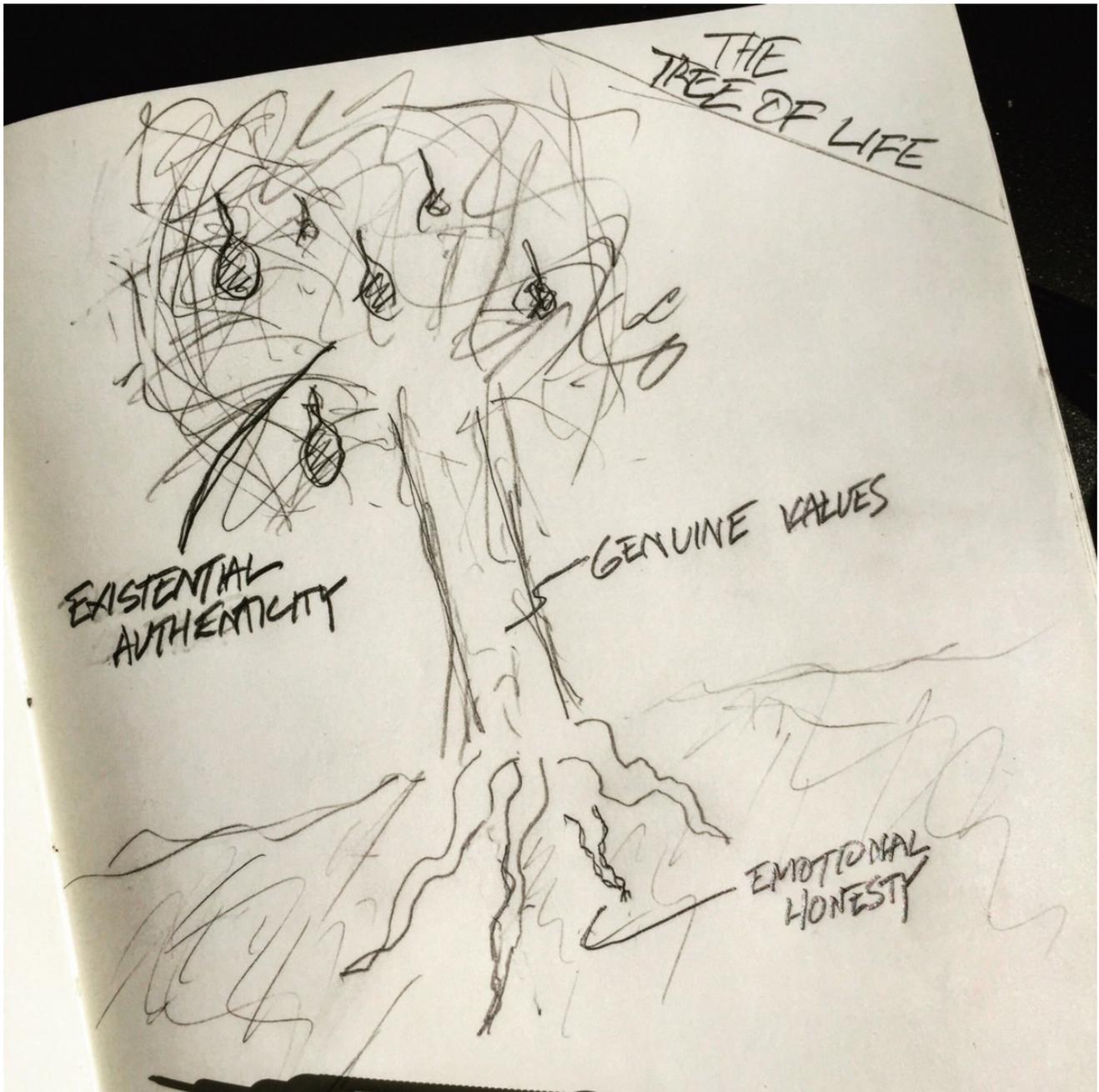


Three Rules For An Authentic Life

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The Tree of Life



Emotional Honesty

Contrary to popular opinion, emotional honesty, which is the most basic kind of authenticity, *isn't* just "saying what you think".

It's being honest about what you feel, starting with you, not them. How did you *really* feel, last time you felt a surge of something? Without the self-deceit and games? Angry, surprised, guilty, anxious? Did you *express* it? I'm betting that you didn't.

It's easier said than done. Our inner lives are fortresses we've built to block the pain and suffering of being human. But it is suffering that makes us capable of joy, grace, truth, creativity, love, anything really constructive and worthy, not just parasitic and empty, in life.

We can't hope to reject parts of ourselves and then feel really or act alive. And yet. More often than not, we develop all kinds of strategies to numb the pain. We hope to pretend, imagine, deny, crush, give it away. But the simple fact is emotion only completes its journey through us in one way. By fully expressing it. Then the roots in us finally find the soil.

The pain we're trying to numb, hide, escape from is the essential suffering of being here, a frail and imperfect being in an indifferent world.

So the tree of life really begins to grow by allowing one's little self to be honest, open, true about its struggle. The branch doesn't reach the sky without the roots finding the soil.

Genuine Values

We think we have values. The unfortunate truth is we're living in an age without values, and that is the cause of many of its problems.

Genuine values aren't needs or desires. They aren't egocentric to begin with. Genuine values are what you believe everyone in this world deserves. What is essential to *life*, what is worthy in all life, not just *yours*.

Now you have a basis for meaningful action. You can work to create such a world. You will fail, probably. But now your struggle itself holds meaning, purpose, beauty. There is a greater reason in your life that animates your every action, intention, thought, emotion.

Your life feels genuine in a bigger way. Not just in what you feel, but in what produces feelings: your actions, intentions, thoughts are authentic. Not just to "you". But to life.

Do you see the difference? Anything can be "authentic to you". The phrase holds no meaning, and it's that lack of meaning that pervades many of our lives, leaves us feeling false and hollow. Genuine values are what is true to life, not just true to you.

To cultivate them, you must step back. Just reflect, contemplate. What is missing? Not just from you, but from this, life, the world? What cries out to you? It doesn't matter what the values you pursue are. What does matter is that you cultivate and pursue a few. Now you are not just living an egocentric life, that will always feel like a lie, because in any sense but the material one, it *is*.

Without genuine values, you are just taking with one hand from others what you give with the other to them, and that is how we end up with ugly spectacles like leaders raising the price of life saving drugs for kids by thousands of percent.

Existential Authenticity

Now we are coming closer to big authenticity. Here is the biggest kind. I am going to define it very differently than say Camus, Sartre, or Houellebecq.

What is your mind? It's a collection of thoughts, a pattern of beliefs. Where did they come from? You inherited them. These are false in a basic sense. Mostly, they are inaccurate, and usually, they will never come true. They're ghosts in your shell.

But who is listening to these thoughts? There is a deeper part of you. Just watching, observing. It is an ocean, and it doesn't speak, but you can listen for its movements. It's the wordless voice in you, that produces your intuition, "gut feeling", "sixth sense", and so on. It is called the heart, spirit, soul. I'll just call it the observer. This is the truest self.

It can take years to awaken that truer self, in therapy, meditation, struggling with your demons. Maybe if you're really lucky (or unlucky) like me, the razors edge of death awakens you.

What is remarkable about that true self? Your mind is different from my mind. Our thoughts and beliefs are different. But our true selves are the same. They are, as Rumi said, the ocean into which all drops vanish.

Your true self and my true self have exactly the same qualities, from the day that we were born. Empathic wisdom, silent strength, endless gratitude, boundless compassion, fierce courage. They observe us rising and falling, with nothing but mighty love for the suffering of the work of being human.

These highest human qualities only come from the true self. We can never find them in mind, in ego, in desire, in fear.

The true self is universal, and this is the truest miracle of human life. Our rivers are unique, each bends differently, but they flow into the same ocean.

Ego, self, is "I am". I am afraid, needy, angry, and so on. The observer is "this is". Wherever there is "I am", there is great and profound suffering, because now there is "I am not". But wherever there is "this is", there is profound and endless beauty, truth, grace. That is a brief description of what you reach in true selfhood.

The true self is the branches, genuine values the trunk, and emotional honesty the roots. Of the tree of life.

Where there is emotional honesty, we can develop genuine values, which lead us to the universal experience of the true self. Towards empathy, courage, compassion, greater love . But if there is emotional honesty, or no genuine values, then the true self is fruit that never grows.

So begin with the roots. Nurture your little tree. Water it with gentleness, constancy, and love.

And soon it will reach the sky. That is what happiness truly is.

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