

In "Walden." Henry David Thoreau observed, "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation." while I believe this iconic aphorism is telling, I also believe it is incomplete: for left out of Thoreau's observation is a select group of individuals who are likewise quietly struggling, in a desperate manner, to lead authentic, examined lives individuals just like me.

Fortunately, we are not alone. At a young age, I read a prescient tale about a fellow sojourner -a brave fictional character named the little prince -who embarks upon a journey of self-discovery, hoping to find his authentic self. Along the way, my young hero encounters a host of characters leading inauthentic lives: lives subjugated to the pursuits of various false gods-wealth—power, knowledge, etc. Eventually, the little prince finds a kindred spirit in the character of the narrator of the story, who, like the prince, struggles to find his authentic self in the gloaming between the actual and the fantastical world.

I understand these fictional characters all too well, like the little prince and the narrator of the story, I have continually striven to lead an authentic, examined life. Except, in my case. I took a far more circuitous route toward authenticity, during my early teenage years. Grappled mightily with a serious internal divide: the dichotomy between acceptance and authenticity. Unfortunately, for a time, I resolved this dilemma in favor of allowing others to define me. In retrospect, I realize I so desperately craved acceptance that I erected a social construct, composed of the type of person I believed the others had wanted me to be. As a way of gaining these false gods' acceptance. I had somehow deluded myself into believing that authenticity could be achieved through conformity; that self worth was dependent upon popularity, but, like the ancient alchemists, I soon realized that this type of authenticity –this form of self denial–was illusory, at best.

I needed greater clarity and substance in my life: I needed to figure out who I was before I could ever start to work out who I was in relationship to the world around me: I needed to stop listening to the external voices coming from the outside world and start listening to the internal voices coming from my inside world.

But living an examined, authentic life is never easy: quite the opposite: it requires constant vigilance and diligence. This is why I have been continually searching out new ways to challenge myself. I feel strongly that by purposely placing myself in difficult situations, I will be able to expose hidden veins of self-awareness that I would otherwise have been oblivious to. Not only that, but as I acquire a deeper understanding about myself, I will acquire a deeper understanding about others, and about the outside world around me.

For example, this past summer, I had the honor, and the privilege, to live among the Dine (Navajo) people, on their tribal lands, in New Mexico. In going on this trip, my hope was to further explore the contours of living an authentic. Examined life by juxtaposing my set of beliefs beside the dine people's set of beliefs in the hopes of finding commonality between our two worlds. In the end, found far more than commonality: I found a new way of living.

Ironically, I went on the trip to help the Dine people. But, in truth, these humble, proud people helped me far more by showing me the true meaning of living an authentic. Examined life, not a faux, self-conscious form of an authentic life, but a real-life built around a few simple precepts. In the end, through their example. Through their lived lives, these phenomenal people helped me expand my personal horizon: helped me expand my personal quest for authenticity: and, helped me become the person I am today. And, for that, I remain eternally grateful.