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The capacity to heal

Dr. Isaac Eliaz is an expert in integrative medicine. He uses his skills as a conventional GP, healer, Buddhist, yoga and meditation instructor to help patients in the US and Israel. In an interview with him in Tel Aviv, he talks about his method and the power of “unlearning”

By Tali Herdevall



Dr. Eliaz lying in the meadow in Eastern Tibet at an elevation of 4,500 meters

It's not every day that you go to an interview with hardly any prior information or knowing what to expect, and leave after an hour with new insights. My recent meeting with Dr. Isaac Eliaz was one of those situations.

Eliaz, Israeli in origin, is an M.D. He graduated from Tel Aviv University and is now an integrative doctor who specializes in cancer and chronic illnesses. He is also an expert in acupuncture, a yoga instructor, healer, educator and an experienced meditation practitioner. For more than 25 years he's been teaching and practicing Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, meditation and body and soul treatment methods, combining traditional Chinese medicine, Western medicine, naturopathy and other methods and matching each person with the treatment that best suits them.

He came to Israel to conduct a workshop in cooperation with the Taatzumot nonprofit organization (see box).

In his clinic in the Amitabha Medical Center in Sebastopol, California, Eliaz and a staff of integrative healers focus on supporting people's spiritual, mental, emotional and physical health, while dealing with illnesses in a variety of ways. This multi-dimensional approach has been proven to be highly effective. The clinic offers treatments and prevention for cancer and chronic diseases; strengthening the immune system; detoxification treatments; and meditation classes.

Eliaz develops products made with an ingredient found in citrus peels, an element that prevents the formation of cancerous cells. He is committed to Israel and wants to help and contribute, thus he has been giving lectures and workshops here.

What is your connection with integrative medicine?

It's my journey. My experience in integrative medicine started when I was a child. My father was an irrigation engineer, so I spent my childhood living in different countries. In Korea, at the age of 15, I studied martial arts and yoga, and I continued to practice it when I was in the army and when I studied medicine. In the 1980s I took an acupuncture course, and for my internship I opened a clinic for Chinese medicine. After my studies I went to the US to specialize in Chinese medicine, and that's where I met a Buddhist instructor. It was clear to me and my wife, who is a nutritionist, that we wanted to continue to study with him. I learned that healing is only successful if there is a combination between body and soul. We need to awaken the body's wisdom, and the body can heal itself under the right conditions.

Learning is done in two basic ways – the linear way we are familiar with, and the non-conceptual way, by intuition. It's called 'unlearning.' After you've learned a lot, you can drop everything you learned. Inner feeling doesn't have to come at the expense of knowledge. It's important to meditate and immerse oneself in nature. Nature has an incredible way of flowing.

How does meditation help?

When you sit and meditate, you're really doing it for yourself. But in Buddhism, when you meditate, you're elevating your meditation. The real motivation is the commitment to help others.

In my process, the healing capacity increases as I practice more. I've been practicing meditation for over 20 years,



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The capacity

sometimes for several months a year, cutting myself off from everything. I have a hut in a forest near my home, and I spend hours sitting outdoors. I meditate with my eyes open because that's how we are all day, and in fact we meditate all the time. It's an effortless process. In Buddhism we use an image of the sky -- the sky's the limit. The process has two elements -- the experience and the journey. When the tightness falls away, it's a process of detachment and grasping. When we let go of solidity, we let go of other things. There is a well-known expression in Zen: 'Once there was a mountain; then there wasn't a mountain.' This is the process of detachment. In this process, the heart protects us, and this is the role that compassion plays for others. The Dalai Lama is a good example in his tolerance and depth and love for every religion. Compassion protects us. We can be hard on ourselves, and this also protects others from us. A person has to be full of compassion; otherwise, meditation becomes an ego trip.

What is the mental healing approach?

When the doctor doesn't believe that a patient will live, the patient doesn't live. The doctor's role as a healer is not to stand in the way of the patient. According to my approach, I am a human being, with no white coat or table between the patient and me. What is unique about Tibetan Buddhism is the contemplation of death -- understanding death, visualization. You practice your own death. Treating cancer patients enables us to touch them. Some of my biggest achievements were with terminally ill patients. Cancer patients are vulnerable. I tell them, 'Think of the second before you were diagnosed. What were the things that were important to you? What were your priorities after the diagnosis?' Life changes. This huge peeling off of priorities is strong. I tell people to make a wish list, and it changes. Openness is an opportunity for change. For someone who is diagnosed with cancer and realizes that his life is about to end, everything changes.

How do you introduce your approach to patients who have trouble relating to this openness?

The heart has no boundaries, it doesn't have a concept. When you connect with your heart and you let the heart open, the heart connects with the sky. The sky can be covered with clouds, but it is always there. Some people have a lot of anger built up inside. They're unhappy, and this wastes a lot of their energy. You need to recognize the importance of impermanence, and that is what I try to bring to my patients. By hearing, seeing, I can benefit my patients. When the heart is open, it is there all the time. Cancer patients' vulnerability makes this treatment valuable. It is a complex mental process. The therapeutic strategy for cancer is acute. The process is very dynamic.

For further details, visit www.dreliaz.org

Photos courtesy of Dr. Isaac Eliaz



Dr. Isaac Eliaz at his clinic

Taatzumot

Eight years ago, Ruth Roi's husband died of cancer, and a year later she herself recovered from cancer. Four years ago, she and cancer researcher Prof. Gershom Zagicek established Taatzumot, a nonprofit organization for cancer patients. Zagicek says that it's possible to anesthetize cancer and live with it in complete health. To achieve this, one must have effective tools. Taatzumot views cancer as an opportunity for change that can lead to a balanced diet, Tibetan meditation, effective Jewish meditation and less fear. Says Roi, "It's like a bee and a flower: We bring you flowers and you, like bees, need to come and collect them. We call people who succeed in anesthetizing cancer 'cancer yogis.'

The organization offers activities, workshops and hands-on practice. For more details: www.taatzumot.com



Dr. Eliaz treating a monk in Tibet

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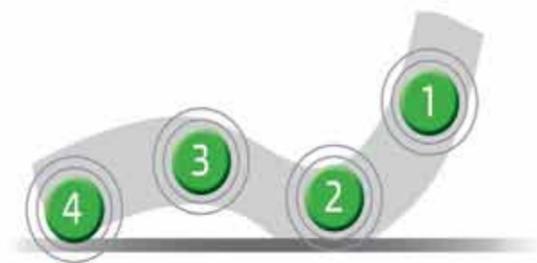


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