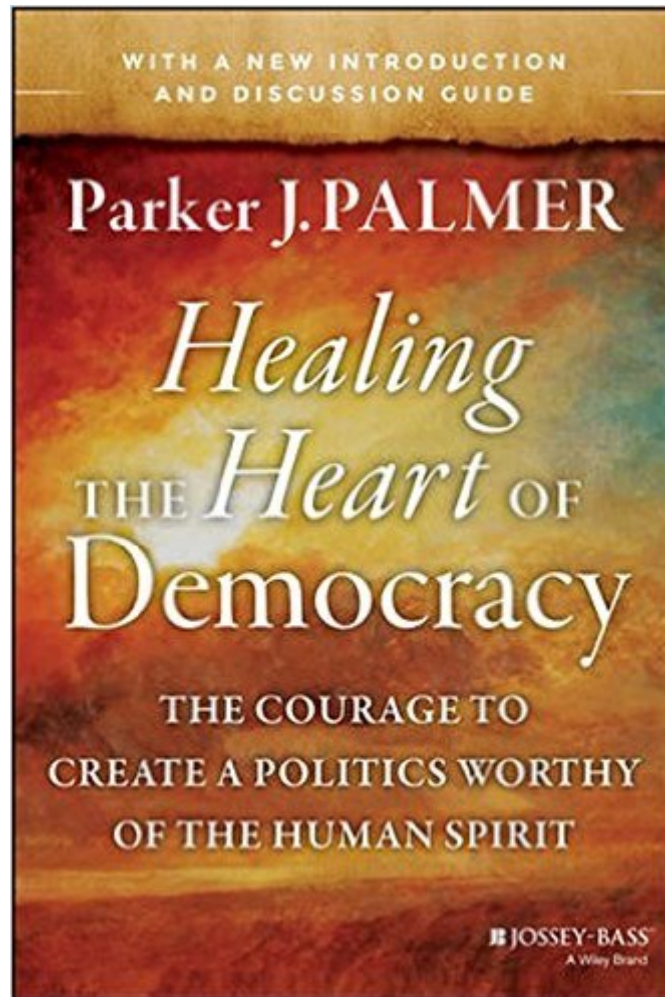


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# Healing The Heart Of Democracy: The Courage To Create A Politics Worthy Of The Human Spirit



## Synopsis

This 2014 PAPERBACK EDITION includes TWO NEW FEATURES: (1) A chapter-length INTRODUCTION in which Palmer explores his political experience since the book first came out in 2011, including a new way to understand "the great divide" in our political life. (2) A detailed DISCUSSION GUIDE with links to online resources -- including 40 brief video interviews with the author -- to facilitate more dialogue across political lines of the sort the book has inspired since it was published.

~ HOPE FOR AMERICAN DEMOCRACY IN AN ERA OF DEEP DIVISIONS ~

In *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, Parker J. Palmer quickens our instinct to seek the common good and gives us the tools to do it. This timely, courageous and practical work -- intensely personal as well as political -- is not about them, "those people" in Washington D.C., or in our state capitals, on whom we blame our political problems. It's about us, "We the People," and what we can do in everyday settings like families, neighborhoods, classrooms, congregations and workplaces to resist divide-and-conquer politics and restore a government "of the people, by the people, for the people." In the same compelling, inspiring prose that has made him a bestselling author, Palmer explores five "habits of the heart" that can help us restore democracy's foundations as we nurture them in ourselves and each other: (1) An understanding that we are all in this together. (2) An appreciation of the value of "otherness." (3) An ability to hold tensions in life-giving ways. (4) A sense of personal voice and agency. (5) A capacity to create community.

*Healing the Heart of Democracy* is an eloquent and empowering call for "We the People" to reclaim our democracy. Publishers Weekly, in a *Starred Review*, said "This beautifully written book deserves a wide audience that will benefit from discussing it." And the online journal *Democracy & Education* called it "one of the most important books of the early 21st Century."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Parker Palmer's newest book, *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, has that distinction that most good books carry - it inspires me and indicts me. It inspires me with so much honest and genuine examination of what America can and has been and what I could be with it and it indicts what America hasn't been and, again, me with it. Every time he names a struggle in America he counters it with a habit of the heart I need to be developing to bring my best citizenship to that struggle; irritatingly, he takes away all the fun I have pointing my finger of righteous indignation at Washington or my state legislature or even my local city council and says over and over with story and insight as Gandhi stated long ago, be the change you wish to see. Case in point, take his discussion of the interaction with a homeless person and the sociological imagination Palmer suggests reframing this engagement with compassionate imagination; it unsettles even though he refuses to take on the issue of whether we give money or not - which is where most of us stop - let's argue the particular; Palmer suggests there is a deeper or at least different way of interacting with "otherness" but doesn't dictate what that needs to be; he leaves that call to a higher interaction for us to define. Of course, this is the least acceptable approach for all of us because when someone tells us how we should use our sociological imagination to interact with homeless people we can run willy-nilly to our reasonable arguments for rejecting or affirming his proposal. Leaving the sociological imagination unspecified for us to define redirects us from the realm of logical thrust and parry and gently invites us to deeper reflection on what the individual - me - in community might mean for us.

Concerned and frustrated about the condition of American political life? Weary of the self-righteous posturing and angry sound bites that characterize our debates? If so, I heartily recommend *Healing the Heart of Democracy* to you. Parker Palmer looks for the cause of the anger, the demonization, and the strident rhetoric that characterize so much of our political conversation. What he finds is not ignorance or ideology or the influences of money and media, but something rather surprising -- heartbreak, heartbreak about the condition of our culture, our society, our body politic. "That shared heartbreak," says Palmer, "can build a footbridge of mutual understanding on which we can walk toward each other." This central insight illuminates much that goes unexplained by the usual political analyses. By looking at our politics from the perspective of the human heart, Palmer reveals the

vulnerability we share rather than the differences we so often display. We mask this heartbreak and suffering by retreating into silence or anger. We impatiently resolve the tensions between positions rather than sit with them and those who hold them. But there is a heavy cost for this impatience: "violence is what we get when we do not know what else to do with our suffering." Tensions in political life are not a sign of failure, he writes, they are a sign of vitality. "Our form of government was designed not to suppress our differences, but to keep the energy of their tension alive so that it could animate the body politic." But such tension is not easy to live with and most of us seek to resolve it by collapsing toward one pole or the other. Palmer urges us to have the courage to live with this tension. Palmer is hopeful, but not naïve.

Palmer's new book is a rare achievement -- idealistic yet pragmatic, deeply spiritual yet often entertaining, it is comfortably academic and at the same time wonderfully practical. I suspect that Palmer's description of his own mindset, as he contemplates the current political, economic and social conditions of our democracy, very closely resembles that of many of us. He says that he did his best to resist writing this book because, "I felt too old, too weary, and disheartened to take the job on, let alone to do it well." One understands! We too grieve these conditions and may wonder about the future of our "great democratic experiment". Yet in the following paragraph Palmer shares this thought: "...writing this book has rejuvenated me ... I now feel better equipped to engage creatively in the conflicts of democracy as a citizen who cares about the common good." The careful reader may well experience a like transformation. This book pushes us to the heart level as we consider the important issues/challenges/decisions of our age. Our HEADS are inevitably drawn into the fray - and in fact the "talking heads" that fill up our airwaves in these times would do the thinking for us! But herein we find a rationale and a plea to address "the visible political realities without losing sight of the HEART that animates them." The focus is on the heart, on one hand, "broken-heartedness" (over the strife and intransigence among our elected leaders and among ourselves), and, on the other, "having our hearts broken open". This frame provides an insightful way to study and come to terms with our capacity to hold the tensions that confront us in life, and to use them toward "creative ends."

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