The POSSIBLE HUMAN

A Course in Enhancing

Your Physical, Mental

& Creative Abilities

JEAN HOUSTON, PH.D.

author of A Mythic Life and The Search for the Beloved

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For the dancers of the Dromenon

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Foreword to the Second Edition

How possible is the possible human? Quite possible, if one follows the journeys this book has taken since its first publication. It has been the text for the self-transformation of hundreds of thousands of people the world over. Thousands of groups have organized regular meetings for personal and social development around its chapters and the principles it teaches. In elementary and high schools it has become a source of exercises and processes to enhance learning. It is used as a textbook in the more innovative psychology classes, and has been the occasion for many debates between students and their traditionally trained professors. It has become anathema to certain fundamentalists and an accessory of change for those who would have us look again at the fundamentals of our existence. It also has inspired the elaboration of its concepts in many of my later books and has carried me around the world teaching its content to people as widely diverse as lepers in southern India and heads of state. It is a book with an attitude!

This book's message, which grows out of decades of research and application, is simple: We are coded with possibilities and potentials, few of which we ever learn to use. Living on so narrow a track has brought frustration and misery, the shadows of hate and the threat of apocalypse. For we are suffering from an ecological catastrophe that comes from a gross overuse of the outward world and a terrible underuse of the inner world. Or, as Jesus says in the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, "If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you."

Now in a world in a state of whole-system transition we can no longer continue to live as half-light versions of ourselves. The complexity of our time requires a greater and wiser use of our innate capacities. The world can thrive only if we can grow. The possible society can occur only if people begin to consider ways to become possible humans.

I have often been asked to describe the possible human, the one who makes a fuller use of the treasures of her mind-body system. In my autobiography, *A Mythic Life*, I offer a description that approaches the ideal.

The first thing that you notice about her is that she enjoys being in her body. A fullness of being inhabits that

body, with its flexible joints and muscles, its movements fluid and full of grace. One senses an ebullience in the bones, an appetite for delight. She is given to long pleasures and short pains, in contrast to most of us, who experience long pains and short pleasures. And if her natural zippiness and boundless curiosity entice her into situations where she gets physically hurt, she is able to control any bleeding and accelerate her own healing.

Like the yogi adepts in the Himalayas, she can voluntarily control involuntary physical processes and stay warm in cold weather and cool in hot. (This is true in emotional climates as well as physical ones.) She also can self-regulate skin temperature, blood flow, heart and pulse rate, gastric secretion, and brain waves. Indeed, she can consciously enter into alpha and theta brain wave states for meditation and creative revery, drop into delta whenever she wants to go to sleep, and call upon beta waves when she needs to be alert and active. Scanning her body, she self-corrects any function that needs to be improved.

This new Eve celebrates acute senses, which are not limited to five, for she enjoys synesthesia, or cross-sensing, the capacity to hear color and touch the textures of music, capture with her nose the smell of words, and taste the subtlest of feelings. Since her sensory palette is so colorful and wide-ranging, she engages and is engaged by the world as artist and mystic, seeing infinity in a grain of sand and heaven in a wildflower. The splendor of her sensory life graces her with an accompanying gift, an excellent memory, for she is so present to the perceptual richness of everyday life that little is lost or disregarded and all is stored in her memory banks for later review and delectation. She can time travel into these memories, walk around in them as if they were happening now—talking to this friend, reliving that moment of joy, even holding the hand of a long-ago loved one. Thus she need never feel lonely, for the past is as present as the present.

And wherever in the past wounding occurred, she can visit that time in her mind as the wiser version of her former self and bring understanding, compassion, and wisdom to the occasion. This practice can free capacities that may have been frozen in the painful past, yielding fruitful consequences for her present and future devel-

opment. She is, thus, a time player, able to speed up subjective time when she needs it to go faster, or slow it down so as to savor lovely moments or have more time

to rehearse skills or review projects.

Each possible human is not a member of some collective *ubermensch* but a profoundly individual and precious demonstration of life in its infinite variety. This is certainly true on the physical plane and unimaginably more so when it comes to experiencing the internal realms. Indeed, the possible human can think in inward imageries and experience subjective realities as strikingly as she can know objective ones. She listens to inward music as complex as any symphony, in fact often richer, for instruments and sounds are added that are unknown to or too expensive for any formal orchestra. She views new movies on her inner screen whenever she wishes, for she knows that it is the nature of the brain to provide stories, well wrought novels for the Inward Television Station (ITS). She uses these imageries to entertain herself as well as to provide the materials of creativity and invention. She is already an adventurer into a vast reservoir of virtual realities and doesn't need any machine to assist her. She makes use of the fact that self-creating works of art are always budding out of the fields of her mind, and she can capture and rework them as she wishes.

Consciousness for her is a continuum of which she can travel the length and breadth at will. She travels the inner highways into the United States of Consciousness, entering the state of meditation here, the region of deep trance there, finding shortcuts into the realms of fantasy and imagination, spelunking her way into the caves of creativity. She continues to discover the many cultures of her psyche and has matriculated in the Innerversity, studying all manner of knowledge and wisdom that these cultures within provide.

She has many friends and allies in the inward and imaginal worlds, the most important of whom may be the beloved of the soul, the spiritual friend who is her archetypal partner and companion of her depth reality. And, whenever she feels ready, she journeys to those source places of her soul, where she partakes of the everlasting waters of life and spirit. She lives daily life as spiritual exercise, and her radiance affects all who meet

her, for she is deeply empathic, knows herself as part of a seamless kinship with all living things. Being more, she feels and cares more deeply about the decay and degradation in the social and moral order. In spite of evidence to the contrary, she recognizes others as god-in-hiding, and in whatever way she can, calls them back to their own possible humanity. She is one about whom we might say that "the human heart can go to the lengths of God."¹

This description of a possible human is neither fantasy nor wishful thinking. Ways and processes to uncover these capacities have been developed in our research at the Foundation for Mind Research as well as in our three-year-long Human Capacities training programs, my seminars, and the Mystery School, where I teach myth, culture, and human capacities. I have described my work as a kind of psychonaut program "to put the first human on earth."

I have found that most people, given the vision of the possible, along with the opportunity to learn new ways of being, can discover and enjoy the fuller awareness of mind and body that grants them entry into a world larger than their aspiration, more complex than all their dreams. Further, in discovering themselves to be better equipped to deal with the complex challenges of modern life, they seem to gain the passion for the possible for making a better world. I should add, however, that in all my research and training seminars I have never achieved or seen the kind of possible human "cooking on all burners" described above. But who knows, maybe you, the reader, will be the one.

—Jean Houston Pomona, New York December 1996

¹Jean Houston, *A Mythic Life* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), pp. 40–43 passim.

INTRODUCTION

The human heart can go to the lengths of God. Dark and cold we may be, but this Is no winter now. The frozen misery Of centuries breaks, cracks, begins to move, The thunder is the thunder of the floes. The thaw, the flood, the upstart Spring. Thank God our time is now when wrong Comes up to face us everywhere. Never to leave us till we take The longest stride of soul men ever took. Affairs are now soul size The enterprise Is exploration into God. Where are you making for? It takes So many thousand years to wake, But will you wake for pity's sake?

CHRISTOPHER FRY A Sleep of Prisoners

Rhythms of Awakening

Suppose some genie of space and time were suddenly to put you into the body and mind of your ancestor of a thousand years ago. You would be in for a stupendous reality jolt. If your forebears were anything like mine, your name might be something like Hugo, Son of Stupid or Clothilde the Lame. Your day would not be much different from your name. In the morning you would wake up on the flea-ridden pallet of your mud-and-wattle hovel because the chicken was walking across your face. After a breakfast of hard bread and gray gruel you would probably go out into the fields of the lord of the domain and push a simple plow all day in the pouring rain (it rained a great deal in the tenth century). Your thoughts were probably not very inspired: "When do I eat?" or "I think I'll kick the ox." And your perceptions would not fare much better: "It's raining . . . I ache . . . I want to eat the ox . . . " At night you and your kin and the animals would gather around the wet wood of a smoking fire to try and catch a little warmth while you scratched your fleas and picked the lice out of each others' hair. On Sunday, after church, you might be lucky enough to find a friend with a hogskin of mead, get drunk, and fall in a ditch until you got dragged home by the bailiff, only to wake up in the morning with a chicken walking across your face.

Certainly, there would be some advantages to your life—you would know your place in the pattern of things, kinship would be close, and the rights and wrongs of things unquestioned. But mostly life would be a narrow, brutish fight for subsistence, and your human energies would be exhausted in the attempt to keep your metabolism going. It is the Dark Ages and its shadow falls across your mind and dulls your spirit.

One hundred years later a rhythm of awakening ripples across the forests, hovels, and castles of the Western world. Invoked by mad monks and greedy nobles, half the population of Europe gets up and goes east—on the Crusades. Slack-jawed and gaping, they pass through gorgeous decadent Byzantium (and no culture is more interesting than a culture in a state of high decadence). Their senses are strummed by the perfumed airs, the silken cloaks, the exquisite foods, the multicolored mosaics, and their ears are ravished by music and speech so sweet it seems the cadence of gods, not of men and women. Everywhere they witness the delectable excesses of a civilization entirely given over to the refinements of its own pleasures, and they begin to awaken to

longings they never knew they had. Seeded with desire, they battle on to Jerusalem and see there the enormous complexity of a city of three thousand years of living history. The crossroads of East and West, the womb of world religions, the place that everyone wants and where everyone wants to be, the conquest of Jerusalem gains them the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Thus quickened and awakened, their souls now richer than they had been before, the vast band of Hugo and Clothilde returns to wattle hut and castle and find them . . . impossible. How are you going to keep them down on the farm after they've seen Byzantium and Jerusalem? How are you going to keep them in changeless circumstance after they have known the terrors and the glories of a "holy" Crusade? And so many leave their old life and pour into the burgeoning towns where lie the opportunities for expanding human possibilities. There, new industries flourish, new crafts, and new desires. Leagues of cities and of men, trade networks and guilds for professional excellence crisscross the continent, and lights turn on in an age no longer dark but aspiring. Everywhere there is aspiration. Men and women aspire to God, and the great vaulted cathedrals rise in answer to that longing, stone fingers pointing to the heavens. Minds yearn for meaning, and in Bologna and Paris and Oxford the great universities are founded to provide the intellectual loom upon which the Pattern that Connects can be woven.

The Middle Ages settle in and reality is seen as a comforting tapestry of hierarchies in which everything is interwoven with everything else in a scheme that is absolute for the entire universe. All orders—cosmological, moral, and political—mirror artfully the details of each other in a grand design that at its best gives order, divinity, and meaning to both the parts and the whole. At its worst, however, the medieval tapestry of life smothers and isolates the developing inner world, thus encouraging the spread of superstition. Again, a rhythm of awakening is needed, and it comes in the form of the Renaissance, with its revival of ancient philosophy and myth, literature, and science. Ideas and images are excavated from their Greek, Roman, and Hebraic origins, forgotten texts are translated, esoteric attitudes become available. A veritable archaeology of the Western world's past thoughts and dreams is unearthed, and the horizon of what it means to be human is extended.

Under this stimulus the psyche grows. The imaginal realms of inner space proliferate and spill over into the external world in a phenomenal growth of new science, art, music, literature, politics, and above all in a new vision of mankind and world that is the glory of humanism.

With regard to the effects of the extended psyche on the external world, consider what happens in painting and music. Prior to the general era of the Renaissance, painting was largely flat and twodimensional with little or no perspective, reflecting perhaps the complacent givens of the medieval universe. With the coming of a more complex consciousness, however, more angles are seen, more shadows and more dimensions. Perspective is the necessary aesthetic response of the Renaissance psyche.

The simple texture of medieval music, which never exceeded three voices, was transformed as the growing polyphony of the psyche demanded a richer and more textured polyphony in music. Whereas before the separate melodic lines were heard together, now music moved toward a complexity of sound that reflected the tensions and multiple levels of the Renaissance soul.

The growth of consciousness spawned in the Renaissance saw us through several centuries of quests within and without, gave us the momentum to extend the "empire of man over things" and to raise the art of exploration into a vehicle for planetary transformation.

Unfortunately, by the nineteenth century, art and artful skill (techne) yielded to technique and, more recently, to technology. And skills that were once grounded in the insight that comes from the rhythm of awakening pulsing through the total body-mind-being became the mechanical artifacts of a humanity increasingly fragmented and cut off from its own depths in psyche. This dangerous dissociation did not occur in other cultures to the same degree, but was generally limited to the post-Renaissance European experience. Not that this made much difference, as subsequent events have shown. The "success" of rationalist-materialist philosophy of power joined to the ruthless European policies of colonization served not only to subjugate large areas of the planet but also to inhibit even larger areas of human experience and ways of knowing. All over the planet a Western psychological imperialism has prevailed, one that makes all other imperialisms pale by contrast. The "single vision and Newton's sleep" dominating Western consciousness since the eighteenth century has brought with it the ideal of mind modeled on mechanism, resulting in turn in the materialization of values, the standardization of society through industrialization, and the inability to consider anything other than cause-andeffect relationships as underlying events. In the interests of an extraordinarily narrow notion of "progress," culture is disintegrating, computers are replacing consciousness, and the erosion of human reality is being enacted and mirrored on the stage of nature in the erosion of the planetary ecosystem.

Today the post-industrial global village sleeps. It sleeps beneath a blanket of cross-cultural ties and intraplanetary webbing so thick that all problems and all answers are interdependent. We have seen in our time the death of exclusivity, although in our present sleep we act as if we knew it not. The weave of persons and nations, of polities and economies, of exploding populace and diminishing soil, of silent hope and heady triumph, of air, water, bread, love, death—this is a weave so thick that it has become a single fabric with few loose threads, so strong that perhaps not even human beings can destroy it. And formidable indeed are the social, economic, and psychological forces that confront us, the atmosphere of chaotic ecclecticism within which it becomes almost impossible to distinguish narrow and selfish interests from sustained commitment, superficiality from bold experiment, and excessive claim from genuine accomplishment. This is the case on all levels, be they social, economic, interpersonal, or governmental. Paranoia has become a way of life, but we have neither the time nor the resources to sustain it.

As a professional in human development, I frequently have occasion to attend conferences made up of social planners and heads of corporations, the forgers and managers of the modern world. Too often, to listen to their judgments and evaluations is to wrestle with darkness. It is to engage in seminars filled largely with futile visions, negative scenarios, the death of hope, with a few technocrats promising a magic act from some technological panacea. With all the bravado of statistics and graphs, one still senses strongly the retreat of consciousness of those who govern before the planetary pathos for which they are partly responsible.

Underneath the blanket giants tremble, other cultures begin to sing, the genius of woman emerges, the depths start to rise, and the other side of the moon of ourselves haunts our becoming and demands its tribute. It is the first stirrings of the Rhythm of Awakening. Many have felt it coming. Some have experienced it with joy and hopefulness; others have felt it as a gut-gripping terror, knowing that its music, when it comes, demands that they live at their edges. For the first sweepings of the Rhythm bring chords of dissonance which warn us that our present problems are not primarily political or economic but are rooted in the inadequate use of our humanity or, rather, in our persistence in using those capacities in ourselves that are no longer appropriate to present times. When so little of the physical and mental as well as the innate spiritual vitality of person and culture is being tapped, when too great a reliance is being placed on the rational, the immediate, and the functional, then consciousness is caught in tunnel vision, inadequate to deal with the complexities and challenges of the time. Thus we recognize the tragic consequences of this inadequacy and our present seeming inability to use the range of what we are.

We see this especially in the great number of technically "complex" short-term solutions we bring to many-layered social and economic problems, followed by the inevitable long-term failure of these solutions because of their psychologically simplistic base. When thinking and doing are largely linear, analytic, and hierarchical, and when the self that does that thinking and doing is insular, fearful, and manipulative, is it any wonder that our best intentions and problem-solvings become a crazy-quilt patchwork of Band-Aids.

Impotent before the complexity of things and using too little of ourselves to be capable of finding meaning in the melange of a time of too-muchness, many are retreating into fundamentalist havens, ideological fortresses of "truth," back-to-basics formulas and panaceas that promise to make things real and reliable again while sanctifying our stupidity. This and the mandating of mediocrity is potentially one of the greatest dangers we face, for the world is too interrelated and interdependent to sustain the spread of further reductionism and narrowings.

The Search for the Possible Human

The Rhythm that is coming brings the search for the possible human in ways that it has never been sought before. Previously the ideal of a possible human was one limited by cultural and climatic constraints and gave only limited excellence. If you had been an Arunta in the Australian desert, your notion of the possible human would have been of someone who had the most acute and extended sensory system in order to detect food or water in the parched and barren landscape in which you lived. Similarly, if you grew up in a hunting society, a refinement of sensory and muscular coordination would also be part of the ideal, along with qualities of courage and endurance. Among the educated of Athens in the fifth century B.C., the possible human would have been expected to express the virtues of physical beauty, mental grace, and high skills in speech and rhetoric. For the Romans, a strong mind in a strong body was the sine qua non, while for the ancient Hebrews it was a morally upright and righteous ethic guiding every aspect of life. Among the ancient Chinese the noble one was seen to exist in perfect harmony with both society and nature, having the most exquisite sensitivity to the nuances of social and familial relationships. Among certain strata of Northern European society the tough-minded rationalist who is successful in the commercial or professional realm is to be emulated, while among the Balinese a grace in body and mind and a fluidity in states of consciousness mark the possible human, along with the ability, as one Balinese said to me, "to do everything as well as possible."

Given the enormous variety in the nature of the ideal, it is inevitable that the possible human of one society would be the pariah of the next, while the full flowering of one would outrage and seem ludicrous to the other. Memories of these encounters are the great sore spots of history and legend, as complex but harmonious agrarian societies de-

voted to the intricacies of seasonal ritual and reconciliation are overwhelmed by the conquest ideals of invading warrior cultures. Similarly, as we have seen in the tragic history of frontier America, a native culture whose human ideal revolves around attunement with nature suffers the direct of consequences when confronted with a culture whose ideal includes the constant extension of the "empire of man over things."

We arrive finally at our own time, when the human race can no longer afford the invidious comparisons and psychological imperialism that some "successful" cultures and nations impose upon others. In this time of planetary culture we need the full complement of human resources, wherever they are to be found. We need to bring forth and orchestrate all the Rhythms of Human Awakening that have ever been in humanity's search for what it can be.

As we have seen, previous cultures have tended to deny some areas of development while acknowledging and encouraging others. With the present convergence of the findings of anthropology, crosscultural studies, psychophysical research, and studies into the nature and function of brain, we are beginning to have in hand a perspective on human possibility as profound as it is provocative. This perspective allows us to turn the corner on our humanity, exploring and experiencing the astonishing complexity and variety of the world of the possible human. It is virtually a new introduction to the human race.

Some may initially retreat before the magnitude of the vistas that this perspective presents. Our lensing of reality is so conditioned by culture and circumstance that we tend to allow in only familiar, limited notions of what is both proper and possible. In this, our situation is not unlike what might happen should a praying mantis—an insect—suddenly find itself up at the marble podium addressing the United Nations. The mantis would rub its wings together, peer out at its surroundings, and think, "Hmmm, not much food out there," having no idea of the immensity of the human drama that is happening before it. So too with ourselves in our limited lensing of reality.

How do we open those lenses to permit entry to both the vision and the inspiration needed to launch the journey of the possible human? For without inspiration we will have neither the courage nor the momentum to enter upon the tremendous task of responding to the present Rhythm of Awakening, a task and a response in which we quite literally partner evolution in the transformation of our selves.

Let me tell you why I am convinced of the extraordinary opportunity that is ours. In 1965 my husband, Robert Masters, and I formed The Foundation for Mind Research in New York City, determined to recover and uncover as many methods as we could to help us explore the nature and range of human capacities. We began our series of experiments by reviewing culture and history and the many varieties of

the ideal of the possible human, considering those types of experience that have traditionally been most enriching in ways that are positive and do not present grave dangers to the person or otherwise include certain aspects that might be detrimental. We then inquired further as to which capacities have been highly valued in different cultures throughout history while, at the same time, the ordinary person of our time has been blocked in his or her use of those capacities.

These considerations led us to experimental explorations with over a thousand research subjects during the next seventeen years. We were interested in the immediate experiential and other values of altered and extended states of consciousness, alternative cognitive modes, and new styles of learning. We studied the impact of thinking in images, thinking kinesthetically, time distortion, the acceleration of mental process, sensory enhancement, the modulation of pleasure and pain, and the nature and evocation of the creative process. This work was fertilized by a variety of techniques both very old and very new: the orchestration of dreams and dreaming, the voluntary conscious control of involuntary physiological states (heartbeat, brain waves, skin temperature) assisted by biofeedback and autogenic training, and even the induction of religious and other peak experiences, as well as many other varieties of innate mental and physical capacities, all available to, but rarely used by, most human beings. Because these were all experiences and capacities valued highly by those who have had access to them, we supposed that they would also be found to be of value by the volunteers participating in our research programs.

Our initial procedures had to do with finding ways to open the lenses and unshackle the minds of our research subjects. Visiting different societies throughout the world, searching through time and history, probing both orthodox and esoteric traditions and ways of working with human possibilities of other cultures, we found many procedures commonly used by people across the millennia to alter attention on the spectrum of consciousness so that sensitivity might be heightened, solutions found, inner journeys taken, visions sought and gained. Whether it be through dancing, drumming, chanting, fasting, or employing the many varieties of psychophysical and psychospiritual exercises, human beings have learned to travel to their edges, there to fall off the known world and bring back news from the unknown.

And so we joined ancient processes to modern research methods, even occasionally creating mechanical and electronic devices to help elicit various phenomena of consciousness. As we broadened the base of our investigations, we began to explore ways of extending and refining the sensory and perceptual capacities and the self-modulation of pleasure and pain. This led us more and more deeply into what became the major research emphasis of our Foundation—the investigation of the

body-mind continuum. We discovered what many others had discovered before us—that you cannot have a successful and permanent extension of mental, psychological, and spiritual capacity without working toward an enhancement of physiological capacity. One of the reasons that talking therapies do not work as well as they might is that, since they do not knowledgeably involve the body in the therapeutic process, they engage too little of the client's being. A "cure" of psyche is at best a temporary adjustment and undergoes reversals when the uncured body asserts its memories and distortions.

The deterioration of the body that typically occurs before individuals reach adulthood leads to deterioration across the entire spectrum of the brain-body system. We become progressively less able to learn, perceive, conceptualize, relate, and create. It is a path of physical erosion and real loss of human intelligence, this Western division of body from mind, and its consequences are being felt all over the planet. This rationalizing, objectifying mind-set is a direct outgrowth of the loss of awareness of sensorimotor functions, as is the inability to use a larger range of body-mind perceptions for more subtle understanding and complex problem-solving. Quite simply, the holocaust of body-mind has led to the ecological holocaust and to the awful inadequacy of present political and economic solutions.

Consideration of this tragedy led us first to a search for already existing systems, not of physical but rather of psychophysical education—that is, systems that do not divide the body from the mind or ignore the importance of consciousness, but instead seek to work with the unity of body and mind that constitutes the human person.

As our psychophysical work continued to develop, we were able to integrate our imagery and our creativity studies into exercises aimed at improving and developing body movement and awareness. Thus, some psychophysical work was done with imaging in altered states of consciousness and with accelerated mental process. Then, for example, a minute or two of clock-measured time, which may be subjectively experienced as an hour, can give results equivalent to what might be obtained by an hour of actual physical work. Also, it soon became clear that subjects and students who were engaged in the psychophysical work learned more completely and with greater ease to release and apply such more inwardly tuned potentials as the improvement of memory, the capacity to think on multiple tracks at once, and even the ability to tap, at will, into the symbolic and mythic dimensions of the self. It is significant that modern researchers are rediscovering what the early Sanskrit psychophysical philosophers had always known that the key to transpersonal realities lay in the expansion of physical awareness.

It was becoming apparent that because of the diffusion effect in the