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# Preface

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The need for complementary and alternative medicine as a supplement to conventional medicine has grown steadily in recent years, as part of the attempt to find solutions that conventional medicine is unable to provide.

There is a significant difference between complementary medicine and alternative medicine. Complementary medicine, as the name implies, is offered in addition to conventional medicine, while alternative medicine is offered in its stead. We still lack conclusive scientific proof on the efficacy of most of the treatments offered by complementary and alternative medicine. More than a hundred different types of complementary and alternative medicine treatments are available, including acupuncture, medicinal herbs, food supplements, homeopathic medicine, massage therapy, naturopathic medicine, osteopathic medicine, the application of magnetic fields, chiropractics, and others. The number of people in Israel seeking complementary or alternative therapy is steadily increasing, just as it is throughout the western world. One study conducted in Israel showed an increase between 1993 and 2000 from 6% to 10% of all patients. Most of those seeking treatment have chronic skin or joint diseases, or malignant diseases.

## Therapeutic Sites and Complementary/Alternative Medicine Sites

Many different kinds of complementary and/or alternative medicine treatments are offered at special therapeutic sites established in many countries, especially in Asia and Europe. While thousands of such therapeutic sites offer care to millions of patients every year, the efficacy of the treatments offered at these sites has not been tested or proven scientifically in prospective, controlled clinical studies. These therapeutic sites are established near natural springs or other sources of water believed to have therapeutic properties, next to fields of mud whose effectiveness has been proven in the treatment of joint diseases and other illnesses, or in areas where special climatic conditions prevail that assist in healing diseases, or at least in alleviating symptoms. For the most part, these therapeutic sites, which are located in isolated regions, far from large cities, so that the patients may benefit from a feeling that they are on vacation away from their daily concerns, have been shown to strengthen the immune system and reduce symptoms. Thus, a hotel situated in the center of a city or in a busy neighborhood that calls itself a hotel-spa cannot be considered a serious therapeutic site.

In Israel, the main and best known therapeutic site stretches along the western shore of the Dead Sea. In contrast to most other therapeutic sites around the world, this area has been chosen for many research studies conducted by researchers from Israel and abroad over the past forty years. These studies have proven the efficacy of the various types of treatment offered at the site as complementary therapy for a wide range of skin, rheumatic, heart and lung diseases, and many others. Some of these studies were encouraged and financed, in part or in their entirety, by the “Dead Sea R&D Tamar Regional Council D.N. Dead Sea”, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Health, the national lottery (Mifal

Hapais) and many other institutions. The Israel Hotel Association has also made a significant contribution by providing free stays for patients participating in the studies. Despite the results of these studies, Israel has not yet decided to recognize this region as a national health resort. As a result, its acceptance into the International Society of Medical Hydrology and Climatology (ISMH) of countries with therapeutic sites based on unique natural treasures recognized by their governments has been delayed.

This book was written to provide the reader with basic information on spa medicine in general and on the Dead Sea region in particular. It describes the different types of diseases and the broad spectrum of treatments with proven efficacy, including regular drug treatment and treatments unique to the Dead Sea, their mechanism of action, their effect, their adverse effects and the pros and cons of sending patients to the Dead Sea region.

From the earliest days, mysterious healing properties have been attributed to water, which has been considered effective in the treatment of a wide range of diseases and pains. This belief is prominent among three of the world's great religions, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, as well as among many other religious communities around the world. The Bible relates the story of Naaman, a general in the army of the King of Aram, who, while a hero, suffered from leprosy. Because he was a great military figure, it seems reasonable to assume that the disease from which he suffered was not in fact leprosy, but rather psoriasis. The prophet Elisha recommended to Naaman that he bathe seven times in the water of the Jordan River. The bathing cured Naaman and turned his skin into that of a "young boy" (II Kings 5:1-14). It is well known that the ancient Egyptians used water for healing as far back as 4,000 years ago. Ruins of the oldest spa can be seen to this day in the city of Murano, Italy, where spring water was used for therapeutic purposes 5,000 years ago.