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Although it remained hidden for hundreds of years, recently unearthed parchments indicate a tenth and final circle of Dante's Inferno: MIDTERM NOSTRA VITA

AARON DUCHATEAU | ILLUSTRATOR

Guest commentary

Narrow minds inhibit peace

On Nov. 1 I attended a guest lecture by a Dr. Mitchell Bard that was put on by the Oregon Hillel in conjunction with the Jewish Student Union. The lecture was entitled "Eyewitness to the Disengagement — Israel after Gaza: The Next Step Towards Peace." I attended this lecture expecting a thoughtful and, I hoped, balanced account of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict with a focus on the recent withdrawal of Israeli settlements and troops from the Gaza strip area of Israel/Palestine. Instead, I was greeted with speaker who quite preposterously blamed the conflict entirely upon Palestinian "Muslim Jihad extremists" (a phrase that he went on to equate to some 1.2 million Muslims) and gave very little mention of the Gaza pullout itself.

The Middle East peace process has been a topic that I have a great interest in, and I have gone to great lengths to read both sides of the argument, and have come to realize that the conflict is one that goes both ways. Dr. Bard was clearly not of this opinion. His lecture included great praise for the staunchest of Israel's hawks, such as Ariel Sharon, and the harshest of criticisms for Palestinians and their late leader Yasser Arafat. Bard painted Arafat as nothing more than "a corrupt war criminal," while refusing to answer a question posed to him immediately after the lecture as to current Israel prime minister Ariel Sharon's responsibility for the Qibya massacre whilst serving as a commander in the Israel Defense Forces.

All the more troublesome was Dr.

Bard's claim that he, like Israel, "knew" and "understood" Arabs, and he went on to falsely equate Iranians to Arabs (most are in fact Persian in ethnicity) and demonstrated a very shallow knowledge of Arab history and psychology as a whole, especially in his dismissal of the Lebanese political organization Hezbollah. Hezbollah, while responsible for terrorist acts, plays a much greater role in the Middle East by building schools, hospitals and infrastructure for needy Arabs, and operates as a political party much like Sinn Fein effectively operates as the political wing of the IRA in Northern Ireland.

Bard's inability to see things outside of black and white terms is truly troubling and hardly makes him a very sympathetic or informative speaker; indeed, he came across as little more than an out-and-out Israel advocate with a very one-sided understanding of the overall conflict.

After listening to Dr. Bard, it came as no surprise to me to discover that Dr. Bard is affiliated with the Jewish advocacy organization known as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), which follows the policy of advocacy for unlimited financial and political support for Israel on the part of the United States regardless of the direction of policies taken by the Israeli state. AIPAC goes to great lengths to keep voting records for and to politically attack and destroy any member of the U.S. Congress that deviates in any way from AIPAC's tightly held beliefs. AIPAC as

an organization has been dismissive of any scholarship upon Israel that equates the conflict with being in any way multilateral.

Dr. Bard expressed the official line of rhetoric put forward by AIPAC with absolutely no deviation. Interestingly, I have heard that in AIPAC's charter is a constraint placed upon AIPAC members to not debate Israel's policy, as doing so is "divisive." Thus the underlying problem with AIPAC is that it is an organization that would seek to exclude a healthy debate upon the topic of Middle East peace, a topic that requires a multitude of perspectives to be expressed in order for a solution to ever be reached.

There was an utter lack of any attempt at evenhandedness at any time during the lecture and I feel this in the end misses the point of holding such a lecture, which is to seek a peaceful solution to the Middle East crisis. I believe that the fault with this resides with Hillel and the JSU. Both organizations should realize the necessity for a balanced viewpoint upon the conflict if the conflict is ever to be solved, and it is shocking that they would so actively put forward so narrow-minded a speaker. I would call upon both Hillel and the JSU to be more thoughtful in selecting future speakers on a topic that truly deserves a thoughtful and evenhanded presentation.

Alexander Deley majors in history and political science at the University.

CORRECTION

In "ASUO distributes Halloween safety bags," published Oct. 28, the Emerald reported that the ASUO distributed Halloween safety bags. Student government was involved in the bag project, but the Peer Health Educators, Alpha Phi Omega service fraternity and other students distributed the bags. The Emerald regrets the error.

OREGON DAILY EMERALD LETTERS POLICY

Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged, and should be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com or submitted at the Oregon Daily Emerald office, EMU Suite 300. Electronic submissions are preferred. Letters are limited to 250 words, and guest commentaries to 550 words. Authors are limited to one submission per calendar month. Submissions should include phone number and address for verification. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style. Guest submissions are published at the discretion of the Emerald.

Editorial

Meditation movement lacks proper credentials

A sold-out crowd packed into 150 Columbia Tuesday night to hear famous filmmaker David Lynch speak. Perhaps they came to learn about the meaning of his dark films, but Lynch primarily used his time to promote the controversial practice of Transcendental Meditation.

A practitioner of TM for 32 years, Lynch wants to raise billions of dollars to teach it to any child in America who wants to learn it. Like many TM proponents, Lynch, accompanied by two "experts," described TM as a way to usher in world peace and achieve greater personal effectiveness. Lynch and his comrades couched the practice in scientific terms.

But they didn't give the audience the whole story.

Now famous as the Beatles' one-time guru, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi founded TM in India in 1958 as the outgrowth of a Hindu spiritual movement. Since then, more than 6 million people have learned TM, according to the organization's Web site. Learning the technique costs \$2,500.

At first, TM practitioners meditate for about 20 minutes twice daily with their eyes closed, repeating a syllabic phrase or "mantra" to reach "pure awareness" and rid themselves of conscious thought.

We don't dispute the fact that meditation in general can be calming and beneficial. Yet we raise questions consumers should seriously consider before purchasing this commodity as a means to attain peace.

First, we question the high cost. During his speech, Lynch said people who really want peace will find the money to pay for TM classes. Some advocates say the cost ensures the TM movement will persevere and grow, and that the price wouldn't seem outrageous if we lived in a culture that values meditation. Yet people can learn many types of meditation for free from books and classes. Proponents claim the TM mantras are more effective than repeating secular sounds, but some books on meditation say otherwise.

We also question the scientific merits of TM. Advocates claim a multitude of scientific studies validate the physiological benefits of TM. Many of these studies, however, are conducted at the organization's own Maharishi University of Management and they are not necessarily published in peer-reviewed journals. Any scholars thinking about trying TM should check out these scientific claims, especially those that suggest TM is different from other forms of meditation. We also cannot find any credible evidence to support the claim that TM creates peace by "radiating an influence of harmony to your surroundings." In light of the recent heated debate over the scientific merit of Intelligent Design, TM should come under equally rigorous investigation.

People with certain religious beliefs should also investigate the religious roots of TM. Although advocates claim it is simply a "mental technique" and not a religion or philosophy, historical facts clearly show TM is rooted in Hinduism; the mantras people repeat during TM are the names of Hindu gods. Moreover, the movement lost a 1979 suit after the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled TM was based on religious concepts and shouldn't be taught in schools. TM has been presented in a secular package to appeal to Westerners.

Millions of people like Lynch have found TM to be a satisfying and worthwhile purchase, as demonstrated by their longtime commitments to the practice. However, we hope listeners at Lynch's recent speech take the initiative to investigate the statements made by this salesman of pseudo-science and evaluate whether they belong in an academic setting like this University. We think they don't.