

TRANSFORMATION IN PARADISE

BOOK ONE THE ISLAND

I had a resort on a tropical island... it was heavenly. Every morning as I watched the sun rise lazily over the Gulf of Thailand I was amazed to find myself at the center of so much beauty and the magic. How did a regular guy from New York wind up in this storybook life? It was a wild and wonderful ride that led me to this worldly paradise and from there onwards to dreams untold. I will not burden you with the details of my previous circumstances other than to say that I went to excellent universities and received distinguished degrees which led me to a pretty “successful” life that was mostly empty. I left that all behind to seek adventure and fulfillment in a way of life that was far removed from my upbringing. It has been an incredible journey, and it has allowed me to experience the wild, wonderful and exotic places that exist both in the world and within my soul.

The Beginning

My first stop was the Mediterranean island of Ibiza which captured my heart and provided the freedom that allowed me to feel my true essence for first time. I wound up there by chance at the end of an extended European holiday, and was instantly captivated by the magic of this place. From the very first moment I felt a strange familiarity; as if I had finally landed in the one place on Earth where I truly belonged. No longer was I an alien in an alien world trying to make sense of a way of life that never felt right. Here was a place of freedom; a place where people like me were drawn

together; a place where my heart could sing its song. I was hooked. I returned to America, took a long hard look at my situation, and asked myself this simple question: When I get to be fifty do I want to look back and say that it's nice to have a Rolls Royce... or do I want to say that I had some adventure in my life? Once I was able to frame the situation in that way the answer was all too clear. Within a few months I had wrapped up my affairs in the States and my journey of adventure had begun.

I loved living on Ibiza and probably would have stayed there forever except for the inconvenient truth that I was running out of money. Several years of living well had burned a huge hole in my savings and I could not find a niche for creating income on Ibiza. I think perhaps the fact that I loved *being* there so much made it hard for me to imagine ruining that feeling with work. My definition of "work" at the time was: "If you would rather be doing something else... then what you are doing is work." I could not foresee a situation on Ibiza wherein I would be happy doing anything other than living as I had been, so it became clear that I would need to leave the island if I was to rebuild my finances. The first plan was to go back to the States as that was my home country and the place where I knew the ins and out of how to create an income.

My idea was to open a Thai restaurant/bar/craft shop in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Having lived in and loved Ibiza I wanted to replicate that sun-filled alternative atmosphere as much as was possible within the U.S., so Santa Fe seemed like reasonable compromise. Amazing as seems today, back then there were very few Thai restaurants in America and none in Santa Fe, so opening one there would have been unique. I had recently taken my first extended trip to Asia and could see the opportunities for buying things there and then selling them for much more in the West. Many of my friends in Ibiza had been doing this for years with jewelry, gems, furniture, clothing and whatever. I

envisioned a chic restaurant and bar, plus an adjacent craft shop with all types of exotic Asian bargains. Winters would be spent in Asia buying new goods for the shop and soaking up the tropical warmth. I even rented a house in Santa Fe and then...

In the midst of a long meditative walk I was struck by a powerful realization that would blow my plans out of the water. Suddenly it became crystal clear that returning to America – even to a cool alternative spot – would be a big backward step in my life path. I could easily imagine myself falling back into the comfortable yet deadening routines and mindsets that I had managed to escape only four years earlier. The energy that it took to leave the states had felt like what you see when a rocket takes off from Cape Canaveral. In the first few seconds the vast majority of the fuel and power is used just to get the giant rocket off of the launching pad. With aching slowness it inches upward as the flames shoot out all over; trembling and shaking but hardly moving at all. Eventually it moves slowly into the air and then each succeeding second of its ascent becomes smoother and faster with much less effort. Once the spacecraft is clear of the Earth's atmosphere it is able to do all sorts of maneuvers easily and effortlessly with only the slightest amount of rocket power.

Leaving the “atmosphere” of my home country had required a similarly enormous energetic output, particularly in the “lift-off” stage. It had been an exciting idea to move to Ibiza, but the practicalities of closing down one's entire life in a matter of months were daunting to say the least. House, possessions, businesses, family, friends, legalities, etc., etc., ad nauseum. We hovered and shook over the launching pad for what seemed like an eternity until finally our exhaustive efforts lifted us off into a new life. Just like the spacecraft, once we were free the gravitational pull of our pasts it was ever so easy to

maneuver into new and wonderful experiences with grace and ease. So when faced with the necessity of leaving Ibiza I wondered what would happen if I went back to the States. Would I ever again have the moxie to pack it all in and take my chances in a foreign land? Would my desire for adventure and freedom be overwhelmed by the sirens of security and the comforts of the familiar? My inner voice told me that going back was just that... going back... so on to Plan B...

Koh Samui

At the end of my first extended trip around Asia I spent the final week on the island of Samui in the South of Thailand. We had to get there by boat as there was no airport and the vast majority of the accommodations were small primitive jungle huts built right on the beach. Almost all of the tourists were young backpackers which made the prevailing energy relaxed, loose, stoned and free – beautiful! I had a fantastic time and then returned to Ibiza to figure out what to do with my life. A few months later when Plan B was being contemplated this marvelous tropical island burst into my consciousness in a different way. Obviously this place was going to become the Next Big Thing in Asian tourism. Beautiful white sand beaches, millions of palm trees, a burgeoning tourism infrastructure, and not much competition. There were a few upscale hotels scattered around the island and some cozy mid range places here and there, but plenty of opportunity for me to create something special. A landing strip had already been constructed and they were waiting for approval to open a small airport. It sure seemed to be the right place at the right time so I jumped on a plane and went back there for two weeks of intensive scouting.

This time I was not on holiday and I stayed in a different resort every night. I wanted to get a feeling for the rooms, food, staff, service, and prices that were being offered at all different levels of luxury; from basic cold water bungalows to relatively posh ones. My methodology was simple: Understand fully what everyone else is giving to their guests and then make sure that I give mine better value in every way – rooms, food, drink, service, and perhaps most of all ambiance. I had a huge built-in advantage because over 90% of the tourists who came to Samui were Westerners... like me. While the Thai owners struggled to figure out what these strange “Farang” (foreigners) wanted, all I had to do was design a place where *I* would be happy and that would put me ten steps in front to the crowd. You can see why I felt that life had spread a golden opportunity before me. In my previous incarnation as a somewhat affluent yuppie I had experienced some of the finer boutique resort/hideaways on both coasts in America, so I had a general feeling of what I wanted to create. Understated elegance in breathtaking natural surroundings with attentive and efficient service that was conspicuous by its seeming invisibility. This would be a five star resort, but with the laid back ambiance that made Koh Samui so special in those days. Of course I had no idea how to design, staff, organize or manage a resort – not to mention that I would be doing it in a primitive jungle setting – yet I was undaunted. I had two great friends who were confident that they could raise the millions needed to get this off the ground. So I bid goodbye to all of my friends, and after a farewell tour of America to say goodbye to family I was off on my tropical adventure.

Before leaving Ibiza I had consulted with a very switched-on psychic whose main message for me was to make sure that I had all of my legalities in order. Heeding that advice my first bit of good fortune in Bangkok was to connect with an American lawyer

who was the head partner of a very prestigious law firm. He made it easy for me to get everything in order and turned out to be my legal angel from start to finish – a lovely man. Everything was falling into place and I knew from experience that this was a sign that I was on the right track. Things were moving fast as I had found a great piece of land on the best beach in Samui and was working on building plans with a firm of young Thai architects in Bangkok. I was living in a small bungalow on the beach and every morning I would jog five kilometers on the sweet white sand to get to “My” land. My imagination and inspiration soared as I walked the property envisioning how it would look and where everything would fit in. Every couple of weeks I needed to go to Bangkok to consult with my lawyer, the architects, and many others to gather information about everything else that I would be needing, because there was virtually nothing worthwhile that could be obtained on or near Samui.

This went on for a few months and the dream was really starting to take shape. Telephones were scarce on the beach, but when I was in Bangkok I would call my friends in London to see how the financing was coming. Everything seemed to be going right on schedule... and then it wasn't. Suddenly the millions that seemed assured had slipped through our fingers and I was left in a leaky bungalow in the middle of nowhere with no plan and no prospects. Disappointment turned to momentary panic and finally to reluctant acceptance. Time for Plan “C” which was basically to have a great time for the next two months in this tropical paradise, and if nothing arose by then I'd be off to the States in search of a job. It was just before Christmas and the beach was alive with the energy that comes with the beginning of the busy season, so why not go with the flow... and that is when the real magic started to happen.

The Magic

I have neglected to mention that my first four months of living in Thailand were much more than just a business venture. Every night was a continuous party with amazing people from every corner of the globe coming together to share joyous times on this special island. Samui was still somewhat undiscovered by the outside world, so whether you stayed for only a few days or for many months you felt that you were sharing in a wondrous secret. Now that the hotel project had fallen through I was completely ready to go with the flow and let the energy of this wonderful paradise take me wherever it was going... and did it ever! Having lived for years on Ibiza I was no stranger to hedonism, but the next few weeks on Samui brought new meaning to that word in a very organic way. I was fully immersed in a whirl of natural splendor, beautiful people, incredible food, great drugs, and a timeless quality of life that defies description... you had to be there... and then it got even better.

The most incredible people started turning up on my doorstep. It would usually go something like this: No warning, no previous connection, just a knock on my bungalow door and an unfamiliar voice calling my name to see if this was my hut. “Yes, this is me... who are you?” “Hi, I’m a friend of Hari Rama (or whomever) and he told me to look you up.” How did this person find me in the middle of the jungle? Never mind, we have a great mutual friend so he must be OK.... and it always was. On and on it went with more and more people turning up in the same strange and wonderful way... for months! Friends of friends or just people passing by who somehow felt the energy and were attracted to what became a perpetual party of fascinating talks and wild experiences. I never wanted it to end. There was something about this place where I

was living; something that my presence had provoked and something that I could perhaps enhance even farther. Sitting around and getting stoned at the end of one of our glorious evenings I expressed this feeling to the people who were in our floating group at the time. One of them suggested that I take over this piece of land and make it into something special – start with the beautiful energy that we all felt and then make it last by spreading it to many people. Everyone thought this was a marvelous idea and a couple of them said they would be happy to be partners in such a venture. Was this just a stoned idea that would evaporate in the light of day, or was it the next step in my adventure? Over the course of the next few days this spark of inspiration grew ever stronger and I began to consider it in earnest.

A Thai friend of mine had leased his land that I was living on with the intention of building a resort. Unfortunately he had run out of money after partially constructing only six huts, so I knew that he would be very relieved if I would offer to buy out his interest in the lease. I set about finding out how much I would need to first take over the lease and then construct a resort – not the five star establishment of my previous plans, but a more modest and natural place that was in tune with the lifestyle that I was living. My friends who had hatched the idea went home a few days later, but much to my surprise they immediately sent me the money that they had promised so things were happening fast. I called my two friends in London – the ones who had tried to raise the millions – and told them of my new plan to build something that was much more down to earth... and much more fun. They are both wonderful men – stand-up guys as we would say in New York – and they immediately said that they would each personally send me whatever money they could afford. Within a few weeks I was able to purchase the lease... it was mine... and then...

The Creation

Now what? The plot of land that I had suddenly acquired was quite large and it was located on the best beach in Koh Samui, but it was pretty much a blank canvas. There were six partially constructed bungalows near the beach but zero infrastructure (roads, water, electricity, drainage, plants, trees...). My new domain was an old coconut plantation that had become overgrown and it consisted of some scrubby bushes, dozens of very tall palm trees that threatened to blow over in the next breeze, and lots of sand. No problem! I was just the man for the job of turning this empty lot into a tropical paradise that would be the dream destination for thousands of people. Never mind that I had zero experience as either an architect, builder, gardener, designer, hotelier, restaurateur, barkeep or just about anything that would be helpful in this endeavor. What I did have was a clear vision of the feeling that I wanted to create, and a strong belief (hope?) that existence would provide what I needed at each succeeding step... and that is pretty much what happened.

The first thing I needed was a plan of what this place would look like. In my research for the bigger hotel project I had stayed in and diagrammed numerous bungalows around the island, so I knew which design features I liked and what was needed to create comfortable living spaces at all different price levels. While drawing up designs for my huts I was inspired by an idea which would be crucial to our eventual success. One of the main reasons why I had been having such a marvelous time over the last several months was the variety of wonderful people whom I was hanging out with. Of course there were many young travelers, but there was also an interesting mixture of

people of all ages from different countries, backgrounds, cultures and economic strata – a variable cornucopia of human diversity. That is what made Samui great in those days, and that is the energy that I wanted to preserve and enhance.

Most resorts cater to one kind of client in terms of their price structure and the quality of their amenities. This naturally lends itself to an atmosphere that is homogeneous, sterile ... and somewhat dull. My inspiration was to create built-in diversity by offering a wide range of different priced accommodations. The general plan was to construct 45 independent bungalows of differing sizes and shapes with prices ranging from as low as \$6 per night to a high of \$60 per night, with several different price levels in between. In those days \$60 per night was pretty high end, so we would be able to attract everyone from the lowest budget backpackers to those who could afford beachside air conditioned luxury. This was uniquely arranged so that no matter what you paid for your bungalow you were still an equal participant in the entire experience – eating at the best restaurant on the beach, being served with grace and efficiency, hanging out at the coolest bar, and all that jazz. I set about busily drawing the plans for these habitations in my untrained two-dimensional style, and after much trial and error I was satisfied with the five different types of bungalows I had designed. Now I needed to figure out where on the land they should be built and how to make this scrubby coconut plantation look vibrantly beautiful and elegant. Once again magical help appeared. Several guests who were friends of friends arrived from a well known ashram in India, and sure enough one of them was a very experienced landscape and development designer. We became friends, and before they returned to India he had created for me a beautifully conceived layout of the entire property. Now all I needed was a builder I could trust –

here in the jungle – in a place where foreigners like me were regularly taken advantage of. OK existence whadda ya got now? The answer was right in front of my nose.

A bungalow complex just down the beach was owned by a lovely Thai man named Panya. We had gotten to know each other as I booked many of the people who came to see me into his resort, and we ate quite a few meals at his restaurant. As it turned out Panya was not only the owner of this resort and a devout Buddhist, but was also an experienced builder who had constructed several small resorts on the island. I showed him my plans and he was polite enough not to laugh at my amateurish two dimensional drawings. Within days he came back to me with a price for the entire construction which was much less than I thought it would be... but also much more than I had managed to raise at that point. We shook hands and he said he could start in about a month when he had finished the job his crew was currently working on. Hopefully I would have enough money raised for the first payment by then.

In the meantime I started making outlines in the sand for the size and locations of the bungalows to be built. I must have been quite a sight dragging old palm wood and pieces of junk all around the property for days on end. Every once in a while someone would come off the beach and ask me what I was doing, and I would explain that I was building a resort. They would glance around at this rather forlorn looking piece of ground and then stare with a look of either wonder or pity at this American fellow who had apparently gone mad. Most of them had nothing pressing to do so often they would have a seat on the sand and ask to know more about this seemingly crazy project. Once we got to talking they realized that I was not totally insane, and some of them would get really intrigued with the adventurous nature of the project. One thing would lead to

another and eventually, to my amazement, several of these people actually sent me money after they had returned home to Europe or America. Some of my investors materialized in this way; others appeared in their own magical ways. A strikingly beautiful English girl who had just partied her way through a tidy inheritance was willing to throw her last \$25,000 in with me. Same for a roving English musician who had become such a good friend that he did not want to leave, so he invested most of his life savings in the place... and on and on... A full description of the eclectic and bizarre mixture of investors in this venture could fill a book by itself. Needless to say I am eternally grateful to each and every one of them.

THEY SHOW UP

A month had passed since I had contracted for the construction, and every few days I would casually ask Panya when they might be starting. His answer was always the same: "Very soon... I think (and then he would smile mysteriously)". In the meantime I was looking for investors, creating a menu, finding staff, writing a brochure, etc. etc., but always with one eye peeled for a sign of the elusive building crew... and then they arrived... sort of. I was awakened early one morning by what sounded like a demolition squad. Shaking out the cobwebs, I ran outside and could see a great cloud of dust near the road at the front of the property about 300 meters away... and there they were. Dozens of wiry Thai workers busily dumping heaps of old scarred wood and sheet metal into a huge pile of junk that they had formed at the front of my land. Were these the building materials? No wonder Panya gave me such a reasonable price; I was staring at a pile of recycled garbage... Doh! I tried to find out what was going on but the worker who seemed to be in charge spoke no English at all and before I could get someone to translate they were gone... all of them... poof!

As it turned out this pile of rubble was actually the material that they used to construct their temporary staff quarters which were torn down and rebuilt at each successive job. The next morning they had all come back and converted what had seemed like useless garbage into a vibrant little shanty town where they would live until my resort was finished. Panya finally showed up and introduced me to the construction foreman who did not speak English but was very bright and able to understand my plans with the help of some sign language. All systems go, yahoo! The next morning at daybreak they were on the job. There must have been about 60 workers running all over the place and I had no idea what any of them were doing. Remember that I had never previously planned nor built anything in my life up to that point, so this was all a learning experience on the fly... in the middle of the jungle... in Thai. Well I did say that I wanted some adventure in my life...

The construction took a total of ten months and every single day was filled with incidents that challenged my patience, intellect and imagination. The workers were incredibly diligent and friendly, but they had absolutely no idea as to what a Western guest would want in their holiday abode. My plan called for the construction of 45 small houses (bungalows/huts) of varying sizes and designs spread gracefully around the property, plus a larger house for my self right in the middle. There was also a large restaurant (150 seats), an exotic beachside bar, kitchen, store rooms, water tower, etc.. Coordinating all of this meant that I was literally running from one end of the property to the other all day long checking what was going on and correcting whatever I could. I may not have known much about construction, but I sure knew what I wanted these buildings to look and feel like. I was also constructing staff quarters for 26 on the part

of the property that was on the other side of the road away from the beach, but I let the Thais do as they wished there. My only instructions were to make these as nice or nicer than any staff housing they had ever built before, but due to the cultural divide I had little or no idea as to what that actually meant.

Like I said, it took only ten months to complete the entire job which was incredible, but it could have been finished even faster had my financing been somewhat less erratic. The initial surge of investors had taken me through the purchase of the lease and the first two months of construction, but then things slowed down dramatically. Many people who came and went showed interest in the project, but upon returning to their everyday lives on the other side of the world the allure of tropical adventure had receded. The flow of cash was at best sporadic, so whenever I did not have enough to make the monthly construction installment payment Panya would redeploy most of his workers to another project. One day there would be dozens of Thai workers running in every direction like busy bees – the next day a pathetic skeleton crew of three forlorn stragglers pounding nails into the walls.

I was driven by a powerful feeling that this project was destined to be something truly special, but raising the necessary funds required me to continually take huge leaps of faith over my own skepticism. The voice of my subconscious programming would constantly mock my efforts: “Come on man, you’re sitting here in the middle of nowhere expecting people to come walking by and give you their hard-earned money for a pie-in-the-sky project. First you hit them with your seductive come-on line that you have absolutely no experience in any of what you are doing. Then you back that up by reminding them that should they join this venture they will have zero legal rights to say

anything. If they are still interested after all of that you finish them off with your devastating closing line: 'If you don't completely trust me then it's probably best that you keep on walking.' Your whole approach is a masterful combination of baseless arrogance and wishful thinking." We all have these negative subconscious programs running in the background of our minds. They are based on the belief in lack, limitation and fear that comes from our societal conditioning. It starts the minute that we emerge from our mothers' wombs, and grows more intense with each year... until we decide to wake up. Moving to Ibiza had been part of my wake up call, and clearly the next big step was having the faith to see this through. So I pushed through the "logic" and "common sense" that said I was deluded and kept my focus on what I was creating. The money would come... and it did... in ways that logic and common sense could never have predicted.

Molly and Paula were lovely young English girls who worked in Hong Kong selling vintage clothing. They often came to Samui for holidays and instantly became part of our extended family. One day Paula came up to me while I was working on some drawings and said that she might be able to help me raise more money to finish the resort. I was really touched but could not imagine how this girl could possibly be of help. She said that she was friendly with a Polish man in Bangkok whom she and Molly bought wholesale clothing from. She had heard that he was always looking to make investments so maybe he would want to be part of this project. It all seemed far fetched (to my "logical" mind) but who was I to turn away from what fate had put before me in the persona of this lovely young woman. So Paula made the contact and I made the long trip to Bangkok. After a very funny meeting with this guy and his partner I was more than certain that this had been a fool's errand... and three days later he transferred

\$50,000 into my account. The money went straight to Panya and his army of workers returned to my property the very next day. This was one of many such financial miracles that kept happening from sources that were not on the radar of anyone's "common sense". There was the vivacious English girl of aristocratic birth who sent my proposal to her solicitors and received "logical" advice that could be summarized as: "You must be joking!". She said thank you very much... and sent me the money. There was the apparently straight lawyer from Hong Kong who turned out to be anything but straight and became an enthusiastic contributor of both finances and legal advice.... and on and on. Right up until the day we opened money was coming in from large and small sources that had nothing in common except for a feeling of magic.

Island

While all of this was going on I was still being regularly visited by an endless stream of fascinating and wonderful people from all over the world. I was honored and blessed that people like this wanted to hang out with me, so I made whatever time I could spare to be with them. Two who really stood out from this illustrious crowd were Gaye and David, the founders of a great Mystery School in California. They were in the process of traveling through Asia to find new and exciting wisdom and rituals to add to their teachings. During one of our long evenings together I brought up for discussion my search for the right name for this special resort that was quickly becoming a reality. Several names were bandied about and then one of their friends, a wise and joyous man named Paul, said, "What about Huxley's Island?". Brilliant! The name instantly had a ring to it. I only vaguely remembered the book that he referred to which was a 60's classic about a perfectly run society. Paul reminded me that "Island" had been Aldous Huxley's final novel and the story centered around an island nation where the people

lived in a Utopian society that blended the best aspects of Eastern and Western philosophies. Every dimension of the society on this island was based on beauty, fairness, harmony and love, with the clear intention of giving all of its people the opportunity for a free and fulfilling life. As Paul continued to describe the novel I realized that we had stumbled upon something much more profound than just the name for my resort... we had uncovered its soul. My vision of a beautiful place where people could be free to enjoy themselves in a loving atmosphere was now expanding into something greater. I began to understand why so many unusual synchronicities were continually arising to support this creation, and it was clear that I was merely the vessel through which all of this was happening. The Island. This place was going to be something special... a beautiful island of love, joy and goodness... and so it came to pass...

The Shadow of Their Smiles

It has been said that if you are not living on the edge then you are taking up too much space. Well, like it or not, I was definitely not taking up too much space during my long sojourn in the tropics. Before we continue with the story The Island I want to share with you some of the important cross-cultural lessons that I learned during my first eight months of living in tropical splendor. Thailand is known as “The Land of Smiles” and that reputation is well earned by the vast majority of the population who are gracious, helpful and... yes smile a lot. These are the people that I and many others have fallen in love with, but alas that is only one side of the coin. The Thai culture also has a shadow side of corruption and exploitation with a level of primitive violence that was revealed to me in terms that were stark and unmistakable. Facing some of these

situations early on left me better equipped to handle the challenges that would later threaten my Shangri-La. These powerful experiences helped me to see the whole picture of what I was getting into, and this education about the dark side started almost immediately ...

The Price of Life

There was only one book store on Koh Samui when I arrived. It was located in the main town and run by a Hungarian named Igor – I didn't make that up – his name was actually Igor. It was extremely important to have a source of reading material in this remote location so finding Igor was a real blessing. He was married to Thai woman from Bangkok and together they would buy or trade used books from the departing travelers and then resell them. He had amassed quite a collection of popular novels and seemed to be doing well, but he told me that he needed to expand to other items in order to make a go of it. Selling pirated music cassettes was a big business back then and Igor's wife planned to put a display of them outside of their shop. That was the last I heard of it until one morning several weeks later when Igor turned up at my bungalow in a panic. His eyes were filled with fear as he begged me to lend him 10,000 baht so that he could get off of the island immediately. I assured him that I would give him the money and finally was able to calm him down enough to find out what had terrified him. It all started with the cassette stand.

His wife had insisted that they needed it to make more money but Igor was afraid that the local people who were already selling cassettes on the same street would get angry. His wife said not to worry as she was Thai and knew how to handle this. Yes, she was

Thai, but she was not from Samui, and people from Bangkok like her were viewed by the local people as a foreign breed from a distant place. Nonetheless she set up her stand and for a few weeks business was pretty good; perhaps too good. That morning she had been riding her motorbike on her way to the shop when another bike swooped out of the jungle and came roaring up next to her. The rider on the back had a gun and he put two shots through her head. That was it – they rode off in a cloud of dust, and though there were a few witnesses nobody recognized them. Living on the edge. Igor disappeared for six months and then returned to run his bookstore, but his heart was never in it after that and he wound up leaving the island a year later. At least he was alive. I found out that his story was not that uncommon on Samui and that the going rate for murder was 5,000 baht. That's 200 dollars to take someone's life... no questions asked.. makes you think a bit.... and I did because...

Having just sewed up the lease on my land I was insanely busy doing everything to get this thing off the ground. I was everywhere at once doing the 24/7 thing many years before that term was invented. One afternoon a young Thai man who I had befriended came by and said that he had to talk with me “Right now - very big thing!”. We sat in the sand and after much fumbling and he finally said that “Big man who own land want to kill you.” Wait a sec, I must have heard that wrong – what did you say? He repeated it more slowly and the message was the same. After what had happened to Igor's wife I was not going to take this lightly so I pressed him for details. He had heard from people in the village that the original owner of my land had just died and now his two sons were the owners. This did not affect my lease which still had many years to run, but it looked like it might drastically affect my health.

Apparently my land had been leased by my friend Lin from an old Thai couple for what at the time was a reasonable price, but which now seemed like a steal given the rapid rise in land prices due to the coming boom of tourism on the island. The two sons who had just inherited the title to my land were steaming over the fact that they could not get one penny out of property until my lease expired in what to them seemed the distant future. Apparently their plan was to have me knocked off (only 5,000 baht!) so that they could reclaim the land and make a killing (pun intended). Of course the whole scheme made no sense at all because first of all I had nothing to do with the fact that their parents had been paid so little, and second of all killing me would not solve their problem. It was the previous owner – the one whom I had sublet from - who had made the original deal with the parents. Meanwhile, my sublease was not in my personal name but in the name of my company: Samui Ventures Ltd.. I had followed the sage advice of the Ibiza psychic to make sure that all of my legalities were in order, and my American lawyer in Bangkok had done it all flawlessly. Of course none of that was going to save my skin unless I could transmit this information to two local men who were extremely angry and, let us say, challenged intellectually. Fortunately I had another Thai friend who knew one of the brothers and it was arranged for me to meet him face to face. After numerous uncomfortable meetings I was finally able to make him understand that whatever they did to me would have no effect on the legality of our lease which would remain in the name of my company. Actually that was not completely true. I was the only shareholder in my company, so it is highly likely that had I expired the lease would have perished along with me. Fortunately I was able to obfuscate that fact (finally something worthwhile from my education at Law School!) and the beat went on, though I would revisit the anger of these two brothers years later.

Saving the Swedes

There was an abandoned restaurant near the land that eventually became The Island, and my friend Lin's brother had decided to re-open it. His name was Kan and he had a shady and dangerous reputation for reasons that were never made entirely clear. His energy was dark, but he could also turn on a bright tourist-friendly personality when needed. He brought in whole crew of young Thai men and in one day they had set up a temporary kitchen, put out bamboo tables, and were ready for business. Since he was the brother of my friend I was seen as part of his "family", so I supported his new business by bringing people and spreading the word. The food was good and things went well at first. I got to know most of his staff and they were all nice enough, but had strange tattoos covering their bodies. This was a few years before tattoos became fashionable so the sight of ink was usually limited to bikers, sailors, and those who forever regretted one really drunk night. But these tats were different and I managed to find out that they symbolized membership in violent gangs that worked for the underworld. Some family I had joined!

Tats or not, we all got along well but then one night things turned ugly. I was at a large table with friends at the end of a late evening when we heard a commotion out on the beach. At first we ignored it because a bit of wildness was not that unusual, but then the atmosphere changed as you could feel the anger and fear sweeping through the air. I got out of my seat just in time to see four Swedish boys running away down the beach being followed closely by the entire staff of tattooed killers. I quickly found out that this had something to do with not paying the bill, but clearly it was driven by emotions that

were much stronger than that... and then I started to run after them. I don't know why... there was no conscious thought... it seemed like I was being swept along in some kind of irresistible current. I glanced over my shoulder and realized that no one was coming with me – great! The four Swedes ran into a restaurant that was closed for the night and were quickly surrounded by Kan and his men who grabbed chairs and whatever else was at hand and then started to slowly close in on them. This was the scene as I came running up to them, and you could feel in the air both the lust for violence that was building among the Thais and the abject animal fear emanating from the four boys. If I had any sense I would have gotten the hell out of there, but before I had time to think my body started to move forward. I started screaming in a voice that was alarmingly loud and commanding – a voice that had never before come from within me. I moved quickly through the lines of the Thais, grabbing chairs out of their hands as I went and demanding that they let me pass. A disembodied part of me was watching all of this as it happened and thinking: “ Who is this guy?”. I am not Rambo and not all that big, but on this night I was imbued with a power that would not be denied.

The Thais had stopped in their tracks and were apparently stunned by the fury of my voice helped by the fact that I was someone that they knew pretty well. I reached the Swedes and told them to keep quiet and let me handle this. They were paralyzed with fear. As I turned to face Kan and his men I realized that someone had followed me from the restaurant. It was a Rich, an English boy that I had befriended, and he was standing shoulder to shoulder with me – brave lad. I stared at Kan and asked what was the problem and he said that they cheated him and they think they are better than poor Thai boys but they will find out different. I said that I would make sure that they paid him everything that they owed and that they would apologize and never make him

trouble again. Kan merely sneered, but his troops were wavering now that the intoxication of mob violence had abated. I turned to the Swedes and told them that I could get them out there if they did exactly as I said, and they nodded in numb terror. I then declared to Kan that I would take them back to their bungalow complex, get the money from them, and make sure that they left the island the next day. Kan's gang started to murmur among themselves so I grabbed that opportunity and said "Let's go!". Talk about deer in the headlights ... these descendants of Vikings were frozen in their tracks. Just then a voice emerged from the night stronger and more urgent than even mine had been up until now. The voice said "Come with me now!" followed by a steady stream of imaginative expletives. I suddenly realized that this voice was also coming from within me and that the frozen Vikings had thawed out enough to move whilst their captors were still transfixed by the power of that voice.

We left the restaurant and headed down the beach walking steadily in a show of false confidence that I hoped would lull Kan and his men. We had gotten about 100 meters away before Kan was able to rally his troops and get them to come after us. The Swedes' bungalows were only another 100 meters down the beach and I knew if they could get there they would be safe - the owner was a respected local man whom even a ruffian like Kan would not cross. I told the boys to run and they took off like Olympic sprinters while I turned back in hopes of delaying Kan and his men. By the time Kan reached me it was clear that he could not catch the Swedes, but now I was somewhat concerned for my own safety. I once again declared to all of them that I would personally make certain that they would get all of their money the next morning and that they were completely in the right and none of them would lose any face. This did

not impress Kan, but fortunately at that moment his brother Lin arrived on the scene and I walked off under his protection.

I did not sleep well for many weeks. Whenever there was a moment of silence those scenes of fear and violence would play over and over again in my head. The images were burned into my brain, and they still are to this day. I was incredibly impressed with what I had done, but at the same time I knew that I had not really done anything. Something outside of my normal self had taken me over that night and done what needed to be done. It was magnificent.... and it was freaky. This experience also gave me a powerful new insight into the source and substance of human compassion. I had felt the fear of these boys right down to my bones, and it had struck cold terror in my heart. At the same time I had also felt the anger, frustration and neediness of the Thai boys who lived in a permanent state of inferiority when around Westerners. This also welled up in me and demanded that I understand these feelings and treat them with respect. This is the essence of compassion; being able to resonate with the emotions of others and then using that feeling understand them with the love – the same love that you would want to be graced with (hello Golden Rule!). Many times I had read about how we need to embrace the dark shadows of our being in order to be whole, but now, for the first time, it all made sense. We are all vessels which can hold any of these feelings and it is only through acceptance and awareness that we can transmute these powerful energies into the one true energy... which is love.

The Flight of the Finch

His name was Finch and he was a cool as they come. When I first arrived on Samui he was already well-ensconced at a small rather scruffy bungalow complex that he had single-handedly turned into a major destination. Finch was in his early 20's and filled with the carefree self confidence that is characteristic of young men who have been admired early in life. He arrived on the island from his native Scotland with no set plan and plenty of free time. He quickly adapted to the culture of the backpacker and became great friends with the Thai owners of the tumbledown place where he was staying. They began asking Finch how they could improve their meager business and he happily gave them suggestions. This casual relationship grew stronger as the months passed with Finch making more and more changes, and eventually his place became famous among the hip travelers' set. It was still pretty much of a dump, but he had transformed the menu to appeal to young stoners and the ambiance was relaxed. I met him when we first arrived and was impressed with what he had done and his general air of ease.

The owners of his place were shocked and amazed at how quickly their humble business had been turned around. They were making money for the first time in their lives and everyone seemed very happy. Finch had become the Lord of that section of the beach with a constant stream of young female admirers following in his wake. The Thai owners were flush with cash and were busy buying trucks, TVs and all of the other things that they had never had before.... and then the bubble burst. Too many people kept showing up asking the wrong questions: "Is this Finch's place?" "Can I talk to Finch?" "Do you work for Finch?" Nobody seemed to know that this place belonged to the Thai owners. They were losing face big time, and in Asia that is much more

important than having a new truck. This family that had taken Finch under their wing and profited from his friendship was now looking for a way to get rid of him.

I was located just a few hundred meters down the beach but was only vaguely aware of these goings on. I had little time to socialize during those months as I was busy planning The Island, so my contact with Finch was minimal. Thus I was very surprised when he showed up late one night at my bungalow. He did not have his usual calm demeanor and got right to the point: his Thai “family” was trying to poison him. I tried not to look shocked but I failed miserably. I had been living in the jungle long enough to know the violence that could exist under the surface, but this was on another level. I had seen these people treating Finch as a brother and watched as he embraced their culture and grew their business. OK – you’re losing face - so ask the guy to leave – give him a few weeks to move out – but poison him? I asked, “Are you sure?” “Aye, I’m dead certain. One of the sons tipped me off this evening so I did not eat my dinner and took it to a guy who knows these things. He confirmed that it was definitely a type of poison that feuding families sometimes used in the past on Koh Samui – very deadly.” “What’s your plan?” “I was hoping you would hide me here tonight and tomorrow at 5:00 a.m. take me to catch the early boat to the mainland.” “Yes of course, how will you get your things?” “They don’t know that I am on to them – probably thought I just wasn’t hungry, so I’ll pack a rucksack and sneak out when they have gone to sleep.” “OK, I’ll wait up for you and drive you myself in the morning – good luck mate.” He said thanks and disappeared into the dark of the evening.

Finch showed up a few hours later and I gave him a safe place to sleep where no one but me would know that he was there. A few hours later we drove through the dark to the

main town where he boarded the decrepit old supply boat that was getting ready to make it's nightly return to the mainland. I never saw him again, but his brother later became a regular visitor and assured me that Finch was the same as ever and doing just fine. This episode was another great lesson for me on multiple levels. First of all I was made even more aware of how precarious was my existence as a foreigner here in this wilderness. I would remember this lesson many times in the future, and it always stood me in good stead. On another level my confidence and self respect grew another notch because I knew full well that hiding Finch and taking him to safety was more than a little dangerous for me. Nonetheless I never hesitated and did the right thing as if by instinct. In this crucible of unforeseen dangers and strange customs I was learning who I really was... seeing myself in many different lights... and the more I got to know this guy the more I began to truly love him.

Angels

There would be more experiences of the dark side throughout the years, but they were completely overwhelmed by the powerful forces of Light that entered my life, bringing with them endless amounts of joy and love. It is part of the perennial wisdom that when things are falling into place it means that you are headed in the right direction. Happy coincidences that might be considered as lucky or accidental by most people, are actually the ways in which the Universe supports us when we are on the right path. There are no accidents, no coincidences... only synchronicities. These are the fortunate things that occur in our lives for no logical reason. You cannot plan them, nor can you summon them, but when you are aligned with your higher purpose they show up all the

time. I knew all of this in my mind from years of studying about spiritualism, but in Asia I finally felt it in my heart. These kinds of wonderful “coincidences” kept happening over and over again until I finally “got it” and knew that unseen forces were helping me to find my way on what was clearly a virtuous path.

The Staff

Keeping the construction of The Island moving along in the right direction was a constant challenge, but at the same time I also had to devote much of my energy to figuring out how to run a resort. As noted before, I had no practical experience in any of these matters so the entire process was a grand self-taught learning experience. Finding the right people to ride with me on this rollicking adventure was a trip all in itself. Initially I thought I would need about 25 people to properly staff a resort of this size, but I had no idea where to begin. I had my eye on a couple of good waitresses from other restaurants on the beach but that was the extent of my ability to find staff. I had been living in this very foreign culture for only about six months, so I had little idea of the mentality of Thai workers and what they expected from their employers. My general plan was to treat my people with as much love and respect as possible, but I had no clear idea of what the parameters for that were in local culture. Everyone with experience working on the island told me that the most important thing that I needed was a good Thai manager. Once I found that man he would hire all of the staff, make sure that they did their work properly, and keep everyone in line. This seemed like a good idea so I put out some feelers, and sure enough within a few days the perfect Thai manager showed up at my doorstep.

His name was Charlie, pronounced Cha-Lee, and he was an older man who had a wealth of experience managing hotel staff throughout Southern Thailand. He spoke very good English, and was soft spoken and polite, unlike most Thais in positions of authority who were generally loud and insensitive. It seemed that I had found a gem so I hired him on the spot and he moved right in. Young Thais started showing up everyday to apply for work and Charlie seemed to be handling that very well. I was relieved to have that off of my head as I was so busy with the construction and all of the other preparations. We started to amass a small staff that moved in and began training, but things did not go smoothly. Reports kept coming to me that Charlie was too demanding and too hard on the staff. I would then meet with him and he would say that this was the “Thai way” and if he was not tough with them they would not work properly. I did not approve, but he was the one with all of the experience and everyone had told me that a manager like this was necessary so I let him continue... but not for long.

I often worked all night writing up plans, brochures, schedules, menus, and whatever. After one of those long nights I went out on the beach to watch the sunrise and came upon two sweet girls that we had hired to work in the kitchen who were softly crying. They did not speak much English but I got the idea that somehow Cha-Lee was responsible for this. As I sat there in the sand trying to find out what had happened shadows started to appear and I saw that many of my new staff were coming to join us on the beach. A couple of girls whom I had hired as waitresses joined the group and they spoke enough English to act as interpreters. We sat together on this beautiful beach with the sun rising over the Gulf of Thailand and I listened as they expressed their sadness about Cha-Lee’s abusive manner. They were all so beautiful – so sweet – how could I have let them be bossed around by someone who could neither see nor

appreciate their inner beauty? These innocent kids had come from all over Southern Thailand to start a new life of opportunity – a life that was different from the old Thai ways of their parents. Somehow they had been led to me, and I was beginning to understand what a marvelous blessing that was. I told them that I would take care of everything and that they should get all of the staff together for a meeting later that day.

I then went to see Charlie and told him that his services were no longer needed. I gave him a substantial bonus and told him there were no hard feelings but that the only boss The Island staff would ever have was me. He looked at me like I was insane (I was starting to get used to this) and said that he had never heard of such a thing. No Thai boss would ever deal with the staff personally, and a farang like me would never understand how to manage Thai people. Maybe so, maybe so, but me and my new staff were going to put that conventional “wisdom” to the test. Cha- Lee packed up and left and then I went to meet with my people. We all sat in a circle on the floor of my half-finished restaurant and I told them that they were my family. I would be the head of the family and if they had any problems or any questions about anything they could come directly to me. They were all so young. A few of the ones with some work experience were in their early 20’s and the others were mostly in their teens. Not one of them was from Koh Samui – all had come to this place of opportunity from villages throughout Thailand to seek a life that was better and different from what would have been their fate at home. They were the black sheep of their families. The ones who could not abide following the same old patterns that had been in their local culture forever. They wanted more and they had the courage to leave all that was familiar to strike out on their own. We were kindred spirits who had somehow found each other. I loved them so much.

Wanna

These were my angels and each one of them, along with the ones who joined them through the years, brought joy and light into my life. There are too many wonderful experiences to relate in one book, so let me share the stories of just a few who were particularly representative of this angelic field. We begin with Wanna. After Charlie left I handled all new job applicants myself, and one day an older Thai woman came walking in. When I say older I mean she was maybe 35 give or take a year. Her name was Wanna and she spoke little English, but I had interpreters, so I quickly found out that she had been the head housekeeper at a respected resort for the past several years. I couldn't believe my luck! Housekeeping was something that I had no conception of so the appearance of this very together woman was going to take that burden right off of my shoulders. Of course I hired her immediately and gave her full responsibility for the housekeeping and laundry. I assigned a few of young girls to be her assistants and she immediately started training them with cool confidence and a soft hand. I eventually used the cleaning staff as a kind of farm team for new girls. If they did not speak any English and were not keen to work in the kitchen I would give them to Wanna who would magically turned them into smiling happy workers who were always dependable and contented. When one of them would learn more English and start to feel more comfortable around foreigners I would promote her to be a waitress or another interactive job, and Wanna would get a new girl to break into her crew. Despite this process of constant turnover Wanna and her happy charges never missed a beat. I had devised a rather brilliant yet complicated room cleaning schedule that gave

different levels of service to different priced rooms. Wanna, with her ragtag crew in tow, followed it to a T and she even adjusted it on her own at times when it was more logical to do so. She also was in charge of the laundry for the entire resort and for the guests as well, and she did it all with an effortless ease that was nothing short of magical. I was receiving the love of an angel... a love that I saw in her eyes every day ... so grateful.

Tio

For about a the year before The Island opened I usually ate breakfast at a cute little place up the beach called Lotus Resort. A few humble bungalows and a surprisingly good restaurant that had real coffee, and home made brown bread which were true delicacies in those days. Their waiter and his girlfriend came work with me when I opened and a few weeks later they told me that Tio (Tay-Oh) had been fired and needed a job. I did not know Tio very well but remembered her as a rotund older woman who worked both in the kitchen and as a housekeeper at Lotus. I asked whether she could work with Wanna but they said she had bad knees so could not do housekeeping anymore. I then asked if she could cook and they said not very much. My policy was always to hire from within by giving the friends and family of my staff the first crack at new jobs. This worked well for me as it kept the cohesiveness of our Island family, and my staff were happy to have their family and friends with them. So even though I did not really have a job for Tio I said OK, tell her to move in as soon as she is ready. She showed up an hour later and I instantly fell in love with her. She was really short, round and maybe 45 years old which was ancient compared to most of the staff. I didn't know exactly what she was going to do, but I knew that she was incredibly grateful for the opportunity and would be an asset in some way. Boy did I underestimate that one!

Let me digress for a moment about the way that my kitchen staff developed. Once again I had been advised by friends with years of experience in Asia that the most important thing that I needed in my kitchen was a strong Thai chef. He would supervise all of the buying, do much of the cooking, and make sure that the rest of the staff performed well. As luck would have it the chef from a very good local restaurant had just quit a few months before we were to open and he came to work for me. I put him in charge of the group of girls that we had already hired and everything seemed OK as they continued to learn how to prepare the dishes on my initial menu. A few months later we were getting ready for our official opening when one night I was told that the chef had run off. Just like that – gone. Apparently he had gotten drunk and into some kind of trouble so he left the island. Great! Two days before the opening and no chef. I went out on the beach and slumped down into a deck chair to get my bearings and relieve my rapidly building headache... and then they came... one by one the girls from my kitchen came and sat around me. Nobody said anything, they were just “there” with me. Finally I asked “What we do?”, and they all replied “We can do Papa”. “Whaddaya mean ‘We can do’ – who can make the Chinese fish?” In unison: “Term”. “Who can make the special noodle dish?” In unison: “Term”. This went on with me going halfway through the menu before I realized that Term – a beautiful young girl whom I thought was a mere vegetable chopper - was actually the major talent in the kitchen. She and a few others had been doing most of the cooking all along while the “chef” was usually drunk. That was it. I vowed that no man (except for me) would ever set foot in that kitchen again. We opened to rave reviews and never looked back. Which brings me again to Tio,

I had put her in with the kitchen girls as that was the only place where I thought she could fit. Now that the girls were in charge the food was outstanding, but I was still not 100% pleased with the coordination of the meals. Everything was made fresh so it was challenging on a busy night to get all of the dishes for one table prepared and ready for serving at the same time. This was a consistent problem in all Thai restaurants and one that I wanted to solve in mine. We tried different systems but nothing really worked. Then one night I noticed that Tio was no longer in the back chopping vegetables, but instead had stationed herself where the food came out for the waitresses. She was constantly chattering with all of the cooks while at the same time directing the waitresses like a drill sergeant ... and the meals were arriving in perfect order. A star was born! She proceeded to take complete control of the kitchen and re-enacted her impeccable meal coordination skills every night for the next nine years. Even on New Years Eve nights when we had two full sittings of 150 each lasting well into the next morning her little kitchen cranked out delicious meals that arrived right on time. She was amazing. Not only that, but every day at 6:00 am she and my driver would take the truck to town and buy all of the food that was needed for that day. Every day – she never missed – and she fought tooth and nail with the women in the market to get us the freshest and best. Another incomparable angel – blessing me with her love every day.

Tien

When I was considering the gender makeup of my staff I once again started out by cautiously following the conventional wisdom. Through my observations of other resorts and conversations with people in the business I was led to believe that a breakdown of about 50/50 males and females was ideal, and that is the template that I initially used. However, it took me only a few weeks to realize that many of the young

men whom I had hired did not fit in with the special feeling that I envisioned for the Island. The atmosphere that I was creating was a sweet blend of natural beauty, relaxed freedom, cool music, and most of all love energy. Clearly I needed more Yin and less Yang if I was going to pull this off, and as a result the balance eventually wound up being 28 girls and 7 guys... my kind of odds. We had a gardener/maintenance crew who were all young men who had grown up in the jungle. They could handle just about anything from trimming tall trees with a machete to catching bats with a net... and then cooking them on the barbecue! Great kids, and if you came into The Island any morning at 6:30 a.m. you would hear the gentle sound of their bamboo rakes cleaning and smoothing the sand walkways that meandered through the property. All of my waitresses, cashiers and housekeepers were girls, and you already know that the kitchen staff which had been 90% women became 100% for the duration. In fact almost all of my guests' contact with the staff was laced with lovely feminine energy, but there was one major exception.

We had a beautiful bar right on the beach called The Rock Island Pub. It was brilliantly designed by Panya to have eight sides which gave people easy access while keeping a feeling of closeness. Attached to this bar was a "go down" which was an idea that I had borrowed from my travels in Bali. This thatch covered platform was one step down from the bar, and it extended out into the beach. There were dozens of big beautiful cushions to lounge on as you sipped your drink and listened to the music as it blended with the rhythm of the sea. I was lucky to find two pretty young women with bartending experience and my good friend Taki volunteered to train them. He was staying with me for a long term and had great experience as a bartender in Europe so these girls would learn from the best. The two girls became very proficient, but I had to stay up with

them every night because in those days it was necessary to have a male presence at the bar.

Soon after we opened it became obvious that we were going to be more busy than I had imagined so we needed more help and several of my staff brought in relatives from their home villages. One morning the girl who served all of the drinks in the restaurant came to me asking if her cousin who had just arrived from the South could work with her. I said yes, and when I returned a couple of hours later I saw this very cool looking guy learning how to make a watermelon shake. Could this possibly be her cousin? He looked like an American Indian with very long black hair, striking features, and a smile that could melt ice. He also looked completely out of place making coffees and fruit shakes, yet he went about learning this simple trade with calm grace and dignity. Taki came down for breakfast and when he asked me who the new guy was I said, “That’s my bartender” – I had known it from the moment I laid eyes on him. I was going to let him work a few days in the restaurant to see if he could stick it out, and if he did then Taki would start training him for the bar.

His name was Tien and became a master at mixing cocktails within a matter of weeks. Even more important was the air of cool elegance that he brought to the bar which was completely in synch with the vibe of The Island. That combined with his exotic good looks helped to make our bar the hottest spot on the beach, and our weekly beach parties were always packed with happy people. Over the course of the next few years Tien evolved into much more than a bartender and in fact became my right hand man. It was easy to give him more responsibilities because he always handled them with intelligence, grace and loyalty. That last quality was essential, and it was made clear to

me one night only a few months after he had started working in the bar. To set the scene, I had recently had a minor motorcycle accident that had left my right shoulder completely useless. It was only a temporary condition, but for the moment I could not lift that arm at all. Bad timing...

Wherever there is alcohol there is the potential for violence and even within the Buddha Field that was The Island that energy occasionally seeped in. There was an older English fellow living down the beach who was reputed to be a small time criminal from London. I had never seen him cause any trouble but was glad that he rarely came to our bar because his energy was dark. On this particular night I heard a commotion in the bar and arrived just in time to see this hoodlum chasing after a smaller man and cursing him at every step. Just as he was overtaking the poor guy I stepped in between them and stopped him in his tracks. I tried to reason with the bloke but he was flushed with drink and a boiling anger which he proceeded to turn on me: "So the big boss with all of the pretty girls is going to stop me is he?" (Oh great!) "I seen you jogging on the beach every day pretty boy; let's see what you've got." (Gulp!) Terrific, not only do I have no desire to fight this man who probably has murdered people, but I can't even lift my right arm to defend myself. My mind was struggling to think of a response when suddenly the guy was propelled forward and landed at my feet. It was Tien! He had jumped onto the bar and then flew through the air to deliver a magnificent flying drop kick right into the middle of this mug's back that had sent him flying into the sand face first. The fool struggled to his feet and said defiantly, "Who done that?". Tien was about half of this guy's size, but he went right up to his face and said: "You touch my Papa... I kill you!" ... and he meant it. I grabbed the guy with my good arm and led him stumbling out onto the beach away from the others. "Look mate, it's not good to start

up with the Thais. If you do something to this man then four others will come to get you at night and it will be YOU that winds up in jail.... have you ever seen the inside of a Thai jail? It ain't pretty. Go home. I'll quiet him down and you'll be OK." At this point the guy was so confused that he slunk off down the beach without a word. But the words that echoed in my mind for days were: "You touch my Papa I kill you!"

The Angel of Loyalty.

DIRK

I needed a break. The creation of The Island was about 80% complete and I had been working 18 hours a day for months on end. I was so tired that I could barely see straight, so decided to take a couple of days off and go to Koh Phangan which is Samui's smaller sister island just to the North. I left my friend Simon in temporary control of the construction crew, threw a few things into a canvas bag, and hopped onto a "taxi" which was actually an old pick up truck with benches in the back. Everything was so wonderfully primitive back then. I got off at small fishing village where we boarded a noisy old boat and set off on the one hour crossing – well it was one hour if the weather was good – and the boat did not break down. I had been to Koh Phangan numerous times so I knew it well, but it was still an adventure every time and a challenge to not get sick on this rocking boat that reeked of diesel fumes... it was heavenly. As the boat (finally) pulled into Had Rin beach you could sense a certain magic. The beach was achingly beautiful and wonderfully serene with crystal clear water and just a handful of small bungalows scattered about. As the boat dropped anchor I waded in waist deep with my bag held over my head, and headed for the little bungalow place that I always stayed at. It was marginally cleaner than the others (they changed the sheets once in

awhile) and the owners were extremely friendly. Luckily they had a good bungalow available right on the beach and for the princely sum of 150 baht (\$6) per night I was in.

Even though Samui was primarily a backpackers' haven in those days it was still sophisticated compared to Koh Phangan. When you were on Had Rin beach it felt like you had traveled back in time to 1968, and that delicious feeling of innocent freedom was everywhere. There was nothing to do but eat great food, lie on the beach, read a book, watch a video.... and get stoned. It was the perfect place to really get away from everything. Even though I was close enough to see Koh Samui if I walked to the other side of the beach, my mind was lost in another time and space. That first afternoon I fell peacefully asleep on the beach and awoke to the sound of two guys playing Frisbee. This was not your typical laid back Frisbee toss – these guys were hundreds of meters apart, flinging that thing with unerring accuracy and then catching it behind their backs or in other contorted ways – very impressive. I later met one of them at dinner and we got along instantly. His name was Dirk and he was on holiday from his native New Zealand having just sold a restaurant that he had run for years. When he said the word restaurant my ears perked up because I was in the middle of planning how the design for my kitchen and was looking for help. One thing led to another and he said he would come over to Samui on his way home and give me a hand. His words were prophetic...

I returned to The Island and was pleasantly surprised when Dirk showed up about ten days later. He moved into one of the newly finished bungalows and that night we had a great dinner wherein he met all of the regular crew. We made plans to look at the kitchen setup the next morning. Dirk was out and about at sunrise looking not only a

the kitchen but at everything else. As it turns out he had been a builder for many years so was extremely interested in the way the Thais had constructed my place – extremely interested and not terribly impressed. By the time I had had my coffee and started to register a few clear thoughts he had already informed me of about hundreds of things that were poorly constructed and would need fixing. Just what I wanted to hear first thing in the morning and only months before I was scheduled to open for business. Nonetheless, I was grateful for his input, and the next few days were taken up with him showing me the numerous faults in my paradise and me trying not to panic. Dirk was very much like the character in the movie “Crocodile Dundee”. He had been a soldier, fireman, builder, chef and God knows what else. After spending a few days with him it became clear that he was the type of guy you would want on your side if you were stranded on a deserted island – or perhaps if you were opening a resort in a wild and crazy place. As luck would have it, he was intrigued by the possibility of spending considerable time at The Island and asked if he could come back and work with us for awhile. Music to my ears.

Dirk arrived about three weeks before the official opening and it was none too soon. On the day that he arrived we had just turned on the new water supply and virtually all of the 50 bathrooms simultaneously sprang leaks. Two days later our new electric transformer was turned on to the sound of numerous switches being blown out. I managed to get some of the builders back on site to work on corrections, and Dirk was right in there with them from dawn til dark. The man was a human dynamo that never stopped working and was always at full power... a very strangely disguised angel who had arrived just in the nick of time. Amazingly we (he) got everything working perfectly just before we opened and by that time Dirk was clearly installed as my close ally and

maintenance guru. He wound up staying with us for two years, and in addition to being a tireless worker he was a wonderful addition to the cast of characters that made The Island so incredibly unique. Good on ya mate! Dirk was a gem.

Shaka

We had been open for about eight months and things were going great. There had been some changes in the staff because some of my early hires could not adjust to my very un-Thai way of running things. They had been replaced by new volunteers for the Black Sheep Brigade, who were more attuned to this radically different style of life based on freedom, fairness and love. All of my Thai family were wonderfully suited to the positions that they held, and each one brought their own special energy to the mix, but there was one job at The Island (aside from mine) that needed a Western touch. In my ongoing research of other resorts to see what worked and what did not, I was consistently put off by the way reception and guest relations were managed. There were only a few posh places on Samui back then and they were all run in same manner as the big hotels in Bangkok. You were greeted by lovely Thai girls standing behind a desk dressed in colorful silk uniforms. All of the lines that they delivered were carefully scripted and delivered with smiles. “Good afternoon sir.” “Do you have a reservation?” “Have you had a good flight?”... and so on. Everyone was polite but there was no real human contact and it was all very formal. On the other end of the scale were the mid-priced and inexpensive places where reception was often nonexistent. Normally you wandered into the restaurant and kept saying the word “bungalow” to everyone you saw until finally someone would point you in the direction of the manager/owner... if they happened to be around. They would then try to figure out if they had a room available, and if so which one. Eventually you got to see the hut and if you liked it you took it.

The same type of shortcomings existed when you were staying at a place and wanted some information. At the posh places they would tell you about the treks and trips that they promoted, but they had no useful info as to what was really going on. If it was not on their pre-printed forms then they were not able help you... but they were always polite and smiling. At the lower end you might get lucky and stay with an owner who was interested in helping the guests, but that was rare so I was determined that the guests' experience at my place would be completely different. I went back to my basic question: "How would I like to be treated?", and the answer soon became obvious. In the months before the opening we were renting bungalows as soon as they were finished in order to make a bit of money. The regular crew that lived with me at that time included a couple of young English women who had invested money in the project and an American girl. When people would wander in from the beach looking for a room I would ask one of these girls to handle them and it quickly became obvious that this was the solution to the reception situation. About 97% of our guests were either Europeans or other Westerners so it made perfect sense that they would feel more relaxed, secure and communicative if they were greeted and taken care of by a Western woman. "Blending traditional Thai hospitality with Western management" was the way I wrote it in the brochure, and it was much more than just a saying.

The way that this evolved was that I would always have two or three young Western women living with us who would share the responsibilities of being assistant managers. Our "office" was the central table in the restaurant and each of these girls would be stationed there for several hours each day. During those hours they would be in charge of virtually everything – showing bungalows, handling guests' questions or problems,

changing money, checking deliveries to the kitchen, supervising the housekeeping staff, the laundry, the music, the waitresses... everything. It was really a lot of responsibility for a young woman to take on, but the atmosphere was so relaxed that they never sensed the possibility of pressure. Normally these girls would stay for a year or two getting interesting work experience and having a marvelous adventure in paradise before returning to their regular lives. I had two great girls for the first six months but one of them had to return to school soon so I was looking for a replacement.

One night at the bar I was setting up the music before dinner when I got that feeling that I was being watched. Rupert Sheldrake has done many experiments showing that we all have a sixth sense that tells us when we are being stared at and mine was highly activated at that moment. I looked to my left and sure enough a very exotic looking woman was staring a hole right through me. I smiled and she just kept staring... so I smiled some more, said hi, and she replied, "You are the most beautiful man I have ever seen.". Okay – what could I say to that? I was momentarily speechless but finally managed to croak out a thank you. Her name was Shaka, and as you can tell she was never shy about expressing her feelings. She was from Chile but had just arrived that evening from India where she lived in the Osho Ashram. She had found my place because many of my friends and acquaintances were followers (Sannyasins) of Osho and had already been to The Island. She and a few others from the Ashram were here to renew their Indian visas and they were in no hurry to leave. You may know the story of her guru Osho who was originally known as Rajneesh when he famously had 96 Rolls Royces at his Ashram in Oregon. Shaka and her family had been so inspired by this man that like many others they had left their lives in Chile and moved to America to be in his presence. Eventually he was hounded out of the United States by the government

and fled from country to country trying to find a resting place. During this Odyssey Shaka was right there with him step for step as part of his inner circle until he finally returned to his roots in Poona, India. He had passed away recently and, though the ashram continued operating, Shaka and others were ready to move on.

In the weeks that she stayed at The Island I got to know her quite well and realized that this woman would be a great manager. When I asked her if she wanted to stay on and work with us she jumped at the chance. That night we celebrated her decision at the bar and let me tell you – that woman knew how to celebrate! We all had way too much to drink and smoke and went to bed very late saying that we would meet the next day to start showing her the ropes. The next morning I staggered down to the restaurant/office at my usual time of about 10:00 am and there she was sitting bright as a button next to the girl who was working and absorbing every detail. As it turns out she had shown up totally sober and ready to go at 7:30 despite the excesses of the previous night. Not only that, but she already seemed to know the workings of my rather intricate booking system – the same system that had baffled a college educated American girl for months. This was looking good. Shaka absorbed everything within a few days and she very quickly became the centerpiece of my management team. She was perhaps the most powerful woman that I had ever met. She could drink a bottle of wine, six B-52's, smoke three strong joints, and still be right on time to work at 7:30 the next morning.... and she wasn't just there at 7:30... she was THERE! Full of energy, totally clear, completely in command... whew! In addition to her physical and intellectual prowess she was also extremely powerful in the psychic and spiritual realms. One night I remember that she was either angry or jealous (or both) with another woman, but instead of saying anything she just sat at the bar with a concentrated look on her face.

At one point this other woman got up and walked behind the bar to ask a question of the bartender – suddenly two whiskey bottles started to shake and they quickly fell out of their racks and crashed right at her feet. She screamed with fright and jumped backwards. I managed to catch out of the corner of my eye a wry smile playing across Shaka’s lips. Let me tell you, I was at the bar almost every night for ten years and that was the only time that a bottle ever fell out of those secure racks. Yes, Shaka was powerful, but fortunately that incident was the rare exception when she turned that power in a negative direction. For all of the years that she worked with me her amazing strength and talent was almost always directed at making The Island more exciting and happier in countless ways. She was a hot-blooded Chilena Scorpio... and very much one of my guiding Angels.

ALEC

A young American traveler who lived down the beach would often come to our restaurant and one night he showed up with an interesting older man named Alec. I was introduced to this fellow and he told me that he lived in a cheap bungalow that was so dusty that it was giving him asthma so he was anxious to find a new place. I asked him if he wanted to move in with us and his answer was an enigmatic “We’ll see young man.” Long story short – after a few weeks of coming around and getting to know us a bit he finally decided that he would move to The Island. He told me that he would be staying for several months and as he was on a pension he needed an inexpensive room. I really liked this man and wanted him to be a happy member of the family, so I had my construction guys renovate a small bungalow that I had been using for storage and they made it into a very lovely suite for Alec. It was about 100 meters from the beach, and

near the huts of the other Western staff which instantly made Alec feel part of the inner circle. When I showed him his new home he was blown away, and I will never forget his first morning at The Island. He had been staying previously at a typical travelers' place (it was where Finch had lived) so the meals were haphazard affairs, and there was often a television droning in the background... and now for something entirely different...

I came down to the restaurant/office at my usual time the next morning and Alec had already been there since before they opened at 7:30. I went straight over to him and asked him how everything was. He looked at me with those weathered blue eyes that had seen so much and said: "My boy, why didn't you make me come here sooner!" My weak reply: "I tried, I tried, but you were a tough sell." He continued, "Everything is so clean, the food is delicious, the girls are delightful, the coffee is real..... and Mozart! ... Mozart!! ... playing softly as the sun rises... this is heavenly!" Music to my ears and in my head I heard the line that Humphrey Bogart said to Claude Rains at the end of "Casablanca": "I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship." Indeed it was. Alec had installed himself at the perfect table for watching everything that went on in the amazing Theatre of Life that was The Island, and that became his permanent station for the next seven years. He was a prolific writer who was always jotting down notes and yet he always had time for everyone who came to his table – whether they were seeking wisdom or just a good listener. He had lived an extraordinary life that started in Poland, but then led to France where he had fled after the Nazis invaded his homeland. Soon after joining the French Army they too surrendered and he was captured, but somehow managed to escape from prison and make his way over the Pyrenees to Spain. From there he emigrated to England, joined the RAF, and flew numerous missions over Germany. After the war he was on the move again, first to

Canada and finally to New Zealand where he became a professor of French studies and the headmaster of a prominent school.

By the time I met him he was in his 80's, but looked and acted much younger. He would go back to New Zealand once a year to sign up for his pension and then return to us for the next ten months. Despite his advanced age he always traveled by train and boat with the backpackers as he reveled in their youth and innocence. He was firmly installed at "Alec's Table" day and night, and was usually surrounded by young people listening to his tales and picking up tips on the best way to travel. He became a very important presence at The Island and I quickly grew close to him and felt that he was very much a father figure, not only to me but for the whole place. We shared the same birthday, so every year on that propitious day the staff would go all out to create a fantastic celebration with Alec standing next to me sharing the sweet glow of that spotlight of loving energy. This round little man, who could be quite cantankerous at times, had found a place in our hearts, and we in turn had given him a sense of belonging that was built upon a firm foundation of love and respect. It was a relationship filled with beautiful synergy, and it was a blessing for all of us.

Law & Order

When you are in a foreign country on holiday everyone is happy to see you and to accept the money that you will be spending. As a result it is extremely rare for you to have any major problems with the local people unless you go out of your way to provoke them. However, living and working in a foreign land is a wholly different matter, so when you

decide to become a permanent part of an Asian community it is imperative that you get a handle on how things work.

Ott

I had my first lesson in the workings of the local police when one of my workers got in trouble. It was back when I was first building The Island and I only had one man working for me as a gardener, translator and all around liaison with the locals. His name was Ott and he was intelligent, good hearted and soft spoken, so you can imagine my surprise when I found out one morning that he was in jail. Apparently he had been at a party the night before and had gotten so uncharacteristically drunk that when he left the house he jumped on the first motorbike that he saw and took off for home. Unfortunately that was not his motorbike and when the police came to find him that morning the “stolen” bike was right outside of his hut, so they went in and arrested him. This seemed like more of a misunderstanding than a crime so I enlisted the help of my Thai friend Chan who knew his way around and could translate for me.

We drove one hour to the main town but they would not allow us to see Ott. I was however able to get a look at the “jail” and it was a sickening sight. Ott and a few other prisoners were in an open air cage with heavy rusted iron bars and a filthy concrete floor; like animals in a zoo. I had to get him out of there. Chan found out that we could get Ott released if I posted bail of 100,000 baht which was a fortune in those days and more than I had immediate access to. We managed to slip Ott a note with some pocket money and a promise to get him out soon. It took me two days to get enough money transferred from Bangkok and then we went back to the police station where I signed numerous forms, handed over the money, and finally got my friend out of that hellhole.

He was given a court date and told that I would lose all the bail money if he did not show up. The officer in charge then said (to Chan in Thai) that if I wanted to have the case closed with no trial I should negotiate with the Chief of Police. This seemed like a good idea so we made an appointment for the following week. Meanwhile, being the trained lawyer that I am, I decided to gather some evidence before going to this “negotiation”. First we went to the people whom Ott had stolen the bike from. They said that they called the police when they saw the bike was missing, but when they found out that it was Ott who had taken it they immediately went to the police to have him released. They were content that they had their bike back in good condition and had no desire to prosecute their friend. All of this was to no avail as they were told by the police that once he was in jail it was no longer their business. I was starting to get the message.

Chan and I showed up right on time for our appointment with the head man the following week but were told that he was not yet in the office. We went outside to wait and after about 30 minutes Chan poked me and pointed to a large blacked out Mercedes that had just rolled in saying, “There he is.” That Mercedes would have cost about \$50,000 in America at the time, but in Thailand the cost was closer to \$150,000 given the astronomical taxes that they levied on imported luxury cars. So my question to Chan was simply: “How much does the Chief of Police make?” Answer: “20,000 baht per month”. So this guy makes \$800 per month and owns a car that costs \$150,000. It was all starting to add up very neatly. When we finally were escorted into the chief’s office his first words were, “How come you Farang spend big money to help Thai boy. I never hear such thing.” I said that Ott was my friend but he still looked at me with confused amusement. Then we got down to business and I asked him how much it would cost to get the case dismissed. He said 75,000 baht and I replied in full lawyerly disbelief: “But

the stolen motorbike in question only costs 35,000 brand new, and it was returned in perfect condition, and the owners are not pressing charges.” His reply to my brilliantly argued case was simple and to the point: “Make no matter – 75,000 baht or your friend go to trial... and I think maybe he lose and go to big jail for long time.” I realized that I had better quit before I would be the one going to “big jail for long time” so I settled for losing 75K and considered myself lucky to be getting even 25K back. What happened next was perhaps the strangest part of all. I was given a receipt by the desk clerk and told to go the bank across the street. I presented the receipt to the bank and was given 25,000 baht which apparently came from the police department account. This pay off was not black money. It did not come from under the table. Everything was right out in the open. This was the way business was done and this is why the chief of police had a car that cost almost 200 times his monthly salary. I was learning.

A Sad Tale

My next lesson in Asian police work was the result of a tragic accident that happened just months after we had opened. Three really nice young English lads were staying with us as part of an Asian holiday that was their final fling before entering Oxford University in the fall. They were polite, intelligent and good natured, so it was a pleasure to have them around. One day they went to the other end of the beach to rent jet skis and tragedy struck. Apparently they were getting a bit wild, as teenagers do, and one of them turned the steering bar so violently that it hit him hard in the ribs and apparently punctured his lung. By the time the others realized that he was badly hurt and were able to get him to the shore he was in very bad shape. The local people rushed to help and managed to take him by truck to the primitive local hospital, but he never recovered and passed away. Of course we had no knowledge of this until the two

surviving boys staggered in from the beach hours later, but by then there was nothing we could do... other than comfort these poor brave lads who were in traumatic shock.

We managed to calm them down with the help of some valium, and they both finally fell asleep in their bungalow. Later that evening a police car pulled in and an investigator with two other cops in tow came into the restaurant asking for the boss. This fellow seemed a bit less savage than the other cops I had met on Samui and he even spoke passable English, so we sat down to talk. I was already wary enough from my previous experience not to trust the police, so I lied to him and said that the boys were not there. He then began questioning me to find out how much I knew about what had happened. It was obvious to anyone that this was purely an accident, and that is the scenario that unfolded as I described what I knew of the incident. I was in somewhat of a traumatized state myself as this whole tragedy had hit us all like a ton of bricks, but as this man's questions continued to fly in my direction I slowly began to wake up to the fact that he was trying to build a case for homicide. It was so absurd that at first I could not see it, but slowly it dawned on me that these two lovely boys who had just seen their best friend die in their arms were now in real trouble. This cop was going to twist the facts so that he could put these two English kids in jail – either to extort a fortune from their families, or to boost his reputation, or most likely both. In the version of reality that he was trying to weave these two had been driving their jet skis so violently that their aggression and negligence had caused the third boy to die. Negligent homicide was what he was after, and that meant serious jail time for these innocent lads,

Once I caught on to what was happening I stopped giving him any more information and said it would be best if he came back the next afternoon to talk directly with the

boys after they had had a night to rest. Luckily he bought this and as he drove off into the night we sprang into action. Our plan was simple – get these kids off of the island before the cops could get them in their clutches, and bring them to the British Embassy in Bangkok where they would be safe. There was still no airport in Samui and even if there had been it would have been too risky to leave by a regularly scheduled boat or plane... but there was always the night boat. Yes, that rickety old tub that wallowed its way across the channel every night would not be under any kind of surveillance so it was the perfect vehicle. The boys would need help as they were in a serious state of shock, and I needed to stay here to deal with the police when they came back the next day. This meant that escort duty fell to two strong women: Katherine (the striking English girl who had invested her last savings with me) and the woman who was then my wife. It was very courageous of them to undertake this dangerous mission, but they both volunteered unblinkingly.

I gave them enough money so that as soon as the night boat landed on the mainland they could take a taxi to the airport and get the first flight to Bangkok (certainly the mainland airport would not be watched). Once there it was straight to the British Embassy and sanctuary. We woke the boys, told them the basic plan, and then loaded their gear onto our truck for the trip to the ferry pier. They were still in a complete state of shock, but understood the urgency and rose to the occasion. Once the four of them were safely on the boat and it had put to sea I drove the one hour trip back to The Island through the dark jungle... with my heart in my throat. We had no telephones at The Island so I arranged with a neighboring resort to have access to their phone. I called the British Embassy as soon as they opened and eventually managed to speak with someone who was in a position of authority. After explaining the situation I gave them

the phone numbers of the two boys' parents so that they could be alerted. Having been assured that the grounds of the Embassy were in fact British sovereign territory, I asked him to call me as soon as my people arrived. I then sat down and immediately fell soundly asleep in a chair next to the reception desk of my neighbors' resort.

I was shaken awake some time later and anxiously went to the telephone. It was all OK. They had gotten to the Embassy and the boys were now safe and in contact with their families. I thanked my brave women warriors who had escorted them to safety and arranged for their return home the next day. I breathed a huge sigh of relief and then was hit by a wave of panic as I remembered that I still had to face what might be a very angry policeman. I walked back to my restaurant, ordered a large cup of coffee, and tried to collect my thoughts as I waited for the inspector to show up. I didn't have to wait long as he arrived soon after accompanied by his two bodyguards and immediately asked to see the two boys. I said that I had not seen them yet that morning - probably still sleeping - and then made a show of obtaining the spare keys to the boys' bungalow from our files. The four of us headed solemnly down the garden path and when we arrived at bungalow #205 I knocked loudly several times and called out the boys' names. Obviously there was no reply, so after one more exasperated verbal summons I put the key in the lock and flung open the door. I was shocked... shocked... to find that the room was completely empty and it looked like the inhabitants had fled in a hurry. I called to a nearby cleaning girl asking if she had seen the people from #205... and on and on. (A quick aside here. I had done some acting in my life on stages from New York to Ibiza, and though my talents would never remind anyone of Sir Laurence Olivier, they stood me in good stead on this day) This inspector was not happy, and I

am not certain that he believed my “Mr. Innocent” act, but he had no proof otherwise so eventually left the premises vowing to get to the bottom of this. Whew.

The girls returned the next night and they were deservedly showered with tons of love, respect and gratitude by myself and the few others who knew what they had accomplished. Meanwhile, I was looking over my shoulder for the next several weeks to see if the Inspector would return to ruin my life, but he never showed up. I guess he either dropped the case or was called off by higher ups who had been contacted by the British Embassy. I eventually heard from the families of the two boys whom we saved, and I also corresponded with the parents of the deceased lad. They were incredibly understanding... but so terribly sad. All I could do was tell them how much we had grown to love their son in the short time that we knew him. I felt so helpless, and that feeling would return the next time that I was called upon to deal with a tragic and untimely death.

A Dream Come True

The construction was finished, Dirk had fixed all of the leaks, the staff was primed and ready to go... Show Time! Ten months of frenetic energy combined with countless inspirations and synchronicities had birthed a beautiful resort that was ready to stretch its legs and move into life. We had an incredible opening party just before Christmas and from that moment on everything kept getting better and better in a continuous swirl of exciting new experiences. I was “working” 15 hours a day, seven days a week, with no holidays and I loved it. Remember my definition of work is that if you would rather be

doing something else then what you *are* doing is work. Well, there was no place that I would rather have been than doing what I was doing, so the countless hours that I was putting in did not count as work in my view of the world. On every level I was experiencing fulfillment that was beyond my wildest dreams. The staff had become my beloved family and together with this “Black Sheep Brigade” we were creating a loving space so powerful that it captivated people from around the world. On one level I knew that this was all emanating from me, yet at the same time I was completely aware that its true source was something much more transcendent. I had found the perfect niche for expressing my inner loving nature, and the Universe was using me as a channel to spread this to hundreds of people each day. I could not imagine a better “job”.

Spiritually we were lifting people’s vibrations and we were also a big success commercially. We had no telephones and only took reservations that were sent by fax to one of our suppliers in the main town. I also did not use any travel agents having found that they liked to book people in the busiest times (when I did not need their business) and almost never in the slow times (when I did need their help). Yet somehow everyone who was supposed to come to The Island managed to find us. In the first months all of our guests were walk-ins from the beach which seems like a risky marketing strategy, yet we were full just about every day. Granted it was the busiest time of the year, but it was still amazing for a completely new place with no bookings and no phones to have 40 bungalows completely full. After the first season word of mouth began to spread rapidly and that along with numerous repeat guests and wonderful write-ups in travel books and newspapers kept our occupancy rate way ahead of the other resorts on the beach.

What’s In The Food?

Putting together a menu for the restaurant was a daunting challenge because I had never done much cooking and had no experience running a restaurant. Hold on, actually I do have a lot of restaurant experience – I have eaten the vast majority of my meals as an adult in restaurants, and many of them at some of the finest places in the world. So I went about eating at every different type of place on the island and making notes about what was good and what wasn't. From the smallest most humble food shacks to what passed for the fanciest eateries around I sampled food, checked prices, watched service (or lack thereof) and acquired a feeling for what was being offered and how I could give people better for less. I had a built-in advantage over the Thai managers as I knew what Westerners liked and what they expected. All I had to do was create food and value that I myself would appreciate and that would be leagues ahead of the competition.

I created basic menus for breakfast, lunch and dinner and then started testing the food. My small original kitchen staff worked hard to learn how to prepare Western favorites like big California type salads, real club sandwiches, omelets that were light, fluffy and cooked with butter rather than oil, and on and on and on. Each dish was prepared many times until I felt that it tasted and look right and then the recipe and process were locked in for all to learn. The girls in the kitchen were amazing! So patient and happy while I tried things over and over... always treating them with love and no hint of criticism but knowing that they were losing a tiny bit of "face" each time the dish was sent back for further refinement. Sometimes I would actually go in and prepare something myself to get the idea across. I remember trying to describe a simple sautéed fish and when they could not get the idea I grabbed a pan and had at it. Suddenly I realized that I had never grilled a fish before in my life... yet I knew how it was

supposed to look... and taste.. so I started. Luckily they got the picture right away and took over before I could mutilate the poor fish. They got it just right – moist, flaky, lightly browned and divine. They must have made hundreds of them over the next few years and each one came out exactly the same – remarkable – I loved my girls.

This process went on for weeks until two full menus were finally created: one for the daytime and another just for dinner. Fortunately half of the menu was Thai food so there was very little for me to do on those bits except to choose my favorites, taste and approve. We had a soft opening for a couple of months which gave me a chance to fill out the staff and get them comfortable making so many things that they had never heard of before in their lives. We only had a few bungalows open so there were not that many customers at first, but then we started to attract a lot of business from all over the beach. People were amazed at being able to get both real Western food and great Thai dishes that were beautifully prepared and served for such a reasonable price. So many people gave me compliments that I started to realize that they were not just being polite to a new business – they really loved the place!

From the moment that we officially opened the restaurant was busy morning, noon and night. The compliments continued to flow and we were written up in several guide books with glowing reviews. I really couldn't figure out what was happening. I know that we were all working hard to have everything fresh and the girls in the kitchen were incredibly efficient in getting the meals out on time and in order, but was that all there was to it? My wonderment reached a new level when one of our guests asked if he could speak with me. He had been staying with us for over a week and was very quiet and to himself. He told me that he had eaten every meal his entire stay at my restaurant and

that the food was uniformly superb. He then blew my mind by saying that he was the owner and manager of one of the trendiest restaurants in San Francisco – the place was so famous that even I had heard of it in my splendid tropical isolation. He asked me how I was able to create such consistently great food and ambience in such a challenging location. I had no cogent response and could only repeat my mantra of attention to detail and good fortune - but I knew that there was something much more to it than that.

Some time later I was sitting out on the beach as the bar was closing. It was our custom to light up a joint at this time of the evening so that we could really unwind after another long and wonderful day. The hashish was particularly strong that night and I was really floating when it hit me! The food... the restaurant... the amazing compliments... it's all about LOVE! Everyone adores this food and this place because they are tasting/feeling/experiencing the love that goes into every bite. My girls in the kitchen feel loved, protected and appreciated in ways that most Thai girls could never possibly imagine. They are treated with respect and affection at all times, and if they have financial or family problems they know that they can always come to me for help. Most important of all is that each one of them is hugged and acknowledged many times every day, and they are made to feel that they are an important part of a very special experience that we are all sharing. In a word they are Loved and that loving vibration goes into the food they prepare, the drinks they serve, the cocktails they shake, the service they give, and everything! What an amazingly virtuous circle I had stumbled upon, and how wonderful that the world can work in such a beautiful way.

A Hot Party

There was not much organized nightlife in those early years, so our bar became the hottest spot on the beach. Every Saturday and every Full Moon was Party Night at The Island. My garden boys would spend the day cutting palm leaves, picking flowers and blowing up balloons to beautifully decorate the area around the bar. Marketing was primitive but effective. I was always on the lookout amongst the young travelers who stayed with us to find a few that were artistically inclined. When I discovered one I would ask him or her to design flyers for the parties, and a good flyer design was traded for a free dinner with drinks. I would then round up a few pretty girls to walk the beach with balloons and bikinis distributing copies of the flyers to all and sundry. They too got free dinners and drinks so there was rarely a problem finding volunteers. There was a big palm tree right in front of The Island that leaned out over the beach so that you could see it from far away. We had strung hundreds of colored lights up and down this tree and also had spots trained on it so that at night when you were at the other end of the beach – five kilometers away – you could see our symbol: “The Palm Tree With Lights”. It was all so sweetly innocent and uncomplicated.

Another Saturday another party. This one was on January 19, so we had been open for just over a year which meant that we had already given about 70 parties and were well practiced in this joyous ritual of revelry which went something like this: During the course of dinner the ever-present sweet jazz music would gradually evolve toward acid jazz and finally morph into full fledged dance tracks. Once things got going Tien and my girl bartender would be shaking cocktails nonstop all night, and all of the Western staff would be in the bar as well serving beers, mixing drinks, pouring shots, dancing and washing the glasses in between. I was normally playing the music, serving drinks, counting money and singing songs the entire evening... but this night would be different.

One of the highlights of every party was the fireworks display. You can buy all manner of fireworks in the supermarkets in Thailand, so we always featured a massive launching of rockets climaxed by the lighting of a huge ball of gunpowder that shot flames high into the sky for several minutes. I had taught my boys how to set this up so that it was safe and there had never been any problems. On this night the wind was blowing hard off of the sea and onto the shore. I consulted with Dirk who had been in the New Zealand Fire Service and we decided to test a few rockets to see if they would fly safely out to sea. I was extremely busy, so when Dirk came back and said all was OK I completely trusted his judgment.

About an hour later things were really rocking when Shaka came running into the bar screaming that I needed to come right away. I could see the panic in her eyes so I rushed out and looked up to see that the roof of the restaurant and the adjoining kitchen were ablaze in fire. Apparently some of Dirk's rockets had been caught in the heavy winds and were sent backwards over the bar onto the roof. They had smoldered there for awhile and eventually, with the encouragement of the wind, had caught fire in the dry thatch. By the time that I was alerted the fire had already gotten quite large and we were catapulted into action. Tien as the first one on the roof – leaping like a gazelle to the roof of the bar and then onto that very large and fiery expanse of dry thatch. I was right behind him (amazed that I had been able to jump up there so easily) and Dirk was right behind me. He knew that this was his fault for letting the rockets backfire, but he also knew that as a former fireman he was the only one who had any idea of what to do. We had four big fire extinguishers which were handed up to us, and we emptied them onto the flames in a great fuselage of smoke and chemicals. The fire barely shrugged as it continued to get stronger with the winds whipping up its energy. The water hose was

useless because it had no pressure at the height of the roof, so the people at the bottom were filling up the big 50 liter plastic water bottles and handing them up to us.

There were four of us in the middle of the fire: me, Tien, Dirk and a guy that I will never forget named Michael Murphy. Mike was a fireman from Santa Cruz, California who came to Samui every winter, and I was very lucky that he happened to be there that night. He was a powerful young man who was experienced in fighting fires – just the kind of guy I'd want to have alongside of me in that situation. Many of the guests had joined in to help us and they had formed a chain for filling up these big bottles with water and then handing them up to the four of us at the top. We would each dump all of the water onto the piece of thatch that was directly in front of us and then rip that piece out of the roof with our bare hands. This was the method devised by Dirk and Mike because no matter how much water we put on the thatch it would always catch fire again due to the wind, so the only way to extinguish it was to rip it out and throw it to the ground. At one point I stopped for a moment to catch my breath and looked up over the flames. We weren't going to make it. The wind kept driving the flames inland and away from us – over the roof and onto the other side – and I could see my whole dream disappearing. The flames could easily jump from the restaurant to the first row of bungalows and then straight down the line destroying the entire place in an orgy of conflagration. It was hopeless... but we kept on.

I grabbed the next big water bottle that came up through the chain and emptied it onto the flames – all with only my right hand. Suddenly I realized that I am not nearly strong enough to do this – 50 liters of water is over 100 pounds, and I was lifting these things with one hand like they were coke bottles. Not only that, but I was ripping

flaming pieces of thatch out of the hardwood supports that they were nailed to with my bare hands. Shades of a mother lifting a car to free her baby! There was a power rippling through us that was far greater than our normal selves. Maybe we *can* do this thing. My three partners were doing even more than I was and slowly we started to make some progress. We had pulled off so much thatch that we were now standing barefoot on just the thin wooden supports as we worked our way up to the top of the roof. There we were - standing on these precarious strips of wood four meters in the air and yet there was no fear, no panic, no fatigue – no time for any of that. There was only the fire.

Slowly the tide began to turn as the once indomitable flames began to yield to our efforts. The four of us were working together in perfect unison; dowsing the flames and ripping out the thatch in a fiery ballet of desperation... and then it was over. Between the four of us we had removed over half of that gigantic thatch roof and the once roaring fire was now just a soggy smoldering mess. At first we were too exhausted to move, but finally we managed to work our way slowly back down to solid ground. I looked up to survey the damage and was appalled. The entire roof of the kitchen was gone and half of the restaurant as well. The place was a mess and everyone was staring at me as I stood there covered in black soot with my party clothes reduced to mere rags. For a moment I was speechless as thoughts races through my brain. There had been many other heroes that night, particularly the dozens of men from the party who had created the “bucket brigade” of water and risked their lives to be with us on that perilous roof. There was only one thing to say: “Drinks are on the house! Let’s get this party going.” Everyone who had fought the fire let out a cheer and descended on the

bar. Most of the guests had backed away from the danger and watched from the beach as the drama unfolded, but they too were welcomed back for a free drink. I was still in shock and knew that tomorrow would be a great challenge, but tonight was for celebrating that we were still here – still standing.

Party on!

When We Open Again?

I got things rolling at the bar and then made my way through the wrecked restaurant where Shaka was guarding all of the guests' valuables. During the fire she had luckily had the courage and presence of mind to get them out from under the burning roof, and now she was now taking them to safety. She kept muttering something under her breath that I could not understand so I moved closer and heard, "Osho, Osho, what are you doing?" When I asked what that was about she said that tonight was the one year anniversary of Osho's death, and she could not understand why her beloved guru would want to ruin the wonderful new life that she had found. I don't know if Osho's spirit had anything to do with the fire, but I would not rule out the possibility given his strong connection to Shaka. I was much too tired to think about it just then, so I hugged and thanked Shaka before staggering off to my house which was about 100 meters from the beach. There I was in for another shock – the mirror. I looked like hell. My clothes were torn to tatters, my face was black as coal, my hands and feet were covered with burns and blisters... and my smile was radiant! I took a fast shower, changed into clean clothes and went back out to the party which lasted well into the next morning.

I only slept about two hours that night and then headed down to the restaurant at 6:00 to watch the sun rise over my shattered restaurant. It was a pitiful mess and the staff all

looked dazed and defeated as they slowly filtered in. A few of them finally came over to where I was sitting and with their saddened eyes staring down at the floor sheepishly asked: “When we open again Papa?”. I immediately realized that this depressed energy had to be changed right away, so I snapped out of my stupor and before I could stop them the following words came tumbling out of my mouth: “We open right now!”. I jumped out of my seat, gave all of them big hugs, and started showing them that half of the tables and chairs were not damaged so we could move them out onto the beach. The snack bar where we made coffee and drinks was still functional and we could set up a temporary kitchen outside in the back. “Go to the staff quarters and bring everyone here to help with the clean up – we open for breakfast at 7:30.”... and so we did.

The next step was to get started fixing these buildings, but it was Sunday morning and I didn't have a clue as to how I could begin. Panya was doing work on the mainland with his whole crew and I did not know any other builders, but once again the energy of the Universe was looking out for me. A couple of Thai guys who I knew only in passing came by to look at the disaster and offer their condolences. We got to talking and it turned out that they were friends with a builder, so I asked them to please try and get him here right away. Of course they looked at me like I was crazy, but after some prodding they went off to find the man. Just as they left another Thai acquaintance who had a business on the island came by to pay his respects and I asked him who had built his restaurant. One thing led to another and he drove away to see if he could locate this second builder... on a Sunday... in the jungle... where there were almost no telephones. An hour later both builders showed up. The first one said that he could probably find enough thatch to do half of the job, and that it would take about a week. I hired him on the spot and off he went to round up his crew and equipment. The other builder then

started to leave but I stopped him and asked where he was going. He said I had already given the job to the other guy and it was not the “Thai way” for two crews to work on the same job. I couldn’t let this man get away and that feeling of desperation must have spurred my Law School training to kick in from the back of my mind. Instantly a flow of impeccable logic spewed forth from my brain... or was it from a higher source? Wherever it came from it did the trick. I explained that I had hired the other man to do just *half* of the job, so this man and his crew could do the other half as a separate contract. I kept talking fast and finally he shook my hand with a confused expression. Just then a third man came by to see the wreckage (my fire was a BIG event on Koh Samui) and it turned out that he had a huge pile of new thatch that had just been delivered, so I paid him much more than the normal price and sent my truck over to pick it up. This man obviously sensed a good opportunity so, in addition to selling me the thatch, he also gave me a (somewhat inflated) price for bringing ten of his workers over for the day. I jumped at the offer and when the other two builders showed up with their men I managed to talk them into adding this whole new crew to speed up the job. Everybody was promised to be paid well at the end so they scrapped the “Thai way”, and this small army of builders happily took to my barren roof with tools in hand.

They started working at about 9:00 am, and by 6:00 pm the entire roof had been repaired with shiny new thatch. It was magnificent. It was a miracle. People would come in from the beach and ask where they could find the place that they heard had burned down the night before and I would tell them they were standing in it! I had learned an incredible lesson in the awesome power that could be generated through positive energy and focused attention. It had been much more than just good luck or coincidence that had turned this smoldering wreck into a gleaming edifice within a

matter of hours. The key factor had been transforming the depressed feeling tone which had been surrounding that situation. Once I had managed to turn that around, then every step that I took thereafter had been supported by a greater power – a power that is beyond our limited world of the physical cause and effect. This may sound strange to some, but it is part of the perennial wisdom of the ages, and it had been firmly etched into my consciousness on that memorable day. I helped the girls to get things ready for the dinner rush, and then wandered back to my house in a haze of blissful amazement... but this did not last for long.

Romance

I was hoping to catch a quick nap before getting ready for dinner, but my wife said that she needed to speak with me about something important. She was a lovely woman whom I had been with for almost ten years, and we had made the transitions to Ibiza and thence to Thailand together. She had been supportive all along, but The Island was completely my “baby” and her interest in it was sporadic. Nonetheless, I thought we had a good relationship so it was quite a shock when she said that she was leaving me. The timing wasn’t the best coming only hours after the Big Fire, but there it was and I had to deal with it. I will spare you the details as breakups are often messy and self-involved. The very short version is that she departed a few weeks later which left me both saddened and confused. Saddened that this ten year relationship had come to such a sudden end, and confused about the meaning and validity of romantic love.

Meanwhile, I got on with my life, and a really strange thing started to happen. I began to feel that lots of women were staring at me with a “lean and hungry look”. At first I thought it was my imagination, or an egotistical delusion caused by my romantic confusion, but it was for real. It was as if they had some sort of sixth sense that told

them I was now single and available. There was no shortage of pretty girls coming to The Island, and I must admit that this attention was quite intoxicating, so I reveled in it for awhile, but eventually I realized that it was not for me. I had “been there and done that” a few times before in my life and knew that it satisfied the ego but not the soul. After much introspection I began to arrive at a clearer idea of what I wanted in that area of my life, and was determined that my next serious relationship would be The One. From now on “I’d be Look’in for Love in all the *Right Places*” ... and of course it was hidden in plain sight.

A few months after we opened a very attractive German girl who had been staying up the beach checked in and became one of our regular guests. Her name was Sabina and her lovely presence was a wonderful addition to the energy of The Island. She carried herself with great dignity yet she was also a very free spirit, and on party nights she would dance all night in endless joyous circles. Sabina was smart, pretty and dependable so I was very lucky when she decided to stay on for a long term and become one of my Western managers. She loved the place and was an incredibly good worker, but she rarely talked to me other than when we were working together. And so it came to pass that one night in the slow season we were the only ones around of the Western staff, so I asked her to have dinner with me. We had been living and working together in the same place for almost three years, and yet this was our first intimate conversation... and the wine flowed.. and the restaurant emptied... and time stood still. The restaurant closed and we moved to the cushions in the bar. The bar closed and we found ourselves on the beach as the moon rose over the lagoon. Finally I walked her home and as we hugged each other in the doorway it felt like her entire body had melted

into mine – it was delicious. I leaned down to kiss her but she pulled away and disappeared inside.

Sabina's little bungalow was only 50 meters from my house, but it seemed like it took me hours to get home. I finally knew what the love songs mean when they say "walking on air", and it felt great. The next day I was busy all morning running some errands in town, and when I returned there was an envelope stuck under the door of my office. It was a three page letter from Sabina which said in essence: "I fell in love the minute I laid eyes on you and have waited almost three years for you to notice me. After last night I was hoping to see you this morning, but I guess you did not want to see me. I understand and will not get in your way anymore because soon I will be moving to New Zealand or back to Germany." That was the gist of it, but spread over three pages it was incredibly touching. My heart cried out, "Wait a minute!!". I hastily scribbled out a reply asking her to please see me that night. I ran to her bungalow, but my knocks were not answered, so I slipped my note under her door and hoped for the best. I went down to dinner early that night and pretended to be busy, but every few seconds I would nervously look to see if Sabina was coming... and then finally I saw her walking down the path... my heart leapt and a tear came to my eye. This was my girl. This was The One. This was the love that I had been searching for. It is said that everything in life arrives in divine and perfect timing, and the feelings that welled up in me for this adorable girl were unquestionably both divine and perfect. From that night onward our love blossomed in every imaginable way and it continues to be new, fresh and awesome every minute of every day. Lucky guy.

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

Yes I was a lucky guy. I was living a life that was exciting, exotic, romantic and rewarding, in ways that I previously could not have imagined. Several times every day I would be stopped in my tracks by the beauty of this place and the people around me. It was intoxicating, and I had enough awareness to be overcome with gratefulness for what life had given me. I was living a life that most people could only dream of, but it was not all Mai Tais and orchids.

Turn Up The Bass

You may remember that on party nights in addition to mixing drinks, singing and dancing I was also the resident DJ. So one Saturday I'm sitting at the bar early in the evening getting my music lined up before things got too busy, and a stocky young Thai man sits down right opposite me. Now first of all that was strange because virtually no Thai people ever came to our bar except for friends or the occasional Thai guest. The other thing that made me wary was that this guy had a permanent smirk and the kind of vacant eyes that stared right through you. I smiled and asked him if he wanted a drink, got him a Singha beer and then tried to ignore him - to no avail. Some time later Tien managed to casually get my attention and called me aside. He pretended to show me something in the bar but his real message was: "Papa - this very bad man - get money for kill people." Great...

Maybe the owners of my land had changed their minds and decided to ice me anyway? Maybe one of the other resorts was jealous of our success? Maybe... maybe... maybe this is some kind of a test? Whatever. I went back to my seat behind the music and put on my best “game face” hoping that this guy could not sense my fear... and then things got strange. The party was picking up and all the while this killer continued to stare through me despite my efforts to ignore him. Finally he spoke in a guttural voice saying: “Turn up the bass Mr. DJ!”. I looked up, smiled, gave him a thumbs up and added an infinitesimal amount of bass. This seemed to please him as a lopsided smile appeared on his face, yet two minutes later he made the same demand: “Turn up the bass Mr. DJ!”. Was this phrase a killers’ code that I was missing, or was it just the only phrase he knew in English? I smiled, nodded, but did not change the music. If this was truly some kind of test then I was determined to pass it. Random requests to “turn up the bass” came every few minutes now, but I chose to ignore them... and then came the potato.

From out of nowhere this guy produces a boiled potato and starts to peel the skin off with a knife. Now I’m really starting to imagine that there are subtle messages being sent that I have no way of interpreting. He finishes peeling and then slices the poor potato in two with one quick flick of his weapon. He then picks up one of the severed halves and offers it to me – peace offering or death sentence? I haven’t got a clue, but something told me to hold firm, so I grabbed a napkin, put the potato on it, and told him in my rudimentary Thai that I was not hungry now, but thanks, I’ll have it later. He looked confused – maybe it was my bad Thai accent – but then went about eating his half of the proffered potato. Ten minutes later I looked up and he was gone; and in the

ten ensuing years that I was on Koh Samui I neither saw nor heard of him. Had I passed the potato test? Had I faced down a killer? Or was it all in my imagination? I guess I'll never know, but one thing that resulted was a great upsurge in my prestige among the Thai staff. Tien had seen me stand up to this notorious killer (not that I had any great choice about it) and within hours the story had spread like wildfire that Papa had made this guy back down. Of course the truth was very much a different matter as I had been scared, confused and nervous throughout the whole ordeal, but credit where credit is due; I did not lose my cool... and thus are legends created. This had been my second experience of living on the edge with regard to hit men... and it would not be my last...

Mad Dogs and Lady Boys

Keeping the energy of The Island clean and beautiful was a full time job. This vision inspired by the Utopia of Aldous Huxley had become quite a Buddha Field and anyone who was at all sensitive could feel the love that permeated this very special place. The most important part of maintaining that delicious feeling was being constantly mindful to treat each other and our guests with loving consideration, but there was also the necessity to keep the darker energies out of this golden circle. When people came through the beautiful bougainvillea arches at our entrance I wanted them to feel safe, secure and at peace. Amazingly, there had built up around The Island a kind of force field of goodness that seemed to ward off negative energies, but occasionally some of that dark matter would slip through. This brings me to the wild dogs of Samui. If you walked the beach during the day you would see a few lazy dogs sleeping in front of each bungalow resort, and they usually stayed asleep, except when another dog would walk past their stretch of beach. Suddenly they would rise up in frenzied anger with teeth

bared to chase off the invader and sometimes to take a piece out of him. That was not very pleasant but at least they rarely bothered people... except at night.

A strange metamorphosis would come over some of these canines late at night and they would gather in packs to terrorize people. I had a few run-ins with these mad dogs over the years whilst walking home at night on the beach, and I learned that if you were really aggressive they would back off... but it could be pretty frightening. Once The Island was up and running I would occasionally wake up in the middle of the night to hear one of these packs coming through the grounds. These vicious dogs were walking through my peaceful place – disturbing the tranquility – sowing fear - not gonna happen. I found some very strong sticks about the size of baseball bats and stationed one at each of the doors to my house. Whenever I heard a pack of dogs I would silently get dressed and slip out of the house with my staff in hand. Usually all I had to do was waive this big stick over my head whilst coming up behind the pack and they would hustle off toward the beach and then disperse. But there were some the nights when it was not quite that easy – nights when the leader of the pack – the Alpha male – would wheel around and come at me. Gulp! This large crazed dog with his teeth bared and drool dripping from his fangs would lurch towards me snarling and flashing his empty black eyes. I had been a pretty good baseball player so I had great (too much?) confidence in my ability to whack this dude before he could get to me. Luckily I seemed to be protected by something much more dependable and powerful than my hitting stroke. Every time that a leader of the pack turned on me it would instantly provoke a wild hoop and holler to come flying out of my mouth. I don't know where this came from, but it would shock the dogs and bring forth from within me an aggressive energy that was too strong for the alpha male to resist. He would turn away at the last moment

just as I was I brandishing my stick, and then THWACK I would hit him right on the rump sending him yelping into the moonlight with his gang in hot retreat behind him. If they had ever turned on me en mass I would have been goner, but I never felt that it could happen – something deeper within me knew that I was protected. After the first few years the dogs somehow must have felt the energy that had had built up around The Island because they never came through again... but something else arose that kept me up at night.

Samui had almost no organized nightlife when I first moved there. This was in stark contrast to the more developed resort areas like Pattaya and Phuket that had adopted the very successful forms of entertainment that rocked the seedier sections of Bangkok. In these other resorts there were well-known areas where the streets were lined with numerous small bars and each of those establishments had its corps of cute Thai bar girls. Walking past a line of these “bar beers” was like going through a gauntlet of outlandishly insincere compliments. There was the ever popular, “Oh, you sexy man!” and “Come by me drink sexy man.” and “Love you long time!” and on... and on. The main point was to get these foreigners to sit down next to the pretty girls and buy a few drinks. If they wanted to go further than that it was always available, but there was rarely any pressure in that regard (though after a few drinks and hearing over and over again how sexy you were, those girls started to look pretty, pretty good to a sex starved European – be he boy or man). Yes, it was the sex trade, and it flourished wherever tourism became big in Thailand, but in the early days there was almost none of that in Samui... not yet.

What we did get was European men bringing Thai prostitutes down from Bangkok for a beach holiday. On a few occasions an older man would show up at The Island with a very young Thai “girlfriend” and this would cause quite a commotion. The simple ethos of my place was that everyone had the freedom to do whatever brought them joy as long as they did not interfere with the joy of others. So what was I to do with these asymmetrically aged couples whose very presence created unrest even when they did not directly molest anyone else? On top of that my staff of proper Thai girls did not say anything but I could tell that this kind of guest offended them. So about the third time that this happened I politely asked the guy to leave and from then on in my check-in girls knew not to give rooms to that type of guest. As it turned out we never had to invoke that rule because for the next ten years we did not have one couple like that ask for a room – not one. Another amazing lesson in how the power of intention can create a field of energy that affects our reality.

Meanwhile, Samui’s pristine nightlife of mellow beach parties evolved quickly after the airport opened and more conventional tourists started to flock to our shores. The first stage was a string of the “Bar Beers” on each main road, followed months later by a some small clubs, and within a few years larger clubs that stayed open all night were well established. This created a whole new subculture of unsavory characters and it became a constant challenge for me to keep the special energy of The Island unsullied by this dark energy. I don’t want to give the impression that I was some kind of nun, or that my place was a cloistered abbey – don’t forget I came from Ibiza, the party capital of Europe! Many of my guests were very much into the nightlife and we still had our big beach parties at my bar every week. I was also a partner in the first big club on Samui (The Green Mango) and was friends with the owners of several of the other clubs and

bars. The nightlife itself was fine with me; the dark energy that I speak of came from the drug dealers, pimps, thieves and other such folk who inevitably hung around that type of environment. Keeping that element out of The Island whilst still maintaining the feeling of freedom was a constant challenge, so whenever I would hear an unusual noise at night I would be on alert. Often it was just some guests coming home very late and very drunk, so a quick word was enough to calm them down. Other times it was a bit more complex.

Every once in a while a young man would bring a bar girl back to his bungalow but then get cold feet. Whether it was fear of AIDS or just general confusion, the kid would freeze and then lock the girl out of the room. I would awaken to loud moaning and knocking; drag myself out of bed and ride to the rescue. What always amazed me is that the girls usually called me “Papa” which is what my staff called me. I was quite sure that I had ever met most of these girls, but luckily my reputation apparently preceded me and that gave me the kind of respect that is priceless in Asia. I was always able to pay the girls what they thought they were owed and they left quietly after bowing profusely in my direction. This actually happened only sporadically, but handling a distraught prostitute at 4:00 am was child’s play compared to dealing with an angry katoy. These are the so-called Lady Boys who are liberally sprinkled throughout Thai nightlife. They are young men with feminine features who for one reason or another find that their best way to make a living is to dress up as girls and hang out at the bars. I must say that I have never understood how this dynamic works. I mean if you are gay and fancy young men then why would you want them to dress up like girls? Conversely, if you are straight then why go for a katoy when there are so many attractive young women who will vow that you are a “very sexy man!” and take care of your every need.

It's all hopelessly beyond my heterosexual orientation, but somehow these lady boys have found a market for their wares.... however there are sometimes complications. The sound of an angry katoy at 4:00 am is much louder and more visceral than that of most prostitutes. Perhaps their carefully concealed male hormones are released with a vengeance when they feel cheated, but whatever it is, these guys are loud and violent. Screeching, kicking at the door, trying to force windows, and waking me up like a bolt of lightning. The first time it happened I just thought it was a girl who was particularly angry, but then I noticed the deeper voice revealing itself through the screams and realized that this situation was more complex. Invariably my young guest was very drunk and had taken this lad home thinking full well that he was a girl. Once on the bed he would realize his mistake and COMPLETELY FREAK OUT! Every ounce of homophobia, sexual insecurity and pure embarrassment that dwelled within this boy's psyche would explode in a fit of rage that would send the poor katoy flying out the door. Then it would be the lady boy's turn to feel the sting of rejection – a deep pain that echoed with the rejection he must have felt his entire life. This is what I would stagger into (after my own long night of work), but once again I was always protected by a force beyond the realm of my material senses. The katoys seemed to either know or at least sense who I was and that I was there to help them. Most of them called me Papa which I found especially endearing, and they would always settle for a small amount of money for which they would shower me with profuse gratitude. I learned much about compassion from these young men; much about how to feel the emotions of people whose lives were as different from mine as they could possibly be; much about the dignity that these boys carried as they strode down a difficult path of life.

Curt

One of the most rewarding things about running The Island was the continual acknowledgement of a job well done that came from our steady stream of return visitors. Many people would come back year after year to get another dose of that special Island magic. Now you have to understand that this is not the same thing as going to the same place for coffee every day or having a favorite a restaurant in your home town. All of the people who continually came back to The Island traveled a long, long way to get to us. They had plenty of other options as to where to spend their holidays, so I was always incredibly grateful and gratified to see them returning year after year. Many of these regular guests were families who became integral parts of our Island family as we watched their children grow and mature each year. Others were independent travelers or Asian expats who always had The Island as one of their main destinations and popped in several times during the year. Then there were the long term regulars who would come every year and install themselves in their favorite bungalow for months at a time becoming as much a part of the place as we were. One of these was a lovely man named Curt who arrived almost every year just before Christmas and stayed for a few months. He was a musician from the States and would occasionally play short concerts for us in the restaurant at dinner time. Curt was soft spoken, easy to be around and a very positive addition to the ambiance of The Island.

The two weeks around Christmas and New Year were always the busiest and most frenzied time of the year. I learned early on that if I had five times as many bungalows I could have filled all of them at that time of year because the demand was overwhelming. Most of the resorts raised their prices for those two weeks, which is basic supply and demand capitalism, but despite the fact that I have a degree in Business Economics I did not go that route. Instead of raising prices I decided to use these prime dates as rewards for my most loyal guests. The prices remained the same and the people on my lengthening list of multiple return guests were given the first crack at reserving places for the end of year holidays. This not only seemed just and fair, but it also created a massive love-fest for those two weeks because literally everyone staying with us was part of the “family”. The New Year’s Eve dinner and beach party were the climax of this ongoing celebration and organizing those was a real challenge as we were always swamped with bookings. Our restaurant was extremely popular (where else could you get love in the food!) so we were used to being busy, but New Year’s Eve always pressed us to the max. The restaurant seated 150, but with over 100 people staying with us there was very little room for outside customers to be part of our celebrations. By the second year of operation I realized that we needed to have two sittings – 150 early guests - mostly from outside people or those with children - and 150 later who would eat right through the arrival of the New Year. This was a great challenge for the staff and we worked hard to get it as organized as possible.

It was the morning of December 31, and I was diligently poring over the seating plan for that night’s festivities when one of the waitresses came running up in a panic and said that Wanna, the head housekeeper, wanted to see me right away. Figuring that it was some kind of laundry screw up or whatever, I said that I would come in a few

minutes. “NO! Papa you must come Now!” OK, OK, settle down I’m coming. I walked down our beautiful garden path and came to Wanna and her four girls shivering in agitation about 20 meters away from the budget bungalows – they looked like they had been struck by lightning. Wanna was a pretty cool customer so I was really surprised that when I asked her what was the matter she could only shake her head and point in the direction of bungalow #6. This was Curt’s regular room and he had been with us for a few weeks already. I was starting to get a bit wary and that feeling grew stronger when I noticed that none of the girls were following me as I went towards the room. I looked back for support, but they all just shook their heads and Wanna said “Not can do”. The door wasn’t locked so I opened it and saw Curt lying on his back with his eyes wide open staring vacantly at the ceiling. As I went towards him my senses started to go on full alert and I could feel the adrenaline starting to course through my veins. I tried to find his pulse but was met with only the chilling cold of a body that was lifeless. Instinctually I took my fists and smashed them into his chest in a wild effort to ignite a spark of life; hoping against hope that he would suddenly sit up and come back into this world. But all that my pounding produced was a trickle of blood that trailed out of the side of his mouth. I then regained a bit of composure and started to check the body and look for clues. He was ice cold all over, and though I had never seen a dead body other than at funerals, it was quite clear that Curt had left this dimension of reality. There were no signs of a struggle and no other evidence of what might have happened.

I went outside to comfort the cleaning girls and after holding them for awhile I told them all to go home for the rest of the day. What to do next? It’s six hours before the massive New Year’s Eve dinner extravaganza and my good friend is lying dead in the

middle of my resort. Fortunately a Thai friend of mine named Lin who was very well connected on the island was living in one of my out buildings at the time, so I immediately went to see him. Lin owned a popular nightclub, and he told me that Curt had been playing music there the previous night and hanging out with other musicians who were known to do a lot of serious drugs. Curt liked to smoke an occasional joint like just about everyone on Samui, but I had never heard of him doing anything heavier. We surmised that he had been pretty drunk and that the others might have talked him into trying something new which perhaps led to his death. Obviously I will never know the real answer, but the immediate problem was what to do with his body. I was very lucky to have a friend like Lin who told me not to worry because he would contact the police and go with them to get the body. What a relief that was!

The police arrived several hours later and I told them the bare bones of the story: I had found him dead that morning; he had been at the club the night before; he was a guest whom I knew well. I signed a release form and they took the body and all of his belongings. That was it. I went to my house, took a long hot shower, got reluctantly into my party clothes, and headed out to greet and entertain the wonderful people who had come half way around the world to spend their holidays with me. It was an absurd contradiction of emotions that no amount of drugs or alcohol could reconcile, but we got through that very long night drinking countless toasts to the memory of dear Curt and shedding more than a few tears along the way. I was later in contact with members of Curt's family who had been informed by the Thai police that the cause of death was a drug overdose. This really upset them as they knew that Curt was not a drug abuser. I did the best I could to explain what might have happened, but more important than that, I let them know how much we had all loved him and what a wonderful person he

was. I also learned a lesson about foreigners dying in these parts that would stand me in good stead in the future. The body was taken away with few questions asked. The police simply declared the cause of death to be an overdose, and then sent the body to the American Embassy in Bangkok so that it could be returned to his home. That was it. Foreigner died of overdose – we sent the body to his embassy – case closed. It was all so simple... and perhaps too easy.

A New Landowner

Over the next several years there were occasional rumors of local people being jealous enough of our success to do me harm, but none of them came to anything... until very near the end. My property had been purchased from the two brothers (the ones who wanted to whack me in the beginning) by a wealthy Chinese Thai investor from Bangkok. This man sensed the opportunity in the burgeoning Samui Tourist trade and went around buying up all of the beach resorts that he could lay his hands on. My two landlords were very happy to finally get their hands on some real cash, but they neglected to tell the buyer that I had four more years to run on my lease which was fully paid up in advance. Thus he would have to wait four years with zero income before he could do anything with the land. I had recently heard about this transaction through the island grapevine, but since I had a paid up lease I did not feel that it would affect me in any way. I was wrong. One afternoon a local guy with a sleazy reputation named Pak showed up at my restaurant and asked to speak with me. We went out to a table on the beach where no one could hear us and he proceeded to tell me that the new land owner had hired him to kill me. Say what?! This guy spoke pretty good English, but surely he had misspoken – I mean why would he tip me off if he was going to shoot me?

I was in shock but kept talking and the story began to emerge. Once again the idea was to get me out of the way so that the lease could be broken, but this time I was dealing with a very sharp businessman who knew that he could sweep aside my company if I was not there to represent it. Pak said that since he had known me for years he did not want to do this job and preferred that I talk with the new land owner and settle the matter peacefully. Pak would be paid no matter how my lease was broken so he would rather get the money without killing me... how considerate. I now could see that this whole conversation was just a warningand it had been very effective in grabbing my attention. Pak gave me the new owner's card and two days later I was in Bangkok to meet with him.

My American lawyer's firm had grown ever larger and more prestigious over the years, so I felt that their presence could counter the weight of this wealthy Thai businessman. One of the senior Thai partners of the firm came to the meeting with me and as we took our seats in the plush conference room I felt much more civilized than I had when talking to Pak on the beach... but that was just an illusion. Mr. Wongchai came bouncing into the room - a rotund and seemingly jovial sort who greeted us with big smiles and gracious bows. After the obligatory small talk we got down to business and his tone, though still friendly on the surface, was tinged with danger. He said that he had no objection to me finishing my lease; after all he was the head of a huge conglomerate with building projects all over the country, so why should he be concerned with this one little hotel. The problem, he said, was that the old owners (the brothers) had lied to him about the lease and now he was suing them to get back a large part of the purchase price. Wongchai explained to me that these men from the South were not respectable businessmen like him and that they might do anything to avoid giving back

any of the purchase price. Of course he thought this type of thing was a terrible reflection on his country, but what could one do about such backward men as these?

This went on for quite some time and then we broke for tea. In the privacy of a separate room I asked my lawyer where he thought I stood, as some of the conversation had been in Thai which I did not completely understand. This very straight urban lawyer looked me in the eye and said, "I think it is very possible that this man intends to kill you if you continue with the lease." Excuse me? So the whole thing about pinning it on the brothers was just for show – a cryptic message that I had totally missed but that was plain as day to another Thai person. The deal was clear - arrange to shorten the lease and you will live..... I shortened the lease. I returned to Samui and reluctantly resigned myself to this new situation, but I still held out hope that after this lease expired I could negotiate a new extension. The Island was so popular that we could afford to pay Wongchai a very substantial rental for additional years and still have a healthy profit, so I did not feel that the door was completely closed. Meanwhile we had several more years to go on this lease and thousands of people to bring happiness to, so onward and upward!

The End Game

We had just finished another incredibly successful high season and I was looking forward to getting some R&R. In the weeks following Easter the flow of tourists would dry up to a trickle that would not pick up again until mid July. As a result many of the resorts on Samui were virtually empty in May through June, and several even closed up. We were very fortunate to still get about 50% occupancy in those months, so it was worth staying open and I was able to give the staff extended holidays. We also did a lot

of maintenance during those slow months going through every bungalow to see what needed to be fixed, painted, polished or replaced. It was also the time for my annual holiday. As mentioned before, I worked about 15 hours a day, seven days a week, and pretty much loved every minute of it... but I did get really tired by the end of April. I was very lucky that I had two wonderful friends who would come to run The Island for me every year at this time. They lived in San Francisco and had first come as guests and then honored us by returning to The Island a year later to get married. I totally trusted both of them so when they agreed to come and run the place each June it was a great blessing. Sabina and I would leave at the end of May, spend a few days at a major city in Europe, and then on to Ibiza for the entire month of June.

This particular year we were nearing the end of our five weeks of blissful relaxation and I went into the town in Ibiza to send a fax to The Island reminding them of the day and time of our arrival home. Curiously there was a fax waiting for me which was odd because I was not expecting anything. It was not good news. Someone had broken into my office during dinner on the night before the staff was to be paid and had stolen the entire payroll. My office was inside of my house so this made the news even more disturbing on several levels. First of all, in the order of things at The Island my house was sacred ground. There was an aura built up around me over the years, and in this little world – this Island – it was simply not done to violate the sanctity of my space. In addition to this whole aura thing there was the practical matter that the house was obviously not secure enough and someone knew where we kept the payroll money. Clearly an inside job and that was worrisome.

We returned home a few days later and everyone was really shook up. The energy of the entire place was more like a funeral parlor than the vibrant Buddha Field that we were used to. I sprang into action immediately doing everything that I could think of to restore balance and harmony to my world by changing the energy. My house was made into a mini fortress: bars on the windows, double bolt locks on every door, one big picture window was even taken out and bricked up. I also hired a local policeman, whom I knew personally to be honest, to live on the grounds in a specially secured bungalow so that he could sleep in there with the guests valuables every night. I had always kept those valuables in my house at night, but that did not seem safe enough now. All of these changes were heart-wrenching. This place that had always been so free, open and safe was now being transformed by the specter of fear. Throughout the years I had always watched over things and diligently kept the lower vibrations out of our space, but it had never before been necessary to create the atmosphere of an armed camp. Luckily these changes would not be very evident to the guests, so I felt that if we could bring the overall feeling tone of our Island family back to its normal level of high loving vibration then all would be well. In order to do that we would have to clear away the pall of sadness and insecurity that had descended over the staff. It was time to call in the monks.

I lived in a Buddhist culture. All of my family/staff were Buddhists along with 95% of the population of Thailand. From the very first days I observed all of the Buddhist customs out of respect for my people and for this wonderful culture that had accepted me so willingly. We had a magnificent Spirit House at the front of the property that my girls lavished with decorations and love offerings every day. Before we opened I had consulted with the monks at the local Wat (temple) and was instructed according to

their astrology as to what was the most propitious day to hold our grand opening ceremony. The Abbot and all of his monks presided over this amazing celebration in true Thai style and my staff were overjoyed. Whenever there was a new building, or a baby, or just about anything of significance we would invite the monks to make a blessing and this always meant a big party with endless chanting and many donations to the Wat.

The biggest celebration of all was when Sabina and I got married. Once again we were told that the monks needed to consult their Thai astrology charts and this time we were given not only the date but the exact time that the ceremony was to commence. Sabina was taken to a beauty parlor at 4:00 AM and when she was returned three hours later she looked like the most exquisite porcelain doll that you have ever seen. Wrapped in silk and made up so that every one of her beautiful features was shining through...

Wow! I was dressed in the traditionally uncomfortable Thai groom's outfit. The ceremony started just after sunrise on the platform below my bar that was built out onto the beach. The Abbot and nine of his monks were in full command of the proceedings and they chanted... and chanted... endlessly. After the chanting was over they performed all manner of Buddhist rituals to the delight of my Thai family and to the amazement of the many Western friends and family who had flown in especially for the occasion. That night we had a fantastic party for hundreds of people... but I digress...

We had called upon the monks to transform the saddened state of The Island after the robbery and they pulled out all the stops. Every ritual that you could imagine was performed in full regalia including the stringing of a four kilometer long colored cord that encircled the entire property to shield us from evil spirits. After a few days of these

intense purification rites it seemed like the staff was in much better spirits, so the monks returned to their Wat and we returned to the business of running a resort. Six months later the robbery was only a vague memory with everything running smoothly as we headed into another exciting high season. As always the weeks around Christmas and New Year were fully booked many months in advance with loyal returning guests. The party on New Years' Eve was one of the wildest ever as all of us were releasing the pent up anguish that had accumulated since the robbery. Finally things were back to normal; celebrating on the beach with our extended family from around the world; putting that ugly incident behind us and dancing with joy. The feeling of relief was palpable... and then our world came crashing down.

The details are sordid and complex so I will keep this mercifully brief. At 3:30 AM the party was winding down when someone came running into the bar with a look of terror on his face. It was the Thai policeman who was responsible for guarding my guest's valuables. Long story short: he had been called out on a police emergency so he left his room for about an hour. When he returned all of the guests' valuables, which he had been guarding, had disappeared from his secure bungalow. That meant the money, passports, plane tickets, credit cards and jewelry that had been entrusted to me by over 100 of my most valued guests were all missing. I shook off the alcohol and the fatigue as best I could and marched off to the scene of the crime. There was no evidence of a break-in so it had to have been an inside job and clearly the police were in on it. I woke up all of my garden boys and we fanned out on the property with flashlights looking for clues in the dark.

Just after sunrise we caught a break. In a dark area behind the wall we found what was left of the security bags and it was quite a relief. All of the cash, traveler's checks and jewelry had been taken, but the plane tickets, passports and most of the credit cards were still there. We made up notices to put under every door saying that there had been a robbery and to please come and see me in the restaurant. It was 7:00 on New Year morning so everyone would be sleeping in late, but slowly they started to straggle in for coffee. I spoke with each one individually, telling them what had happened, giving them what was left of their valuables, and asking them to tell me how much they had lost. I was exhausted both physically and mentally, but stayed with it until everyone had been seen. The one thing that stood out the most was how incredibly compassionate almost everyone was – they seemed more sorry for me than for themselves – great people! I paid everyone in full for what they said had been lost, although I had no answer for the sadness of a fabulous guest who had brought his parents here for the first time only to have his mother lose her wedding ring which had been a family heirloom.

Once again a cloud of gloom enveloped The Island and this time I was less optimistic. The police had obviously been involved in this robbery so my options were limited. The reality of how helpless I was in this situation brought into stark contrast the existential dangers that I had always faced as a foreigner in this land. Up until this point I had always been able to surmount those fears by creating positive energy through the strength of my intention. I had a powerful sense that I was somehow protected; that what I was doing was in alignment with the fundamental order of things. But now it all seemed to be coming apart and the answers did not readily appear. My primary focus had always been on making everyone happy by creating this place to be a beautiful reflection of its artistic inspiration: the Utopian society in Aldous Huxley's book

“Island”. My “island” was also created to be a special place where Truth, Beauty, Love, Justice and Harmony were the order of the day in every way. When I first chose the name based on that book I had pointedly ignored the sad ending of Huxley’s novel wherein the idyllic island of Pala was overtaken and destroyed by the powers of greed and corruption. His book had ended in tragedy, but my “island” would be different... and yet these same forces of evil now seemed to be crashing in on me... but I refused to give in.

Over the course of the next two weeks I hired two full time security guards to watch my house and the grounds all night. I also went to the local shooting range and after some target practice was assured that I could still hit a small target with some regularity. I asked a Thai friend who was connected to find me a good quality 9mm handgun... and then I came to my senses. My whole life was centered on bringing more love and positive energy into the world. Was I really going to shoot someone if they broke into my house? I cancelled the gun order and spent the next few days trying to restore a sense of normality, but one morning the police arrived en masse demanding that I turn over one of my garden boys to them. Their story was that they had broken the case (!) and that this quiet fellow who worked in my garden was the mastermind behind the robbery. This was typical of local police work – they would pick up an innocent person and then beat them mercilessly until he confessed to the crime. Case closed. I wasn’t about to let them do this to any of my people so we had a confrontation right there in the middle of the resort – very entertaining for the guests. The cops started to draw their guns and I was about to panic when a friend of mine came running up. His name was Chai and he was the son of a wealthy local man who was highly respected. Some of my staff had called him when they saw this confrontation mounting (they all had cell phones

by then) and luckily he was nearby. He spoke quickly to the police chief who reluctantly backed down, but gave me a very dark look that said he would return.... and he was as good as his word.

Two nights later we came home after dinner, saluted the private security guard who was stationed outside my door, and entered... the Twilight Zone. My office was a shambles, and our big steel safe was lying empty on its back having been blown out of its concrete base and forced open. Most of the money from the high season had been in there along with other valuables... all gone. There were no signs of a break in so I was mystified... until I looked up and saw that they had actually taken off the roof of my house and broken through the ceiling to get inside. In a flash of insight I suddenly realized that there was no place to hide. We were being harassed by a criminal police force, and if they were willing to break through the roof of my home then where could we be safe? It took us hours to calm down and when we finally did I told Sabina that this situation was way too dangerous and she would have to leave and go to Germany until things cooled down. She was really afraid and I know that she wanted out of this nightmare, but nonetheless she looked me straight in the eyes and said, "I am not going anywhere without you.". I tried to explain to her that I could not possibly leave my business, my house, my Thai family and all that I had built, but her answer was the same: "I am not going anywhere without you.". That's my girl.

The end came quickly. Two nights later I returned to the house during dinner to get something and as I opened the door a Thai man came rushing into the room behind me and pointed an M-16 assault rifle directly into my face. His eyes were wild with a vacant stare that was frighteningly opaque. I was too shocked to think, but some other part of

me took over and, to my amazement, I felt myself projecting an aura of cool competence. I have no memory of what I said, but whatever it was had a hypnotic effect on this guy who lowered his weapon and stood gaping at me. Just then two uniformed cops burst into the room and as they surveyed the scene a look of complete confusion came over their faces. Things had not gone according to their plan and they did not know what to do. After a few minutes some people who had been attracted by the noise gathered around to see what was happening, so the police abandoned their mission and departed. Their plan had been simple, and it would have worked if the trigger man had not hesitated at the crucial moment. The police chief had lost a lot of “face” in the confrontation with me the other day, and I had also been trying to get help from influential people whom I knew in Bangkok. All in all this foreigner was causing him way too much trouble, so it was time to get rid of him. The alibi would be that they were watching the property because of the two previous robberies, and when a third robber broke in and shot me they were quickly on the scene, but not in time to catch the guy. I remembered how easily poor Curt’s case had been handled. In the same way my body would be packed up and sent to the American Embassy in Bangkok – so sorry – we did our best – case closed.

I finally got the message. Sabina was right. I loved my home, my people, my business and my source of income... but not enough to die for them. I had to get out but was afraid that if I made my departure too obvious they would just come and shoot me. We let everyone know that Sabina was going to Germany within the next few days because it was too dangerous for her to remain here, but that I was of course staying to run and protect my business. Two nights later I had all of my senior staff come to my house for a meeting at midnight. This was the core of my Island family that had been with me from

the very beginning. I had seen them all grow and mature into wonderful young adults who took pride in who they were and what they did. I loved them so much, so it was with tears in my eyes that I told them that I would be leaving the next morning with Sabina. The resort was fully booked in advance for the next three months, so there was no point in closing up. I explained that they were now so competent that they could run the place without me. Tien was to move into my house and be nominally in charge. They were to put all of the money in the bank and when I can come back everyone would get big departing bonuses. They were then sworn to secrecy until my plane left, and we all hugged and cried for hours...

Early the next morning we took everything that we could carry and Tien took us to the airport. The Samui Airport is still known for its tropical beauty, but back then it was so much more pristine. Just a few thatched open air buildings and one lone runway lined with thousands of beautiful bougainvilleas. We sat there amidst this natural splendor waiting to board our plane to freedom; looking nervously over our shoulders; half expecting a police car to come screeching out of the silent jungle. It seemed like an eternity, but finally we were called to board, took the little tram to the runway, and got on the plane. We took our seats hoping not to hear the captain call out our names saying that we would have to disembark because the police were waiting for us at the terminal. Then one engine started... then the other... and we slowly moved down the runway... picking up speed... airborne! As we climbed over the beach I could look down and see The Island... it was over. Of course the Universe had one more joke to play on us. As our small plane leveled off they turned on the music and it was Frank Sinatra singing "My Way". Yes, I had done it my way, and as I squeezed Sabina's hand

in a combination of relief, joy and sadness the words of the song said it all, “Regrets, I’ve had a few, but then again, too few to mention.”.

THE ODYSSEY

We arrived in Bangkok, checked into the hotel where we normally stayed, and immediately passed out. They had upgraded us to a lovely suite on the 22nd floor (an unexpected blessing) and when we awakened in the middle of the night we were so traumatized that all that we could do was sit on the bed and stare at the city lights for hours on end. Finally the sun rose and it was time to face our new reality. I took care of some business with my lawyer and then contacted my mother to ask if we could stay with her until I got things sorted out. Of course she said yes, and two days later we were on our way to New York. Shortly after our arrival I gave my Mom a watered down version of what had happened. I didn’t want to alarm her, but she was a tough cookie who had seen a lot in her life, so she knew instinctively that there was much more to the story than what I had revealed. In any event she graciously agreed to let us use her condo in Miami for the next few months, so a week later we were headed South. This was the place where we would lick our wounds and figure out what to do with the rest of our lives. It was a lovely apartment right by the beach and I was quite familiar with it having spent a few holidays there in the past. Sabina and I went through the usual nesting rituals which occupied our minds for the first week or so, but once we were settled in the shock, fear and emptiness of our recent experiences began to resurface with a vengeance.

It was all gone. There had been fulfilling employment that provided deep satisfaction and abundant income. There had been friends from all over the world and our wonderful Thai “family”. There had been a sense of belonging and status in our community. There had been a sweet rhythm of life that swayed gently from Samui to Bali to Singapore and to Ibiza. There had been meaning to each day and a beautiful future beckoning in the distance. All of this had been our ground of being, and then suddenly it had vanished in a flash of senseless violence. I could not understand why my “island” of truth, beauty, love, justice and harmony had been swept away. I kept hearing Shaka’s voice repeating what Osho had always said to her during their desperate flight from country to country: “What to do?... Just accept!” Accept that everything happens in divine and perfect timing; that life takes you where you are supposed to go; that our limited consciousness cannot possibly comprehend the how and the why of these things... just accept. So we lived these empty months in Florida - walking the beach, losing ourselves in distractions and searching for meaning.

Every week I would receive a fax from Tien telling me how they were doing at The Island – how much they took in at dinner on a big night, how full the rooms were, how they handled all of the challenges that arose. I was so proud of them. I was also monitoring the level of danger there and it appeared that I would be able to safely return to close my resort at the end of the high season. In May we flew back to New York and spent a few weeks touching base with my family and then it was time to return to Thailand. I had instructed Tien to have The Island completely closed the week before our arrival – no guests, no restaurant, just empty rooms. It had to be clear to everyone on Koh Samui that I was only returning to close the place and then move on. My staff would of course remain so that I could see them one last time and give them

their final bonus money. We would not be staying in my house as that was too fraught with frightening memories, so we arranged to stay at a friend's hotel at the other end of the beach.

We made the long flight from New York to Bangkok, and upon arrival we immediately boarded a plane for Samui. The pilot flew around the entire island before making his final approach to the airport and my emotions were in turmoil. My love for the lush tropical beauty of this place that had been my home for so long was overwhelming. Countless memories flooded back in an endless stream that was timeless – ten years of adventure and bliss pouring through my consciousness in a matter of seconds. At the same time that wonderful feeling of coming home was vibrating through my very bones. There were no fears, no regrets...just the joy of being... the joy of returning. My staff was expecting us to arrive the next day because we thought we would need a day to acclimate before seeing everyone, but we couldn't wait. Right after checking into my friend's resort we headed straight for The Island. My god, it was so beautiful. We had only been away for five months, but I had forgotten how stunningly gorgeous this place had become... and it was so quiet.... like a ghost town. Empty bungalows... empty pathways... and yet you could feel the energy of the people who had departed just days before... and all those who had lived and loved in this place for so many years. To say that it was surreal does not come close to describing the otherworldly experience of walking down my once-vibrant garden pathway into an abyss of stillness.

The restaurant was empty – lifeless. The body of The Island was recognizable, but its spirit had departed... and then they started to arrive. First a few of my people happened by and shrieked with joyous surprise as they saw me standing there. The

tears flowed; the hugs would not let go; a few more arrived; more tears; more hugs; more joy/sadness. The word spread quickly and within minutes I was surrounded by my entire family. These beautiful young spirits who years ago had bravely embarked on a strange and wonderful voyage with me. They had put their trust in a captain who came from another world – from another dimension – listening not to the fears of their minds, but to the feelings in their hearts. Together we had learned; together we had grown; together we had found the meaning of love; and now it was time to move on. It was time to dismantle The Island. Over the next few weeks I sold everything that was not nailed down, and with that money I was able to give everyone a substantial bonus. I also helped them to find new jobs which was pretty easy as they were valuable additions to anyone's business. There was a final farewell party and then we were off to Ibiza.

Decisions had to be made. I had always intended to return to Ibiza when my Asian Adventure was over. The plan had been to work in Asia for as long as we could and then return to this magical island in the Mediterranean with the freedom to live, love and learn in every way. I had purchased a lovely piece of land where I was going to build our dream home and live happily ever after. Yes, there had been a plan, yet I now found myself on the wrong of an old Woody Allen joke: "If you really want to make God laugh..... tell him your plans for the future!". Our source of income had completely disappeared along with a ton of cash that was stolen in the robberies, so it was financially impossible for us to move to Ibiza... but we did it anyway. How many times had I counseled people to follow their hearts, follow their dreams, don't settle for less than what their beautiful inner spirit deserved. It was time to walk the talk. Ibiza is the place that makes my heart sing; the place that resonates with my soul on so many levels; the place where I know that I belong. Being there would require some serious

adjustments, but we were ready to live a simpler lifestyle that was rich with all of the things that are truly important. I did not know what the future would hold, but I did know that in the ever-present Now moment this is what felt right. What to do?

BOOK TWO: THE REVELATIONS

FINDING MY LIFE PATH

Who Am I ?

We returned to New York for a few weeks to settle up our affairs and say good bye to my Mom, then it was back to Ibiza. I managed to sell my land and we found a lovely home that we settled into. Then what? Most people know Ibiza as the party capital of Europe with wild nightlife and crazy dance clubs. Sex, drugs and rock & roll have always been a big part of the equation, and this is a reflection of the amazing sense of freedom that Ibiza engenders. But this wonderful feeling of freedom from conventional values also creates another side of Ibiza – an island that is alive with artistic creativity, alternative lifestyles and spiritual growth. That these disparate expressions of liberty can all flourish together so beautifully is one of the things that make this place so very special. In my first whirlwind go-around on Ibiza I had partaken of everything in a wild smorgasbord of indulgence that included plenty of exotic night life. This was the basis of most of my friendships there, so upon returning I naturally slipped back into a wonderful circle of friends with whom I shared many of those memories. Because of this my social life picked up where it had left off ten years earlier, but somehow the drinking, dancing, drugs and late nights just didn't do it for me anymore. Truth was

that I had never been all that enamored of it. Yes, compared to most people in the world my former life in Ibiza had been wild and crazy, but when measured against most of my Ibiza friends it was painfully straight. I was known for jogging every day, being in the gym regularly, only going out on weekends, and usually heading home before 3:00 AM. A regular nun by Ibiza standards... and now I was even worse (better?)... things had changed. Who was I?

I was actually living two lives at once – each reflecting an aspect of the freedoms that epitomize Ibiza. On the one hand I was still going out on weekends and being part of the wild social scene, yet the vast majority of my time was spent in contemplation and study of the mysteries of life. This had been something that I had pursued sporadically for many years, and now I had the time and space to explore it in greater depth. I read everything I could get my hands on with regard to consciousness, right living and the nexus of science and spirituality. I began to apply this timeless wisdom to my everyday life through a daily meditative practice and integration of my previous yoga training with other forms of sacred movement. It was all good, but I felt neither here nor there. My continuing social life was completely out of synch with this deeper me that was emerging, yet it was so much part of who I had always been that I could not conceive of life without it. I realized that I was somehow addicted to this part of my personality even though it brought me nothing more than a vast emptiness which could only be filled by things that abused my physical body. Sabina felt exactly the same way, and every time we awoke with staggering hangovers we vowed to back away from that part of our lives, yet the engrained habits seemed unbreakable. Our souls were yearning to get us off of this counter-productive merry-go-round and they finally took matters into their own hands (do souls have hands?).

Shock Treatment

Despite the weekend bingeing we were both very fit and could hike up and down mountains for hours on end. That is why it was so shocking when Sabina started to have numbness and weakness in her legs. Thinking that it was something minor like a trapped nerve we treated it ourselves, but when it kept getting worse we went to a few recommended healers. After a week of this nothing seemed to help and Sabina now had trouble walking, so we went to the hospital for tests. The neurosurgeon took one look at her and immediately ordered a Cat scan and an MRI. When those were finished she was checked into a room as they wanted to run more tests over the next few days. There were two beds in the room, but luckily the woman in the other bed was just going home so Sabina had a private space to herself. I sat there with her all day, and as visiting hours came to a close it seemed like she was pretty OK, so I left her my mobile phone and said I would return first thing in the morning. She was so weak and fragile that I set up the phone so that all she would have to do was press the call button to ring in our house. I was exhausted and more than a little frightened. The doctor had told me that it looked like she had MS but that they would not know for sure until all of the tests came back in the morning.

I arrived home and started looking through our medical books to find out what MS was all about. We did not have a computer back then so no Googling to rely on, but we did have an excellent collection of books. As I started reading my emotions sank deeper and deeper with each sentence. If it really was this MS thing then life was going to change in a very big way. Just then the phone rang... and my heart melted. It was Sabina and she was sobbing into the phone; her weak voice shaking with fear and absolute despair. “I

can't lift my arms! I can't move my legs! I can't reach the button for the nurse. I don't know what to do!" "Hold on darling - Ill be there as quickly as I can – just relax – I'm coming." I ran out of the house, jumped into the car and went speeding off into the night. With no traffic the hospital is only 15 minutes from our house, but as I neared the main road I was slapped in the face by a sudden realization: it was a special holiday that evening and a huge fireworks display was about to begin. It was one of those nights that if you weren't going to the fireworks then you stayed away from that area because the traffic was brutal. But my girl was in danger; paralyzed with fear; nothing was going to stop me. I drove like a mad man in a movie car chase – laying on my horn, driving up on the median and squeezing between trucks. It was insane. Someone or something must have been watching over me because I did not hit anything, did not get arrested, and managed to get through a back road to the hospital. I double parked and ran to the entrance and then remembered that visiting hours were long over so how was I to get in?

Hey, I was born in Brooklyn, if there was no way in then I would make one. I walked confidently into the lobby, went over toward the snack bar, and then bolted up the steps when nobody was looking. I got to the third floor in a matter of seconds and peered around the corner at the nurses' station... no one there! I quickly made my way down the hall to Sabina's room where I gathered my thoughts, swallowed my fears, and burst through the door in a rush of powerful loving energy. Like a shining knight coming to the rescue, I wrapped Sabina in my arms and held her for what seemed like an eternity. We cried and cried and I kept telling her not to worry because I was here now and I was not ever leaving. I stayed in that hospital room with her for two full days. God bless the staff and the wonderful ethos of Ibiza for allowing me to sleep in the empty bed and

never leave my girl's side for a moment. I fed her, walked her to the bathroom, washed her and held her oh so closely for hours on end. Test after test was taken and finally the doctors came to tell me that Sabina definitely had MS. I had read enough to know that she certainly had all of the physical symptoms and the MRI had shown clear evidence of plaques on the spinal cord which was the definitive proof. We checked out of the hospital and drove back to our house in a state of shock and confusion. Life was going to change in a very profound way and it was hard to see how this change could possibly be something positive.

This is a very beautiful story, and it is Sabina's story to tell, not mine, so I will merely give you the highlights. A few days after leaving the hospital we went to see the neurosurgeon, and by now I practically had to carry Sabina from the car to his office. The doctor was a good man and he had studied in Germany so he could speak to Sabina in her native language. The news was not good. He said that there was no cure for MS but that they had drugs which could help her with the symptoms. In his experience some people managed to recover to live reasonably ordinary lives, but most went downhill over time with many winding up in wheelchairs. He wished that he could tell us differently, but this was the current state of treatment in conventional medicine. He then asked if she wanted a prescription for the steroidal drugs that might help with her symptoms. We already knew from our research that these drugs only repress the body's immune system and inevitably lead to even more problems. I looked over to Sabina as this was her decision, and I fully understood why she would agree to take the drugs. She looked so small; so helpless. My beautiful shining girl reduced to a quivering shadow of herself. Her world and her self image had come crashing down in a mere two weeks, so of course she would reach out for any lifeline that would take away the pain and

preserve some of her dignity. From within this battered body came a soft but firm reply to the doctor's query: "Thank you, but I will not take any drugs". She then looked up at me with total love and trust and said: "We will find another way". I will forever be humbled and awed by the courage which she showed that day and it made me realize that I had to raise my game to her level.

MS is what is known as an auto-immune disease which means that your own body is attacking you from within. Since conventional medicine does not have any cures available for these kind of diseases we began to explore alternatives. My great friend Anna loaned us her laptop and showed me how to use it so that we could order books and dig up more information. I soon purchased my own computer and we were thrust into the digital age by dire necessity. Of the twelve books that we first ordered eleven of them were lovely stories of how people had managed to live with the disabilities of "their" MS. I hid all of those books. I did not want Sabina to identify with this disease as "her MS" because when you do that you are affirming that you will have it forever. The only books that I wanted let her read the ones about people who had been able to completely recover their normal lives. Again, this is Sabina's story, so I will keep the details to a minimum. We explored every avenue of healing and used our intuition to separate the wheat from the chaff. Some things worked better than others, but in every instance the one thing that was really doing the healing was the powerful love that was behind it. Whether it was healing hands, energy medicine, gentle exercise or any of a host of other modalities that we tried, they were only vessels carrying the love energy. Perhaps the greatest healers were forgiveness and gratefulness which Sabina worked at tirelessly.

Within a few months her symptoms were much better, and she was able to walk by herself when we went back to the hospital for a follow up MRI. The next day we were disappointed to find out that something must have been wrong with the machine because they wanted Sabina to come back for another test. These tests are pretty uncomfortable so I was not happy about her having to do it again, but back we went the next day. The MRI was again looking for plaques on the spinal cord because those are the clearest evidence of MS. If there were more plaques now than there were when she was first tested months ago then it meant that the MS was getting worse. However, if there were no new plaques then we would know that her symptoms had stabilized. We went back a few days later to hear the results and received the good news that there were no new plaques. The doctor then rubbed his eyes and said: "I don't know how to explain this but there are actually no plaques at all on your spinal cord.". Say what? Did I hear that right? Yes, they double checked the first set against these new ones and her spine was now 100% clear. That is why Sabina had to be tested again because they had never seen anything like this, so they figured it must have been a mistake the first time. Not only did she not have any new plaques but the original ones had disappeared! Thank you, Thank you, Thank you...

Seven Years in the Desert

Sabina's clean MRI was, to paraphrase Winston Churchill, not the beginning of the end, but the end of the beginning, of her quest to regain perfect health. With incredible perseverance she kept going with all of the things that she was doing to get stronger. Her dream was to once again be able to walk in the nature that she loved so much, and every so often she would test her progress by holding onto my arm and seeing how far she could go. One day we had walked about 200 meters from our house which was the

longest we had ever gone, but then she fell down sobbing in despair because her legs would not move anymore. At that moment I heard a voice saying: “Walk with your heart – walk with your heart my darling.”. That voice had been mine - flowing unconsciously from somewhere within me – and what it said was perfect. Sabina rose up and walked all the way back to the house without any help. Within six months she was not only walking but she was climbing hills and doing everything that she had always done before. That was ten years ago and she has only gotten stronger and more beautiful in every way since then. We had been to the edge of an abyss and had learned many lessons about love, gratitude and miracles. Life would never be the same. The end of the beginning.

Spiritual Evolution

All in all it was almost a year from the day Sabina first felt symptoms until she was back at full strength. Our lives were totally absorbed in her condition for the first few months, but even after she began to feel pretty normal there was no possibility of having a social life, and that was a major blessing. Our hearts had been screaming “Stop the world I want to get off” for years, but we needed help to make that move... and help appeared in this strange yet undeniable form. By the time Sabina had fully regained her health our lives had changed so drastically that going back to our old ways was an impossibility. In fact the turn-around had been so drastic that it caused me a lot of confusion. Who exactly was I now? I used to be a regular guy whose life was filled with contradictions: I went out on weekends, but also meditated every day and did a bit of yoga. I stayed very fit with exercise and jogging, but I also smoked, drank and occasionally did some drugs. I studied the spiritual masters but also spent much of my time reading about economics and politics. But all of this was changing rapidly. When

my social life was taken out of the equation by our new life situation the contradictions in my lifestyle became ever more obvious and frankly seemed ridiculous. Without the social distractions to muddle my perception I developed a clearer picture of who I wished to be in the world. The things in my life that were not in synch with this new self-image stood out in stark relief. The light of awareness began to shine brightly on the parts of my personality that were not in resonance with my true path and those dissonant parts could not survive such scrutiny.

And so began my evolution from part-time spiritual dabbler to full-time seeker of truth and higher consciousness. For the next seven years Sabina and I lived an incredibly monastic life. Here we were in the party capital of Europe, but we might as well have been in an ashram in India. With very few exceptions we spent every night in our home exploring the mysteries of life and searching for deeper truths. We read countless books on a wide range of topics that included spirituality, nutrition, natural healing, alternative history, quantum physics, and just about every unconventional worldview that you can imagine. There was no time for novels, movies, television, or anything else that did not feed our souls which hungered for answers to the deeper questions in life. We were constantly on the internet weeding out the many things that were useless in order to find the gems of wisdom and wonder that are hidden in plain sight in that wild virtual world. Everywhere that we looked new doors of learning opened up that beckoned us to buy more books, find more videos, and commune with more of the keepers of true wisdom. It was intoxicating and we were overwhelmed by the incredible joys of discovery that washed over us each day.

We were learning so much that our mind-based egos had little chance in their battle to keep us as we had been. Everything had changed. For example, I had spent my entire adult life eating many of my meals in restaurants, but now that I knew so much about nutrition and health a new consciousness naturally flowed into our eating habits.

Shopping for fresh organic food became one of our rituals. Sabina learned how to make incredibly healthy meals that were not only nutritionally balanced and delicious, but also filled with the love that she put into each carrot that was chopped. Every area of our lives had taken on this feeling of sacredness, and it all flowed from a daily spiritual practice. What began as a five minute meditation each morning gradually grew into a two hour practice that sets a beautiful feeling tone for the start of each day. Over the years I have added things and subtracted others from my practice, and it has evolved as new wonders came into my life. Meditation is of course the most essential part of finding one's inner self, and I have learned how to meditate in numerous ways that work for me; moving, breathing, stretching, and of course sitting.

This new way of life felt so right, and yet I would still often ask myself the same questions: "Who am I? Where is this leading? What is my purpose in life? Is this all that there is?". In those precious moments when meditation led me to complete silence I would always find the answers: "You are Love." "Your purpose in life is to give and receive Love." "Yep, that's all there is.... what could be better?" Then of course my little mind would intervene to cast doubt upon this inner wisdom: "How do you know that is your inner voice?" "Maybe it's just your mind replaying all the things that you have learned from others." Yes, the eternal question – Is it real or is it Memorex? Is that really the "still small voice" from within or is it your mind trying to fool you? Learning how to distinguish between the wisdom of your heart and the chatter of your

mind is the essence of personal transformation. Over time I learned that the way to achieve this state of clarity is by learning to live consciously, and you do this by creating a daily practice that brings you to your center every day.

In order for wisdom and clarity to grow in your consciousness you must first prepare the ground. It's like the story of two farmers who each inherit one half of a big piece of land. This land had not been cultivated for many years so the ground was hard, the soil was depleted and there were rocks everywhere. One of the farmers did not see the point of working on this seemingly hopeless piece of ground, so he spread a few seeds, occasionally gave them some water and that was it. When spring arrived a few pitiful shoots tried to come through the parched soil but they soon withered away. The other farmer saw great potential in his half of the land, so he immediately started to prepare the ground. Tilling the soil, clearing the rocks, spreading organic fertilizer, and carefully planting new seeds one at a time. Throughout the winter he watered and nurtured this field every day, and by spring he had the most beautiful garden that you could imagine. Wisdom and awareness began to blossom in my consciousness when I summoned the intention to prepare my inner ground through practices that worked for me. I found out that I did not need to follow a guru or be limited to one specific pathway. There are many great “spiritual technologies” available to everyone these days, so if you have the *intention* to grow and evolve then is it easy to create your own unique way of tilling the soil of your soul. The most important thing to remember is that the purpose of the journey is to find the beautiful love energy that is your true essence. As long as you stay focused on that clear intention, then whatever methods you choose will be leading you on the right path .

As all of this became more and more clear I was able to reflect upon my amazing experiences at The Island and see how they had been a big part of my learning curve. It had been a magical time when love, compassion, joy, beauty, creativity and passion had all come into my life in great profusion. Even the seemingly tragic ending was just another way for existence to get me to where I was meant to go... and where was that? I am reminded of the questions that Michael Beckwith is always telling us to ask ourselves: “What is trying to emerge from within me?” “How can I use my gifts and talents to bring value to the people that are coming into my life?” What has emerged from within me is the gift teaching the practice of personal transformation and a talent for blending ageless wisdom with modern science in a way that everyone can understand.

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

How It All Works

Before we begin this journey of personal transformation let’s have a look at where we will be going. Think of this as a quick fly-over to get an aerial view of the terrain that we will be covering. Don’t worry about the details – they will come later – just get a feel for where we are headed. First we will look at how we got to where we are now, and that means understanding how our conscious and subconscious minds were shaped throughout our lives. Once we know where we are, it will be easier to see how we can get to where we want to be. Your subconscious programming is running most of your life, and that means that you are mostly following the beliefs and perceptions that you inherited from other people. If you want to live your own life then you need to change

these programs so that they reflect *your* beliefs, not the beliefs derived from others. The way to restore your free will is through the practice of mindfulness which is very *simple* to understand, but not so *easy* to put into everyday practice. Making that task easier are the spiritual technologies and *blissiplines* that empower us to transform of our lives. You will get a real sense of how beautiful life becomes when you begin to expand your awareness and live consciously. A look at the Law of Attraction will reveal it to be much more than just wishful thinking, because the Universe is aligned so that if you change the vibrations of your thoughts and emotions you can actually change your experience of reality.

This will lead us to an exploration of how the discoveries of modern science are bringing us to a fuller understanding of why and how the vibrations of what we think and feel are so important. This emerging nexus of science and spirituality is reaffirming the perennial wisdom of the ages, and it is showing up in all areas of our lives. From the reflections in frozen water crystals to our own health and wellness, everything is reacting to the vibrations that we create. The mind/body connection shows how the fifty trillion cells in your body respond instantly to your perception of the world around you. A look at epigenetics puts to rest the myth that our lives are controlled by DNA and shows us that we have the power to co-create our health. Finally we will have a quick peek at quantum physics to give you a basic sense of how the world really works. For over 100 years science has known that everything is energy, yet most of us are still in the dark about it, so let's get started.

The Art of Conscious Living

Have you ever wondered about where the motivation for your thoughts and actions comes from? Countless studies have shown that our conscious mind is running the show only about 5% of the time, while the other 95% of what we think and do is controlled by our subconscious mind. While the conscious mind has the ability to create thoughts and initiate action, the subconscious mind acts more like an information processor that records everything in your life and stores it for future use. When the conscious mind is inactive or distracted the subconscious automatically steps in and takes control, but it is only able to reflect your past experiences and has no ability to create original ideas.

From birth until about the age of six your subconscious mind downloads and stores everything from its environment; every word that it hears, every emotion that it feels, every image that it sees. This accumulation of input from your family, religion, television, society, etc., becomes your basic persona or habit mind. Throughout your life the subconscious continues to be molded by outside influences as it obediently absorbs the norms and beliefs of your schools, friends, culture, government and media. On a certain level this subconscious database is very useful because it remembers how to do the countless things that you have learned over the course of your life. You can drive a car, cook an egg, and dance the tango, without having to consciously think of how to perform each step because your subconscious stores all of that information and does it automatically. This is all well and good when dancing or preparing an omelet, but the problem arises when you allow your subconscious habit mind to make the choices that define who you are and how you interact with the world. By letting the subconscious take over these personal decisions we surrender our power of choice and as a result we go through life unconsciously repeating the beliefs, habits and judgments that we have inherited from others.

The way to restore your free will and regain control over your life is by learning to live consciously. Remember, the subconscious only takes over when the conscious mind is not paying attention, so if you increase your awareness the conscious mind will be in control for much more than the “normal” 5% of the time. You can achieve this higher level of awareness by cultivating *mindfulness* which simply means setting your intention to be in touch with each present moment so that you can remember to use your conscious mind. A mindful person when faced with a choice of how to act in the world consciously resists their automatic subconscious reactions, and then chooses to follow the guidance of their inner wisdom. Deep within each of us is a wisest self or soul self, and at every fork in the road of life it whispers: “Is that who you wish to be? Will that bring you happiness?”. Mindful awareness allows you to hear that “still small voice” and gives you the opportunity to make choices that resonate with the wisdom of your heart.

By living consciously you take responsibility for who you are in the world by intentionally choosing your thoughts, words and deeds so that they are in alignment with your highest ideals. This is quite a challenge because you must overcome an entire lifetime of being programmed by the ideas, actions and beliefs of others. At first you will continue to think, say and do things that are not in harmony with who you wish to be, and that is part of the process. As each of these old patterns of behavior arises you simply shine the light of awareness on them and then gently correct yourself. Over time this process of realignment gets progressively easier because your conscious choices will create new positive habit patterns in your subconscious, and the old inherited reactions will gradually lose their power. This evolution of consciousness will unfold easily and effortlessly as a natural reflection of being in alignment with your highest choices. But

what are those highest choices. As you free your self from the beliefs that you inherited from others where do you find your new belief system?

Follow Your Heart

Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a source of wisdom that could give you the right answers to all of life's questions? Perfect responses for everything from the biggest decisions to the smallest wonderings: Should I take that job? Is she/he right for me? Can I trust him? Should I go out or stay home? and on and on and on

Whatever the situation your path to happiness would always be clearly marked. Sound good? Well congratulations because each of us already has an inner guidance system that always stands ready to steer us in the right direction. It is our wisest self or soul self, and it speaks the wisdom of our hearts. Think of it as your own personal GPS system to keep you on the Road to Happiness. If you stray or get lost it gently tells you which direction to take and which decisions to make. When we choose to listen to its messages the doors of life swing open wide and we become a shining reflection of our true inner beauty.

The challenge that we all face is learning how to consistently connect with this heart-based wisdom so that we become a living expression of our inner knowing. Every situation in life presents you with the opportunity to choose whom you wish to be in the world, and the choices are always clear. You can either continue the same old responses and reactions that have been programmed into your mind since birth, or you can choose to follow a more intuitive path. That path leads to the wisdom of your heart which will

gently guide you to the thoughts, words and actions that reflect your highest vision of yourself.

Albert Einstein put it this way:

“The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.”

We remember “the gift” when we choose to answer life’s questions by following the intuition that emanates from our hearts. In so doing we align ourselves with the love-based feelings of joy, gratitude, kindness and compassion.

This all sounds very simple, and in fact it is: you make conscious choices that are in harmony with the wisdom of your heart so that your inner radiance is reflected in the world. *Very simple...* but not always so *easy*. In fact it can be quite a challenge because this wonderful GPS guidance to Happiness has been disconnected in most people. Our conditioning from the moment of birth (and even before) has taught us not to trust this natural source of wisdom and to listen instead to the incessant chatter of our little brains which are merely reflections of our past programming. Even when we have become determined to be mindful and conscious our intention grows weak in the face of adversity. Life does not always flow smoothly, and situations arise where you may be feeling angry, nervous, fearful, or confused. In those difficult times your emotions can get you so worked up that the last thing in the world that you want to do is to start looking for inner guidance. You may try to call down to your heart for advice, but in those situations it’s like talking on a bad cell phone connection. You keep asking your heart for answers but all you can hear is the static of your own emotions. “You’re breaking up.... I can’t hear you.... oh the heck with it” ... and you fall back on your old subconscious reactions. The only way to be able to find the wisdom of your heart in

such stressful moments is by learning to build stronger lines of communication between your conscious mind and your inner wisdom.... between your brain and your heart.

The way to do this is through practices that teach you how to access inner stillness, because in order to find the wisdom of your heart you must first get past the chatter of your mind. There are many ways to find that peaceful place within and all of them are equally good; whatever feels right for you is your perfect path. Meditation is the classic approach and it works well with breathing exercises that help you to travel inward. Moving meditations like Yoga, Qi Gong and Tai Chi connect you with your inner presence by working through the body and breath. Being in Nature is the simplest way to strengthen your connection to the wisdom of your heart. Walking in the countryside, working in your garden, or just sitting under a tree lets you feel the stillness which is always present in nature, and through that feeling you can experience your own inner peace. These are some of the spiritual technologies that we can use to reprogram our subconscious minds so that they reflect our highest values. I like to call them “Blissiplines” which is derived from the word discipline, but I prefer not to use the prefix “dis” which has a negative connotation. Words like DIS-array, DIS-pute, DIS-respect and of course DIS-ease all reinforce the negative within us. By contrast, Blissiplines are things that we do on a regular basis that bring BLISS into our lives, and in fact the very doing of them becomes blissfully joyous after awhile. So joyous in fact that eventually you will create a daily spiritual practice that blends various meditative activities in a way that is uniquely suited to you. Cultivating Blissiplines makes strengthening the connection to your inner wisdom natural, easy and graceful.

Of course the point of all this is not to spend your life sitting on the top of a mountain in silent meditation. The reason that we build a strong connection to the energy of our hearts is so that we can have access to that wisdom when making choices about how to act in the world. Following your heart means walking through life with love energy as your guide - intentionally creating your thoughts, words and deeds to be a clear reflection of the beautiful person that you truly are. It means not just talking about it, reading about it, or thinking about it, but really living it. Your most important spiritual practice is learning how to bring the values of your heart into every moment. So whenever you come to a crossroads in life remember these simple words: _

**“ It is only with the heart that one can see rightly;
what is essential is invisible to the eye.”**

(The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupery)

The Magic of Conscious Evolution

As you can see there are many obstacles to overcome on this journey of self discovery but fortunately the Universe provides magical help along the way to guide us to our destination. As noted above, the first obstacle that we face is our own belief system – the way that we have learned to interact with the world. This accumulation of input from our family, society, religion and the media programmed us to believe that certain types of situations make us happy.... while others make us angry... and still others are a signal to be nervous...or fearful... or confused... or worried.... or whatever. These values and biases that we absorbed in childhood have become stronger and stronger over the years, and they are the underlying cause for the way that we react to what happens in our lives today. To understand how this works let’s look at just one

emotion... say anger. You were “programmed” by your conditioning to feel anger in certain circumstances and every time that you have had a similar experience it has reinforced that original angry reaction. In your consciousness you have created a “chain” of anger and each new encounter adds another link to that chain. What started as an anger chain with just a few links that you learned in childhood has become a huge chain with all of the links that were added throughout your life. This is why sometimes we can get really angry at a very trivial event and then think: “Why am I so upset about such a small thing?”. It is because that situation triggered you to bring up your entire chain of anger; and the same thing happens when someone or something pushes any of your emotional “buttons”. A person, place, word or situation activates one of your programmed responses and when that “button” is pushed you automatically react with your complete lifetime chain of emotions related to that type of experience.

As we have seen, the way to reverse this negative cycle is by learning how to resist our programmed reactions by using mindfulness to make *conscious choices* about how to act in the world. We always need to remember that though this seems rather simple it is in fact quite a challenge because we must overcome an entire lifetime of being controlled by our inherited patterns. Even when you are determined to be mindful you may still continue to think, say and do things that are not in harmony with whom you wish to be..... and that is OK. It is natural for these engrained reactions to persist, but that resistance will magically melt away if you maintain your intention to be mindful. The simple key is to become *aware* when you have reacted unconsciously to one of your old chains of behavior and then gently correct yourself. That’s all you have to do.... and this works even if your awareness comes hours or days after the event has happened. Just by noticing and correcting your inherited reaction to a situation you not only stop

yourself from adding a new link to that chain, but you automatically eliminate a great many of the old links all at once. This means that you do not need to laboriously dig through your past to correct every instance where you have added to a negative emotional pattern. All you need to do is bring the light of awareness to each new situation as it arises, and then watch as it acts like a powerful laser beam - instantly dissolving countless past links in that chain of emotion - freeing you from the weight of years of emotional baggage all at once. How does this work in everyday life? Try this the next time you are locked into a difference of opinion with somebody. Instead of going on and on trying to prove your point just stop and ask yourself: “Would I rather be right or happy?”. The correct answer is always “happy”, and when you make that choice the argument that you were having suddenly doesn’t seem so important anymore. This is just one of the many examples of how we can consciously choose to bring our inner light into the world.

But that is only the beginning. As you continue to intentionally create your thoughts, words and deeds so that they resonate with your highest ideals another form of magic will start to unfold. Easily and effortlessly you will begin to experience a higher level of consciousness in all areas of your life. You will become more discerning about what you put into your body and how to keep it healthy. Your tastes in music, books and entertainment will become more refined as will your choices of where to go, what to do and whom to hang out with. This is the magic of conscious evolution and it is a natural reflection of choosing to be in alignment with your inner wisdom. Living at this higher vibratory level you will automatically feel more comfortable around similar vibrations in every aspect of your life and will gravitate toward others who are evolving in the same direction. The evolutionary impulse that is sweeping through these remarkable times in

which we live has two distinct yet related aspects. First it inspires us to transform from within to reveal our true authentic selves, and then it impels us to create the world we live in to be a reflection of that inner beauty. When we set our intention to follow this flow of transformative energy the Universe reaches out to guide and support us. It begins by dissolving the barriers of our past programming through the “magic” of mindful awareness. Then, as we connect with our inner wisdom, we are “magically” drawn to a higher vibratory level in all things so that our life experience mirrors the evolution of our consciousness.

The Power of Perception

We have seen how you can use mindfulness and conscious living to create your own belief system, but do our beliefs really create our reality? Can you actually transform your life by changing your perception? To find the answers to these questions we need to look at how the workings of the brain interact with our power of intention. When you were born your mind was a blank slate and you absorbed everything that you were exposed to with nothing filtered out. This continued into your childhood, but some time around the age of six you developed what is called the Reticular Activating System (RAS). This is the part of your brain that determines what information your conscious mind will experience. It has a vital function because our senses are exposed to about four billion (4,000,000,000) bits of information every second, but our conscious minds are only capable of processing about 2,000 bits per second. The RAS selects what will come into our awareness and all of the other information is filtered out so that our limited consciousness is not overwhelmed. The only problem is that this RAS filter chooses what you will experience based on the values of your old inherited belief system.

It only allows into your life the things that fit this old programming and filters everything else out. No wonder so many people keep having the same problems over and over again with regard to relationships, money, health and happiness. You did not choose your belief system..... yet it controls your perception of reality..... unless you decide to change it, and that is what we have been talking about.

By using conscious living to reprogram our subconscious minds we can adjust our mental filters so that they allow into our experience all of the good that life has to offer. We have the power to do this, and an example of how it works is what happens when we start to become interested in something new. It can be a song, an idea, a new car or just about anything that you are intensely thinking about. Suddenly this new thing starts to show up in your life.... in magazines, on TV, over the internet, in conversations.... it's everywhere. By giving this item so much attention you have sent a message to your brain that it is important to you, and the RAS is then instructed to let it come into your awareness. This shows that by concentrating our thoughts we can change our perception of reality, so the next step is to learn how to *intentionally* use this power to *consciously* choose the content of our experience.

Most of us want our lives to be filled with peace, love, abundance and joy, so if we can learn how to focus our attention on these qualities the RAS will bring them into our reality. There are two powerful practices that when used in conjunction with meditation can help you to accomplish this transformation. Affirmations are positive messages about ourselves and the world around us that reprogram our inner guidance through repetition. Visualization is a creative way to see in your mind's eye the way that you wish your life to unfold. These are two very important tools of spiritual technology that

work through repetition to realign your subconscious mind with your highest idea of yourself. Remember, your old belief system became engrained through years of repetition, so it also takes repetition of your new beliefs to have them take over.

“As a single footstep will not make a path on the Earth, so a single thought will not make a pathway in the Mind. To make a deep physical path we walk again and again. To make a deep mental path we must think over and over the kinds of thoughts we wish to dominate our minds.” (Henry David Thoreau)

These words were written over 150 years ago, yet they perfectly describe the workings of what science calls neural pathways - the “highways” that carry information in your brain. When we use affirmations and visualizations to focus our attention on positive thoughts and feelings we create new neural pathways, and the more that we repeat them the stronger and deeper they become. At the same time the old inherited pathways wither away and weaken from lack of use. Over time this changes your RAS/filter so that what you experience in life becomes a beautiful reflection of what you choose it to be.

Another excellent way to use the power of intention to transform your perception is by speaking positively. Everything that you say sends a message to your subconscious mind and when you voice negative thoughts you are reinforcing old negative belief patterns. Pay attention to what you say and you may hear things like: “I never have any luck”; “life is hard”; “you can’t have everything”; “You have to take the bitter with the sweet.” and on and on. Once you start becoming conscious of your words you will be amazed at how often you are affirming negativity. By consciously choosing to speak positively you will reinforce a new core of beneficial beliefs, and this will be mirrored in the world around you by your RAS. So whenever negative phrases pop into your head... or out of

your mouth... just press your mental DELETE button and replace them with words that reflect the beautiful reality that you want in your life.

People are fond of saying: “ I will believe it when I see it.”, but that is merely an illusion because in truth: “You will see it when you believe it.”. Instead of allowing inherited values to dictate the content of our existence, we have the power to create a new template of perception that will literally change our reality. It all starts with the intention to be consciously mindful of our thoughts, words, and actions so that they reflect the beautiful person whom we choose to be. Each of us has the power to create a life filled with health, happiness and harmony.... and when you believe it you will see it.

The Law of Attraction

The Law of Attraction is another way of understanding how changing your beliefs and perceptions can transform your life. With the great popularity of the book and movie called “The Secret” many people have heard about the Law of Attraction, but few have a real grasp of what it actually is and how it works. The basic principle underlying this phenomenon is that throughout the Universe *like attracts like*, meaning that all things which vibrate at the same level are attracted to each other. The way that this applies to you and me is that whatever we think and feel will be attracted into our lives according to the basic mantra that “energy flows where attention goes”. That seems quite simple so why is it that, since all of us want to be happy, healthy and wealthy, not everyone actually is? To find the answer to that question let us assume for the moment that this truly is a Universal Law, and look into how it is supposed to be applied effectively in our lives.

One reason that we do not always get what we want is that the Law of Attraction does not discriminate between positive thoughts and negative ones. Wherever your attention goes that's where the energy flows, and that is what you will attract. For instance, if you are having difficulties with your work situation then much of your attention would focus on the fact that you *do not* want to have problems with your job, but in so doing your main *point of attraction* would be "*problems with my job*" and that is exactly what you will attract – more problems. The way to transform this is to *consciously* choose to focus your attention in a positive direction so that your point of attraction is in line with what you really want. In this instance you could center your attention on something like: "I can make my job enjoyable and fulfilling" and this would start creating the harmonious situation that you desire.

Once your thoughts are vibrating on this positive level the next step is to align your feelings and emotions with that same point of attraction. You can think good thoughts and repeat positive affirmations all day long, but if at the same time you are having feelings of fear and doubt then you will not manifest what you desire. In fact, according to the Law of Attraction if you are stuck in negative feelings and emotions then you will attract that same kind of negative energy into your life – like attracts like. For example, have you ever had one of those mornings that from the moment you got out of bed you just didn't feel right, and then everything seemed to go wrong for the entire day? If so then you have experienced the downside of the Law of Attraction in action. Your initial negative feeling was your point of attraction and that snowball of negativity got bigger and bigger as it rolled through the events of your day. The way to get out of that downward spiral is by making a conscious choice to use your free will and imagination

to “change the energy”. You do this by choosing to focus on something that is positive and joyful so that you can experience the good feelings that flow from those happy thoughts.

Here is an example of how it is all supposed to work. If you desire to have a wonderful loving relationship then start by *imagining* what it would be like for that to happen in your life. Fill your mind with positive thoughts about the perfect relationship and then begin to *feel* the excitement that comes with the first blush of romantic love. Be constantly vigilant to avoid negative thoughts or feelings like “I don’t deserve this” or “this couldn’t happen for me”, and if they arise quickly banish them in favor of new ones filled with joy. The final step is to let go of your expectations of *how* your wishes will be fulfilled and trust in the process by allowing the Law of Attraction work its magic.

Now you have an idea of how to apply this law in your life, but is it really a law or is it just wishful thinking dressed up in a shiny New Age package? Scientific validation of this law is suggested by the “Observer Effect” of quantum physics (which we will look into later) and by studies of the power of perception. In addition there are numerous documented cases showing how the Law of Attraction has worked for many people. If you are still skeptical then I suggest that you try your own experiment: consciously raise the vibrations of your thoughts and emotions and see what happens in your life... you will be pleasantly surprised. Some day science will develop instruments that are sensitive enough to measure the vibrations created by thoughts and feelings, and then we will be able to measure how they affect our reality. In the meantime let’s have a look at

what we already know about how the vibrations of our thoughts and words create our world.

SCIENCE MEETS SPIRITUALITY

Reflections in Water

The pioneers at the leading edge of science are expanding our view of the world by proving that much of what we take for granted is not as it seems. A great example of this is the work of Dr. Masaru Emoto and his team of scientists who have carried out numerous experiments on the effects that words, thoughts, music, pollution and other stimuli have on the molecular structure of water. They do this by flash freezing the water immediately after it has been exposed to the stimulus and then examining it under an electron microscope. The results are stunning. When water is exposed to positive intent through words or feelings such as love, joy and gratitude its molecules develop incredibly beautiful and complex crystalline structures. However, the same water when presented with negative stimuli like fear, anger and violence takes on disorganized shapes that are often grotesque. In some of these experiments water is put into bottles that have positive words written on them; words like “Love”, “Joy” and “Gratitude”. The water is then quickly frozen and when the crystals are examined under the microscope they are magnificent. Water from the same source is then put into bottles that have negative words written on them like “Fear” and “Hate”. These crystals when frozen and examined under the microscope are malformed and distorted. A similar dramatic affect on the molecular structure of water takes place in response to different

types of music. Mozart and comparable melodic tones cause the water molecules to create exquisite magical crystals, whilst punk and other dissonant sounds produce forms that are incoherent and ugly.

Dr. Emoto has used many different types of stimuli in his experiments and the results are consistent: when the stimulus is positive/love-based the molecular crystals are beautiful; when the stimulus is negative/fear-based the crystals are deformed. In some tests people were told to concentrate on the water and have either positive or negative thoughts; in others they spoke positive or negative words to the water; in still others they merely had feelings and emotions that were either love-based or fear-based while in the presence of the water. In every case the water molecules transformed to conform to the vibrations that were being expressed – beautiful for the positive and deformed for the negative. So our thoughts, words, and feelings all have the power to change physical reality. This goes completely against how we have been led to believe that the world works. Our common sense tells us that just writing the word “love” on a bottle of water cannot possibly change the shape of the molecules inside of it... Yet it does. Likewise, our conditioning tells us that playing a different type of music or saying positive words will have no affect whatsoever on water or on any other natural element.... Yet the proof is clear that they do. How does the water “know” what we are saying or writing? How does it “feel” that some expressions are positive while others are negative, and how can it “hear” the difference between beautiful music and soul-less noise? It would seem that water is somehow connected to everything in its surroundings and that it is able to perceive and reflect the vibratory level of whatever it comes into contact with.

Continuing research will someday give us a complete picture of how this happens, but for now here is some food for thought: Your body is about 70% water, and the planet Earth is roughly 70% water. This substance that comprises so much of our existence is constantly changing its structure to reflect whatever is in its environment, and that includes what we think, say and feel. Clearly our thoughts and emotions have an effect not only on the world around us, but on our physical bodies as well, which brings us to...

The Mind Body Connection

Have you ever heard of the placebo effect? In a typical experiment to test a new drug patients with the targeted disease are split up into two groups: one group gets the drug while the people in the second group are told that they are getting the drug but they actually get a sugar pill that has no active ingredients. In virtually every experiment the second group shows a great improvement in their condition, and at times they show as much or more than the people who took the real medicine. Remember, these were the patients who *thought* they were getting the real drug but actually took a meaningless sugar pill. Clearly it was the power of their *belief* that activated their bodies to heal with no outside intervention. Welcome to the mind/body connection.

There are countless scientific studies that have conclusively proven this incredible connection between what people believe and how their bodies react. In one such study all of the patients were warned that the drug they were being given could have toxic side effects including the loss of hair. As expected many of the people who took the real drug did experience these effects, but the stunning result was that *30% of the people who took*

the fake drug lost all of their hair! How could that be? You can't lose your hair from taking a sugar pill..... unless you *believe* that the pill is a toxic drug.

How is it that your mind alone is capable of creating such amazing physical and chemical responses in your body? What is the process that transmits the power of your feelings and emotions from the brain to your cells? A simplified version of what happens goes something like this: Your brain employs a very efficient messenger service that immediately alerts the cells in your body whenever it is experiencing a thought or emotion. So for example, when you are having a joyful feeling your brain automatically sends special messenger molecules (called peptides) throughout your body spreading the good news that a happy emotion is being felt. When each of these molecules arrives at a cell it plugs into the cell wall at a special receptor point - like a key going into a lock. Once this "key" fits into the cell wall then this messenger is able to communicate with the DNA in the nucleus of the cell. In this example it "tells" the DNA that you are feeling joy and instructs it to produce the specific chemicals that are associated with that delightful emotion. This happens in trillions of cells at the same moment creating changes in your body which reflect that happy feeling.

All of your thoughts and emotions trigger this same process – first they are experienced in the brain; then they are communicated to your cells; finally the DNA in the cells is instructed to change your body chemistry. Positive ideas and beliefs send messages that help to create health and healing, while negative ones do the opposite. Perhaps if we can learn how to transmit the right signals to our DNA by managing our thoughts and emotions we will be able to treat many physical conditions without the use of harmful drugs or surgery. This mind/body connection could be the foundation of a revolutionary

new way of promoting good health and healing, yet conventional medicine has been slow to embrace it. Healing through non-physical means does not fit within their prevailing philosophy. One is reminded of the famous quote from Schopenhauer:

“All truth passes through three stages. First it is ridiculed. Second it is violently opposed. Third it is accepted as being self-evident.”

It would seem that with regard to the mind/body connection we have passed through most of the first stage and are now firmly within the second stage. Yet despite the resistance of some in the scientific community there continues to be considerable research into how we can learn to use our intentions, beliefs and perceptions to create health and well-being. Some day this work will lead us to Schopenhauer’s third stage when everyone will acknowledge that the human body is not merely a complex machine, but is in fact a vibrant energy center which responds holistically both to physical stimulation *and* to the power of consciousness. When that day comes you will become fully empowered to...

Co-Create Your Health

Ever since Crick and Watson discovered the DNA molecule in 1953, conventional science has been focused on the idea that everything in our physical lives is controlled by our genes. According to this theory of genetic determinism if you have the gene for a certain disease or condition then it is highly likely that you will get it at some point in your life. But what if the real truth were otherwise? What if it could be shown that we actually have the power to influence the actions of our genes? These are the findings of the relatively new science of *epigenetics* which actually means “above genetics”.

Mounting evidence has proven that the way genes express themselves in our bodies is

not predetermined by our DNA, but is in fact controlled and modified by our lifestyle choices and by our perception of the world around us.

Every cell in your body has the exact same DNA in its nucleus, but the genes in that DNA cannot do anything by themselves – they are merely the plans or blueprints for creating changes in your body. What activates and controls these gene “blueprints” is the environment that surrounds the cells, so if we change that environment we change the way our bodies work. One important way that we can control that environment is by eating healthy food and avoiding toxins. When you do this it sends a chemical signal to your DNA telling it to choose gene “blueprints” that promote health and well being. So modifying your diet and lifestyle can help to manage the way your genes act, but perhaps the greatest influence on the behavior of your genes comes from the way you perceive the world around you.

Remember, it is the environment surrounding your cells that chooses which genes will be activated. Your brain is always sending chemicals into your blood to influence that environment (hormones, peptides, etc.), but it is your *perception* that tells the brain which types of chemicals to release. When you are feeling positive emotions such as joy, gratitude and love your brain is instructed to flood your system with endorphins and other beneficial chemicals. These “happy hormones” travel through the blood to all of your cells instructing the DNA to activate genes that strengthen your immune system and keep you healthy. By contrast, when your perception causes you to feel stressed or fearful the brain releases “Flight or Fight” chemicals such as cortisol and adrenaline. These chemicals instruct the DNA to choose genes that shut your body down to prepare it for danger. This weakens your immune system and has a damaging effect on your

cells which eventually leads to physical problems and illness. Dr. Bruce Lipton, a leading expert on epigenetics, puts it this way:

“Your brain converts your perceptions into chemistry, and that chemistry sculpts and controls the body to either health or disease.”

Thus our perceptions create much of the chemical environment that activates our genes, but the story does not end there. The latest research has shown that our perceptions also create vibrational energy which plays a role in controlling our DNA. Every emotion that you have sends vibrations throughout your body, and these vibrations influence which of your genes will be activated. Emotions that are linked to fear and stress activate genes that lead to illness while those associated with joy and peace promote good health. Once again it is your *perception*, as reflected in your emotions, which creates the vibrations that affect the behavior of your genes. Interesting proof of how this works comes from scientific studies which have shown that our DNA actually changes shape according to the way we feel. When we are feeling positive emotions like love, peace and compassion our DNA responds by relaxing and unwinding its strands, and this strengthens our immune system. However, when we have negative feelings such as fear, anger or hate our DNA contracts and tightens thus weakening the immune system. What is really amazing is that these effects occur even when your DNA is separated from your body. In these experiments DNA samples were taken from the people being tested and brought to another location a great distance away. These people were then exposed to emotional stimuli and their DNA - in the distant location reacted instantly - opening when their emotions were positive, and contracting when they were negative. The vibrations created by your emotions are so powerful and so connected to your DNA that they cause it to react even when separated from your body by a great

distance. Think about that the next time you get angry! (also remember this when we look at Quantum Entanglement in the next section)

For over 50 years we have been led to believe that we are powerless victims who must meekly accept the genetic cards that we have been dealt, but those days are over.

Merely having the gene related to some illness or condition does not mean that we will suffer that fate because genes by themselves cannot initiate changes in our bodies.

Epigenetics has empowered us with the knowledge that our thoughts and feelings, as colored by our perceptions, have a great influence on which genes will be activated.

This means that we are the co-creators of our own health with the power to change the behavior of our genes simply by transforming our perceptions. Every moment presents us with the opportunity to make conscious choices that can shape our physical reality, and when we choose to fill our thoughts and feelings with positive emotions our bodies respond with vibrant health and vitality. We are truly the co-creators of our reality, and this becomes even clearer when we go deeply within the very building blocks of the Universe....

The Strange World of Quantum Physics

Many of the things that we take for granted in our daily lives would not be possible without the discoveries made over the past 100 years that are known as the science of quantum physics. Nuclear power, lasers, computers, satellites, mobile phones, MRI machines and just about all of modern technology are the result of the application of the principles of quantum mechanics. On a deeper level this “new” science is an essential piece to the puzzle of understanding how the world works and why changing your vibrations actually does change your reality. Just the mention of “quantum physics”

tend to scare people off, but the basic principles are quite easy to grasp if we avoid scientific jargon and don't get bogged down describing the complex experiments, so let's give it a go.

Traditional "old" physics was created by Isaac Newton and others starting in the late 1600's. These scientific pioneers did a remarkable job of describing how our material world works according to fixed laws which explain everything from falling apples to the movements of galaxies in space. What became known as "Newtonian physics" was so successful that it became a generally accepted fact that the world was a huge mechanical system that was completely governed by these laws of material physics. The fundamental building blocks in this mechanistic universe were called atoms and they were perceived to be dense balls of matter, but this original concept did not stand the test of time. As measuring devices became more sophisticated it became clear that atoms were not solid objects, but were in fact tiny solar systems with electrons orbiting the central nucleus. This is the model that most of us learned in school, but unfortunately that model is way out of date because....when you look really closely at an atom you find that... it's not really a little solar system... in fact it is almost completely.....EMPTY SPACE.

That's right, the atoms which make up everything in our universe have virtually no mass; they are 99.999999% empty space. Think about that for a moment. It is probably the single most mind-blowing fact that you will ever learn. To give you some idea of the scope of this, if an atom were the size of a gigantic cathedral, the nucleus, representing the mass, would be the size of one grain of rice! The electrons that "orbit" this tiny nucleus would be the equivalent of dust motes floating near the ceiling of the cathedral.

All the rest would be empty space. If this is true (and it is!) then why do things in the material world look and feel so real? If a wall is made up of empty space with virtually no physical mass then why can't I put my hand straight through it. The reason is that what we call "empty" space is not really empty at all because the inside of every atom is filled with ENERGY. This subatomic energy is always vibrating which causes a spinning effect– something like small tornadoes. That is why things feel solid and you cannot put your hand through a wall, because the energy vibrations in your hand's atoms are resisted by the energy vibrations in the atoms of the wall. Okay, that (kind of) explains why things in the material world seem solid, but why do they look like they do? If the atoms in a flower have no material mass then why does it look so beautiful? That is because the "empty" spaces in the atoms of the flower are not only filled with energy, but they are also encoded with *information*. Think of it this way: When you put a DVD of a movie into your computer that DVD does not look anything like the movie you wish to see – it is merely a disc that carries digital information. Your computer is able to interpret that information from the disc and show it to you as a full length motion picture. In the same way, when you look at a flower (or anything else,) you are really looking at the empty space of its atoms. However, your brain, like the computer, can interpret the information that is in the atoms of the flower and then "show" it to you in physical form. The flower is all "empty" space, but the information encoded in that space is interpreted by your brain into the beauty that you see.

So as science looked deeper into the nature of matter to find the building blocks of the Newtonian universe, they found instead a strange and mysterious world made up of tiny specs of matter surrounded by vast empty spaces – empty spaces filled with energy and information. Thus was born the science of quantum physics which seeks to explain the

nature and behavior of matter and energy in the world of very small things and to solve the mysteries of how these affect our larger physical world. From the early 1900's until the present day, numerous experiments have proven the basic principles of quantum physics, so let's take a very cursory look at this complex subject that is at the heart of all things.

1) Everything is Energy

We have already seen that atoms are almost all empty space and that things feel and act as if they are solid because these vast empty spaces are filled with energy and information. Einstein's famous equation $E=Mc^2$ essentially means that energy (E) and matter (M) are interchangeable, so we can say that everything comes from energy.

2) Wave-Particle Duality

Light is pure energy that can express itself either as an electromagnetic *wave* or as a stream of *particles* called photons. Subatomic entities like electrons can also appear as either a solid particle or as a wave of energy. When something is in its wave form it has no definite existence; it merely represents an infinite amount of *possibilities* of how and where it can exist. It only has measurable existence when it *chooses* to be in particle form. That sounds very strange – how can a wave of energy make a choice as to how it is perceived? This leads us to.....

3) The Observer Effect

OK, this is where it really gets weird. We have established that the basis of all matter is intangible quantum energy that swirls around as wave-like possibilities with no definite material existence. But it only has this ghost-like/undefined quality when it is not being

looked at. When it is observed, as when a scientist tries to measure it, the undetermined wave becomes a *real* particle with a definite location. In other words, at the subatomic level when you shine your consciousness on something you bring it into the material world. So the flower that we spoke of before was only a *possible flower* until you looked at it, and then it became “real”. I told you this was going to get weird. Perhaps you are starting to see the connection between the principles of quantum physics and things like the power of perception and the law of attraction. Science is saying that at the quantum level everything is energy, and that our perception – our consciousness – is what converts this energy into physical reality. So if you change your perception it can change your experience of physical reality... and there’s more...

4) Quantum Entanglement

This is the quantum principle that Einstein called “spooky action at a distance”. In the simplest terms it means that when subatomic particles are mingled together they become “entangled” with each other and a permanent bond is formed. Once this is done then whatever is experienced by one of these particles will be *instantaneously* felt by the other regardless of the distance between them. Entangled photons can be thousands of kilometers apart, but when you pinch one of them the other jumps at exactly same moment even though you are not doing anything physical to it. Bell’s Theorem takes this one giant step farther by stating that this type of permanent connection occurs not only at the subatomic quantum level, but that it also exists on the macro level of people, places and things. This points to a scientific proof that we are all connected through our consciousness to a “One-ness” that flows from the smallest parts of our being to the farthest reaches of the cosmos. This connection is sometimes known as The Field, the Zero Point Field, The Divine Matrix, or

The Quantum Matrix

This is the field of consciousness beyond the limitations of our physical material world that connects us to everything in the Universe and to all of its knowledge. Mystics and sages have spoken of this “One-ness” throughout the ages and now science is gradually coming to the same conclusion. This fusion of physics with metaphysics was stunningly demonstrated in the results of a recent experiment which was designed to find out how the heart and the brain react to emotional stimulus.

The people being tested were seated in separate rooms and attached to machines that measured changes in their brain waves and heart rates. They were instructed to stare at a blank computer screen and different images would appear on their screens every few seconds. Most of these images were designed to calm them but a few were meant to cause a strong emotional reaction. A special computer was used to choose each image a millisecond before it was projected onto the screen, and it was absolutely impossible for anyone (including the scientists doing the experiment) to know which picture would be selected.

Thousands of these tests were run and the data from the heart and brain monitors clearly showed that both the heart and the brain responded to the emotional images, and that the heart responded before the brain. This was interesting, but the truly astonishing discovery was that both the heart_and the brain_responded *before* the image had flashed onto the screen. Let me repeat that: In every case their hearts and brains responded *even though the image had not yet appeared on their screen and in fact had not*

yet been chosen! How did they know what was coming? Clearly both the heart and the brain must have communicated with a source of information that had knowledge of which picture would be shown before it was chosen. This is called precognition and you can see that it is very similar to Einstein's "spooky action", because in both cases information is transferred with no direct physical cause. Welcome to the Matrix.

Our common sense tells us that it is impossible for these people to have reacted to a picture before it was even chosen. That is because we have been taught to believe that we live in a material world that is controlled exclusively by physical cause and effect. Quantum entanglement and experiments like this show that perhaps in this case our common sense is mistaken... just as it was proven wrong when people thought the Earth was flat, or that the Sun orbited around the Earth. In 1966, Cleve Backster had his own common sense turned upside down when he experienced first hand the magic of the Quantum Matrix. Backster was one of the world's foremost experts in polygraph technology which measures electrical skin resistance to find out whether people are telling the truth. He was curious to see if plants could emit a similar type of electrical charge so he attached his machine to the leaf of a plant. He tried several things to get the plant to show a reaction but nothing seemed to work. Deciding that he needed to do something more drastic in order to get the plants "attention", he came up with the idea of using a match to burn the connected leaf. At that very moment the recording pen on the detector swung to the top of the chart showing a huge electrical surge in the plant. But he had not yet burned the leaf, he had only thought about doing it! Somehow the plant had felt the vibration of his thoughts and registered extreme alarm at the prospect of being burned. Needless to say, this blew Backster's mind and it spurred him to

continue his research by performing hundreds of similar experiments over the years with ever more stunning results.

Countless studies in quantum physics and parapsychology have produced overwhelming evidence for the existence of this Quantum Matrix of connection. Max Planck, the father of modern physics, described it this way:

“All matter originates and exists only by virtue of a force..... We must assume behind this force the existence of a conscious and intelligent mind. This mind is the matrix of all matter.”

The details of how it all works are still shrouded in mystery as the pioneers on the leading edge of science continue to add pieces to the puzzle. What we know so far suggests that it is a field of consciousness which connects the entire Universe in such a way that what affects one thing also affects everything else. This is similar to the “butterfly effect” of chaos theory which basically says the same thing: we are all connected and a small change in one place can have a large effect in a distant location. It is also becoming clear that the Quantum Matrix has the capacity to store infinite amounts of information and that each of us is in constant contact with this timeless source of knowledge. This is analogous to the Eastern concept of the Akashic Records which is a dimension of consciousness that holds the entire history of the Universe.

The implications of these discoveries are enormous because they reveal that we humans have barely begun to touch upon our full potential. As we learn more and more about our connection to this One-ness we will have to completely re-think our traditional notions about how the world works and what our role in it should be. No longer will we accept being mere cogs in a great mechanistic Universe, but we will instead embrace our

true status as co-creators of everything in the Cosmos with access to the wisdom of the ages. Thus fully empowered we can create a world of elevated consciousness that reflects our highest ideas about who we are. I wonder what that would look like...

THE DAWN OF TRANSFORMATION

Heaven on Earth

These are exciting times in which we are living. There is a feeling of uncertainty that is reverberating throughout every area of our society and culture. The world is awakening to a new level of consciousness as people from every corner of the globe are becoming increasingly aware of their connection to something greater than themselves. Yoga centers are appearing in every community; alternative healing is accepted and practiced by millions; books about meditation and spiritual growth are bestsellers. More and more of us are feeling that the rhythm of the world we have inherited is not in harmony with the song that plays in our hearts. Something deep within our essence keeps saying, “there must be a better way”, and we are compelled to search for alternatives to the norm. The human race is reaching a critical juncture – a choice point – with two very different energies competing for the soul of our planet. On one side we have the entrenched power structures of our existing world who are fighting this wave of change with all of their considerable might. On the other side we have the evolutionary impulse of our species which is urging us to transform; encouraging us to move gracefully towards our highest potential.

What is that highest potential? Imagine a world that is inspired by an evolved consciousness – a world where love, joy, truth, beauty, harmony and abundance are the

guiding principles. That is the Heaven on Earth which we all yearn for, and the only way for that to become a reality is by raising our collective consciousness. But how can we accomplish such a radical transformation and where does it all start? It starts with us.... you and me. In order to transform the consciousness of the planet we must first go within to transform ourselves.... go within to discover the wisdom and goodness that dwells within our hearts. Once we have uncovered this inner light we then need to bring it into the world so that it shines brightly through our words, our actions, and our very presence. Living at this higher level of awareness makes our individual lives more beautiful in every way, and we also become an inspiration for others to follow the same path. When a critical mass of humanity has awakened to their inner goodness the world will be transformed.

There is a wonderful analogy in Nature for this type of transformation: the metamorphosis of the humble caterpillar into a glorious butterfly. In the last weeks of its life a caterpillar ravenously consumes many times its body weight making it so bloated that it can no longer move. At this point all it can do is hang upside down from the nearest branch where it gradually encases itself in a shell called a chrysalis. Inside of this dark cocoon the caterpillar starts to decompose but then something extraordinary happens. Amid the chaos of the caterpillar's decaying body a completely new type of cell emerges seemingly out of nowhere. Biologists call them Imaginal Cells because they carry within them the information and *imagination* to create something entirely different. These new cells are completely foreign to the caterpillar's immune system so it sees them as enemies and immediately begins to attack them. The battle rages on, but the imaginal cells are persistent and for each one that is destroyed thousands more arise to take its place. Soon the caterpillar's immune system is

overwhelmed, and as its body continues to break down these miraculous imaginal cells cluster together to orchestrate the creation of an entirely new organism – the graceful and beautiful butterfly.

In these exciting times we are being urged to become the imaginal cells of our society... urged to have the imagination and intention to see ourselves and our world as something uniquely beautiful. Every day more and more of us are awakening to the possibility that we can rise above the limiting perceptions that we have inherited from others. We are becoming aware that we have the freedom to choose the way that we live – freedom to make conscious choices rather than be ruled by unconscious reactions. As we raise our awareness in this way it is natural to feel more comfortable around people and places that have a similar feeling – a similar vibration. We gravitate toward others who are evolving in the same direction, and just as the imaginal cells clustered together to create beauty from decay, so too can we create a society of awakened souls with the power to transform our planet. Let us again envision the Heaven on Earth that we spoke of before - a beautiful world filled with people who are guided by a higher consciousness that reflects their true nature of love and compassion. Could there be famine in such a world? War? Greed? Violence? Injustice? Of course not. You see, “Heaven is not a place..... it is a state of consciousness” and we have the power to create that heavenly consciousness right here and right now. Humanity is poised to take the next step in its evolution – to shift away from the current worldview based on lack, limitation and fear toward a new paradigm grounded in abundance, freedom and love. This is the vision that is pulling humanity forward, and one of the keys to making this vision a reality is understanding who we are and why we are here.

The Evolutionary Impulse

Throughout human history we have been fascinated by three perennial questions: Who are we? Where did we come from? What is the purpose of our lives? The way that we respond to these questions forms the basis of how we see ourselves in the world and also determines the type of society that we will create. For the past 150 years science has relied on Charles Darwin's theory of evolution to answer these crucial questions, and as a result almost every aspect of our Western culture reflects his vision of the world. But what if Darwin got it wrong? What if the foundations of our economic, ecologic, political and social structures are all grounded on false premises? Is it possible that Nature's true evolutionary impulse is the very opposite of Darwin's theory?

The predominant Darwinian worldview says that we are the result of an arbitrary evolutionary process that motivates us to strive for individual survival at all costs. Life itself is supposed to have sprung up spontaneously from the inert material world, and human beings are said to have evolved through the random mutations of our genes. According to this theory every once in a great while a lucky creature experienced an accidental genetic mutation that created a helpful trait for survival. He or she then passed on this marvelous new characteristic to their offspring and eventually, over millions of generations, the new feature became part of the human race. We are taught to believe that this process of accidental causation is responsible for every useful trait that we possess. Darwin's theory also declared that competition is the natural behavior

of all species including humans, and that each of us has been programmed to fend for ourselves in a continuous struggle for survival. So the Darwinian answers to the perennial questions are clear: Who are we? Evolved apes who are purely physical material beings. Where did we come from? We are the lucky result of a system of random accidental mutations. What is the purpose of our lives? Survival!

For over a century conventional science has been telling us this same story: the human race is merely a complex form of physical matter that has come about by pure chance, and we must struggle against each other in order to survive. This has created a completely unbalanced materialistic society that is based on fear, greed and scarcity. It abuses the environment, consumes too many resources, and creates constant conflict. This all sounds pretty grim and hopeless, but fortunately there is an alternative worldview that points the way toward a future that is much brighter and more sustainable. The leading edge of modern scientific knowledge supports this very different kind of evolutionary impulse – one which provides positive responses to the perennial questions.

Who are we and where did we come from? Conventional science has led us to believe that we are insignificant specs of matter that are the end product of random biology... accidental blobs of protoplasm clinging to a large rock as it hurtles through space. The truth is far different and it suggests that there is a conscious intentionality to our existence. The latest research tells us that about 200,000 years ago human beings suddenly appeared on the face of the Earth. They were fully formed and very much the same as we are today - including the size of their brains. There is mounting evidence that specific changes occurred in their DNA at that time which gave them many of our

uniquely human capabilities. This drastic transformation from the pre-existing apes happened very rapidly and could not possibly have been the result of gradual Darwinian evolution. Science does not as yet know exactly how this came about, but the evidence points to a conclusion that we are much more than mere accidents of biology. In the words of Michael Beckwith, “We are on purpose, with a purpose”.

That brings us to the third perennial question: What is the purpose of our lives? The accepted Darwinian principle is that Nature is based on the “survival of the fittest” which means that our deepest motivation is to compete against each other to get what we need in a world of scarcity. In other words, there is not enough to go around so I had better get mine. This is the foundation of our current society, but when we look more closely we see that the actual truth is completely the opposite. The eloquent writings of Gregg Braden have pointed out that over the past fifty years more than 400 peer reviewed scientific studies of Nature have asked one simple question: “Does survival-oriented competition help a species to thrive and grow?” The answer in every case was a resounding no. The results from 100% of these studies clearly showed that competition for resources always leads to failure. All of the scientific research on this topic is unanimous in its conclusion that the best way for a species in Nature to survive and prosper is through mutual aid and cooperation.

This natural urge towards wholeness and harmony is the evolutionary impulse that will guide us during this pivotal time in the history of our planet. The things that are falling apart in our present society are the ones that are unsustainable because they have been built upon false assumptions. In order for the human race to flourish we must transcend these old beliefs so that the choices we make are in alignment with the truth of

our being. It is our sense of identity that will determine the direction that we take, so it is important that we know ourselves, not as biological accidents, but as conscious beings who are individual aspects of the one greater consciousness. Our purpose is clear. It is to go beyond the prevailing mentality of competition and scarcity by awakening to our authentic nature of love, generosity, creativity and cooperation. In so doing we will realize the true evolutionary path of our species which is to create life on Earth to be a shining reflection of our finest qualities.

The Power of Intention

This is the evolution of consciousness that we see unfolding all around us, but can it really grow strong enough to bring meaningful change to the world? The answer to that question just might be found in the enormous power of human intention. Throughout the ages mystics and sages have spoken of a “one-ness” that links us to everything in the universe. As we have seen, modern science has now proven that there is in fact such a field of connection and that it is strongly affected by our thoughts and emotions.

Powerful proof of this has come from studies of the Earth’s magnetic field. Everything in the Universe has an energetic field around it, and we have satellites that measure the electro-magnetic field that comes from our planet Earth. These measurements almost always stay within a specific range of fluctuation *except when there are events that attract intense human attention.* The most stunning example of this was on September 11, 2001, when the magnetic field of the planet Earth spiked way above its normal range and then stayed unstable for several days as the world watched those events with rapt attention. Similar readings have occurred at the time of other events that galvanized human emotional attention such as the death of Princess Diana and the Asian Tsunami.

Why is this important? Because from quantum physics we know that our entire physical world is made up of energy and that same energy connects all of us to each other through the Quantum Matrix. This data and similar studies suggest that when many people are concentrating their attention on one thing it creates a powerful energy that can have a profound transformative effect on the world around us.

The challenge that we face is learning how to harness this incredible power of *attention* by focusing it through our *intention* for positive change. The good news is that the equipment we need to accomplish this task is as close as the beating of our own hearts. The strongest transmitter that you have for projecting your intentions into the world is not your brain, it is your heart. The electromagnetic field of the human heart is immensely more powerful than that of the brain... 5,000 times more powerful! This field of heart energy sends powerful vibrations out into the world which is pretty amazing, but it gets even better. Recent studies have proven that when we are feeling heart-based emotions like love, compassion, gratitude and kindness we create *coherence* between the heart and brain which increases the strength of these vibrations exponentially. So the already powerful energy that emits from our hearts becomes incredibly more powerful when combined with love-based emotions. This means that a relatively small number of people projecting these positive feelings can have an enormous effect on the field that connects all people and which underlies our entire physical reality.

This is the opportunity that is being presented to us in these exciting times; the opportunity to transform this planet by collectively raising our vibrations to a higher level. It all starts by choosing to live consciously so that our lives become a reflection of

the feelings that emanate from our hearts. In so doing our positive intention is focused like a laser to send a powerful message that is can effect the very fabric of the universe. For all of the world's imaginal cells the message is clear...

Be The Change

This inspirational phrase echoes an emerging awareness that the way to create positive transformation in our lives and in the world around us is by elevating our individual consciousness. That means learning to choose our thoughts, words and actions so that they are a clear reflection of our highest ideals. To reach this level of expanded awareness you must first travel within to connect with your true authentic self, and then bring that unique inner beauty into the world. It begins by remembering that you are something greater than what your conditioning has programmed you to be. In search of that higher self you embark upon an inner journey of discovery which leads to the beauty and wisdom that is your true nature. You then become a living demonstration of that inner light as it emerges through you and as you. This is how you change the world.... just by being you.... the truly authentic beautiful you. In so doing you hold the space for all of humanity to evolve to its highest potential, and when enough of us have awakened to our inner goodness Heaven on Earth will not just be a possibility ... it will have already arrived. So the question is where do we start?.... and the answer is with you... and with me...and with those around us. It is through this process of individual awakening that the rhythm of humanity will finally come into harmony with the song that plays in our hearts, and as more and more of us transform we will truly become..... the change we wish to see.

CONCLUSION

We have covered a lot of ground from the creation of Island on Koh Samui to the dawning of a “Brave New World”. I have shared with you my personal journey that has led me to the teaching and practice of what I call The Art of Conscious Living. So here in Socratic form is a summation of how you can apply this timeless wisdom to your lives and the lives of those around you.

Spirituality and Consciousness seem to be more popular than ever before. Why is this?

These are incredibly exciting times in which we are living and this is why I call it The Dawn of Transformation. More and more of us are feeling that the world we have inherited is not in harmony with what we feel in our hearts. We are searching for a better way of living and you can see this clearly in the rising popularity of yoga, meditation, spiritual books and alternative healing. The Evolutionary Impulse that drives humanity has reached a critical point – a choice point – and for the first time in human history we have the opportunity to reach for our full potential. Many people are feeling the pull of this powerful transformative energy and it is awakening within them the desire to bring real joy and beauty into their lives.

How does Conscious Living fit in with this awakening?

As people start to feel this new awareness they want to change their lives to find true happiness and fulfillment, but most do not know how to go about it. Conscious Living guides you onto a new path and gives you the tools to create your life to be a joyous celebration in every aspect of your being - Body, Mind and Spirit. Instead of being a victim of your past experiences and perceptions you get to choose whom you wish to be right here and right now. Conscious Living shows you how to take back your power by choosing your thoughts, words and actions so that they are a clear reflection of your beautiful authentic self – the real you that is buried beneath layers of conditioning.

What does one do to make this kind of transformation?

The essence of living consciously is mindfulness, which simply means being aware that you have the power to make choices about everything you say and do. Instead of blindly following your past programming you discover that who you really are is so much more than that – so much more beautiful. The best way create this type of positive change in your life is to develop a daily practice of what I call “Blissiplines” which are disciplines that bring you real bliss. A daily practice can start with just ten minutes each morning and then grow as you become more comfortable with it. We are all unique individuals so your practice will become a personalized mixture of blissiplines that work for you and your lifestyle. Physical practices like yoga, Qi Gong and energy exercises are blended with the inner explorations such as meditation, affirmations, visualization and conscious breathing. Body, mind and spirit are all nourished so that you feel your true inner beauty on all levels and can bring that wonderful energy into every area of your life.

How long does it take to master Conscious Living?

Your life will begin to transform immediately and the stronger your intention to grow the faster and deeper will be your progress. How long does it take? That question reminds me of the Zen student who wanted to know when he would become enlightened. His teacher smiled and answered that enlightenment is not a destination – it is a journey – a continuing adventure that yields more and more light at each new level. Living consciously works the same way. Your body and spirit will be lifted to new heights, and you will feel so great that you will be compelled to fly ever higher.

How can we combine Conscious Living with our busy working lives?

Actually that is the whole point of living consciously: to make our daily life a reflection of our highest choices. The first step is to create some time in the morning for your blissiplines so that you can connect with your inner wisdom, but that is just the beginning. Your practice will continue throughout the day as you learn to bring mindfulness into every aspect of your life – relationships, business, social life..... everything. Each minute presents you with another opportunity to be the change you wish to see. Over time, as you continue to intentionally live in harmony with your inner light, you will begin to experience new levels of consciousness in all areas of your life. Work, play, health, and creativity will all evolve naturally and gracefully as your true authentic self begins to shine.

This sounds great so what is the best way to get started? Is it enough to read books on the subject?

Getting started is a very individual matter. Some people love to read and teach themselves; others prefer to have personal guidance; and most of us respond best to a combination of both. It can be very helpful to work with someone who has already been down the path so that you get the message faster and in a form that will “click” or resonate with you. We live in an age where we are overwhelmed with information through books, media and the internet. This presents us with the challenge of finding out what is worthwhile and what is not, so again guidance from a trusted source can save you from wasting a lot of time and energy. Certainly learning the blissiplines is a lot faster and more fun with a good teacher who can help you to find the ones that work best for you. That said, this process is all about empowering you to participate in your own unfoldment, so once you get going you will need less and less guidance.

Any final thoughts?

Each of us has a unique gift to give to ourselves and to the world. That gift is our beautiful inner light fully emerged and expressing itself in every aspect of our being. It is our birthright to shine with the full brilliance of the love, compassion and kindness that is always present within our hearts. In so doing we not only make our lives incredibly rich and fulfilling, but we also become a beacon for others to follow... holding the space and creating the vibration for all of humanity to evolve to its greatest potential. It's a sweet thing and it is available for all those who want to make their lives richer and more rewarding. As the Buddhist proverb says: When the student is ready the teacher appears...

ADDENDUM

A book on transformation is not complete without some mention of the energy and emotion surrounding the Mayan Calendar and the date of December 21, 2012. If you are reading this after that propitious day then you already know that the world did not end, but there is much more to these prophecies so let us briefly explore...

THE MYSTERIES OF 2012

Most people have heard the predictions about powerful cosmic forces that will come together on December 21, 2012 to cause radical changes on the planet Earth. This persistent story has given rise to numerous different prophecies ranging from an apocalyptic disaster to the glorious dawning of a spiritual revolution. Why has this date attracted so much attention and what could it mean? There are three main threads to this story, and the first involves the calendar used by the ancient Mayan civilization of Central America. These people had developed incredibly sophisticated mathematical and astronomical knowledge many centuries before such things were discovered in the West. Their “long count” calendar was projected to last for 5,125 years, culminating with “The End of Times” on December 21, 2012. Some say that this “end of times” simply means that the Mayan calendar will reset to zero for a new cycle; others see it as a major turning point in human history.

The second indication that points to 2012 is a very rare event called Galactic Alignment. This occurs when the Sun, as seen from Earth, is directly aligned with the center of our

Milky Way galaxy. Such an alignment only happens once every 25,800 years, and yes.... you guessed it..... the next one is on December 21, 2012. Furthermore, it is probably not just a coincidence that this comes on the same day as the Mayan “End of Times”, because the center of the Milky Way is linked to the creation of the Universe in Mayan mythology. The final piece to the puzzle is called the Precession of the Equinoxes which involves astrology. Simply stated, the constellations related to the twelve signs of the zodiac move slightly backwards in the sky each year, so that every 2,160 years or so the one that is visible at a certain point in the sky changes. On December 21, 2012, most astrologists agree that we will have finished one of these long cycles and moved from the Age of Pisces to the much-anticipated Age of Aquarius.

There are many different interpretations of what these celestial signs mean, and they present a broad spectrum of possible consequences. The gloomiest of these predict that the Earth will undergo cataclysmic catastrophes that would mean the end of our world as we know it, while the more positive ones view December 21, 2012, as the portal through which a vast awakening to enlightened consciousness will emerge. The end of the world scenario relies partly on scientific evidence that there may be unusually heavy solar flare activity sometime during 2012. Building on this possibility the negative predictions envision a huge explosion in the sun’s atmosphere. If that happened it could trigger a geomagnetic reversal on Earth with disastrous consequences caused by switching the magnetic polarities of the North and South poles. Without going into all of the details, one can safely say that while something like this is not completely impossible it is extremely unlikely.

On the other end of the scale are the most optimistic interpretations of 2012, which believe that this “End of Times” does not mean the end of our material world, but rather the end of our obsession with materialism. This positive spin on 2012 says that the current worldview based on the low vibrations of fear and greed will be swept away by a sudden shift in global consciousness to the higher vibrations of love and light. There is much evidence for this hopeful prediction in the fact that more people than ever before are searching for an alternative way of seeing the world. However, the fact remains that the vast majority of the human race still clings stubbornly to its old ways of thinking, and it is difficult to imagine that this could change so dramatically before the end of the year 2012.

So if it is extremely unlikely that the world will end in 2012, but also highly improbable that the majority of the world’s people will instantly wake up to a higher level of consciousness, then what are we to make of this whole phenomenon? I suggest that if December 21, 2012, has any significance at all it is not because of what may happen on that one specific date, (remember Y2K!) but rather, that it represents the center point of a *range* of years in which the *potential* for a great transformation exists. The winds of change are blowing and their effects can be felt in the failing of our old systems of finance, ecology, energy and politics. As these traditional structures falter we are presented with many challenges, but also with a great opportunity to alter our course and to steer civilization in a more positive direction. Perhaps the energy surrounding 2012 will be the catalyst that inspires the people of this planet to start choosing a new and more enlightened path in our quest for a better world.

