Dr. Daley’s Interview with Davidji of the Chopra Center for Wellbeing.
(as prepared, see audio link for full interview)

**Chopra Center:** Dr. Daley, you started out your career by following the usual path for a medical doctor . . . getting an M.D. and then doing a specialty, in your case radiology. Yet you say you soon become frustrated by the conventional approach to medicine, which focuses on symptoms and disease, and you left the specialty of radiology to focus more on preventive medicine and a relatively new field called “ecological medicine.” Could you start by explaining what exactly ecological medicine is?

**Dr. Daley:** Well, before I try and define ecological medicine specifically, let me mention what ecological medicine is intended to lead to. The goal is facilitate a continual movement toward what I call Holos. Holos is the Greek root of the modern English words one, whole, health, healing, and holy. The meaning we give to each of these words should be evident in the others as well. I use Holos to refer to all of them singularly. So holos is holistic health in the broadest and truest sense of the term.

Modern science in the form of complex systems science and systems ecology now support ancient healing traditions and philosophies in recognizing that health transcends the individual and crosses system boundaries. *It is a single scale free process achieved by the whole and its parts simultaneously. It is a process extending from the cell to the earth.* By combining insights from several scientific disciplines, a clear relationship can be demonstrated between ecosystem distress, in which ecosystems are degrading, and human distress or disease… and, likewise, ecosystem health is interdependent with human health.

The origin of this singular entity of health is organism-environment interactions, or ecology. Ecological medicine, then, is focused on optimizing a person’s environmental interactions to optimize not just that individual’s health but the health of other people, wildlife, nature, and the planet. Environment, here, refers to the total environment, an integrated environment of physical, social, natural, and man-made domains.

**Chopra Center:** There is quite a lot of new research coming out suggesting that our genetic background doesn’t have to predetermine whether we get cancer or Alzheimer’s or some other disease just because our father or mother did. Can you share with the audience what role you believe genes play in our health? Do you have any practical words of wisdom for listeners who may be feeling “doomed” for heart disease or arthritis simply because it runs in their family?

**Dr. Daley:** Yes, feel empowered and take control! Genes and one’s genotype are simply waiting for instruction on what to do and this instruction comes from one’s environmental interactions, or ecology.

Very few diseases are caused by specific genes or sets of genes. These include things like SC, thalasemia, cystic fibrosis, etc. Interestingly, these disease causing genes were the result of natural selection and in response to anthropogenic environmental imbalances over the last 5,000 years. So I can still say that these diseases are the result of environmental interactions.
All other diseases involve combinations of genes responding to combinations of environmental inputs. The body-mind is plastic and is constantly being remade and redefined by our ecology. The more we can optimize or individual ecology, the greater our experience of health and happiness and the less our risk of disease.

**Chopra Center:** I’d like to understand how the treatment or care you’d offer someone would be different from that of a conventional Western medicine. For example, say that someone comes into your office complaining of fatigue and a history of fibromyalgia? What course might you follow in your treatment?

**Dr. Daley:** Well, first I need to emphasize how unconventional my practice is. David Leonardi founded and designed the Leonardi Institute, where I practice, to involve very intense and longitudinal physician-patient relationships. I can spend 4-5 hours in direct contact with every new patient and then maintain a constant dialogue going forward. The therapeutic approach is not implemented in one day but is progressively added to, refined, and evolved over time. This allows me to really practice integrative and ecological medicine in which any and all things that work can be considered and the deeper and slower work of mind-body medicine and ecological embodiment can be explored.

So, depending upon the individual, I use various combinations of conventional treatments, herbs and nutriceutical treatments, mind-body methods, bio-identical hormones, and referrals to CAM practitioners of all kinds. The core of the approach however, is optimizing ones ecology which I break down, for practical reasons, to nutrition, physical activity and movement, electromagnetic interactions (which includes chronobiology and sleep), air and water quality, stress and life-meaning. The deeper and longer term aspect would be to explore ecological embodiment if one is so inclined.

**Chopra Center:** For those attending your session at Journey into Healing, could you give us a little sneak preview of some of the ideas you’re going to be sharing?

**Dr. Daley:** The session is called Mind-Body-Earth and my goal is explore the concept and not just the concept but, more importantly the experience, that our mind emerges from the interaction of our body and our environment. I want to extend the realization that, just as the mind and body are not separate, the body, earth, and mind are not separate. These are compatible perspectives and, in fact, mind-body-earth unity is simply an extension of mind-body unity.

But my goal is not to add to our mess of conceptual paradigms but to lay the groundwork for experientially and subjectively reconnecting our minds to our bodies and our bodies to our earth. I call the experience of this oneness ecological embodiment and oneness or wholeness is synonomous with health.

I don’t want to draw a map but rather lead the way out into the terrain (quite literally), which is where our true and complete self can be realized. This is where Holos can become a reality.
Chopra Center: I understand you’re writing two new books – one is on how athletes can achieve peak performance. Do you think that the human body actually benefits from some of the athletic activities that the human mind has designed? . . . these 100 or 200-mile ultra marathons, triathlons, and other events that push the limits of the body – do you think that people who do these events are actually setting themselves up for long-term damage to their bodies?

Dr. Daley: I believe regular aerobic activity, including shorter high intensity activity and longer low intensity activity, is critical for optimal health and the huge majority of our population is greatly deficient in this. But at the same time, I’m concerned by the current fad of doing marathons and other long distance events after being relatively sedentary. In my opinion, it takes years for the body to become adequately conditioned to do these events safely and the scientific literature would back this up.

One recent study showed abnormalities in the way the heart contracts for up to 30 days after a marathon. These runners were likely under conditioned for the marathon. Ultramarathons may be more concerning. Recent studies have shown that ultradistance events can lead to fibrosis of the heart muscle over time. But the question remains if these subjects were adequately conditioned for such activity.

The human body was meant to move and run on a regular basis. As a population, we need to do much more of this but we need to start from where we are as an individual and allow time for our bodies to adapt (which is how health is improved from exercise).

Chopra Center: For the non-professional athlete, what is the optimal amount of physical activity you’d recommend?

Dr. Daley: The evidence is quite consistent about this subject. For walking/running, it’s at least 5 miles/day. This is about the same as the 10,000 steps rule many have heard. More generally, we’re talking about 45-60 minutes of moderate to high intensity activity most days of the week.

This can be in any form, just get out and move, explore, play, dance, compete, or whatever is most enjoyable. I don’t remember having a concept of exercise as a child, there was just play and it was active and vigorous and I had fun doing it. We need to preserve that as adults.

Chopra Center: What practical advice would you give to someone who hates exercise but knows they need to do it to be more healthy, lose weight, prevent diabetes, etc.?

Dr. Daley: Don’t do exercise! Find some activity involving movement which is enjoyable and meaningful. It could be bird watching or photography, for example, but go look for birds or subjects out in nature, up in the mountains, encounter them animal to animal on your own two feet. Everyone has a hobby or interest, we just have to find a way to connect it to movement. Creativity is key.

Functionality can also be important in turning exercise into “not exercise.” Try commuting to work or running errands on a bike or on foot. Save gas, save your health, and save the planet. I actually calculated the population wide CO2 impact of eating whole organic food and actively
transporting for trips less than 5 miles and this resulted is far less CO2 emissions than converting
the country completely over to renewable energy sources! Additionally, it reduced the incidence
of degenerative diseases enormously! Solar and wind technology will not do that. The effects
extend through the global economy and to the issues of poverty, starvation, and war as well.

Everything is connected in health and disease, so, if a patient is passionate about a particular
issue, physical activity can be a means to influence whatever that may be.