

## **A COURSE IN MIRACLES with JUDITH SKUTCH WHITSON**

JEFFREY MISHLOVE, Ph.D.: Hello and welcome. Today we're going to talk about *A Course in Miracles*, and my guest, Judith Skutch Whitson, is the president of the Foundation for Inner Peace, the organization which publishes *A Course in Miracles*. Welcome, Judy.

JUDITH SKUTCH WHITSON: Thank you, Jeffrey.

MISHLOVE: It's a pleasure to have you here. You know, we were reminiscing earlier; one of the last times I was with you was about twelve years ago when we had dinner with Helen Schucman and Bill Thetford, who were the individuals involved in channeling these manuscripts which have become *A Course in Miracles*. It must have been some experience for you to watch that material blossom and spread all over the world during these years that you've been involved. Why don't we start, for the benefit of our viewers, and talk a little bit about what *A Course in Miracles* is, in succinct terms, and how it developed, and where it's grown?

WHITSON: Do we have a few hours?

MISHLOVE: Twenty-eight minutes and thirty seconds.

WHITSON: Well, we'll start with what it is. Basically, I could call it a metaphysical system of spiritual psychotherapy, which is a mouthful, I know -- but metaphysical because it's dealing with not the world of form; spiritual, because it's addressing itself to spirit as a reality; psychotherapy, because it speaks of healing, and it tells us that we're all in need of healing because of a duality, and that if we were to look beyond the world of form, we will be able to see and experience what we really are, our true nature, which is spirit.

MISHLOVE: We're all in need of healing because we're in this world of duality.

WHITSON: Exactly. And all we have to do is look around us at the world that we call real, and see how much healing is necessary. Mother Teresa puts it very well when she talks very simply about the need for love in the world. She says the world is suffering from a terrible epidemic, and it's called spiritual deprivation. But thank God, she says, there's a remedy; it's called love, and it's contagious. And *A Course in Miracles* to me is a definitive handbook on how to love.

MISHLOVE: Well, that's succinct. It's about three volumes.

WHITSON: It's three volumes, yes. There's a text, and it sets forth the principles of *A Course in Miracles*. It tells what a miracle is, which is really a shift in perception -- to be able to see what lies behind form and see spirit. It has a workbook, so that it can help one put into practice the principles that the text contains. And then there's a third small volume which is a manual for teachers, which is interesting because it addresses itself not to an outside teacher to teach you, but rather the teacher within -- to reestablish that relationship with the teacher within, to help us teach ourselves what we already know.

MISHLOVE: How did this material come into existence?

WHITSON: Ah. Once upon a time, in 1975 -- I should really start with my own story, because otherwise I'm going to go back too far -- I was with a friend, in fact a mutual friend of ours, Douglas Dean, and living in New York City. I was invited by him to accompany him to Columbia Presbyterian School of Physicians and Surgeons, where we were going to meet two medical psychologists. The reason we were going to meet them we really didn't know, except one of them had heard us speak and said he was interested in pursuing the conversation. At that time we were very interested in healing, and researching many alternatives there were to the medical model.

MISHLOVE: Yes, Douglas Dean is very well known as a healing researcher.

WHITSON: Right. I had been teaching at New York University, and he was a teaching partner at times, and so we were very anxious to go up to what we called the establishment of the Columbia physicians and surgeons. When we met them, there was a feeling that I had that went beyond, "How do you do? My name is. . ." I sort of thought I knew them -- not that I had seen them before or anything, but there was a familiarity, I could say a family-like feeling. I started to find myself saying things that I hadn't expected to say, in other words, opening up. Indeed, they felt the same way, and took us after a very nice lunch in the cafeteria to their inner sanctum, their office, where they locked the door and pulled down the shade, and told us the deep dark secret of their last ten years, which had been as -- the only word I have for it is scribes -- of the material called *A Course in Miracles*. Now, the way it came to them was through their relationship. They had had a very long period together, teaching, researching, writing grant proposals, and their life together and among their faculty wasn't very harmonious; in fact, they described it as one of the most stress-filled domains in the world -- academia, medical academia.

MISHLOVE: Well, I'm sure people who have been there would acknowledge that.

WHITSON: I think every profession has built-in stress levels, but they had reached the pinnacle of their stress level, and one day the quieter of the two of them, Bill Thetford, who was a very gentle man, a very thorough scientist, a very solid person -- he just blew up. He said in a very meaningful way to her, so that she heard him, that he was sick and tired of the attitudes that that stress seemed to have promoted between the two of them, and that they just weren't getting along, that there had to be a better way to live in the world.

MISHLOVE: There had to be a better way.

WHITSON: There had to be a better way, and he was determined to find it. Instead of laughing at him, because she was quite an acerbic

woman -- very clever, very sharp, the older of the two of them by fourteen years, and this was unusual for him, to be so emotional -- instead of laughing, she actually took his hand, and she said, "You know, Bill, I think you're right. I don't know what the better way could be, but I'll help you find it." To me that's very important, because two people joined to find a better way of being in the world -- in other words, to heal their relationship. Not too long after, Helen started to experience what she called heightened visual imagery. Being a psychologist, she would never say psychic or vision, but heightened visual imagery -- which gave her the feeling that there was something within her catching her attention and very gently taking her along the way, through experience, to an opening up. In fact after many of these visions -- which were interesting in themselves, but I couldn't possibly relate them now -- she started to become very familiar with an inner voice which was very clear, unaccented, no sex, just a voice, which she said spoke with a gentleness and yet an authority she could not avoid listening to. One day, after having had many of these kind of experiences, she was at home, unable to sleep, and she was actually feeling, hearing the words: "This is a course in miracles. Please take notes." And she didn't know what to do. That was quite startling. She called up Bill on the phone, and she said, "You know that voice I told you about? It won't go away, and it's saying something very peculiar." And he said, "What is it saying?" And she told him: "This is a course in miracles. Please take notes." He's a very pragmatic fellow. He said, "Well, you've been having interesting experiences which I've been taking down so we have a record of them. Why don't you just do what it says? You take very fast shorthand. Why don't you just do it?" So she did, and what she took down startled her a great deal, but the next morning she brought it into the office, before the staff came in, and they locked the door and pulled down the shades so no one should catch them at this, and she actually read from her notebook to him what she had taken down, and he typed it up, and then they discussed it, and it was an introduction to *A Course in Miracles*. It said: "It's a required course; only the time you take it is voluntary.

Free will does not mean you can establish the curriculum, but rather the time in which you need to take it." And then it talked about the opposite of love is fear, but what is all-encompassing can have no opposite. It also said the course could be summed up very simply this way: "Nothing real can be threatened, and nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the peace of God." Well, she was threatened. At that time she called herself a militant atheist, and he was an agnostic, and here was something that mentioned G-O-D, and it just wasn't in her vocabulary. So he convinced her that it was beautifully written, and whatever it was, if it should happen again, to keep on doing it, and that began a seven-year collaboration, whereupon any time she wished, when she was ready, she could pick up her shorthand notebook and her pen, and literally start from where she left off before, without even checking what the book said, and in that way, with Bill typing down every day what she had taken down herself, *A Course in Miracles* came into being. It didn't represent the belief system of either of them, and yet it talked about healing, and the healing of relationships, the reason for it coming. That in a nutshell, as succinct as I can make it, is the story.

MISHLOVE: And it has subsequently literally transformed the lives of thousands and thousands of people.

WHITSON: Well, it certainly seems to. Of course it's not for everyone, but people who are drawn to it and who have used it do claim that they have found a heightened peace of mind as they start to see the connection between them and someone else, and that when they recognize that they have really the same goal, which is to experience and express love, that the barriers that they have put up to that love seem to disappear, whether it's family relationships, or in the office, with the children, with the neighbors, or even the other, which could be another country or culture.

MISHLOVE: And the course seems structured in a very elegant and simple way. There's a thought that one concentrates on or visualizes, one a day for three hundred and sixty-five days.

WHITSON: Yes, that's no accident; three hundred sixty-five is a special number. But I don't think it ever meant that the course must be completed in a year, but rather it shouldn't be done in less, because it really is an unlearning system -- to unlearn the thoughts, the belief system that we hold -- that we feel this world is finite; we've come into it for no reason whatsoever except biological; we have experiences, some joyful, some sad; we have some health, some illness; and we die, and that's the end. This seems to be the belief system that many of us live our lives by.

MISHLOVE: We get pretty locked into it.

WHITSON: We get locked into it. We seem to have the witnesses that that is true -- and yet, and yet, behind all of that we feel the yearning for another home, a different home, that we all seem to be familiar with in some strange and mystical way. We get clogged up with tears when we see a character in a film called E.T. say, "I want to phone home." Everybody starts weeping. Why? What is it that touches us so much? We really do know that there's something beyond this, something else, and when I say beyond I don't mean out there -- that within us is a knowledge that we have turned away from. And so A Course in Miracles' real purpose is to reacquaint us with that inner teacher, that inner voice -- you can say the inner voice that Helen heard. There are interesting things about that, particularly since the voice did identify itself. I asked Helen, the first day I met her with Douglas Dean, when she showed me the manuscript, "Did the voice have a name? Did it identify itself, such as the Seth material and others?" She said, "I was afraid you were going to ask that," and Bill Thetford said, "Why don't you tell her, dear? She's going to read it." And she said, "It says it's Jesus."

MISHLOVE: This is a Jewish lady.

WHITSON: Yes. I said, "Well, is it?" And she said, "Of course," which was interesting, because on the one hand she didn't believe in it, but on the other hand she knew it was true. I think we're all in that

position in our lives. There's something that we know is true, but we don't agree to believe in it.

MISHLOVE: Well, you know, when I met Helen and Bill they seemed like very humble people, and very peaceful, and yet they felt like they themselves were probably the people who still needed to study the material the most.

WHITSON: Well, I think on one hand that they knew that they had taken down something that was beneficial to people who wanted to use it. After all, they were two professors of psychology, and it came in a psychological-spiritual model. Certainly the words in it, the terminology, is Christianity as we know it today, but the redefinition of many of the terms starts to bring a different interpretation, and at least for me makes the ideas come alive. So they knew what they had done was meaningful; on the other hand they were embarrassed that they weren't total models of it.

MISHLOVE: This Course in Miracles, it's something that many professional people, who have a hard time relating to other spiritual systems but are looking for a spiritual system which they can relate to, have done well with, isn't it?

WHITSON: I think that's true, possibly because it's a self-study course. No one gives it to you. You can take it in your own time. It's voluntary. You're going to get the curriculum of life sooner or later, and you can choose that it could be sooner. I think it's not threatening because of that -- that you can do it at your own pace, and you're not comparing yourself to anyone. Also, it's consistent. The logic in it --

MISHLOVE: It's very rigorous.

WHITSON: Absolutely.

MISHLOVE: It's like looking at classical Buddhist logic, or something of that sort.

WHITSON: Yes. And it's expressed in today's terminology. We're all very aware today, particularly in this country, of psychology. A Course in Miracles couldn't exist without Freud, because Freud defined the ego. A Course in Miracles talks about the ego, and then beyond. The ego in A Course in Miracles terminology is what I would call our little self -- our personal, self-seeking, everyday "me, me, me" identity -- whereas the higher Self, capital S, is the inner self which extends, which is love, where we find our peace. And so to me *A Course in Miracles* is a very logical progression in Western psychology.

MISHLOVE: How have the various religious denominations and organizations responded to this material?

WHITSON: Well, as far as I know, no one really has -- no organized religion -- has responded. I mean, no one has called up and said, "I represent organized whatever," but rather individuals from all walks of life, in all different traditions, have taken *A Course in Miracles* to be helpful to themselves.

MISHLOVE: I have had occasion to visit Science of Mind churches, and I've noticed that they seem to incorporate it as a regular part of their structure.

WHITSON: Well, I'm Jewish, and I incorporate it in my structure, and certainly the course deals with Christian terminology. Someone asked me once, "Well, how come you're an identified Jew, and you are studying a system purportedly from Jesus?" I could see no inconsistency, because wasn't he?

MISHLOVE: A great rabbi, at least.

WHITSON: Well, my feeling is if one really wants to make friends with one's higher self -- and everyone knows it is there, otherwise who are we talking to all the time in there? Who are we asking advice of? If you really want to, all you have to do is say, "I'm willing." *Course in Miracles* has a nice quote. It says, "Show the

slightest willingness, and a thousand angels rush in to help." And we do get all the help we need when we open up to that willingness. And that voice is really ever-present, and very available to us, and it very much know what it is, who it is, and how to help us remember it.

MISHLOVE: One of the individuals who I know has gone a long way with this material is Dr. Gerald Jampolsky, who's written a book called *Love Is Letting Go of Fear*.

WHITSON: Which is from *A Course in Miracles*, of course.

MISHLOVE: He's used this in his work with children with terminal illness, helping them to come to terms with what they have to live with, to enjoy the last portion of their lives. And it's been quite successful, I understand.

WHITSON: Well, as the course says, if fear is the opposite of love, but love is all-encompassing and therefore has no opposite, then love is our identity and fear is a barrier that we, our minds, erect ourselves. It doesn't matter if you have a terminal illness, or it doesn't matter if you're in extreme pain, or if you've just been fired from your job, or all the various ills that we can think of that befall us in our society. But if we can allow ourselves to remember that love, to demonstrate it to others, and thus to experience it, it's interesting how fear disappears. In the dying process -- since Jerry Jampolsky isn't talking about healing these people, he's talking about helping them be at peace with themselves, not even with the situation, finding the peace inside -- then remarkable transformations occur. The child can die, but the family retains something wonderful that was shared, and that lives on, until we finally get the idea that love is letting go of fear.

MISHLOVE: Isn't a lot of this material at odds with some aspects of traditional religion and theology, which talk about the need for sin and guilt?

WHITSON: A need for guilt, right. Yes, I would say that -- not so much at odds with, but to me it's the next step. We've defined sin and guilt; we know what it feels like. Is it helping us? I look around at me in my life, because I like to measure everything by whether it works for me or not, and I see every time I have a guilty thought or feel that I have been sinful I'm not going to feel good. I'm actually projecting what I'm feeling about myself onto someone else, and that doesn't make me feel peaceful and happy. But if I am willing to ask the in-self, the self that knows inside, the higher self -- the course calls it the Holy Spirit -- how to see the situation, then readily I am shown how I can demonstrate love. Sin and guilt disappear when love walks in the door.

MISHLOVE: So in effect what the course is saying is it doesn't matter who you are, what you've done, where you've been -- that the presence of God, the presence of the spirit, is there now for you unconditionally.

WHITSON: Right. You can always be ready to say, "I will" to spirit -- which doesn't mean, by the way, that one should accept the point of view that it doesn't matter what I do in this world, and hence I can commit terrible deeds against other people and myself. That's not what it's talking about at all, but rather to see mistakes rather than sin, because mistakes can be corrected, whereas sin really demands guilt and punishment. Mistakes are correction, and you can say, resurrection.

MISHLOVE: In other words, there's a difference between responsible and feeling guilty.

WHITSON: Yes. But I would say the primary purpose of *A Course in Miracles* is to remember who you are through what your inner teacher, your higher self, the Holy Spirit, can teach you, because if we decide every thought that we have, we would like it to be the thought from our higher self, we're going to be very peaceful people and act very differently in the world.

MISHLOVE: What are some of the other directions that the course is taking now that so many, many people are involved? I know there is music, there are videotapes, there are posters, coffee mugs.

WHITSON: Oh yes, yes, yes. At the beginning I thought, "Oh, my goodness; Helen" -- who died, by the way, in 1981 -- "would turn over in her grave if she saw all of this." And yet if people want to express these ideas in the various forms that manifest what they're believing at this time, why not? The Foundation for Inner Peace, which publishes the *Course in Miracles*, doesn't have anything to do with that. If people want to use the material, why not? I noticed that some of the music is quite beautiful, and some it I would even call inspired. Someone told me that she was writing a play based on *A Course in Miracles*. That part, it'll extend in its own way and in many other ways too that I can't even imagine, as the ideas of love will, but the project, if you can call it that, that I'm at this point the most involved in and dedicated to, is the translations. People from all over the world have studied *A Course in Miracles* in English, and when they've studied it enough, and when they feel that it becomes that person's particular function to bring it to the people who speak the language of that country, they identify themselves. In other words, we didn't say, "Oh, we've got to translate this material." It's nothing like that; it's rather people say, "Please, will you let us translate this material?" And since there's no letting or not letting, but rather a joining, these individuals identify themselves to the Foundation for Inner Peace, which holds the copyright, and we work together. There are fourteen ongoing translations now. That thrills me more than anything -- to see it coming up in different languages, and know that it must be touching people, because it's so alive.

MISHLOVE: Well, you've been very active in a number of ways. You've been active, for example, raising money originally for parapsychology research, helping to establish the Institute of Noetic Sciences, setting up meetings in Congress, as I recall, with futurists. The Congressional Clearinghouse for the Future was a project you were involved in.

WHITSON: That's how I met my husband.

MISHLOVE: Do you see *A Course in Miracles* having an effect in the secular world?

WHITSON: I really can't answer that, because it's a supposition, and I'm giving power to a book rather than honoring the ideas. Rather, I would phrase the question: Am I becoming more peaceful, more forgiving, less condemning? Because I know if I am, from the use of this material, then other people can, and they are. And do I see person to person, that change, that transformation happening in others? Does the miracle of another perception, a perception that replaces the one that condemns us to alienation, aloneness, and illness, begin to fill up other individuals? Yes, I see that happening a lot. I couldn't say there's more change going in psychology or the traditional religions, or drama, or whatever, but rather that there are individuals in every walk of life who are using *Course in Miracles*, or many of the other excellent disciplines, to help them find that peace and extend it.

MISHLOVE: The *Course in Miracles*, as you mentioned before, is an individual study program, but there are groups who work with it as well, aren't there?

WHITSON: I never saw any place in *A Course in Miracles* that said, "Get ye in groups," but yes, we're sociable animals, and people do like to come together to help each other study, to fathom -- this is difficult material. Changing one's mind about what one thinks one is - - we hold on very hard to what we know and to the past, and in order to release those ideas and let a new belief system come in to take the place of the old is sometimes threatening and frightening, and people reach out to others. And so they on their own form autonomous study groups. There are thousands of them. I have no idea where they all are; once in a while we hear about them. They come and they go. Maybe they meet for a while in someone's home, maybe they meet in a church, maybe they meet in a synagogue or in

a school building or a hospital even, and help each other for a while, and maybe they finish and go on. Some of them are long-term, since the course first was discovered, and still going. But again, it's so individual.

MISHLOVE: What do you think will be the long-term impact? It's only been now less than two decades that this is going on, and we've really seen a thousand flowers blossom, so to speak, with this work.

WHITSON: Well, I couldn't have predicted, Jeffrey, eleven and a half years ago, that I could sit here today and tell you that in 1987, January, there were three hundred thousand copies of *A Course in Miracles* in circulation. I have no idea how many people study one copy, so I'm guessing over a half a million folk at least are students of *A Course in Miracles*, and I have no idea how many others it's indirectly affected. So I don't know. I think we're probably laying the foundation, along with many, many others, who share basically the same point of view but go about it in different ways -- a foundation for a tremendous change of mind, which I call the great transformation.

MISHLOVE: The great transformation. In other words, a new global direction.

WHITSON: Yes, yes.

MISHLOVE: Because, I suppose, if enough people can feel this sense of inner peace, this sense of inner connection with their deepest nature, then perhaps that can become a planetary reality.

WHITSON: There's no question about it. I think the best way for me to describe this isn't on the planetary level at all, but the individual. You, of course, with years of experience in the field that you've been in, and my touching on that field too, we believe that minds are joined and that information passes between us, whether we articulate it or not. When we look at a world that's not at peace -- with factions fighting each other, with hunger, with all the other

problems we have -- it can be very depressing. But when we recognize in our lives that there's one individual, at one marvelous moment, a miracle has happened with, without a word, we know the power of love, and we recognize it really can transform humanity. And I speak of -- oh, I could pick a thousand.

MISHLOVE: Judith, we're out of time.

WHITSON: We're out of time?

MISHLOVE: But I think you just said it. I think you really did reach that keynote to end on. Thank you very much for being with me.

WHITSON: It's been a pleasure.