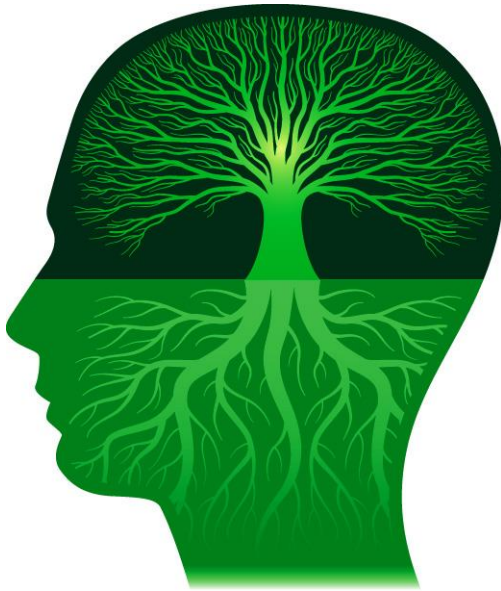


**Don't build so many defenses that even you can't find your true nature.**



As change practitioners, we can draw some parallels between the sapling/trunk metaphor mentioned in the last post and our own struggle to stay connected to our inner nature. In this post, and the two to follow, I'll identify ways we can learn from the metaphor.

The sapling/trunk relationship is a paradox. On the one hand, the sapling depends on the trunk's ever-growing strength to buffer it from jeopardy; at the same time, it runs the danger of becoming completely engulfed and eventually assimilated into the very thing that is there to preserve it.

Every safe haven has its price. For the sapling, it's that the trunk can become so dense the sapling's identity (and therefore, the tree's soul) can appear to vanish. The tree is living but it lacks "aliveness." If the sapling

can't withstand the pressure of the trunk's growth, the tree will still be left standing, but will not truly flourish without the vitality that comes from its inherent spirit.

Life is a risky proposition, and not every acorn yields a seedling. Many seedlings never produce a sapling, and there are plenty of saplings that fail to safeguard themselves properly with an adequate trunk. Likewise, not every sapling that generates a protective trunk survives the pressure of its defenses. With poetic license, I'll say that, when this happens, the sapling is absorbed into the trunk itself to the point that the tree's spirit is lost. The protector becomes the assailant of that which it was supposed to protect.

We can say the same for those who are change practitioners. Their **character** becomes overwhelmed by the protective mechanism they set up to safeguard their uniqueness. Compromise after compromise leads to layer after layer of protective defense. At a certain point, their basic nature becomes so entombed within its own defenses that it is rendered inaccessible.