

The Path

True self will come to our rescue if we let it. The pain of being alienated from our own truth will crack our closed system open.

Phase One: Birthright Wholeness

Comes when we arrive in this world with no separation at all between our inner and outer life. Why most of us love to be around infants and young children: What we see is what we get. Whatever is inside an infant comes immediately to the outside, both figuratively and literally! In the presence of a new human being, I am reminded of what wholeness looks like. sometimes moved to wonder, "Whatever became of me?" see it all around us in the very young.

Phase Two: Raising the Wall

That long life passage in which we build and buttress a barrier between inner truth and the outer world. Some children need this wall at home, others not until they get to school. But sooner or later, everyone needs a wall for the same reason: to protect our inward vulnerabilities against external threats. As it starts to dawn on us that the world is a dangerous place, we wall off the most fragile parts of ourselves- beliefs we hold, dimensions of our own identities - in hopes of protecting them, sometimes against great odds.

Phase Three: Getting Centered

True self will come to our rescue, if we let it. The divided life is pathological, so it always gives rise to symptoms - and if we acknowledge the symptoms, we may be able to treat the disease- depression, feeling aimless or anxious or agitated or angry. But at some point in phase two, having lived behind the wall for a while, most of us feel the pain of being alienated from our own truth. If we are willing to feel it and name it, instead of trying to numb it, this pain will crack our closed system open, forcing us out from behind the wall toward the healing vision of phase three. In this phase, we reach for integration by reordering our onstage lives around our backstage values and beliefs. "I want my inner truth to be the plumb line for the choices I make about my life - about the work I do and how I do it, about the relationships I enter into and how I conduct them." This is the yearning to be "centered,". The desire to center our outer lives on inner truth is a step toward integrity. Phase three has a shadow side- getting the wagons in a circle or moving into a gated community or creating a secret garden where we welcome only those with whom we feel at ease. The shadow side of phase three arises when we use inner truth as a filter to exclude anyone or anything we find challenging. Real-world examples are common; witness the divisive role religion often plays in public life, where believers on both the left and the right separate the "good guys" from the "bad guys" along doctrinal lines. When we use our truth to create such divisions, we fall far short of the openhearted engagement with the world that all the great spiritual traditions advocate. Phase three becomes no more than the wall of phase two in disguise.

Phase Four:

Whatever is inside us continually flows outward to help form, or deform, the world and whatever is outside us continually flows inward to help form, or deform, our lives. There is only one reality. When we understand phase four in the relation of our onstage and backstage lives, we see that phases two and three are illusions - necessary illusions, perhaps, at certain points in our lives, but illusions nonetheless. We may fool ourselves into believing that we are hiding our truth behind a wall or using our truth to screen out what is

alien to us. But whether we know it or not, like it or not, accept it or not, there is no place to hide! We are constantly engaged in a seamless exchange between whatever is "out there" and whatever is "in here," participating in the creation of reality, for better or for worse. In this fourth phase we see that we have only one choice: Either we walk awake to life's continual interchanges, learning to co-create in ways that are life-giving for ourselves and others, or we sleepwalk unconsciously co-creating in ways that are dangerous and often death-dealing to relationships, to good work, to hope. We come full circle. to the adult version of the wholeness into which we were born.