



From Sincerity to Authenticity, by John O'Donohue

One of the most vulnerable living forms in creation is human. At this moment, there are people in a doctor's office getting news that will change their lives forever. [...] There are people having accidents that they never foresaw. There are safe, complacent people whose lives are managed under the dead manacle of control, falling off a cliff into love and into the excitement and danger of a new relationship. In life, anything can come along the pathway to the house of your soul, the house of your body, to transfigure you. We're vulnerable externally to destiny, but we're also vulnerable internally, within ourselves. Things can come awake within your mind and heart that cause you immense days and nights of pain, a sense of being lost, of having no meaning, no worth; a kind of acidic negativity can knock down everything that you achieve in yourself, giving your world a sense of being damaged.

Another way to approach this is to look at the huge difference between sincerity and authenticity. Sincerity, while it's lovely, is necessary but insufficient, because you can be sincere with just one zone of your heart awakened. When many zones of the heart are awakened and harmonized we can speak of authenticity, which is a broader and more complex notion. It takes great courage and grace to feel the call to awaken, and it takes greater courage and more grace still to actually submit to the call, to risk yourself into these interior spaces where there is very often little protection. It takes a great person to creatively inhabit her own mind and not turn her mind into a destructive force that can ransack her life.

[...]

[Even some] lovely people feel that their real identity is working on themselves, and some work on themselves with such harshness. Like a demented gardener who won't let the soil settle for anything to grow, they keep raking, tearing away the nurturing clay from their own heart, then they're surprised that they feel so empty and vacant. Self-compassion is paramount. When you are compassionate with yourself, you trust in your soul, which you let guide your life. Your soul knows the geography of your destiny better than you do.

—John O'Donohue