

## Preparation for Authenticity

Among the many meanings of the term “authenticity,” it most commonly assigns the degree to which one is true to one’s own personality, spirit, or character, despite external pressures (Wikipedia). Brené Brown writes in her book *The Gifts of Imperfection*, “Authenticity is a collection of choices that we have to make every day. It’s about the choice to show up and be real. The choice to be honest. The choice to let our true selves be seen.” This implies two things, first, that there is a basic “realness” to everyone, and second, that it can be challenging to embody and display this basic truth about one’s self.

The difficulty of genuine expression is the risk of being different and not accepted. Acknowledging this fear, Adlai Stevenson encourages us not only to be authentic, but to accept others’ authentic expressions: “I think that one of our most important tasks is to convince others that there’s 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 meaningless. Here lies the power of the liberal way: not in making the whole world Unitarian [Universalist], 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.”

The reward of an authentic expression is put as follows by Rachel Archelaus. “As you become more aligned with the truth of who you are, the question of liking yourself goes away. It is a natural state of being.” Or, as Eckhart Tolle writes, “Only the truth of who you are, if realized, will set you free.”

I tore myself away from the safe comfort of certainties through my love for truth—and truth rewarded me. *Simone de Beauvoir*

The privilege of a lifetime is to become who you truly are. *Carl Jung*

Because going against our natural inclinations can make us feel like impostors, we tend to latch on to authenticity as an excuse for sticking with what’s comfortable. *Herminia Ibarra*

Behind most of our masks, however, is a truth that is hidden for a specific reason. Often we don’t know what that truth is. I wasn’t ready to deal with my truths, but ready or not, they started to bubble to the surface. Once that began to happen, try as I might, I couldn’t get the toothpaste to go back into the tube. *Brian Copeland, Not a Genuine Black Man*

All the world’s a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances,  
And one man in his time plays many parts.  
*William Shakespeare, As You Like It*

Cherish forever what makes you unique, ’cuz you’re really a yawn if it goes. *Bette Midler*

People change and forget to tell each other. *Lillian Hellman*

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, Real Moments: Discover the Secret of True Happiness*

The thing that makes you exceptional, if you are at all, is inevitably that which must also make you lonely. *Lorraine Hansberry*

## **Questions to Ponder**

1. What does authenticity mean to you? This question will be part of the sharing at the meeting.
2. What do you consider to be authentic parts of your personality?
3. Are these authentic parts steady for you, or do you find they change?
4. Has there been a time or situation where being authentic was difficult or where your actions did not match up with your beliefs? What held you back from acting in a way that matched your beliefs?
5. Are there ways in which you are affected by other people's being or not being authentic?