

Protect your essence without snuffing it out.



As change practitioners, we can draw some parallels between the sapling/trunk metaphor introduced in the last post and our own struggle to stay connected to our inner nature. In this post, and the three to follow, I'll identify ways we can learn from the **sapling and trunk metaphor**. The sapling is the keeper of the tree's character, but it is a fledgling and lives an extremely precarious existence. As soon as it is established, it triggers the buildup of a more durable envelope in which to keep the

tree's essence. This is where the trunk's growth comes in.

The sapling's charter is to hold and nurture the base substance of who the tree is, not to protect itself from possible harm. It is the trunk's job to encircle the sapling with layer after layer of hardwood so its spirit is sheltered from outside damage. When we apply the metaphor to humans, it helps us to see that the trunk does its job well, but the security it offers can also be the sapling's demise. If the trunk grows too dense, it can overwhelm the sapling's ability to function as a reservoir for the tree's vibrancy.

It can be said that a similar bond forms between the core of who we are and the protection mechanisms we create to buffer our character from harm. The conditioning we have been exposed to throughout our lives tends to morph our uniqueness into ways of operating that are more acceptable to others than would otherwise be the case. Without some means of protecting the essence of who we are, the conditioning process can completely overcome the truth of who we are.

Even slight infractions on our core nature can be distressing, so the prospect of our character being lost altogether is avoided at all costs. To prevent this from happening, we create defenses to shield the integrity of our character and insulate us from the emotional pain we would experience if it were breached. In this way, we can "accommodate" others who expect something different from us than who we really are, without actually transgressing our inner core.

Whenever we find ourselves in settings where our true nature isn't valued, the tendency is to grant people what they want but then add another layer of defense. Over time, a debilitating rhythm can be established: keep people comfortable, add a layer...keep people comfortable, add a layer, etc. The defenses are an effort to "be in the world but not of it," yet, after enough years of "keep people comfortable, add a layer," the core spirit that is supposed to be protected becomes no more than a faint echo.