



By Dr. Edward Taub

The Spa Prescription

Dr. Taub's personal adventures in wellness

Two Bunch Palms is one of the best-kept secrets in the destination spa industry. It's a really big experience to grasp, much less explain to others. It feels like something miraculous happened to me that nurtured and nourished my entire being, so how does one describe it?

I want to share a discovery about nature to explain why this venerable spa has been refreshing, restoring, and rejuvenating its guests for more than a century—ever since a U.S. Camel Corps survey team discovered two groves of palm trees towering over an oasis of natural hot springs in the southern California desert.

Believe it or not, the discovery is about an invisible, odorless gas found everywhere in our body. There's more of this gas in our body than oxygen, but not from breathing it in from the air like oxygen. Rather, our own cells constantly produce this gas, which lasts for just a few seconds.

THE MAGIC OF NO

The gas is Nitric Oxide (it's not laughing gas, that's nitrous oxide). NO is its chemical name. My colleague, Dr. Ferid Murad, was awarded the 1998 Nobel Prize in Medicine for discovering that NO is the human body's "signaling" molecule. In other words, NO is responsible for transmitting the crucial signals between all our cells to keep them healthy and well. Thus, inadequate production of NO in the body typically leads to degeneration and disease. In a nutshell, our body's NO production largely determines whether we stay healthy—or not! My own collaboration with Dr. Murad, a decade after he received the Nobel Prize, led us to conclude that NO is the Spark of Life, our natural Healing Force. We also identified NO as the molecular basis of wellness, Prana and Chi.

Others are now describing NO as the God Molecule.

Eating fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, exercise, laughing, singing, and dancing will increase NO. So will wine and dark chocolate (in moderation), as will yoga, massage, meditation, and prayer. Finally, living with integrity increases NO. Additionally, research shows that the feelings of epiphany or being in God's presence that we experience from time to time, are associated with a grand burst of NO production in the brain! Stress, worry, anger, resentment, obesity, cigarettes, recreational drugs, excess alcohol, refined sugar, trans fats, and junk food will decrease NO production.

Obviously, modern molecular biology holds enormous potential for the spa industry to offer unique treatments for unresolved health problems and stress. I'm certain my experience was basically a reflection of increased production of NO in my entire body.

HEALING THERAPIES & HOT SPRINGS

I began my Two Bunch Palms experience by consulting with Spa Director, Tony Calsolaro. I informed him that I had been in excellent health until eight months previously when I suddenly became deaf in my left ear just three weeks after my younger brother passed away. I explained that I had been my brother's protector, best friend and doctor during a

prolonged and heartbreaking struggle against cancer. Ironically, the only way I could objectively fill all the roles my brother wanted me to play was turning a deaf ear to his suffering and pain! I said I hoped to eventually regain my hearing, but in any event, my immediate goal was keeping my body, mind, and spirit in the best shape possible to preserve the hearing in my good ear and build my immunity against the onset of any further chronic degenerative disease in my body.

"Breathwork" the director said, adding, "Doctor, all I can tell you is that we have a genuine master of this type of therapy, and afterwards, most people simply move their lips and just mouth the words 'Oh...my...God.'" The description on the spa website reads: "Breathwork uses specific breathing techniques to cleanse the body and mind of blocked energy. This clearing technique is used to rejuvenate our physical, mental, and emotional bodies and creates greater connection between self and Spirit. In one session you can experience a feeling of stillness, well-being, and total harmony. With full relaxation, the Breathwork session



is profound and healing.” At the end of my session with the master therapist, all I could do was mouth the words: Oh... my...God.

Next, I chose the Healing Earth Treatment, which consists of receiving blessings from two native American therapists, who according to the website, “utilize universal energy in a transformational ceremony that includes a sand scrub, an anointing, and a massage with desert herbs that cleanse and awaken the spirit.” It felt absolutely sacred, and I was moved by such a stunning experience. I also chose Cranial-Sacral Therapy, described as “a specialized modality accessing the central nervous system that allows for the gentle removal of accumulated restrictions of the connective tissue surrounding the head, spine, and to some extent the whole body.” Another master therapist conducted this treatment, which was so illuminating that it defies further description.

My Thai Massage was done on a floor mat by a Swiss therapist grounded in the work of Dr. Moshe Feldenkreis who helped rehabilitate wounded Israeli paratroopers in their war for independence. It felt like every joint and muscle in my body was stretched to the point of blissful submission, then relaxation.

Most of the time, before, between, or after spa treatments, I floated in the healing waters of the natural mineral hot springs for which Two Bunch Palms (and the surrounding city of Desert Hot Springs) is justly famous. Europeans typically go to take “The Kur.” Some countries reimburse citizens for spending a week or two at the baths seeking a cure. Are the waters effective? Is sure felt

like that for me—wonderfully relaxing, healing, and invigorating, which is a sure sign of increased NO production.

I spent the rest of my waking time sitting by the ponds quietly feeding ducks, fish, and turtles that seemed to expect nothing less from the guests. The environment was magical and serene. Guests are requested to keep their voices down to not much louder than a whisper, which adds to the pleasure of dining in the wonderful restaurant that features spectacular views of the surrounding snowcapped mountains.

It’s no wonder that people have been marveling over this location for a century before my visit. The spa treatments, the time spent floating in the mineral springs, or just being still under the magic of the desert sun and stars filled me with a newly awakened knowledge of life’s immensity. I felt like the energy coursing through my entire being was the same energy permeating the whole of nature. It dawned on me that living my life with integrity was the most important thing I could do, and then my hearing loss stopped mattering to me. **OS**

Edward Taub, M.D., F.A.A.P., is a founder of the Integrative Medicine movement and a family physician and board-certified pediatrician. He is also the author or co-author of eight books on preventive medicine, including the most recent *Stress Management in Today's World* (Reader's Digest, 2009). Last year, he redirected his life to become the Director of Integrative Medicine for the Southern California Hospice Foundation. He is also the ship's doctor on the historic tall ship, *Curlew*, where he conducts *Voyages to Wellness*.