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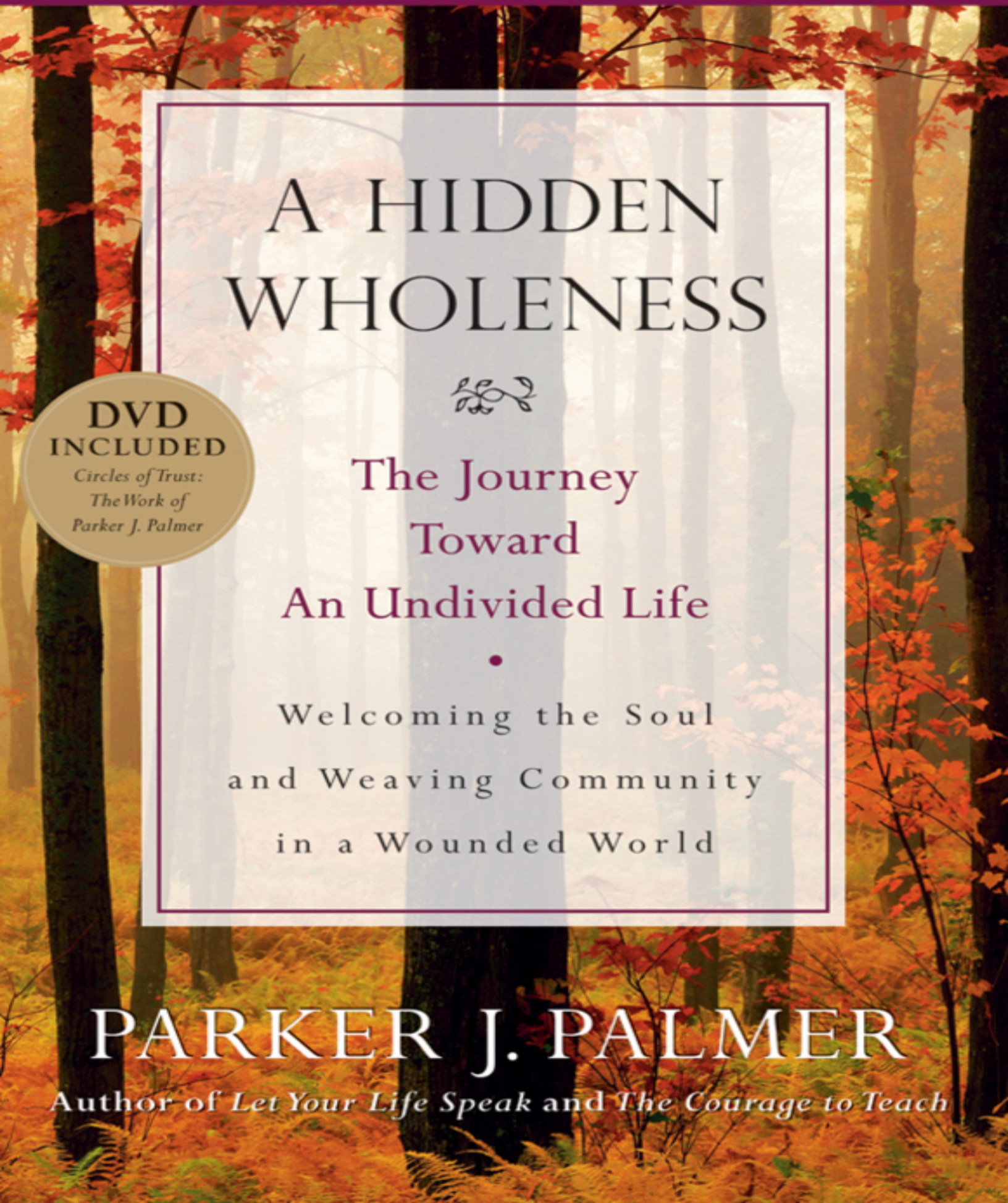

A HIDDEN WHOLENESS

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Circles of Trust: The Work of Parker J. Palmer

The Journey Toward An Undivided Life

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Welcoming the Soul and Weaving Community in a Wounded World

PARKER J. PALMER
Author of *Let Your Life Speak* and *The Courage to Teach*

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Let Your Life Speak

A Hidden Wholeness

The Journey Toward an Undivided Life

Welcoming the soul and weaving community in a wounded world

PARKER J. PALMER

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FOR MARCY JACKSON AND RICK JACKSON WITH GRATITUDE AND LOVE

Gratitudes

This book brings together four themes I have been musing on since my mid-twenties: the shape of an integral life, the meaning of community, teaching and learning for transformation, and nonviolent social change.

As six previous books and forty years of lecturing prove, I love to think, talk, and write about these things. But—knowing how quickly words can cut loose from human reality—I love it even more when language comes to life. So I take deep satisfaction in the fact that the most important words in this book have already found embodiment, thanks to the gifted people I am privileged to call colleagues and friends.

In cities across the country, these people have created settings where others can join in "the journey toward an undivided life." They are so numerous I cannot list them by name, but I want to point toward them with gratitude for their caring, competence, and commitment:

- The staff and board of the Fetzer Institute, who have supported so much of the work on which this book is based
- The staff and board of the Center for Courage & Renewal, who provide educators and people from many other walks of life with opportunities to deepen their personal and professional integrity[1]
- The one hundred–plus people and counting in the United States and Canada who have gone through the center's facilitator preparation program, learning how to create "circles of trust" where people can take an inner journey toward living "divided no more"

- The countless educators, philanthropists, physicians, attorneys, businesspeople, community organizers, clergy, and others who participate in such circles because they know their own need, and the world's, for rejoining soul and role
- The staff of Jossey-Bass and John Wiley, who actively support this book, and others related to it, because they believe in the work that it advocates

A few people have made special efforts to help this book and its author along. They all have my gratitude and love:

- Marcy Jackson and Rick Jackson are codirectors of the Center for Courage & Renewal. For nearly a decade they have led the effort to create circles of trust in far-flung places, doing so with skill, patience, wisdom, vision, and love. I dedicate this book to them to honor their remarkable work and to let them know again how much their friendship means to me.
- Rob Lehman is president emeritus of the Fetzer Institute and chair of its board of trustees. He has a strong and abiding vision of how vital it is to join the inner and outer life. Without his friendship and encouragement, much of the work on which this book is based might well have remained undone.
- Tom Beech is president of the Fetzer Institute. A much-valued friend since our days as college classmates, he was an early advo cate of the local and national work of the Center for Courage & Renewal. As long as I have known him, he has modeled the undivided life.
- David Sluyter is a senior adviser to the Fetzer Institute, and Mickey Olivanti is a Fetzer Institute program officer. They helped me launch the teacher formation program in the early 1990s and have supported it

faithfully ever since. They are good friends and colleagues whose confidence and companionship mean a great deal to me.[2]

- Mark Nepo, Chip Wood, and Roland Johnson are, respectively, a poet and essayist, a public school principal, and an attorney. They are also good friends and fellow travelers who gave various versions of this manuscript a thoughtful reading, and I am grateful for their generous help.
- Earlene Bond, Ann Faulkner, Guy Gooding, Sue Jones, Elaine Sullivan, and Bill Tucker are leaders in the Dallas County Community College District who have brought formation into their part of the educational world through the Center for Formation in the Community College.[3] I am grateful for their friendship and support.
- David Leach, M.D., executive director of the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, and Paul Batalden, M.D., professor of pediatrics and community and family medicine at Dartmouth Medical School, are leaders in transforming medical education and health care. They have shown me how the key ideas in this book speak to a profession that I know little about, and I value their encouragement and friendship.[4]
- Sheryl Fullerton is my editor. She is a gifted maker and marketer of books with great wisdom about that arcane craft, as well as a treasured friend who knows when I need consolation and when I need a challenge. I thank her and her talented colleagues at Jossey-Bass and John Wiley who have worked hard to bring this book into being: Joanne Clapp Fullagar, Paula Goldstein, Chandrika Madhavan, Sandy Siegle, and Bruce Emmer.

- Sharon Palmer is my best friend, my most trusted critic, and my love. She is the first reader of everything I write—and since I throw out twenty pages for every one I keep, she does a lot of reading. When I asked her what she looks for when she edits, she answered with three questions: Is it worth saying? Is it said clearly? Is it said beautifully? That should explain both my throw-out ratio and why I need to keep working on my writing.
- We are grateful to the Lilly Endowment, Inc., for their generous support of the production of this Leader's Guide and of the Circles of Trust Online Materials.

Twenty years ago, during a summer teaching stint in England, I picked up a small volume of poetry in a Cambridge bookstore. In it was a haunting little poem by D. M. Thomas called “Stone,” which I copied and put into my briefcase, where it can be found to this day. Thomas muses on the titles of a series of books that “the poet” will write over his or her lifetime and ends with these lines:

> *There is also the seventh book, perhaps, the seventh,*
>
> *And called The Seventh Book because it is not published,*
>
> *The one that a child thinks he could have written,*
>
> *Made of the firmest stone and clearest leaves,*
>
> *That a people keep alive by, keep alive.*[5]

From the moment I first read “Stone,” I sensed that it held a message for me. Last year, when I suddenly realized that *A Hidden Wholeness* would be my seventh book, I began to wonder if the message was that I should not publish it! Some critics may wish that I had come to that conclusion, but obviously I did not.

“Stone” speaks to me, I think, about the hope that has kept me writing for forty years, the hope to find words that might somehow give someone life. I do not know if the words in this book will fulfill that hope. But I do know that the work on which this book is based—the work of bringing people together to rediscover and reclaim their wholeness—has given me more life than anything else I have done professionally. May this book allow more people to benefit as much as I have from the life-giving, world-healing power of communities that welcome the soul.

Notes

1. For information about these opportunities, go to http://www.teacherformation.org and click on the section for readers of *A Hidden Wholeness.*

2. For further information on the Fetzer Institute, go to http://www.fetzer.org.

3. For further information on the Center for Formation in the Community College, go to http://www.league.org/league/projects/formation/index.htm.

4. For further information on the work of the Accreditation Commission for Graduate Medical Education, go to http://www.acgme.org and click on “Award Program.”

5. D. M. Thomas, “Stone,” in John Wain, ed., *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry: Post-War to the Present* (London: Hutchinson, 1979), p. 27.

Prelude
The Blizzard of the World

> *The blizzard of the world has crossed the threshold and it has overturned the order of the soul.*
>
> —LEONARD COHEN[1]

There was a time when farmers on the Great Plains, at the first sign of a blizzard, would run a rope from the back door out to the barn. They all knew stories of people who had wandered off and been frozen to death, having lost sight of home in a whiteout while still in their own backyards.

Today we live in a blizzard of another sort. It swirls around us as economic injustice, ecological ruin, physical and spiritual violence, and their inevitable outcome, war. It swirls within us as fear and frenzy, greed and deceit, and indifference to the suffering of others. We all know stories of people who have wandered off into this madness and been separated from their own souls, losing their moral bearings and even their mortal lives: they make headlines because they take so many innocents down with them.

The lost ones come from every walk of life: clergy and corporate executives, politicians and people on the street, celebrities and schoolchildren. Some of us fear that we, or those we love, will become lost in the storm. Some are lost at this moment and are trying to find the way home. Some are lost without knowing it. And some are using the blizzard as cover while cynically exploiting its chaos for private gain.

So it is easy to believe the poet's claim that "the blizzard of the world" has overturned "the order of the soul," easy to believe that the soul—that life-giving core of the human

self, with its hunger for truth and justice, love and forgiveness—has lost all power to guide our lives.

But my own experience of the blizzard, which includes getting lost in it more often than I like to admit, tells me that it is not so. The soul's order can never be destroyed. It may be obscured by the whiteout. We may forget, or deny, that its guidance is close at hand. And yet we are still in the soul's backyard, with chance after chance to regain our bearings.

This book is about tying a rope from the back door out to the barn so that we can find our way home again. When we catch sight of the soul, we can survive the blizzard without losing our hope or our way. When we catch sight of the soul, we can become healers in a wounded world—in the family, in the neighborhood, in the workplace, and in political life—as we are called back to our "hidden wholeness" amid the violence of the storm.

Notes

1. Leonard Cohen, "The Future" © 1992 by Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.

CHAPTER I
Images of Integrity: *Living "Divided No More"*

> *Jack pines . . . are not lumber trees [and they] won't win many beauty contests either. But to me this valiant old tree, solitary on its own rocky point, is as beautiful as a living thing can be. . . . In the calligraphy of its shape against the sky is written strength of character and perseverance, survival of wind, drought, cold, heat, disease. . . . In its silence it speaks of . . . wholeness . . . an integrity that comes from being what you are.*
>
> —DOUGLAS WOOD[1]

Into the Wilderness

Every summer, I go to the Boundary Waters, a million acres of pristine wilderness along the Minnesota-Ontario border. My first trip, years ago, was a vacation, pure and simple. But as I returned time and again to that elemental world of water, rock, woods, and sky, my vacation began to feel more like a pilgrimage to me—an annual trek to holy ground driven by spiritual need. Douglas Wood's meditation on the jack pine, a tree native to that part of the world, names what I go up north seeking: images of how life looks when it is lived with integrity.

Thomas Merton claimed that "there is in all things . . . a hidden wholeness."[2] But back in the human world—where we are less self-revealing than jack pines—Merton's words can, at times, sound like wishful thinking. Afraid that our inner light will be extinguished or our inner darkness exposed, we hide our true identities from each other. In the

process, we become separated from our own souls. We end up living divided lives, so far removed from the truth we hold within that we cannot know the “integrity that comes from being what you are.”

My knowledge of the divided life comes first from personal experience: I yearn to be whole, but dividedness often seems the easier choice. A “still, small voice” speaks the truth about me, my work, or the world. I hear it and yet act as if I did not. I withhold a personal gift that might serve a good end or commit myself to a project that I do not really believe in. I keep silent on an issue I should address or actively break faith with one of my own convictions. I deny my inner darkness, giving it more power over me, or I project it onto other people, creating “enemies” where none exist.

I pay a steep price when I live a divided life—feeling fraudulent, anxious about being found out, and depressed by the fact that I am denying my own selfhood. The people around me pay a price as well, for now they walk on ground made unstable by my dividedness. How can I affirm another’s identity when I deny my own? How can I trust another’s integrity when I defy my own? A fault line runs down the middle of my life, and whenever it cracks open—divorcing my words and actions from the truth I hold within—things around me get shaky and start to fall apart.

But up north, in the wilderness, I sense the wholeness hidden “in all things.” It is in the taste of wild berries, the scent of sunbaked pine, the sight of the Northern Lights, the sound of water lapping the shore, signs of a bedrock integrity that is eternal and beyond all doubt. And when I return to a human world that is transient and riddled with disbelief, I have new eyes for the wholeness hidden in me and my kind and a new heart for loving even our imperfections.

In fact, the wilderness constantly reminds me that wholeness is not about perfection. On July 4, 1999, a twenty-minute maelstrom of hurricane-force winds took down twenty million trees across the Boundary Waters.[3] A month later, when I made my annual pilgrimage up north, I was heartbroken by the ruin and wondered whether I wanted to return. And yet on each visit since, I have been astonished to see how nature uses devastation to stimulate new growth, slowly but persistently healing her own wounds.

Wholeness does not mean perfection: it means embracing brokenness as an integral part of life. Knowing this gives me hope that human wholeness—mine, yours, ours—need not be a utopian dream, if we can use devastation as a seedbed for new life.

Beyond Ethics

The divided life comes in many and varied forms. To cite just a few examples, it is the life we lead when

- We refuse to invest ourselves in our work, diminishing its quality and distancing ourselves from those it is meant to serve
- We make our living at jobs that violate our basic values, even when survival does not absolutely demand it
- We remain in settings or relationships that steadily kill off our spirits
- We harbor secrets to achieve personal gain at the expense of other people
- We hide our beliefs from those who disagree with us to avoid conflict, challenge, and change

- We conceal our true identities for fear of being criticized, shunned, or attacked

Dividedness is a personal pathology, but it soon becomes a problem for other people. It is a problem for students whose teachers “phone it in” while taking cover behind their podiums and their power. It is a problem for patients whose doctors practice medical indifference, hiding behind a self-protective scientific facade. It is a problem for employees whose supervisors have personnel handbooks where their hearts should be. It is a problem for citizens whose political leaders speak “with forked tongue.”

As I write, the media are filled with stories of people whose dividedness is now infamous. They worked at such places as Enron, Arthur Andersen, Merrill Lynch, WorldCom, and the Roman Catholic Church, to name a few. Surely these people heard an inner call to wholeness. But they became separated from their own souls, betraying the trust of citizens, stockholders, and the faithful—and making our democracy, our economy, and our religious institutions less trustworthy in the process.

These particular stories will soon fade from the front page, but the story of the divided life will be in the news forever. Its drama is perennial, and its social costs are immense. The poet Rumi said it with ruthless candor eight hundred years ago: “If you are here unfaithfully with us / you’re causing terrible damage.”[4]

How shall we understand the pathology of the divided life? If we approach it as a problem to be solved by “raising the ethical bar”—exhorting each other to jump higher and meting out tougher penalties to those who fall short—we may feel more virtuous for a while, but we will not address the problem at its source.

The divided life, at bottom, is not a failure of ethics. It is a failure of human wholeness. Doctors who are dismissive of patients, politicians who lie to the voters, executives who cheat retirees out of their savings, clerics who rob children of their well-being—these people, for the most part, do not lack ethical knowledge or convictions. They doubtless took courses on professional ethics and probably received top grades. They gave speeches and sermons on ethical issues and more than likely believed their own words. But they had a well-rehearsed habit of holding their own knowledge and beliefs at great remove from the living of their lives.

That habit is vividly illustrated by a story in the news as I write. The former CEO of a biotechnology firm was convicted of insider trading and sentenced to seven years in prison after putting his daughter and elderly father in legal jeopardy by having them cover for him. Asked what was on his mind as he committed his crimes, he said, "I could sit there . . . thinking I was the most honest CEO that ever lived [and] at the same time . . . glibly do something [wrong] and rationalize it."[5]

Those words were spoken by an expert at "compartmentalizing"—a much-prized capacity in many lines of work but at bottom no more than a six-syllable name for the divided life. Few of us may share the speaker's fate, but many of us already share his expertise: we developed it at school, where ethics, like most subjects, tends to be taught in ways that leave our inner lives untouched.

As teenagers and young adults, we learned that self-knowledge counts for little on the road to workplace success. What counts is the "objective" knowledge that empowers us to manipulate the world. Ethics, taught in this context, becomes one more arm's-length study of great

thinkers and their thoughts, one more exercise in data collection that fails to inform our hearts.

I value ethical standards, of course. But in a culture like ours—which devalues or dismisses the reality and power of the inner life—ethics too often becomes an external code of conduct, an objective set of rules we are told to follow, a moral exoskeleton we put on hoping to prop ourselves up. The problem with exoskeletons is simple: we can slip them off as easily as we can don them.

I also value integrity. But that word means much more than adherence to a moral code: it means "the state or quality of being entire, complete, and unbroken," as in *integer* or *integral.* Deeper still, integrity refers to something—such as a jack pine or the human self—in its "unimpaired, unadulterated, or genuine state, corresponding to its original condition."[6]

When we understand integrity for what it is, we stop obsessing over codes of conduct and embark on the more demanding journey toward being whole. Then we learn the truth of John Middleton Murry's remark, "For the good [person] to realize that it is better to be whole than to be good is to enter on a strait and narrow path compared to which his [or her] previous rectitude was flowery license."[7]

Living "Divided No More"

A jack pine "solitary on its rocky point" is one of the loveliest sights I know. But lovelier still is the sight of a man or woman standing with integrity intact. Speak the names of Rosa Parks or Nelson Mandela—or other names known nowhere but within your own grateful heart—and you catch a glimpse of the beauty that arises when people refuse to live divided lives.

Of course, wholeness comes more easily to jack pines than to human beings: *Pinus banksia* is unable to think itself into trouble! We are cursed with the blessing of consciousness and choice, a two-edged sword that both divides us and can help us become whole. But choosing wholeness, which sounds like a good thing, turns out to be risky business, making us vulnerable in ways we would prefer to avoid.

As I was working on this book, *Time* magazine published its 2002 year-end issue, naming Cynthia Cooper, Coleen Rowley, and Sherron Watkins its "Persons of the Year."[8] They were honored for confronting corruption at WorldCom, the FBI, and Enron, respectively, honored for turning their consciousness toward living "divided no more." They took their inner truth into the outer world, reclaiming their personal wholeness and helping our society reclaim some of its own.

Sadly such courage is not universally admired. Sherron Watkins has been reviled by some of her ex-colleagues at Enron, who believe that if she had kept her mouth shut, they could have saved the company and their jobs.[9] Since much of the evidence suggests that Enron had become a massive shell game, their criticism tells us less about a good business plan than about how unpopular integrity can be. "There is a price to be paid," said Cynthia Cooper of WorldCom. "There have been times that I could not stop crying."[10]

In the wash of information that surrounds us, the stories of Cooper, Rowley, and Watkins will soon be swept away. And yet I have to wonder, is information overload our problem, or did we *want* to forget how these three witnessed to the real-world possibility of an undivided life? That three ordinary people refused to live a lie means the rest of us could do it, too—if we were willing to embrace the challenge of becoming whole.

But we cannot embrace that challenge all alone, at least, not for long: we need trustworthy relationships, tenacious communities of support, if we are to sustain the journey toward an undivided life. That journey has solitary passages, to be sure, and yet it is simply too arduous to take without the assistance of others. And because we have such a vast capacity for self-delusion, we will inevitably get lost *en route* without correctives from outside of ourselves.

Over the years, my own need for community has led me to collaborate with others in creating settings where there is mutual encouragement for "rejoining soul and role." One result has been a national retreat program for public school educators who face daily threats to their personal and professional integrity—threats that, if they go unmet, will imperil our children's well-being.[11]

As word of that program spread, people in other arenas—parents and politicians, clergy and physicians, community organizers and corporate executives, youth workers and attorneys—began to ask where they could get similar help. In response, the program was expanded to help people from many walks of life bring their integrity more fully into the world.[12]

So this book is not a theory in search of applications: the principles and practices explored here have been proven on the ground. Now they seek even wider use, wherever people want to live undivided lives that are joined to the needs of the world. The first half of the book explores the sources of our dividedness and of the call to live "divided no more." The second half offers guidance for creating settings where people can support each other on the journey toward an undivided life:

- Chapter II diagnoses the divided life, examines its personal and social consequences, and tells stories of

what integrity looks like from infancy into adulthood.

- Chapter III lays out evidence for the claim that we arrive in this world with a soul or true self and looks at what happens when we ignore, defy, or embrace our own truth.
- Chapter IV explores a paradox: our solitary journey toward rejoining soul and role requires relationships, a rare but real form of community that I call a "circle of trust."
- Chapter V names the preparations required if that inner journey in community is to take us somewhere worth going.
- Chapters VI, VII, VIII, and IX describe in detail the practices necessary to create spaces between us where the soul feels safe enough to show up and make its claim on our lives.
- Chapter X makes the case that the principles and practices explored in this book can help us walk the path of nonviolence in our everyday lives. Can we learn to respond to the mounting violence of our time with soul-honoring and life-giving ways of being in the world? Much depends on the answer.

Notes

1. Douglas Wood, *Fawn Island* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 3–4.

2. Thomas Merton, "Hagia Sophia," in Thomas P. McDonnell, ed., *A Thomas Merton Reader* (New York: Image/Doubleday, 1974, 1989), p. 506.

3. U.S. Department of Agriculture, *A Changing Forest* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2001).

4. Rumi, “Forget Your Life,” in Stephen Mitchell, ed., *The Enlightened Heart* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), p. 56.

5. Sam Waksal, interview with Steve Kroft, *60 Minutes,* CBS News, Oct. 6, 2003. See http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/10/02/60minutes/main576328.shtml.

6. Noah Porter, ed., *Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary* (Spring-field, Mass.: Merriam, 1913), p. 774.

7. John Middleton Murry, quoted in M. C. Richards, *Centering* (Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), epigraph.

8. “Persons of the Year,” *Time,* Dec. 30, 2002–Jan. 6, 2003, pp. 30 ff.

9. Ibid., p. 33.

10. Ibid.

11. For more information about the program for public school educators, go to http://www.teacherformation.org.

12. For more information about the expanded program, go to http://www.teacherformation.org and click on the section for readers of *A Hidden Wholeness.*

CHAPTER II
Across the Great Divide: *Rejoining Soul and Role*

> *As once the wingèd energy of delight carried you over childhood's dark abysses, now beyond your own life build the great arch of unimagined bridges.*
>
> —RAINER MARIA RILKE[1]

A Child's Secret Life

The instinct to protect ourselves by living divided lives emerges when we are young, as we start to see the gaps between life's bright promise and its shadowy realities. But as children, we are able to deal with those "dark abysses" by sailing across them on the "wingèd energy of delight" that is every child's birthright gift.

This energy comes from the soul—the core of pure being that children are so intimate with—that is, as the poet Rumi says, "here for its own joy."[2] The remarkable resilience youngsters often reveal, even in the face of great hardship, comes from this place called the soul. And the soul animates the "secret lives" that many of us led as children, in an effort to shield our vulnerable selfhood from the threats of the world.

My own secret life started in the fifth or sixth grade. At school, where I wanted to fit in, people saw me as outgoing and self-assured. I made friends easily, knew how to get a laugh, often had my hand up in class, and was elected president of one thing and another more often than FDR. Though I could not dribble a basketball downcourt without

tripping over myself, my clumsiness served me well, making me less threatening to other boys and evoking the maternal instinct in girls.

But no one knew how anxious my public role made me. After school, I did not hang out with friends; I hid out in my bedroom. With the door shut tight against the world, I read stories, built model airplanes, or immersed myself in the fantasy realm of radio serial adventures. My room was a monastic cell where I could be the self with whom I felt most at home—the introspective and imaginative self so unlike the extrovert I played with such anxiety at school.

The details of this story are mine alone, but at bottom it is the story of most people I know. As we cross the rising terrain between infancy and adolescence—still close enough to our origins to be in touch with inner truth but aware of the mounting pressure to play someone else "out there"—the true self starts to feel threatened. We deal with the threat by developing a child's version of the divided life, commuting daily between the public world of role and the hidden world of soul.

The secret lives of children have inspired some splendid literature, of course. In C. S. Lewis's classic *Chronicles of Narnia,* we read about a magic wardrobe through which young Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy pass from their humdrum existence in the English countryside into a parallel universe of light and shadow, of mystery and moral demand, confronting the daunting and bracing challenges of the inner journey.[3] I have never doubted the truth of the Narnia tales: that magic wardrobe was in my bedroom, too!

But when we turn from literature to life, this charming feature of childhood soon disappears, to be replaced by an adult pathology. As the outer world becomes more demanding—and today it presses in on children at an obscenely early age—we stop going to our rooms, shutting

the door, walking into the wardrobe, and entering the world of the soul. And the closer we get to adulthood, the more we stifle the imagination that journey requires. Why? Because imagining other possibilities for our lives would remind us of the painful gap between who we most truly are and the role we play in the so-called real world.

As we become more obsessed with succeeding, or at least surviving, in that world, we lose touch with our souls and disappear into our roles. The child with a harmless after-school secret becomes the masked and armored adult—at considerable cost to self, to others, and to the world at large. It is a cost that can be itemized in ways well known to many of us:

- We sense that something is missing in our lives and search the world for it, not understanding that what is missing is us.
- We feel fraudulent, even invisible, because we are not in the world as who we really are.
- The light that is within us cannot illuminate the world's darkness.
- The darkness that is within us cannot be illuminated by the world's light.
- We project our inner darkness on others, making "enemies" of them and making the world a more dangerous place.
- Our inauthenticity and projections make real relationships impossible, leading to loneliness.
- Our contributions to the world—especially through the work we do—are tainted by duplicity and deprived of the life-giving energies of true self.

Those are not exactly the marks of a life well lived. But they are not uncommon among us, in part because the dividedness that creates them comes highly recommended by popular culture. “Don’t wear your heart on your sleeve” and “Hold your cards close to your vest” are just two examples of how we are told from an early age that “masked and armored” is the safe and sane way to live.

But our culture has it backward. The truth is that the more dividedness we perceive in each other, the less safe and sane we feel. Every day—as we interact with family, friends, acquaintances, and strangers—we ask ourselves if “what we see is what we get.” And all those other people are asking the same about us! Being cautious about the degree of congruence between outer appearance and inner reality is one of our species’ most ancient ways of seeking safety in a perilous world.

“Is this person the same on the inside as he or she seems to be on the outside?” Children ask this about their parents, students about their teachers, employees about their supervisors, patients about their physicians, and citizens about their political leaders. When the answer is yes, we relax, believing that we are in the presence of integrity and feeling secure enough to invest ourselves in the relationship and all that surrounds it.

But when the answer is no, we go on high alert. Not knowing who or what we are dealing with and feeling unsafe, we hunker down in a psychological foxhole and withhold the investment of our energy, commitment, and gifts. Students refuse to take the risks involved in learning, employees do not put their hearts into their work, patients cannot partner with physicians in their own healing, and citizens disengage from the political process. The perceived incongruity of inner and outer—the inauthenticity that we