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Peace Shield in Place by Pentagon Meditation Club

Twenty-three thousand miles in space, a military satellite's camera softly whirs as its lens focuses on a pinkish-red rocket exhaust flaring in Eastern Siberia, Russia. A Soviet colonel, gone rogue, has launched ten missiles each packing twenty nuclear warheads. Their trajectory is over the Arctic for the U.S. east coast. Within ten seconds of the missiles' launch, the satellite's communications to the Crystal Palace - a secret nuclear-war coordination facility buried in the Colorado Rocky Mountains - triggers a "defense condition 5" alert.

The battle is fought in space, hundreds of miles above an unknowing populace. There are no soldiers or pilots, just laser and proton-beam battle stations and electric rail guns programmed to destroy incoming missiles. The U.S. military's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), whimsically known as Star Wars, is getting its first test. It's a silent battle. No atmosphere means no sound. Nine out of ten missiles are terminated. One gets through and twenty U.S. cities, including New York and Washington D.C., disappear in ruddy mushroom clouds. The Pentagon, headquarters of the U.S. armed services, is rubble and twisted, melted girders.

Ed Winchester, 50, a civilian systems accountant at the Pentagon, doesn't like to think about this horrifying scenario. He knows it's a possibility, but he also knows the more that people apply the power of thought to such visualizations, the more likely it is to occur in our physical reality - a mind law known from Hindu rishis to 20th century biologists like Rupert Sheldrake.

Ed Winchester is also the articulate and peace-impassioned president of the Pentagon Meditation Club. Every Friday, at the lunch break, members of the club gather in a plain conference room - bereft of hi-tech gadgetry - enter a meditative state and create an image of luminescent white 'peace shields' emanating from themselves, fusing together with their fellow meditator's shields and projecting out to envelope Earth. As the visualization continues, the leader softly shares, "I direct

my thoughts to the world of my inner being. I see world leaders, friends and adversaries, joining together in fellowship to resolve issues, forgiving each other..."

"We call this our Spiritual Defense Initiative," says Winchester, a play of words on the official title - Strategic Defense Initiative - of an extremely expensive, currently non-buildable and untestable nuclear defense program. The only way such a defense system could be tested is by putting the whole array in space and launching a thousand missiles into it. Though the majority of American scientists oppose SDI for a number of good reasons, Reagan administration wordsmiths have called the program a peace shield, that term being used on American TV commercials with innocent kid-type drawings to drum up popular support.

Our peace shields aren't technological, but spiritual, and they are in place right now at no cost," explains Winchester. "The Meditation Club's goal is to fuse together enough individual peace shields to protect humanity by their unified force."

But their more immediate objective is boosting the consciousness of Pentagon personnel into recognizing that peace is an individual process. Walter Benish, a, seasoned member of the club, says their meditation has a psychic resonating effect on the people at the Pentagon. "It sets up the proper atmosphere so that it comes into the minds of others, particularly those working at this building."

The Pentagon, built in 1943, serves as the brain of the U.S. military services. It has hundreds of offices housing thousands of military and civilian personnel. Inside this brain, in the convolutions of its corridors, are about 75 Pentagon employees that sit for the weekly meditation and other activities. The Meditation Club is like the pineal gland of this brain. In an environment where the prevailing mindset is war preparedness, the Club offers an experiential spiritual conscience. One woman who got involved in the Club a year ago offers this perspective: "This is a very personal thing. I have felt really in the guts of me out of alignment with the priorities, the mission, what goes on here for a long time. So participating in the Pentagon Meditation club and the peace shield is a way I think to satisfy that struggle and feel more in alignment. I can be a minority voice for such and such values in this other larger circle of people that are pursuing defense and war and aggressive ways of thinking."

The conflict of conscience at the Pentagon is real, though it lies under a guarded surface. When first started, the meditation group was thought a bit spaced, and it even sustained a direct hit by the Christian fundamentalist presence at the Pentagon. They wanted the club nuked. Winchester, a Roman Catholic by birth with extensive Transcendental Meditation training, sat down with the fundamentalists and convinced them of meditation's benefits. Winchester is quite good at this. Earlier this year he was part of a Soviet-American task force on "Changing perspectives in global security" and presented the peace shield meditation to four soviet dignitaries. He told them, "Millions of people the world over may be unconsciously generating coherent force files when they enter deep prayer and meditation." The Soviets were very enthused. Winchester was also able to set up a meditation program with the Defense Intelligence Agency.

Indeed, with the poised and persuasive presence of the Club, some of the Pentagon meditators have become de facto gurus. Benish relates, "I think at first the people in my office - when I got heavily involved in the meditation group - looked at me slightly askance. But now I am finding both young and old employees coming to me with spiritual questions, and they seem to take me aside for some kind of guidance or whatever. I'm not sure they even realize how many are coming to me now." Many club members - who range from mailroom clerks to executive-level managers and officers - practice meditation privately at home and work and have quickly applied its benefits to their job performance. "It's allowed me to develop better management systems," says one. Winchester, who is involved in the Pentagon's much criticized defense acquisitions budget ($700 for a hammer) wants to build cost consciousness on the ground floor of higher consciousness. Besides the meditation club, he has started stress-reduction workshops. Through this medium even more people are being exposed to the physical and mental rewards of a controlled mind.

The Pentagon controls a $60 billion budget specifically for the machinery of war. Pentagon meditators are often asked, "If you really want peace, reduce the number of tanks, of submarines, of nuclear missiles." Benish's reply, "Those are inanimate objects. You could have thousands or one or two. It is what the person who controls that object, who sits in that object, does and thinks that is the important thing. That's what we are here about" That, in essence, is the philosophical agenda of the Meditation Club: to effect a harmonious, inwardly sensitive individual, soldier or civilian, whose mind is at peace, feels peace and a self-correcting empathy with all other humans. Hardware is not important. The mind controlling it is. Winchester insightfully states, "I believe that the proof is in the pudding, and I would like to see a test done. And that is what the meditation group here is really pushing for, to test these ideas on concrete applications in problems of national defense. The presence of arms is not what creates the disturbance, and likewise the absence of

arms will not necessarily create peace. Those things follow after we are at peace with ourselves."

Toward this end, Winchester arranged a meditation meeting in May between American and Soviet soldiers and has been distributing "meditation kits" to top ranking generals and admirals. Benish observes, "It's not until we can convince the minds of men and women around the world that this must become a reality that the true peace shield will take over and there will be world peace. That may be a century from now. We are only taking the first steps."

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