

## The Inner Life of Rebellion by On Being

PARKER PALMER: It's an act of rebellion to show up as someone trying to be whole and I would add, as someone who believes that there is a hidden wholeness beneath the very evident brokenness of our world.

[music: "Seven League Boots" by Zoe Keating]

KRISTA TIPPETT, HOST: The history of rebellion is rife with burnout. Burnout, which Parker Palmer has defined, as "violating my own nature in the name of nobility." Then you have the irony of this moment we inhabit, where we are freer, psychologically and practically, to be rebels. But the forms and institutions we are dealing with don't need smashing. Most of them are imploding all on their own. Many of our acts of rebellion are in the first instance acts of creation. And that may be something importantly different, as Courtney Martin has written, from the mantra many of us grew up internalizing that we are supposed "to save the world."

COURTNEY MARTIN: I needed to reorient myself. Have a totally different relationship with rebellion that would last me a lifetime. And was honoring of the lifetimes of rebellion that have come before me that — here I thought I was just going to like graduate and head out into the world, and like, be super-efficient. I'm a little suspicious of efficiency, in part, because I crave it so much, and I think that that's a very generational thing. And emotions aren't efficient. And I think rebellion in many ways isn't efficient. And never will be.

MS. TIPPETT: I'm Krista Tippett, and this is On Being.

[music: "Seven League Boots" by Zoe Keating]

MS. TIPPETT: Rebellion was the subject of the 2014 PopTech conference, where I sat down for a cross-generational conversation with journalist and author Courtney Martin, together with her friend and mentor, the Quaker wise man Parker Palmer. We spoke on stage at the Opera House in Camden, Maine.

MS. TIPPETT: We have been looking forward to being here all year. And what we're going to do is delve into the human aspect of rebellion, the inner life of rebels, and that is a complicated and sometimes messy space.

If this generation does rebellion differently, generatively, resiliently, I think it will be, in part, because of a new redemptive commitment that I'm aware of in the world that is very much on display here at PopTech: To connect inner life and outer life, inner work and social change; To be reflective and activist at once; to be in service as much as in charge; and to be wise in learning from elders and from history while bringing very new realities into being for this age.

Courtney Martin and Parker Palmer are two of the wisest thinkers I know and they're two of the wisest teachers I know, on two places across the generational spectrum, about the work and the gift of creating transformative life-giving structures for our world by becoming transformed life-giving people.

And so I want to start, um, by asking the two of you to talk about what that word "rebellion" connotes for you. I mean, what your life experience has brought you to think about when you think about rebellion. And to reflect on that a little bit in terms of, you know, where you started, where you came from. And I'd like to start with you, Parker. You came of age in the middle of America, in the Midwest, in the 1950s. You went on to do graduate work at Berkeley, and to become a community organizer in Washington, D.C. in the 1960s.

MR. PALMER: You know, I think for me, uh, awakening into rebellion was a slow process. Certainly to be born in the '50s in a white upper middle class suburb of Chicago as I was, was to, uh, labor under the illusion that all was right with the world. Um, my first wake-up call came when I went to Union Theological Seminary in New York City for a year. Until God spoke to me and said he wanted me to get the hell out of the church.

[laughter]

Uh, and so he sent me to Berkeley...

[laughter]

...where I spent most of the '60s. And that was, you know, a huge education in the streets as well as in the classroom, in fact, more in the streets than in the classroom. And, I went there thinking I'd become a college professor. But, um, by the end of the '60s with the cities burning and my heroes having been assassinated, I went to Washington, D.C. and became a community organizer working on issues of racial justice.

Five years later, I realized that I was trying to lead people towards something that I had never really experienced for myself, namely community. And so, I went for what I thought was a sabbatical year, but ended up to be 11 years of my life to a place called Pendle Hill near Philadelphia, which is an intentional Quaker community that's arranged kind of like an ashram, kind of like a kibbutz, kind of like a commune, kind of like a monastery but sex was OK.

[laughter]

And lived there under conditions of radical equality. With a Ph.D. from Berkeley, I was Dean of Studies. But I made the exact same base salary as an 18-year-old coming to cook

in the kitchen or work in the garden, because he or she didn't know what to do next. One of the great gifts it brought to me in the middle of struggle was an understanding that the value of a person has absolutely nothing to do with status, power, income, leverage. The point is, we're constantly shaping reality and the world, and shaping ourselves in a simultaneous act. And I — these are the things that have led me to rebel against, um, the standard images of why people are or are not valuable, uh, how it is we're called to live together, rather than apart, um, what it means to change the world, which is something that can be done on a moment-by-moment basis, as well as in establishing organizations, uh, creating inventions, et cetera, et cetera.

MS. TIPPETT: Courtney, what has rebellion come to mean for you, and where did you start with that?

MS. MARTIN: Um, well, you know, I grew up in Colorado Springs, Colorado, which is a really religiously conservative town. But I grew up with these progressive parents who were sort of a product of that social movement era. I grew up with stories about my parents taking over the student union and getting beer in the student union, which to them seemed very important, in addition to like, um, diversifying the student body, and all these things. But my dad used to always jokingly say, you know, we wanted to change the world, and instead we just got rich.

Which you know, is sort of tongue in cheek. We weren't exactly rich, but we were comfortably middle class. And so, I kind of grew up with this sense of rebellion as kind of my, um, both birthright and birth burden. That somehow, you know, my parents had these big ideas, and they, in some ways, were able to realize them, but in a lot of ways, didn't. And so here I was, you know, this was now something I needed to carry on with me. And I think I really internalized that in a deep way.

Um, but when I sort of came of age, especially in college and post college, thinking about was that the script around rebellion that I'd inherited, not just from my parents, but sort of the world at large, was too simplistic. It was too flattened out, as kind of a white privileged American, it was this "save the world" rhetoric that we — you referenced.

Um, and who are you saving? In that scenario? And why do they need saving? And what form of saving? And so I think as I left college, I became very disillusioned with a lot of what I'd heard, both about the world at large, but also about my role in it, sort of questioning who am I to save anyone? And what is that all about? So one of the things I feel like my parents really entrusted me with was this idea that you should trust your own outrage. And being able to honor that anger, to me, is one of the most important muscles of a rebel.

MS. TIPPETT: You've written about your generation. You said that we are the most wanted, educated, diverse generation in history, and the most conscious of complexity. Um, and that one of the things you came to understand, also as you became a journalist, is that doing social justice entails a huge psychological risk. And I wonder if you would explain what you mean by that.

MS. MARTIN: I think, you know, I've heard that phrase about the simplicity on the other side of complexity and...

MS. TIPPETT: Yeah, Oliver Wendell Holmes. Yes.

MS. MARTIN: Yeah, I have such deep respect for that idea. Like that to me is what I crave

more than anything is — and I think part of why Parker’s writing is so beautiful, and his influence means so much is he is such a genius at the simplicity on the other side of complexity. But that is hard-earned. And I think that’s part of what I mean, is you know, there are really simple ways to be a just force in the world, and I think they are, you know, honoring the dignity of each human being you encounter, et cetera. But there’s so many complexities also. And so it’s about like if you’re trying to create systemic change, you have to think about all those complexities. And you have to think about yourself humbly within those complexities. Um, and that is exhausting. And I’ve had moments in my life where I’ve felt that way, of just totally paralyzed, um, but there’s such a powerlessness in that, too. So, I think there’s something — you have to have this like robustness around holding that complexity, and being able to acknowledge that it’s kind of beyond your comprehension, and yet you still have to keep trying to do it, and do it in the most ethically, honorable way.

MS. TIPPETT: Right.

MS. MARTIN: You know what I mean?

MS. TIPPETT: And I think you’ve pointed out that for your generation in particular, but I don’t think this is just restricted to any generation now, we’re so bombarded with facts, and details, and complexity, and usually the dark side of the complexity.

MS. MARTIN: Mm-hmm.

MS. TIPPETT: Right? Which is what comes to us as news for the most part. Um, and that whereas, you know, your generation in particular is accused of being apathetic, disengaged, you know, you’re saying, you know, people are just overwhelmed...

MS. MARTIN: Yeah.

MS. TIPPETT: ...that in fact, that very empathy, becomes a liability....

MS. MARTIN: Right.

MS. TIPPETT: ...because of what’s laid upon it.

MS. MARTIN: Absolutely. And I think there’s another part of our generation, when you have so much privilege, um, and you don’t want to sit around feeling guilty, you want to do something productive with it to want to run out there and make solutions happen. But the dark side of that instinct is that it just doesn’t acknowledge that complexity, and it can use a lot of resources in a way that ultimately is not benefitting or honoring the humanity of the people that you are supposedly trying to help.

MS. TIPPETT: Mm-hmm.

MR. PALMER: Mm. Well, on the complexity subject, I think Courtney has said some very important things. And I’ve been very influenced by her book, *Do It Anyway*, which helped me understand that my generation did it because they wanted to save the world, and when within five years, the world hadn’t changed one whit, and there’s been a lot of blowback, they gave up on that and turned to something banal, or worse.

Um, I want to throw in the word "community." I mean, I think complexity can only be held

by community. And I think that one of the most important things that needs to happen right now is if I may say so — by at your invitation being modeled right here, which is inter-generational community.

I a few years ago invited Courtney and a bunch of her friends, who are some of the most remarkable people I've ever met, these 30-something folk who are doing it anyway, and who give to me every sign that they're in it for the long haul. Not just for the short ride. I invited them to my home in Madison, Wisconsin, to help me and some of my colleagues at the little non-profit I founded, the Center for Courage & Renewal, um, understand the digital revolution and how our work might be enhanced and amplified through that, because my generation knows very little about that.

So, we spent three days in the living room and I was learning so much. And I remember saying to them, you may remember this, Courtney, at one point I said, you know, at age, what was I, 70 at the time, 75 now. I said, 'I feel like I'm standing somewhere down the curvature of the earth. I cannot see the horizon that you folks see, where you're standing higher on that curvature. I need your eyes, and I need your ears, and I need you to tell me what it is you're seeing, because that same horizon is coming at me, even though I don't know it.' My point is that I'm standing here having quote "figured a lot of things out" through 75 years of education, social engagement, risk taking, rebellion, although I think you can claim the rebel status only in retrospect, and only very lightly, because as soon as you start thinking in this moment consciously I'm a rebel, you screw it all up. This self-labeling is dangerous stuff. Just do what you do. I mean, the bird doesn't think I'm a bird, I can fly. Why, you know...

[laughter]

...what am I doing sitting here on a branch? They just, you know, they do what they do. And so I would just say one more thing about Courtney's wonderful emphasis on humility. My last book is called, *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, and in that book, I talk about five habits of the heart. But when I give talks about it, I say if five is too many for you to hold onto, you really only need two. You need chutzpah and humility.

You know, you need the chutzpah to know that you have a voice worth speaking, and things worth saying, and you need the humility to know that it's vital to listen, because you may not have it right at all, or only a very partial grasp on the truth. So, I think it's in holding these paradoxes that we start to sort things out. There's so much of this life that we're all trying to live that's just not about either/or, even though we've been trained to think in binary code. Right? I mean that in the larger sense, the metaphorical sense of that term. It's both/and. I breathe in and I breathe out. I really — it would really be dangerous for me to say I think I'm basically a breathing out kind of guy.

[laughter]

So that's how I'm going to devote my life to. Um, I am an individual with a voice. I am also embedded in a community on which I'm highly dependent, from which I came, and to which I will return. And I include the community of the natural world in that. And I need both the chutzpah and the humility to be there fully, to be there now, and to be there in a life-giving way.

MS. TIPPETT: I'm Krista Tippett, and this is *On Being*, today, in a cross-generational

conversation with thinkers and writers, Parker Palmer, and Courtney Martin. We're at the 2014 PopTech conference in Camden, Maine, with the theme of rebellion.

MS. TIPPETT: So there's a phrase of Thomas Merton that "in everything there is a hidden wholeness" that you both have reflected on in your writing. And I wonder if you'd just talk a little bit about, um, what you think that has to say to 21st century people and with this theme of rebellion, kind of, in mind.

MS. MARTIN: Well, I think it's an act of rebellion to be a whole person, right? It's an act of rebellion to show up as your whole self, and especially the parts that are complex, that are unfinished, that are vulnerable. Um, you know, in part because of the Internet and we're talking about sort of living online versus living on land, and who you sort of curate yourself to be, et cetera, I think there's never been more pressure, um, to kind of parcel yourself, to, you know — Erving Goffman, the sociologist talked about sort of these performative selves, and I feel like it's like never been more, um, kind of asked of us to show up as only slices of ourselves in different places.

So I think even just to — to feel like you're showing up as your whole self in different settings is a pretty rebellious act. But I also think it's really something deeper about, um, discomfort was mentioned earlier, and I think it's — it's a word that probably hasn't come up enough over the course of our time together is, um, that we're in a time that I think can create too much comfort, if you let it. And so, there's something about being whole, but being uncomfortable in that wholeness, and like, holding those things together. Do you know what I mean, Parker? I'm trying to like grapple it, what the relationship between discomfort and wholeness is.

MR. PALMER: Oh, yeah. I mean, I think you're right on target, Courtney. I, you know, I was listening to you with great appreciation and thinking, I love your phrase, you know, "it's an act of rebellion to show up as someone trying to be whole" and I would add, as someone who believes that there is a hidden wholeness beneath the very evident brokenness of our world. And somebody who wants to say that somehow part of that hidden wholeness is love, part of that hidden wholeness is our fellow feeling for each other, part of that hidden wholeness is a desire to make this thing work, and to work it out together. Um, the act of persisting in those fundamental beliefs that something better is possible. I think this is courage. And I try to call myself to it every day. And I often fail.

So, rebellion can be that very small thing of swimming upstream against a tide of cynicism or against a tide of scarcity. And trying to witness to that in your life day in and day out. And it can really, really make you hurt, as I've said in my writing and in my talking, three times in my adult life, I have been plunged into deep depression for six, eight months at a time. Depression isn't the cost that everyone pays, but I'm working with some people now in the world of Internet, uh, startups, who are very, very concerned about the rash of suicides that happened a few years ago among, relatively young and some middle-aged Internet startup folks, where the success rate is only 10%. And a lot of money is at stake. And a lot of people's jobs are at stake. And they've taken this all on themselves, and they're not getting any sleep, and they can't find any peace. So, you know, we really need to be talking with each other about these things. Uh, we need to go public with it because we are each other's health care workers.

MS. TIPPETT: Yeah, and not just, uh, people who are successes, but people who are trying to make a difference in the world. Right?

MR. PALMER: Absolutely.

MS. TIPPETT: Yeah, people engaged in social justice.

MS. MARTIN: Yeah, I mean, Do It Anyway grew out of an experience for me, which was, you know, leaving college. I went to Barnard College, and I was kind of pumped up on my human rights education. I went to go do something in the world, this is 2002, and, you know, it was a really rough time be a young idealistic person, who wanted to...

MS. TIPPETT: Right. You were a senior in college, uh, starting your senior year, when September 11th happened, right?

MS. MARTIN: Yeah, experienced September 11th, and then, you know, I was part of the anti-war marches. I woke my friends up out of their hung-over stupor and said, like, you're coming to this march and I'm like, no we've got to be there. We've got the be bodies on the street. I actually go to this place of deep desperation. I wouldn't call it depression, necessarily, 'cause I haven't had the same kind of clinical experience, but I had this —actually very funny. My family went to this totally depressing documentary, which is our favorite thing to do when we all get together.

[laughter]

It's really a lovely tradition. Um, and we came home and, you know, we were all totally upset. And I said, you know, I've had this fantasy of lighting myself on fire on the White House steps. Like, writing a letter about why war is wrong, and lighting myself on fire. And I realized it was totally over-dramatic and ridiculous, but it was speaking to this thing of like here's like a white woman in America with a safety net and all kinds of privilege, and I feel so powerless that that's what I want to do? Like something's going on here. And that's when I started to deconstruct the narratives I was holding onto, and the ideas I had about what successful rebellion looked like, right? Like I wanted to do the march, and have the war stop. I wanted to canvas for the president I wanted to win, and I wanted him to win, like I had this very transactional relationship with the idea of rebellion.

And so, part of what I understood through that emotional low was that I needed to reorient myself. Have a totally different relationship with rebellion that would last me a lifetime. And was honoring of the lifetimes of rebellion that have come before me that — here I thought I was just going to like graduate and head out into the world, and like, be super-efficient. Um, I'm a little suspicious of efficiency, in part, because I crave it so much, and I think that that's a very generational thing. It's like we're really obsessed with efficiency. And emotions aren't efficient. And I think rebellion in many way isn't efficient. And never will be.

[music: "White Nights" by Ryan Teague]

MS. TIPPETT: You can listen again and share this conversation with Courtney Martin and Parker Palmer through our website, [onbeing.org](http://onbeing.org).

I'm Krista Tippett. On Being continues in a moment.

[music: "White Nights" by Ryan Teague]

MS. TIPPETT: I'm Krista Tippett and this is On Being. Today exploring how to do disruption, innovation and rebellion as meaningful acts of creation — the inner work of sustainable, resilient social change. Parker Palmer is an esteemed Quaker author and educator, well known in recent years for his book, *Healing the Heart of Democracy*.

Courtney Martin is Editor Emerita at *feministing.com*, co-founder of the Solutions Journalism Network, and the author of *Do It Anyway: The New Generation of Activists*. And both of them are columnists for the On Being blog. We sat down for a cross-generational conversation on stage at the Opera House in Camden, Maine as part of the 2014 PopTech conference on the theme of rebellion.

MS. TIPPETT: Parker, there's something that you wrote, a piece about, "the modern violence of overwork," um, which is a wonderful phrase, and I think it applies not only to overwork in the literal sense of how we do our jobs, but also to this overextension of what we can achieve in everything we do. Um, I'm just going to read it. "There is a pervasive form of modern violence to which the idealist most easily succumbs, activism and overwork. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form of its innate violence. The frenzy of the activist neutralizes his or her work. It destroys the fruitfulness of his or her work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom, which makes work fruitful."

And then you talk about how this came to you the hard way, as an activist who burned out. And you said, "There's a critical question that you asked yourself, 'What do I need to do right now to tend the root of inner wisdom that makes work fruitful?'" And I think fruitful not necessarily being synonymous with efficient, or even evidently effective.

MR. PALMER: Right. So, um, to be clear, the first part of what you read actually comes from Thomas Merton.

MS. TIPPETT: Oh, OK.

MR. PALMER: Who's one of my heroes. And from Douglas Steere, from whom Merton got it, so we stand on the shoulders of giants, right? So, um, but I love the quote. I love the insight. And I do try to ask myself on a regular basis, and sometimes I lose the need for the question, what do I need to do right now, to water the root of inner wisdom that makes work fruitful?

And I will say that one of the things that I think about a lot, I mean, I could talk about practices I have, like walking in the woods, or reading a lot of poetry or sitting in silence alone or with other people, um, those are helpful to me in sort of letting the waters still, and coming back to myself, and learning more about what it is — where it is my life is taking me, rather than where I want to take my life.

But there are some important frames around that for me, and I'll mention just one of them. We are in a society that is obsessed with effectiveness, with outcomes, with results. And efficiency is very much attached to that, which Courtney wisely pointed to. I want to be clear that I'm not against effectiveness and getting results. I work hard on writing

books, or on creating a non-profit, and on propagating programs through our 220 facilitators around the country. I want that work to be effective, just as everyone in this room wants to be effective.

But I am very clear, for myself, that the tighter we cling to the norm of effectiveness, the smaller and smaller tasks we're going to take on, because they're the only ones with which you can be effective. But there has to be a standard that trumps effectiveness. And I have a word that I use for myself that helps me walk this path. Um, and that's the word faithfulness. Faithfulness has to trump effectiveness. And I don't mean anything high and mighty about that. Remember, I'm the guy that God kicked out of seminary.

[laughter]

By faithfulness, I mean, am I being faithful to my own gifts? Am I being faithful to the needs I see around me, within my reach? And am I being faithful to those points at which my gifts might intersect those needs in some life-giving way? Um, you know, at age 75, I think about my mortality more than I did when I was 35 or 45. And, one of the things that's very, very clear to me is that when I'm drawing my last breath, I will not be asking did I sell enough books? Did I get enough good enough reviews? What are the numbers looks like, you know? I'm going to be asking, given my limitations, given my fallibilities, cutting myself a lot of slack for my failure to do so, did I use my limited lifetime to show up fully as I knew how with what I've got? That's what I call faithfulness. And I think it's a matter of framing what we're doing as well as those particular practices, like walking in the woods, like silence, like reading poetry, that can bring us back to those points that you might call true north.

MS. TIPPETT: So, I really think I'd like to just open this up now and see what's on your mind and what you might want to discuss with these two. Um, if you have a question, you can raise your hand, and someone will come to you. Here, up here.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1: Hi, um, just going back to the discussion that we started a little bit around discomfort and, you know, what does that really mean for us. For me, you know, discomfort is when I learn the most about myself and people around me, and it feels like, you know, society itself is always trying to, you know, stop that feeling of discomfort and just to get your perspective on it.

MS. MARTIN: Yeah, I mean, I think it's Piaget, right, the educational philosopher says, there's a sort of perfect amount of discomfort for learning. So, your experience is really proven out. I think about one moment when I was most uncomfortable was actually, um, when I got my first book deal. I was 25 and I got this advance, and all of a sudden, I was going to have money.

And I was deeply uncomfortable with the idea that somehow I was going to be the one with money. Why, like, why did I deserve it? And, you know, the only thing I learned to do at moments like that when I'm so uncomfortable is to share my confusion with others. And look to people who are more resilient, and sort of more robust than I am.

So I did this thing were I gave 10 friends \$100.00, and I said, come to this bar a month from now, give away this money in some way, come to the bar a month from now, and tell the story of what you did. And people came. And we called it the "Secret Society for Creative Philanthropy", 'cause we wanted to make it feel fun and covert. And people did wild things. I mean, they had strangers at book stores buy each other their favorite

book, and take these funny Polaroids, and people made \$100.00 worth of lasagna and, you know, all kinds of random stuff.

But it was the most joyful night for me, because it was a way of being in confusion in community, getting back to this idea in discomfort in relationships. But doing that in a way that felt like I could share it. I think discomfort sometimes comes from really productive, like, intellectual and emotional fog, but also comes from disconnection from other people. So, when we're in that discomfort, getting back in relationship can be so important.

MR. PALMER: That a beautiful answer. All I want to add to it is that when I learned about the "Secret Society for Creative Philanthropy", that's when I realized I've got to meet this woman.

[laughter]

MR. PALMER: I love this woman. Um, and I could use a few bucks, myself.

[laughter]

MR. PALMER: You know. That and the point at which just to be totally transparent a friend emailed me and said, "Do you realize that there's a woman blogging about you on a website called Feministing?"

[laughter]

MR. PALMER: And I thought, I'm in really deep oatmeal here.

[laughter]

MR. PALMER: That's a Quaker term. I don't want to lose you in —

[laughter]

MR. PALMER: — technicalities. So, I reached out to Courtney, and said, let's talk. And, it was one of the best things I've ever done.

MS. TIPPETT: There's one.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 2: Hi, my name is Emily, and, um, what an honor to get to listen in to your conversation today. Picking up a little bit on the theme, um, I'm curious, I think we all develop, out of necessity, the tools for navigating our inner and outer worlds. And you've spoken very eloquently on that. But I'm curious if you could talk a little bit about any ways in which both of you have learned to do that in community, and some of the ways that we can actually replicate that ourselves.

MR. PALMER: Yeah. If I — can I take a crack at that? So, um, I wrote a book about it. I hate to pull that ploy, but it's called *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*. And in a lot of ways, the central theme of that book is how we create safe spaces for the kinds of conversations that you're referring to. And that we've really been talking about up here. Um, one of the things this society is most deficient in is safe spaces for truth-telling about the condition of our souls. And if the word soul doesn't work for you, it's identity and integrity in the language of secular humanism. It's the

spark of the divine, in the language of Hasidic Judaism. It's big self or no self in the paradoxical language of Buddhism. Everybody has a name for it. Different name. And nobody knows its true name. Um, so I think there is, to use language that's familiar to all of you, although it makes me a little nervous, there is a technology of creating safe space. The reason technology makes me a little nervous is that, um, I think at bottom, um, our — this journey is not about techniques. I think it's about existential immersion. I think it's really important in the midst of a technological conference to remember that there's a sub-strate of trying to be human that lies beneath any particular methodology. But...

MS. TIPPETT: I like the phrase spiritual technology, actually, and I think —

MR. PALMER: I know, you used it in the write-up.

MS. TIPPETT: Yeah, but I mean say a little bit about what the spiritual technology would be for creating safe spaces.

MR. PALMER: Um, so, I think first of all, safe space needs a facilitator. I don't think it happens automatically. And I think the role of the facilitator is to keep the space safe, even when someone tries to break the safety. I think there are some simple rules, there are some not so simple rules, but one of the simplest is no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no correcting each other. Well, what we're going to do in the absence of those behaviors, is we're going to learn to listen deeply to each other, and we're going to learn to ask honest, open questions to hear each other in to speech. Which I think is another of the most critical tasks of our time. So many people, unseen, unheard, they need to be heard into speech. Um, so there are things we can do, um, but it's a discipline.

MS. TIPPETT: Courtney, you wrote a column, or a blog somewhere about listening as a social technology for the — an innovative — a social innovation for the 21st century.

MS. MARTIN: Yeah.

MS. TIPPETT: But — but, I mean, I think the point is that it is an art, but we have to relearn it.

MS. MARTIN: Yeah.

MS. TIPPETT: We don't have a lot of space, and we don't actually have a lot of practice. The forms we use to discuss difficult things are not actually about listening.

MS. MARTIN: Right.

MS. TIPPETT: There's sometimes about waiting your turn, until the other person has finished —

MS. MARTIN: Yes.

Ms. Tippett: — what they have to say so you can speak.

MS. MARTIN: Yeah.

MS. TIPPETT: Which is not listening.

MS. MARTIN: Totally. And I'm actually on the Board of the Center for Courage & Renewal, and so I'm deeply invested in the practice that Parker's talking about. And was part of this group of young activists who got together and went through this process. And I think for a lot of us what was so jarring in the best possible way was we realized how little of that kind of listening we were doing, and how little that kind of listening we were being listened to in that way, how rare that was for us. Um, and I don't think unless you create those spaces, you don't have a place to grapple with your own power. I mean, we talk about rebellion and we think about the powerless rebelling against the powerful, right?

But the people in this room, are generally holding a lot of power. And, where are the spaces when you are able to tune in and question how you're actually using that power, whether it's, you know, money or time or networks or whatever it is. I think it was a sort of soul-shaking experience for me to have a moment to pause and go, wow, I've been working so hard to make a life, to be able to pay my rent, and, you know, create a life that, like, I haven't paused to go, wow, I actually have a little bit of power now. What am I going to do with that? And are the things I'm doing with that in line with my ethics? And who I am in the world. And I think a lot of very powerful people have no time to pause. Um, they don't create those spaces. And I think some of the most unethical things that happen in the world is because of that cacophony.

MS. TIPPETT: I'm going to do my radio-thing. I'm Krista Tippett, and this is On Being, today, in a cross-generational conversation with thinkers and writers, Parker Palmer, and Courtney Martin. We're at the 2014 PopTech conference in Camden, Maine, with the theme of rebellion.

MS. TIPPETT: Parker, you know, I think that the way you talk about the soul as a piece of intelligence in us, and a compass, which is distinct from the intelligence of our minds, or even of our emotions. And there's a line of Mary Oliver's poetry, "This is the first, wildest, and wisest thing I know, that the soul exists and that it is built entirely out of attentiveness." And that's another thing that we just — we have to carve — seize space for.

MR. PALMER: Yeah. And if I could say, 'cause I know the word "soul" is hard for some people. I want to say a quick word about how it came to me, because it was one of the rare fruits of that experience in deep darkness called clinical depression. All of the faculties I had depended on all my life were useless. I could not think my way out of this. My intellect was useless. My ego, which is pretty strong, as are many of the egos in this room, and I mean that in the best possible way, um, was shattered. My emotions were dead. Depression is not feeling sad. Depression is being unable to feel anything. And my will was so miniscule as to hardly be noticeable. It involved things like getting up at 10 in the morning, instead of 10:30.

So, there were moments in that depression when way back in the thickets of my life, I could feel a little stirring, like that wild thing, that wild animal, that Mary Oliver refers to in the poem. That little spark, that little stirring that made me think I can make it one more day. I won't kill myself today, because that's where I was on some days. What came to me as I emerged from depression was that the soul is like a wild animal in two respects. It's very resourceful. It's very savvy. It's very sinewy and strong. It knows how to survive in places where there's very little to eat, like an animal in the deep woods. But at the same time, like a wild animal, it's very shy. And we know that we want to see a wild animal, the last thing we should do is go crashing

into the woods, shouting for it to come out.

[laughter]

Right? And yet a lot of our institutional life is like put it on the table, folks. You know.

MS. TIPPETT: Or cross-examine it.

MR. PALMER: Yeah, cross-examining it, or get, you know, share.

MS. MARTIN: Elevator pitch.

MR. PALMER: Yeah. Share or die, you know, kind of. And so, the safe space is where the wild animal can put in an appearance. And, um, I value it for that reason.

MS. TIPPETT: Mm-hmm.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 3: Earlier today Josh Klein was talking about, um, rebellion through hacking. And he talked about the elegant hack of solving a problem with the fewest amount of code, the easiest, quickest solution. You're talking about, uh, rebellion inefficiency in a totally different way in your life's work. And that it will take forever to get to it. So I would just love to hear your perspective on kind of the simplicity or the quickness of the technology side of this rebellion, and also the long-term, the personal side of which you're both coming at it from.

MS. MARTIN: Well, good thing I told you what hacking was backstage, huh?

MR. PALMER: Yeah. I asked —

[laughter]

MS. MARTIN: Parker was like, quick definition of hacking, right before we were coming out.

MR. PALMER: Right, exactly.

MS. MARTIN: Oh God.

MR. PALMER: Right back here, I said Courtney, what's hacking?

[laughter]

MS. MARTIN: Um, I hope you don't mind that I shared that.

MR. PALMER: No, I love it. Man, I love it.

[laughter]

MR. PALMER: I love it.

MS. MARTIN: Well, I think exactly — well, first of all, when I was hearing that idea of the elegant hack, I was thinking that is the simplicity on the other side of complexity. It's like a you know, internet version of it or whatever, which is so cool. Cause it's not elegant because it's, um, efficient necessarily. I mean it is elegant

because it's efficient, but it's after considering all the million ways that you could do this thing. You do it in the most beautiful, perfectly-made way, right? So to me, that is the simplicity on the other side of complexity.

But I think because there are these technologies that allow us to scale rebellion or social change or whatever we want to call it, much faster, further, because we can disrupt markets, it's even more important that we create the spaces we are talking about, because things can happen so fast, and they do happen so fast, that there aren't a lot of pauses built into the Internet age. Right?

I mean, I think we're even creating them. There's like those apps where you can like shut down your Internet on your computer and like, you know, make sure it won't let you log on to the Internet for a while kind of thing. So we're actually starting to figure out ways to pause ourselves through technology. But I think generally the architecture of the Internet age does not include a lot of pauses. And, I mean, look at this audience when the wifi's a little slow. Myself included, right?

[laughter]

MS. TIPPETT: Right.

MS. MARTIN: We're all like refreshing on our tweet deck and trying to get things to move faster. So, even more reason that these open, honest questions, and these moments of silence and grappling with our own power, we must, we absolutely must build them into our lives.

MS. TIPPETT: Right. And that architecture is unfolding, right? It's not finished. We are the makers of that.

MR. PALMER: The reason I asked Courtney the question just before we came on, was I spent half the morning asking myself, is it possible to hack the soul? And then I realized I had no idea what I was thinking about.

[laughter]

MR. PALMER: So I decided I wouldn't use that line when I got out here.

MS. TIPPETT: Did it — so you didn't come up with an answer?

MR. PALMER: I didn't, no. I didn't.

MS. MARTIN: Well, Parker loves language. So I think you were so excited about this new language.

MR. PALMER: I was.

MS. MARTIN: Yeah.

MR. PALMER: I went off on a real trip this morning.

MS. TIPPETT: I think you see why it's not just that I — that these two are bringing important thoughts and important questions into the world, but I think the friendship between them is beautiful. And we are so segregated by age in this culture. We talk about

other kinds of segregation, but we are segregated by age, and we do have a longing for wisdom and for this cross-generational communication. So it's great to have both of you here. I want to just, um, bring this back up here for just a couple more minutes.

So there's the language of rebellion. There's also the word disruption, which is everywhere now. And innovation. And, you know, all innovation is not progress. Right? All disruption and rebellion do not lead to good results. So, a little bit of wisdom about how we train ourselves to know the difference, or what are some practices we can have to be in that state of discernment, even as we are doing important, wonderful work that we feel called to.

MR. PALMER: So for me the word community comes back. I'm terribly interested in the word movement, but a movement is characterized by a community that, at its best, is a discerning community. And I would say most importantly, a movement community invites its critics into the tent. If you don't invite the critics in, if you don't stay, uh, open to the critics, in a very vulnerable way, you become fascist. Fascism kills off its critics, either literally or metaphorically. And so, the discernment about where are we going, you have to listen to the critics. They're the ones who can see what you can't see. They're the ones who can pop the bubble that always appears over a movement, making everybody breathe the same air, think the same thoughts, and figure we've got it right, and nobody else does. So, community is critical to me. And also, holding these paradoxes, like, simplicity and complexity. Like, chutzpah and humility. Like breathing in and breathing out. Um, like resting and acting. Simple stuff, but we forget to do it.

MS. MARTIN: Yeah, I think I would offer you some Parker Palmer words, actually, that have been very meaningful to me that he said something to the effect of that "we're whiplashed between the arrogant over-estimation of ourselves, and a servile under-estimation of ourselves." And I think the sweet spot is somewhere in between, right? And kind of trying to stay there as much of the time as you can, as you're doing your innovation or your disruption or your rebellion or all these grand things that we might call that.

To me, it's really about trying to be in that space in between. And it also is really about feedback. I mean, I think we live in a culture that does not give us a lot of models of what it looks like to learn in public. And I've had this many times over as someone writing in the feminist space or in other spaces where you know, I'll get feedback, and my first reaction is sort of a shamed reaction. And then I have to take a deep breath and go what does it actually look like to potentially be wrong, um, and integrate some of that feedback but, there's just so few models of that. And I think in our political sphere, we actually call it flip-flopping —

MS. TIPPETT: Yeah, right.

MS. MARTIN: — anyone shifts what they think about something.

MS. TIPPETT: Right.

MS. MARTIN: And really, some of my — the rebels I respect most did learn in public. You think about Malcolm X, or other people who very visibly shifted their mind about something over a period of time. That's who I — that's the kind of rebel I want to be, is someone who does learn in public, and not have my ego be so tender that it get bruised into silence. Um, so that feels like a really important piece of it to me.

MS. TIPPETT: I actually want to read some Courtney Martin words, too. This is such a beautiful line of yours. Um, from your book, *Do it Anyway*: “Our charge is not to save the world after all, it is to live in it, flawed and fierce, loving and humble.”

I asked Parker if he would bring a poem to read to finish, and you brought a couple, so you get to choose. I don’t know, I think poetry is maybe a kind of rebellion against prose, you know, that helps keeps language alive again and again.

MS. MARTIN: And notice he’s reading it off of a newfangled device.

[laughter]

MS. MARTIN: He’s got an iPhone.

MR. PALMER: I was actually trying to post on my Facebook page, but it —

[laughter]

MR. PALMER: So, uh, there — I chose a bunch of stuff, but the one that feels most right to me is a brief meditation by Victoria Safford. It’s called “Hope.” I think that’s a very important word in this conversation. And I think to hold hope these days is to be a rebel.

“Hope,” by Victoria Safford. “Our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of Hope — not the prudent gates of Optimism, which are somewhat narrower; nor the stalwart, boring gates of Common Sense; nor the strident gates of Self-Righteousness, which creak on shrill and angry hinges (people cannot hear us there; they cannot pass through); nor the cheerful, flimsy garden gate of “Everything is gonna be all right.” But a different, sometimes lonely place, the place of truth-telling, about your own soul first of all and its condition, the place of resistance and defiance, the piece of ground from which you see the world both as it is and as it could be, as it will be; the place from which you glimpse not only struggle, but joy in the struggle. And we stand there, beckoning and calling, telling people what we are seeing, asking people what they see.”

[music: “Anyone” by Keith Kenniff]

MS. TIPPETT: Parker Palmer is founder and Senior Partner of the Center for Courage & Renewal. He’s the author of bestselling books including *Let Your Life Speak*, *The Courage to Teach*, *A Hidden Wholeness*, and *Healing the Heart of Democracy*.

Courtney Martin is the co-founder of the Solutions Journalism Network and a strategist for the TED Prize. She’s the author of five books including *Do It Anyway: The New Generation of Activists*.

And both Parker and Courtney recently became the inaugural columnists for *On Being*. You can read their moving, thought-provoking commentaries Wednesdays and Fridays at [onbeing.org](http://onbeing.org). There, as always, you can listen again, and share this show or watch our entire on-stage conversation live at [PopTech](http://PopTech).

This week we’ve also posted a gorgeous introduction to Thomas Merton by Parker Palmer. Merton has come up a great deal in our show recently, in this episode and my recent

conversation with Fr. James Martin. And you can stream every episode on your phone through our iPhone and Android apps or on the tremendous new On Being tablet app.

[music: "Ruins" by Portico Quartet]

MS. TIPPETT: On Being is Trent Gilliss, Chris Heagle, Lily Percy, Mariah Helgeson, Chris Jones, and David Schimke.

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