



Healing the Whole

An Interview With Caroline Myss, Ph.D.

by Brita Adkinson

The famed intuitive, healer, and best-selling author says the New Age community needs to look outward.

Caroline Myss, Ph.D., is a leading light of the New Age industry. She is famed as a pioneer of energy healing; as a medical intuitive; and for her work with sacred contracts, archetypes, and chakras. Her book releases include three *The New York Times*' bestsellers: *Anatomy of the Spirit*; *Why People Don't Heal and How They Can*; and *Sacred Contracts*. She has released more than a dozen spoken-audio sets and even card decks, including Healing Cards and Archetype Cards.

Myss is founder of Chicago's Caroline Myss Education Institute, to which she now devotes much of her energies. She currently is working on a new book about the sacred contract of the United States, as she urges people to turn their gazes and

spiritual focuses outward — to their families, their communities, and their country.

You can find out more about Myss; her teachings; and the Caroline Myss Education Institute and its programs at www.myss.com.

Brita Adkinson: Caroline, what are your thoughts on today's New Age book industry?

Caroline Myss: The New Age book industry is expanding tremendously, because what is interesting to people is changing a great deal. There was an opening in the New Age publishing field for more sophisticated New Age work, including more

scientific approaches.

In the early days, extreme kinds of books characterized the New Age. There was channeling, extraterrestrial stuff, plant-life talking — all those kinds of things, and that was OK. But over the years, the field has become very sophisticated. It includes books about conscious health, and these books are not considered crazy anymore. They are considered wise. The field has matured, and there has been a natural progression of the field taking on subjects in a more mature way — subjects such as economics, right livelihood, and finances.

The allopathic medical world not only is more accepting of New Age subjects, it is participating in them, too. Traditional doctors are as interested in stress control as New Age healers are.

The New Age world and the New Age culture — we are small, but how powerful we are! The New Age field is one of the leading areas of reading popularity, and it has an enormously powerful impact.

Adkinson: How do you think the book market should expand to serve the continuing development of humanity's consciousness? What kind of books do we need?

Myss: First of all, let's define New Age and get ourselves on the same map here. When I talk about New Age I am talking about the field of human consciousness, which includes health, healing, conscious living, and conscious lifestyle. It includes our growing awareness about the balance of nature and our lives.

I look at trends and see that the world, like it or not, is going into a cycle of real conflict and violence. This is the reality of what is happening in the world. If I were a publisher, I would think, "What is it that the world needs?"

War is real. Terrorism is real. What is the responsible New Age response to these things? To go sit in the garden and light a candle and say, "Om"? I don't think so.

I have people tell me things like, "I don't watch TV, because it's just so negative!" Well, my goodness, yes — it *is* negative. But a core part of being a conscious person is being *aware*. The New Age can be so narcissistic and self-indulgent — all about pleasure. A lot of New Agers are on a pleasure cruise.

What is my response, as a teacher and writer, knowing that the world is going to be in a cycle of great violence? My response is to direct people to becoming as politically aware and Earth-aware as they can. The whole idea of the consciousness movement is to bring consciousness to bear upon. The day has come to start bearing upon.

I am writing a book about the mystical roots and history of America. I want people to connect to the founding spiritual vision of this nation, so they can realize how far off we have gone. If the New Age is about social conscience, social awareness, and social consciousness, what is the place of social activism? What is New Age social activism? What is your responsibility in a world that is on fire?

Publishers should be making aware books that are pertinent to the world at large right now.

Adkinson: It sounds like you are moving away from a focus on personal development to a focus on society's development.

Myss: I do both, not one or the other. I'll never do one thing.

Adkinson: So, how do we blend these two things, and not forget about society's development while occupied with our personal healing?

Myss: The model we have developed in the New Age world is a model that is incredibly self-focused on one's own healing — that is very self-centered. It says, "As long as I am healing, I can neglect a lot of other things."

We need to mature. We need to include the whole. We need to realize we can do a lot of things simultaneously. We can work on our own healing *and* become effective lights in the world.

If the New Age is about conscious change, then never has there been a time when it was more needed than it is now. So, what is conscious change? I don't see any books at all, anywhere, on New Age activism. The way it used to be, in the 1960s, we had a vibrant Democratic Convention; we were against the war in Vietnam; and there was power everywhere being directed at social change, including in books. Those were brilliant days. Now there is absolutely nothing.

Adkinson: What is your advice for New Age

book publishers, Caroline? What can they do to make a difference?

Myss: If I was in publishing, I would be very open to receiving manuscripts from authors who have social awareness. I would take a look at books on the changes ahead — on what the world is going to look like and what lies ahead. I am interested in the consequences of how the government is bringing about the end of Americans' rights. We are in an era that sees the Patriot Act coming into force. I have a strong social interest in waking Americans up again and saying, "You are losing your country, guys! It's happening little by little, but you are losing it!"

The people in the New Age culture also need to have a real understanding of the fundamentalist religions around the world. We may know a lot about how to meditate, but we don't understand fundamentalism. We need to become tradition-fluent.

And I think we need to take a look at imperialism. The United States is the leading force in the world right now and has a new, emerging role. But, alarmingly, at the same time the United States is forgetting its spiritual roots. I think Americans are under a spell. They have got to wake up and remember that social, conscious awareness and a commitment to enlightenment is what this nation is about.

I want to say to publishers and authors: Pour it out — write and speak to alert people that the social-awareness tradition that gave birth to this country is sleeping. I don't see it anywhere. OK, so that's enough of my social platform.

Adkinson: What advice do you have for independent retailers during these times?

Myss: I love bookstore owners. They are my favorite people in the whole wide world. I always have wanted to own a bookstore. I love bookstore people, and I love independent bookstores. They have a special place in my heart. Whenever I go on a book tour, I go to independent bookstores. Those store owners are mythic characters to me. They are standing against giants these days.

Independent-bookstore owners have to hang on through a storm of facing the big guys. That pressure is very real. Transitions Bookplace is a New Age bookstore here in

Chicago that is very near and dear to my heart, and a Barnes and Noble store is going up right next door to it.

Transitions Bookplace's owners, Howard Mandel and Gayle Mandel, are very good friends of mine. Their store model at Transitions Bookplace is brilliant. The thing about independent bookstores is they provide a wonderfully warm, intellectually rich atmosphere. What they can offer that Barnes and Noble cannot is sacred space. They can bank on atmosphere, and that is how they can outrun the big Barnes and Noble next door.

If I wanted to set up a bookstore and capitalize on sacred space, I would organize the kinds of daily talks that Howard puts forth in his store. I would have different lecturers come in, including both well-known national authors and local unknowns who have something special to give — a special light to shine on a store and its customers.

I would set up a sacred space for quiet time or for meditating. It wouldn't have to be a huge space. I'm not talking about building a church here. But I would have a meditation corner with a rule that while you are in there, no one talks. In this sacred space, I would have a Buddha, a crucifix, some saint, and maybe the Madonna. I would incorporate something from all the world religions in the space.

Then, I would make available the religious goods from those traditions for sale throughout the store. Stores like Barnes and Noble can't sell traditions, which are vitally important to people in the consciousness field. The thing about New Age bookstores is that they can emphasize multicultural goods in a way that crosses lines. Chain stores are too socially correct to do that.

Adkinson: Is it appropriate for business owners to bring their spiritual practices to work, or would that be overstepping the bounds of a business environment?

Myss: I can see where that could be taken as overstepping boundaries. I have a business. I am very conscious of taking the principles I believe in and applying them in my business life. But I never would bring my spiritual practice in.

For my employees, it's not about what I do

spiritually. It's about how I live those principles. I don't have to force my spiritual practice on anybody, but I had better live it. My job is to live what I tell them I believe.

If I tell them I believe in conscious business, I had better create one. But that doesn't mean I expect them to pray consciously with me about conscious business. So, I don't bring my practice in, but I practice it. There is a big difference.

Adkinson: What's the focus of your work now, Caroline?

Myss: The Caroline Myss Education Institute (CMED) has become 50 percent of my life. At my institute, people study very extensively two or three times a year for two years. The institute provides a very deep, delicious investigation of their sacred contracts; their archetypal patterns and how to work with and apply archetypes; and how to read the archetypal patterns in their projects and relationships. CMED is accredited to give continuing-education credits, so the program suits nurses and people in the healthcare field who need to add educational credits each year.

Adkinson: Who takes these classes?

Myss: I have people from across the board — from people in the healthcare field to people in the healing arts, such as body workers. But there also are people who just are in their own lives, whatever they do — teachers, lawyers, housewives, retired people. There is a huge spectrum, including New Age hobbyists — the people who don't have to work.

I started last year. My students come to me in Chicago. I have 150 people in the current class and a huge waiting list. I am starting a second class next month, so I will have two classes running simultaneously — one in its first year of study and one in its second.

Adkinson: Your institute is quite new. In the next few years, do you think the institute will expand?

Myss: I hope it does, Brita. I hope to make the programs available to people in other countries through the Internet, and we already have started to record the classes and put them on DVD.

Adkinson: What is the purpose of this training, Caroline?

Myss: Everything I do has the same pur-

pose. It just sometimes has different faces. It's always about choice and awareness. My purpose always is about educating people about how much choice they have in their lives — in determining the things that happen. It's about helping people recognize that even the subtlest fear patterns in them are a choice. When you realize, "I have a fear of this!" and you don't do anything about that fear, that's a choice, and it has consequences.

Archetypal patterns are keys. Studying them lets you go deep into your unconscious, so you can get to know yourself according to patterns that are locked into your soul.

As a reporter, Brita, you obviously have an interest in being someone who is involved in information, like a networker. There is a reason why someone like you finds that appealing — to be a messenger, to be like the god Mercury, to take information and pass it to others. Why are you doing that? There is a part of you that feels this is a way of moving light. You are a shapeshifter. You take light, and you move it. You change the shape of it, forming it into an article, and you hope that it changes the shape of other people.

The more you understand about yourself in this way, the deeper your spiritual life becomes. So, everything I do is about helping people work with the art of becoming aware.

Adkinson: Are you the only teacher at your institute?

Myss: Yes, I am. But I also bring in special, surprise guests. I love doing that! People who are absolutely exceptional come in and, for example, give a lecture on a Saturday afternoon.

Therese Schroeder-Sheker was with us yesterday. She is a music thanatologist and a harpist. She has performed at Carnegie Hall, but then she felt a calling to work with dying people. She developed what she calls the Chalice of Repose Project (www.chaliceofrepose.org). She teaches people to sing ancient Gregorian chants to people who are dying to help them pass over.

She is like a Mother Teresa. Who would want to live their life singing to dying people? The whole idea is overwhelming, but for her doing so is completely beautiful and life-dedicated. She has a special light in her. Anyway, I

brought her in, and she sang Gregorian chants and talked about the sacred in a way that left people in my audience spellbound.

Another guest was a Yaki Indian shaman who lives in Arizona, way out in the bush. This Yaki medicine man lives with his wife and his little son out in the middle of nowhere, and he does not come out. But I came to him, and I brought him out. He was a nervous wreck, he was so frightened. But he came in, and he talked about the native way.

Adkinson: Do you work with energy healing these days?

Myss: No.

Adkinson: Is that all past?

Myss: Well, nothing is ever past. It's just not my focus at present. I don't do medical-intuitive readings professionally anymore. I do them in my classroom, with my students, whenever I can, but it's not my focus anymore.

Adkinson: What are the major challenges you are facing in your life?

Myss: Brita, why would anybody want to know that?

Adkinson: You are someone who is leading the way, so our readers may be curious.

Myss: I am not sure my crises are leading the way! Like anybody else, I go in and out of health crises all the time. I have had recent bouts with serious health problems. I was in surgery this past year. In my personal life, I go in and out of problems, too. But right now I am in a happy-little-camper place, I can tell you. Things are good.

Adkinson: Wonderful. What do you perceive as successes in your life right now?

Myss: My school — these classes are my sacred jewels. I am very grateful that my books have been successful, and I am hoping my next one will be, too. We'll see. I feel successful as a teacher. I love it — I love being with people in the classroom, and that is a very important part of my life. And, I am trying to be a successful cook, too. That's my hobby!

Adkinson: It sounds like the institute is really close to your heart.

Myss: Very much so. The thing I love so much about having my own institute — and I discovered it the very first day I stepped into the classroom — is that I feel a freedom to

teach in a way I don't feel free to teach at other workshops or conferences. I can talk about *anything* — from saints, miracles, mysticism, and angels to education, the social mind, and the problems facing humanity. I don't have to watch what I say. It is a very comfortable place for me — to finally feel that I am truly in charge of my own classroom.

Adkinson: Do you find your fame and prominence in the New Age market limiting, because people impose their expectations on you?

Myss: No, I don't find that confining. I am such a wild woman that it would be very hard to confine me! Confinement just does not work for me.

“What is New Age social activism? What is your responsibility in a world that is on fire?”

— Caroline Myss

I was in the world of health, and I moved out of it. Now I am in the world of archetypal exploration, and I am moving on to the world of archetypal interpretation of global events — the contracts of nations. I will never be confined.

Adkinson: Do your classes appeal to businesspeople — in particular, those from the traditional business world?

Myss: I would love to be able to reach that audience. I look at my audiences, and it is very obvious there are more women than men present. I have asked myself, “Why is the New Age world far more appealing to women than to men?”

You may find my answer intriguing. What I finally realized is that the New Age world has yet to become a profitable world. It does not know how to earn its living yet. Peace is not yet economically shrewd. This world is

based on war, not on peace.

When men look at the New Age approach and try to apply it to business, it is very hard for them to think about how they can keep profit alive while becoming consciously aware that the person they are doing business with has a spirit. We have a business model that is based on a take-no-prisoners approach. Business is business. The business-model awareness says, “If it's business, then no matter what I do, it's just fine.”

The New Age is suggesting that rule no longer is applicable. For people whose entire world is about profit and decisions based on “business is business,” how do you decide to compromise that level of power for conscious awareness? All of a sudden, to become conscious is to go broke! It prevents you from making really tough, rotten decisions.

Do you remember the movie *You've Got Mail*, which starred Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan? He runs a bookstore chain moving into the neighborhood, and he looks at this cute little neighborhood bookstore and says, “Business is business, toots!” She says, “This store is my life, my mother's life, my heart.” And he replies, from his heart, “Oh, well. Business is business.”

Can the world of consciousness — and, mind you, I don't think the New Age world is so conscious, anyway — and a more holistic model penetrate the traditional corporate model? The answer is yes. But it has to be done in a realistic way.

Put money in it, and businesspeople will follow you. Turn spiritual health and well-being into profit centers, and the businesspeople will be right there with you, girl. I am telling you the absolute truth. If you tell corporate people you have found a way that meditation can increase profits, they would send along their staff in a New York second! Because that's their world.

Adkinson: How can New Age businesses better learn to join spiritual awareness with real-world business sense?

Myss: The New Age world has yet to prove it has got what it takes to survive. In the New Age field, people still barter! They say, “I will massage you, if you do something for me.” It is a world of poverty. If somebody asks what

they earn for a living, they are terrified even to say, "I get \$45 an hour for massage." Well, you actually should be getting \$145 an hour if you have been doing it for 15 years and you are skilled at it. But New Agers are completely under the spell of the Old World that says you cannot have a profit and be a consciously spiritual person at the same time.

My key word is realism. So many times I have seen New Agers seduced by a vision that they can do something that just will help so many. But they never include in this vision their human shadow side. They are as greedy as corporate people. It's just that they wear different clothing. They never admit their shadow, and that is why so much New Age stuff falls flat on its face.

Just because you are called to a spiritual path should never be any indication that you have accomplished the journey. People in the New Age field have to recognize that their shadow is still quite Old World. They have to admit, "I'm just as greedy as the corporate man."

I hate to say this, but money makes the world go 'round, and it never will be any different. It is true now, and it was true when Jesus was alive. It always is true.

Adkinson: And, to make money, New Age has to have relevance, which brings us back to your emphasis on conscious activism, doesn't it?

Myss: Yes. The New Age is not just about changing yourself. Go out there now, and *do* something. New Age people need to get involved.

People need to wake up. Wake up!



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