Introduction and cancer mind-body connection

Well, Dr. Ronald Alexander, it it's, I mean, it's always such a delight to chat with you, and I'm. So as you're doing so much amazing work, you help me, you help the friends of mine.

And you really guided so many people to clarity, through very difficult times. so thank you for for being with me here today. Oh, you're very welcome.

It's a pleasure to be here with you, Michael. So one of the challenges, obviously, with dealing with, with cancer, you know, you always try to look and find.

Yeah. What what are some of the leading reasons, and a place where a lot of people on look, is, is kind of hidden traumas, belief systems, emotions, you know, can can you talk a little bit about how that link can be made and how these, these type of negative impacts in the body can what what kind of physical response that that would have?

Yes. Yeah. when I was in graduate school, I specialized in psychosomatic and behavioral, medicine and did as much, research as humanly possible. exploring the mind, body and spiritual connection between illness, and disease.

And so when I think of cancer, I would say probably it's very difficult to say what percent of mind emotional, energetic imbalances like stress, grief, sorrow, anger, rage, what percent of all of those, complexes go into, the cancer illness or the cancer disease?

But what I can say is, in the last 48 years of my practice, going all the way back to my first healing clinic at Cedars-Sinai, and that was called the center for Health and Healing, is in the early days when people would come in to learn meditation or yoga therapy, from my staff.

There were many, many cancer patients, patients with lung cancer, breast cancer, ovarian cancer, some brain tumors. And there was a similar pattern of what I would call emotional congestion and emotional contractility in that most of the, the people, I would say probably 80% of the patients who had some form of cancer or leukemia.

and then, of course, in that I think HIV came around 80 or 84. Yeah. Around then. Yeah, yeah. Around then, similar things like stress, emotional upsets.

improper grieving, that all went into these patterns of holding in, holding back and then turning off, cutting off or shutting off an emotional, mind body healthy arc of feeling, expression, release, feeling, expression, release.

And one of the things that I learned from, one of my mentors, Alexander Loan, doctor Alexander Lowe, one of the bio energetics, he was one of the co-founders with, John Paracas.

Trauma, grief, and emotional congestion

Is that when you have congestion, if you add the breath, any form of breathing therapy, whether it's yoga therapy or breathing in Tai chi or, Reiki in therapy or modern day, I'm a practitioner and certified in somatic experience seeing therapy that was founded by Dr. Peter Levine, is what we see is when this contraction, the nervous system does not function in an optimal way.

And to create health wellness, vitality and resiliency, you need to engage patients, especially patients who are struggling with cancer, in moving from congestion to expansion, from contraction to expansion.

And one of the easiest in, most direct avenues to do that is any form of breath therapy. You know, breathing is

really one of the essential, tools to unlock someone who's been cut off, split off, shut off, or shut down.

So there's a relationship, I think, with cancer and closing off or contracting in your body physiology, the contraction of emotion and feeling. See what is what is really emotion.

Emotion is energy that's either in motion or it's energy that is stuck in stagnant. And I think there's a relationship between stagnation and emotional resiliency.

stagnation and a cancer personality type where it as you take a deeper dive into the last. Three years, five years, seven years, you see all sorts of elements of either loss or changes in, employment or heartbreak or you see changes in economic conditions, loss of a dream house and particularly with lung cancer, which is interesting.

We were just talking about the relationship of smoking and lung lung cancer. But I also see it in terms of loss. in, digested and unresolved grief, sorrow and sadness, because all of those emotions stay stagnated.

So the there's not the piece of healthy emotion which is get the emotions to flow energy in motion with cancer, you know, the personality type. There's a lot of contraction and constriction.

And then there's another piece I think, to consider, emotions and. Bodily felt feeling and bodily felt sensation is when people close off and they shut down their nervous system and oftentimes, when we're dealing with cancer, if we look a little bit more into the past, we see trauma, we see abuse, post-traumatic stress.

it's very common in when I was working with, Vietnam veterans is that they would describe, and I would ask them to go back into their childhood, and then they would we put trauma in their childhood, and then they report trauma through being in the Vietnam War.

And then. We could see that. Well, Agent Orange was one possible component for the cancer. But when we take a deeper dive, we do also find that there was a lot of trauma and post-traumatic stress from being in the jungles and, being in, in war and having to either kill, trying to, to kill.

So there's also a soul, interesting soul component. I think that's much more difficult to articulate. but the way that I, think about it is I'll often ask, cancer patients, what is your soul? Or.

And if somebody would find that offensive, I would say, what is the essence of the core self? What's the spiritual lessons that having to deal with this healing crisis that it's bringing forth in your soul?

What is your soul possibly, screaming out to you that needs attention and that needs healing? and that needs sensitivity. And more often than not, people go down that avenue very quickly and they'll start to describe that.

They've been feeling that they've been living out of balance in their, their work relationship is an all work, no, no play, or neglecting their physiology, very little exercise.

neglecting their, health, their, diet, nutrition. and then interestingly enough, there's many cancer patients who say that when I asked this avenue, those say that they're finding themselves almost as if they're in a graduate school of spiritual learning.

Yeah. See, I know you're smiling because you understand this language. It's a it's a curriculum, where the soul really is taking on this very, very painful and difficult, healing challenge.

as a, as a learning opportunity. So a couple of things. I mean, one, you're talking about the, the emotions that are not released and the, the impact that that has on you kind of emotionally and then talking about like, like grief and the impact on on the lungs.

I'm curious. So, you know, when you don't have that release and you're, you're holding on like, like guilt or sorrow or anger or whatever it may be, and you're you're holding that.

Breathwork and moving from contraction to expansion

You're not releasing that and not expressing that and, or processing it in a healthy matter, you know, that energy's got to be stored somewhere and, and, and to me, you know, if it the way that the body would do that is that it would create kind of a physical location sometimes, you know, to store that emotion, you know, but it can obviously it's dispersed through the nervous system.

But then to kind of put it in this pocket over here, you know, to be dealt with later, but then later never comes because it is an isolated, you know, so that you can use your energy in other fashions.

I mean, so to be able then to, as you then develop the cancer and then recognize that. Yeah. Now I get to get into this graduate program and I get up all of a sudden, you know, deal with things that have been stored for ages of time, you know, what is it that's been stored?

Where is it coming from? And how do I process that so that I can graduate? Yes. And I often us, patients where where do you experience, that the UN resolved material that could have a connection emotionally to your cancer.

Where do you feel it's, living in your body physiology. And where do you feel energies flowing in your somatic sense of self? And where do you feel that it's congested?

And I'll give a just a very important case study. So I was working with a woman, in my Santa Monica office, and she was a mother of four, and she came down with breast cancer and, double mastectomy.

chemo, radiation, and, two of her brothers at a very prestigious, cancer research center in America, where both oncologist and they took a look at her Cat scans and bloodwork, and they said, you really need to get your, affairs in order.

You probably have a maximum 16 weeks left. And so I was working with her and seeing her two, three times a week and doing breathing work and, really working at assessing with her that she had four kids.

Her husband had left her for a younger woman, and she was filled with grief and sorrow and also with self regret of like, well, what did I do? why wasn't I enough for him?

she felt so much guilt, some much obligation. And all of that, again, was very contracting. Her energy and her feeling sense of self was very little. She was tired all the time.

She didn't have any energy. So as we got into the therapy and we started working on the grief and the sorrow and calming the voice of self-criticism and teasing out that sure, she wasn't perfect in her marriage, but that's not why he left.

So I started to teach her a mindfulness meditation, and one of her brothers was a practitioner of transcendental meditation and I don't practice TM, but I know how to do it, and I Revere it in all great respect.

it's an excellent system of meditation. And, many of my patients practice it, even though I'm a teacher in the ordained, in the Zen and mindfulness traditions.

And so we had this idea that, well, first of all, let's not accept that what the doctors are telling you is what is. So let's challenge that, okay? Because they're just reading Cat scans and bloodwork.

we could live in another dimension, you know, this 3D and then this 4D and then this five D so we could move into a more spiritual dimension now that we're doing this, grief work to release the congestion and create more expansion.

So we were talking and we came up with the idea that, in Iowa at the, Maharishi International University, there's a course, it's an advanced course because she was already a practitioner, called the cities course in cities in, the, the

Vedic in yoga traditions, meaning spiritual powers, spiritual energies.

And so it was, I think like a 21 day or 26 day course where you meditate all day long and you're doing incredible breathing. So about 20 days into it.

And her energy started shifting from her feeling tired to feeling more energized, and she was actually able to participate from morning until late at night.

And the more that she meditated, the more energy she got. And then even more grief came up that didn't even come up in the psychotherapy, in sorrow and sadness, and there was less self recrimination.

About 20 or 21 days in, she was meditating and it was in the early evening and she'd been meditating all day, and she said, doctor one, I saw right here in in the yogic system we call it, it's the third eye or the Ashna chakra.

It has to do with intuition and also has to do with, spiritual and sacred energy. Its color is purple. And she said, I saw the cellular construction of the cancer cell in my body.

I saw it, and I had this. She referred to it as a voice, but she said it wasn't like, really like somebody speaking to me.

Case study: meditation, remission, and cellular healing

But there was this like almost silent download. And she said she saw the construction of the cancer cell and then simultaneously right next to it was and this is what you need to do through meditation to transform the cancer cell into a healthy cell.

And she said she went into remission. She said right then and there. She said she felt her whole body, from head to toes, go into what she would call remission.

And so she came back. We continued to work the whole next year, and she's still living today, and it's like 20 years later. And her own brothers told her to get her, ducks in place and and to say goodbye.

So that's an example of thinking of, you know, cancer cells in contraction, working against the vitality and the well-being and then activating, in this case, both through psychotherapy, but most importantly through a meditative spiritual practice, that she opened up a whole other dimension of how to transform the toxic cancer cell into a healthy cell.

Because it was internal, it wasn't like she read it in a book, or someone told her to do a an affirmation. She saw it, and she said once she saw the construction of the two different ones, her energy went to the healthy construction of the cell and linked it to her breath into the mantra that she was practicing and here we have her 20 years later and and even her brothers, who are both prestigious hardcore scientists, esteemed oncologists say it was a miracle and they don't refute.

They say you went up there, you did the meditation for a month and you came back and we take a look in. You're in full remission. And to this day she still information.

So my grandfather used to say in Boston, the proof's in the pudding. what an incredible story. And I mean, what I love. What I love with that is that showing because we always, when we get in that position, we, we give it's almost like we give away our power where we're dealing with something so big we feel is bigger than ourselves. Yes.

And we we give away our power to the oncology. So to whoever it may be. And here she is. You know, she is the one you know, going into her core self, you know, seeing, you know, the, the medicine existing within her, the knowledge that exists within her, you know, by and like you're saying, you're you're creating this other reality instead of being stuck in the reality that, you know, you only have X amount of weeks, you know, left to live.

You know, she's kind of stepping into what if this reality, the five D relation, you know, possibly only later that

exists. Yeah. In shifting from 3D that you can shift up to five D reality.

And in five D things happen that we can't scientifically explain. I was a scientific research of meditation in the 70s, but I, I cannot explain her experience.

But since we know she had it, she can articulate it. She can write about it and describe it. And we know that she's alive 20 years later. So we know that she was fighting for her life.

And then after she had the therapy and the meditation experience and continued to meditate to this day, there was a profound transformation from three D, which was get you your life in order.

You've only got 8 to 16 weeks to resilience, wellness and vitality. So it is possible. Maybe someday we'll be able to scientifically explain transformation at that kind of cellular level.

through study and research. there is a wonderful researcher, named Richard Davison, Doctor Richard Davison, and he said, the center for Wellness and Happiness at the Keck Research Lab in Madison, Wisconsin.

He's a, professor there, and he's researching through meditation, well-being and happiness in its relationship to changing emotion and changing with the Dalai Lama because he works very closely with the Dalai Lama, refers to his destructive emotions.

And the Dalai Lama has always been, a pivotal force in Buddhist psychology to articulate a cartography of destructive emotions and coming up with what we call positive antidote emotions.

So the opposite, of sorrow. The in Buddhist psychology is the antidote of meditating on joy, in embodying joy in your heart and throughout your body as an antidote to the cellular, in the emotional feeling states of sorrow or sadness.

So and. So. How would you do that? I mean, how how would you when you you said, because you're a person dealing with sorrow, trauma, whatever it may be.

Yeah, yeah. How do you kind of when you meditate, how do you shift that energy to joy when the sorrow is so kind of deeply ingrained in who you are at that time?

Well, what I do is I welcome people first to go into the sorrow and use a psychotherapeutic lens for us to really take time in the same way that, for example, a dentist might take a lot of time with removing decay from a tooth before they fill it and then put a crown on it.

So I'll take as long as it takes to cycle therapeutically through the psychological, template. pay attention to the sorrow and the grief, sadness, rage or anger, that's all part of that complex.

And then once they've really sufficiently feel that they've emptied out and they've, released from there both the nervous system in this somatic, physiology, the feelings and the emotions in that subset of emotions connected to, sorrow, then going in and having them work with on a daily basis, first identifying the, the, the past sorrow that they've just been working on healing and then coming up with the exact antidote and then meditating and embodying it by, threading joy.

With their entire nervous system so that they go from that destructive emotion to the positive emotion, but they have to learn to meditatively embody it into their somatic sense of well-being, in their body physiology and in working with that every single day, and then also isolating out what are all of the difficult emotions in what are the certain traumas or abuses that you've experienced?

And putting them down on one side of my iPad and then coming up for for them all the positive antidote memories from Buddhist psychology, which help them to shift or transition from the destructive emotions to the constructive, body mind states of well-being, resiliency, happiness.

And so as they're kind of visualized inside through kind of, you said, threading. So I kind of visualize how you kind of through your nervous system, you're visualizing and feeling the emotion or trying to kind of embody that emotion, you know, through the nervous system throughout your whole being. Yes.

So that the joy, it doesn't it just doesn't live in the mind state.

Destructive emotions and cultivating joy

But you connect it to the breath, like threading it from, the visualization here and then threading it into the heart center so that then it flows through your whole body.

So it's an embodied sense of transformative emotional shifting so that you have to, embrace and harness the positive, antidote and have it flow through the entire body.

And then I suggest to the patient to find a specific place and I'll say, put your left hand somewhere on your body where that's going to be your reservoir or your resource.

And we're going to store joy and fill up that resource or reservoir. And so let's just say they say it's their heart center. So put your hand on your heart center and then close your eyes and see yourself storing joy or love, or happiness in that specific area of your body.

And every time that you meditate, are you out taking a walk in nature access that resource state in with the breath. Let it flow through all the cells in your nervous system so that what is happening, in scientific neuroscience speak, is we're taking the dorsal brake off the parasympathetic nervous system, and we're allowing the ventral vagal system to flow digestion.

attunement contact mirror neurons, resting. And we're allowing the energy as the dorsal brake comes off. the parasympathetic nervous system, then the ventral vagal can kick in, and that promotes well-being.

resiliency, mind body healing, spirit flow, getting people from again from contraction and constriction into the flow state. And this is really important, Michael, even with people who are told that they are terminal and as we both know, as practitioners, that oftentimes means that we're going to be working with them and assisting them to the other side.

But one of the things that I attempt to do with them is to encourage them and to inspire them, that even in this next weeks or months, and we don't know how long, is to generate as much resiliency and happiness and expansion inside of that, complex of cancer that somehow seems to be intractable.

you know, medically speaking, if you really do have a, an exit time that nothing can be done to really, turn that around. But between now and whenever that happy happens is to really, though, know that they can, on the journey, in the exit out of their body, they can have expansion and a sense of well-being, in a sense of happiness and joy and love.

And and yeah, with that, I mean, to me, it whether you're kind of Buddhist, Christian, Buddhist, Christian, yeah, whatever you may be right in, in that transition.

I mean, I know Buddhist, you know, that last breath is extremely important. That's a very holy moment. And to be able to do that, that last breath, you know, with, you know, being in a, in a, in that kind of enlightened space sort of say becomes really important.

And if you're a Christian, then to be able to kind of open up your pathways, you know, so that you are more ready to take that next step, what whatever that next reality looks like.

So, yeah, so to me, you know, being at peace and being more, you know, complete as an individual, in that, you know, at that time it is essential. Yes. And I'm glad you brought up this point.

That's a good point. Whether you're Buddhist or Hindu or Muslim or Christian, this very interesting. similarities. For example, in the Catholic faith, you welcome in a priest who will give you the last rites of the church.

But what is that? It's actually in the Tibetan, in the Zen traditions, it's very similar to inviting in someone who's either a monk or, a llama or someone who's trained, to assist in the death and dying process, to guide you from the last breath into what we refer to in Tibetan Buddhist Buddhism as the battle stages, the stages of what happens with soul and consciousness at the moment of death.

In what continues well. In Buddhist thinking, soul continues. In Christianity, soul continues also, and. In the Buddhist tradition, it's the last breath that they pay attention to.

And interestingly enough, many people that I've worked with have asked me to open the doors in all the windows in the room that you're in, in select. There's some sense of inner knowing that soul is wants to be free and in in the Christian's system, it's not so much that they go through the battles, but they go through from earth to, I guess, heaven.

Death, dying, and spiritual transition

but it's the it's the similar transitions that I find very, very interesting. So I'm glad that you brought that up, because that's really important. and I also have dialog with patients about, what do you think happens after this life?

Like, have you given any thought to to it? And I'm very, very careful not to impose my beliefs unless they ask me in before I even answer. I say, yeah, but let's discover and do a kind of an inquiry into what do you believe?

you know, I have this one patient Tuesday night group, and he's so afraid of dying. understandable. His image is he says to me, doctor, I'm going to be laying in the coffin, and I.

I'm buried in the earth, and I'm all alone, and it's dark. So his imagery is that he continues when he dies buried inside of a casket. And so we've been talking lately about folk.

Would you consider some other kinds of possibilities? And so he's been reading up on, things about death and dying, and he's starting to entertain that there, perhaps in 4D and five D that we drop our physical body.

You know, cancer may ravage our physical body in like, a spacesuit. We don't know, long needed in essence or soul core self, whatever way you want to articulate it, you know, goes out those windows and out through the door.

But somehow it continues through time, space and place. And all of that, of course, is a mystery. we have maps in the various spiritual traditions, but for all intents and purposes, I've had the unique opportunity to be, clinically given, psychedelics earlier in my career, in my 20s, because I interned at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center in Baltimore.

Understand this love graph. And Joan Halifax was there. And, William Richards, the all esteemed MD, LSD and psilocybin researchers. And so I did have many opportunities to experience being outside of my physical body.

So I have a strong sense of, yeah, I don't want to leave it right now, but if I have to, there might be another chapter and then another chapter, and then another chapter.

Yeah. And that's the thing recognizing that, you know, we are not just as body. We're we're so much more to that. And and with that, you know, there's a the body like you're talking the physical realm which is a 3D chapter.

But then moving into the five D and you're talking about kind of the, the core self and then also creating, I'm almost like imagining, you know, what what kind of creatively do you want to create?

I mean, how how to access that core component within yourself to create a reality that's more in line with who your your higher self is? In a way, yes.

so, how would an individual go about doing that? Because that that seems to me to be, you know, like the the lady you were talking about, that was one of the aspects that she, she was doing.

And, and I know you help a lot of people in that process. Yes. what I suggest is with the patients that are struggling with cancer, whether they, they know that they're terminal or they just have the health challenge to get well is that they start to find and explore a meditation system or a prayer system or a spiritual system like charity or deacon, something that they can daily do with.

They go inside, they close off the external world. And one of the meditations I suggest is doing the Loving Kindness Meditation in the Heart Center to generate loving kindness, first and foremost from themselves, to assist them to go through, you know, cancer, as we both know, as practitioners, is just to incredible.

bear, of an illness to work with. but there's so much opportunity in terms of changes that, patients can make and those that make it through the healing process with cancer recognize that there's so much healing opportunity in lifestyle change, dietary change, physical change, spiritual change, and that to have a daily discipline of of a meditation, prayer practice so that each and every day for me, I do it twice a day, once in the morning, once, in the evening before dinner, so that I'm continuously coming home to myself so that I can foster wellbeing.

I can create an open heart, I hope and heartedness for myself, and I can create and center for myself. And then if I'm struggling with any kind of stress that I can kind of work with what that stress is and what are the the emotions, I use meditation not as just, the concentration practice, but also to let whatever's going on inside of me, I let it come up, and then I look at it and I'll oftentimes breathe into it and work with it until I can transform it.

And if I can't transform it, I might say, okay, let's put that in the file and we'll come back to it at another time when there's more opportunity. you know, if I needed to work with a colleague or a friend who's a therapist, and we change sessions and we work on the material, but a daily, what we call it in the yogic system, in, in the Zen system of a daily sadhana, which is, a daily process of tending, and it can be as minimal as five minutes up to.

I mean, I have some patients that meditate for an hour in the morning and they meditate for 30 minutes before dinner. it it doesn't matter how much time, it matters just that you devote some time and with consistency.

And I think the hot meditation is a really good meditation for cancer patients because they need to generate love for themselves, compassion and empathy for themselves.

And they need to when they're meditating, address any kind of guilt or feelings of, I brought this on myself. No, cancer is here. Now, what are we going to do to heal it and let go of any guilt or responsibility that you did this to you?

It's here and now.

Daily practice, self-compassion, and creative power

How are we going to learn from it and grow and how we're going to create again, that expansionary frame of the spiritual learning that's involved in helping you to, elevate.

And in some cases, even when we lose people with cancer in the last two weeks and days when I'm working with someone, we'll talk about that. This is all wonderful preparation that you really completing something that we don't understand.

You know why you. In the same way, if I'm working with a little boy and doing hypnosis with him, and he's got cancer, we don't know why, but our job is to help people come back to love and to compassion for the struggle and to cultivate kindness in, gentleness to themselves, and then to radiate that out to others.

I love it. Yeah. That that's that's so. And we forget that when we're in fear, when we are, you know, yeah, we've our natural defense mechanism is, is constriction and, kind of.

Yeah. Energy is, is more going into your too rather than kind of expansion where you're opening up, you know, because cancer is that can I congested energy.

So in order to be able to undo, you know, reduce that congested energy is exactly that, that kind of expansions I love that. Yeah. And another meditation I oftentimes suggest, based upon what happened with, meditation woman in Iowa is, I'll say, visualize and hold in the mind's eye the cancer cell, one of many cancer cells.

But just pick one and turn to look at it and describe it and see, like energetically, does it have a color? You know, oftentimes people say it's black, it's brown, sometimes it's red.

and then I'll say, okay, now let's let that pass away. And let's now formulate a very healthy, resilient, cell in your body that can fight that cancer cell.

And I want you to visualize that here, but also with your left hand. I want you to put it on your heart center and connect the two. Yeah. That's powerful.

Came kind of in closing, talk to me a little bit about, you know, so people understand the kind of power that exists within them. You know, that that kind of creative power, how they can, by accessing that, that five d world that you're talking about and, and how that can really shift things within their 3D world.

and just so that people know the power that exists within them. Yeah. A very, very important point, Michael, and I'm glad you brought that up. And that's, I always suggest to patients that their unconscious are their essence or their soul is always up to something interesting and that inherent, regardless of how sick they are or how weak they're feeling, that there's a resiliency, there's there's a resource inside that still has power.

It has fight to it, it has energy to it. And what we do is we tap into it. I actually have them visualize where it lives in their body. Is it in their hara, which is the navel point in Zen?

Is it at the diaphragm? Some people that's here, some people, the power is here. Some people say that the power is in their legs. And to directly access that power, and regardless of how weak or ill or, how toxic they're feeling going through chemo, to tap into that power and own it and bring it forth and let that guide and direct you while you're going through the healing process.

I love it. Well, Dr. Ron, thank you so much. I mean, you do such amazing work and and, I tell me a little bit about you, where can people find you? I know you've written a book, which is is is really, really powerful.

show and tell. This is my newest book. It's called what? Core Creativity, the Mindful Way to Unlock your Creative Self. And then my, other recent book is Wise Mind, Open Mind.

And this is really good for people who are going through health challenges. The subtitle is Finding Purpose and Meaning in Times of Crisis, Loss and Change, and that you can get as a, e-book on Amazon.

And this one, you can get it in any booksellers and, for more information on me, Ronaldalexander.com or www.openmindtraining.com and Dr. Karlfeldt this was a wonderful, dialog.

Really happy to to do this with you. Yeah it was wonderful. Thank you so much. I really appreciate. This. Take good care. Namaste. Namaste.