

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Vero Beach  
Covenant Groups

**Lying**  
June, 2022

Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,  
but connected, in mystery and miracle,  
to the universe, to this community and to each other.

**Check-in:** What is most on your mind today?

**Opening Reading:**

"I didn't do it  
That's a lie  
I didn't do it  
No, not I  
I didn't do it  
Hear me cry  
I didn't do it  
Hope to die  
I didn't do it  
I'm not that bad  
But if I *did*...  
Would you be mad?" *(Shel Silverstein, Every Thing On It)*

**Topic Exploration:**

**REASONS PEOPLE LIE:**

To:	Avoid punishment.	Avoid embarrassment.
	Conceal reward or benefit.	Be polite.
	Protect someone from harm.	Maintain privacy.
	Self-protect.	Exercise power over others by controlling information.
	Win the admiration of others.	<i>(Paul Ekman, psychologist)</i>
	Get out of an awkward social situation.	

Lying is a major component of the human behavioral repertoire. Without it, we would have a hard time coping. When people speak unvarnished truth all the time, they tend to be judged tactless and hurtful. In everyday life, we tell little white lies all the time, if only out of politeness: "Your homemade pie is awesome" (It's not). "No, Grandma, you're not interrupting anything." (She is). A little bit of pretense seems to smooth out human relationships without doing lasting harm.

Of course, generations of thinkers have lined up against this perspective of accepting little white lies. The Ten Commandments admonish us to tell the truth. The Pentateuch is explicit: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." Islam and Buddhism also condemn lying. For 18th-century philosopher Immanuel Kant, the lie was the "radical innate evil in human nature," and was to be shunned even when it was a matter of life and death.

Small children generally tell their first purposeful lies at about age four or five. Before starting their careers as potential con artists, children must first acquire the ability to recognize and understand social rules and what happens when the rules are transgressed. For instance, if you confess, you may be punished; if you lie, you might get away with it. They must also have the ability to imagine what another person is thinking: Your mother will not believe the dog ate the candy bar if she sees the chocolate on your lips.

People cook up about two stories a day on average, according to social psychologist Bella M. DePaulo, of the University of California, Santa Barbara. A 2015 study in the Netherlands of people aged 6 to 77, found that children initially have difficulty formulating believable lies, but proficiency improves with age. Young adults between 18 and 29 do it best. After about the age of 45, we begin to lose this ability. (*Adapted from "The Art of Lying," Theodor Schaarschmidt, Scientific American, July, 2018*)

### **Questions/Sharing:**

1. Do you remember telling lies as a child? As a young adult? How did you feel about lying? Were your lies discovered? What were the consequences of your having lied?
2. The quote "Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive," (*from "Marmion" by Sir Walter Scott*), refers to how complicated life becomes when people start lying. Can you relate the meaning of this quote to any of your own life experiences?
3. A friend tells a lie to someone else and asks you to corroborate it. How do you respond?
4. Do you know when you're being lied to? If you catch someone in a lie, how do you handle the situation?
5. In what instances might it be more comforting to hear a lie rather than the truth?
6. What do you think are the consequences of self-deception, or lying to oneself?
7. The psychologist Paul Ekman states that the most dangerous lies are those told in order to exercise power over others by controlling information. In your opinion, what are the most dangerous lies?

### **Closing Reading:**

"Above all, don't lie to yourself. The man who lies to himself and listens to his own lie comes to a point that he cannot distinguish the truth within him, or around him, and so loses all respect for himself and for others. And having no respect he ceases to love."

(*Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov*)

**Check-out and reflections on today's session:** Please express any closing thoughts on the content or process of today's session.

**Extinguish the Chalice**

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,  
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.  
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

**Housekeeping**

UUFVB covenant groups program/p.a.