



By Dr. Edward Taub

The Spa Prescription

A personal “voyage to wellness” at Acqualina Resort & Spa helps to cure a brother’s loss, and more.

I felt aglow with a sense of radical amazement over life’s wonders while walking along the ocean’s edge after my treatments at ESPA at Acqualina. I was experiencing the sense of wellness that occurs when the energy of our body, mind, and spirit are attuned with each other.

ESPA was my recent port of call on a personal “Voyage to Wellness,” seeking relief from the deafness occurring in one ear just after my younger brother passed away with cancer. I had been his protector, best friend, and primary care doctor during a heart-breaking three-year struggle to live. Ironically, the only way I could objectively fill the roles my brother wanted me to play was by turning a deaf ear to his suffering and pain while at the same time being compassionate.

Healing is a process, not an event. It’s not necessarily even synonymous with being

cured. Nevertheless, I’ve been researching and visiting some of the world’s most notable spas for health and healing to hopefully regain my hearing—or if not, then to at least learn to live better with my hearing loss while building my immunity against other stress-related conditions. ESPA helped my healing by leading me to a point of balance where I felt like my own healing force was flowing freely to nourish my entire being. It was just what I needed to deal with what I call compassion fatigue.

Our bodies are more than just flesh and bones. We are systems of living, breathing, vital energy. Except for western medical science, virtually all traditions of medicine are based on a supreme vital force flowing through our bodies—keeping illness and disease at bay. Traditional Indian Medicine, or Ayurveda, calls this life energy Prana,

and embraces a natural treatment system that encourages our health by strengthening its flow. This is what I experienced at ESPA.

Even though it is only natural that ESPA would be drawn to the oldest healing system on our planet, it’s not an Ayurvedic spa company. Rather than focusing on a single element, ESPA offers a modern fusion of the world’s best known healing traditions—which has led to an enviable world-wide reputation for spa design, treatments, services, and products. I was treated to a practical demonstration of Integrative Medicine at ESPA. Ironically (that word again), I introduced this healing paradigm in the early eighties at the Institute of Medicine in Washington, D.C., in a presentation entitled: “A Modern Biosocial and Psychospiritual Approach to Health and Wellness.” I believe our health is much too important to leave up to science, but also much too important to be unscientific about. Unfortunately, our present health-care system lacks effective ways to incorporate such a paradigm. (Understanding it, much less paying for it!) So it’s up to well-informed doctors and patients, as well as enlightened spas with vision, to trust the process and develop new strategies for enhancing the quality of lives.

ESPA has been in the forefront of this type of mission in association with many of the world’s most prestigious hotels and resorts—also since the early eighties when spa industry veteran Susan Harmsworth caught the vision that modern lifestyles were leading to a profound need to stop, consider, and rediscover our natural balance. Her belief led to founding ESPA. She recognized that spa guests were seeking better health and enhanced vitality, and that discerning individuals would understand that health is their most precious asset—which could be



ESPA at Acqualina Resort in Miami Beach

nurtured with treatments and products that really work. This strikes a major chord in me, because I'm constantly faced with patients whose quality of life is rapidly dimming in the face of the rising tide of chronic degenerative diseases—for example, 30 percent of Americans are hypertensive and another 30 percent are already prehypertensive.

Three spa treatments were recommended over three days by Spa Director, Kerri Nelson, on the basis of my health history and goals—with one goal in common: To restore my balance. The treatments were aimed at inducing deep relaxation, stimulating my blood and lymphatic circulation, calming my mind (or if that didn't work, at least distracting my mind), and using the best ingredients found in nature—all to affect my mind and body, while enhancing my mood and affecting all five senses in a healing way. It sounded wonderful!

Much has been written about stress and the ways it contributes to disease, inflammation and aging; my stress management started with an Ama-Releasing Abhyanga Treatment. Abhyanga is a firm body massage. Ama refers to toxins building up in the body that prevent the free flow of our vital force, Prana. Ama comprises germs, tobacco, unhealthy food, LDL cholesterol, free radicals, and also stress. Grief can cause a sudden outpouring of stress hormones that can constrict arteries; in my case I'm certain it constricted the artery to the cochlea, my hearing organ. Ama is the precursor of virtually all disease—too much makes us ill or sick. My treatment was planned according to my individual constitution: Besides my physical characteristics, I'm always cold, I'm a thinker, with conversations always going on in my head, I'm creative and love starting projects but have difficulty finishing them and I do things quickly and get anxious when stressed. My Vata was clearly out of balance.

The spa therapist selected the type of treatment most suitable to balance Vata—including specific massage movements and points on my body; Ayurvedic oils using both Indian herbs and aromatherapy; heating the massage table and offering vata-balancing warm herbal tea; encouraging deep abdom-

inal breathing; calming my mind through a traditional Indian Head Massage at the end of the treatment, and more. Speaking of the end of the treatment, I knew I'd face the world with my vitality restored—especially since I felt like I had sort of left the world when my thoughts and worries ceased in their tracks and evaporated along with the essences of the warm aromatic oils around me and on me.

The next day I experienced the “Ocean Journey” for stimulating the ocean's warming and calming characteristics in my body and mind. The highlight was a total body wrap of warm fresh algae covered with linen and blended with essential aromatic oils. I thought it would not be possible to feel more blissed-out than the day before, but it happened. My mind shut down until just near the finish, when I began hearing a silent voice within me repeatedly saying, “God Loves Me...God Loves Me...God Loves Me.” I opened my eyes and observed the therapist's palms placed directly above my heart chakra; she wasn't touching me and her eyes were closed in her silent prayer for my healing. It served as a profound reminder that God's presence is heard with our heart even more than with our ears.

I experienced the “Super-Active Facial Treatment” on my last day. I wasn't that overly interested in keeping my wrinkles at bay or my skin from sagging, but I had hoped that maybe some of the barnacles on my forehead would disappear. Again, there was skin scrubbing and firm massage all over my body with aromatic oils; surprisingly, at least to me, the “face-work” seemed to take up less than half of the treatment time; I was too far



Healing therapies are a focal point of ESPA's menu.

gone again to recall very much, however, the official description informed me the Super Active Facial Treatment delivers luxurious and results-driven experiences, the benefits of which can be seen immediately. Well, yes! My face felt entirely different than I ever remember it feeling: My skin felt so full, plump, radiant, moisturized, and healthy that I made up my mind not to wash it that night or the next day. And best of all, when I finally did wash my face, my barnacles were gone!

ESPA believes optimal results can be obtained throughout the body by working properly with the skin—the body's largest organ. I was definitely a believer, walking along the water's edge, on the beach at Acqualina, while noticing that the air seemed better and the world seemed nicer. ☺

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.