

Jean Houston

by Craig Branch

Founder of: Foundation of Mind Research, 1965; The Possible Society, 1984; The Mystery School.

Key Books: *Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*, 1966; *Mind Games*, 1972; *The Possible Human*, 1982; *Listening to the Body*, 1979; *Lifeforce: The Psycho-Historical Recovery of Self*, 1980; *The Search for the Beloved*, 1987; *Sacred Psychology*, 1986; *The Hero and the Goddess*, 1992.

Conferences and Workshops: The New Sacred Psychology Seminar; The Possible Human, The Possible Society; The Art and Science of Human Transformation; Living the Possible Human Now.

INTRODUCTION

Jean Houston is an author of 15 books, and is “one of the most high energy and aggressive conference speakers and seminar leaders in the country.” So says Bob Woodward, a *Washington Post* editor, in his book, *The Choice*, part of which exposed the unconventional relationship of Jean Houston with Hillary Clinton.¹

Who is Jean Houston, and why does her friendship with the First Lady cause controversy? She is described in her own brochures and by other writers as a “leading pioneer in the exploration of human potentials and human consciousness,” a world renowned philosopher, psychologist, teacher, story teller and evocateur, and as a “sacred psychologist and global midwife.”²

Gordon Melton’s *New Age Encyclopedia* describes Houston as “a major figure in the human potential movement.”³ As the keynote speaker for a national conference of the American Association of Counseling and Development, she was billed as “The Premiere Presenter in the Field of New Age Human Capacities and Altered States.”

According to Ms. Houston she has been a lecturer at more than 1,000 colleges, universities, schools, churches, hospitals, mental health agencies, corporations [such as AT&T, General Electric, Shell Oil, General Motors, Xerox, IBM] in the United States, Canada, Europe, Africa and Asia. Houston has been “a featured speaker or chairperson for many major academic, scientific and government meetings,” which she described as symposiums for policy makers and U.N. conferences,⁴ as well as conducting workshops for the Carter, Reagan and Bush administrations.

She is “a fixture” at such New Age events and organizations as the Esalen retreats, the Omega Institute, and Windstar Foundation.⁵ She is a past president of the Association for Humanistic Psychology (1978-79).

Her influence has reached even the White House. During numerous lengthy stays with Hillary Clinton, Houston has led the First Lady into guided imagery (meditation) sessions to contact and consult with Eleanor Roosevelt.⁶

HISTORY

Jean Houston was born in 1941 to the show business family of Jack and Mary

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Houston. Jack was a gag writer for Bob Hope and Henny Youngman. Her mother, Mary, was a Christian Scientist. Their family constantly moving, Houston had attended 29 schools by the age of 12.

Houston's first grade teacher at a Catholic school so strongly disciplined her that it somehow led her to escape into a profound mystical experience, an eastern, pantheistic, monistic revelation.⁷

She later attended New York's High School for the Performing Arts, Barnard College, and directed or appeared in off-Broadway plays. While at Barnard she claims to have sustained a head injury which left her blind. She recovered her sight after supposedly receiving a visitation from herself, only 20 years older, who revealed that her future was going to be extraordinary.⁸

Houston traveled to Greece at 19 to pursue interests in archaeology and ancient religions. She turned down a promising acting career after contemplating at the Temple of Athena, because she felt she was "living in a time of tremendous change and ferment,"⁹ where she would play an important part. Houston went on to finish college and, according to her, earn doctoral degrees in psychology and philosophy of religion.¹⁰

In the '60s Houston married Robert Masters, the psychotherapist and sexologist who co-authored the notorious Masters-Johnson report. Together they began to experiment with LSD and other hallucinogenic drugs, believing that the drug-induced altered states of consciousness "were most effective in conveying psychic truth to the participant," and "that authentic religious and mystical experiences occur among the drug subjects."¹¹

Houston and her husband "also developed the ASCID (Altered States of Consciousness Induction Device) better known as 'the Witches Cradle,'" as it was believed to have been used by witches using sensory deprivation and movement to enhance "fantasies and alteration in consciousness."¹²

When legal restrictions made hallucinogenic drug research more difficult, Houston and Masters began to focus on the use of meditation and guided imagery or visualization as an alternative technique for inducing altered states of consciousness. They hoped these techniques would facilitate the emergence of Man's fullest potential.

Melton observes that, "all of Houston's subsequent work has had its foundation in these ideas and the New Age notion of imminent planet wide transformation of the human race,"¹³ a reaching of a critical mass in consciousness (enough people with the New Age world-view, all thinking and feeling the right way), inaugurating a quantum leap into utopia.

Jean Houston claims to have completed her doctrinal studies in philosophy of religion at Columbia-Union Theological Seminary and in psychology at Union Graduate School. According to various published biographies, she claims to have served on the faculties of psychology, philosophy, and religion at Columbia University, New York University, the University of California, Hunter and Marymount Colleges, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Oklahoma.¹⁴

Yet researchers have discovered quite a different background. Columbia University claims that Mrs. Houston never completed her doctoral work. The University of Oklahoma and Hunter College have no record of her teaching there. In 1973 Houston received a Ph.D. in psychology from Cincinnati Union Institute, "an alternative education program," that did not become accredited until 1985.¹⁵

She also made the same embellishment during an interview with Stone Phillips on NBC's *Dateline*¹⁶ claiming to have "a number of Ph.D.s." When confronted with the documentation refuting this claim, she responded, "I just slipped - I was tired." Yet

she also blamed a repeat of this “slip” on her assistant in a later interview with the New York Daily News.¹⁷

She also advertises herself as an “internationally known psychologist,” promoting her seminars at the Foundation for Mind Research, which cost \$50,000 or more, per week. Yet a spokesman for the New York State board of psychology indicated that Jean Houston is not licensed and therefore is not allowed to use that title.¹⁸ Yes, Jean Houston is a mythologist, but her myths encompass current realities as much as ancient mysteries.

Houston’s influence in public education surfaces in the popular New Age curriculum, *Spinning Inward: Using Guided Imaging with Children for Learning, Creativity, and Relaxation*, by Maureen Murdock. Murdock credits Jean Houston as a primary inspiration for her material. She includes several meditation and higher-self contact exercises from Houston’s book, *The Possible Human*.¹⁹

As keynote speaker at the 1989 conference for the prestigious public educator’s Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Houston told the 6,000 educators gathered from around the country how she contacted the Hindu goddess Sarasvati while meditating on the Ganges River in India (tape on file).

Houston continues to conduct workshops on “The Possible Human,” leading “participants through a series of physical and mental exercises in which evolutionary memory is evoked” (*The New Age Encyclopedia*, p. 222). Besides Jung, Houston draws much of her world-view from New Age mythologist Joseph Campbell (*Newsweek*, July 1, 1996, p. 23).

DOCTRINE

Houston and Masters’ book, *Mind Games*, reflects their New Age occultic world-view. They write,

There really may be an underlying unity of all kinds of life [Monism/Pantheism], a pool of consciousness in which every being is affected by whatever may happen to another being ...even plants...are able in some sense and to some degree to share the conscious experience with all other living things.²⁰

Readers are taught to meditate and seek contact with an entity called “Group Spirit” which is the collective consciousness of all, enabling one to discover the collective wisdom creativity and ability of all.

In her book, *The Possible Human*, Houston teaches the reader various exercises in meditation or self-hypnosis with guided imagery. An example is “Exercise 3, Contacting Your Body Wisdom,” Houston directs the reader to contact and communicate with a “personification of your own innate body wisdom... the Wise Old Man or Woman.”²¹

This further illustrates her commitment to occult psychologist Carl Jung’s belief in archetypes and the collective unconscious. Archetypes are “the contents of the collective unconscious as universal primordial images passed down from an ancestral past that includes not only early humankind but humankind’s prehuman and animal ancestors.”²²

In other words, each cell contains actual memories of the entire alleged evolutionary process from the tiny amoeba to Jesus to Ghandi, to Eleanor Roosevelt. The memories and life experiences of Eleanor Roosevelt are supposedly engraved in Mrs. Clinton’s cellular psychic constitution. In fact, Woodward noted this about the thinking and beliefs into which Ms. Houston’s influence has led Mrs. Clinton, “Clearly Eleanor was Hillary’s archetypal, spiritual partner, much as the Greek goddess Athena was for Houston.”²³

The ultimate goal, writes Houston, is for “us to become co-creators with this order” having sprung from “a search for the cosmic connection, a living sense of the nature of reality, a theology of the Way Things Work.”²⁴

Jean Houston and Christianity

Jean Houston has a New Age, occult view of reality. She describes her conversion experience as a young girl futilely trying to get the Virgin Mary to appear to her. Suddenly she had an experience she described as, “the key turned and the door to the universe opened.” She and every aspect of nature, including the Virgin Mary, all “Became part of a single Unity” and it was all “very, very good.”²⁵

Houston fits the classic Monistic, Pantheistic, New Age mold, teaching that through meditative altered states, mystical and psychic experiences - including contact with the dead - one can awaken and evolve a new God being. However, the scriptures teach there is only one true God, Who did not evolve, and needs no awakening. Moreover, necromancy, contact with the dead, is expressly forbidden (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).

Houston also views Jesus as a mythological archetype, a symbolic myth. In one of her guided imagery sessions, she takes the student on a Holyland tour. The student gets away from the tour group and discovers in a tomb the dead body of Christ.²⁶

Christians must point to the true time-space-historical events which establish the validity of the unique Christian message of *reconciliation to God* – a message which shows *God is personal and relational*, not merely an ultimately impersonal “consciousness.”

RECOMMENDED READING

Testing the Spirits, by Elizabeth Hillstrom. With chapters on “The Higher Self & Sub-conscious Processes,” “Altered States...,” “Eastern Meditation...,” “Are Human Beings Developing New Powers of Mind?” and “Communication with Spirits,” this book touches on many of the philosophical and religious issues integral to Houston’s thought. End notes, paper, 240 pages.

Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs, by John Ankerberg and John Weldon. An in-depth biblical and scientific analysis of many New Age beliefs and practices. It addresses many of the eclectic approaches incorporated in Jean Houston’s system. Bibliography, index, paper, 670 pages.

Notes

¹ Bob Woodward, *The Choice*, 55.

² *New York Times*, 24 June 96, A9.

³ Gordon Melton, *New Age Encyclopedia*, 220.

⁴ *Jean Houston Conference brochure*, 4.

⁵ *Washington Post*, 27 June 1996, E1.

⁶ *Newsweek*, July 1, 1996, 26.

⁷ *New Age Encyclopedia*, 221; Jean Houston, *The Possible Human*, 185-187.

⁸ *New Age Encyclopedia*, 221.

⁹ *Daily News*, June 24, 1996, 22.

¹⁰ *New York Daily Times*, June 24, 1996, 5; June 25, 1996, 2.

¹¹ *New Age Encyclopedia*, 221.

¹² *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, 485.

¹³ *New Age Encyclopedia*, 221.

¹⁴ *New York Daily News*, June 25, 1996, 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ June 25, 1996.

¹⁷ *New York Daily News*, June 25, 1996, 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Jean Houston, *The Possible Human*, xi, 147, 149.

²⁰ Jean Houston and Robert Masters, *Mind Games*, 28-29.

²¹ Jean Houston, *The Possible Human*, 27.

²² *Harper’s Encyclopedia of Mystical and Paranormal Experience*, 30.

²³ Bob Woodward, *The Choice*, 130.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 187.

²⁵ Jean Houston, *The Possible Human*, 186.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 174.



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