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When inner calm can equal outer wealth

Meditation can not only help you to battle workplace stress but can also help to concentrate your mind - on the important task of making money. Nick Kettles explains its mysteries

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More than nine million Britons are suffering from 'financial phobia', according to researchers at Cambridge University.

And in a survey of 1,000 people, nearly half said their heart raced when faced with managing money.

Whether earning it, managing it or spending it, our relationship with money is invariably a stressful one. Self-help guides are legion, advice from a friendly IFA just a phone call away but, as yet, there is clearly no panacea for levelling the road to financial harmony and a happier life.

Serious practitioners of meditation, however, say it is a useful way of tackling work-related stress, and the multiple agendas of modern life. But few are talking about it - at least not in the workplace.

Lesley Kirk, a teacher of transcendental meditation since 1977, says: 'In some workplaces admitting you are stressed - and therefore not dealing with it - is an admission of weakness. Meditators keep it quiet; some feel it is their secret edge.'

Although meditation is increasingly recognised for its ability to reduce stress - many GPs recommend it to help slow or control chronic diseases - the more typical image of a monk meditating in a mountain retreat still seems at odds with the cut and thrust of an increasingly secular society, whose primary focus is the acquisition of wealth.

Theresa Hale, founder of London's Hale Clinic, says this should not put people off: 'People can have both a material and spiritual life.'

While some methods do come wrapped in a belief system that calls



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for a more frugal existence, other more popular techniques, such as transcendental meditation, vipassana and the Ishaya's ascension do not.

Although slightly different in approach, they all claim to quieten the mind as a means of restoring mental clarity, while improving health through lowering the physiological rate. They should be practised for at least 30 minutes a day. Kirk says: 'Transcendental meditation is not opposed to the good things in life - it offers people the chance to be more creative and successful in their career and lifestyle.'

Oliver Segilman, 28, was a sales trader at Merrill Lynch before quitting to teach business people ascension meditation. 'I continued to day-trade after leaving the City, and quickly realised a 35 per cent increase in capital within four months,' he says. 'Where previously my mind was more active, ascension meditation helped me to calm it and work more from instinct, like a sportsman playing in the "zone".'

While not all meditators can specify an increase in income in this way, they all agree it helps cultivate a sense of balance and objectivity that leads to improved performance.

Walter Reid, a retired chairman of finance training company MDA Ltd, took up transcendental meditation five years ago, when aged 64, to help recover from major bypass surgery. 'It has improved both my health and mental alertness,' he says. 'This has led to improved confidence, which significantly helps while working within a team. I can step back and see where people are coming from without becoming involved in their emotions.'

Chris Levine, an artist recently commissioned to produce a holographic portrait of the Queen, says vipassana meditation lends the focus he needs: 'I can feel more of a sense of positive challenge in my work rather than being consumed by a negative fear of work commitments, deadlines, expectations and matters generally out of my control.'

It seems that less stress allows meditators to take a more measured approach in all areas of life. If something goes wrong they are less likely to be overwhelmed.

Daniel Kirk, a graduate aged 23 and Lesley's son, says: 'A lot of students have problems with finance because they simply feel so overwhelmed as part of the overall experience of leaving home and having to manage their lives for the first time. Transcendental meditation gave me the clarity to take that experience in my stride.' Segilman adds: 'When the mind is busy with lots of thoughts, it's more likely to distort, leading to decisions made in haste.'

Less haste is something many would benefit from, at least as far as personal finance is concerned, whether managing debt or finding the right investment.

Ian Lawson, 34, a property developer from Brighton, says ascension meditation has given him the staying power and focus to develop a 10-year-plan to invest in property for early retirement. 'It

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has given me an inner calm that allows me to be more responsive and less reactive. The ability to make more balanced judgments has had a bearing on the success so far, but sometimes it's just intuition I've learnt not to ignore. Next year I hope to capitalise on new legislation mooted to come into force regarding real estate investment trust schemes and self-invested personal pension schemes.'

While it is difficult to imagine financial markets run by calm and serene traders - bulls and bears do aptly describe their mood - a little meditation might not be such a bad thing. Especially if it helps cultivate the type of balance clearly absent in recent financial fiascos such as Barings and Enron.

Hale adds: 'By being more detached people become more objective and less likely to be influenced by the feeling of emptiness which people often seek to fill through the acquisition of material wealth for its own sake.'

Too good to be true? You'll only know if you try it.