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Iowa meditators shield Lebanon, rally stocks

BY MARC HANSEN • REGISTER COLUMNIST

If you follow the news, you might have noticed two seemingly unrelated developments.

One, the hurricane season has been a dud. Last year, it was one killer tropical storm after another. This year, we're still waiting for the big one to crash onto the shoreline.

The forecasts were frightening. This hurricane season was supposed to be worse than the last, when Katrina and her friends led to more than 2,000 deaths and billions of dollars in destruction.

Two, the stock market has moved into record territory, with the Dow Jones industrial average closing at 12,116.91, its best historical close.

A coincidence? No, the Maharishi Effect.

It's the 1,200 advanced Transcendental meditators who are camping out for six hours a day in Fairfield and elsewhere, "creating coherence in national consciousness" and changing the national mood.

Granted, it sounds flaky. One physicist called similar research on falling crime rates in Washington, D.C., "voodoo science."

But since the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi himself predicted this would happen back in July, who are we to argue?

It's important to challenge mainstream thinking. You don't want to be the guy who told Guglielmo Marconi there was

no future in wireless communications.

The man in charge of the "Invincible America Course" is John Hagelin, a quantum physicist who graduated summa cum laude from Dartmouth, earned a doctorate from Harvard and was a researcher at Stanford before moving to Fairfield and becoming the director of the Institute of Science, Technology and Public Policy at the Maharishi University of Management.

He also ran for president three times as a third-party candidate and collected lots of votes in Jefferson County.

He isn't running this time, mostly because he's busy making sure the United States is surrounded with a protective shield of collective consciousness.

This isn't something a person does in a regular 40-hour work week, so it took a while to catch up with him. When I did, he was in the Netherlands on a European speaking tour.

The original idea, he said, was to restore peace in Lebanon.

I wasn't sure how a group of 1,200 "yogic flyers" in Iowa and another 200 in Washington, D.C., could stop the bombing in the Middle East.

But Hagelin is convinced it did. He answers the skeptics by referring to field-tested, peer-reviewed documentation in 600 studies and 250 independent research institutes around the

world.

"We are not disconnected from each other," he said. "We influence each other. Wars are nothing other than the outburst of pent-up societal stress in critical hot spots."

Get a large group of hardcore meditators together for six hours at a time, things happen. The mind settles down, awareness expands ... and expands ... until it permeates the collective consciousness. The stress level goes down, people stop shooting each other.

"We weren't using the leverage we have in that part of the world," Hagelin said. "We weren't encouraging moderation on Israel's part. We started this course principally to provide a cooling influence and sanity in our foreign policy."

It wasn't long before U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was changing her plans and flying to Lebanon. A few days later, the United States was helping craft a cease-fire.

"It was quite an amazing turnabout," he said.

The good feelings spill over into the economy. Consumer confidence picks up, which leads to more optimism, a better economy and higher stock prices.

"The stock market," Hagelin said, "was a side effect, an expression of the collective mood."

Stocks up, gas prices down. Consumer confidence rises, unemployment drops.

Stocks won't grow straight to the sky, Hagelin warned. There will be burps and corrections and mini-panics. But the swings won't be so extreme.

I asked Hagelin if he made a killing with this really inside information.

No.

"If we were smart," he said with a laugh, "we would have scraped together some money and invested it. My limited resources were invested already outside the market."

All right, then. If meditation works so well in Lebanon, why not Iraq?

"Lebanon was easier to quell," Hagelin said, "because the political solutions were easy. Iraq is an entrenched mess. The mistakes that have been made will take time to unwind. Iraq is a victim of intense social stress of its own. Saddam was a great contributor to that. It's there in spades, but it can be unwound. We have to give the Iraqis and their geographical neighbors a big dose of this stress-reducing technology. At some point, when tensions are less acute, an act of violence no longer results in a retaliatory act. Then you suddenly tip the equation into a state of de-escalating violence."

Iraq won't be as easy, he said, but the union of modern science and ancient wisdom can be a wonderful thing.

Don't rule it out. Don't be the guy who doubted Marconi.