



## Living with Integrity

BY BETH DANA, MINISTER OF CONGREGATIONAL LIFE, FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF DALLAS, TEXAS

“To be nobody-but-yourself—in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else—means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight.” The poet e. e. cummings wrote these timeless words in 1958. Each of us, young and old, receives messages about who we ought to be. How we assimilate these messages with who we *know* ourselves to be is the spiritual discipline of living with integrity.

Have you ever felt like you weren’t being true to yourself, perhaps even that you were living a double life?

LGBTQ and other marginalized people know this reality well—it’s called passing. Others of you may know this feeling when you’re at work if you can’t be your full self—there’s a divide between work life and home life. Or maybe you feel a gap between your vision of how best to live and the reality of your life currently. Or perhaps you are a proud UU at church, but “in the closet” with more conservative family members or friends.

If you’ve ever experienced this divide, you know that it’s not a very joyful or fulfilling way to live. The truth we hold within is the core of our humanity, so when we are disconnected from the soul of who we are, we can feel lost.

The Quaker writer and activist Parker Palmer has focused much of his energy and writing on the challenge of living a whole and undivided life, aligning soul and role. Essentially, he is interested in what it means to have integrity. In his book *A Hidden Wholeness*, he describes this dilemma using the image of a strip of paper that is white on one side, colored on the other.

The white side is your inner life—your ideas, intuitions, feelings, values, faith, mind, heart, spirit, true self, soul. The colored side is your outer life—the image, influence, and impact you project.

As adults, at one time or another, or maybe as a way of life, we put up a wall of separation between our inner life and outer life, protecting the vulnerabilities of our inner life from the world we live in. This might include parts of our identities that are not safe to share with our communities. If the paper stays with the white, inner side invisible long enough, if we live behind the wall long enough, our inner life can disappear even from our own view, and the wall becomes all we know.

But when we recognize that the wall exists, we can take a step toward integrity by trying to reorder and reintegrate our inner and outer lives, values, and beliefs. We join the ends of our strip of paper to form a connected circle. The thing about this is that there’s still an inside and an outside, white on one side, colored on the other.

So what does true integrity look like? It looks like what happens if you put a full twist in the strip of paper before you join the two ends, creating a Mobius strip.

The Mobius strip was discovered by German mathematician August Ferdinand Mobius. In mathematics, the Mobius strip is a surface with only one side and one boundary. If you trace your finger on what seems to be the outside, you find yourself suddenly on what seems to be the inside. But if you continue, you will find yourself back on what seems to be the outside.

If life is a Mobius strip, there really is no inside or outside; there is only one reality. Integrity is the state of being whole and undivided, which is why the Mobius strip is a beautiful representation of this way of living.

As Parker Palmer says, the inside and outside—of the Mobius strip and of our

# Quest

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I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year’s fashions.

• Lillian Hellman •

A monthly for religious liberals

### THINKING ABOUT INTEGRITY

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selves—are “co-creating each other.” “Whatever is inside us continually flows outward to help form, or deform, the world,” he says, “and whatever is outside us continually flows inward to help form, or deform, our lives.” We travel the Mobius strip of life making choices—about what we project and what we absorb—and these choices can be “life-giving for the world, for other people, and for me”...or not.

The poet David Whyte writes: “hold to your own truth at the center of the image you were born with.” *This* is what it means to live with integrity. And when we hold to this truth it shapes our friendships, our work and our life choices in ways that are life giving, because we know and are being true to who we are.

Our integrity is constructed, in large part, by the choices we make. Even by what may seem like little, everyday choices.

The other day I was at the store buying cushions for my patio furniture. They were big cushions, seat and back attached by plastic ties, piled high in the cart, shoved in there so as to keep them from spilling out all over the floor or knocking over displays in my path. When I went to pay, the checkout person said “two?” as she scanned the tag nearest her. I paused, and said, “no, there are three.”

I could have just said “yeah” and taken advantage of the situation, having to pay for only two cushions instead of three. Some people might have jumped at the opportunity, not even hesitating. But that’s not who I am, it’s not “the center of the image [I was] born with.” I’m not someone who takes advantage of others and lies to save a buck. I’m someone who is, or tries to always be, honest.

But integrity is about more than honesty, or telling the truth. It’s about *being* true to who you are, what you believe, and what you say. It’s the sum total of all those small, everyday choices to be

honest, choices that are life-giving instead of life-diminishing.

I think we generally expect integrity of one another. I can recall multiple times that were like the patio cushion incident. I stood at the checkout, my arms full of pool noodles or bubble wands (birthday party—what can I say?), and the checkout person just asked me how many I had, without verifying or counting. There’s undoubtedly an element of privilege at play here, *and* I believe there’s also something deep within us that makes us *want to believe* others have integrity.

We are called to live with integrity by expecting it of one another. When someone expects me to be real and true, they are calling me to hold to that inner truth at the core of who I am. There is a spiritual invitation in this exchange.

Integrity is a spiritual practice—not a characteristic or quality of an individual, but a way of being and living. The first part is to identify and listen to our core. Who am I, what is that image I was born with, my core, my soul?

Then there is the spiritual work of strengthening this core, of amplifying this voice, which we do by making choice after choice. Every time we make a choice about what we project and what we absorb it’s like we’re working our integrity muscle.

JoLillian Zwerdling, quoted in the book *Emergent Strategy*, writes:

*From starfish I have learned that if we keep our core intact, we can regenerate. We can fall apart, lose limbs, and re-grow them as long as we don’t let anyone threaten that central disc’s integrity. We can grow so many different arms, depending on what kind of sea star we are. We have to nourish ourselves with the resources we are surrounded by...and by doing so we help keep ecosystems delicately balanced.*

I love this image of us as starfish. By fortifying your core and keeping it

intact you can weather whatever comes. Whatever temptations present themselves. Whatever messages you receive from this “world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else.” When you know



and listen to your true self, you can be like the starfish, regenerating when needed. And this helps contribute to a balanced ecosystem.

If you’re like me, you may need some help with this spiritual practice. It helps to have a community who will remind you of who you are, and support you in holding to that core. A community that models integrity. This is one of the many reasons to belong to a church.

All institutions, including churches, struggle with integrity just as individuals do. Are we who we say we are? Do we walk our talk? Our actions must be reflective of the core identity we claim, and of the values that run deep in our tradition and our bones. In a time when integrity is not being modeled by those in charge of our government and most powerful institutions, we as individuals and as a church have an important role to play.

Just as the choices we make about what we put out into the world and what we take in co-create our individual integrity, I believe the choices we make as individuals and as a church help co-create a *society* with integrity. Each time we are honest, true to ourselves, humble about our shortcomings and mistakes, and practice discernment and fortification of our core, we model integrity in life-giving ways, helping transform the culture in which we live.

We are all surrounded by forces that tempt us to be other than who we are. But as the poet David Whyte writes: “There is only one life / you can call your own / and a thousand others / you can call by any name you want.” Let’s live our own, and live it with integrity.

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## Living with Integrity in a “Post-Truth” World

BY **MARK WARD**, LEAD MINISTER,  
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

There’s a reason why we as a religious people covenant to affirm and promote a free and responsible search for truth and meaning. It’s because we believe that our spiritual wholeness depends on confronting the real facts of our lives and the world we live in. We believe we can live free, awakened, and aware; we can be loving, compassionate, and kind; we can live into who we are and use our gifts to help save the world only in the presence of the truth. And from that truth we derive meaning.

And there is no question that we are living in a precarious time for the truth. We find ourselves in a world of “alternative facts” that amount to a torrent of lies from those in the highest offices in the land. How are we to respond in a way that is centered in integrity, in a way of living that is grounded in what is true and what is right? Several years ago I heard a presentation at a minister’s conference that stuck with me. The speaker argued that over the last century different memes embodying cultural ideas or practices have tended to prevail.

For example, she said, in the 1960s the predominant mode of thinking centered on the notion of rights—who had them and how they would be protected. It was a powerful driver of all kinds of things, she said, but in time its importance faded, to be replaced in the 1980s by a different idea, the rising notion that people shouldn’t look to others to make their way in the world, that we are responsible for our own destiny. She identified this with an acronym she gave as “YOYO” or “you’re on your own.”

She argued, however, that in this new century the old notion is beginning to fade and a new meme is rising that acknowledges more directly our interdependence on each other. It’s the recognition that while we are responsible for our individual lives, we can’t get by on our own. She described this with the acronym, “WITT” or “we’re in this together.”

I think that, Donald Trump notwithstanding, WITT is the acronym of our age. It embodies the recognition that we are fundamentally bound to each other and the Earth across races, ethnicities, gender identities, economic status and nationality. Every person matters.

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There is no question  
that we are living  
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for the truth.

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Our work, then, involves building ties to know each other better, and exploring how to empower all people to live with purpose and meaning. It means widening our circles of concern to embrace all people, including those who today are marginalized. It is a powerful center of meaning, grounded in the truth of the unity of humankind.

But it is challenging, too. It requires adapting ourselves to difference, stepping outside the echo chambers of the narrow silos of our lives. We do this through the choices we make in how we conduct our lives, about how we spend our time, who we associate with. Let’s be honest, giving ourselves to this work is not easy.

Easy is living our quiet lives in our quiet circles. Hard is putting ourselves in places we’ve never been, in the company of people different from us. It isn’t comfortable, and yet it puts us in touch with something so remarkable and compelling that it can astonish us when we first experience it. Annie

Dillard describes it as the substrate that underlies everything else in our lives: “our complex and inexplicable caring for each other, and for our life together here.” The simplest word for it is love: an elemental truth so basic, so vital that it eludes our conscious minds, as Rumi puts it, like the water that fish swim in. Choosing to love is speaking out when we see others demeaned, reaching out to neighbors when they are threatened, listening when another is in pain.

Let us say a blessing for the complexities of this world, all the imponderables that unhorse our prejudices and preconceptions, that force us to shake our heads and look again. Our human brains evolved to locate patterns and construct scenarios that distill complicated circumstances down to a few simple elements. It’s a great boon to us, but it also gets us into trouble time and again when the messy world with all of its inconvenient truths trips us up.

Thankfully, complexity forces us amid all our hubris to admit to a little humility. Ah, humility, that not-so-gentle reminder that to be human is to be fallible, requiring us to be open to correction, to learn tolerance and forbearance, and so to be open to grace. Through the power of humility and grace we find our way to love, which is the core of integrity.

The work that Unitarian Universalists around the country and the world are doing in the election process, the work we do in our local communities, all of this is part of the same work of creating the beloved community. And whomever we elect, this work will continue.

Friends, vote for the most intelligent, experienced, and compassionate candidates. And then go love the hell out of the world, each of us in our unique ways. The world cries out for our efforts, and no election alone will end that. ■



## Watertight Integrity

BY REV. MATT TITTLE (1961-2018)

I learned about risk-taking as a component of integrity in the Navy. I spent 11 years as an active duty Naval Officer, and four and a half of my 20 years of service were aboard ships. In ships and submarines, watertight integrity is essential. Without it, the ship risks sinking. Each door and hatch is lined with a rubber seal, treated with petroleum jelly and tested periodically for its integrity. This ensures that there won't be any leaks into the next compartment in the event that one side is flooded.

We constantly trained in the Navy to ensure that our watertight integrity remained intact. During General Quarters, the level of alert that we go to when danger is imminent, all doors and hatches are closed and sealed. No one is allowed to move around the ship and open any of these doors.

But, Condition Zebra is an extreme condition in which we take no risks. Everything is locked tight. We don't go to that condition of watertight integrity very often and don't stay in it for very long. So, we also had condition Yoke, Xray, and modified Zebra—all different degrees of watertight integrity. Just like in life. Sometimes we open doors and take a calculated risk, sometimes we don't.

Fundamentalist or conservative faiths might be considered to be more often in condition Zebra, relying more on certainty and allowing for very little risk. But they deny their wholeness in the very act of trying to maintain it—people don't function as well if they are constantly locked down. As believers in a liberal tradition we allow for less rigidity in our knowledge and beliefs, and are more affirming of others' beliefs. We take calculated risks, but need to have a keen understanding of why we are doing so, and a plan for when we might tighten up a little.

We often talk about integrity in terms of honesty, of right and wrong. But integrity isn't a question of either/or, it isn't a question of should or shouldn't, can or cannot. Integrity is more complex than that. Critics might say this is a slippery slope—that it is moral relativism to explain away integrity as other than pure and certain. To them I say, we can lock down every door. Or we can live our lives paying attention to our wholeness, maintaining our commitment to freedom, having courage in our convictions, and knowing when to take risks. ■

## Integrity's Blemished Virtue

BY TIMOTHY, CLF MEMBER INCARCERATED IN NEW YORK

Helen was revered as a good person, and I was happy to be her friend. She was a manager, a mother, an artist, a neighbor. My experiences with her were always warm and affirming. Everyone trusted her integrity because she lived her values.

But one day we find that she has done something horrible—something offending our moral code. In an instant, Helen becomes disturbing to me. How can I trust her? The experiences we shared are erased by a biting fear that all she was is a lie.

Then Hope—an acquaintance, not even a friend—steps forward with a gift of love. Hope and Helen talk, and affirm their relationship is still authentic. With this assurance, Hope is with Helen as she answers for the harm she created. Hope sees Helen as an artist, a manager, a neighbor *and* a person who violated a tenet. Hope insists we all are more than the worst thing we've done, and should not be carelessly discarded. She forces me to ask if integrity is only the memory of unblemished experience, or if it is simply capricious perception. Hope doesn't say it, but I admit to myself: shame on me! ■

## The Crooked Timber of Ourselves

BY DR. DAVID BREEDEN, SENIOR MINISTER



FIRST UNITARIAN SOCIETY  
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"Finding yourself."

Nearly everyone wants to do it, and many are

willing to pay for the trip. It's worth the effort because when you find yourself, your true self, you dwell in authenticity, creativity, and power. Right?

Not so right. Unfortunately, the Western idea of finding yourself goes only half way. After all, what we discover when we find ourselves is what the German philosopher Immanuel Kant called "the crooked timber of humanity." Kant said, "Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made."

As Kant knew, what we do with ourselves *after* we find ourselves is the real work. After we find ourselves, there's a whole lot of sawing and hammering and sanding and shellacking to be done. As a matter of fact, we've got to saw, hammer, sand, and shellac ourselves every darn day. Perfection isn't the goal. A life well-lived is the goal.

One tool we can use is a working definition of integrity. In my mind, integrity is born out of a match between inner ideals and outer action. For example, if creating justice is my goal, I can't just seek to discover what justice means in the abstract, I need to determine what justice means in my own actions toward the greater whole.

Sure, "finding yourself" is great. But it's only a step in the right direction. Next we've got to grab some tools and work on that crooked timber of ourselves. ■





## The Integrity of Community

BY REV. SUSAN FREDERICK-GRAY,



PRESIDENT,  
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST  
ASSOCIATION

Integrity is one of the most important character traits we can develop.

It is important because it requires both clarity about what we value most and the ability to be reflective about our actions and our lives. But what about communities? What about congregations, denominations, governments and societies?

Just as for an individual, integrity in community is a measure of the alignment between what a community, organization or society says about what it values, and its actions, intentions, behaviors and policies. So a lack of integrity would be when a group's actions and practices violate or negate who they say they are.

But what about as a country? In his book, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*, Harvard professor Michael Sandel says a significant problem in the US is that our political discussions no longer really grapple with conversations about values. *What does it mean to live a good life? What does the common good look like? What are our civic responsibilities? What is essential for the protection of liberty and democracy? What does equality look like?*

The heated and often vitriolic debates of contemporary politics are a reflection of how really empty they are. Slogans and sound bites and personal attacks do not make room for real discussions of values and how to protect them and to live them.

Integrity requires not only clarity about which values matter most, but also the ability to reflect on our actions and to gauge their

alignment with those values. There seems so little capacity in our public discourse for this kind of reflection and debate. And this fosters disillusionment, regardless of political persuasion, with government and public officials because of their inability to act for the public good or address questions that matter most.

Liberty, democracy, equality, a commitment to the common good—these are values we say are foundational to the U.S., and yet it is another value that has been slowly reshaping our society. Sandel argues that market values have pervaded almost all areas of our lives and our society. Almost everything in the U.S. is now for sale.

The market has invaded areas that previously were determined by values related to what it means to have a good society, values aimed at achieving a common good. And nowhere is there a real conversation about where market values make sense and where other values should lead. In fact, the common narrative is that market values are good in all ways—that they provide the efficient distribution of resources and that markets should dictate all aspects of our lives. But there is a price—and that price is the loss of those other values.

Here is an example Sandel gives: There was a study done comparing blood donation systems in the U.K. and the U.S. In the U.K., all blood is donated without compensation. But here in the U.S., there is a combination of donations and blood banks that pay people to give blood. Traditional economics would suggest that paying people to give blood would boost supply, for you have both the motivation of wanting to help others and the financial motivation to give blood. In reality, the opposite is the case. The study found that paying people to give blood “led to chronic

shortages, wasted blood, higher costs and a greater risk of contaminated blood.” Volunteers, when they begin getting paid to do something, find it less rewarding. Getting paid to do something they had volunteered for actually depreciates their intrinsic interest and commitment.

The less we are needed or asked to be civic-minded, the less we are called on for civic duty, the less we as a citizenry are aware, prepared, practiced or attentive to those needs. No wonder this sense of commonality and connection is unraveling. Too often our social relationships are dictated by market values. And the more our lives are dictated by markets, the more those of affluence and privilege are sequestered from those of modest means.

We need more civic places and opportunities for dynamic civil discourse and debate about when market values make sense, and when a different set of values—values like democracy, equality, liberty, happiness and notions of the common good—need to guide us. Without this work we will continue to drift away from our core values and struggle even to articulate them meaningfully. The more nearly all aspects of our lives become market decisions rather than moral ones, the weaker our ability to define and align to what's most important becomes.

This is why integrity is so important—for the individual and for communities. Communities have the power to bring out the best and the worst in people. Change is possible. Healthy, robust, values-based conversations can be reclaimed if we start inviting them—both engaging in them ourselves and requiring them of the people who ask to lead us. When we have lost our way as communities, individuals must work and speak and act to lead the community back to integrity.

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## From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY  
SENIOR MINISTER,  
CHURCH OF THE  
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

Years ago I was working with an acupuncturist. She put needles all over my body to stimulate various meridians, so that my life energy, or *qi*, could flow freely and without impediment. As I was lying on the table, she asked how my body felt. Now, the needles don't hurt, but my body was uncomfortable in a variety of ways. I told her about various sensations that were unpleasant, thinking she needed to adjust her needles. Instead, she said, "That's fascinating. Right now your energy is perfectly in balance."

It was fascinating, indeed. My balanced energy felt uncomfortable and wrong in a variety of ways. What felt right to me, instead, was when I could relax into the comfort of familiarity.

What does this have to do with integrity? To have integrity, we're told, we must look inside to that deepest wisdom, that still small voice. We'll know it when we feel aligned, when we identify our authentic self and align our actions and words with it. But what if that still small voice, and everything else we've been taught to look to as wisdom, is biased in ways that are limiting and limited, and it turns out what we've been trained to see as truth is actually steeped in lies? How do we know what integrity means then?

As I've come to understand more and more the depth to which oppressive worldviews fill my head—worldviews based in all kinds of biases which I rationally reject—I realize that integrity is a difficult commodity for most of us, particularly in areas where we hold privilege. Well, all I really know is that it's difficult for me. I simply can't trust my own integrity by looking within—I need side-mirrors and other reference points. The acupuncturist's viewpoint

provides a corrective to my own.

Quite honestly, it took me many, many years to come to this realization. Years when I thought, "Yeah, I get it, of course, but why do we have to talk about it all the time?" about racism and white supremacy culture and classism and ableism and sexism. Because I had encountered the ideas before, I thought I was grounded in an anti-oppressive, trustable, place. Because I rationally rejected oppressive ideas, I presumed that I had moved beyond them—that my own sense of myself as a person of integrity was trustworthy and accurate.

Integrity, after all, means wholeness. But how can I be whole in a world where we are all torn apart, labeled by identities that only hold pieces of our complexity, pitted against one another for our very survival? How can I be whole when governments and law courts have made up racial categories to describe one another which are foundationally lies, and then based whole legal and cultural systems on those lies? How can I be whole when people categorized as I have been—white—have had access to privilege at the expense of people who have been categorized in other ways?

For me, continuing to work towards integrity has been a study in humility. I am constantly believing *Now I understand!* only to learn yet another thing that tells me I don't understand at all. Work towards integrity has meant interrogating myself about where I locate my sources of "truth," and questioning whether those locations are actually trustworthy. My work towards being a person with integrity has meant learning more every day about the ways I am blocked from engagement with the actual lived experiences of all kinds of people: neuro-divergent people, people with disabilities, black and brown people, people of all genders, people who are poor, people who hold all kinds of national and ethnic identities, people with different religious reference points. Learning from all these people

leads me down a path toward greater wholeness.

Unitarian Universalism is a challenging religion because we are multi-metaphorical. We draw from many world religions and philosophies, and we don't pretend that we all coalesce around a particular belief or metaphor system. But in a way, I think this challenge is the fundamental challenge to becoming a whole person. Rather than believing that if we look towards ultimate truth we will experience the same God (or no-God), we trust that there are larger patterns to be found if our own integrity is part of an interdependent web of perspectives.

Of course, that interdependent web needs to be grounded in some kind of standard of truth to have integrity. In order to live out the principles to which we are committed, we can't ignore pieces of history and current events simply because they are too painful. We have to believe the experiences of people who have radically different embodied life experiences than we do, paying particular attention to the voices from the margins. Liberation theology calls this the "epistemic advantage of the oppressed," meaning that oppressed people know both the dominant narratives and the narrative that comes from living underneath that narrative.

This is a wonderful community in which to learn, in which to become more whole. The diverse lives and experiences of the people here can help us all in the lifelong struggle to live our own lives with integrity. ■

The CLF serves some 1100 members who are currently incarcerated. Live out our Unitarian Universalist values by becoming a pen pal and sharing letters and words of encouragement with a CLF member behind bars. You can find more information at [worthynow.org/pen-pals](http://worthynow.org/pen-pals)



## REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR,  
MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN  
LEARNING, CHURCH OF  
THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

What does it look like to live a life of integrity? It seems to me that this question is at the heart of Unitarian Universalism. We don't have a creed, a set of beliefs that everyone must agree to. But we are also not just a convenient social club that offers a low-cost, low-risk way to get together. We are a religious body, and our faith calls us to engage with what is highest and deepest and most meaningful. William Ellery Channing had the audacity to claim that the point of our religion—of our living—is to cultivate “likeness to God.”

That's a pretty tall order, to try to make yourself as much like God—however you imagine God to be—as possible. But I think it comes down to a matter of integrity. Integrity means wholeness; you can see the meaning in the word *integer*, a whole number. If God is somehow the whole of everything that is larger than the sum of the parts, cultivating likeness to God means learning to find our own wholeness, our own deep connectedness.

When we live with integrity, our insides match our outsides. I have a term for people whose integrity shines through—I call them “solid chocolate rabbits.” If you think about the chocolate bunnies that you get at Easter, there are two main kinds. There are hollow chocolate rabbits that are generally big and showy and impressive. But they are just a chocolate shell, with nothing inside. And frankly, the chocolate usually isn't that great. But a solid chocolate rabbit, while it might be less impressive to look at, is chocolate all the way through. What you see is what you get. The insides match the outsides.

To be fair, one could have a solid chocolate bunny that was made of nasty,

waxy, tasteless chocolate. It could happen. There are people in the world who are self-centered and greedy through and through, and I suppose that is a kind of integrity. But, you know, that's mostly not my experience. Mostly the solid chocolate bunnies are tasty front to back and ears to tail. And most of the people I've met who have that quality of integrity give me the sense of likeness to God, of demonstrated love and compassion and curiosity.



I think it happens because the way to become a solid chocolate rabbit, to become a person of

integrity, is to have principles. Principles are guides, measures that we judge our choices by. When we hold to our principles then we choose our actions based on what we feel is true and good and right, rather than what society expects of us or what happens to be the most convenient at the moment.

A friend tags the bottom of all her emails with “Be kinder than necessary.” That's a principle you can live by. When I asked friends what principles they lived by, some of the responses I got were: “Make each day count. Life is not a dress rehearsal.” “You only get to keep what you give away.” “Be mindful and caring in what you do today, for tomorrow it will be embedded in history.” “Love people for who they are, not who you wish they would be.” “Be curious.” “The only way to fail is to never try.” “Use your powers for good.”

A few years ago I wrote a poem that I never intended to become a personal statement of principles, but it did. The poem, entitled “Choice,” ends with the words: “Watch where you are going. Lean in toward what you love. When in doubt, tell the truth.” I don't know if living by these principles makes me good, or the best person I could be by someone else's standards. But when I

exercise curiosity and love and honesty then I feel the most *me*, the most solid in my sense of self.

Living by principles allows us to live with integrity. And, of course, what Unitarian Universalism has to offer in place of a creed is principles. Honor the worth and dignity of every person. Pursue justice, equity and compassion. Meet people where they are and create spaces for growth. Actively search for truth and meaning. Hold to the teachings of your conscience. Remember that in spite all borders we are one world—and remember that the one world we belong to is so much more than the human part of the picture.

These are the principles that we, through our congregations, commit to affirming and promoting. Not just thinking or believing. Because integrity doesn't come from what we think, or from what we say that other people need to do. It comes from choosing, day after day and hour after hour, to make our actions line up with our ideals.

It is a harsh fact of life in these times that we see all too many public figures behaving with a lack of integrity that is nothing less than stunning, dropping principles like democracy and honesty for the sake of power or avoiding risk. But living in the wash of lies that surrounds us these days makes it all the more important that we find grounding in our own principles, and in our own ongoing commitment to shape our lives in the image of what is holy and true and good. ■

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In a system that does everything to dehumanize them, the CLF provides a rare reminder to our incarcerated members of their integrity as worthy human beings. Please be a part of this important work by sending a check in the enclosed envelope, or by giving online at [clfu.org/give](http://clfu.org/give).

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## Full

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

“She’s so full of herself!” we say,  
as if that were an insult. As if  
there were something else  
that one should be full of..

But haven’t you ever felt like  
a nest full of mockingbirds  
or a box heavy with hardware  
for cabinets you don’t even own?

Have you never stuffed yourself  
full of someone else’s ambitions, plans,  
habits of speech? Is there  
no part of you that has gotten lost  
wandering about after fool’s gold?  
Enough.

I want to be packed as full of myself  
as an avocado in its skin,  
as a seal sunning on the beach.

Carry the rest in a basket, in a backpack,  
in a purse or your bare hands.  
Roll all your loves behind you  
in an enormous suitcase.

Inside, skin to skin,  
muscled heart to brain to bone,  
let there be only you.

*Lynn’s book of poetry, Bread and Other Miracles, is available at [lynnungar.com](http://lynnungar.com)*



