



CENTER *for*
**COURAGE &
RENEWAL**

FOUNDATIONS OF THE COURAGE & RENEWAL[®] APPROACH

“By choosing integrity, I become more whole, but wholeness does not mean perfection. It means becoming more real by acknowledging the whole of who I am.”

-Parker J. Palmer

THE CENTER FOR COURAGE & RENEWAL'S MISSION

The Center for Courage & Renewal exists to nurture deep integrity and relational trust, building the foundation for a more loving, equitable, healthy world.

WHAT WE DO AND WHY WE DO IT

Through Circle of Trust® retreats and programs rooted in the Courage & Renewal® approach, we nurture supportive communities of reflection and practice to help people come alive with a renewed sense of purpose, build trustworthy relationships, and cultivate the courage to rise to today's challenges, making a difference within themselves, their work, and the world.

While the forces of exhaustion, loneliness, violence, and injustice are real and undeniable, so are the powers of human authenticity, generosity, courage, and community that rise up to meet them.

Whatever personal or societal divisions we face, the resources we need to transform our lives and the world can always be found within us and between us - in the human heart and in community. When we fully embrace the genuine within ourselves and honor the inherent worth and dignity of every being, we move towards wholeness and unleash the power to build a better world.

The source of our integrity - the genuine within us - goes by many names: soul, true self, inner light, identity. When we connect with that part of ourselves and celebrate it in others, we gain a clearer understanding of who we truly are, why we're here, and the gifts we bring to the world individually and collectively.

When we show up in our homes, relationships, workplaces, communities, and ecosystems rooted in our own integrity and with a deep bow to human dignity, we inspire hope in those around us and foster the relational trust and stamina we need to keep moving, step by step, toward a more loving, equitable, and healthy world.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CENTER FOR COURAGE & RENEWAL

In 1997, Parker J. Palmer with Marcy Jackson and Rick Jackson founded what would become the Center for Courage & Renewal. First known as the Center for Teacher Formation, our organization began as a program within the Fetzer Institute. Courage to Teach® became the premier program helping teachers connect soul with role, rekindling their passion for educating the whole student.

As our approach grew more popular within the teaching profession and other social sectors, the Center for Courage & Renewal was established as an independent nonprofit in 2003 to create programs and immersive Circle of Trust® retreats for people in education, healthcare, ministry, nonprofits, activism, business, and anyone yearning to become more authentic and whole.

THE COURAGE & RENEWAL APPROACH & OUR CORE VALUES

The Courage & Renewal approach is distinguished by principles and practices intended to create supportive communities of reflection and belonging that help people move towards personal and societal wholeness, explore questions of meaning and purpose, and keep showing up for themselves, for others, and for the causes they care about with integrity and courage.

The ways in which wholeness and division show up within us personally and between us societally are inextricably linked. One of the tensions we hold in our work is the reality that, even as we choose to create spaces that invite the soul and nurture wholeness and relational trust, the forces that push us toward the divided life are always present.

Across the world, billions of people live in communities with deeply entrenched legacies of violence, colonialism, and supremacist ideologies. Indeed, as Parker J. Palmer writes, “...violence is woven into the very fabric of our collective existence.” One result of these harmful and ongoing legacies is that we, as active members of these communities, have been conditioned to value certain aspects of human experience and expression over others, creating false hierarchies of humanity and sowing seeds of personal and societal division. Such divisive forces cultivate myriad forms of othering, marginalization, and oppression, including racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, ableism, classism, religious prejudice, ageism, and nationalism. Whether intentionally or unintentionally - conscious or unconscious - the dynamics of power, privilege, bias, internalized oppression and superiority that are fostered in our societies show up inside of us and around us at every level of our lives.

The Courage & Renewal approach helps us actively and intentionally choose to nurture ways of being with ourselves and one another that move against the violent, oppressive forces that create personal and societal division. Instead, we choose to embody core values and practices that move us towards personal and societal wholeness, embracing the genuine within us, and honoring the inherent worth and dignity of every being. These are not choices we make just once, but ones that must be made time and again - for ourselves and our community.

We Choose Integrity: Living and working with integrity requires us to develop greater congruence between our inner and outer selves, to live less divided lives. To move towards such wholeness we must become more self-aware and accepting of our gifts and strengths as well as our shadows and limits.

We Choose Authenticity: When we “show up” as whole people and act authentically, those with whom we live and work are more willing to trust us in relationship and leadership. This can lead to transformed workplaces and organizations.

We Choose Diversity: Diversity is a deeply valued source of strength, richness, and wisdom for us and for the communities in which we live and work. The capacity to welcome and make space for diverse voices and multiple perspectives is critical to the creation of circles of trust, and to the healing and wholeness needed in our world.

We Choose Community: As we do “inner work,” we are not simply focusing inwardly on ourselves. Rather, we become more aware of the fabric of our connectedness with others in our families, workplaces, and communities. This results in an ongoing sense of responsibility and stewardship of the people and concerns that most matter to us.

We Choose Courage: For people whose vocation is serving others, courage is needed to persevere and be “whole-hearted” in the often overwhelming circumstances in which we are trying to make a difference—whether that be in the life of a child, patient, congregation, or community.

We Choose Love: Our work is grounded in love, by which we mean the capacity to extend ourselves for the sake of another person’s growth. Our work in community stretches us to understand, respect, and support each other, teaching us why learning to love is one of the most demanding disciplines we can choose.

We Choose Hope: Hope is believing and acting on our finest and most dearly held dreams, persisting even when the odds are against them. In the midst of the despair and broken-heartedness experienced by so many in our world today, our work engenders hope for people to live purposeful lives, do meaningful work, and make contributions to succeeding generations.

We Choose Renewal: Just as we experience nature’s cycle of renewal through the seasons, so we experience natural cycles of engagement and withdrawal, love and loss, creativity and despair in our personal lives and work. When we take time to slow down, quiet ourselves and reflect, to renew ourselves, and recall our commitments, important changes can happen within us and around us. As we are renewed, we in turn can contribute to the renewal of our professions, workplaces, communities, and ecosystems.

COURAGE & RENEWAL TOUCHSTONES FOR TRUSTWORTHY SPACE

Facilitators of Courage & Renewal programs use these Touchstones to define clear boundaries in a Circle of Trust, the kinds of boundaries that create trustworthy space for the soul. While these Touchstones define how we relate in a retreat, they can be adapted to support workplaces, communities, and other groups – any place where we want to honor the integrity of the individual and build relational trust.

- **Give and receive welcome.** People learn best in hospitable spaces. In this circle we support each other's learning by giving and receiving hospitality.
- **Be present as fully as possible.** Be here with your doubts, fears and failings as well as your convictions, joys and successes, your listening as well as your speaking.
- **What is offered in the circle is by invitation, not demand.** This is not a "share or die" event! Do whatever your soul calls for, and know that you do it with our support. Your soul knows your needs better than we do.
- **Speak your truth in ways that respect other people's truth.** Our views of reality may differ, but speaking one's truth in a circle of trust does not mean interpreting, correcting or debating what others say. Speak from your center to the center of the circle, using "I" statements, trusting people to do their own sifting and winnowing.
- **No fixing, saving, advising or correcting each other.** This is one of the hardest guidelines for those of us who like to "help." But it is vital to welcoming the soul, to making space for the inner teacher.
- **Learn to respond to others with honest, open questions.** Do not respond with counsel or corrections. Using honest, open questions helps us "hear each other into deeper speech."
- **When the going gets rough, turn to wonder.** Turn from reaction and judgment to wonder and compassionate inquiry. Ask yourself, "I wonder why they feel/think this way?" or "I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?" Set aside judgment to listen to others—and to yourself—more deeply.
- **Attend to your own inner teacher.** We learn from others, of course. But as we explore poems, stories, questions and silence in a circle of trust, we have a special opportunity to learn from within. So pay close attention to your own reactions and responses, to your most important teacher.
- **Trust and learn from the silence.** Silence is a gift in our noisy world, and a way of knowing in itself. Treat silence as a member of the group. After someone has spoken, take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words.

- **Observe deep confidentiality.** Safety is built when we can trust that our words and stories will remain with the people with whom we choose to share, and are not repeated to others without our permission.
- **Know that it's possible** to leave the circle with whatever it was that you needed when you arrived, and that the seeds planted here can keep growing in the days ahead.

One of the gifts we are given in a circle of trust is a chance to see how abnormal violence is. Here, under conditions that evoke “the better angels of our nature,” we experience our innate capacity to honor, not violate, the identity and integrity of others. And we witness the remarkable things that can happen — within us, between us, and beyond us — as we learn to relate to each other that way.

-Parker J. Palmer, A Hidden Wholeness

PRINCIPLES OF THE COURAGE & RENEWAL APPROACH

If we are willing to embrace the challenge of becoming whole, we cannot embrace it alone — at least, not for long: we need trustworthy relationships to sustain us, tenacious communities of support, to sustain the journey toward an undivided life. Taking an inner journey toward rejoining soul and role requires a rare but real form of community that I call a “circle of trust.”

-Parker J. Palmer, A Hidden Wholeness

- **Everyone has an inner teacher:** Every person has access to an inner source of truth, named in various wisdom traditions as identity, true self, heart, spirit or soul. The inner teacher is a source of guidance and strength that helps us find our way through life’s complexities and challenges. Circles of Trust give people a chance to listen to this source, learn from it and discover its imperatives for their work and their lives.
- **Inner work requires solitude and community:** In Circles of Trust we make space for the solitude that allows us to learn from within, while supporting that solitude with the resources of community. Participants take an inner journey in community where we learn how to evoke and challenge each other without being judgmental, directive, or invasive.
- **Inner work must be invitational:** Circles of Trust are never “share or die” events, but times and places where people have the freedom within a purposeful process to learn and grow in their own way, on their own schedule, and at their own level of need. From start to finish, this approach invites participation rather than insisting upon it because the inner teacher speaks by choice, not on command.
- **Our lives move in cycles like the seasons:** By using metaphors drawn from the seasons to frame our exploration of the inner life, we create a hospitable space that allows people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives to engage in a respectful dialogue. These metaphors represent cycles of life—such as the alternation of darkness and light, death and new life—shared by everyone in a secular, pluralistic society regardless of philosophical, religious, or spiritual differences.
- **An appreciation of paradox enriches our lives and helps us hold greater complexity:** The journey we take in a Circle of Trust teaches us to approach the many polarities that come with being human as “both-and” rather than “either-ors,” holding them in ways that open us to new insights and possibilities. We listen to the inner teacher and to the voices in the circle, letting our own insights and the wisdom that can emerge in conversation check and balance each other. We trust both our intellects and the knowledge that comes through our bodies, intuitions, and emotions.

- **We live with greater integrity when we see ourselves whole:** Integrity means integrating all that we are into our sense of self, embracing our shadows and limitations as well as our light and our gifts. As we deepen the congruence between our inner and outer lives we show up more fully in the key relationships and events of our lives, increasing our capacity to be authentic and courageous in life and work.
- **A "hidden wholeness" underlies our lives:** Whatever brokenness we experience in ourselves and in the world, a "hidden wholeness" can be found just beneath the surface. The capacity to stand and act with integrity in the gap between what is and what could be or should be—resisting both the corrosive cynicism that comes from seeing only what is broken and the irrelevant idealism that comes from seeing only what is not—has been key to every life-giving movement and is among the fruits of the Courage & Renewal approach.

PRACTICES OF THE COURAGE & RENEWAL APPROACH

In this culture, we know how to create spaces that invite the intellect to show up, to argue its case, to make its point. We know how to create spaces that invite the emotions to show up, to express anger or joy. We know how to create spaces that invite the will to show up, to consolidate effort and energy around a common task. And we surely know how to create spaces that invite the ego to show up, preening itself and claiming its turf! But we seem to know very little about creating spaces that invite the soul to show up, this core of ourselves, our selfhood.

-Parker J. Palmer, A Hidden Wholeness

- **Creating spaces that are open and hospitable, but resource-rich and charged with expectancy:** In a Circle of Trust, we are invited to slow down, listen, and reflect in a quiet and focused space. At the same time, we engage in dialogue with others in the circle—a dialogue about things that matter. As this “sorting and sifting” goes on, and we are able to clarify and affirm our truth in the presence of others, that truth is more likely to overflow into our work and lives.
- **Committing to no fixing, advising, “saving” or correcting one another:** Everything we do is guided by this simple rule, one that honors the primacy and integrity of the inner teacher. When we are free from external judgment, we are more likely to have an honest conversation with ourselves and learn to check and correct ourselves from within.
- **Asking honest, open questions to “hear each other into speech”:** Instead of advising each other, we learn to listen deeply and ask questions that help others hear their own inner wisdom more clearly. As we learn to ask questions that are not advice in disguise, that have no other purpose than to help someone listen to the inner teacher, all of us learn and grow.
- **Exploring the intersection of the universal stories of human experience with the personal stories of our lives:** Guided conversations focused on a poem, a teaching story, a piece of music, or a work of art—drawn from diverse cultures and wisdom traditions—invite us to reflect on the “big questions” of our lives, allowing each person to intersect and explore them in their own way.
- **Using multiple modes of reflection so everyone can find their place and pace:** In Circles of Trust, we speak and we listen. We explore important questions in large group conversation and dialogues in small groups. We make time for individual reflection and journaling. We respect nonverbal ways of learning, including music, movement, and the arts. We honor the educative power of silence and the healing power of laughter. Together we weave a “tapestry of truth” with many and diverse threads, creating a pattern in which everyone can find a place that both affirms and stretches them.

- **Honoring confidentiality:** Participants in Circles of Trust understand that nothing said in these circles will be revealed outside the circle and that things said by participants will not be pursued when a session ends, unless the speaker requests it.

THE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES AT WORK IN THE WORLD

The work of the Center for Courage & Renewal and the Courage & Renewal® approach is informed by a movement model of social change. Every social movement, small and large, that has made the world a more just and hospitable place has been animated by active respect for human identity and integrity.

Typically, these movements have unfolded in four stages:

- 1) Individuals make the decision to stop leading “divided lives.”
- 2) These people discover each other and form communities for mutual support to help sustain that decision.
- 3) Empowered by community, they go public with their values and visions.
- 4) Movements develop – and become – alternative reward systems, thus weakening the inhumane sanctions that are the basis of every harmful institution’s power.

What happens in a Circle of Trust – grounded in honoring the identity and integrity of each participant – flows out into the world as an authentic source of personal and societal healing and a power for positive social change. Participants in a Circle of Trust return to their homes, workplaces, and communities, taking two important resources with them:

- 1) Greater access to the inner teacher and a new depth of self-knowledge, often resulting in a clearer sense of guidance for their personal and professional lives and a resolve to live closer to their core commitments.
- 2) Principles and practices from the Courage & Renewal approach that can be applied to their daily lives.

As a result of participating in circles of trust people report:

- a stronger sense of purpose and integrity
- expanded capacity to be fully present to others in ways that affirm and heal
- increased skill in asking the honest, open questions that help others uncover their own inner wisdom
- greater confidence to seek or create communities of support
- increased understanding, appreciation, and respect for human differences, based in deeper awareness of the identity and integrity of ourselves and others
- greater capacity to build the relational trust vital to healthy relationships, workplaces, and communities
- more courage to live authentically
- renewed passion for their work or vocation
- a deeper commitment to leadership and service to others

*To learn more about the work of the Center for Courage & Renewal, please visit www.couragerenewal.org. For more about the principles and practices of the Courage & Renewal approach in theory and in practice, please see Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004).*