

CHAPTER THIRTEEN A METHOD FOR FINDING PARADISE IN THE WORLD

Now that we have explored several places and times, we can detail the method for finding a more rewarding view of the world, which can rival many people's dreams of paradise. Thailand and Cambodia are two societies that are not usually studied outside their national borders, but they're bottomless treasure chests of creativity and beauty. I had already seen the synthesis of Thai cultural patterns in Sukhothai, which combined influences from:

- Angkor,
- Sri Lanka,
- India,
- The lower Thai peninsula and Malay states farther south,
- Pagan,
- Mon societies in Burma,
- The Dvaravati civilization,
- The Chinese diaspora,
- Ancient traditions that Tais had brought when they moved in,
- Rivers that help unify the land's diverse environments and abundant growth,
- The tropical heat and dramatic monsoons,
- Wet rice farming and the communal life that it encourages.

These places and environmental features converged in billions of interpersonal interactions, and they fostered Thai art and ways of thinking about the world (I calculated billions because millions of people communicated with each other dozens of times each day over many centuries). They reinforced each other and engendered a field of meanings that people throughout the land have shared up to today. This field has synthesized:

- The importance of the wat and its vihara in the community,
- Animistic traditions that harmonize a multitude of spirits,
- Aesthetics that mix gracefulness and vibrancy,
- Etiquette alternating with esprit,
- Reverence for the royal court, which is associated with Buddhism and animated power,
- Social hierarchy and following the conventions of one's in-group and superiors,
- Distinctions between the safe inside/*muang* (the family, rice farming, and the temple) and the wild outside/*pa*,
- Desires to hide conflicts over social status beneath pretty surfaces.

Thai culture is actually much richer than what I saw in Sukhothai. Lan Na also synthesized these patterns, and it developed its own varieties and gave them many down-home touches.

Ayutthaya was also central in the emergence of Thai culture. It absorbed the most Khmer influences and added their majesty to it.

The key thing about Thai culture's development and continuity is: These three states emerged together, and they influenced each other. They constantly exchanged monks, artists, political envoys, and goods. Combinations of Sukhothai, Lan Na, and Ayutthayan art and customs pervaded markets, wats, palaces, and homes so much that people from at least the 15th century on imbibed these impressions every day. This shaped their outlooks in ways that have been uniquely Thai ever since.

How can people fathom all these aspects of Thai culture when they're used to categorizing things and seeing them as separate objects? Academic conventions and online search engines encourage people to treat topics in this way. But the entire fusion of natural and cultural landscapes has made Thai society what it is. It has also given the West many of its most enduring and recognizable traits, so we need to be able to conceive cultures in a new way.

Thai culture is both infinite and unified. The ways in which its people have conceived and represented the world comprise an infinitely abundant landscape—its artworks, rituals, economic goods, cuisine, stories, domestic architecture, and combinations of etiquette and esprit can be endlessly varied, as well as mixed with each other in limitless ways. They have regularly been shared between several political centers, and between elite and folk cultures. All these interactions have reinforced a shared way of portraying and thinking about the world that has been unified enough to be distinctly Thai, and to endure throughout Thailand's history until now.¹

This fusion of infinity and unity of a culture is not conventionally studied, so there is no established concept of it. But it's a key aspect of a culture because it patterns the perceptions, thoughts, art forms, and identities of people who are raised in it. This coalescence of both is a basic aspect of who we are, and a key part of this method for finding paradise in the world. Appreciating it can expand your world into one new vista after another so that your perspectives will become increasingly rewarding.

The unity of Thai culture has allowed limitless scope for creativity. Artworks in the Thai capitals and in satellite towns, villages, and rural wats have assumed endless varieties which are still characteristically Thai. The three great kingdoms consolidated influences from all over Southeast Asia, India, and Sri Lanka into a cultural landscape that has been fruitful enough to allow ever more variations to emerge, and yet be shared within an environment of common meanings and assumptions about the world.

At the same time, the variations have reinforced Thai culture's unity because they have permeated daily life in so many ways (in sculpture, temple architecture, rituals, behavior, cuisine, stories, literature, and common objects like ceramics, furniture, fabrics, and houses) that they have converged into a common field meanings for everyone. Because they're constantly reinforced, people have considered them to be the most basic patterns in the world. What seems obvious actually reflects an inexhaustibly rich cultural landscape.

This means cultures are bigger than ism's. Classicism sees an elite (and usually male) center that generates and spreads the most important traditions. It has proclaimed that Greek men in colonnaded agoras creating geometric forms, discussing abstract philosophic ideas, and fashioning realistic sculpture developed the standard of civilization. But since the 1970s, academia has often shifted towards the opposite idea: Cultures are in flux and pluralistic. The rising number of children of parents from different ethnic backgrounds and the millions of immigrants on every continent are often cited to prove this statement.

But cultural landscapes are richer than a choice between one dominant group of dead guys and a mishmash lacking ideas and perspectives that everyone shares. Elite patronage centers (such as the Thai and Khmer royal courts, Florence's guilds of wealthy merchants, and the Catholic Church) and folk cultures have influenced each other through many media, and this unifies societies enough to allow everyone to share enough of the same mindset to communicate. Royal and village wats resemble each other. Pictures in family Bibles and parish churches are similar in content and form to the Vatican's paintings. All media reinforce a common way of perceiving and thinking. It's common because people share similar perceptions, thoughts, artworks, stories, and expectations of how to behave, and they discuss them multiple times each day. They are thus ingrained in their language and the images they fashion. These similar perceptions, thoughts, and encounters are shared in upper class venues, common people's homes, streets, markets, schools, and houses of worship. At the same time, they're shared within the same natural environment. Since they are experienced in all places people are familiar with, they're constantly reinforced. They thereby seem like the world's most fundamental patterns, which unify it.

At the same time, the abundance of ideas, artworks, interpersonal interactions, and social groups within this unity encourages more variations because the variations can be synthesized in endless ways. It also allows exchanges with other cultures by giving all societies many points of contact. A culture's unity and infinite creativity thus engender each other.

Cambodian culture is also both infinite and unified. Khmer society was usually dominated by one capital, but Khmers synthesized art, ideas, stories, and rituals from multiple Hindu traditions (both Shiva and Vishnu worship) and Buddhist faiths. Their culture was influenced by several states in both India and the rest of Southeast Asia. It mixed art and ideas from all these lands with its own traditions, including ancestral cults, rituals for spirits in nature, and folklore, as well as with its unique natural landscape. This multitude of influences fertilized Khmer art's mixtures of elegance and grandeur. Angkor always had a rich stock of forms and ideas for both types of expressions. New artistic organizations, like Our Strength and Sammaki, which I had the pleasure of encountering in Battambang, promise more creativity in the future.

But Cambodia and Thailand are only two countries in this region. Next door are Burma, Vietnam, Laos, and Malaysia, and each has experienced its own interchanges between political centers, folk cultures, and the natural environment. Farther south is Indonesia, where many states thrived over the centuries. And nearby are two little countries called India and China, which have been in contact with Southeast Asia for more than 2,000 years. So the more I saw on this trip, the richer Southeast Asia appeared to me.

And the richer the whole world became. I kept comparing Southeast Asia with my own cultural origins. The Western tradition also emerged as both infinity and unity. In the ancient Middle East and ancient Greece, ideas, aesthetics, and faiths emerged that have been treated as basic ever since. Monotheistic religions developed in the Middle East, and Greeks created and refined ways to express proportion, distinct entities, abstraction, linear relationships, the human body, and people's portraits. Ancient Romans synthesized all these traditions from both areas and reinforced them as fundamental. They also added the arch and the dome to them. Europeans in the Middle Ages then emphasized Biblical stories and metaphysical ideas (like the great chain of being, which they expressed in Gothic cathedrals) and blended them with ancient Greco-Roman ideas and aesthetics. Fifteenth century Florentines then synthesized these ancient and medieval currents with new techniques for three-dimensional perspective and for representing

the body, and many artists added their own styles to them. Together, they fleshed both out and helped to make them seem like basic reality. Venetian, Roman, and northern European artists added their own backgrounds and made the new perspective seem even more real. Like Southeast Asia, the West has combined continuity of ideas and art forms that it has found most meaningful with infinite creativity.

Who are you? Who am I? People harbor heritages of cultures with limitless wealth and creativity. Ideas and perceptions that people have considered most basic have been established as such within a whole culture. They are not isolated things; they're meaningful within this limitlessly abundant whole.

Our cultures are so abundant that they can rival many dreams of paradise because growth is fused with a culture's infinity and unity. New meanings are always possible in a society because:

- Mental horizons can expand in many directions because each culture can interact with several others.
- A culture always has more riches in its own past, which can be discovered as people see it from new perspectives that emerge as times change and as other cultures are explored.
- New artistic styles can emerge, like Picasso's flouting of three-dimensional perspective at the beginning of the 20th century. Also, new combinations of old art forms can be synthesized. This has happened many times in Thailand as people have combined features of different Buddha statues.

So to understand your own thought and identity thoroughly (to understand their full range of meanings), you must reach out to other cultures, as well as explore the heritage and future possibilities of your own. This is a wonderful paradox. The ways in which people unify their perspectives of the world (their perceptual patterns, art forms, and fundamental concepts) encourage them to look beyond those perspectives. And these ways are intertwined with so many pasts and other cultures, and they're intertwined through so many media, that the expansion of mental horizons beyond the current perspective can become at least as basic in our experience as holding them to the same boundaries. Perceptual patterns, common art forms, and fundamental concepts unify our world, but they also encourage us to transcend the ways in which they unify it and to arrive at bigger and more inclusive views of the world. They encourage us to always find more meaning and more wonders around us so that seeing all cultures shine on each other becomes ordinary.

Furthermore, our horizons can grow in infinite possible directions. We can explore many cultures, and we can do so through multiple media. We can also choose many possible sequences of societies and media, and my trip's unusual sequence (Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Middle East) showed me that the possibilities are unlimited. My journey's unconventionality demonstrated to me that we can transcend our current perspectives, not once, but again and again.

Thinking can thereby evolve from strictly apprehending things as they are conventionally defined to expanding into bigger landscapes which include more ideas and mindsets, and which encourage all to enrich each other. The conjoining of unity and infinity encourages limitless growth of horizons into all cultures and temporal periods. Each culture is thus a fusion of unity, infinity, and growth (UIG). Moreover, as you explore one culture, you can increasingly

appreciate others. As you do this, you can find that all societies can inspire each other so that the whole world can be shown to be UIG—all of its cultures and people can always highlight and influence each other in more ways. This mutual reflection can become predominant in our perspectives and identities so that they're not confined to conventional borders between societies.

In *The Untethered Soul*, the yoga teacher Michael A. Singer said that the highest state of happiness and creativity that people experience results from how open they are, and he thus recommended a constant state of openness.² What we can be open to is actually much bigger than what anyone has realized so far because it can expand in limitless directions as cultures interact more deeply and share more ideas, arts, and experiences. We all have seen only a minuscule fraction of what we can become.

As people learn about more cultures, the unity of their own will become richer because they will have more ideas, artworks, and types of experiences to share with others who live in it. As more people share their new views with each other, the infinity of their own cultures will increase because their societies will become even more creative. As unity and infinity become richer, more growth will happen because people will have more ways to expand their horizons. A self-reinforcing process can thereby emerge in which people deepen their enjoyment of all cultures, and cultures continue to inspire each other. Every artwork, fundamental idea, and person is a threshold to explorations that become ever more blissful.

But what is this bliss? How can we wrap our minds around the idea of an infinite cultural landscape expanding in limitless directions? It can seem more intangible than any pantheon that Mahayana Buddhists dreamed of. Recent studies of peak experiences can connect this idea with the here and now.

The psychologist Abraham Maslow made peak experiences his business, and he explored them in *Toward a Psychology of Being*. Many people today know him for his hierarchy of needs because high school and college freshman marketing classes teach this concept. According to this hierarchy, our physical needs must first be met. We then focus on social needs, such as the approval of others and the feeling of belonging. After they're satisfied we strive for the highest human goals. This high end of the spectrum was Maslow's main interest, and it included being the happiest and most creative that we can be.

Back in the 1930s, Maslow noted that psychology mainly dealt with troubled people and that it usually defined mental health in negative terms—as not being sick. But what about the top 50 percent on the scale of well-being? What about the top one percent? Wouldn't it be better for us to study them and see them as our models?

One trait that Maslow noticed in people in the top percentiles was they had more peak experiences. He saw several aspects of pinnacle experiences:

- A wider range of perceptions and ideas emerge.
- There is a more creative flow of thoughts, which is less bound to social conventions. Many great artists experience this. For example, Picasso painted in several styles throughout his long career. People can liberate themselves from the mechanics of a situation and see wider ranges of connections.
- People feel more deeply integrated with their surroundings and able to find more beauty in them.

- They feel more whole and they don't fight with themselves. Instead of feeling like bundles of drives and social roles pulling in opposite directions, they're spontaneous, joyful, and fully expressive, and they feel that whatever they do is good.

I enjoyed many peak experiences while traveling, in which multiple times and places seemed to fuse. Instead of being bound to one time and culture, I felt that I was in a larger field in which I could see a wider range of ideas and art forms reflect each other.

This first experience occurred when I reached Angkor Wat's upper terrace. After the long procession through the temple, I found people from all over the world in this place which Khmers had envisioned as heaven. The visitors from many cultures, the terrace's refined forms and carvings, the breezes through the window slats, and the chirping of birds and bats merged into a field that both transcended and included all times and places. I felt deeply integrated with all these times and places, and all became integrated in this field which seemed increasingly luminous.

I enjoyed Thailand's sinuous forms in temples, markets, sculptures, and paintings even more than I would have if I had not seen Cambodia first because memories of the more monumental Khmer buildings were still fresh. I also often thought of the West's greater focus on static linear forms and distinct bodies. Since Thais have created congenial streams of many patterns, my memories of other cultures added to the flows I saw and enhanced my experiences. All these cultures seemed to mesh into a larger graceful flow.

When I arrived at the Parthenon in 2008, I stood in front of it and admired its balanced proportions, but I enjoyed them even more when I thought of other cultures' ideas of balance. Thai flows are also balanced, but according to different perceptions, concepts, and shared experiences—they balance grace and animation and thereby tame the environment's energies. Many Khmer temples balance elegance and power. Chinese ideas of yin and yang also express balanced energy flows, but in a different way than Thai flows. They're more symmetrical by moving in circular patterns that repeat.



Figure 1. Representation of the harmonious universe in a Daoist temple in Kaifeng, China.

So the kind of balance that each society has emphasized reflects ideas it has considered most fundamental. When I was in front of the Parthenon, I thought that the idea of balance can now be expanded to our globalized world as a balance of many cultures' perspectives. No single one dominates the others, and people are free to explore all the different varieties, synthesize them, and appreciate more types of beauty. I thus savored cultures from all over the world as I enjoyed the Parthenon. All mixed into a field that was richer than any single form.

I then went to Italy and when I arrived in Florence from Rome, I sat on the cathedral's front steps, which face the baptistery that Brunelleschi painted to demonstrate three-dimensional perspective. As I thought that it's now possible to expand our views of the world to include all cultures, the baptistery's static shapes and thick lines became less rigid, and they became part of a dialog with other societies' favored patterns, like Thai flows, yin-yang patterns, and India's vast metaphysical landscapes. The baptistery's lines highlighted my memories of these patterns and the cultures that have emphasized them because they contrasted with them. In turn, these other cultures accentuated the West's focus on abstract lines and shapes. The lines and forms seemed to twinkle like stars as they expanded into a larger field in which all cultures illuminated each other.

So, many places expanded from one time and culture. Multiple mindsets, times, and places became interlaced in a bigger field in which everything's meaning deepened. One place after another expanded from mechanics to magic—it became a portal to higher levels of integration in which things became increasingly free from one system of categories, and in which unexpected vistas emerged. Places became increasingly luminous, and as they did, they glimmered together so that the whole world seemed like a field of light and love.

The psychologist Martin Seligman has updated research on the positive psychology that Maslow pioneered. In a book called *Flourish*, he said that he prefers not to use the word *happiness* because it's hard to define and measure. He thus focuses on well-being, and he defined several components of it, which can be measured more accurately in experiments and surveys:

- Positive emotion. I felt many types while exploring different cultures' world-views. Sometimes I felt ecstatic while going beyond one convention after another. Other times, I felt warmth by relating to people with so many different mindsets. My afternoon in Theanly's home in Battambang, when he showed me his paintings, was a good example of this. I also often felt gratitude for the experiences that I had in all countries.
- Engagement. Seligman sees this as being in a flow. The psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi also considers flow to be central in happiness and well-being. Both see flow as a full involvement with your activity so that your consciousness becomes absorbed in it. I felt this in all the countries I visited. Walking through Khmer and Thai temples immersed me in their cultures, and ultimately that trip became a larger flow that took me around the world.
- Meaning. This is belonging to something larger than yourself. I first felt involved with each culture I visited. The feeling of engagement then expanded to the whole world.
- Fulfilling relationships with others. I enjoyed expanding the types of people I related to. For example, playing guitar allowed me to get closer to people in Thailand's hill tribes.

Entering different cultures also kept expanding the types of happiness I experienced. I learned how the mellowness of the Thai feeling *sabai* is embedded in its culture. I equally enjoyed contemplative moods in Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals. I found that the more open you are to different types of happiness, the more often you can be happy.

Seligman found that curiosity, interest in the world, and tolerance of ambiguity enhance well-being. These are all in line with the constant growth of horizons that comes from exploring other cultures and increasingly appreciating their unity and infinity.

Seligman also wrote that appreciating beauty can increase well-being, and he advocates remembering the times when you've been thrilled by excellence in art, music, movies, science, and mathematics. If you often have these experiences, and if you frequently remember them, you're likely to enjoy more well-being. I found that exploring excellence and beauty in other cultures greatly expands the range of what you can appreciate, and it increases the frequency of these moments.

Seeing our world as a fusion of unity, infinity, and growth enhances many findings about what encourages happiness and well-being. When you see this mixture in the world and in yourself:

- You're constantly open to enjoying more of the world's diversity of cultures,
- You feel related to more types of people,
- You feel engaged with the whole world,
- You have many memories that elicit positive emotions,
- You have a greater diversity of ideas and experiences to enhance your creative flows,
- You enjoy more types of beauty.

More and more places and people can inspire peak experiences and become sources of joy. They make the ways in which you were trained to perceive and think less constricting, and the world around you can expand into limitless enchantments.

But what the heck is infinity? It is a key aspect of our thought and identities, but academia and science have usually shied from it as though it's a flame-spitting demon ready to attack the established order. Thinking must rest on secure foundations so that people can share ideas in ways that are reliable for acquiring more knowledge. Infinity seems dangerous because it's unclear.

But infinity has always been within and around us, and it can inspire us to reach our highest potentials for enjoying the world and being creative. How can we appreciate it in a way that is on speaking terms with conventional knowledge?

This is what the rest of the method allows. Unity, Infinity, and Growth comprise the first half: UIG. Their fusion is the cultural environment in which people live, which patterns our thought, art forms, identities, and behavior. The other half is how we can relate to this field—how we can perceive and think about it so that we can fully appreciate it and optimize it for encouraging more creativity and happiness.

This half also has three aspects. They're three types of perceiving and thinking, and we can alternate them and thereby avoid getting stuck in one of them. This will allow us to keep exploring the integration of Unity, Infinity, and Growth.

The first is looking *At*. This is conventional knowledge—you look *At* something according to the perspectives you're accustomed to. A Westerner can linger over the details of Michelangelo's *David* and examine every limb, muscle, facial feature, and hair curl. He can then walk around and see them from many angles. As a person continues to look *At*, he learns more details according to the network of ideas that his culture most commonly uses.

If you're multicultural (if your parents are from different cultures, or if you have lived in more than one culture, or feel deep affinity with more than one) you probably combine those cultures' ways of thinking. If so, this is your way of looking *At*—you are following the conventions you're most accustomed to.

Academia usually looks *At* by adhering to its own conventions, and they have become common where the world has modernized. It focuses on facts and techniques for analyzing them, and it's partitioned into different fields, each with its own specialized terms and techniques. But most of these conventions don't encourage people to discuss big ideas like *paradise*. Though it's necessary to keep knowledge communicable within conventions so that everyone can share it and build on it, binding all reality to them narrows our perspectives of the world and of ourselves.

However, we can have the best of both worlds. We can use our conventions and thereby be confident that we're standing on firm ground, and we can also be free enough from them to appreciate other experiences and ways of thinking. We can then return to our conventions, express other cultures in our own society's terms, and see our own backgrounds from new perspectives.

Mihaly Csikszentmihaly wrote that the flows that people he studied experienced were usually directed towards some goal, such as writing a book, conducting a scientific experiment, climbing a mountain, or winning a basketball game. He found that these activities are structured

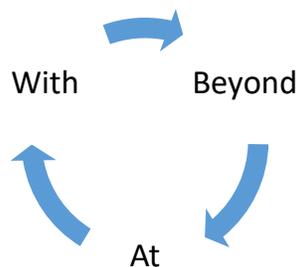
by rules and that people's focuses narrow to performing their current tasks.³ But he also noted that being in a flow doesn't prevent it from becoming destructive, and he said that developing nuclear weapons and manufacturing nerve gas can also be highly engrossing. I imagine that many Khmer Rouge soldiers were fully absorbed in their killing rampages. Mihaly also noted that a person who has spent years working within the conventions of one field naturally thinks that developments in it are the most important events in the world.⁴ He thus recommends constant re-evaluation of what we do, with the most inclusive political criteria we can think of.⁵ So being able to see beyond our current way of looking *At* is crucial for maximizing well-being. The wider the range of ideas and experiences we can explore, the more inclusive our evaluations can be.

The second type of perceiving is looking *With*. This is examining your own culture's conventions. As you explore its historical and natural environment, you can appreciate the abundant landscape that your own ways of thinking developed in. As you look *With*, you can see limitless creativity and beauty in the ways in which you have conventionally perceived and thought (looking *At*).

This is similar to forms of meditation in which people examine their own thoughts. In *Vipassana* traditions, they learn to think about why they are thinking certain things and why they're feeling in certain ways. They thereby see themselves more objectively, and they're more able to control negative emotions, like fear and anger. Looking *With* broadens self-examination to the culture that you live in. Westerners can see more ways in which the Italian Renaissance, northern Europe, the medieval heritage, and antiquity converged, and how they have shaped their ideas of the world. As you keep discovering more of the infinite beauty within your own thinking, your emotions can become more positive. You can enjoy the riches in your own perceptions, thoughts, and identity so that what formerly seemed ordinary become sources of awe and wonderment.

The third way of perceiving is looking *Beyond*. By doing this, you appreciate the ways in which people in another culture perceive and think. If you're not Thai you can realize that Thai ways of perceiving and thinking emerged in an infinitely prolific landscape. You can thereby see limitless riches in another society, use them to highlight your own, and then inspire other people in your society to expand their horizons into a wider range of ideas.

So you can approach AWB as a circle:



Look *At* anything you find meaningful and view it in the ways in which you're used to perceiving and thinking. You can then study some of your own culture's heritage (looking *With*) and see more riches in your own ways of looking *At*. Then explore another society (looking

Beyond). You can then look *At* again and see your own culture in new ways. If you keep journeying through this circle, your perceptions and ideas can become more inspiring and enjoyable. Places can become related more on the basis of mutual reflection than rigid boundaries.

You can also journey in the other direction. You can look *At*, then *Beyond*, and then *With*. In other words, you can venture into another culture and then look more deeply into your own history. You can also look *Beyond* multiple times in a succession by exploring several societies, and then delve into your own heritage. The combination of my 2007 round-the-world journey and my 2008 trip through the West's heritage in Greece and Italy followed this pattern. All these types of sequences will keep expanding your horizons as long as you mix looking *At*, *With*, and *Beyond* in some way.

A key thing about this method is: All three components in each half enhance each other as you travel through the circle again and again. Within the Unity/Infinity/Growth half (within a culture's and person's field of connections):

- Unity becomes richer as you compare your culture's shared meanings with other societies' ideas and art forms. You can then see aspects of your culture's unity from more perspectives and share these new views with others in it. The people around you can then incorporate what they just learned and share it with others that they know. In this way, the unity of your culture can become even richer.
- Infinity is exposed in more ways in the world's cultures and people—they all become more creative as people gain new perspectives and apply new ideas to their surroundings.
- Growth of mental horizons and affinities with other cultures happens in more people, and in more directions, as unity becomes richer and as infinity is further exposed. Expansion of horizons can become as constant as any conventional order of meanings.

All three components in the other half of the method also enhance each other. Within *At/With/Beyond* (the optimal way to perceive this field):

- You can look *At* the world according to your conventions after you've looked *With* or *Beyond* and find more inspiration and beauty in them. I found more meaning in the Parthenon and Renaissance European art because I could compare them with other cultures.
- You gain more ways to look *With*. You can see your own culture from more perspectives as you look *Beyond* and compare it with ideas and art from other societies. I enjoyed seeing how three-dimensional perspective developed in the great 15th century Italian painters' works even more by comparing their world with Thailand, which developed a different way of thinking and perceiving.
- You gain more skills in looking *Beyond*. As you explore more cultures and increase your range of ideas and perceptions, you become more mentally flexible and thus able to appreciate new societies more deeply. You can also mix all these cultures' traditions and ideas in new ways.

Another key aspect of this method is: Both halves (Unity/Infinity/Growth and *At/With/Beyond*) enhance each other. As we continue to look *At*, *With*, and *Beyond*, we will appreciate ever more riches in our field of connections. In turn, we'll further enhance our

abilities to combine looking *At*, *With*, and *Beyond* as we bring other cultures into our flows of ideas and perceptions. This will increase our ability to find and expose yet more aspects of our field of connections. All six of these components thus empower each other—they increase each other's ability to help people find more beauty and radiance in the world and in themselves. They're not abstract variables or static categories which are separate from each other; they work together to make the world ever more fulfilling, and they co-develop further as they do.

So the whole method is:

UIG><AWB

With it, our field of connections and our perspectives of it can continuously enrich each other without a final limit. As this happens, infinity becomes more prevalent in the world, and in our ideas of it.

But what is infinity? This has been an elusive concept, but we can identify three aspects of it here:

1. Infinity is not merely a static quantity. It's not just some ultimate high number, ready to be counted up to. Instead, it expands. As more of infinity is exposed in more people, and in more cultures, each person and each culture can inspire others to become more imaginative and creative. Humanity's field of connections can become increasingly infinite as people and societies enhance each other. Infinity is thus dynamic—it grows, and the more people appreciate and share it, the more it can grow.

Furthermore, the dimensions in which infinity grows can multiply without a final limit. This happens as more cultures are compared and then combined in new ways, and as more people expose more of each other's inner wealth (their cultural heritages, personalities, and imaginations).

2. Infinity is not confined to one meaning. Instead, it's limitless in many ways. A lot of modern studies of infinity have been based on the work of the mathematician George Cantor (1845–1918). He analyzed sets of objects and said that a set is infinite if its members can be put in a one-to-one correspondence with the natural numbers, which progress in this series: 0, 1, 2, 3 . . . to infinity.⁶ This kind of set can be counted one-by-one without a final limit. One-to-one correspondence with numbers in an endless series has been one of the most common concepts of infinity in the modern West, but it's inadequate for understanding the world's cultures, our own identities, and our potential for creativity and happiness.

For instance, a culture regularly interacts with several others. It influences them, and it's influenced by them. Their relationships are not strictly one-to-one, but multidimensional, and these cultures change as they interact. They don't become completely different (they retain many of their most common traditions), but because they have assimilated new ideas and art forms, they're not exactly the same. Cultures are richer and more multifaceted than simple objects that can be fully understood by being counted.

Artworks are not just separate objects to be counted either. A whole cultural environment shaped a work of art. This is why a Thai temple is the way it is, and why an Italian Renaissance painting has its own features. Furthermore, they're interlaced so that

each artwork is influenced by several others. Attempting to count artworks one-by-one won't fully grasp them. It's the multidimensional interlacing that gives them many of their meanings and their most recognizable characteristics.

People are also not strictly abstract objects which can be counted one-by-one. Each person grew up in a culture, or in a fusion of cultures, and each human being has a personality, an identity, an imagination, integrating ideas, aesthetical preferences, emotional patterns, interpersonal relationships, and a natural environment. We all have many facets, and we're connected with each other through all of them.

So a culture, an artwork, and a person is more than just a countable object. Each is interwoven with many others of its kind (cultures influence each other, and so do artworks and people). Furthermore, a culture, an artwork, and a person are interwoven with each other. Their relationships are thus multidimensional—they're related to several others, and they all affect each other.

The web of connections that all three share can be seen as infinite in many ways, and different cultures and people have emphasized different aspects of infinity:

- It can be somewhat conceived as a set of countable objects, as modern mathematical conventions have treated it.
- It can also be unbounded love for all beings. Mystics and saints have stressed this inner dimension of infinity. The 16th century Spanish Saint Teresa of Avila and the 16th century Hindu mystic Mira Bai wrote of limitless love for divinity. They didn't experience it by counting, but by feeling enraptured. This type of infinity is more connected with the heart than the head.
- Unbounded creativity—the ability to synthesize ideas and art in new and unforeseen ways. The psychologist and anthropologist Gregory Bateson said that cultural patterns can emerge from a field that's more chaotic than settled into countable objects, and that this makes creativity unpredictable. People cannot line up all the possible outcomes beforehand and count them because unforeseen patterns can emerge.⁷
- Sheer exuberance. The focus is not on one object; instead the person is immersed in a surge of things and forms. She doesn't experience this surge by counting everything in it, but by experiencing it as a whole and reveling in its vitality. Khmer temples and sculpted vegetal motifs have expressed this. Some types of African, Latin American, and hip hop dance embody nature's vitality by allowing each dancer to improvise movements instead of being confined to pre-established steps. All performers can intermix in an exuberant whirl of patterns that cannot be predicted or reduced to one form.
- Concepts of divinity. The German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) felt that a key aspect of human existence is the idea of divinity which is infinitely greater than us. Kierkegaard felt that this divinity cannot be approached analytically, but with a total leap of faith.

The Jewish mystical tradition, the Kabbalah, grounds the universe in God's infinity, which is called *Ein-Sof*. All the things we see in the world came from it.

- Human relationships. A meeting between two people is infinite possibility because we reflect our whole cultures and personalities. Many Jewish traditions emphasize ethical relationships over treating other people as objects to be counted. Martin Buber said that the latter approach treats another person as an *it*. He felt that reality is more fundamentally *I and Thou*—we are human by interacting as people and respecting each other’s needs and views. Because each person’s needs and views are different, a meeting of two people requires both to expand their horizons.

Human relationships can change in ways that are open-ended. The Talmud is an ancient Jewish tradition of discussions about how people can live in accordance with God and follow ethical obligations to Him and to each other, and it was first compiled around the time that Christianity was emerging. Recently dialogs have been added to it about how ethics and divine laws apply to the internet. Human life thus changes, and new situations can always arise which require innovative thought about ethics.

- Indian ideas of a vast cosmos. This universe is more subtle than something that can be measured in just three dimensions, along the X, Y, and Z axes. More than 2,500 years ago, composers of the *Upanisads* said that the universe’s essence is in a tiny space within the heart, called the *hridaya akasha*. An adept yogi can meditate on it and feel that he’s unified with all creation. Ancient Indians imagined an image of this unity. The chief god in the *Rg Veda*, Indra, has a web of jewels. Each jewel reflects every other, and each contains reflections of all the others. I’ve often thought that this is an excellent way to envision the world’s cultures.

So infinity has been seen in many ways besides objects that can be counted one-by-one. These ways have come from the varieties of people’s experiences, and experiences are influenced by the culture and natural environment they emerge in. Any one-sided definition of infinity is only partial. It leaves out most types of human experiences. A richer way of seeing it is necessary in order to fully relate it to our field of connections and ourselves.

This list isn’t comprehensive; people in other cultures have seen infinity in yet other ways.⁸ The idea of infinity can expand from one variable to as many as we have the ability to imagine, and this ability can increase as we have more types of experiences and appreciate more cultures.

3. Infinity isn’t just an abstraction. People can become it to an ever greater extent. You can do this by opening yourself to more ways of appreciating the world, by enlarging your imagination, by relating to more types of people, and by having new types of experiences. As you do, and as you share your discoveries with others, you can help them become more infinite. Each person can then become a force for extending infinity even more—each can inspire more people, and the six aspects of UIG><AWB will further enhance each other.

Infinity can thereby grow in all aspects that cultures imagine. This ever-increasing growth of infinity can become fundamental in our identities and in our perspectives.

Infinity can thus evolve. It can grow in more people and in more directions. It can also assume more varieties. As people increasingly become it, they can help it to grow even more. Our perspectives and our identities can expand from one culture's lens to this ever-growing enrichment of more people and societies, in more directions and variations, as these expansions become more common.

However, infinite possibility can seem paralyzing. Where in the world do you start? What direction do you take? What goal do you set, and how do you monitor your progress towards it? How do you know if you're deviating from it? People usually need limits to focus on in order to get things done. In addition, no matter how many other cultures we explore, we need to communicate our findings in at least one society's terms if we want to do anything creative. There is a big difference between creativity and just having ideas—we need to share ideas with others and turn them into methods, products, services, and works of art that other people can use.

Looking *At*, *With*, and *Beyond* in a circle always allows you to work with a structure. You can begin with the limits that your own culture has emphasized. You can then look *With* and develop a deeper appreciation of those limits by more fully understanding the traditions that have focused on them. You can then look *Beyond* and see limits that another culture has ordered itself with, such as the symmetry of Angkor's temples, which structured exuberant Khmer motifs. You can then look *Beyond* again and appreciate limits that another culture has made fundamental, like the decorum in traditional Thai etiquette and the usual avoidance of grandiose monuments in Thai architecture. Then you can appreciate your own culture's conventions from more perspectives. When you explore several cultures' favored limits back to back, your perspective can expand beyond one system of limits and into a field in which each culture reflects the others.

A culture's emphasis on certain limits also reflects its own infinitely creative history. The more varieties of limits you explore and compare, the more your perspective can expand to this multidimensional and infinitely creative inter-reflection. You're always within limits, but your horizons are not bound to any single one forever. Instead, you can see an enlarging variety of limits, be increasingly free from each one, and appreciate the infinitely creative cultures that have emphasized each.

Looking *At*, *With*, and *Beyond* allows you to work with limits in a way that helps you appreciate infinity to an ever greater extent. You can always have a structure, but you can also see infinity in the cultural environment in which it has been emphasized, and you can expand your horizons beyond it and appreciate other types of limits and the infinite landscapes they reflect. You can be grounded in limits, but you can also use them as portals to new perspectives that keep enlarging your appreciation of Unity/Infinity/Growth.

However, many psychologists and anthropologists have said that most people prefer their own cultures and that they feel uncomfortable when they're outside of them for a long time.⁹ Gregory Bateson, in *Mind and Nature*, saw similarities between cultures and biology. A society and an organism need internal coherence to maintain themselves (an organism can only live on certain types of food, have a certain metabolism, and maintain a certain body temperature). We have just seen that the dominant perspectives that people in a culture share are dominant because they're reinforced by an astronomical number of experiences. The very multitude of experiences that reinforce a culture's world-view thus encourages conservatism so that looking *Beyond* often feels threatening.

Combining looking *At*, *With*, and *Beyond* is an optimal solution to this problem because it encourages people to realize that there isn't a stark difference between their conventions and

novelty. Instead, all three types of perceiving enhance each other. Looking *With* and looking *Beyond* add more richness to looking *At*; they don't replace it. They add perspectives that show more riches in conventions—they reveal more historical depth, more beauty, and more bridges to other cultures.

You don't need to time looking *At*, *With*, and *Beyond* with a stopwatch (though you can if you're most comfortable with that approach). I never do them in that way; I like to allow enough time to savor each experience for as long as I want, and that often varies. Sometimes I favor a certain way of perceiving on a certain day. But I alternate them often enough to avoid getting stuck in one. The key thing is to alternate so that your perspective always expands and becomes more inclusive.

However, most fields of knowledge are highly specialized today, and the time required for keeping up with developments in one field makes it hard to take time to look *With* and *Beyond*. But if you do at least a little of both each day so that they become ingrained in your routine, you can increasingly appreciate the Unity/Infinity/Growth that each culture's way of looking *At* emerged within, and this will give you more perspectives to apply to your field. The manual at the end of this book details ways to mix all three types of perceiving.

Any culture can initiate a shift in perspective to UIG><AWB. Thailand's and Cambodia's heritages of irreducible variety can encourage ways to express our world's diversity. Indians can use their traditions of imagining a vast universe to inspire bigger views of the world's tapestry of cultures. Each society can develop its own style of looking *At*, *With*, and *Beyond* and thereby enhance UIG all the more.

America has tremendous potential for leading this revolution in perspective, since people from cultures all over the world live here. If enough people discover the depths of their human wealth and share it, we can lead the world in developing perspectives that are richer and more creative. A lot of Americans currently feel straightjacketed as economic demands have become increasingly pressing. Hedrick Smith (in *Who Stole the American Dream?*) and Joseph Stiglitz (in several recent books) have detailed the rise of inequality in this country over the last 35 years, which is now so great that 1% of its people own 40% of the wealth. But money is only one dimension of our founding fathers' vision of maximizing life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Yet financial worries have been pressuring people into narrowing their focus to this dimension, and this greatly diminishes the dream. Looking *At*, *With*, and *Beyond* can enable us to develop the other dimensions so that all can grow equally.

It can also help us to extend the freedom which Americans are proud of. Freedom within habits of perceiving and thinking isn't the highest freedom that people can attain. When we liberate ourselves from dependence on looking *At* according to one convention, we can explore a field of connections that's infinitely larger, as well as advance America's heritage of exploring new frontiers and innovating.

Each culture has enough wealth in its past to pioneer a new way of viewing the world. It's win-win because everybody exposes more wealth in more people, and each culture enhances itself and the rest of the world at the same time. More creativity surges in more people, and they can help others to boost their own. A limitless number of infinities can keep nurturing each other. As this happens, infinity can grow and become more prevalent in our views of the world.

As this happens, love can become an increasingly fundamental aspect of thinking. People can always see more potential in each other and become more able to help it grow. In the West

thought has usually been seen as defining and analyzing things. But we can also see more in things, and as we learn about other cultures' perspectives and ideas, the *more* can increase so much that we can see the essence of a person, an idea, an artwork, and a culture as more than what she/it is currently defined as. Her/its essence is to keep growing richer in multiple dimensions and increasingly able to enrich others.

Unity, Infinity, and Growth are interwoven through so many places, temporal periods, artworks, human interactions, and varieties of experience that there are limitless ways in which we can become more. The next major expansion of perspective can shift from "It is" to "It's more." If we balance looking *At*, *With*, and *Beyond*, all components of UIG><AWB will enhance each other so that *more* can become increasingly prominent in our world and in ourselves.

Since people have usually looked *At* so far, saying that the essence of a person, an idea, an artwork, or a culture is to become more than what she/it is can seem like a paradox: Something is what it is by being more than what it is. But the ability of the components of UIG><AWB to enhance each other without an ultimate stopping point allows *more* aspects to grow and be exposed in limitless ways. This ability opens the field of possibilities to so much more than what each thing is currently seen as that new perspectives can emerge on a regular basis. Seeing *more* can thus become a regular experience.

The limitlessness of the possibilities to see *more* in things means the perspective can shift from a focus on conventional definitions to the experience of widening the perspective. This can seem like another paradox: A perspective is not just of a thing or a situation; it's also its own widening beyond that view of it. But as U, I, G, A, W, and B keep enhancing each other, new ways of envisioning and connecting things, and new ways of seeing potential in people and cultures, keep opening up. Thinking can become like flying around the world rather than adhering to one established footpath. The joy of flying and seeing the world as an infinite field growing richer and more loving can become increasingly central in our experience.

Both apparent paradoxes (an entity is more than what it is, and a perspective widens beyond its current horizons) complement each other. As U, I, G, A, W, and B keep enhancing each other, continuing enrichment of everything can become our basic reality. The chapter on the Italian Renaissance explained that we can see the world become bigger and bigger. This growth can actually happen in ever more people, cultures, directions, and combinations. As it does, giving and mutual growth can become increasingly central in our views of the world. We'll explore what this reality can be like more deeply in Part Three.

I wonder if UIG><AWB is in the architecture of paradise because it encourages perspectives and love to advance in limitless directions so that all societies are part of an ever-enlarging field of love. Whether it is or if I'm dreaming, it's at least an optimal general framework for envisioning our globalized world. It lets each culture be itself because it doesn't impose any other's favorite conventions on it, and it encourages all societies and people to keep appreciating each other more deeply, and to keep nurturing each other. If it is not the architecture of paradise, it's an excellent general orientation for a global civilization that can rival people's dreams of paradise.

But first, some nasty stuff. How does this ever-enlarging world full of love mesh with today's power politics, financial difficulties, and ecological perils? Huge gaps between rich and poor fester all over the globe. Political corruption reeks, not only in all the Third World countries I visited, but in the good old USA. The year after I returned home from my blissful 2007 trip, the global banking system nearly crashed, I lost 25 percent of my net worth, and most Wall Street

tycoons who developed its crooked policies kept doing business as usual and grew even richer. Some economists worry about a future global financial crisis that will be even more traumatic because many governments are now carrying too much debt to be able to alleviate it. Thai politics became increasingly violent and resulted in a military coup. The political situation in many Middle Eastern countries became more bloody and oppressive. The ancient Sanskrit term *matsya nyaya* (the law of the fish—the big ones eat the small) is evident all over the world. How can you expose infinite paradise in the world when many of the people who run the political system you live in behave like sharks?

After Chiang Mai, I explored the concrete dragon called Bangkok. The sequence seemed apt to me because after musing over old temples and celestial palaces, I explored the city's simmering streets. They gave me insights for implementing this method in the real world.