

Preparation for Integrity (Theme for January)

Having integrity means being honest and trustworthy and acting in accordance with one's values. As UU Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray puts it, people of integrity are people who "speak up or act up for what they believe to be good and right; people who mean what they say and say what they mean." Having integrity, however, is more than just being a good person. Gray says that integrity "requires both clarity about what one values most and the ability to be reflective about one's actions and one's life. It requires both self-knowledge and attention."

One approach to self-knowledge is to consider our values over our lifetimes. Some of us felt the strongest sense of integrity in our youth, with an initial, compelling call to build and express our values. For others, a sense of integrity has been built more gradually as we discovered our values through lived experience. When we look to our experience, however, it may be difficult to identify our core values and distinguish them from values that we have adopted for our roles in society.

To find our sense of integrity and consistency, we need to look for wholeness, the root meaning of "integrity," related to the word "integer" as a whole number. Our UU first principle of inherent worth and dignity suggests that one path toward integrity may lie in asking our heart and our mind which values are closest to our true self, our core. This approach might involve a stripping away of beliefs that are based on society's demands. As Rachel Naomi Remen says, "Integrity rarely means that we need to add something to ourselves: it is more an undoing than a doing, a freeing ourselves from beliefs we have about who we are and ways we have been persuaded to 'fix' ourselves."

Being "whole" doesn't mean being one-dimensional, since our values encompass many facets – our identity, our moral values, our emotional, intellectual, and artistic expression. Integrity is not just about our selves and our values but also about connections between those values, the self we present to others, and the actions we take. Sometimes integrity is about justice, when we feel we need to act according to our values even if the community disapproves. As Harper Lee puts it in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, "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." Integrity can also be about our personal identity when we bring our authentic, whole self to a workplace or an organization or a relationship.

Integrity is centered on our own values but honors the values of other people as well. Acknowledging integrity in people with whom we disagree can be difficult. Even in our UU congregations, where we commit to honoring each other's inherent worth and to welcoming diversity, we may still argue about values and how to live them. Honoring both our own values and also the values of others is perhaps the greatest challenge of all.

When you are in integrity, people should be able to visibly see it through your actions, words, decisions, methods, and outcomes. When you are "whole" and consistent, there is only one you. You bring that same you wherever you are, regardless of the circumstance. You don't leave parts of yourself behind. *So-Young Kang*

Integrity is telling myself the truth. Honesty is telling the truth to other people. *Spencer Johnson*

There's never been more pressure to kind of parcel yourself ... It's never been more asked of us to show up as only slices of ourselves in different places. Even just to feel like you're showing up as your whole self in different settings is a pretty rebellious act. *Courtney Martin*

Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Integrity does not imply a particular set of moral values. Opposing moral values can in themselves be consistent, coherent, and whole. Each side of a moral argument can represent and inspire a life of integrity, however distasteful the moral decisions will look from across the moral divide. How do we respect the integrity of those with whom we disagree? *Rev. Michael Luechtenberger*

The truly scary thing about undiscovered lies is that they have a greater capacity to diminish us than exposed ones. *Cheryl Hughes*

If you have an inner voice telling you that how this country is now is not right, / that these shootings aren't right, / that racism isn't right, / that treating immigrants as they are isn't right, / Honor that voice. / It's your heart reminding you that love is real, that there is a more beautiful way to live. / Nurture this voice and link it to others. *Omid Safi*

Questions to Ponder

1. What values are most important to your sense of integrity?
2. What is your "integrity path"? Is integrity for you about honesty, matching your insides with your outsides, keeping your commitments, living your values, putting the pieces back together, or refusing to hide?
3. Do you have a role model for integrity?
4. Some people feel that they had a stronger sense of integrity as a young adult, while others feel that they have built a sense of their own integrity over time. If your sense of integrity has changed over the years, describe that change.
5. Are you able to integrate parts of your life and bring integrity and authenticity to your work or organizational life, family, and relationships? Or do you bring a different "self" to each?
6. Recall a time when you struggled to act with integrity. What were the circumstances?
7. When your values are different from those of the people around you, how do you maintain your integrity? Some possibilities: "push back," re-examine your own values, try to balance your values with the other side, disconnect from discussing values.
8. Consider one of the Spiritual Exercises in the Integrity issue of Soul Matters this month, like "Counting Your Values on Your Hand," "Remembering Our Way into Integrity," or "Name Your Many Names." If you find one of them valuable, what was that experience like for you?

Words of the Day

Consider some values related to integrity, such as kindness, honesty, justice, fairness, authenticity, personal expression, or others. What value most represents your own sense of integrity? The Words of the Day sentence is "The value that is most represents my sense of integrity is ..."

Some questions, quotes, and ideas are adapted from the Soul Matters January 2020 "Integrity" issue. Also see that issue for Spiritual Exercises and additional resources.