

## May Theme

### Reconciliation: The Practice of Integrity

*Reconciliation is a deep practice that we can do with our listening and our mindful speech. To reconcile means to bring peace and happiness to nations, people, and members of our family. In order to reconcile, you have to possess the art of deep listening. ~ Thich Nhat Hanh*

#### Introduction

*Reconciliation* is defined as a “restoration of friendship, or of friendly relations”. It means a return to harmony after some discord; and to repair some relationship that was broken and to restore its *wholeness*. *Integrity* is described as “the state or quality of being entire, complete, and unbroken.” Integrity means a completeness, a wholeness, without parts missing or broken; the healing of emotionally/ psychologically/ spiritually fragmented selves. Integrity is about honesty with our true self. In our frantic and disconnected world, we can easily become separated from our own selves and from each other.

The “practice of integrity” brings to mind the human yearning to embark on the journey toward discovering and embracing our authentic self, and the subsequent joy that comes when we find places to express our true self. Practicing wholeness requires insight into our humanness and finding what we seek within ourselves, and with each other. The important thing is that we cannot embark on this journey toward wholeness alone; we need relationships of trust and communities of support to sustain us. Integrity is truth and truth-telling. It is the essential requirement for living honestly with ourselves and thus allowing each of us to live in harmony with others, in community.

We all live in a cultural and social context, and we develop and are defined in central ways by our relationship to and with the culture, in both intimate (family, friends) and more distant (town, nation, world, church) communities. As responsible, autonomous individuals, a central tenet of Unitarian Universalism, we cannot completely avoid being out of line with the values and actions of our larger culture and community. We can try to reconcile ourselves to the tension that results from this difference by actions that work, externally, to change the culture, or internally, to change ourselves; although some differences are irreconcilable and we must live with the tension, or we must leave the community.

Ancient Hebrews found reconciliation to their God in Temple sacrifices and had detailed purity rituals and commandments that guided their approach to the Temple. Integrity was only possible through a life lived according to these commandments. Post-Temple Judaism exchanged the Temple for ritual reverence for and study of Torah, the “instruction” that was derived by discourse and debate about the meaning of the commandments.

Many Christians believe that humans are born with Original Sin that separates them from God, and that only an acceptance of Jesus Christ as savior will reconcile them back to God (as Adam and Eve were at The Beginning). For some denominations, e.g. Roman Catholics, reconciliation must be through the institutional Church whose priests have the singular authority to perform the sacraments. For Protestants, the institutional authority is replaced by the Bible, and each individual can know the “truth” by reading the text and following the apparent rules.

We Unitarian Universalists have adopted this notion of the authority of the individual and carried it further, holding that the basis for belief is primarily from an individual’s experience, supplemented by sacred texts from other traditions and by our own sense of the divine. We thus have a different notion of *reconciliation*, (salvation: being healed, made whole – *achieving integrity*). We believe that people are basically moral, not sinful, and we strive to live in right relationship with each other and the world. To the degree that any one of us holds a belief in god, we don’t have a “religious” notion of a separation from god (although we might personally feel this way sometimes), nor do our UU Principles direct us towards a theistic reconciliation. Rather, in *seeking the truth in love*, we assert a search for integrity in observing and understanding the evidence around us, and by making the world a better place for everyone to live.

#### Questions for discernment, on our own or with each other:

1. Describe a time when you felt a relationship had been fractured, and what you did to reconcile it.
2. What is the difference between Reconciliation and Forgiveness?

This month’s theme was composed by Gary Strichartz, Alex Businger and the Worship Associates.

3. When or in what settings do you feel most integrated? When or where is it hard for you to be a person of integrity?
4. Describe a spiritual practice that helps you feel integrated or whole.
5. What prevents you from practicing integrity?
6. Describe when it may be hard or impossible to reconcile with someone. Are you distressed by that separation, or have you made your peace about it?

### **Quotes and readings:**

Reinhold Niebuhr, a 20th century (CE) theologian and social philosopher, understood that the work necessary to build (or restore?) the just and beautiful world required community and more than a lifetime:

Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore, we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore, we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we must be saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore, we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.

*~Reinhold Niebuhr*

True reconciliation does not consist in merely forgetting the past. ... Reconciliation means working together to correct the legacy of past injustice.

*~ Nelson Mandela*

True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the hurt, the truth... because in the end only an honest confrontation with reality can bring real healing. Superficial reconciliation can bring only superficial healing.

*~ Bishop Desmond Tutu, who ran the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*

Reconciliation is a deep practice that we can do with our listening and our mindful speech. To reconcile means to bring peace and happiness to nations, people, and members of our family. This is the work of a bodhisattva. In order to reconcile, you have to possess the art of deep listening, and you also have to master the art of loving speech. You have to refrain from aligning yourself with one party so that you are able to understand both parties. This is a difficult practice.

*~ Thich Nhat Hanh*

Trust has two dimensions: competence and integrity. We can forgive mistakes of competence. Mistakes of integrity are harder to overcome.

*~ Simon Sinek*

Ignore shallow advice about human relations and remember that a man handles human situations correctly only when he has first made himself right with himself.

*~ Vernon Howard*

You and I go through life, and you would be surprised how much of the time in life the question, 'How can I live and have integrity at the same time?' is present. It's very difficult for people to live with integrity. Usually, there seems to be a conflict between integrity and living. The fact is that you give up your life when you compromise integrity.

*~ Werner Erhard*

The Worship Associates are: Jen Ryan Brown, Alexandra Businger (chair), Alan Cantor, Erin Collier, Jess Jonas, Katherine McHugh, Megan Momtaheni, and Gary Strichartz.

When we take total responsibility for our recovery, we confront ourselves for the sake of our integrity. We don't depend on the outcome for our reward. Our reward comes from taking the right action. This is the best and most stable motivation for our recovery. This kind of motivation makes it possible for us to stay the course regardless of the circumstances in our lives, whether we are successful or have experienced a failure, through health or sickness, through pain or joy, through hardships or times of plenty. When we are committed to recovery, we will continue traveling the road to recovery no matter what.

~ *Allen Berger*

When I was younger I thought success was something different. I thought, " When I grow up, I want to be famous. I want to be a star. I want to be in movies. When I grow up I want to see the world, drive nice cars. I want to have groupies." But my idea of success is different today. For me, the most important thing in your life is to live your life with integrity and not to give into peer pressure, to try to be something that you're not. To live your life as an honest and compassionate person. To contribute in some way.

~ *Ellen DeGeneres*

I now know myself to be a person of weakness and strength, liability and giftedness, darkness and light. I now know that to be whole means to reject none of it but to embrace all of it.

~*Parker Palmer*

Living with integrity means: Not settling for less than what you know you deserve in your relationships. Asking for what you want and need from others. Speaking your truth, even though it might create conflict or tension. Behaving in ways that are in harmony with your personal values. Making choices based on what you believe, and not what others believe.

~ *Barbara De Angelis*

Truth is between us, in relationship, to be found in the dialogue of knowers and knowns who are understood as independent but accountable selves. This dialogue saves personal truth from subjectivism, for genuine dialogue is possible as I acknowledge an integrity in the other that cannot be reduced to my perceptions and needs.

~*Parker Palmer*

One of the tragic ironies of history is that such original and creative geniuses as Buddha and Jesus have been extolled as perfect patterns for all to emulate. In the very struggle to be like someone else rather than to be one's own true self, or to do one's own best in one's own environment, a child is in danger of losing the pearl that is really beyond price – the integrity of his (or her) own soul.

~*Sophia Lyons Fahs*

Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind.

~*Ralph Waldo Emerson, Self-Reliance*

**Suggested reading:**

*A Hidden Wholeness: A Journey Toward an Undivided Life* by Parker Palmer

**Sources:**

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/reconciliation-as-spiritual-discipline>

<https://www.usaid.gov/burma/our-work/peace-and-reconciliation>

The Worship Associates are: Jen Ryan Brown, Alexandra Businger (chair), Alan Cantor, Erin Collier, Jess Jonas, Katherine McHugh, Megan Momtaheni, and Gary Strichartz.

## Peace And Reconciliation | Our Daily Bread

<https://odb.org/2011/05/07/peace-and-reconciliation>

When the US Civil War ended in 1865, more than half a million soldiers lay dead, the economy was shattered, and people remained deeply divided politically. The observance of Mother's Day in the United States began with two women's efforts for **peace** and **reconciliation** during this time of anguish.



The Worship Associates are: Jen Ryan Brown, Alexandra Businger (chair), Alan Cantor, Erin Collier, Jess Jonas, Katherine McHugh, Megan Momtaheni, and Gary Strichartz.