

# dear residents

Lessons from Parker J. Palmer - The Undivided Life

May 24, 2026

Dear Residents,

One of the more interesting byproducts of growing up in a largely conformist society (what [Michele Gelfand](#) describes as a “tight” culture) was learning very early to compartmentalize parts of myself. On one side was empirical inquiry: science, observation, evidence, the gradual realization that knowledge evolves and that uncertainty is intrinsic to discovery. On the other side were powerful social and cultural norms suggesting that the life would unfold according to a predetermined script.

As a young student, I often found myself suspended between these worlds. None of this was part of any formal curriculum, but through wandering bookstores and libraries, I slowly explored questions about identity, meaning, psychology, and human behavior. I encountered fragments of ideas from [Sigmund Freud](#) (the id, ego, and superego) imperfectly understood by me at the time, but compelling because they hinted that human beings were not singular, unified selves. We carried tensions within us: instinct and restraint, aspiration and obligation, authenticity and conformity.

Recently, I had the good fortune to attend an educational retreat sponsored by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education and the Center for Courage & Renewal, inspired by the work of Parker J. Palmer. The opening session included Parker Palmer speaking about [the divided life](#): the distance that can emerge between one’s external role and one’s inner convictions. His reflections resonated deeply with many of us in the room.

What struck me most about the retreat was not simply the content, but the people. Program directors, designated institutional officials, coordinators, and educators from vastly different institutions and personal backgrounds seemed to converge around a common set of values: authenticity, self-renewal, generous listening, kindness, collaboration, and the courage to live and lead in a more integrated way. Despite the complexity and regulatory structure surrounding medical education, there was broad agreement that systems function best when they do not lose sight of the humanity of the individuals within them.

I left the retreat thinking about how easily institutions can drift toward abstraction. Policies, metrics, evaluations, staffing models, schedules, and compliance structures are all necessary. But they are not sufficient. At the center of every educational system is still a person: someone learning, struggling, adapting, aspiring, and trying to become (not just residents, program directors too!).

Perhaps one of the most important lessons of leadership is recognizing that placing individuals first, even within highly structured and regulated environments, ultimately serves the collective good as well.

Psychological safety, trust, authenticity, and compassion are not soft alternatives to rigor. They are often the very conditions that make meaningful growth and excellence possible.

Medicine asks much of you. It asks for competence, resilience, discipline, and accountability. But I hope it never asks you to become divided from yourself in the process.

Happy Memorial Weekend.

Best regards,

Dino Kazi