





million schoolchildren around the world, and the David Lynch Foundation for Consciousness-Based Education and World Peace, which he set up in 2005, has so far taught it to some 200,000 children in 120 schools in 24 countries. Over the past four years it has raised more than \$7m to spread the word among students, teachers and parents, and it has an annual budget of around \$2.5m.

Lynch's main focus to date has been on the US, where the foundation has introduced basic TM into around 35 schools, both public and private, including some religious schools. But some schools in Britain have already introduced pilot TM programmes, with a mixture of Lynch Foundation money and funding from the Maharishi Foundation, which is well established over here. Lynch's foundation estimates that 50 British schoolteachers have so far been trained in its "consciousness-based education campaigns".

Simon Croal, a teacher at Belfast Boys' Model School, a state-funded secondary in a working-class area, has no qualms about espousing TM, which he introduced two years ago with the help of \$15,000 from the Lynch Foundation. "In general, it settled the kids — some of them more than others," he told me. "Either they got it or they didn't, but in general it did calm them down a lot. At the beginning, one or two kids were

Right: the surviving Beatles, Paul McCartney and Ringo Star, pitching in with Lynch last year. Above right: Russell Brand (centre) will attend the TM gala. Above: a researcher at the Maharishi University demonstrates meditative brain-wave patterns



totally against the idea, but they were curious because the others were doing it, and then they ended up enjoying it. We did a little survey at the end of the year, and 90% said it relaxed them and made them less likely to get involved in behaviour that could get them in trouble."

Croal said parents and governors were cautious at first, but were ready to be persuaded. "I had to run it by the board of governors and the principals. So long as it worked and it wasn't causing any problems, they were happy enough for us to give it a go. We got consent from the

parents, and none of them had a problem.

Lynch aims to launch the foundation's first international branch in London next summer, charged with the task of fund-raising and financing further TM programmes, not just in schools, but in prisons, and as part of drug-rehabilitation programmes. "It's a wonder why the whole world isn't meditating," he says.

He has rallied his showbiz contacts for support. Tomorrow night, the comedian Russell Brand, Brand's wife Katy Perry, the actor Clint Eastwood, and Russell Simmons, the founder of



Def Jam Recordings, are due to join him on stage at the second annual Change Begins Within gala at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, to raise money for his foundation. Last year, Moby, Sheryl Crow, the surviving Beatles, Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr, Yoko Ono and Olivia Harrison were among a starry line-up.

Lynch — the director of such cult classics as *Eraserhead*, *The Elephant Man* and *Blue Velvet* — has a reputation for strangeness. This is also the 20th anniversary of his weird and wonderful

Hawn Foundation is promoting a technique it calls MindUP, and Hawn, who has meditated every day for the past 30 years, and who describes herself as a Jewish-Buddhist, last year discussed its implementation with an aide to Michael Gove, now the secretary of state for education.

Meanwhile, some private schools, including Tonbridge, Hampton, and Wellington College, have begun to offer a distant relation of TM known as “mindfulness”. A form of mental-health

‘IT WAS AS IF I WAS IN AN ELEVATOR AND A CABLE WAS CUT. BOOM! I FELL INTO BLISS, PURE BLISS — NOT A GOOFBALL HAPPINESS BUT A THICK BEAUTY’

TV series, *Twin Peaks*, which still airs on the Horror Channel. Today he is pottering round his office, wearing his trademark black jacket with a white shirt buttoned to the neck. His sweeping grey hair seems a little messier than usual, as do his trousers — he has been putting the finishing touches to some paintings for an exhibition.

Lynch is not the only star with designs on our children — or with his own foundation. The actress Goldie Hawn wants to revolutionise British schools by introducing meditation, which, she claims, makes students less aggressive. The

training, it offers relaxation techniques and promotes positive thinking to reduce anxiety, to combat stress and to promote self-awareness.

Mindfulness is gaining enthusiastic support among academics. Felicia Huppert, a professor of psychology at the University of Cambridge's Well-being Institute, is convinced of its benefits. Results from pilot projects at Tonbridge among 14- and 15-year-olds have been so positive (students reported feeling calmer and more confident) that Huppert would like to see the technique spread into the state sector and to see

more teachers train to run courses. She is backed by the Mental Health Foundation, which, in a report earlier this year, recommended that mindfulness be more freely available.

David Lynch first learnt TM in 1974, during its heyday, and credits it with enlivening his creativity. He has written a book about it, *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness and Creativity*, in which he describes the day he was given his mantra: “[It was] as if I were in an elevator and the cable had been cut. Boom! I fell into bliss — pure bliss... and right away a sense of happiness emerges — not a goofball happiness, but a thick beauty”.

We talk at his impressive modernist concrete house not far from Mulholland Drive (from which he took the name of his 2001 film) in the Hollywood Hills. He is currently making a documentary about Maharishi, but there is as yet no release date. He uses the word “beautiful” a lot to describe the TM experience — 13 times during our interview, in fact — but there is something he wants to get off his chest. “Transcendental Meditation is not a religion,” he stresses. “It’s not against any religion. TM is not a cult nor a sect... This is the secret to unfolding your full potential. This is the secret to happiness and fulfilment.”

Lynch explains the process of using a mantra — what he terms a “very specific sound-vibration-thought” — in order to “effortlessly dive through subtler levels of mind”. He tells me about a school he visited in a tough neighbourhood of San Francisco. Its governors had tried a variety of means to keep order, but nothing had worked — until they implemented TM. “A year later and this is now a blissful school. Grades have gone up. Fights have stopped... You see the students’ faces, and they’re shining. Why? Because it comes from the deepest level. Maharishi said: ‘Water the root and enjoy the fruit.’”

The school is Visitacion Valley Middle School. While its principal, James Dierke, is as wildly enthusiastic as Lynch, he fights shy of using the term TM. Instead, he refers to it as “quiet time in the classroom”, because, he says, some people feel TM has a “negative connotation”.

Dierke introduced quiet time to teachers and to pupils aged 11 and 12. “We were able to chart the results almost immediately,” he told me. “The kids are less upset, it’s another tool in their toolbox to deal with adversity and unhappiness, and there are fewer burn-out days among the staff — a common phenomenon in inner-city schools.”

Felicity Kaplan, a veteran of the TM organisation in Britain, said: “It’s already in one sixth-form college in the northwest and four ➤➤➤ 71

Peak Performance:
Sherilyn Fenn and Kyle
MaLachlan in Lynch's in
the offbeat *Twin Peaks*

schools in Northern Ireland. Two primary schools are waiting to introduce it — again in the northwest of England — and there are two projects at the developmental stage in Scotland.” She declined to name them. “We keep the schools confidential. It’s a very delicate thing, so it’s better to get the programmes up and running and the success and results there before we have any publicity. There can be some negativity out of misunderstanding,” she explained, adding that Britain is “a bit on the conservative side”.

For more long-term results, we must look to the Maharishi School in Lathom, Lancashire. Nearly 25 years old, and funded through school fees, it is the only specialist TM school in Britain, and is run by Derek Cassells. Last year’s Ofsted inspection concluded that the curriculum was “outstanding”, as was “the provision for pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development”. Of course, this is a private school with a dedicated staff, small classes, and not one pupil has special educational needs or English as a second language. But Cassells argues that there are plenty of small schools that aren’t as successful: the difference is TM. “You can see when you come into the Maharishi School, just how effective it is and how unique,” he said. He is encouraging other schools to adopt TM, but acknowledges that it has its detractors.

Transcendental meditation is expensive. In Britain, depending on income, it costs between £290 and £590 for four one-hour sessions, further coaching sessions and access to online information. Some suggest that it is all about marketing a simple, 5,000-year-old technique to gullible westerners; that it’s a multi-billion-dollar organisation underpinned by bogus scientific evidence; and even that it is a religious cult. Was this why Lynch was so keen to impress upon me that TM wasn’t a sect?

Fears have been expressed that teaching TM in schools could ruin the lives of children who decided, as a result, to follow some of the more intensive courses on offer, particularly the Purusha and Mother Divine programmes, which require extensive meditation, and celibacy.

One of TM’s critics is Judith Suissa, a senior lecturer in philosophy of education at the University of London’s Institute of Education, who regards it less as a danger than as a sideshow. “I’ve got nothing against kids spending half an hour a day doing meditation,” she said,



SOME PEOPLE SUGGEST THAT TM IS ALL ABOUT MARKETING A SIMPLE 5,000-YEAR-OLD TECHNIQUE TO GULLIBLE WESTERNERS, AND THAT THE SCIENCE IS BOGUS

“but a lot of children come into school with severe problems, and a lot of those are for real objective reasons — they’re in bad housing, or they don’t have enough to eat, resulting in emotional issues. So instead of focusing on teaching meditation, we should be looking at the real social and political problems.”

The main controversy, though, is whether or not the claimed benefits of TM have any basis in science. In a study at the University of Oregon, meditators outperformed non-meditators in an attention test, and saliva samples revealed lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol in the meditators when both groups were subjected to an anxiety-inducing maths quiz. But this study was not specifically on TM.

A paper published in 2006 in the Archives of Internal Medicine showed that TM lowered blood pressure in patients with heart disease. They were also better able to process insulin. Previous studies have found significant increases in the feel-good hormone serotonin during TM — but, then, jogging, playing tennis or listening to a Bach cantata can induce euphoria, too.

One study described the benefits of TM on children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder — but it was led by Sarina Grosswald, who works for the David Lynch Foundation, so could not have been said to be completely independent. What is more, according to a 2007 report for the US Department of Health and Human Services, the research conducted into the

health benefits of meditation (including TM) had been generally of “poor methodological quality”. In truth, many scientists and psychologists argue that truly independent studies of TM and its effects have been few and far between.

Another criticism is that, once you have done the basic course, there are more advanced ones — Sidhis, including Yogic Flying — which don’t come cheap. Lynch says the basics are enough — then qualifies this. “Let’s say you have a lawn and it’s pretty good, but it’s kind of brown and needs watering. And to really come up to its full glory you water it 20 minutes in the morning and 20 minutes in the evening, and that’s enough to take you to the goal. But if you pump fertiliser in, it grows more rapidly. So there might be a point where you say: ‘I’d really like to get my Sidhis.’”

I decide to go to Fairfield, Iowa, the home of the TM movement. His Holiness planted his Maharishi University of Management (MUM) here in 1974. In Revelations, a coffee bar and bookshop near the centre of town, I meet Bob Roth, a tall, friendly 60-year-old who looks 10 years younger, and, as one of the heads of TM in the US, will act as my guide. He has taught TM for almost 40 years, and his celebrity clients have included Moby and Russell Brand.

It is also Roth’s function to rebut the criticism aimed at TM. He insists that, out of 6m people who learn TM, only 100-200 choose to take these higher courses. Most, he says, just stick with a simple 20 minutes twice a day. A murder ➤➤➤➤

on the MUM campus that made international news in 2004 undermined TM's public-relations efforts. A 24-year-old man stabbed a fellow student with a knife in the dining hall. It was later discovered he was psychotic and should not have been meditating. Roth says the guidelines are clear: if someone says they are seeing a psychiatrist and wants to learn to meditate, the TM teacher has to seek the psychiatrist's permission. (You might ask what use clear guidelines are, if they are not followed.)

Challenged on the cost, Roth says there are discounts for students, the elderly and the military, adding that scholarships, grants and loans are available, and that payment covers a lifetime of follow-up sessions. He plays down the sums involved, estimating that the organisation is worth a few hundred million dollars worldwide — not the billions widely reported.

Besides the David Lynch Foundation, there are two other large donors to TM in the US: the Abramson Family Foundation, set up by the property developer Jeffrey Abramson (also a director of the Lynch Foundation), which funds research and provides bursaries for students; and that of a Texan couple, Drs Alice and Howard Settle, who made their fortune in oil.

As I tour Fairfield, it's hard not to see why some people think of TM as a religion, such is the

devotion of its practitioners. Roth counters by professing that he is Jewish, not "TM-ish", and that he has no interest in Hinduism. He says TM predates many religions. "I think Maharishi saw there was some very valuable knowledge from this ancient Vedic wisdom," he says. "The question you have to ask is: is meditation rooted in Hinduism and Buddhism? Is yoga rooted in Hinduism? Or, as Maharishi would say, do meditation and yoga and ayurveda have their own universal existence, and were they adopted by Hinduism and other religions as far back as 5,000 years ago?"

That night, Roth takes me for dinner in downtown Fairfield. During the meal his BlackBerry rings. "It's for you," he says, passing me his phone.

"Hello, Alex, how are you getting on?"

I recognise the gravelly voice immediately — it's Lynch. I remind him I'm to learn TM in a few days. "You're going to love it. Just stay regular in your meditation," he says. "Don't add anything to it. Don't subtract anything from it, and just watch things get better and better."

Back home in Austin, Texas, I've come to the city's TM centre, run by Jim Davis, a long-time practitioner. There are two chairs in the tiny office, facing a small table. Smoke from a brass incense burner rises towards the ceiling, and

beside me stands Jim, a man in his sixties with white hair and a tidy white beard. He faces a framed picture of a bearded Indian yogi sitting on a throne, and begins to sing a soft, Sanskrit hymn. He then turns to me and begins repeating a Sanskrit word: this is my mantra. I'm told to think it over and over. Then something happens.

I'm not asleep — I hear sounds from outside the office and I'm aware of what's going on around me. It's a pleasant feeling and I have no doubts that it helps calm me — and probably most people who practise it. It is a shame the TM organisation declines to separate this basic meditation technique from ludicrous claims about levitating or its belief that a large group of Yogic Flyers can bring about world peace.

However, I am convinced that it's not some destructive cult. Where is the cult leader? All the people I met on this journey into the inner workings of TM were well-meaning, even if most people might snigger at their attempts to make the world a better place. As for the cost of it, TM is a business, and this does give pause. Particularly when you could go to your local Buddhist temple and learn to meditate for free ■