

CUNY ETHICS AND MORALITY ESSAY CONTEST: VIRTUE

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Integrity and Honesty.

In each of our lives, we have been and are going to be tested at one point or another on our integrity and ethics. Can you remember a time in your life when you were asked to do something, by an employer, friend, a neighbor which was outside the confines of what was right or what you felt was right? What decision did you make? Did you do the right thing by keeping your integrity and honesty or did you go off the path and did the wrong thing? These are some basic, yet very important situations we have all at some point of our lives encountered or yet to experience. In every human setting, there are certain laid down principles which are generally considered vital to the social wellbeing of the people as well the society. These are the ethics and virtues that serve as a guideline to the way an individual live his or her the life and are generally accepted and recognized as good virtues, which this text seeks to espouse into detail.

Important thoughts therefore occupy one's mind immediately when the aforementioned questions are asked regarding the importance of good ethics and virtues. These thoughts are about the combination of factors that leads one to ask such questions. Factors of family upbringing, societal accord, religion, and personal beliefs and experiences are some the factors that combine in one way or the other to shape a person's judgment of his or her actions and inactions when tested to do the wrong thing instead of the right thing. In other words, the factors influence the virtues of an individual. However, it is also the conviction and determination of an individual to live by these virtues that counts. That is why integrity and honesty are the virtues that I was trained to uphold, which I have to continuously and forever live by. If I personally had my own way or asked about one good ethic or virtue that was crucial in shaping a person's life, I

would without a shadow of a doubt emphasize on the virtues of integrity and honesty because they are virtues that are slowly waning in our society, in the political front, in education, and even in economics. These virtues if properly passed on and constantly put into practice not just rhetoric, our societies and indeed the world will be a much better and happier place to live in, and the future would surely be one of optimism.

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines integrity as "the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles". In other words, integrity and honesty are two sides of a coin or are closely intertwined. Having a high level of integrity makes one honest. When an individual's daily dealings, actions and inactions hinge on the core principles of integrity and honesty, the individual becomes a much better person in not only impacting positively on other people's lives, but also becomes better in practicing other important virtues like respect, love, justice, self-control and wisdom as they are consequences of being honest. As former United States President Dwight D. Eisenhower stated that "the supreme quality of leadership is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on a section gang, a football field, in an army, or in an office." In other words integrity is a key component to success regardless of where an individual finds him or herself, which must therefore be practiced constantly and sincerely. Hilary Hinton Zig Ziglar, an American author, salesman, and a motivational speaker also stated that "with integrity you have nothing to fear, since you have nothing to hide. With integrity, you will do the right thing, so you will have no guilt." I interpret this to mean that integrity erodes guilt in the actions and inactions of individuals.

Indeed life without integrity is worthless. That is why with integrity in my life, I have obtained a sense of purpose, a sense of strength, and above all a sense of responsibility. Integrity

and honesty serves as the bedrock of all other virtues and morals because practicing all other virtues without honesty and integrity in it, then it is fake and unreal. Humans as we are, are not, and cannot be perfect without imperfections. In other words, our mistakes in life present a golden opportunity for us to turn a new leaf and improve as human beings. Instances are when one does not respect other people or only show respect for a purpose, or when is only charitable to other people for selfish personal reasons. These are all imperfections and therefore the only way they could be turned into perfections or improvements by going back to basics, which is doing it with a great deal of honesty and integrity. This is aptly summed up in the words of Thomas Jefferson who said that “honesty is the first chapter of the book of wisdom”. This underlines how crucial integrity and honesty is in our lives as it defines the real motives behind our actions and inactions.

My personal experience in practicing the virtue of integrity started when I was growing up. Growing up in African setting where one’s honesty and integrity does not only give the individual a role of trust, but also positively impact on the image of one’s family and parents at large. With all the love, care, and attention that my parents shoed me, they will not accept any act of dishonesty from me either towards them or towards any other person. My dad or Mother will not hesitate to discipline me for any act of dishonesty. The need to practice the act of honesty and integrity was like a daily reminder for me and my two siblings from our parents. My mom for instance for instance was very much respected by both her friends and the neighbors. I remember vividly her friends savings some of their monies with her. What she did anytime a friend brought some money to save was at the time looked very funny to me as a kid. My mom will call one of my elder brothers to write down the serial numbers on each of the notes (bills) on a piece of paper, and then she wrapped both the paper and the money together. I remember

questioning why she always did that and whether her friends could not save their monies in the bank. She responded by saying to me “we used to keep our monies with our parents or people we trusted at home because we did not know what banks were in this village”. On why she always made my brother write down the serial numbers on the bills, she said “you don’t ever have to touch anything that does not belong to you unless with the permission of the owner, that is only in times of emergencies. That is what we call trust and honesty”. In other words she did that to make sure she did not use the money while it was under her care to take care of her needs, and later replace it back at same amount, but different bills. It was only with time that I understood why she did that, which earned her lots of respect and trust. That is when a famous African proverb came in mind which states that “confiding a secret to an unworthy person is like carrying grains in a bag with a hole.” In other words confiding in a person who lacks integrity and honesty is indeed a waste.

My dad on the other hand is another reason why I have practiced and still strive to make sure my daily actions and inactions are underpinned by honesty and integrity. He always stressed on the need for us to practice honesty with a great deal of integrity. He said to us that “Personal Integrity is a strongly held sense of commitment to openness, honesty, inclusiveness and high standards in one’s self.” He further stated that “integrity and honesty is also the ability to do the right thing even it is not the easiest choice” in other words he admonished us to strive to be honest in everything we do in life, be it in school, at work, or in relationship with other people. On one of such occasion when he had talk with us, he concluded by saying that “it will not be easy, but if you guys do everything with a great deal of honesty and integrity in it, I am very sure and positive you will go far in life and leave your marks everywhere you find yourselves”. As summed up by Nelson Mandela in his word that “... the first is to be honest with yourself. You

can never have an impact on society if you have not changed yourself... great peacemakers are all people of integrity, of honesty, and humility.”

With these experiences, I have been I have gained many satisfaction and developed into a much better person that I hope to be. Integrity and honesty has helped in constantly reflecting on my thoughts and feelings. It had helped foster some courage in me. Courage is doing what you know one wants or needs to do, which is right, despite one’s fear and intimidation. It takes an immense amount of courage to say or do what is right. It is often difficult and takes practice and patience. Practicing honesty and integrity has made me help my peers to imitate the need to be honest in life. It has also fostered my connection with other people. It has brought me closer to many people where we all feel secured enough to be genuine in our interactions. Through honesty, I have been able to develop self-respect and respect for others.

Integrity and honesty are very important virtues that that serve as driving force in the complete human existence. It is therefore crucial that everyone make them an integral part of their life. This is because having Personal Integrity and honesty is giving your word and commitments, such that your actions and behavior are consistent with what you promise and commit.

This however has not been without challenges and obstacles. Some of the obstacle that I encountered ranged from some friends, some co-workers, and some school mates. These were as a result of the fact that I have had to defend and demand what is right. My insistence that the right thing be done at all times has had some repercussions. Some friends had to bring to an end our friendship, resorting to name calling and verbal assaults, all in an attempt to discourage me from abandoning my virtues of showing great deal of integrity and honesty in everything I did.

Admittedly, it was, and still not an easy task, however I still strive to overcome the difficulties. I have always and still strive to overcome this standing my grounds and hoping that they will change their mind, which in some cases have paid dividends. This because the result of my insistence help change the mind set of some of them.

In conclusion, the importance of having integrity and honesty in one's life cannot be underestimated. That is why every individual's practice of other important virtues must first of all be hinged on integrity and honesty. As Oprah Winfrey put it "Real integrity is doing the right thing, knowing that nobody's going to know whether you did it or not."

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