



Personal Integrity in Religious Life

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Introduction

Dr. Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, narrates one incident about his father when they were living in Durban South Africa. They were living in an isolated place, far away from the town and this isolation made him look forward with eagerness any trip to the city. One day Arun's father Manilal asked him to drive him to the town for a conference. His mother gave a long list of groceries she needed. His father asked Arun to get the car serviced during the same trip. When he dropped his father he said: "I will meet you here at 5.00 pm and we shall go home together." Arun completed all the buying for his mother and went for a movie. He got so engrossed in a movie of John Wayne and he forgot the time. When he remembered about the time of meeting his father, it was already late. It was already 5.30 and half an hour late. He ran to the garage and got the car and rushed to his father who was waiting for him, and it was almost 6.00. "Why were you late?" his father asked Arun. He could not tell his father that he was watching John Wayne film and so he said: 'The car was not ready, so I had to wait.' He did not realize that his father had already called the garage. So Arun was caught by his father. His father said: 'There is something

wrong in the way I brought you up that did not give you the confidence to tell me the truth.’ In order to figure out where he went wrong with you, Manilal walked home 18 miles. He began walking, dressed in his suit and dress shoe, through the unpaved and unlit roads. Arun could not leave him, so for five hours he drove behind him, watching his father go through this agony for a silly lie that he uttered. Arun decided then that he will never lie again.¹

This incident narrated by Arun Gandhi reveals personal integrity of his father. Persons of integrity leave a mark by their lives, deeds and words. In a broad sense we can say that integrity means a sense of soundness and a sense of harmony by integrating various qualities such as honesty, truthfulness, fairness, standing for certain principles. Integrity is reflected in a person’s life and character. Some of us are blessed with such nature and character mainly because of our personal makeup, and our upbringing. But most of us struggle to achieve some degree of personal integrity. At a very simple level, integrity means matching our words and actions. But there are several other aspects to the notion of integrity. So, there is moral integrity, intellectual integrity, emotional integrity, and spiritual integrity.

Becoming Integrated

Becoming a person of integrity is a long process. And we do not become persons of integrity all of a sudden. It is not the same as becoming a perfect person. In old spirituality they spoke of perfection. What they meant by this, among other things, was becoming a virtuous person. Integration denotes the process of integrating or bringing together various parts

1 Nina L. Diamond, *Voices of Truth: Conversations with Scientists, Thinkers and Healers* (Wisconsin: Lotus Press, 2000) pp. 178-179.

to a whole. It is bringing together various aspects of our life into a more or less stable or harmonious pattern. Becoming integrated persons means becoming authentic persons. Becoming authentic persons and integrated persons involve two basic aspects: (1) Becoming integrated is related to one's self, and (2) Becoming integrated is related to the way we relate to people and situations around us. What are the usual signs of an integrated person?

(1) Integrated persons tend to have a reasonably good sense of their identity: Usually, integrated persons will have a sense of their identity. Here by identity, we mean the sense of who we are. Being aware of who are requires recognizing our sense of worth. It involves recognizing our strengths. It also involves our limitations. On the other hand, those who have a very weak sense of identity or a confused sense of identity usually will find it difficult to accept their self-worth. They will find it difficult to accept their own strengths and good qualities. There will be a secret fear and doubt lurking at the back of their minds. I say this or do that what others will think of me? If I do not have a sense of reasonable sense of identity, then I will be living and fulfilling other people's expectations and realities. Having a sense of identity brings stability to our lives. A sense of identity gives us a sense of direction in our lives. Having a strong sense of identity is not the same as being arrogant. In fact, arrogant people have a sense of insecurity. I need to ask: Am I able to affirm my identity? Am I able to affirm it reasonably? This is an important step in becoming an integrated person.

(2) Integrated persons tend to be discerning persons: Usually integrated or authentic persons tend to be discerning persons. By this we mean a sense of 'sifting through' our experiences and separating good from the bad. But to be a

discerning person, I need to create a space for my self. I need to take some time out for prayer and reflection. I need time and space for solitude. I need time and space to discover myself. This is not the same as getting locked up in one's self. A sense of discernment helps us discover the direction of our desires and basic orientations. What are my basic orientations? What am I looking for in my life? Have I found something worthwhile in my religious life? Am I making my choices in a reasonable way? Socrates: 'An unexamined life is not worth living.'

(3) Integrated persons tend to stand up for principles:

Standing up for principles is one of the characteristic features of an integrated person. Here principles mean a set of convictions based on some values. So often what comes into our way of thinking honestly is our insecurities, fears, need for approval, and our prejudices. Suppose I want the approval of others and want to be popular, then, I begin to compromise on certain principles. Then I will not speak out fearing that I will lose popularity. Indeed, there are many ways of standing up for one's principles. We need to stand for principles in ways that are gentle. Persons of integrity tend to be also courageous. Courage is not the foolhardy recklessness. It is the ability to face adversity, pain, fear and uncertainty with a sense of peace. We can stand up for principles. It is not so much doing brave things. Being courageous is basically a state of mind. We are not intimidated by others. When we are courageous, we function from a sense of inner security. Then, others will not be a threat or source of fear for you.

(4) Integrated persons tend to reflect a sense of inner freedom: Integrated persons tend to reflect a sense of inner freedom. It is freedom from irrational fears. It is freedom from excessive attachment to people and things. It is the

freedom from the compulsion to please others. It is the freedom from being too much depending on others. It is also the courage to do things what you think is right. It is also being comfortable with oneself. When you have inner freedom, you are excessively anxious about what others think of you. When you have inner freedom, you can take the criticism of others without losing your sense of peace. When you have inner freedom you do not seek other's approval.

(5) Integrated persons tend to communicate what they are thinking: Many of us tend to take our emotions as facts. It is good to remember that much of our emotional responses and reactions are the result of our thinking. There are certain thought patterns behind our emotions and feelings. And these emotions are not facts. Our feelings and emotions do not really tell us about reality and facts. There can be different interpretations about the same thing. What we need to communicate is our thoughts and not our conclusions. An example of such conclusion would be the labelling of Br. x: "You are lazy. You never help in the community." Now that is the conclusion. What is required is the communication of our thoughts and feelings. What is required is the communication that when some people help the burden falls on a few people. Or that it is a shared responsibility. Communicating with integrity requires describing my thoughts and feelings. I should not rush to conclusions about what's really going on.

(6) Integrated persons tend to take responsibility for their actions: An integrated person would take responsibility for their actions. They will stand by it. They will not easily blame others. They will not blame the situations and circumstances. Perhaps blaming and making excuses could be signs that we are not willing to take responsibility for our life. In fact constant blaming others reflect a view that

‘I am a victim.’ This view expresses the view that others are causing all your hardships. Such attitude somehow gives the idea that we are not in charge of our lives. When I have this attitude, I tend to surround myself with resentment, anger and frustration. Integrated persons will take responsibility for their actions and for their life. They will prefer to suffer the consequences of their principles and actions rather than making a compromise on these.

(7) Integrated persons tend to admit when they are wrong:

Apologizing has never been easy. Admitting that I am wrong can be one of the most difficult things. Some of us tend to think that apologizing is a sign of weakness. Apologizing when you’re wrong is a powerful way to show your inner strength. A sincere apology for what we have done or not done can be a powerful way of expressing our integrity. It shows that you care for the truth. It shows that you care about the other person. But do not use apology to show that you are better than the other. Be sincere in your apology. Do not apologize if you do not mean it. Do not apologize out of guilt feeling. There is something called bad apology. Apology is one of the skills we need to learn in our lives. A sincere apology can make us feel better and improve relationships.

(8) Integrated persons tend to be honest: To act honestly, we need to think honestly. We need to have some basic principles to think honestly and act honestly. Honesty is difficult because it can make us vulnerable. On the other hand, reckless and ruthless honesty can break relationships. We need to cultivate a way to be honest in a gentle and compassionate way. Being honest, courageous, and standing up for principles are very important. But truly integrated persons also tend to be compassionate.

Conclusion

These are some indicators of an integrated person. Obviously, this is not a comprehensive list. It does not mean that a person of integrity tends to display all these features. It need not be. Most integrated persons will have some aspects present in them in a greater degree in them and some other aspects in a lesser degree.

On Priests

- "People who say that we priests are lonely are either lying or have got it all wrong. We are far less lonely than anyone else, for we can count on the constant company of the Lord, with whom we should be conversing without interruption. We are in love with Love, with the Author of Love!" – St. Josemaria Escriva
- "Each priest is a man with a body of soft clay. To keep that treasure pure, he has to be stretched out on a cross of fire. Our fall can be greater than the fall of anyone else because of the height from which we tumble. Of all the bad men, bad religious men are the worst, because they were called to be closer to Christ." –Ven. Fulton J. Sheen
- "A priest is one who makes Christ visible. The people see Christ in the saintly priests and they seek even to touch his robes as they did the robes of Christ. Children come to him without fear; non-Catholics give to them a reverence which they rarely give to others. The sure measure by which a priest draws souls to Christ is also the means by which he can drive souls from Christ." –Ven. Fulton J. Sheen