

Chapter 8: INTEGRITY

He did all of the right things.

On our first date, Brant took me out to see flamenco dancing. He held open the doors, asked me about myself, and insisted on paying for the dinner bill. And yet, at the end of the night, I didn't feel the spark.

"This has been really fun," he says, "I'd love to see you again."

My stomach clenches up. I want to run away. I hate this moment.

I could smile brightly and say, "Me, too!" and then avoid his texts by feigning illness or extradition. But I can't get around the fact that deliberately withholding the truth in these moments feels like a lie.

When we hear the clear voice of "not the one," how do we extricate ourselves with integrity? What does compassion look like when it comes to saying "no?"

Nice versus Good

I spent a few decades being confused about the difference between "nice" and "good."

When I was living in New York City, I played the Nurse in a rock opera production of *Romeo and Juliet* at La Mama Theatre in the East Village. (Imagine rapping, "He's dead, he's dead, he's dead, he's dead. Alas the day, he's gone he's killed he's dead.") A stocky, wisecracking Greek guy from Queens played the role of the villain Tybalt. Well, Tybalt asked me out on a date. Although he was an attractive guy, I didn't feel a spark.

I demurred. "Thanks, but, well, I'm not dating right now."

Then I turned around and promptly dated Mercutio, and tried to keep it on the DL. Tybalt, not quite as demur, found out (because, duh, news travels fast when you're in all in the same production) and called me.

"Hey, you're dating Mercutio."

I flush in mortification, "Ohhhhhhh..."

"Why did you say you're weren't dating?"

"Ummmmm...I don't know, I felt...I thought...I didn't want to..."

"Look," he huffs impatiently, "it's fine to not be interested, but just don't lie about it."

Tybalt, you may have missed the point in killing Romeo, but your comment was right on target.

I was desperate to be liked. When Tybalt asked me out, I believed that if I had been forthright and honest about my feelings, he wouldn't have liked me anymore. He would be disappointed. He would be hurt. He wouldn't find me attractive. He might even get mad at me.

Ironically, by being "nice," I had generated precisely the result that I had most feared.

Like most of us, I got the following messages as a kid:

"Play nice."

"Don't hurt people's feelings!"

"If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all."

And then there's this one: "Don't tell a lie."

What do we do when these messages conflict?

It's hard for our parents to explain the difference to our five-year old selves. "Rachel, when Allie takes your My Little Pony and you feel angry and scream that you hate her, is there a better way to communicate your feelings honestly that doesn't condemn her personhood?"

When we're kids, we aren't wired for emotional sophistication. So our parents give us the cliff notes: "play nice." When "nice" and "honest" square off, we are confused about what to do. We bring this confusion forward into our adult lives and continue to play out our playground dynamics in our intimate relationships.

As adults, we have the opportunity to consciously clarify and upgrade these old confusions. We can choose to widen our understanding of compassion beyond a child-like understanding of "nice."

Despite what we may tell ourselves, lying is rarely compassionate. It's usually about control.

We spend a lot of time jockeying for control, attempting to make the world – and the people in it – behave in a way that makes us feel safe and secure. Being honest can feel scary if we are afraid of how someone is going to react to our candour. When we're delivering unpleasant news, honesty may mean opening ourselves up to a negative reaction.

If I had told Tybalt directly that I wasn't interested in him, it is quite possible that he would not have "liked" me anymore.

But which course of action would have been more respectful? To deprive him of a candid response because it made my world more comfortable, or to share information that would empower him to protect his emotional wellbeing?

Compassion means acting with empathy for someone else's suffering and experience. When we remain silent or distort the truth, we are depriving someone else of important information that would enable him or her to make his or her own best decision. While it may seem superficially kind to lie to someone, in reality we are reducing his or her potency for our own convenience.

When it comes to romantic relationships, open and clear communication is intrinsic to a healthy dynamic. Withholding information from our partners isn't nice; it undermines the trust that is the bedrock for healthy intimacy. Relationships happen in the space between two people. Clear communication keeps the water of interchange clean, fresh and healthy. Deception – no matter how well intended – fosters weeds, scum, and sickness.

When we distort the truth, not only is it confusing for the other person, it also compromises our own integrity.

After I lied to Tybalt, I had to edit myself continually around him. I could not be authentic self. That was, until he discovered the truth. And then, much to my chagrin, he saw me for who I really was.

Honesty liberates us from confusion. Honesty is living with our eyes wide-open, hearts and minds clear. Honesty clears away the drama of deceit, the self-consciousness of doubt. Honesty is the clean lines of the desert landscape. The naked rocks of the ocean. The tremendous beauty of the vast night sky.

It's your truth.

Honesty isn't always "nice." But it is ultimately *good*.

Honesty

If you'll recall from chapter four, the first guideline for worldly interaction is *ahimsa*, which is non-violence, or compassion.

The second guideline is *satya*, or truthfulness.

Satya

The second great guideline for conduct, truthfulness keeps our own mind calm and unfettered. When we lie, our minds are frequently anxious and divided. Truthfulness helps us to remain steady and clear. Not only does this yama invite us to be truthful with others, it reminds us to be truthful with ourselves.

Here's the tricky part: embracing truthfulness isn't as simple as blurting out everything that we're feeling and thinking. As the yamas suggest, honesty rests in the wider arms of non-violence and compassion. Without compassion, blunt honesty can be needlessly hurtful and self-serving.

As a teacher trainer, I often go to classes that are taught by other teachers. When I feel the compulsion to give the teacher honest feedback "for their own good," I have to do an internal check to see this "honesty" is coming from a place of compassion ("I want you to be the best teacher that you can be,") or ego ("I need to feel important and smart"). Truth that arises from compassion – rather than ego – is the truth worth sharing. As mindful yogis, our practice is to discern when honesty will serve the highest good.

At the end of my date with Brant, I didn't need to disclose a laundry list of reasons why I thought the relationship wouldn't work. Outlining our perceived incompatibilities could have been needlessly hurtful. However, I did need to make sure that I communicated my intentions clearly so that he wasn't confused by my ambiguity.

"You know, this is a good time for a check in," I say to Brant slowly.

I try to *practice the pause*. I know from experience that I have to slow down when I talk about something uncomfortable. The first couple of times I tried to be honest at the end of a date, I pretty much vomited, "It's-been-nice-but-I-don't-think-we're-a-match-Thank-you-so-much-goodbye" and then ran away.

So now I take a breath. Recovering niceaholic. Baby steps. If I'm going to say something that's hard to hear, then the least I can do is be present for it.

"This was a really great date," I continue. Something in my tone alerts him.

"Uh-oh," he says. "Ruh-roh Shaggy."

I have to laugh. "I had a really nice time," I say sincerely, "you were obviously very thoughtful and chose a really fun night for us. But for me, I'm not feeling like we're quite the right match. But I really appreciate your time tonight and your consideration."

"Awwww, I thought it was going well."

"It was fun," I say.

“Well,” he shakes it off, “thanks for being upfront about it. No seriously, I actually do appreciate it. You wouldn’t believe how many times people just ghost.”

How many times has your coffee date ended with the, “Let’s talk soon,” or “Sure, give me a call!” when the truth is that we know we don’t feel an attraction?

Here’s your practice for compassionate honesty: tell your date how you really feel at the end of your time together.

Sharing your feelings may make your date uncomfortable - it may make you uncomfortable! - but when you are honest, you are giving them valuable information so that they know how to frame their experience and where to move next. If you are not interested, then it’s not enough to assume that the rejection is implicit. “Oh, well, just not calling back is the sign that I’m not interested.” In the meantime, you’ve left someone in a state of uncertainty for several days, wondering about you and how you feel. (Remember champagne Steve? Don’t be a champagne Steve!)

Dvesha

Aversion. Dvesha is aversion to pain. Dvesha explains why we prefer to consistently resist doing stuff that is uncomfortable. However, when we put our Big Selves in the drivers’ seat, our aversion to discomfort starts to naturally dissipate.

Being honest – even if the honest truth is that you don’t know! – is liberating. Keep in mind: just because your date is not a match doesn’t mean that they are not a good person. They are just not a good person *for you*. Keeping in mind that “rejection” is not personal allows you to see their good qualities (more on rejection in the next chapter).

Being honest when we may hurt someone else’s feelings is hard, but ultimately kind. If you’re having a hard time finding a way to articulate your feelings, here are some suggestions:

- “Thank you so much for spending your time with me. At this time, I don’t feel like there’s the connection I need to feel in order to move forward romantically. I really appreciate your time and wish you great luck in your search.”
- “Thank you for your time tonight. You know, you seem like a really kind person.” Add *authentic* feedback of what you liked. “However, I feel as if we want different things/ are looking in different directions.”
- “Thank you for sharing your time with me. Although I really enjoyed your company and getting to know you, I’m not feeling that click that I need in order to move forward.”

If you don't know what you want to do:

- “Do you mind if we have a check in? I feel like it's a good practice to be really up front after meeting someone for the first time to see where we are at...How are you feeling?”
- “I really appreciate that you took the time to meet with me. I'd love for us to be really honest with each other. I know it's scary, but we don't really have anything to lose by putting it all on the table! What are your thoughts?”

Rather than be tempted to put on the façade of “nice,” it becomes our spiritual practice to find a tolerance for our own discomfort. When we are no longer afraid of being uncomfortable, then we have the option to assess the situation and decide from a higher place whether our candour or silence is the highest route to compassion.

Free up their headspace. Free up their time. Be compassionate. And be clear.

“The third enemy of compassion is idiot compassion. This is when we avoid conflict and protect our good image by being kind when we should say a definite ‘no.’ Compassion doesn't imply only trying to be good.” – Pema Chodron, *The Places That Scare You*

In my experience, the reaction to this kind of truthfulness has been positive. Almost every single person – after an understandable moment of processing – has appreciated the openness and the candour and – literally – thanked me. When we are clear and respectful, we are giving them the information that they need to safeguard their affections, time, and heart.

Or course, not everyone will be quite so appreciative.

Mike invited me to an outdoor concert. He was a sweet comic book nerd (I love nerds!) and worked security in the transport industry. Because we had mutual friends that I trusted, I agreed to drive with him rather than take my own car.

Surely an outdoor concert would be fun.

“I want to leave,” I text my roommate. “He's been talking about himself non-stop. I can't get a word in edgewise.”

“There's a huge leak in the kitchen,” she writes back.

“What, OMG!”

“It's everywhere. You need to come home now.”

I laugh, getting it.

“Thanks, but leaving now seems selfish. Note: always self-drive.”

After the concert, Mike is enthusiastic. “I knew you’d love this!”

He hasn’t actually asked me what I thought. I’m starting to feel like Mike is talking to his idea of me, rather than seeing who I am. I’m tired and feel a headache coming on.

“Here, take my Ipad!” We get in his car and he gives it to me. “You be DJ. Chose what you like.”

I choose a song.

He shakes his head. “No, no, no, try this song,” he says, “It’s really good. You’ll love it.”

I had liked the song that I’d chosen, but didn’t push it. After a long ride back to the city, we arrive at my car. Gentlemanly, he jumps out to walk me to the door.

He’s excited. “What a great concert...what’s next!”

I pause, “Well, let’s talk about that for a moment.” I feel uncomfortable, but I know that Mike and I are not a good match. It’s better to tell him now than leave him wondering about our next adventure.

He looks at me, puzzled.

I take a breath, “Mike, you’re a great guy, and I’ve had a really nice time with you tonight, but I don’t quite feel that we’re syncing up in the way that I need to move forward romantically.”

He shakes his head, confused. “What do you mean?”

“I don’t think our interests are the same.”

“Sure they are.”

“Mike, I’m like opera...you’re like...”

“Rock and roll?”

I smile, relieved. “Yeah.”

He puts up his hands, looks down, and starts backing to his car, “Don’t give up on me just yet.”

I’m confused. I shake my head and try to call after him, “No, Mike, it’s not about giving up on you. You’re not doing anything wrong. You’re great. I just don’t think we’re right for *each other*.”

He hedges, “Ah, I don’t know. Just, just don’t give up on me yet.” He gets into his car and drives away.

Not matching up with someone isn’t a comment on his or her personhood. There’s a gal out there who is perfect for Mike. It’s just not me. I shake my head.

Well, at least I told him. Telling him now is better than walking around with the queasy, unfinished feeling that I would have if I had remained silent.

The next day, I get a text:

Rachel, thanks for coming out. I had a great evening at the concert. Right up until the point where you kicked me in the balls.

Ah. Well. I had to laugh.

Balancing ahimsa and satya isn’t always easy, or always clear. In your search for a partner, you will probably connect – and disconnect – with many people. Not every encounter will end on a happy note.

There are unfortunately a terrible amount of publicized examples online (like Instagram’s Bye Felipe) that detail cruel, immature, and even shocking responses to an honest exchange. Although in my direct experience it’s been rare, people use these communication channels to lash out.

- “Your loss.”
- “Ungrateful slut.”
- “Frigid bitch.”

An important caveat to online (or in person) communication: there is absolutely no need to respond to communication that is frightening, aggressive, distasteful or overtly sexual. Many women and some men have reported feeling threatened or harassed – especially in online dialogues.

When someone is malicious, it’s best to follow the advice of another yoga sutra to “disregard the wicked” (sutra 1.33). Do not hesitate to block and report users whose

communication is off-colour. Upholding others is not just about compassion, but may also be about creating strong boundaries (more on this in chapter twelve).

Sometimes your attempts at honest and compassionate communication may fall on defensive ears. However, do you really want to date someone who has a hard time hearing about your honest experience? Their inability to hear your truth doesn't bode well for conversations that are of real importance, such as where you should send the kids for school, or how to address your mom's need for a nursing home.

Remember Alex? We hit a road bump early on in our relationship. I meet him at a Starbucks to have "the conversation." Because we'd gone on more than a few dates, it was important to me to meet him in person.

Alex walks in, sees my face, and doesn't bother to order anything.

We look at each other.

"Look," I start. As always, I get squirmy. My chest feels tight. "I just don't think that this is working. There are too many things that..."

He interrupts, rather gently, "Hey, it's okay. I think I behaved like a jerk. We don't have to go through a list of reasons why this won't work...unless you want to?" He means this sincerely.

"No," I say, surprised. "I don't need to."

He pauses, "Okay. Honestly, you're the first person I've connected with in a long time that I've really liked. It's been great to feel that again, and I'm grateful that I met you. And I wish you nothing but the best."

I nod.

He stands up, "Hug?"

I give him a big hug.

He steps back, "I suppose we could say that we'd stay in touch, but... we probably wouldn't." He smiles. "Take care."

"Uh, you, too," I say. I watch him leave, feeling oddly bereft. I'm impressed by his honesty and openness.

I sit back down and think.

Road bumps always happen; it's how we deal with them that is important. Alex's accountability and grace was so impressive that I realized he was someone worth knowing better. We stayed in touch, and eventually, our friendship turned into something more.

Integrity

When we align ourselves with the wisdom of our Big Selves, we are cultivating and strengthening an inner sense of worthiness and solidity that is separate from the outside world. This is integrity.

"We act with integrity because we want to uphold our values; not because of the affirmative response that we will get from the outside world."

When someone is defensive or angry because they don't want to hear about your feelings, your practice is to uphold the integrity of your action and character without external validation.

Their response – positive or negative – is less important than upholding your values.

During dating, taking these small steps to practice self-validation helps prepare you for the spiritual work of communicating difficult truths when the stakes are higher. In the wider view, your truth creates trust, which is more important than a momentary emotional feeling of being uncomfortable.

After I started my online dating quest, someone began creating fake and salacious profiles of me and then began communicating with other men as my avatar. I first heard about the profiles through someone I'd dated.

"Nice sexy new profile, Rach!" I get the text from Curt. We'd gone on a few dates and then we'd had an honest conversation that it wasn't going to go further. He is a dynamic and interesting man, and we had left things on a positive and friendly note.

"What do you mean," I text back.

"...That's not you?"

"What's not me?"

I check out the profile, called "SexyRachel." There are photos of me that have been hacked from other online sites and from (alarmingly) my private email correspondence. The profile is sleazy, demeaning and sexualized.

“My nickname is Stiffy Nips, and I might respond really well if you call me that.”

“I have dated wealthy men and been a piece of ass on the side.”

“After my divorce, I became attached to my Hitachi Magic Wand (a vibrator). I’d even give it a grateful kiss at night.”

“Come to my yoga class and watch me! But don’t tell me. I like it when I’m not sure if you’re there...”

I feel shocked, shaken, and humiliated.

I report the profile to OK Cupid and to the police. It gets taken down and another profile pops up in its place. Again and again. The profiles became increasingly demeaning. Men begin contacting me through my website and Facebook page to continue the “conversation.”

“Sorry, not me,” I write back. “You’ve been had. You’re likely been corresponding with some middle-aged dude in a basement.”

Though I filed several police reports, they couldn’t do anything legal without a physical threat. I had a choice: pursue a civil suit, or let it go.

I took a breath, stepped back, and considered my options. My Big Self was watching as my Little Self had a storm of feelings and outrage. What was truly of value to me here? What was the highest course of action?

If I choose to panic over these profiles – and invest in a civil court case – I would be spending a lot of time and energy to find “justice.” Was that really how I wanted to spend my time and energy? Was I going to define my sense of self by what others might think, or by what I thought?

Here – albeit in a strange package - was another opportunity to practice self-reliance and self-trust. Another opportunity to remember that internal worthiness cannot be found in an external source.

I chose to let it go. I wanted to put my energy into higher value pursuits.

Choosing to rely on our own internal sense of goodness helps us to put our Big Self in the driver’s seat. By choosing to act with purpose and integrity, we are upholding our higher values regardless of personal inconvenience and discomfort.

And – on all levels - isn’t that what humanity needs?

Practices

Journal: Nice versus good

- What looks like “nice” to you?
- Do you equate compassion with softness or passivity? What might vigorous, active compassion look like?
- Think an example from your life when you valued truth over “niceness.” Now think of an example where you chose niceness over truth. How did you feel in each case?

Dating Practice: Honesty

- **First Date Practice:** at the end of a first date, initiate a proactive, upfront conversation with your date about how you both feel and if you want to move forward (even if the answer is, “I don’t know”).
 - Practice courageous authenticity, and admit your own true feelings to yourself.
 - Ask yourself: am I choosing this course of communication for my own comfort levels, or for the greater good of the person in front of me and myself?
- If you’ve met someone in person more than once, ending the exchange via text is no longer appropriate. If you need to have an honest conversation, do it over the phone or in person.
- Use language that requires you to own your truth, rather than making it about them. For example, “I feel this way...” rather than “You make me feel...”

Meditation Practice: Compassion and Truth

- Find your meditation seat (see Chapter 2 for more detailed instructions if needed).
- Begin an internal survey of your body.
- Notice any sensations and hold them in the light of your awareness.
- Can you be with “what is” with both truth and love?

Yoga practice: Fortitude

- Chair
- Dolphin Plank

This week, practice cultivating fortitude in your yoga practice. We often want to check out of a yoga pose as soon as it becomes uncomfortable. Can you stay in the discomfort of the practice in order to become stronger? Can you sacrifice your own temporary convenience for a greater ideal?