

Soul Matters 2014-15

# January

*What Does It Mean To Be  
a People of Integrity?*

“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

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## *What Does It Mean To Be a People of Integrity?*

There is no doubt that C.S. Lewis was right when he wrote, “Integrity is doing the right thing even when no one is watching.” Morality, honesty, knowing right from wrong - who of us would argue that these are qualities of a person with integrity? And yet our faith tradition has always been a little uneasy with leaving it simply at that. When it comes to integrity, the Unitarian Universalist take has always been as much about wholeness as goodness. Embracing the many aspects of ourselves has been more of a concern than perfecting every last aspect of ourselves. Indeed, we resonate with Quaker theologian Parker Palmer who writes, “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.” Yes, says our religion, keep working at making yourself better, but along the way please don’t allow yourself to get so tangled up in perfection that you feel the need to hide those imperfect parts. This need to hide is what has always worried us UU’s the most. Integrity is most surely about honesty, but the honesty that seems to matter the most is the ability to hold an honest view of oneself.

Which also involves enjoying that flawed self. When Palmer talks of “embracing it all” this is not a matter of somber resignation. There is a gladness involved. We can be whole without being perfect! To come to this realization is most surely the goal of any spiritual path.

And there is yet another sense in which integrity calls us to gladness. Here the poet Rainer Maria Rilke puts it best: “May what I do flow from me like a river, no forcing and no holding back, the way it is with children.” Here the call of integrity is not “Be perfect.” or “Be good.” but “Be yourself!” Know your center. Know what makes you uniquely you. And live from that place! Forget the masks. Forget the “shoulds” and the “suppose tos.” Just figure out what takes you to that place of deep gladness and to that remain true! This doesn’t mean abandoning the task of “doing the right thing when no one is watching,” says our faith; it just means that you will know what the right thing is when deep joy accompanies your choice.

Integrity and joy. They are companions on the spiritual journey. May we encounter them both more deeply this month.

# Our Spiritual Exercises:

## Option A: **A New Year of Integrity**

New Year's resolutions are often about changing oneself. In light of this month's theme, make it about holding on to (or remaining loyal to) yourself instead. Pick one thing that makes you distinctively you and then resolve to protect, celebrate or live into it for at least this month. Think of it as a "resolution to your integrity." Come to your group prepared to share why you picked the personal characteristic you did and how your resolution to honor it altered your day-to-day living this month.

## Option B: **What's The Big Deal about White Lies?**

White lies regularly come up in conversations about integrity. Are they really that big of a deal? Spend this month figuring out the role they play in your life. Monitor when you use them. See what patterns emerge. Do you use them to protect the feelings of others? Or to hide something about yourself? Do they serve your sense of integrity or betray it? Come to your group ensure what you learned?

## Option C: **Person of the Year**

Time magazine names of a "Person of the Year" every January. They choose someone whose impact stands out and whose influence dramatically shifted the events the past year. Likewise, we all have someone in our lives who shaped our sense of integrity just as significantly. Come to your group with the name and story of someone who was a model of integrity in your life.

## Option D: **Your Greatest Act of Integrity**

All of us have it: that time in our life on the strength of our character stood out and we acted out of our deepest sense of what was morally right or most true to our core. Revisit and re-celebrate that moment by sharing it with your group. Spend some time before your meeting reflecting on how that moment of high resolve not only brought you pride but challenge you to live up to it again and again.

## Option E: **A Child's Integrity**

One of the most sacred responsibilities of a parent or caretaker is to foster and protect their child's sense of integrity. If you have a child in your life (either as a parent, relative or mentor), use this month to be a bit more intentional about this precious task. Find at least one way to support their sense of integrity and true self.

## **Your Question:**

*As always, don't treat these questions like "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply find **the one** that "hooks" you most and let it lead you where you need to go. And then come to your Soul Matters meeting prepared to share that journey with your group.*

1. **As a child or young adult, what did watching those around you teach you about integrity?** Where they positive or negative lessons? And maybe most importantly, how has that impacted you today, knowing that young ones around you are also watching you?
2. **Has your integrity grown?**
3. **Does integrity bring you joy? Or does it feel like work?**
4. One of our recommended quotes reads, "There are times in this harum-scarum world when figuring out the right thing to do is quite simple, but doing the right thing is simply impossible." **Are you facing such a situation right now? As you struggle, are you being kind to yourself?**
5. In her poem, Now I Become Myself, May Sarton, writes, "Now I become myself. It's taken time, many years and places; I have been dissolved and shaken, worn other people's faces..." **Are you aware of wearing other people's faces? What's stopping you from taking them off?**
6. Parker Palmer writes, "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." **What one thing could you embrace right now to feel more whole?**
7. **Is your workplace a place of integrity? If not, how have you learned to stay true to yourself in the midst of those pressures to do otherwise?**
8. **Have you raised your children to have integrity?**
9. **Does your marriage have integrity?**
10. **Do your friendships have integrity?**
11. **Does your spiritual life have integrity?**

## Recommended Resources:

*As always, this is not required reading. We will not analyze or dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to get your thinking started, and maybe to open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be “a people of integrity.”*

### in·teg·ri·ty

noun

1. the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness.
2. the state of being whole and undivided.

## Wise Words:

"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

"To be human is to become visible while carrying what is hidden as a gift to others. To remember the other world in this world is to live in your true inheritance."

- David Whyte, *from his poem "What To Remember When Waking"*  
(<http://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=994>)

"Integrity is telling myself the truth. And honesty is telling the truth to other people."

- Spencer Johnson

"Everyone makes mistakes, so being a person of integrity does not mean you haven't committed a moral or ethical violation, ever. It means having the strength of character to learn from those 'misbehaviors' and seek continual self-improvement."

- Eric Kail

"Before we can even embrace the notion of integrity, we need to develop the ability to intellectually wrestle with the urge to rationalize away our underlying faults and the related consequences."

- Eric Kail

"A little integrity is better than any career"

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

"But there are times in this harum-scarum world when figuring out the right thing to do is quite simple, but doing the right thing is simply impossible...."

— Lemony Snicket, *Horseshoe: Bitter Truths You Can't Avoid*

"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

I'm an Obliger, for sure! I do really well when other people are expecting me to do something, when I have a commitment with someone else ... but I tend to let myself off the hook if it's "only" a commitment to myself."

-Leo Babauta

"You are only afraid if you are not in harmony with yourself."

— Hermann Hesse

"Return to the most human, nothing less will nourish the torn spirit, the bewildered heart, the angry mind."

- May Sarton

“Integrity is doing the right thing, even if nobody is watching.”

— Jim Stovall and C.S. Lewis

“On some questions, Cowardice asks the question, “Is it safe?” Expediency asks the question, “Is it polite?” 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

“I believe in integrity. It’s a belief that’s tested in those gut-wrenching moments when conflicting values pull me in opposite directions. Back in the early 1980s, [he wrote] I was in a training session for mental health workers who were volunteering to provide counseling to cancer patients who had a terminal diagnosis. Each of us was given 16 index cards and asked to write on each the names of people, abilities, things, and values we hold dear. In the course of our imagined cancer, we had to surrender cards or somewhat abruptly have them taken from us. At the end [of the exercise] I had two cards: One read “Integrity” and the other read “My Family.” How could I choose between these two; such a choice was unfair and impossible. My initial thought was that I would give up my integrity, because I love my daughters and would want their comfort at my death. But then, I would realize that dying without integrity might be worse.”

- From NPR’s This I Believe

A few years ago I took a family systems training for clergy. When discussing how a leader maintains integrity in the

midst of intense anxiety, we watched a film about JFK and the Cuban missile crisis. As I watched this film, I began laughing. We saw the iconic image of JFK hunched over the phone in his office as he waited for Russian Premier, Nikita Khrushchev, to call and de-escalate the impending nuclear world war. When he finally received a telegram from Khrushchev it was late at night. He said to his cabinet that he was going to get some sleep. The people in the room were incensed. He said something like, "The world will be glad that I slept before responding." I began laughing out loud! How many times have I been intensely anxious in my role as a leader in a church! While I am not at the helm with a pending nuclear world war, I think many people would be just fine with me sleeping before making a decision. I have a printed picture of JFK hunched over his desk near my phone in my office. It is a great reminder to not take myself so seriously. Lightening up helps me manage myself so that my own anxiety does not undermine my ultimate values and goal. In other words, it helps me lead with integrity.”

- A Soul Matters Minister

“Keep fresh before me the moments of my high resolve. Despite the dullness and barrenness of the days that pass, if I search with due diligence, I can always find a deposit left by some former radiance. But I had forgotten. At the time it was full-orbed, glorious, and resplendent. I was sure that I would never forget. I had forgotten how easy it is to forget.

There was no intent to betray what seemed so sure at the time. My response was whole, clean, authentic. But little by little, there crept into my life the dust and grit of the journey. Details, lower-

level demands, all kinds of cross currents -- nothing momentous, nothing overwhelming, nothing flagrant -- just wear and tear. If there had been some direct challenge --a clear-cut issue -- I would have fought it to the end, and beyond.

In the quietness of this place, surrounded by the all-pervading Presence of God, my heart whispers: Keep fresh before me the moments of my High Resolve, that in fair weather or in foul, in good times or in tempests, in the days when the darkness and the foe are nameless or familiar, I may not forget that to which my life is committed”

- Howard Thurman

## Videos & Online:

### **The Calm Within**

<http://www.karmatube.org/videos.php?id=2568>

Dewey Bozella was locked up for 26 years for a crime he did not commit. This story is about one man's journey to reclaim his life and hold on to his integrity against all odds.

### **A Christopher Hitchens Memorial**

<http://www.upworthy.com/people-were-outraged-by-what-he-said-his-entire-life-but-right-before-he-died-he-was-still-at-it?c=reccon2>

## Books:

### ***A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life***

by Parker Palmer

### ***On Lies, Secrets and Silence, Selected Prose***

By Adrienne Rich

<http://www.brainpickings.org/2013/07/02/adrienne-rich-honorable-human-relationship/>

## Movies:

Locke

To Kill A Mockingbird

Pleasantville

Constant Gardener

Chocolate

The Shawshank Redemption

On The Waterfront

The Mission

Dead Poets Society

Thank You For Smoking

Milk (*Check out the UUA study guide:*

<http://www.uua.org/lgbtq/discuss/125446.shtml>)

## Articles:

### **The Insufficiency of Honesty**

By Stephen L. Carter

An article exploring the meaning of integrity, and its differentiation from honesty.

Found by googling “THE INSUFFICIENCY OF HONESTY Stephen L. Carter Atlantic Monthly”

Also see:

<http://www.nyu.edu/cas/ewp/nicolichsufficiencyd03.pdf>

### **Seeing Ourselves in the Hunger**

#### **Games**

By Cynthia Landrum

How do we live with integrity amidst our own dystopian future?

<http://www.uuworld.org/ideas/articles/220173.shtml>

### **Against Innocence**

By Rosemary Bray McNatt

Does our political integrity prevent us from compromise?

<http://www.uuworld.org/2003/06/feature2.html>

### **A Lesson in Academic Integrity: The cost of plagiarism**

<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/a-lesson-in-academic-integrity-as-students-feel-the-injustice-of-plagiarism/>

## For Young Souls:

### Books:

*The Empty Pot* by Demi

*The Day the Crayons Quit*

by Drew Daywalt

*Ruthie and the (not so) Teeny Tiny Lie*

by Laura Rankin

*The Berenstain Bears and the Truth*

by Stan and Jan Berenstain

*Dear Mr. Rosenwald*

by Carole Weatherford

*The Story of the Jumping Mouse*

by John Steptoe

*The Three Questions* by Jon J. Muth

### Movies:

Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory

Brave

Mary Poppins

Frozen

The Miracle Worker

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Join our Soul Matters Facebook group to share and find inspiration for this month's theme:

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/soulmatters/>

### **SOUL MATTERS PINTEREST PAGE**

Join our Soul Matters Pinterest boards to see pins and pics for each of our monthly themes:

<http://www.pinterest.com/soulmatters2014/>

February's Theme:  
Faith