

Celebs, war vets promote meditation

December 13 2010, by Sebastian Smith

Hollywood A-listers including Clint Eastwood joined grizzled US military veterans Monday to promote what they called the near-miraculous powers of meditation in overcoming war stress.

The event in New York drew an unlikely alliance ranging from fashion designer Donna Karan to traumatized veterans of World War II, Vietnam and Iraq.

Uniting them was a belief that transcendental meditation, dubbed TM for short, is the cheapest, most effective and medication-free way of healing people who have suffered severe stress in war and any other extreme experience.

"I'm a great supporter of transcendental meditation. I've been using it for almost 40 years now. I think it's a great tool for anyone to have," said Eastwood, best known for playing violent, hardened characters on screen.

The fund-raising event at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York was organized by experimental film maker David Lynch, whose Foundation for Consciousness-Based Education and Peace encourages meditation along the lines espoused by famed guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

Lynch said his project, named "Operation Warrior Wellness," aims to train 10,000 veterans in the art of finding inner peace.

Critics have cast doubt on the value of meditation for treating psychological disorders.

But Lynch said there are "a lot of misunderstandings about meditation."

The director of "Blue Velvet" and "Mulholland Drive" said the technique can help everyone from disruptive school pupils to soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.

PTSD is an increasingly high-profile problem among servicemen returning from Afghanistan and Iraq, a large number of whom are believed to fear revealing their disorder to military health staff.

Vietnam vet Dan Burks gave a moving account of the mental scars he carried after a battle in which he says he killed Vietnamese soldiers and lost many of his own troops.

PTSD, he said, "is a wound. It takes your life away, just like losing a limb."

"But guess what: you can get rid of it," he said, describing his life after discovery of transcendental meditation as "the difference between Heaven and Hell."

Another veteran, World War II pilot Jerry Yellin told the fund raiser that for three decades after the end of the war against Japan he "found no satisfaction in life in anything I did."

At age 51, he took up TM and says he found peace. "We have the ability to teach young people who are suffering tremendously... young people who are in a foreign land," he said of today's veterans.

One of those, a former infantry soldier in Iraq, said TM "cleared the

skies and I could tell where I was going."

"I felt this warm groovy feeling," he said. "It just gets better and better."

The star-studded event hosted by Lynch also saw testimonials from fashion designer Donna Karan and British comedian Russell Brand.

Brand said he had suffered severe stress from his much-publicized sex-and-drugs addictions and also found solace in TM.

"I felt love, sort of love for myself but also love for everyone else," he said in a rambling speech delivered in his trademark hyper-energized style.

"I am a human being and it is applicable to all human beings. Someone, everyone can draw from it."

Skeptics may question whether war veterans already unwilling to speak about their mental problems will embrace regular meditation. Lynch says they can.

"Clint Eastwood is about as macho as they get and he's been meditating longer than I have," he told The Wall Street Journal.

"We're behind this technique and we think it can help veterans reclaim their lives and save themselves, their families and their friendships."

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