



# MIND OVER BODY

AN ELFISH face, eager movements, shining grey eyes and words full of zest: This is Dr Nimrod Sheinman, the Israeli naturopath who is in Melbourne to teach mind-body healing.

Dr Sheinman is clinical director of the Institute of Human Ecology, one of the few institutions in Israel teaching natural medicine including naturopathy, osteopathy, chiropractics and acupuncture. He is also a founding member of the Israeli Council for Nutrition and Healthy Ways of Life which recently ran a conference on natural medicine for high ranking officers in the Israeli airforce and is planning one for Members of Parliament. Natural medicine is less widely understood in Israel than in Australia, Dr Sheinman says, although the conventional medical profession there is a little more open and hypnosis and relaxation are used in hospitals.

Dr Sheinman was once an aeronautical engineer in the Israeli airforce. He left in search of a more creative vocation, travelling to the USA to do a doctorate in naturopathy. There, the seven years of training include all areas of basic conventional medicine — anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, etc. The difference is that treatments are non-drug and non-surgical, including homeopathy, herbal medicine and nutrition.

During these student years, Dr Sheinman became fascinated by what is now his all-consuming concern: The body-mind connection. This is the influence of one's state of mind on health, sick-



Dr Nimrod Sheinman

## Tamar Lewit talks to a doctor of natural medicine about mind- body healing.

ness healing. Clinical research by medical scientists — immunologists, endocrinologists, biochemists and psychotherapists — has recently overthrown the old idea that the immune system works independently, he says. We now know, he notes, that the brain produces hormone-like molecules called neuropeptides in response to emotional patterns. These neuropeptides carry messages to the white blood cells affecting the immune system. A new method for assessing the immune system by blood or saliva tests can gauge the body's response to emotions by testing the number and strength of specific types of white blood cells. Such tests, Dr Sheinman says, have shown, for example, that women fired from their jobs have a lower immune function than working women, and that the immune system is deficient in medical students during exams.

Dr Sheinman's concern is the positive side of this mind-body connection: If emotions can depress immunity, then surely, he says, they must also be able to increase health and recovery from ill-

ness. An Israeli study, for instance, showed that men whose wives said "I love you" daily survived better after heart attacks.

Medical research has typically concentrated on sick people. But if we want to understand health, we should study its champions, those who overcome illness, Dr Sheinman says. Recent studies show that what the health champions have in common is something Israeli sociologist Professor Antonovsky calls a "sense of coherence." This sense of coherence is made up of three factors: Comprehensibility, or the ability to see some order in the world; managability, or feeling that resources to cope are available; and meaningfulness, or a sense that there is a reason for living.

Dr Sheinman sees an interesting link between these ideas and Jewish traditions. The Jewish lifestyle, he says, contains many of the factors most important for developing a good sense of coherence. Among these are family and regular rituals such as Shabbat and daily prayers, which create a sense of comprehensibility. Strong family and

communal bonds, typical of Jewish society, are also very important — more crucial, studies show, than wealth or social status. Perhaps, he says, this is what has made the Jews so exceptional as survivors.

Dr Sheinman practices what he preaches. He exercises almost every day, does yoga, spends time praying, meditating and reflecting, and follows a healthy, mostly vegetarian diet. But it is no effort, he says. After a while it just becomes natural, like breathing. Taking responsibility for our own healing makes life more interesting and vibrant: "We are all terminal cases. At some point we will all die. But there is a lot within us to challenge life and make life and even illness a creative process."

Dr Sheinman will finish his Melbourne stay with two workshops at the Melbourne Living Centre on the mind-body connection. "Contacting Your Inner Wisdom", October 21-22, is for the general public; "Training in the Use of Therapeutic Guided Imagery", October 23-26, is for health professionals.