

Living a Life of Integrity

Small Groups: January 2014

In my family of origin, it was not OK to cry. My parents (inadvertently and mostly unconsciously) taught me that expressions of anger were unladylike, possibly unsafe, and downright unacceptable. As a child of wide-ranging emotions and deep empathy, I found all of this quite confusing.

My story is probably not different from many of yours. In your families too, some feelings were deemed acceptable. Others were not. Certain ways of being and acting were encouraged. Others were discouraged. Perhaps you also found the unwritten and sometimes unspoken set of rules of your childhood and youth confusing. Brad Blanton, psychotherapist and author of Radical Hospitality, says we all grow up with a sense of mistaken identity. He says we all “lie like hell all the time” because we have been taught to pose as someone other than who we truly are. We are taught by our families, our schools, our religious institutions and society-at-large that we are our case histories, our reputations, our grades, our accomplishments, the clothes we wear or the money we make, the work we do or the cars we drive (the list goes on). Our primary identity, according to Dr. Blanton, is as people living in the present moment, noticing, being, relating.

I don't know about you, but living fully in the present every moment sounds daunting, exhausting, impractical, and frankly impossible. Still, I think I get Blanton's point. It can take a long time for us to sort out the “Me” from the “Not Me,” to let go of past “programming” and fears, to figure out who we are and how to live authentically in the world.

Virginia Satir, author of Peoplemaking and a pioneer in the field of family therapy, talked about “congruence” as an inner state that occurs when your insides match your outsides. In other words, you achieve congruence when what you're feeling on the inside is reflected in what you say and do and how you look on the outside. Congruence is a lack of hypocrisy. Congruence is synonymous with emotional and spiritual honesty, authenticity, and integrity. People who strive to live a life of integrity, people who are congruent more often than not, tend to be the healthiest among us – physically, emotionally and spiritually. Living with integrity ultimately reduces stress. To stop pretending, to be transparent – what a relief! So many times I've heard our new members say they are grateful to be Unitarian Universalists because they feel they do not have to hide important parts of themselves in our congregations. They can be who they are. I say, “Hallelujah!” to that!

Over time, I learned I could claim my tears as the gift of sensitivity and caring they are. To feel deeply with and for others is important. I also learned that anger is a healthy response to injustice. Anger signals that relationships, whether personal or systemic, have been violated and are in need of attention and repair. Claiming our true feelings is an important step in living a life of integrity. Learning how to channel those feelings into constructive action consistent with one's highest values is also important to living a life of integrity. My experiences as a UU continue to encourage me to strive to be my best and truest self. I hope that you will use your experiences with Unitarian Universalism and within our congregation as opportunities to claim your authentic self, to decide which parts of yourself you want to keep and which parts you wish to discard, to find support for living a life of integrity.

Why is this important? Let me refer back to something Virginia Satir said. She said that being congruent brings inner peace. She believed that inner peace, peace “within,” ultimately leads to peace “between” (two or more people) to “peace among” (all people). This is the lesson taught by all great spiritual teachers: By changing ourselves for the better, we change the world.

Ever striving to live a life of integrity,
Rev. Linda

Living the Theme: Experiencing Integrity

Use these exercises to reflect on how you experience integrity and what living a life of integrity might mean. Choose one of the exercises below to engage the theme. Come to the meeting prepared to share how you tried to live integrity and what you learned from the practice.

Warning: Some of these exercises may cause discomfort. Integrity is key to Unitarian Universalism. Not having to check our doubts, questions or who we are at the door of our congregation is important. At the same time, studies show that lying and self-deception are very, very common. Some say we all do it. These exercises invite us to explore an area where we may still have work to do on the path to integrity, so proceed with a gentleness toward yourself – we all have our own hidden struggles.

Exercise # 1 **Explore Your Inconsistency or Self-Deception**

A big part of integrity is being self-aware and self-consistent. Common challenges to integrity are self-blindness (being blind to our inconsistencies) and self-deception (finding justifications for them.) We are not usually totally successful; some part of our minds recognizes the inconsistencies, and we quickly become uncomfortable thinking about them. So spend a few days trying to be mindful of when your mind goes to a thought, or even an action, that you makes you uncomfortable. Rather than quickly changing gears, ask yourself what is making this difficult. Is it doubt or fear you are feeling, or not wanting to face something? Consider UU Minister Forrest Church's mantra: "Want what you have, do what you can, be who you are." Is the issue one of acceptance (want what you have), taking action (do what you can), or integrity (be who you are)?

Exercise # 2 **Crystallize Your Core Values**

Take time in this New Year to try to put into single words, what you find to be your core values. The values you think are most important to how you want to live. Values that you want to guide your life and your choices and perspective. Write them down. Be specific. Use only one or a few words to capture each value. If you are artistic, consider, like one of our Worship Associates, making an image for each one, making a poster. If you are not so artistic, consider writing them down where you will see them often – on your mirror or on your screen saver, or a Post-It on your computer. Somewhere to keep these core values right in front of you. Come to your meeting ready to talk about what core values you discovered were most important.

Exercise # 3 **Catch Yourself in a Lie...and Listen to What That Lie is Trying to Tell You.**

[This exercise is from the Rev. Scott Tayler]

We all do it. Every single day. We lie. Big lies, little lies, white lies, well-intended lies and sometimes, not so well-intended lies. Often there is a pattern. And that pattern tells us something about ourselves. In school some of us cheated a little here, a little there. For some of us this was about laziness and just not wanting to do the work. But for others it likely had something to do with a deep fear of not being perfect and thus not deemed “good enough.” As parents, maybe your most prominent pattern of lying involves protecting your kids from the harsher realities of life. I have a friend who still tells her child that Santa and angels are real because she wants her daughter to “hold onto magic” for just a little while longer. I have another friend who hasn’t yet told her son that she has cancer. For her, this is about not wanting her son to look at her with pity or feel he has to take care of his mom.

You get the point: Our lies don’t just tell us what we’re trying to get away with; they also tell us what we’re wrestling with. So how do your lies speak to what you’re wrestling with? Do they say you’re scared? kind? protective? distrustful? lazy? driven? too driven?

That’s what this exercise is all about. Here are your instructions:

1. Spend a few days, maybe even a week, paying extra attention to when, how and how often you lie.
2. Identify a pattern.
3. Figure out what that says about you and what you’re wrestling with.
4. Try to boil that down into one word or sentence. (“I figured out I’m scared to trust people with my truth” or “I realized that I’m more conflict-avoidant than I thought” or “I thought this was about me being compassionate, but now I’m not so sure.”)
5. Come to your meeting ready to talk about this sentence and the insight connected to it.

Some Questions to Think and Talk About

As always, don't treat these questions as "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply look them over and find one that "hooks" you most. Live with it for a while. Allow it to regularly break into - and break open - your ordinary thoughts. Then come to your small group prepared to share that journey with the group.

1. **Have there been times in your life when you felt you could not express who you were, when you had to, like Brad Blanton says, "lie like hell" or pose as someone other than who you truly are?** What was that like? Why was it necessary? How did you move past it, or have you?
2. **What percentage of your true self are you living. How much do you share with others?** How much of the real you do people actually see? 80%? 60%? 20%? Seriously, try to put a percentage on it and then figure out how you feel about this?
3. **Are there certain people with whom or places where you feel like you have more integrity than others?** Who gets the real you? Where do you get to be fully yourself?
4. **As you get older, is living with integrity easier or more difficult?** Why?
5. **Is there anything you need to change in your life that might help you on your path to living a life of integrity?** Are there obstacles you are facing right now to living your values or to living into your whole self?
6. A lot of writings about integrity also speak to honesty. **How honest are you? Do you ever think it okay to lie?** If so, when?
7. **When did telling the truth "save" you or someone else? Have you ever lied for kindness or love?**
8. **Sometimes exaggerating is a form of lying. Who or what isn't as bad as you're making them out to be?**
9. **Did your parents steer you rightly or wrongly when it comes to integrity?** What did they teach you about allowing your outside emotions to match your inner feelings? Were some emotions or actions not allowed? What did they teach you about following what you believed to be true or right? How has their legacy and teaching informed you?
10. **Have you ever had a time when you really felt you got to be fully yourself? Was it a moment or maybe a period in your life?**
11. **Have there been times – or are there now – circumstances you face that are limiting your ability to be and share who you are?** Are there confines of work or illness or personal situations that are, or feel like, limitations on how you understand yourself?
12. **Is your life true to your values? Are you walking your talk? Do you think this is noticeable to others and why?**
13. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and character." **What dominates your thoughts and imagination? It is thoughts about kindness, fairness, love, money, perfection, honesty, relationships, achievement, pleasing others?** How do you see this manifest in your life? Do you think it is in helpful or not helpful ways?

Recommended Resources

These are **not** required reading. We will not dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to get your thinking started and offer different ways to see and explore the theme.

First Thoughts and Wise Words

Integrity

1. The quality of being honest and fair
2. The state of being complete or whole
3. Firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values

Always we hope
someone else has the answer.
some other place will be better,
some other time it will all turn out.

This is it.
no one else has the answer.
no other place will be better,
and it has already turned out.

At the center of your being
you have the answer;
you know who you are
and you know what you want.

There is no need
to run outside
for better seeing.
Nor to peer from a window.

Rather abide at the center of your being;
for the more you leave it, the less you learn.

Search your heart
and see
the way to do
is to be.

--Lao Tzu

“Never separate the life you live from the words you speak.”—Paul Wellstone

“...before I can live with other folks, I've got to live with myself. The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience. Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

“When you are content to be simply yourself and don't compare or compete, everyone will respect you.”

Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*

“In the end you should always do the right thing even if it's hard.” Nicholas Sparks, *The Last Song*

“Waste no more time arguing about what a good man should be. Be one.” Marchus Aurelius. *Meditations*

It Doesn't Interest Me

It doesn't interest me if there is one God
Or many gods.
I want to know if you belong or feel
Abandoned.
If you know despair or can see it in others.
I want to know if you are prepared to live in the world
With its harsh need
To change you. If you can look back
With firm eyes
Saying this is where I stand. I want to know
If you know
How to melt into that fierce heat of living
Falling toward
The center of your longing. I want to know
If you are willing
To live, day by day with the consequence of love
And the bitter
Unwanted passion of your . . . defeat.

-- David Whyte

“A few years ago at New Years, instead of writing resolutions, I spent some time thinking about my personal core values to see if I could crystallize them into a few words. I came up with 4 C's: Caring (which covers love), Courage, Curiosity and Calm (which invokes peace). I found some photos that embody these thoughts: an outreached hand for caring, the Dali Lama for courage, a winding road for curiosity and a still lake for calm. I saved these photos with the words typed on them to powerpoint slides and I have them as my screen-saver as an affirmation of how I want to be in the world. I also spent some time that year reflecting at the end of the day on my four values: how did I live them that day? It could be something as simple as speaking up at a meeting for courage. (I can be a shy person.) The screensavers can be timely reminders during my work day. I've found that integrity becomes more of a daily practice when I live an examined life.”

– Worship Associate

It takes two to speak the truth..
One to speak, and another to listen.

- Henry David Thoreau

And a man said, speak to us of self-knowledge. And he answered saying: Your hearts know in silence the secrets of the days and nights. But your ears thirst for the sound of your heart's knowledge. You would know in words that which you have always known in thought. You would touch with your fingers the naked body of your dreams. - Kahlil Gibran

This above all, to thine own self be true. And it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man. - Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

I would admonish you, above all considerations, to be honest. I mean honesty in every conception of the word: let it enter into all the details of your work"...” Dr. William J. Mayo

WHEN LIFE IS MESSY

It is easy to pray when the sun shines
And we are grateful for another glorious day of being. It is hard to pray when wind and rain and thunder plague every step and spoil our every plan.

It is easy to be virtuous when life goes well and our existence is a journey from bliss to beauty and back. It is hard to be virtuous when life assaults us and our very being is a pilgrimage from bad to worse to worst.

It is easy to be cheerful when health bursts in us
So we can feel the very pulse of life. It is hard to be happy when pain and fatigue beset us
And we wonder if we can go on.

It is easy to do good when our goodness is rewarded
And we feel the power of pride in accomplishment. It is hard to do good when we suffer for our efforts
And are troubled because we have been misunderstood.

It is easy to feel religious impulses well up inside us
When inspiration lives at our elbow and walks on our path. It is hard to feel religious when we are tired with work to be done and discouragement seems to mark our every move.

O God of order and neatness, we give thanks for all that is good. We are grateful for manifold blessings bestowed upon us.
O God of chaos and disorder, be with us also when life is messy. Bless our coming in and our going out from this day forth.

- Richard S. Gilbert, UU Minister,
from *In the Quiet of This Hour* 1995

R. C. Sproul writes "The theories we preach are not always the ones we actually believe. The theories we live are the ones we really believe." I think this is so true of many religious followers (and people in 12 step recovery in terms of what they preach in meetings!!), but it also fits for me around the values I live by. I remember being told, before having kids, that they will follow our examples and the values we live by, not what we preach to them. I think that is spot on!" – Worship Associate

“A person will worship something – have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret, in the dark recesses of our hearts – but it will out. That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming.” -Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Book of AA: "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves." My friend went on to call honesty "the linchpin of all 12-step programs."

INVOCATION

Let us try what it is to be true to gravity,
to grace, to the given, faithful to our own voices,
to lines making the map of our furrowed tongue.
Turned toward the root of a single word, refusing solemnity and slogans, let us honor what hides and does not come easy to speech. The pebbles we hold in our mouths help us to practice song, and we sing to the sea. May the things of this world be preserved to us, their beautiful secret vocabularies. We are dreaming it over and new, the language of our tribe, music we hear we can only acknowledge. May the naming powers be granted. Our words are feathers that fly on our breath. Let them go in a holy direction.

- Jeanne Lohmann, from *Shaking the Tree*, Fithian Press 2010

At first it seems that telling the truth is more uncomfortable and difficult than telling a lie. And it is just this conviction that leads us to lie in order to hide our weaknesses and avoid giving explanations or getting into trouble-out of laziness or perhaps out of fear. Yet it is falsehood that in the long run is more difficult and complicates our life. - from Piero Ferrucci, *The Power of Kindness*

"Tailoring our ambitions to our capacities is realistic and wise. Then our ideal is to be ourselves, only but fully ourselves. To be ourselves is to be what we discover ourselves to be at the core of our being and not what others say, wish, or expect. Only ourselves, that is, not to exceed our limits by striving to be more than we really are. Fully ourselves, that is, allowing no aspect of self to lie dormant; being attentive to all that surfaces at the level of being in order to put it into practice intelligently and effectively. Being true to our real and actual capacities. This realistic ideal is not static. It adjusts to the real capacities that we discover in the course of living." – from PRH--(Personnalité et Relations Humaines) -- developed by a French priest--translated means Personality and Human Relations

"I'm finding that there can be a strong relationship between integrity and fellowship. When I turned away from the church I was raised in, a friend told me that I needed fellowship to keep my faith alive. At the time, I thought that the belief must be hard to swallow if you need a group of people to keep reinforcing it. Now I appreciate the value of fellowship. We might not share a creed but we do share our faith in the UU principles. Living one's values is not always easy; there are a lot of gray areas and we need each other's support and insight. I've learned from the examples of others and from the service. It's a foundation for action in the big, busy world."

- Worship Associate

"As humans, we are both observers of and actors in our own lives. This dual role of protagonist and viewer places us in the unique position of being both subject and judge of our behavior. Depending upon whether our actions are in synchronicity with our set of moral and ethical principles, the resulting feelings may be comfortable or discomfiting. One feels in a right or discordant relationship with oneself.

As humans, we are also unique in our ability to think, to reason and to question. We are curious and ask "why," "how." We have memories of past events and remember experiences and the feelings that they prompted. We may also dream of future possibilities.

As humans, we have been gifted with the wisdom, insights and observations of familial and societal teachings and experiences. Writings and teachings have shown us what has worked and not worked for civilizations.

It is, thus, our individual responsibility to contemplate and define for ourselves what is right, just and honest behavior as a man or woman living in a world with other individuals."

- Small Group Ministry Facilitator

... we are not in need of new knowledge or how to live sanely – but in bitter need of taking seriously what we believe, what we preach and teach. The revolution of our hearts does not require new wisdom—but new seriousness and dedication. -Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*

"I have called this center the self. Intellectually, the self is no more than a psychological concept, a construct that serves to express an unknowable essence, which we cannot grasp as such, since by definition it transcends our powers of comprehension. It might equally be called "the God within us."...The self has as much to do with ego as the sun with the earth." -- Carl Jung

It is hard to always live a life of integrity, but it is the most important value to me. Integrity is being my authentic self and authenticity is hard to achieve. In order to become my authentic self, I had to undo a lot of defenses I had accumulated and risk being myself. This means taking the time to check in with myself on a daily basis to ask myself in honesty and in depth, how I am and whether there are relational or other issues that need attending to because I fell short. Mindfulness activities where people focus on their thoughts floating through their mind non-judgmentally, just being aware, can lead to becoming more conscious as to what is going on with us. We have to do it daily though. – Worship Associate

"Character isn't inherited. One builds it daily by the way one thinks and acts, thought by thought, action by action. If one lets fear or hate or anger take possession of the mind, they become self-forged chains."

— Helen Gahagan Douglas

If a man does not keep pace
with his companions, perhaps it's because
he hears a different drummer.
Let him step to the music which he hears,
however measured or far away.

...Henry David Thoreau

"On some positions, Cowardice asks the question, 'Is it safe?' Expediency asks the question, 'Is it politic?' And Vanity comes along and asks the question, 'Is it popular?' But Conscience asks the question 'Is it right?' And there comes a time when we must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but we must do it because Conscience tells us it is right."— Martin Luther King, Jr.

Whatever games are played with us, we must play no games with ourselves, but deal in our privacy with the last honesty and truth. - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Today I bent the truth to be kind, and I have no regret, for I am far surer of what is kind than I am of what is true. -Robert Brault

The Layers

I have walked through many lives,
some of them my own,
and I am not who I was,
though some principle of being
abides, from which I struggle
not to stray.
When I look behind,
as I am compelled to look
before I can gather strength
to proceed on my journey,
I see the milestones dwindling
toward the horizon
and the slow fires trailing
from the abandoned campsites,
over which scavenger angels
wheel on heavy wings.
Oh, I have made myself a tribe
out of my true affections,
and my tribe is scattered!
How shall the heart be reconciled
to its feast of losses?
In a rising wind
the manic dust of my friends,
those who fell along the way,
bitterly stings my face.
Yet I turn, I turn,
exulting somewhat,
with my will intact to go
wherever I need to go,
and every stone on the road
precious to me.
In my darkest night,
when the moon was covered
and I roamed through wreckage,
a nimbus-clouded voice
directed me:
"Live in the layers,
not on the litter."
Though I lack the art
to decipher it,
no doubt the next chapter
in my book of transformations
is already written.
I am not done with my changes.

- Stanley Kunitz (1905–2006)

"Never, never be afraid to do what's right, especially if
the well-being of a person or animal is at stake. Society's
punishments are small compared to the wounds we in-
flict on our soul when we look the other way."
— Martin Luther King, Jr.

Online Articles, Videos and Podcasts

Pema Chödrön and Dzigar Kongtrül: Let's Be Honest
http://shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2864&Itemid=0

Pamela Meyer, "How to Spot a Liar" Ted Talk
http://www.ted.com/talks/pamela_meyer_how_to_spot_a_liar.html

Books and Movies

Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*

- Read the book or rent the movie. Note especially the character of Atticus Finch. He treated everyone with equal dignity and integrity.

Getting Real: Ten Truth Skills You Need to Live an Authentic Life

Susan Campbell

Lying (Kindle Single)

Sam Harris

Albeit with tongue in cheek, Mark Twain once wrote: "No fact is more firmly established than that lying is a necessity of our circumstance--the deduction that it is then a Virtue goes without saying." Well, Sam Harris begs to differ. And differ he does, with an impassioned, straight-shooting argument not only that lies are "the social equivalent of toxic waste," but also that each of us is capable of, and would benefit from, a life led free of the lie.

The Grace of Silence: A Family Memoir

Michele Norris

While exploring the hidden conversation on race unfolding throughout America in the wake of President Obama's election, Michele Norris discovered that there were painful secrets within her own family that had been willfully withheld. These revelations—from her father's shooting by a Birmingham police officer to her maternal grandmother's job as an itinerant Aunt Jemima in the Midwest—inspired a bracing journey into her family's past, from her childhood home in Minneapolis to her ancestral roots in the Deep South. The result is a rich and extraordinary family memoir—filled with stories that elegantly explore the power of silence and secrets—that boldly examines racial legacy and what it means to be an American.