A con artist lasts in the world, what, seven years?"

Four schools in the US already have independently put TM on their curriculum and the foundation says that 40 more have signed up. It would be easy to dismiss his plans as hyperbolic but the American Journal of Hypertension reported that children in Georgia who practised TM showed a reduction in systolic blood pressure while at the Nataki School in Detroit, early research by the University of Michigan on students practising TM suggests that they are happier, have higher self-esteem and handle stress better than non-TM students.

"I hated school. All I did was to memorise stuff to get a good grade; it wasn't about learning." As pumped up as he is is about his mission, he knows that it may not be easy. "There is tons of resistance to putting TM in schools because where there's misunderstanding there's fear. The first step is to explain to parents what TM isn't and what it is. You tell them what results they can expect and they say, I want this for my child. They see their children aren't going to be brainwashed and it isn't hocus-pocus.

Throughout our interview Lynch, who is shooting his new movie Inland Empire, drinks coffee from a mug big enough to swim in, one of the 15 cups he downs each day. Add to that 20 cigarettes and you see that the director is no sprout-eating hippie. "I did quit cigarettes for 22 years after I started meditating but I went back to them because I love tobacco," he smiles. " always say that meditation is for smokers, drinkers, drug addicts . . . for everyone. What happens is that once you start meditating, you give up things that are hurting you, so I'm guessing that the cigarettes will go again, too.



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