

InPresence 0015: The Inspirational Jean Houston

with Jeffrey Mishlove

Video Transcript - *New Thinking Allowed* with Jeffrey Mishlove

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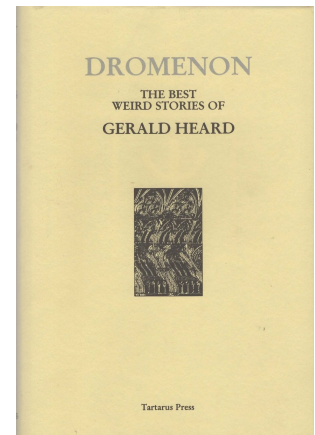
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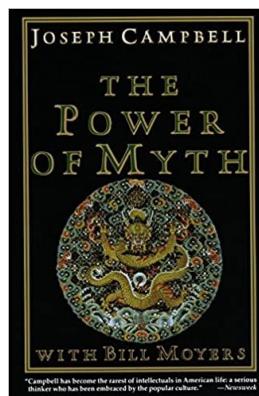
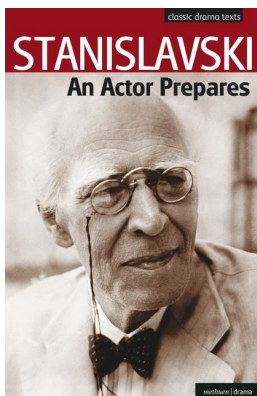
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(00:38) Hello I'm Jeffrey Mishlove. Today, I'd like to talk about Jean Houston. Jean is probably the one living person other than my own family members and closest friends who has had the strongest influence on me in my life. I first met Jean back in 1973 at the convention of the Association for Humanistic Psychology in Montreal, Canada, where she gave a performance of a play she had written, a one-person play, reading of a play called "Inside Out". I was so thrilled by what she had presented - a combination of a real integration of psychology, spirituality, parapsychology.

(01:29) I invited her to come and deliver the same performance in Berkeley, California, sponsored by KPFA radio with which I was then affiliated, and she did. Since then I've gotten to know her rather well. I attended a 3-week program in New York that she ran called Dromenon. Dromenon is a word for the maze that appears in the ceramics in the floor of the Chartres Cathedral. Jean had discovered that walking through the maze could create a slightly altered state of consciousness. As I recall, she based it on a short story written by Gerald Heard, close friend of Aldous Huxley. She based a three-week workshop on that. It was one of the most profound experiences of my life.



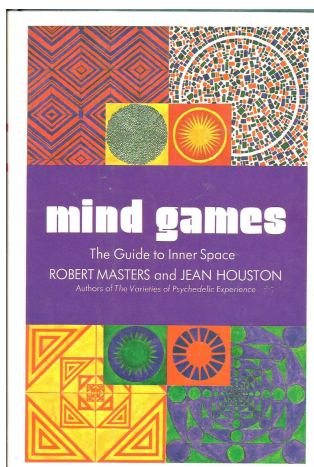
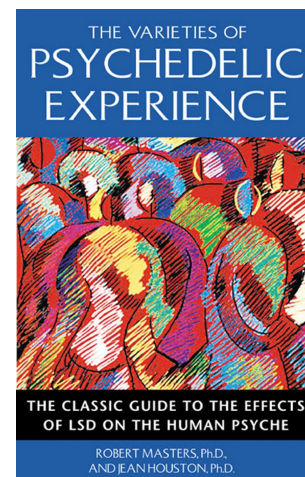
(02:29) Subsequently, she had launched her Mystery School and I was blessed to be able to attend a couple of seasons of Jane Houston's Mystery School. Each season involved, as I recalled, 9 weekends per year. So her work was very intense and very deep. It involved laughter, humor, lots of it, because her father was a humorist and a comedy writer for some of the greats, like Bob Hope and others in the early days of television.



(03:07) But, that was just the start of it because she had a very penetrating intellect and an enormous dramatic ability as well and could easily have had a career in the theater. Much of her work actually is based on the method acting approach of Stanislavsky. She was also, I can say, strongly influenced by the work of Joseph Campbell.

(03:32) Basically, if I had to summarize it in a nutshell, Jean's approach was to take the great stories of humanity - each Mystery School weekend would focus on such a story - and she would act it out dramatically and talk about it and get people engaged in trance work and physical exercises having to do with the story. Then she would ask you to think about - "How does the drama affect you personally? What if you were this character or that character in the story? How would you have responded?" Very deep and powerful work.

(04:13) Now, even before I met Jean, she had established a reputation, because she and her husband Robert Masters had set up the Foundation for Mind Research in New York and had published a book called *Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*, shortly after Timothy Leary came out with his endorsement and promotion of LSD. Jean Houston was working with people who had had psychedelic experiences. And she and her husband began to map out what it was really about. I would say to this day, that book stands as a classic and one of the best books ever published on the psychedelic experience.

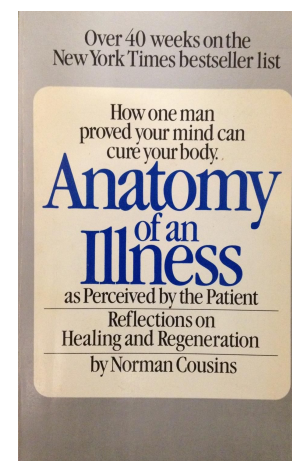
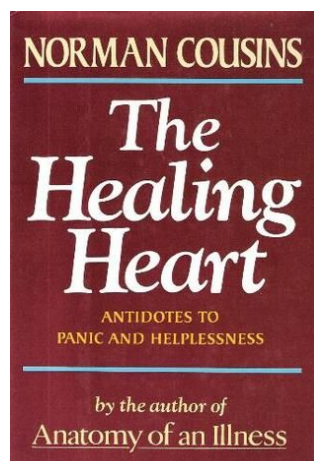


(04:59) Subsequently, she has written, I should think, about two dozen subsequent books all of which are excellent. Her book *Mind Games*, I think came out in about 1975, had an endorsement by John Lennon.

(05:15) Jean was also known for her work with people at very high levels, people who have reached a peak of their career but then wanted to go further. For example, Norman Cousins, very well-known humanitarian, editor of the Saturday Review, began to suffer from a very serious illness - I think it was cancer, I'm not sure - but Jean worked with him to get him to appreciate the healing power of laughter. He experienced an amazing remission from his disease and then went on to a new career talking about the healing

power of laughter. I think he even set up a foundation to support research and promotion of the use of laughter as a tool for healing. Jean had him watching old Groucho Marx movies while he was in his hospital bed. And because laughter stimulates various healing hormones in the body.

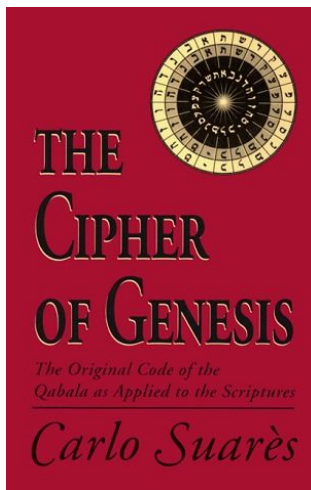
(06:21) She also discovered at a very early age that she had a remarkable gift for inducing spiritual epiphanes - altered states of consciousness. I'll tell you about one. I remember this in one of her Mystery



Schools, she devoted the weekend to an understanding of the Hebrew Kabbalah. She based her work largely on the work of Carlos Suarez, who was also very influential in the work of Fred Alan Wolf, a Kabbalist. Carlos Suarez, I understand, was also a person who was the basis for a character called Balthazar in the four novels - the name escapes me, but I'm going to run it under your screen...

(07:22) The point is, he wrote a book called *The Cipher of Genesis*. He went through, for example, the very first sentence in the Hebrew Bible, the *Book of Genesis*, in Hebrew is "Bereshit bara Elohim et hashamayim ve'et ha'aretz." - "In the beginning, God or Gods created the Heaven and the Earth." And the Kabbalistic approach is to go through this letter by letter. And when

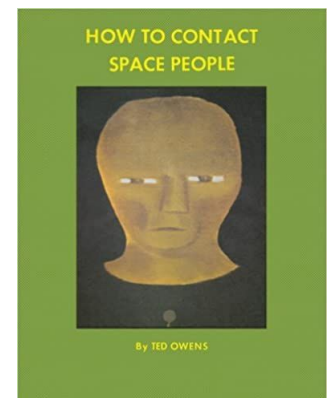
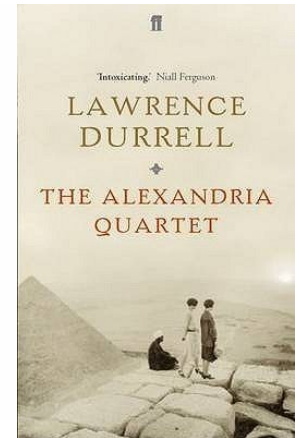
you go and understand - because each letter in Hebrew is also a word - and by going through this exegesis of the first sentence, Jean was trying to explain exactly how it was that God created the Heaven and the Earth.



(08:10) I don't think I could repeat it now, but she did it with such eloquence and conviction that as I was listening to her speak, I felt like, "I got it. I understood it deep within me." It was so powerful I started rolling on the floor in laughter. I was just hysterical. It seemed like the funniest thing in the world, and then the next moment it would seem all so poignant, the love of God to create the universe for our benefit, and I was crying, and then the next minute I was laughing again, then crying. Jean noticed me going through this extraordinary experience and she came over to me and she said, "You're having an epiphany, huh?" And she winked at me.

(08:58) I thought it was so touching, so touching. Now, people have asked me over the years, because at this point I've conducted about a thousand interviews on the radio and television and video, and people ask me, "Who has influenced you the most?" And for many many years I would say, "Well, I've interviewed a lot of great people, a lot of profound people, deep scientific thinkers, important philosophers, but to me, Jean Houston was head and shoulders above all the others. I said that ever since and I say it proudly today. Not that she's a perfect human being by any means. She has her flaws, but she is a wonderful person and I've had the great fortune to have met her mother and her brother and her husband.

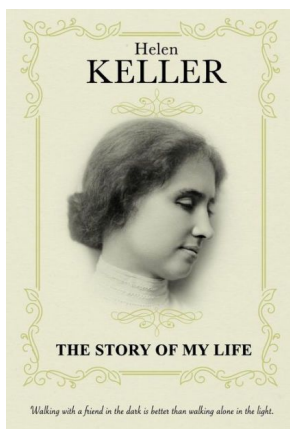
(09:57) Her brother was actually the first person who introduced me to the book *How to Contact Space People*, written by Ted Owens. Within a year of



having had that introduction, I met Ted Owens and began a 10-year study of him. Her brother Robert was a UFO enthusiast.

(10:20) I'll conclude this discussion of this wonderful, beautiful lady, who is now 80 and is still working. She sees people on a one-on-one basis and gives occasional lectures and workshops. If you have an opportunity to hook up with her or even to get some of her videos or audio tapes, they are well, well worth it. They are amongst the most important inspirational materials that I have in my library, and of course her books. But, I want to leave you with one thought that I got from Jean Houston, because much of the previous and many of the previous segments of this new "InPresence" series have talked about the necessity to integrate the shadow, to confront the dark side, to become aware of our fears of psi and the psychic realm.

(11:18) Now, Jean has a sort of a twist on that and I think it's important. She said at one time, there is no such thing as psychopathology or vice. She referred to her dear friend, Margaret Mead, who once said to her, "What is your favorite vice? Mine is gluttony." And Jean would say that every flaw, every fault that other people will accuse us, "You have this flaw, you have that fault" - she'd say - "No, your flaws, your so-called faults, can be your greatest strength."



(11:56) For example, and she knew Helen Keller personally, well, met Helen Keller. Helen Keller was a very famous person in the early part of the twentieth century, because she was born deaf and dumb and blind. Well, she learned how to speak but she had a teacher, Annie Sullivan, and there's a movie about it. I think Patty Duke played Annie Sullivan in the movie, *The Miracle Worker*. Now, Annie Sullivan had a terrible temper, anger of course is considered a vice. But, it was because she had that temper that she was able to get through to a young child who was blind and deaf and teach her to read, and teach her to speak. Helen Keller became a great inspiration to many, many people, but it wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for Annie Sullivan's anger.

(12:52) So Jean reminds us all - look at those qualities that people might tell you, you know, "This is bad, you shouldn't have that quality." See how you can turn it around and make it into something great. I'll leave you with that thought, and thank you for being with me. (13:12)

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