

September Theme

Integrity: The Practice of Wholeness

“May what I do flow from me like a river, no forcing and no holding back, the way it is with children.”

~ Rainer Maria Rilke

Introduction

Integrity is described as “the state or quality of being entire, complete, and unbroken,” as in *integer* or *integral*. Integrity refers to something in its “unimpaired, unadulterated, or genuine state, corresponding to its original condition”. Integrity is about honesty with our true self. In our frantic and disconnected world, we can easily become separated from our own selves and each other. The practice of ‘wholeness’ therefore 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 with integrity. 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.

Our Unitarian Universalist faith tradition has always considered integrity to be as much about wholeness as goodness. Welcoming the flawed self, valuing it in its entirety and celebrating the joy in this journey is what makes our faith tradition and the UUAC community so special. Embracing the conflicting aspects of ourselves, we encourage each other to hold an honest view of ourselves, and to feel safe enough to share our true selves - our darkness and light - without feeling the need to hide our imperfect parts. Integrity within the UU faith therefore is not about being good or being perfect, but instead about being your true self. Lovingly accepting ourselves is more important than perfecting the flawed aspects of ourselves.

Parker Palmer, a Quaker theologian, writes in his book “A Hidden Wholeness” about the practice of being whole and reminds us that it does not come easily to human beings because, “we are cursed with the blessing of consciousness and choice, a two-edged sword that both divides us and can help us become whole.” He reminds us that choosing wholeness often feels risky because it makes us vulnerable in ways we prefer to avoid; he teaches us that living a life of authenticity is one in which “soul and role” are aligned. Palmer suggests that taking our inner truth into the outer world and reclaiming our personal wholeness will help society reclaim some of its own wholeness.

Becoming whole involves figuring out what brings us to a place of deep joy and fulfillment and remaining true to that place; this requires we become familiar with our true selves without our masks. C.S. Lewis wrote, “Integrity is doing the right thing even when no one is watching.” The realization that we are whole without being perfect and without our masks is the goal of many spiritual paths. A life of integrity can be attained when deep joy accompanies our choices. As we join together in our UUAC church community this September, may we encounter integrity, wholeness and joy deeply within ourselves and with each other.

Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, or with each other:

1. In what ways does our UUAC community help you to feel whole?
2. When or how do you experience the spiritual path of finding joy and integrity within?

3. When in your life have you felt you are ‘walking together in community in ways of integrity and service’? Does our church community provide this for you? If so, how? If not, how would you like it to?
4. When and where in your life do you feel whole?
5. Is there a place in your life where you lack integrity?
6. How do you think your inner work will change the outer world?
7. What is it that drives your true self into hiding?
8. What/where is it in your life that encourages your true self to come out?
9. What is the role of perfection in your idea or your concept of your own integrity?
10. How does it feel to accept ourselves with our flaws and/or brokenness?
11. Can you think of a situation when you act with integrity but do not feel whole?
12. What do you think of the claim, “We can only know ourselves if we know each other”?
13. How may lack of integrity and not feeling whole be the same or different for you?

Quotes and Short Readings

We are a community of seekers covenanted to walk together in the ways of integrity and service. Here, we open time and make room to reflect on the questions. Here, we help each other find the courage and commitment to live fully toward what answers we might find and within the mysteries that abide. Here, the whole community may see itself gathered to celebrate its common life. Here, we promise to keep our minds and hearts open to each other and to what lies beyond our certainties to what is yet to unfold.

~Rev. Barbara Pescan

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

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

~Ralph Waldo Emerson, Self-Reliance

I think that one of our most important tasks as Unitarians is to convince ourselves and others that there is nothing to fear in difference; that difference, in fact, is one of the healthiest and most invigorating of human characteristics, without which life would become lifeless. Here lies the power of the liberal way—not in making the whole world Unitarian; but in helping ourselves and others to see some of the possibilities inherent in viewpoints other than one’s own; in encouraging the free interchange of ideas; in welcoming fresh approaches to the problems of life; in urging the fullest, most vigorous use of critical self-examination. Thus we can learn to grow together, to unite in our common search for the truth beneath a better and a happier world.

~ Adlai Stevenson

Be faithful to that which exists within yourself.

~*André Gide*

As once the winged energy of delight carried you over childhood's dark abysses, now beyond your own life build the great arch of unimagined bridges. Take your practiced powers and stretch them out until they span the chasm between two contradictions...For the god wants to know himself in you.

~ *Rainer Maria Rilke*

I prefer to be true to myself, even at the hazard of incurring the ridicule of others, rather than to be false, and to incur my own abhorrence.

~*Frederick Douglass*

It is easy to live for others, everybody does. I call on you to live for yourself.

~ *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

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

~ *Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching*

Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness and drama.

~*Miguel Ruiz, The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom*

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*

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*

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*

For an individual we distinguish integrity as a matter of that person's word being whole and complete, and for a group or organizational entity as what is said by or on behalf of the group or organization being whole and complete. In that context, we define integrity for an individual, group, or organization as: Honoring one's word.

~Werner Erhard

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