

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
THE EXPERIENCE OF AUTHENTICITY

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Opening Ritual/Lighting Candle.

Opening Words:

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

Check-in: How are things with you **right now?**

Readings:

Now I Become Myself

May Sarton

Now I become myself. It's taken
Time, many years and places;
I have been dissolved and shaken,
Worn other people's faces,
Run madly, as if Time were there,
Terribly old, crying a warning,
"Hurry, you will be dead before--"
(What? Before you reach the morning?
Or the end of the poem is clear?
Or love safe in the walled city?)
Now to stand still, to be here,
Feel my own weight and density!
The black shadow on the paper
Is my hand; the shadow of a word
As thought shapes the shaper
Falls heavy on the page, is heard.
All fuses now, falls into place
From wish to action, word to silence,
My work, my love, my time, my face
Gathered into one intense
Gesture of growing like a plant.
As slowly as the ripening fruit
Fertile, detached, and always spent,
Falls but does not exhaust the root,
So all the poem is, can give,
Grows in me to become the song,
Made so and rooted by love.
Now there is time and Time is young.
O, in this single hour I live
All of myself and do not move.
I, the pursued, who madly ran
Stand still, stand still, and stop the sun!

“Seek out that particular mental attitude which makes you feel most deeply and vitally alive, along with which comes the inner voice which says, ‘This is the real me,’ and when you have found that attitude, follow it.” *William James*

"If you seek authenticity for authenticity's sake, you are no longer authentic." *Jean Paul Sartre*

"if you keepin' it real just to keep it real you ain't keepin' it real" *Snoop-dogg*

Introduction:

Trolling the UUA web, I discovered that the mission statements of many Unitarian Universalist organizations use the term "**authentic**" to describe either community—as in building an *authentic* community; relationships—striving to be *authentic* with one another; and/or worship---*authenticity* as an essential element of quality worship.

At a more concrete level, a UU church in Carmel, CA announced a weekly "*Authentic* Relating Games Night."

Which led me to ask: What does 'authentic' mean in the context of religious groups? And what is/are the proper context[s] for experiencing authenticity? Relationships? Community? Worship? Solitude?

Questions for Discussion:

1. Robert Coles, eminent child psychologist, says that we are all indebted to May Sarton for her "*willingness to give her specific fears and desires a chance to be of universal significance; to do that one must believe that private dilemmas are, if deeply examined, universal, and so if expressed have a human value beyond the private.*" Do you believe that Sarton's "private dilemmas" are "universal" and "have value beyond the private"? Does her poem relate to your "fears and desires"?
2. Have you experienced what James describes as "the inner voice which says, 'This is the real me'"? If so, please share with us.
3. How does one know whether or not she or he is experiencing authenticity? Must one reach a certain age or have particular experiences to be authentic?
4. Contrast Sartre (and Snoop-Dog) against self-help advice from Polly Campbell ("Professional speaker and blogger"): "Authenticity starts when you set the intention to be genuine." How do we become authentic without seeking authenticity?

Check-out/Likes & Wishes: How did this session go for you? Is there anything you'd like to call particular attention to?

Closing Words & Extinguishing the Chalice:

"Our deepest calling is to grow into our authentic selfhood, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we *ought* to be. As we do, we will not only find the joy that every human being seeks; we will also find our path of authentic service in the world." *Parker Palmer*