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The Magic of Meditation

Director David Lynch discusses how to find inner peace and change the world ‘to a good one.’

At 59, David Lynch is already arguably America’s best-known avant-garde filmmaker. His directing career has spanned more than three decades, including films like “Eraserhead” (1978), “Blue Velvet” (1986) and “Mulholland Drive” (2001), as well as the early 1990s TV series “Twin Peaks.” But he’s hardly resting on his laurels now. Lynch is directing a new movie, “Inland Empire,” which stars Laura Dern, Jeremy Irons, Harry Dean Stanton and Justin Theroux. And at his Hollywood home on July 21, the father of three officially launched the David Lynch Foundation for Consciousness-Based Education. His goal: to raise enough money to train any U.S. child who wants to learn how to practice Transcendental Meditation (TM). Lynch talked with NEWSWEEK’s Karen Springen about his latest project. Excerpts:



NEWSWEEK: I understand your sister introduced you to Transcendental Meditation while you were making “Eraserhead” in the 1970s and you’ve been practicing it ever since. Why?

David Lynch: When you start TM, you just sit down comfortably in a chair with your eyes closed, repeat a mantra, and away you go. Mostly I meditate on my own. Anywhere I am, twice a day I go off and meditate. Twenty minutes in the morning, 20 minutes in the evening is the deal. And things start getting better. That’s the reason you do it. All the stresses and fears and anxieties begin to recede and a really beautiful inner kind of energy and happiness grows, and you enjoy the doing of things so much more, and those things that used to knock you out don’t have the same power any more. Things get smoother and way more fun.

You’ve said you’d like kids to learn TM so they can reduce their stress level in school. Did you feel a lot of stress in the classroom as a kid?

It was less stressful then than it is now. My schooling was a total waste of time, even though I went to what was a very good high school. I wish that I’d had consciousness-based education. I would have been a lot further down the road. The problems and the stress at younger and younger ages--it’s getting worse instead of better.

How do you plan to raise \$1 billion for your new foundation?

I’d like to raise \$7 billion! That’s my goal. I’m looking for all the help I can get--small donations, large donations.

How is raising money for the foundation different from raising it for a movie?

I would ask anybody [for the foundation]. When I raise money for a film, usually I go to a film company I like. This way I have to go to many sources.

Why do this now?

It was a very private thing to me. One thing I loved about Transcendental Meditation is it's a private thing--you just add it to your life, and go about your business. [But] I thought I've got to do my part and make this happen. It's absolutely possible to have peace on earth. People usually think peace is about the absence of war. But real peace is about the absence of negativity. You don't bring peace by killing people. You bring enemies by killing people. This is real peace, it's right there.

How do you feel about the war in Iraq? Do they need some meditation over there?

It is kind of the height of absurdity to kill for peace. [By] killing someone, you're creating hate, anger, sorrow, despair. All kinds of negativity comes from each killing. The sadness of the mothers and fathers, the brothers and sisters, the friends, turning to anger. You're creating more enemies with every death. It's absurd and not the way to go. The way to go is to start these peace-creating groups as quickly as possible and watch what happens.

I understand you want to start "peace universities" in the Middle East and Russia.

The formula for peace on earth is a group the size of the square root of 1 percent of the world's population. Since there are 6 billion people, you'd need a minimum of 8,000 peace-creating experts doing their job, uninterrupted. This group would be like a factory. It would produce peace on earth.

How many kids would you like to sign up for TM through your foundation?

The purpose of the foundation is to try to raise enough money so every parent and child who wants it can have it.

Do you feel 59?

I don't think anybody does feel their age. The person we talk to inside is ageless, really. Let's just say I'm a happy camper.

How do you feel about people describing your work as "dark," "weird" and "avant-garde"?

There are all kinds of things going on in the world. Artists reflect that world in their work, and a story needs conflict and the human struggle and all these things to be interesting. I get ideas, I fall in love with some of them, and those that I fall in love with, I go. I love ideas. I love the processes of filmmaking.

Your daughter, Jennifer, 36, was a production assistant on "Blue Velvet" and then wrote and directed the 1993 movie "Boxing Helena." Do you plan to work with her again--or with your sons [Austin, 22, and Riley, 13]?

Jennifer has just written two new scripts, and I might be executive producer on one of those. My son Austin is doing a documentary on Terry Malick's film, "The New World," the making of, and doing a really great job on that. My son Riley is a killer guitar player. They're all meditating.

Do you have any plans to retire?

No, no, no. Filmmakers, they don't ever retire.

Do you ever take vacation?

No. They don't take too many vacations either. A vacation is, to me, kind of a waste of time.

Anything else you'd like to add?

If you get the word out, we can change the world around to a good one.