

Character's Hidden Assets

Sometimes a metaphor is the best way to portray the complex nature of a practitioner's relationship with his or her character. A strong metaphor conveys complex concepts in a simply understood way. For this post, I will use a sapling and an oak tree; it captures the intricacies and entanglements of how our character forms and then becomes covered over.

Within a massive oak tree is the sapling from which it evolved...not the idea of a sapling, but the original sapling itself.

Underneath the bark and the many years of accumulated growth of the trunk, the thin, weak sapling that was the tree's starting point can still be found.

We can use this image of the sapling embedded within an oak's trunk as a way to represent the nature of a practitioner's character. For the metaphor to work, however, I'll need poetic license to inject some human qualities into the biological realities of real trees' lives:

- The Sapling—Its central function is to establish a foundation for growth and be the keeper of the tree's inner nature throughout its life. From a human perspective, the risk is that the sapling won't survive long enough to benefit from the trunk's defense
- The Trunk—Its principal aim, year after year, is to add rings of hardwood to protect the tree's true nature. For humans, the risk is that the trunk will become so dominant that it smothers the sapling's spirit, producing a tree that is large and strong but also inanimate and arid—big, thick, sturdy, and impressive, but at the same time rigid and lacking soul.

If you chipped away the trunk of the oak tree that grew around it, you would find the sapling still there. This would be slow, arduous, and focused work. It would require "getting your hands dirty," and climbing into the innards of the tree.

What this evokes in me is a heightened awareness that nothing short of digging into our own depths will suffice. If we are to reconnect to and reacquaint ourselves with our inner nature, it will require a lot of hard work that we can't detour around, truncate, or delegate.

Liberating a character that has been lost to the dense trunk of defenses that grew up around it can only be accomplished when we painstakingly extract layer after layer of the obfuscation that has built up.