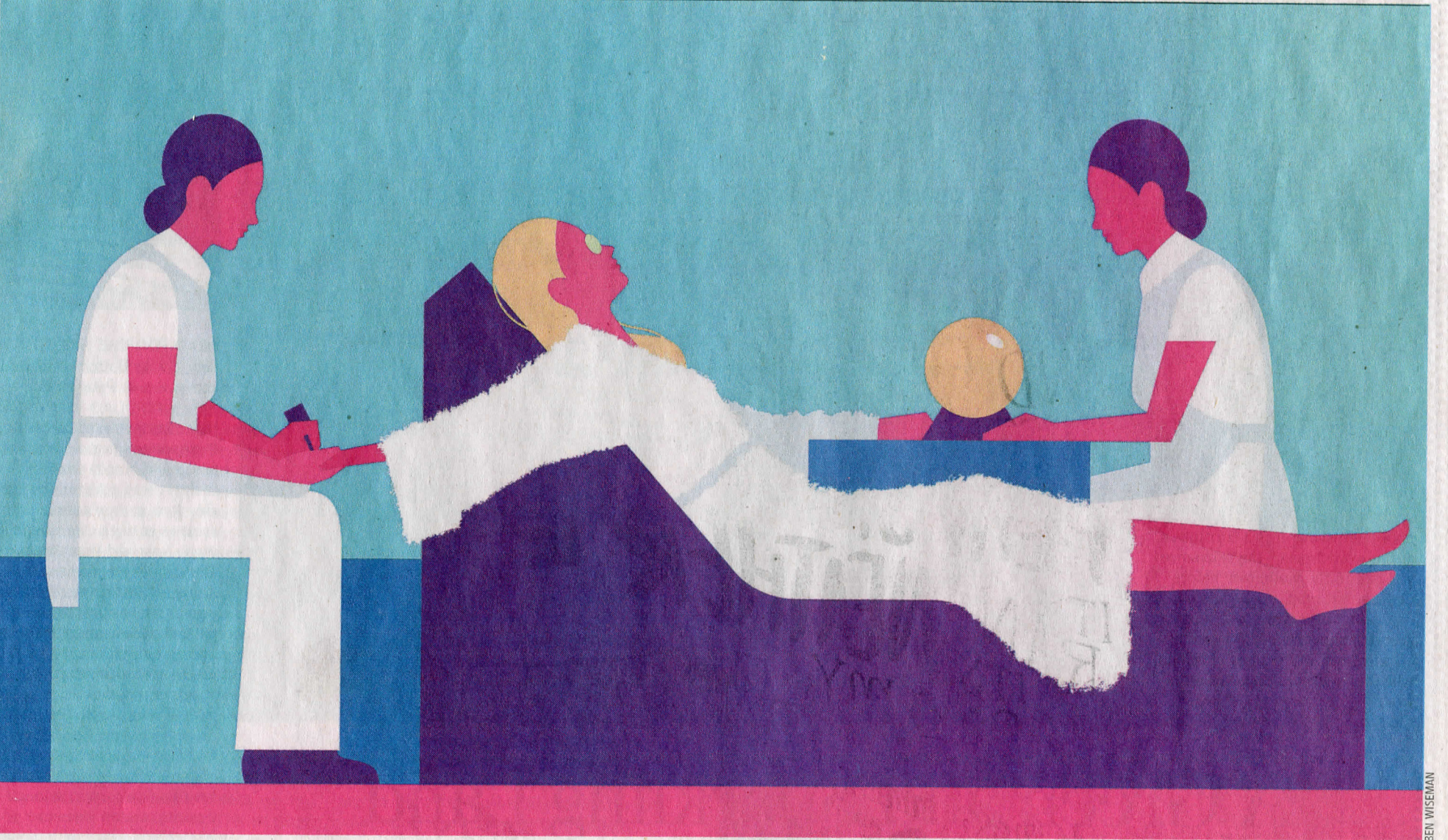


ADVENTURE & TRAVEL



BEN WISEMAN

Medium Wellness

With luxury spas offering ‘metaphysical readings’ as routinely as they do massages, a skeptic puts their psychics to the test

BY PERRY GARFINKEL

SUSAN KING GAVE me a good long look, then turned away, seemingly staring into space. After a few moments she appeared to focus on something in the middle distance and then she was off on an hour-long free-associating journey into my subconscious. Or thereabouts.

Ms. King calls herself an intuitive counselor, aka a psychic, but she’s definitely not the type who sits inside a strip-mall storefront, curtains drawn, neon lights announcing Tarot, palm or crystal-ball readings.

We’re sitting in an elegantly appointed suite at the Hotel Bel-Air in Los Angeles, where she spends several weeks each year consulting with hotel guests and anyone else who can afford the rather otherworldly sum of \$500 for an hour-long reading—or \$725, including a massage at the hotel’s Spa by La Prairie. Ms. King, whose next visit will be Nov. 4-9, has a similar arrangement with the Parrot Cay resort in the Turks and Caicos.

“I see a red ball, almost in flames,” Ms. King told me casually, her down-to-earth style challenging my staunch skepticism. She might have been onto something: I have an autoimmune disorder that causes joint inflammation. In fact, three quarters of what she told me connects via dotted lines, albeit circuitous ones, to situations in my life. Then again, she could have been speaking about anyone when she told me: “Over the past 10 years, you have gone through a metamorphosis.”

A Londoner with an international clientele, Ms. King is part of an increasingly popular trend of metaphysical guidance at upscale hotels and spas, where psychics, once considered fringe, are front-and-center.

Canyon Ranch, a leading wellness resort company with properties in Tucson, Ariz. and Lenox, Mass., reports a 20% increase in “metaphysical bookings” since 2010. The company’s resorts each offer a suite of options ranging from Chinese astrology and handwriting analysis at the Tucson property (\$230 for 50 minutes) to clairvoyant readings and numerology at both the Tucson and Lenox properties (\$230 for 50 minutes in Tucson; \$210 for 50 minutes in Lenox).

“Our guests are looking to explore wellness from all angles—mind, body and spirit,” said Mark Liponis, M.D., chief medical officer for Canyon Ranch. “Metaphysical consultations can provide insight and offer alternate pathways to self-awareness. While they may forget the reading on the bone-density scanner, guests seldom forget their reading from the Tarot cards or the astrologer.”

In my hour with Ms. King, I became a wannabe believer. And who wouldn’t become one, when presented with such appealing predictions as, “You will have more opportunities on your plate than you can deal with...I see you writing near the ocean, somewhere tropical. I don’t feel the Caribbean; I feel the Pacific. Hawaii?”

Sure—bring it on! Upscale hotel-spa managers seem to feel the same way, based on their menu offerings. For instance, you can have your soul read at Spring Creek Ranch in Jackson Hole, Wyo. In Tulum, Mexico, Amansala Eco-Chic Resort and Retreat offers the services of several intuitive shamans, and at Connecticut’s Norwich Inn, Paula Upton,

‘Your guides—guardian angels, pixies, fairies—are telling you to get to work on that book.’

described as a clairvoyant (sees visions), clairaudient (hears words, phrases, and sounds), and empathic (perceives emotions, feelings, and sensations), also does Tarot readings.

“This is a fascinating trend to me, with both pros and cons,” said Mary Bemis, editor in chief of the online magazine Insider’s Guide to Spas. “On the one hand, people go to spas for introspection and healing, and these psychics certainly give them a different peephole into aspects of themselves. On the other hand, the guests are so vulnerable—sometimes they’ve literally just been naked on the massage table—that I want to encourage a ‘buyer beware’ warning: Please take it all with a certain grain of salt.”

I appreciated Ms. Bemis’s concern, but my curiosity was piqued. A few weeks after my reading with Ms. King, I trav-

eled to Tucson, Ariz., where I visited Canyon Ranch and another well-known wellness resort, Miraval, both of which offer psychic services on their spa menus.

At Canyon Ranch, Pat Bruckmann, a staff member in the Ranch’s Metaphysics Program, said she closes her eyes when she’s with clients and sees keywords that clue her in to what’s going on with them, as well as colors that correlate to their moods and emotions. She also picks up messages from writing down a client’s name.

With me, Ms. Bruckmann saw bright yellow, the optimistic sun of my astrological birth sign (Leo), which I hadn’t disclosed, and blue, which happens to be my favorite color and the predominant hue of my website. Coincidence? Perhaps. Pointing out that when she wrote my first name, the P was slanting forward, she explained, “This means your energy is moving forward.” I wasn’t sure what to make of that, though I did recall that my mother used to write my name with a forward-slanting P and would often comment on my energy by shouting: “Perry, stop bouncing off the walls! You’re driving me crazy!”

I asked Ms. Bruckmann what she could tell me about a book I want to write that has been on the back burner since the death of my father in 2002.

“They’re telling me ‘Get going on that; what are you waiting for?’” she said.

“Who are ‘they?’” I asked. “Your guides,” she explained. “Guardian angels, pixies, fairies, your higher consciousness, whatever you believe in.”

OK, I thought, but what if I don’t believe in any those? Luckily, she could not read my mind.

After my final session, with Tina Powers at Miraval, I saw some patterns among the three readings I’d received. All three women told me this is a rich time for me, during which good things are coming my way. It’s true that I have more writing deals pending than usual. Two said they saw me climbing stairs or hiking hills, which is unlikely in the near future, at least until the hip replacement surgery I have scheduled for November. Two told me that I don’t ask for enough in fees (note to my editors). All three agreed that I could develop a serious relationship with Adriana, a Co-

lombian woman with whom I’d recently begun corresponding but had never met.

“You and Adriana have a past-life connection,” said Miraval’s Ms. Powers, a perky blonde who wrote a book titled “Reporting from the Other Side” after an earlier career as a TV news

journalist. “An energetic pull wants it to happen. Look—I have goosebumps! My goosebumps never lie.”

Based on Ms. Powers’ goosebumps—and keeping in mind the grain of salt that Ms. Bemis recommended—I booked a flight to Colombia to meet...my future?

Several weeks later, Adriana met me at the airport in Armenia, Colombia. Almost immediately that grain of salt dissolved and we felt a deep connection. Though I’m not tempted to return to any of the psychics for further guidance, so far they seem to be right on this one.