

Introduction

Welcome to the Wholehearted Journey!

This is a book of poetry, parables and creative ponderings. It is a book of insights gleaned and distilled from the work of hundreds of writers, philosophers and fellow pilgrims throughout the ages. It is full to the brim with important questions and practical suggestions for putting our purposes and principles into practice. It is a call to arms to spirited and soulful living, both in work and in the larger context of our lives. *The Wholehearted Journey* is an invitation to dive deeply into the waters of self-exploration and to come out refreshed and renewed—eager to express our gifts, share our joy and give birth to our dreams. This book is about bringing our whole heart to the altar of every day.

Early in its creation, it struck me that I was writing this book first and foremost for myself, because above all, this writing is a bold and honest expression of how I ache to live. If no one was ever to read this book, the experience of writing it was worth every moment spent in its creation. It has been a wonderful journey: writing and learning from the poetry; ruminating and delighting in the *Reflections* section for each chapter; gathering and selecting quotes for each chapter's theme; and most importantly, putting the suggestions at the end of each chapter into practice in my own life. And while the experience of writing this book has been rich and rewarding, it has also been difficult due to the deep cut of its questions and the discipline required of its tenets.

I began writing this book for the “working person”—a book about ways to bring qualities of soul to the everyday workplace. As I continued writing, however, it became clear to me that the ideas, principles and practices offered in these pages could be relevant to anyone and pertinent to every aspect of life, not just the workplace. For we all work, whether or not we are employed. We all share the important job of living our lives fully, amidst the struggles and strain of daily pressures and challenges that come at us from every direction. So this is written for people who go to a workplace, as well as those who don't. This is for those who continue to search for their true place in the world of work as well as those who are retired and feel in their bones that their “true work” is not yet complete. *The Wholehearted Journey* is for anyone who wants to engage in life and work in a deep and soulful way, bringing their own individual mix of talents, gifts and purposes to every day.

Organization of the Book

Each chapter of *The Wholehearted Journey* consists of four sections:

Poetry: Introducing the central theme of the chapter

Reflections: Offering key insights, parables and anecdotes on the qualities of soul that are derived from the theme

Passages: Focusing on the theme through selected thoughts and comments of great writers and thinkers, present and past

To Ponder and Practice: Posing penetrating questions, suggestions and challenges for integrating the theme and its qualities more fully into our everyday lives

The Poems

It has only been in the last few years that I discovered the power and the potency of a poem as a way of teaching, expressing and knowing myself. For until then, I, like many, had one of two categories in which to place most poetry: the sticky sweet greeting card version and the kind I feared I could never understand. Like many in our culture, my exposure to poetry was both minimal and cursory. Had I only known the awe and wonder that awaited me through the works of such great poets as Rumi, Rainer Marie Rilke, Elizabeth Browning, Henry David Thoreau, William Blake, Ralph Waldo Emerson, W.S. Merwyn, David Whyte, Mary Oliver, Anne Sexton and Mark Nepo!

As I began reciting poetry in my training sessions and keynote speeches, many people expressed their surprise to find that poetry has the power to touch them, deeply at times, in places they have not visited before. That is the

power that poetry can have. It can draw us into the poignancy of our experience and invite us to share aloud the complexities of being human. Poet James Autry says that “Poetry gives you permission to feel.” In my experience, it not only allows you to feel but to distill those emotions into their essentials. Writing poetry is a way of seeing and naming where we have been, where we are and where we are going with our lives. It asks, “What do you want to courageously cry about, scream about and sing about?” It is not afraid of its own voice.

I am not a poet’s poet—I am not learned in the art nor educated in its history. For me it is simply the voice of my own soul, whispering, singing, crying and celebrating. It is the voice from the deep breaking through the surface waters of my normal expression. A poem is something I receive, not something I craft. It is like a prayer. Once having entered the winds of my own yearning or plea, I am carried on its sails, not the reverse. I never really know where a poem will take me, or upon what distant or foreign shore of meaning I may find myself beached by the end of it. And yet strangely, in the end, they all feel like home. It is with great joy that I share these poems with you as a way of opening each chapter. It is my fond hope that by sharing my poetry, this book might provide a nudge for you to begin, or to continue, writing your own.

Reflections

Each chapter in the book revolves around a unique theme giving rise to yeasty topics relating to life’s journey. I use the *Reflections* section of each chapter to delve more deeply into those themes, the characteristics or qualities it summons in us and key ideas or suggestions for weaving those essential qualities into our everyday lives.

As a trainer, I make tremendous use of storytelling as a way of making a teaching point. As such, I have collected myriad fables, parables

and stories, many of them originating from various spiritual traditions, which I share in this book to reinforce essential ideas of each chapter. To the best of my ability, I have attempted to name or give credit to the original source of each of these stories. I regret that some have come to me with dubious origins and I only hope that their creators, named and unnamed, will find this book a worthy platform for the voicing of their ideas.

Passages

We exist in a world of words, most of which are used recklessly, without much precision or care. We hear them, speak them, read them and write them with disregard to their potency. Gustave Flaubert said it well in this quote from *Madame Bovary*:

“Human speech is like a cracked kettle on which we tap crude rhythms for bears to dance to, while we long to make music that will melt the stars.”

For as long as I can remember, I have been enthralled with the world of words. I believe they have the power to startle, surprise and awaken us. Words, employed with precision and care, have the power to melt the ice of our complacency and indifference, to even melt the stars. I have included over 500 such quotations in this book. Their originators use words as the painter wields her brush or the samurai brandishes his sword—with respect and precision, care and attention.

I am elated to gather under one cover a rich and diverse collection of quotations and excerpts from my favorite books. Included in each chapter's section of *Passages* are the inspiring and oft times startling words of writers, mystics, saints, artists, revolutionaries, world leaders and visionaries. I have collected them over the course of several years knowing that I would one day weave these beautiful passages into a linguistic and philosophic composition for

and about the everyday pilgrim walking to the beat of their own soul's drum. I offer them here with humble gratitude and unrelenting awe to their originators.

May even just a few of these quotes invoke for you, dear reader, an idea whose time has come. I will never forget the first time I fell under the spell of these words from Mahatma Gandhi: “We must be the change we wish to see in the world.” This one line changed my life by bringing me to the realization that I am the *only* person I can change. These twelve words live in me now; they have a place in my being like fresh flowers have a place on the table or a photograph has a place on the mantel. Although there are 25 to 30 quotes in each chapter's *Passages*, perhaps only a few will strike you in a profound way, gravitating towards the mantel of your being. I encourage you to read them with an eye for the ones that speak to you most deeply.

Johann von Goethe once noted, “All wise thoughts have been thought already thousands of times; but to make them truly ours, we must think them over again honestly, till they take root in our personal experience.” To that end, I have suggested in the *To Ponder and Practice* section of each chapter that you choose a favorite quote from each chapter's *Passages* and post it where you will see it until it takes root in your own experience.

To Ponder and Practice

Until we put an idea into practice, it does not really belong to us. Only those ideas which we have applied and experienced can ever truly affect our lives in a meaningful way. Thus, every chapter ends with a section called *To Ponder and Practice*, which provides various questions pertaining to the specific theme of the chapter, as well as ideas for nurturing the personal qualities that will enable us to more effectively embrace that theme in our daily lives.

About Questions

Rainer Maria Rilke, though primarily thought of as the finest German poet of the 20th century, wrote prose with equal eloquence. Here is a much-quoted passage from his book, *Letters to a Young Poet*:

“... have patience with everything that remains unsolved in your heart. Try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books written in a foreign language. Do not now look for the answers. They cannot now be given to you because you could not live them. It is a question of experiencing everything. At present you need to live the question. Perhaps you will gradually, without even noticing it, find yourself experiencing the answer, some distant day.”

Nothing shapes our lives so much as the questions we ask—or refuse to ask. Martin Luther King Jr. suggested, in fact, that the “questions we ask will shape our destiny as clearly as the skeleton shapes the body.” The questions we ask serve as a lens on the camera of the mind, telling us what to pay attention to, what to focus on. We are all questioners, but the questions that animate us are profoundly different. Imagine how the nature and quality of our lives might differ according to which set of the following questions most inspires our thoughts and actions.

What will my neighbors think?

Who will love me?

How do I increase my power?

How can I make more money?

What do I think?

How do I extend my love to others?

Who or what shall I serve?

How am I already wealthy?

What's my next career move?

How much life insurance do I have for my family?

How do I avoid heartache?

Where am I going?

How's my financial portfolio shaping up?

How do I stay true to the journey of my heart?

What legacy do I want to leave my children?

What noble challenge has my name on it?

Who am I in the midst of becoming?

How am I living in alignment with my highest purposes?

The everyday questions we ask, like those in the left column, are perfectly legitimate questions—they reflect some of our basic human needs for physical comfort, social acceptance and financial security. But if we ask questions for meaning and purpose pertaining to our worldly needs, exclusive of our spiritual needs, we live a one-sided life. To live wholeheartedly, we must entertain questions that pertain to the inner world as well as the outer world.

Pondering a question is a way of bestowing awareness in our lives. The purpose of the questions provided at the end of each chapter is not necessarily to learn the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. In fact, sometimes a question leads us deeper into doubt and uncertainty, not away from it. Sometimes we are asked a question and the answer appears as if it has simply awaited this invitation to make itself known. Other questions need to percolate or to simply sit in the waters of our being like a teabag, bringing forth flavor over time.

It is not necessary for us to find definitive answers to some of the more elusive, perhaps unanswerable, questions like, “Why am I here?” or “What is the purpose of my life?” We need to ask the big questions, but we may need to be satisfied with small pieces of answers. Even when we are not sure how these pieces fit together, a wholehearted, spirited life requires us to continue facing into the wind and to keep the questions alive.

There is a poetic power in having the right question asked at the right time. My hope is that many questions in this book will give you pause, will stop you in your tracks and cause you to reflect, ponder and ruminate. May your responses to these questions put a brighter light in your eyes or a new song in your step.

About Practices

I believe that we make little progress in our lives merely by attempting to repress or stop what we find harmful, unhealthy or distasteful. Our greatest hope lies in developing what is healthy, wholesome and good, practicing what we cherish, value and love. *The Wholehearted Journey* contains hundreds of quotes and small gems of wisdom from great thinkers throughout time. But the truth is that we can starve while reading a cookbook! Unless we put these ideas to use in our lives, they have no power to bring us real nourishment. The words of Buddha, spoken 2500 years ago, still ring true today:

“However many holy words you read,
 However many you speak,
 What good will they do you
 If you do not act upon them?”

With the myriad choices and decisions we face on a daily basis, both inside and outside the workplace, how do we know where to begin to take steps that will move us toward our wholeness and joy? Amidst all of the therapies,

psychologies and self-help strategies made available to us, how do we discern and select practices that will bring us into balance and rhythm in our lives? I have appreciated this very simple philosophy for improving one’s life:

1. Keep doing what works.
2. Stop doing what doesn’t work.
3. Start doing what will work.

I like it enough to have added it as the final question in each chapter. Taking the time to assess your actions in each of these three areas will give you an opportunity to affirm the good things that you are doing. It will also allow you to identify the habits you have cultivated that are not working toward your highest purposes. Lastly, it will help to bring into focus the new choices you can be making to design the life you want.

Purposes of *The Wholehearted Journey*

The Wholehearted Journey is about bringing qualities of soul to our everyday life and work—including a renewed sense of enthusiasm, purpose and even reverence. That which we regard as sacred, we will naturally treat with the utmost care and devotion. I believe that our lives would love to be treated as sacred—so would our work. But the pace at which most of us live and work prevents this. One of the purposes of this book is to cultivate ways of making a temple of our lives, in and outside of work.

Leonardo Da Vinci advised centuries ago that “Where the spirit does not work with the hand there is no art.” His words ring true, whether we work at home or in the world, regardless of industry or position. When our work is vacant of spirit, it will be devoid of vitality, as will our lives outside of work. By making our lives and work more hospitable to the gifts of spirit and to the qualities of soul, however, we are gifted in

return in innumerable, very palpable ways. The following nine themes summarize the rewards of traveling the journey of life and work with wholeheartedness, and as such, these are the true purposes of this book.

Renew a sense of purpose and passion

Frederich Nietzsche once said, “When a man has a “why,” he doesn’t have to concern himself with “how.” This is true because of the focusing powers of purpose. When we know why we are doing something, that purpose becomes a horizon within us and our feet find wings. With a renewed sense of purpose, we find meaning and fulfillment in the simplest acts and in the most mundane circumstances. We realize that even when we are in situations that appear unworthy of our time and attention, we can supply the “worthiness” just in the way in which we approach a person, task or deed. This book is an invitation to pursue our purposes and passions, to open our arms and embrace the great “why” that calls to us from the world.

Develop a greater sense of faith in ourselves

The sense of vulnerability that accompanies us on the journey of life in the face of the unknown can leave us feeling overwhelmed, ineffectual and powerless. The insecurity produced by these feelings causes us to shut our windows and lock our doors, even though a brilliant sun shines brightly around us. Whenever we face change, fear inevitably raises its head as well. Fear of failure. Fear of success. Fear of the unknown. Fear of loss. Fear of fear itself.

There is an art to learning how to flow with the ups and downs of life’s challenges and hardships, to be open to the light streaking through the dark shadows of transition. Somewhere deep within us, we know that true security is not the absence of danger but the presence of faith—faith in ourselves and in our

ability to survive. On a wholehearted journey we find faith in our ability to make new choices, even as we face adversity and challenges. Although the world cannot guarantee us ongoing employment, for example, we can have faith in our ongoing employability. We all live on faith, because the nature of life is that we are always stepping into the unknown. The issue is what are we putting our faith in. One of the purposes of this book is to shed light on where we have invested our faith and to consider where we want to invest it in the future.

Increase mindfulness and self-awareness

Living happens. Being fully alive, however, takes time and consciousness. For the sake of making a living we often forget to live. Our attention is usually split, in fact, fractured by the many pressures of our lives. We begin sleepwalking through life without noticing that we are not awake to our circumstances, choices and opportunities, much less our needs, desires and longings. Politician and writer Marian Wright Edelman urges us to awaken with this advice, “It is time for every one of us to roll up our sleeves and put ourselves at the top of our commitment list.” I don’t think she is talking about getting the car in for its 30,000-mile check-up or scheduling a manicure. I think she means attending to our inner lives with as much devotion as we give our outer lives. Indeed, mindfulness is as rare as it is precious.

I remember one of my favorite teachers saying that “one of the greatest tragedies in life is living one’s life without ever finding oneself in one’s self.” Clearly, we have to know ourselves before we can bring ourselves to a job, to relationships or to being in community. There has to be someone “home” before we can harness our powers to affect that which is outside us. As the Hindu sage Ramana Maharshi advises:

“Wanting to reform the world without discovering one’s true self is like trying to cover the world with leather to avoid the pain of walking on stones and thorns. It is much simpler to just wear shoes.”

The questions and ideas contained in this book are meant to heighten and enhance the gifts of self-awareness and usher us into more mindful living.

Live more fully in the present

We tend to live in the past or the future; always expecting the coming of some special moment when our life will unfold itself in its full significance. We approach time as if it is a commodity that belongs to us, as if it is something we can manage, spend or waste at will because there will always be more of it at our disposal. And all the while, our one and precious life continues to flow like water through our fingers.

Our lives are made of a stream of days and it is only here, in the present hours and days of our lives, that we find expression for our gifts, our joys and sorrows, our growth and healing. The only place where we have power is in the present. This book offers myriad choices, gestures and acts to enter each day with a sense of purposefulness and power, even urgency, to live each moment to the utmost.

Take small steps

Friedrich Nietzsche wisely reminds us of the obvious:

“He who would learn to fly one day must first learn to stand and run and climb and dance; one cannot fly their way into flying.”

Nietzsche’s words hold real wisdom for us as we travel the winding road of life and work. Being products of a society addicted to immediate gratification, how do we cultivate in ourselves the patience necessary to walk steadily along the journey when all we want to do is fly our

way into success? One way to do this is to focus our thoughts and energy in areas where we have direct influence and control, even if in just the next step. By focusing on small steps in the present, we are better able to set aside the anxieties about our futures and preoccupations with the past and the burdens of our regrets. This book suggests a multitude of small steps to take in order to grow, slowly but surely, our greater powers.

Increase our capacity for joy and wonder

Grace, beauty and wonder are carried on the winds of our everyday lives but unless we set our sails in the direction those winds blow, we will never be carried or refreshed by them. We need not strive or search for these qualities; we must cultivate a greater capacity to receive them in and through our most common experiences as suggested by Robert Louis Stevenson in this beautiful passage:

“The best things are nearest: breath in your nostrils, light in your eyes, flowers at your feet, duties at your hands, the path of right just before you. Do not grasp at the stars, but do life’s plain common work as it comes, certain that daily duties and daily bread are the sweetest things in life.”

Joy and wonder are not merely incidental to a wholehearted life, they are vital. We are so achievement oriented that we often fail to see what’s before us, thinking that accomplishing things will complete us, when it is experiencing life in all its wonder that leads to the path of true fulfillment and wholeness. Only through wholehearted living will we know how to develop a true sense of belonging in the world as well as the sensibilities to experience its wonders. In and outside of work, we are sure to encounter an everlasting mix of conundrum, enigma, dilemma, paradox, illusion, contradiction and inconvenience. Only by adding an equal mix of curiosity, enthusiasm, awe, wonder and wide-eyed amazement will we concoct a cocktail of

life that is not only drinkable but intoxicating in the purest sense. Among other things, this book is a toast to the wholehearted life. May yours bubble with joy!

Shift our focus from reaping to sowing

Many of us wonder where we should be, which position we should be in, and what we should be doing next, while our lives would be better served by shifting our focus to who we are being. We waste time looking for perfect employment, instead of trying to be the perfect employee for the position we hold or using our current positions as the perfect stepping stone to the next job. We continually ask about the meaning of life instead of asking what meaning we should bring to life. We can be quick to judge the world around us and to notice what other people should and should not be doing, while we could be taking a little stock of ourselves and of what we are contributing to the world. The question is not about what we can scorn, criticize and judge, but what we can love, appreciate and take into our arms that counts in life. By shifting our focus from what the world has to offer us to giving of ourselves and being receptive to the gifts of others, we change the world at the end of our fingertips.

American author and minister Robert Fulghum dispels a great myth when he says that “peace is not something you wish for; it’s something you make, something you do, something you are and something you give away.” I think he is sharing an important basic truth, not just about peace, but about every life-giving quality we yearn for as human beings, including contentment, joy, purpose, forgiveness, compassion and love. Most of what we want in life we must seed from the soil of our own beings. Bringing qualities of soul to the everyday circumstances at home and at work is a way of sowing seeds so that our lives and the lives of those we touch may flower more brilliantly.

Respond to the changes in the world with hope and optimism

The ancient entreaty, “May you live in interesting times,” has certainly come true. We have seen more drastic changes in the world of work in the last ten years than we have in the decades preceding them. Today’s world of work is not only full of challenges and surprises, but also every species of colleague, customer and manager, and every variation of work situation, including temping, leasing, outsourcing and project work. Many complain of the “de-jobbing” of the North American workplace, while other economists and futurists tell us that the market is not shrinking but reshuffling, resulting in opportunities that never existed before. So how do we navigate the white waters of today’s economic, political and social realities when we were raised with the tools and thinking suited to the serene waters of a world that is gone and may never return?

Circumstances and terms of employment have changed, but what remains stubbornly the same is each person’s quest to make his or her way in the world, juggling the needs and demands of practical realities with the deeper yearnings of the human heart. Ralph Waldo Emerson once surmised that, “This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it.” Surely that is as true today as it was in his day.

We are in what futurist John Nesbitt called “the era of parenthesis”—leaving behind the realities of one world without having entered the solid realities of a new time. Each of us is responsible for helping to create the world that our children and grandchildren will inherit. If we want a world that is worthy of our own as well as our children’s talents, gifts and potentiality, we must work to shape it. One of the aims of this book is to shake off our fears and anxiety over an uncertain economy, and instead, travel the path

of livelihood with renewed hope and optimism. We need to harness our combined brilliance and brazenness and meet our challenges with a sense of usefulness and purpose. By traveling our individual paths wholeheartedly and with qualities of soul, we can rise to the challenges before us so that, in the words of author Jan Phillips, "... what we create will be as useful as a hammer, as honest as a prayer, as far-reaching as a bridge and as urgent as a cry."

Give rise to fresh cravings

Artist Abraham Heschel described art as something that introduces us to emotions that we have never cherished before. He says, "Great works produce rather than satisfy needs by giving the world fresh cravings." That is my deepest wish for this body of work—that it rouses in the reader longings, needs and dreams that have lain dormant. That it awakens new cravings. Like thirst of the spirit to pour its purpose into the vessel of a workday—like hunger of the soul to build a place of belonging from the bricks and mortar of one's convictions, talents and ancient longings.

We live as pilgrims, journeying into the unknown of each day in a world that is at once chaotic, confusing and full to the brim with choices. When we find ourselves stranded on islands of fear or doubt, we need to remember that we also have larger continents of wisdom and truth on which to stand. May the poetry, reflections, passages, and practices presented in this book take you on small excursions to those larger bodies in the sea of your being. May the ideas offered in these pages usher you into the kind of creative choices, mindfulness and grateful living that will keep your journey alive and vital. May all of our work, individually and collectively, be worthy of the precious investment of our time and talents. As I assert in the last poem of the book:

*This is the pilgrim's plea at the
onset of the 21st century:
To bring all that we are and all
that we have
To the joy and the sorrow,
The wonder and the terror,
The known and the unknown
of daily living.*

As your journey unfolds, I offer you the East Indian word meaning "the spirit in me honors the spirit in you"—*Namaste*.