



PREFACE

A hundred people worked together over the course of ten years in search of meaning. They shared no common background, belief, or predisposition except the suspicion that something essential was missing: we as humans are incomplete. Nature develops us only to a certain point and then leaves us unfinished, just like it creates wheat but not bread, milk but not butter, or grapes but not wine. If farming completes nature, then there should exist a method of inner farming that would complete us.

Guided by this premise, we drew our instruction from teachings old and new, mainstream and forgotten, preserved in literature, art, monuments, and customs — all tested by the touchstone of verification. If the utility of a method could be verified, it was assimilated. If not, it was discarded. Through this process, a vast corpus of inner work was distilled into twelve fundamental labors, each addressing a specific condition of our unfinished nature: an *Old New Method*.

This book presents the distillation of these labors, the experiences of the practitioners who applied them, the resuscitation of dormant teachings, and the dying man's request that drew me to undertake this work in the first place.



JANUARY

Not every seed that sprouts fast grows into a sturdy tree, and at the outset of this work, there is no telling who will succeed and who will fail. What determines this lies sealed within, invisible to any onlooker and even to the farmer himself. I have watched people take their first steps with vigor and promise, only to be undone later by something trifling. And I have watched others begin humbly, hesitant even to call it a beginning, advance at the slowest pace imaginable — and then, near the very end, make one final move that crowns their entire lifetime and goes down in our records as a great success. None of this can be foreseen, but the record, however it ends, is only ever written by those who take that first step, so let us advance into this new year cautiously and attentively.

The labor of January looks in three directions: backward at the past, forward to the future, and out at us. This middle face will be our starting point. The whole idea behind inner farming is that we can make fundamental changes to the way we are. But before we can change, we must acknowledge that today is the result of all our past actions. Tomorrow will only be different if we change today. And changing today is not only a matter of being dissatisfied with our present selves. We must become much more specific and ask ourselves, “What happened yesterday that has dictated how I am today?” “What can I change today so that tomorrow may be different?— *What should be my aim?*”

Our being here does not of itself attest to any aim. Merely being here, we are like passers-by, stepping onto a plot of land casually, not farming it. So the importance of aim will have to be pressed upon us from the very beginning of our work, and then continually throughout it, as it was pressed upon me by a person who would become

instrumental in my introduction to inner farming. One meets many people in this work with whom one wouldn't normally cross paths because of differences in background, generation, or life circumstances, and no other scenario than inner farming would have likely brought me so close to Mo.

More than a generation my senior, Mo had the energy of someone half his age. Our connection grew and deepened through hours of discussion in which he would weave intricate correlations between ancient teachings and daily challenges. Even after a decade of practice, he retained the infectious enthusiasm of someone encountering these ideas for the first time, a delight that spilled over to his listeners. So insistent was Mo on clarity of aim that his entire life became a lesson about it, although we would only realize this in retrospect.

Mo could always flash out the right quotation for the right occasion. "Maimonides says this..." he'd proclaim authoritatively, silver-streaked hair receding from his forehead, eyes twinkling with discovery, then seamlessly transition to, "—and see how this connects to what Rabbi Hillel teaches in the Mishnah." No matter how ancient the sources he cited, he spoke of them in present-tense, as if he had just heard them said earlier that day. What impressed me even more was how our conversations would begin with theory and end in practical suggestions of how I should sip my morning coffee, or drive to work, or handle family disagreements. I had come in desperate need of changing myself, so forging theory into practical tools resonated powerfully. My enthusiasm energized Mo in turn; he drew vitality from witnessing understanding dawn in a young practitioner's eyes and naturally felt responsible for helping me lay a firm foundation for my own work. "Never lose sight of your aim," he urged me repeatedly, "and even if what keeps you here changes with time, maintain a firm grip on *why you are here*."

So what drew me to farm myself?

I had been overcome by a paralyzing aimlessness. Fresh out of high school, the prospect of being stamped with a college degree, shaped by career demands, and packaged into family life, felt like entering a vast factory where humans were processed into socially acceptable products only to be discarded at the end. But what was the purpose behind this ordeal? My elders dismissed my misgivings as childish and irrelevant, but from my point of view they were only further down the assembly line than I was, their edges smoothed, their questioning already dulled. Their numbness heightened my urgency; if I surrendered to the factory reality now, who could guarantee that I would ever again recognize the machinery for what it was? So before joining the assembly line, I resolved to discover what lay beyond the factory walls, even at the risk of being left behind.

Religion, spirituality, psychology, and philosophy were the obvious places to turn, although I found little in them to convince and console me. They circled around the

fundamental questions, perhaps giving me better language for my concerns without actually addressing them. What's more, the people I encountered in these fields—scholars, practitioners, believers—struck me as curiously disconnected from their own teachings, possessing knowledge they seemed incapable of living. After months of searching, it became clear that if any answers existed to my deeper questions, they lay beyond ordinary inquiry. I nevertheless refused to despair and resorted to suspecting that the true answers to the meaning of life were for some reason hidden.

After a year of painstaking reading, attending lectures, and meeting people, I turned to an unusual group as a last resort. Small in number but surprisingly diverse, it pledged allegiance to no single tradition. Unlike other groups I had encountered, each typically devoted to a specific approach—Buddhism, non-duality, Esoteric Christianity, mindfulness—these practitioners drew freely from any source that proved useful. Sufi teachings sat alongside Christian mysticism, Kabbalistic insights merged with Hindu philosophy, yet nothing felt eclectic or scattered. They possessed an unique ability to extract the living essence from these diverse traditions and forge them into practical tools for daily work. In this way, their knowledge remained vital and evolving, a teaching that continued to develop through each practitioner's direct experience.

For the first time in my search, I encountered people who were both genuinely immersed in their practice yet freed from the weight of dogmatism. They were not simply repeating inherited wisdom or speaking on the authority of some guru. They shared insights earned through their own verified efforts. Some of the more experienced practitioners exhibited a depth that attracted me. They struck me as *real* people, genuine people, people I could aspire to become. They could see right through me and advise me in ways I had never been instructed before. This was where I met Mo.

Mo's animated face bore the creases of someone who had lived fully and thought deeply. He was discreet about his doings, but the relentless ringing of his phone suggested he managed demanding responsibilities. For a young man like myself, there was always the feeling that one might be interrupting something important or taking too much of his time. Nevertheless, Mo consistently approached my questions with unhurried attention. So when he asked me about my aim, I felt both intimidated and eager to deliver what I believed to be a clear and well-formulated answer: "I want to lead a meaningful life. I don't mind working hard, as long as it serves a greater purpose."

"You don't mind working hard for a greater purpose," repeated Mo slowly, leaning back on his chair and sending me a piercing look. "That's already very good. *If I am only for myself, what am I?* asks Rabbi Hillel in Pirkei Avot. But that alone won't get you anywhere. You must learn to work *intelligently*. You must break your aim down

into smaller and manageable tasks—and leading a meaningful life is a very large aim. Before becoming useful to anything greater than yourself, you will have to become *reliable* (he emphasized this word). You will have to engage in a methodical study of yourself. That should be your aim. And for that, we can help you.” He paused, then added with emphasis, “*If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?*”

“Write down your aim on a piece of paper and place it in your pocket—*right now*.” He reached into his briefcase, tore out a page from a notebook, gave me a pen, and watched me write my aim. “Good. Now, set your alarm to ring every two hours. When it rings, pull out this paper and read your aim. In a few days’ time, report back to me how this aim sounds to you throughout your day. Does it hold? Could it use further refinement? Or perhaps it isn’t your true aim?”

It was not Mo alone who would influence me during those first and formative years. It was the entire group of practitioners working in tandem. I learned by example, and not always by good example. At times the group wore an atmosphere I had come to recognize as common to spiritual circles: members who spoke with a slow, deliberate cadence, as if each word were dredged up from great depths; others who sustained eye contact designed to project unshakeable inner stillness; newcomers greeted with riddles, or sudden silences following an ordinary remark, as though tilting them off balance were itself a form of initiation. An air of hinted knowledge hung over certain members, a sense that they were privy to things they couldn’t reveal. This veneer, though, sat alongside a far more colorful chaos. Abe, who had joined five years before I did, brought his unresolved conflicts into every discussion, arguing over trivial matters for the sake of arguing. Anna, who had arrived only weeks before me and had not yet earned the standing to say so, already slipped in ideas and methods from other teachings — plausible at first, but over time revealed as her way of bending the work to her own interpretation. Rachel, one of the longest-standing members of the group, had an eye for people’s weaknesses and no particular restraint about naming them; over drinks after one of our early meetings, she ran through nearly everyone in the room — this one too theoretical, that one too sentimental, a third more interested in the opposite sex than in working — perceptive assessments delivered without much apparent wish to help the people she read so easily. Amid this display, though, were exceptions: people who had absorbed the atmosphere without being shaped by it, whose work was quieter, less performed, harder to see at first but more convincing once seen. Mo was one of them.

I would gradually come to realize that the people who practice this teaching are its most powerful lessons. They are the teaching itself, its best books and most conclusive testaments. And they come from remarkably diverse walks of life, defying the patterns of most interest groups I had previously encountered. Here I would meet rational skeptics alongside emotional devotees, success-driven entrepreneurs

alongside humble day laborers, those seeking material prosperity alongside those who had renounced it, ex-convicts alongside model citizens. Yet their diverse backgrounds were secondary, because despite their differences, each had reached an impasse in life just as I had. Each had gotten lost in a labyrinth from which neither their efforts nor any conventional knowledge permitted them escape. In desperate search of a way out, each gravitated from the farthest corners of human experience to converge at this same threshold.

Mo's folded piece of paper in my pocket proved to be more than just a litmus test for my aim. I would roll it between my fingers throughout the day like a talisman, its presence reminding me I had an inner task beyond whatever I happened to be engaged with externally. When I did unfold and read it every two hours or so (as Mo had advised me to) I was brought face to face with the fundamental problem that confronts all who undertake inner farming: the illusion that I was unified. If I were the same person all the time, then I should have a clear and permanent aim that always represented my dominant desire. But could I say that the aim to lead a meaningful life was at the forefront of my mind every moment of my every day? Not only was it difficult to put my finger on exactly what I wanted, it also varied greatly from moment to moment. "I want independence," "I want security," "I want excitement," "I want peace," "I want to be admired," "I want to be left alone." I fluctuated through many different aims, and if I were to write them down and compare my compilation, I would be faced with the embarrassing fact that some could not be pursued without negating others. I harbored a multiplicity of aims. My inner acreage was made of parts indifferent to each other, some even in competition with one another.

Instead of clarifying my aim, the exercise had clarified my fragmentation.

In light of this, before we hurry to plant seeds in a terrain we do not yet understand, inner farming must begin with a candid study of our acreage as it is, for all its diversity and shortcomings. The practitioner is given a map that outlines several divisions to guide this self-exploration. In the context of January, we visit (or revisit) the most fundamental division of our being, our division into three independent parts or bodies, which stands at the foundation of our multiplicity. These three come together at our birth and remain together for the rest of our lives. They separate at our deaths. Forced to cohabit, each nonetheless remains distinct throughout our lives, with its own needs, desires, and impulses. Each responds to different triggers and bows to different constraints. To farm ourselves, we must approach our psychology as group psychology, for as long as we persist in the illusion of being unified, we repeatedly make the mistake of addressing the needs of one body at the expense of the other two.

These three bodies are our *Physical Body*, *Essence*, and *Personality*.

The traits and peculiarities of our Physical Body seem, at first glance, obvious: one person is tall and another short; one is quick, another slow; one has darker skin, another lighter. But along with these obvious traits come many more subtle needs, desires, preferences, impulses, and attitudes, deeply rooted in the Physical Body, that influence our psychology and must be studied in detail.

Essence is the vital force that animates our Physical Body. It is much more than mere life-energy; it is the wellspring of our innate attractions, tendencies, and talents. It is termed *Essence* to imply the concentrated core of a thing, like the essence of a flower or an essential oil; invisible yet unmistakably there. Just as these essences capture the fundamental potency of their source, so does our Essence contain the concentrated seeds of our individuality. One person is drawn to nature, another excels in languages, a third gets along with people. These and many other inborn distinctions, appearing early in life and persisting throughout it, are traits of Essence.

Personality begins forming a few years after our birth in response to the demands of our environment. The term comes from the Latin *persona*—the mask through which an actor speaks. Our Essence can never naturally conform to the culture and times in which we are born, so we are forced to coat it with an adaptable layer. This mask becomes thicker as we press against the dictates of society, primarily through imitation and education. It is an indispensable coat, beneficial for our proper functioning in society as long as it is kept in balance with our Physical Body and Essence.

Such a balance, however, never happens naturally. Nature endows us with three parts, but never with the insight to develop them harmoniously. For various reasons beyond our control, one part always grows at the expense of the other two, like untended land where certain plants and animals dominate others. Most commonly, Personality outgrows its utility as a protective coat and overpowers Essence. It becomes so thick that it prevents Essence from breathing and arrests its development. Time passes—our Physical Body ages, our Personality continues projecting maturity—but our Essence remains arrested in childhood. We appear adult while remaining inwardly infantile, timid, and insecure.

If Essence is choked for too long it enters a kind of coma and no longer plays an active role in our lives. We continue living, but the course of our lives has little to do with our innate inclinations. We become borrowed constructs, molds created by the conventions of society. In the rarer cases where Essence survives this suffocation, its pain calls through the thick coat of Personality as a faint cry of conscience. We experience pangs of being lost, of emptiness, and of incompleteness. The world offers its distractions, but beneath them lies the gnawing feeling that there must be something more. Powerless in the face of external influences, our Essence is nevertheless able to admit this powerlessness to itself. Having endured years of imprisonment, it can no longer bear its confinement. Our past displays a trail of

pretense, our future bears no promise. We experience a strong impulse to do something about our condition *right now* before it is too late.

This mysterious impulse can manifest in a person of any race, gender, or age, and accounts for why such a diverse group of people would be drawn to farm themselves. The teenager grows tired of rebelling, the entrepreneur tired of chasing success, bachelors see through their illusive freedom, parents grow weary of feigning to know what is good for their child. Our Essence cannot wage war against the powers of artificiality that keep it subdued, but it can acknowledge its slavery, and this confession forges the first crack in the armor of our Personality.

“This division was known long ago,” said Mo when he presented these ideas to me for the first time. “It was known and forgotten. We assume knowledge simply accumulates. One generation hands its stock to the next, and each age grows a little wiser for it. Some knowledge behaves this way. Some refuses to.”

“There is knowledge you can borrow whole. Einstein earns $E=mc^2$. He wrestles it out of the world at great cost. I take the same formula from a textbook. I never derive it, never doubt it, never pay a thing for it, and it serves me exactly as it served him. The bridge built on my borrowed formula stands as firmly as one built on his earned one.”

“Then there is knowledge that only half-borrows. Watch a monk perform his order’s rite for the ten-thousandth time. Every gesture is correct. He was taught each one, and they transmit whole, generation after generation, like your formula. Ask him what a gesture means, and you will often get a parrot-answer. The form borrows perfectly. What the form was built to carry, however, stays behind.”

“And then there is knowledge that cannot be borrowed at all. Tell a man who has never lost anyone what grief is. He will agree with every word and understand nothing. Tell the same words to a man burying his father, and he needs no telling. He knows it more precisely than you could ever say it. The description did not change. He did. The knowledge was waiting for him to catch up to it.”

“Self-knowledge stands at the farthest end of this scale, the most exacting case there is. Grief spares some. Not one of us was born without a self to wonder about. Every ancient culture knew this, and knew equally that such knowledge could never simply be handed down. So they wrapped it in a story, an image, a rite, and set it before a man long before he was ready for it. The same words mean nothing to one man and everything to another.”

“Take the division of *Physical Body*, *Essence*, and *Personality*. You do not find it in present-day psychology. But you do in the story of the creation of Adam and Eve. Are you familiar with this story? *God formed man from the dust of the ground and*

breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being—says the book of Genesis. Have you ever noticed how Adam and Eve are made of three parts?”

“I thought it was two,” I said, “—didn’t you say earth and breath?”

“Two parts initially,” Mo replied, his eyes lighting up with the gleam of a teacher who has just watched his student fall perfectly into a prepared snare. “The dust of the ground represents our Physical Body. The breath of life represents our Essence. But what happens when Adam and Eve bite on the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge?”

“They realize their nakedness and cover themselves with leaves.” (That much I had remembered from Bible studies at school.)

“There’s your third part,” said Mo. “Essence is born naked and ignorant. The acquisition of knowledge starts forming the covering that will eventually grow to become our Personality. Consider our early childhood. We were too young to pretend but old enough to perceive. We found ourselves in situations that suggested our natural conduct was inadequate. We were scolded for not saying *please* and *thank you*—responses that never naturally occurred to our Essence. When we reached for someone else’s toy, we were scolded for not asking permission. When we expressed our genuine feelings about a relative, we were hushed for being rude. We gradually realized that our natural conduct did not always align with social expectations, that we must cover it with conventions that seemed arbitrary to us yet were consistently demanded by our elders. This was the advent of our Personality. This is what happens once Adam and Eve bite on the fruit of knowledge.”

Mo’s cell phone buzzed. He took it out of his pocket with haste, his face shifting subtly—the animated teacher momentarily replaced by something more guarded, more formal. A flicker of annoyance crossed his features as he deliberately ignored the first ring, then the second, his jaw tightening slightly. On the third ring, he picked up with visible reluctance. “Not now,” he said quietly into the receiver, his voice barely above a whisper. “Take care of it as I explained to you—I’ll call back later.” He hung up quickly, almost secretively, then turned back to me. It took a moment for the enthusiastic educator to fully return.

“First, Adam and Eve cover themselves with fig leaves, but by the time they’re expelled from Eden, they’re already covered in tunics of skin. So Personality begins growing from those early years and doesn’t stop. It’s a necessary covering, because without Personality, our Essence would remain forever unfit to navigate human society. The problem begins when the tunic of skin thickens into an impenetrable armor, when the means of adaptation becomes an end in itself.”

“Each of us has a few Personalities that we cycle through almost every day, perhaps six or seven. These are coverings we’ve developed in order to adapt to different recurring

situations in our environment. That's why, each time you re-read your aim, it felt different. Each time, you were reading it from a different Personality. It only came as a surprise to you because you hadn't been noticing these shifts. Now, let's take your exercise a step further: observe yourself interacting with different people. See whether you can list how many different 'Asafs' you can count. Then share with me what you discover."

Mo's phone rang again. "I need to take this one," he said, standing up. He answered with a crisp "Yes?" and walked to the far corner of the room, lowering his voice to conduct what was clearly a more involved business matter. The call lasted longer than expected and naturally brought our discussion to an end. But I had gotten what I needed; I had pocketed a specific task of self-observation.

I had a week to put Mo's directive into practice before our group would reconvene. Over that week, I discovered six different roles (or 'I's, as I would later learn they were called) that could manifest even in the course of a single day. There was the 'I' with my parents—short-tempered, rebellious, opinionated, and obstinate. Then came the 'I' among my childhood friends—joking, lighthearted, and carefree. In the presence of attractive women appeared yet another 'I'—serious, pensive, often trying to draw attention through an air of affected melancholy. There was the 'I' with colleagues at work—pragmatic, experienced, looking for the smart thing to say in order to stand out. There was the 'I' who interacted with practitioners in this work—quiet, docile, eager to let others speak, and full of questions to facilitate their discussion. And finally, there was the 'I' alone where, relieved from the pressure of performing before others, thoughts and movements flowed much more naturally but still very much governed by association.

Just like Adam and Eve hurrying to cover their nakedness, the moment I entered society, an acute awareness of others' perceptions instantly covered me with one of these hats. It was by no means a conscious decision. Depending on whose presence I happened to be around, a theatre of invented mannerisms sprang to life: how to speak, how to move, how to laugh, which opinions to express and which to hold back. My tone of voice shifted with different friends and relatives, my posture adjusted to their status, my thoughts reshaped themselves to meet what I perceived to be their expectations. Moreover, the task Mo gave me—to observe myself shifting between these Personalities—itself stood in competition with this unconscious role-playing. There was a deep resistance in me to seeing it, a preference not to turn on the light, to keep the mechanism of these transitions in the dark, far away from my awareness. Consequently, most of these Personalities I only caught in hindsight. I did catch myself switching hats in real time only once (which made for a very awkward experience) and even then by accident. A colleague from work had come home and the role of 'son' and 'colleague' clashed. I couldn't comfortably shift from one to another as both were called for at the same time. In all the other cases, the transition

between Personalities had happened unnoticed. But that single accident was enough to show me that the change was always triggered by circumstances, never by my own deliberate decision. I would look back at my interactions with any person and cringe at having changed skin so radically, just to accommodate their presumed opinion of me. I was left feeling like a spineless marionette, under the complete mercy of external forces.

This unpleasant realization left me deeply unsettled. I now felt even more distant from my aim of leading a meaningful life than when I had just begun inner work. How could I become *reliable* when there was no single and consistent ‘I’ in me? I felt like a farmer who steps onto an acreage crusted over by so many years of neglect and covered by such invasive brush that harvesting anything meaningful anytime soon would be out of the question. And I was impatient to change. A deep disappointment settled upon me to the extent that I altogether questioned my suitability for the demands of inner farming. Had I been hurried and naive to undertake this work? Did I really have it in me to make genuine progress, when my starting point was so compromised?

Mo categorically dismissed my self-criticism. “*For though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again*,” says the Book of Proverbs. Everyone starts this way and remains this way for a very long time,” he insisted. “Besides, your observations are valuable not just for you, but for all of us. Share them with the group in our next meeting and formulate a question around what you have realized. By posing a genuine question before us, you will be teaching us. You see, we old-timers mustn’t be allowed to be overtaken by inertia, and the only way to keep us on our toes is by challenging us with questions, the answers to which we assume we already know until we’re put to the test.”

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The patterns Mo identified in my early struggles would prove universal. Twenty years later, when newcomers joined my groups, I would verify again and again how the difficulties that challenged me in those formative days greeted each new arrival. The dawning sense of the degenerate condition of our acreage, coupled by our inherent weakness of being fragmented and inconsistent, were reliably the first obstacle. Many would not survive this disillusionment.

The hundred practitioners with whom I would formulate the Old New Method were a distillation of some thousand who joined our experiment at different points and for various reasons left midway—and the first to leave were always those who came seeking quick results. They imagined they could bypass methodical work through shortcuts: gaining access to hidden knowledge, undergoing a single profound mystical experience, or mastering some powerful technique. After all, why toil for years for something that might be acquired in a brief span of time? But there can be

no shortcuts to inner farming for the same reason that an external farmer cannot snap his fingers to make wheat or cause a field to grow vines. It is only because our psychology is intangible that we expect it to be more malleable, more accommodating to our wishful thinking than the material world. We think we can wish it into whatever we want. We think—or rather, hope—we can cheat without consequence, and the longer we deceive ourselves in this way, the longer we postpone pulling up our sleeves and getting down to real work.

Those seasoned seekers who find this work having already come to terms with the inevitability of patient labor are like farmers stepping onto their land for the first time. They must begin with a candid survey of their parcel before taking any specific action, for no two plots are alike. Where is the soil fertile and where is it poor? Which sections receive sunlight and which remain for long stretches of the day in the dark? The candid truth is never comfortable, but pretending our land is in better condition than it really is will obviously get us nowhere. This is precisely where the influence of one's co-practitioners proves most valuable.

When I shared my observations and posed the question—*What was the point of formulating an aim if I was fragmented and each of my fragments had its own desires?*—I noticed knowing nods and exchanged glances of recognition among the practitioners. Like an amateur farmer returning from his first week afield, machinery broken and boots caked with mud, I was seeking guidance from those who had struggled through the same terrain countless times before. It was as if I had to undergo this rite of passage to earn their respect. The vulnerability of exposing my confusion felt both humbling and strangely freeing, as though admitting my fragmentation was itself the first step toward integration.

“So you’ve verified that you contain different Personalities,” responded the eldest member of our group, a man in his seventies who I had come to understand was now retired. He spoke slowly and at ease, with a particular warmth in his eyes that always made me feel welcome. “Each of these Personalities kicks in when triggered by a particular stimulus. That is true for us all. There are twelve of us here today. If each of us has six personalities, then you are seated in the midst of seventy-two people—you are in good company,” he said, looking around the room with a gentle smile. The rest of the practitioners chuckled knowingly.

We were seated in a circle in what I would come to recognize as the traditional format for our meetings. Anyone who wanted to share their point of view raised their hand, and the meeting coordinator called upon them one by one. There was no hierarchy in the group; everyone was listened to and addressed as an equal.

“As to the point behind formulating aim,” added a lady in her thirties. She had been the one to receive me when I knocked on the door of this house for the first time a few months earlier. I always felt maternal care from her, “I don’t feel your experience

proves the futility of setting aims but quite the contrary. It's the only way to experience our different parts. And it's not only your different Personalities that have different aims. Your Physical Body and Essence have their own aims too, often indifferent to your other parts and sometimes even in conflict with them. You've laid important groundwork for becoming familiar with these different aspects of yourself. So if nothing else, the attempt to formulate an aim has pressed you face to face with your multiplicity. How else could this be achieved?"

"The Physical Body always wants comfort, security, and equilibrium," continued a practitioner in his forties. Tall and thin with gaunt cheeks, I could easily envision him as a recluse monk engaged in ascetic discipline. But his external life couldn't be farther from the monastic. He was a father of three who worked long hours, his fatigue evident in the heavy bags beneath his eyes. He spoke in short, concise sentences. "The body resists change. It only wishes to satisfy its needs. Eating. Sleeping. Sex. Like an animal."

"Did you also experience resistance in yourself to making these observations?" asked a woman with an accent I couldn't quite place, perhaps Spanish. Her hair was pulled back in a practical bun, and despite being dressed in simple clothes, she carried herself with the unmistakable poise of someone who had once moved in elite circles. I affirmed her suspicions, admitting to noticing a deep preference to keeping the mechanism of these transitions in the dark, away from my awareness. "In fact," I added, "I rarely caught the transitions between my Personalities in real time; I mostly realized them in hindsight."

"This resistance comes from Personality," she explained. "Personality always wants to avoid unpleasant realizations about itself. From the point of view of Personality, this work feels like we regress. Take yourself. Only a while back, you harbored an imaginary picture of being unified. Now you've verified that you are made of many contradictory 'I's. From Personality's point of view—from the point of view of your imaginary picture of yourself—you're worse off than before; you've regressed."

"When we join this work, we start building a new Personality around it," said the meeting coordinator. "Most of our discussions and debates come from this new part. But ultimately, inner farming is not about replacing one Personality with another. Our work must eventually penetrate Essence. The point behind formulating an aim is to figure out what your Essence wants, to single out the genuine urge that drew you to farm yourself, to grab hold of that muffled voice calling to you from under the thick layer of Personality, amplify it, and bring it to the forefront."

"But how can I even be sure that I have such a part," I demanded with strong emotion? Only after the desperate comment came out of my mouth did I realize that I'd not raised my hand.

A momentary silence fell over the room as my question hung in the air, exposing not just my doubt but my expectation of reassurance. I was still very young to this group and would only gradually come to learn it harbored a distaste for self-pity and self-deprecation. Confessions of inadequacy, that in any other environment would typically elicit pity and compassionate support, never touched my co-practitioners in the same predictable way. “You think you’re different—you think you’re uniquely inadequate?” asked the lady coordinator, her tone neither harsh nor coddling but matter-of-fact. “Still you insist on feeling special, even at the price of being exceptionally unfit for this work. We will have to do better than that.” She turned to Mo and said, “Mo, he obviously has a deep appreciation for you and listens to your instruction. Why don’t you take him to visit your factory? That will teach him a lesson worth a thousand words.”

A fleeting shadow crossed Mo’s face, so brief I couldn’t be certain I hadn’t imagined it. Whatever momentary reluctance might have been there vanished instantly, replaced by his usual composed demeanor. I wondered whether he truly embraced the coordinator’s suggestion or merely acquiesced to avoid creating tension before the group. In these delicate group dynamics, refusing would have been conspicuous. Unable to decipher his true feelings, I set aside my curiosity as the conversation naturally shifted to other matters.

Be that as it may, this discussion centered around my personal experience left me with much food for thought. I had to agree with the points of view shared, especially that formulating aim was the best way to press us face to face with our multiplicity. It had done just that for me.

I had hoped Mo’s directives around setting aim would force me to discover a genuine drive that could guide and power my efforts. Instead, they only yielded a deeper verification of my multiplicity. I began suspecting that inner work progressed this way, non-linearly, by taking two steps forward and one step back, an impression that would persist for all the years to come. And in light of this, my understanding of progression became more circular. Each year, as the practitioner steps onto his land, he brings with him last year’s experience to the same tasks, and gains the chance of bending the cyclical nature of his work into a spiral. By this token, the formulation of aim is not something we do once and for all. It is a task we must regularly return to, so that even if what keeps us in this work has changed, we nevertheless maintain a firm grip on why we are here.

Tasked with discovering what their Essence wants, newcomers naturally begin by looking more deeply into what drew them to inner farming in the first place. Those despaired at allowing deadlines to slip by aim to overcome procrastination. Those exhausted from trying to manage how others perceive them aim to achieve independence from public opinion. Those horrified at seeing themselves yelling at their children (exactly as their own parents had yelled at them) aim to break their

toxic parenting patterns. These aims—along with a host of innumerable other possibilities—legitimately push open the January gate, but they are not the January labor itself.

Labor implies practicality, measurable action—*something we can start working on right now*. A wish to overcome procrastination remains hollow until we focus on one simple task, use it to observe our multiplicity, and tackle the root of our hesitation in real time. An aim for freedom from public opinion will yield nothing unless we downscale it to a specific case with a specific individual, and on that immediate scale, challenge the mechanisms of our enslavement. A desire to break negative parenting patterns remains stillborn without a careful study of negative emotions in general; their arising, their imitative nature, and the illusory attitudes that underlie them. Any aim, genuinely pursued, forces us against our multiplicity. But a well-formulated aim will also lay the foundation for all the details of our work to come.

This sharpening of generalities to the point of practice attracts surprising internal resistance. As long as our interest in inner farming remains generic and theoretical, our Personality stays indifferent to it. It might even support it, reveling in grand ideas precisely because they need no practical application. But downscaling our aim into immediate action breaks this stalemate. Suddenly, Personality feels threatened. Our practical efforts might disarm it. Moreover, they seem so small and insignificant that Personality cannot value the unremarkable results they may yield. Fine grapes sound good; clearing brush sounds tedious. It will dissuade us from getting down to real work, for Personality has governed our internal world from time immemorial and will not easily give up its throne. It will fight back, like any tyrant.

I could now understand what had disappointed me in the books, lectures, and groups I had probed prior to meeting this teaching. They had boasted promises of big results—awakening, inner peace, self-actualization—yet had fallen short of sharpening their theories into practice. How exactly were they expecting their practitioners to achieve these things? And why did those practicing them not convince me of their achievements? I could see how they fed their audience's Personalities, because Personality thrives on imaginary ideas and will support any endeavor that might feed its self-image. Break down your lofty aim into simple efforts, however, and you lose Personality's interest. It resists anything aimed at exposing its artificial and fragmented nature. This explains the general preference for philosophical debate over the humble work of actual change. It also explained why it was so difficult to find practical methods during my search. They were not purposefully hidden by those possessing them. They simply lay buried beneath heaps of fantastic theories that attracted more widespread attention, like rare gems scattered in overgrown fields where few think to look.

And even among those who could see through these illusions and were resigned to work methodically, the battle to disarm Personality would prove much more vicious than I had expected, as my visit to Mo's factory would reveal.

Already on our drive there, his demeanor began to shift. At first, the change was subtle. Our conversation continued as usual, but the person behind Mo's words was gradually transforming. I now realized that his phone had been comparatively restrained during our previous meetings, for once we started heading toward his factory, it hardly stopped ringing. Each call seemed to pull him deeper into his business persona, his voice growing crisper, his posture more tense.

The notion that my accompanying him was a deliberate experiment, rather than a routine visit, enabled me to experience this shift differently than I normally would. Normally, I might have interpreted the changes I observed in Mo through the lens of my own insecurities—Had I said something wrong? Failed to meet some unspoken expectation?—but having been forewarned that there would be a lesson in this experience, I could set aside these concerns. Mo's transformation wasn't about me; anyone in my place would have witnessed the same phenomenon. He was exchanging his role as enthusiastic mentor for a Personality I had yet to encounter.

Crossing the factory entrance, the transformation was complete. Mo's enthusiastic and intellectual manner vanished, replaced by an aura of authority and purpose. He walked as if he carried the weight of the world on his shoulders. There was pride, and self-importance, and a jovial satisfaction of being depended upon by so many. His demeanor evoked very specific behaviors from those around him. Workers tensed as they passed by the big boss, assuming fake smiles. Some offered hasty greetings, others found urgent reasons to disappear. The general manager had entered his kingdom and the intellectual Mo I knew was nowhere to be seen.

I was presented as a college student shadowing Mo as part of my internship. Under this pretend role, I was permitted to accompany him everywhere. We moved through manufacturing floors with massive machinery, quality control labs with white-coated technicians, and sleek administrative offices where business decisions were made. Mo had a way of handling people that was both firm and at the same time gave them the feeling that he had complete trust in them. When he reviewed production figures with his management team, he dominated the meeting through calculated shifts between criticism and praise. When the shipping manager reported a delay, Mo gave him a stern look that would have melted me had I been in his place. Yet moments later, he praised the same manager with paternal warmth. He cut through opposing views with swift, almost cruel efficiency. Tactics aside, the growing impression forming within me was that of a patriarch of a large family. Mo's employees looked up to him and relied on him. He was their sun, and like flowers, they perked up with his appearance and wilted once he left.

Towards midday, we happened to pass by a conference room filled with employees who were celebrating something. Mo entered, the room stilled into silence, and we learned that an employee had just had her first child. “Toast!” came the cry from across the room, “—Mo, give us a toast!” Mo stepped forward with pretended reluctance, though I could easily tell he was in his element. He drew himself to his full height and surveyed the room with the gravity of a statesman. “From the Maharal of Prague,” he began, his voice carrying to every corner of the room, “*Children are not only our future; they are our eternity.*” He paused, allowing the words to settle. “May this child grow to fulfill Life’s longing, and may you, Sarah, find in motherhood both the greatest challenge and the greatest reward.” He raised his glass with ceremonial precision, and the room erupted in appreciation as everyone joined the toast.

Later that day, Mo called Sarah to his office and handed her an envelope. “A contribution toward the little one’s future,” he explained. “*Whoever teaches his son, it’s as if he taught his son, his son’s son, and so on until the end of all generations.*” The woman’s eyes filled with tears as she thanked him, and I glimpsed for a moment a different Mo; neither the commanding executive nor the animated teacher, but a Mo I had not yet seen, tender and deeply generous. Was this his Essence? I couldn’t tell for sure—I didn’t yet know enough about Essence to draw a firm conclusion—but that was the only moment I felt comfortable in his presence throughout the entire day.

To some extent, I could understand why Mo would become so engrossed in his role as company founder. He had shared with me his remarkable life-story, of having been pushed to the brink of starvation during World War II and thereafter climbing every rung of achievement’s ladder. Throughout his career, he had worked in all facets of the engineering field, from the most humble technician to eventually founding and managing his own company. He embodied the quintessential self-made man who had erected an empire from ashes. His breakthrough came when a patent he had developed proved essential to military forces across the globe. From then onward, his factory fulfilled contracts worth immense sums. This was no trivial achievement, and the Personality associated with such accomplishment was not inherently negative—indeed, it was serving him and countless others remarkably well. The problem lay, not in its nature, but in its totality: once this company founder Personality took hold, the inner farmer was nowhere to be found.

Justified or not, as the day progressed, I became more and more confused. If Mo himself was made of diverse Personalities that came and went by the force of circumstance (just as I was), then what did his decade of inner farming amount to? As we drove away from the factory at the end of the day and the familiar Mo began to gradually reemerge, his phone rang one final time. He looked at it with a more reserved expression, a resignation mixed with annoyance. “Yes?” He answered tersely,

“No, handle it tomorrow... I’m not available the rest of today.” When he hung up and noticed my confusion, he seemed to read my thoughts. “Was it that bad?” he asked, breaking the chill of silence between us. I told him that I couldn’t say exactly how bad it was, except that I’d spent the day with a stranger. “So it *was* that bad,” he muttered almost to himself.

“I know what you’re thinking,” he continued, “—and you’re right. That man you saw today, he’s not involved in inner work. He’s not the real me, nor who I want to be anymore. But I built that persona over decades and it has served me and many others very well. It has become like a suit of armor I can’t shake off.”

“But how can you tell that all your brilliant arguments about the work are not just another Personality?” I asked, “—how can you tell your work is coming from Essence?”

His lengthy pause suggested I had touched a deep nerve. “Of course, you raise a valid point,” he finally said. “I’m waiting...” he left off here, as if thinking out loud, then continued “I’m waiting for a moment of reckoning when these two parts—Essence and Personality—will be pressed against each other, forced to a duel that only one can survive. I know in the core of my being that this moment will come, and that all the efforts I make till then, as small and humble as they may presently seem, will determine which side triumphs.”

Mo’s moment of reckoning would indeed come, and not too long after this prophetic confession. A year later, he would be diagnosed with terminal cancer.

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In this work, books and lectures pale beside the lessons offered by one’s co-practitioners. One learns through interacting with others; agreeing, disagreeing, sometimes arguing, always working through differences. One benefits from witnessing their successes as well as their failures. And when one observes a fellow practitioner trapped in a stalemate—as I had observed Mo—struggling with internal forces they cannot overcome, unable to break through despite their best efforts, the impression cuts deep. It compels self-examination: Am I truly any different? Can I be certain my progress exceeds theirs? Every such encounter, whether encouraging or disturbing, leaves one fundamentally altered.

And so, the stark contrast between Mo’s different personalities had altered something fundamental in me. But it was only the beginning of a broader disillusionment. As I grew closer to other practitioners, I began observing similar inconsistencies in each of them. The shock, I realized, stemmed as much from my own fantastical imagination as from anything they had actively said or done. I had placed them all on pedestals of perfection, expecting them to embody the complete integration we were all working

toward. Yet the better I got to know them, the more I witnessed them struggling with the same fragmentation I had observed in myself. There was a peculiar pain in this realization, the pain of innocence lost about others' progress, but also a strange comfort that reassured me. "You are in good company—" the elderly man had said in our group meeting. His words now acquired a deeper meaning; I was not hopelessly behind but rather walking the same path that even my mentors continued to traverse, sometimes advancing, sometimes retreating. This disillusionment marked a necessary graduation from student to practitioner, from follower to colleague. The invisible barrier that had separated us dissolved and I found myself standing on equal ground with the entire group, now responsible for my own farming, accepting both the burden and the privilege of tending my own inner soil, without the comfort of imagining that others had already perfected what I was just beginning.

Real and lasting change is so difficult to achieve that it is natural many newcomers would drop off soon after being introduced to inner farming. They come seeking transformation, not a catalog of their defects. And since the most powerful catalyst for seeing oneself is working with other practitioners, they resort to work in isolation. Personality is much better able to maintain its cherished self-image without the annoying mirror of other practitioners. Of course, this preference is the very mechanism that maintains its dominance over Essence. Any practitioner serious about farming themselves will have to see through this illusion, for the thick weeds of habit will not yield to wishful thinking or private meditation.

The one advantage in our fragmentation is that we never get stuck in one corner of our acreage for too long. As we shift from one Personality to another, even the prospects of inner farming look different. In some moments they seem bleak and hopeless, as they often seemed to me. How little in me was capable of change and how much resistance challenged this budding potential! Yet shifting to other parts of my multiplicity, the daunting task of inner farming seemed exciting. In one such moment of inspiration, the architectural plans of a massive structure unfurled themselves in my mind, with detailed schematics for rooms, corridors, utility systems, and foundations—all yet to be constructed. I experienced a curious mix of dauntingness and enthusiasm. The sheer scale of the work ahead was sobering, yet there was something exhilarating about standing before a blank canvas with tools in hand, finally comprehending both the limitations of my soil and its untapped potential.

With time, new people joined our group, and the mantle of newcomer passed from my shoulders to theirs, granting me a wider perspective on the work I had only just begun to understand. As they arrived with their earnest questions and familiar doubts, I could recognize the recurring cycles of enthusiasm and disillusionment, commitment and retreat—symptoms I had displayed not long before. The curtain

was slowly lifting, revealing the patient, methodical work of inner farming, in the face of which no individual has any advantage over another.

“My aim is to change my self-destructive attitudes,” said a newcomer in his thirties whose careworn face bore the lines of someone who had lived harder than his years suggested. He carried an expression of disappointment, chiefly disappointment with himself. “After several violent clashes with people close to me (all my own fault) I realized that genuine friendship will require me to stop being mean and selfish, and stop complaining about everything I disagree with. I must change a lot, perhaps even change entirely.”

His confession moved us. He showed both sincerity and a clear understanding of his condition. By taking responsibility rather than blaming others, he had at least positioned himself properly in relation to his challenge. Yet not a month would pass and this newcomer would find himself in a heated argument with one of our practitioners (which in itself was very unusual), an argument that escalated into war with our entire group. Out of the blue, he vehemently declared that the teaching was contrived, our group was a fraud, and all practitioners were being deceived. Gone was the noble aim, the humble confession, the desire for true friendship. In its place stood the original violent Personality, the very problem that had drawn him to farm himself in the first place, now reaffirmed and triumphant. For those observing, no clearer demonstration of our inner fragmentation could have appeared, along with its bitter consequences. Needless to say, he did not remain with us for long.

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My apprenticeship with Mo reached a natural conclusion when I accepted a job opportunity abroad. The prospects of the new position were only moderately attractive, but I had been drawn to pursue it anyway because my new location would expose me to many more practitioners. Still, I shared my decision with Mo with a heavy heart, knowing this would impact our close relationship that had become so meaningful to both of us.

“I’m genuinely happy for you,” he said. We were sitting in his office (we had agreed that I visit him regularly there to force his conflicting Personalities to confront each other). “You are breaking out into the larger community of practitioners. If you continue at this pace, I have no doubt that you will reach far.” He was speaking with paternal warmth, more pleased at his son’s progress than concerned by his own stalemate. His gaze drifted from me back to his coffee, and his tone shifted. “For myself, I don’t know,” he said gravely. “I should have left this place long ago. Who knows how much time I have left and what I can hope to achieve in this remaining time?”

His phone rang, and for the first time, I saw Mo look at it through the eyes of the practitioner rather than the businessman. It was as if that ring represented the curse he had just formulated. He let it ring and looked at me. “It’s not only time, you see,” he continued, running his hand over the smooth surface of his desk as if reading his life’s story there, “it’s this office persona. It won’t allow itself to be sacrificed. How many opportunities to draw closer to the group’s activities have I not turned down? Each time, a seemingly justified excuse presented itself. First my company was at a critical juncture that required my full attention. If only I braved that year, I told myself, I would achieve financial freedom that would open infinite possibilities in the years to follow. But then my mother’s declining health demanded I stay nearby. And now I have cancer. If I recover from this cancer, will I then take the step? My track record suggests otherwise.” He looked up at me, his eyes brightening momentarily. “Each time I’d gathered enough courage to make a meaningful move, a new issue always came up to stifle my determination. It’s as if the devil has always been a step ahead of me.”

Mo’s words struck me with the force of revelation. Here sat a man in his sixties, respected, successful, accomplished, confessing that the very system I had feared entering after highschool was indeed the trap I had suspected it to be. He had seen through the illusion years ago—had even found a practice that promised liberation—yet remained shackled to the very machinery he recognized as meaningless. It wasn’t enough merely to see the trap; one had to possess the will, perhaps even the luck, to escape it. Mo had acquired the map but lacked the courage to abandon his well-appointed prison. As I sat there, barely past twenty, I glimpsed one possible scenario of my future that I had narrowly averted: a man imprisoned by his own success, forever promising himself that next year would be different, while the devil of circumstance perpetually ensured he tread in place and never make meaningful progress.

Mo faced the challenge of cancer as he had all other challenges in his life, with the methodical determination of a general who refuses to surrender. His wealth opened doors to the finest hospitals in Switzerland and consultations with the most renowned specialists. Yet after two years of dragging the inevitable, even these advantages proved insufficient and he had to face the bitter truth that his end could only be slightly postponed at the cost of extreme physical suffering.

The call came on a winter morning, a few months after I had already relocated. Mo’s unmistakable voice—that same voice I had witnessed commanding boardroom attention with effortless authority—now emerged broken and slurred by narcotics from a hospital in Geneva. “It’s over for me,” he said, each word an effort. “I could buy this entire hospital and it would do me no good.” The man who had built an empire was about to run out of a currency that wealth couldn’t purchase. Each grain of sand falling through his hourglass revealed the hollowness of material achievement.

“I must ask something of you,” he continued. I naturally promised to do anything within my power to help him. “I need... I need to see you all. You, and all the practitioners that were in one way or another instrumental to my work—one last time. Would you do this for me? Would you arrange for you all to come visit me here, before I... go? I will cover all expenses—flights, accommodations, meals—everything. Will you arrange this?”

The impossibility of this request struck me immediately. The list was long, its members scattered throughout the world, and some should now themselves be frail and undergoing various medical treatments. But Mo’s pleading transcended reasonable objection. I gave my word to do everything within my power to grant his final request.

“Do you have any idea how much time you have left,” I asked?

“Two weeks,” said Mo, in a voice choked with tears. “That’s what my doctors are giving me.”

Mo now applied his will to the final and formidable aim of staying alive until we could reach him.

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There are marked consequences for not being unified. We function like a country made of different factions. Each ascends randomly and makes decisions for the whole, only to be replaced by another that sweeps aside these decisions and imposes new ones in their stead. Our treasury is squandered on conflicting projects that are abandoned mid-construction. We live in a perpetual state of emergency management. One dire consequence of this multiplicity is the ignorance of time. Aside from the general intellectual notion that we will one day die, the realization of our mortality hits us only in rare moments throughout our lives. We learn of a friend or relative’s death, or narrowly avert an accident that could have killed us. But because of our multiplicity, within hours—even minutes—a different part ascends and crowds aside this sobering epiphany. Again, we find ourselves absorbed in trivial concerns, planning as though decades stretch before us, postponing what we know to be essential.

The January labor challenges us to work against this anarchy. When we formulate a specific aim, however modest, and commit to adhering to it regardless of which part momentarily dominates, we begin weaving a thread of continuity through our fragmentation. Each time we remember our aim, we reassert government over anarchy. This is the beginning of unity, the patient work of establishing internal consistency over our scattered parts and disciplining them to function as a coherent whole.

“My aim is to stop complaining,” shared a lady in her late twenties with an earnest manner of someone accustomed to careful self-reflection. “All my life, I’ve complained. In fact, complaining is so much part of my self-image that I can hardly envision what kind of person I would be without it. I work as a kindergarten teacher, and as the final week of our year approached, I could observe the familiar cloud of resentment darkening my inner landscape. My love of complaining was casting a shadow over everything, leaving me only waiting for the week to end. So I formulated an aim to resist complaining during this final week.”

Here is an embodiment of the spirit of January. This practitioner is responding to a concrete attitude she has observed in herself. A sound diagnosis is half the remedy. Moreover, she has downscaled her efforts to a specific manifestation of this attitude, namely her work with children. Complaining will doubtlessly manifest in other areas of her life—the weather, current events, family issues—but she is concentrating her resources on a single battle of this wider war. Too broad a focus defeats our budding will, as does the prospect of effort through an indefinite period of time. Instead of worrying over her entire acreage, she wisely focuses on a few square meters.

As the week progressed, she reported back: “At first, reasons to complain surfaced relentlessly, each one challenging my resolve and demanding my constant vigilance. But through repeatedly reaffirming my aim, it acquired reliability. Complaining began reminding me of inner farming. And as the week progressed, I perceived each complaint appearing as something separate from myself. Even if I succumbed to it, I could quickly recover and reaffirm my aim. This opened an entirely new dimension to my days. My life was unfolding on two levels simultaneously; external events and my internal response to them.”

A well-formulated aim transforms our weaknesses into strengths. Each time our natural urge arises, it no longer pulls us helplessly in its own direction but also serves as a reminder to counter-pull and reaffirm our resolve. Our experience of everyday life doubles: we experience both whatever we happen to be engaged with externally as well as our internal reaction to it.

“With each passing day, I found myself more eager to arrive at the kindergarten, more eager to test my growing awareness, to prove to myself that I could meet my obligations without surrendering to complaint.”

The eagerness to live our life, the joy of learning something new about ourselves, the thrill of facing an internal challenge—these are all traits of Essence. As Essence is freed from the shackles of Personality, these and many other emotions naturally surface, injecting our work with renewed vigor. Joy and satisfaction in a work well-done signals that the practitioner’s Essence now breathes freely, the authentic satisfaction of the farmer who, after diligent work, pauses to appreciate the fruits of their labor. Instead of the burdensome drudgery associated with work, our lives

acquire the magic of a fairytale. And if we can learn to see our complaints as they arise, to observe our personalities shifting, to experience our own lives as a spectator witnessing a play, we are in effect introducing a new element to our psychology, one that will begin redirecting our lives in new trajectories. Such a new element is indeed a new body, distinct from Personality, the Physical Body, and Essence, observant of them and able to govern them. The more dominant it becomes in our internal landscape, the less we are governed by accident, until even death itself is met consciously.

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“Mo has been expecting you.”

I was led through a dark hall that opened into a round dining room with a panoramic vista. The table had been removed to make space for a bed where Mo lay covered in blankets. The room was lined with visitors assembled to bid him a final farewell. It had taken me three months to gather everyone—*three months!*—and Mo had outlasted his prognosis by ten weeks!

I sat down and heaved a sigh of relief that he was still alive, that it had all miraculously panned out. The past three months had been a blur of sleepless nights, coordinating flights across continents, navigating conflicting schedules, and persuading some who were themselves frail or burdened with obligations to make the journey. But I had been able to grant this man’s final request, a man to whom I felt deeply indebted. From across the room, I could observe Mo’s visitors approaching one at a time, sharing a few minutes of intimacy to exchange parting words, then stepping back.

Suddenly, the realization that he was about to leave us struck me like a blow of unbearable emotion. *He is here now*, I realized with painful clarity, *and very soon will be gone forever*. Either because of the magnitude of the occasion, or the warmth of the company around me, or my exhausted state (I’m not entirely sure why), rather than break down in tears, I was able to contain this overwhelming emotion, and *at that moment time stopped*. Or perhaps it would be more precise to say that time became palpably unreal. The seconds and minutes continued progressing, of course, but they felt secondary to the scene unfolding before me. I was propelled beyond myself. My awareness, normally confined to my body, expanded far beyond its familiar boundaries to encompass a much wider panorama. I could perceive the room—myself, Mo, the visitors—from the vantage point of an audience-member watching a play. Everything that before had seemed ordinary now appeared luminous with meaning. The procession of people bidding farewell to their co-practitioner was not confined to us and Mo; it had happened before and would happen again. People had been climbing the ladder of inner farming from the dawn of humankind, each rung inhabited by one pulling someone from below and being pulled from above. The chain had never been broken and never would be. I was witnessing the final scene

of a drama in which everyone was playing their prescribed role—not in time, but through eternity.

It was impossible to tell how much time elapsed, but at some point the last visitor gave Mo a final embrace and beckoned me to come over. I sat down by Mo's bedside. His complexion was pale and his consciousness intermittent, like an engine running on its final fumes. Each breath felt as if it could be his last. "You fulfilled my dying request," he said when consciousness returned, "—you have proven *reliable*," he chuckled. I was amazed he would remember this detail, that in his final moments, steeped in pain and fatigue, he could still care for my own work.

Mo's body had shriveled almost beyond recognition, but the enthusiastic expression in his eyes had not changed. I could see and recognize the best of Mo that I had gradually come to know and appreciate, a lively Essence peering through an all but perished body. "*It was not all in Personality*," he stated with the voice of a lifetime of triumph. "My understandings were there at the hour of need..." he drifted off briefly, then regained his line of thought, "I admit that all these years my work had been more superficial than it should have, more talk than action. But the suffering of these past two years pushed it deeper and etched it into Essence—of that I'm sure. The moment of reckoning came and I got what I had asked for. I just never imagined it would come at this price!"

"How'd you do it?" I asked. "How'd you cling to life so much longer than the doctors expected?"

"Everything changed the moment it became clear I was about to run out of time. Personality disappeared. Without a future, you don't worry about appearances. I finally shed this heavy armor, and although my Physical Body was declining rapidly, my Essence felt invigorated. I knew exactly what I had to do: *I had to stay alive till you came.*"

"I knew you wouldn't be able to round up everyone in two weeks. So I'd have to apply my best efforts to maintain this body longer than its bleak prognosis. To this end, I studied it like a scientist aiming to understand exactly what was happening inside. I became so familiar with its quirks that I knew precisely the effect of everything—a bite of food, a sip of drink—*everything*. I could predict how anything would influence my organism and slow down its decline."

"I had to rest a lot, and each time I woke up from resting, I had to reaffirm my aim. *I must stay alive till they come*. I had to keep this in the forefront of my being. *I must stay alive till they come*—I'd tell myself. *What can I do right now to stay alive?* Sometimes it was a particular type of food my body craved, or a beverage that eased its pain a little and relieved some of its pressure. Add a blanket for more heat, or remove a blanket to cool down. Sometimes it was the view (that's why you find me here in the

dining room). Sometimes it was a call to a friend, a simple conversation to take my mind off myself. And so, day by day and moment by moment, I reaffirmed my aim, postponed the inevitable, till you came..." His eyes closed as he drifted into a different world. He took a few deep breaths in this limbo, then recovered himself and gazed at me as if he had left off talking only a moment ago. "But that's not what I wanted to speak with you about..."

"On the brink of death, a crack opens between this life and the hereafter and you realize many things you cannot normally see. I saw so many things, Asaf, I could spend days trying to share them with you—things about myself, about this world... *and things about you.*"

"I spent my life collecting fragments, Asaf. A quote from Maimonides here, a lesson from Hillel there—but I never had the freedom to weave them into something whole and complete. *You have that privilege—that obligation!* These ancient teachings are dying, scattered across traditions that no longer speak to each other..." He drifted off again, then returned with surprising rapidity and vivacity, grabbed my hand with a firmness disproportionate to his frail appearance, and added, "You wanted a greater purpose to live for? Promise me you'll gather the fragments of these ancient teachings. Promise me to create a complete method that honors the past and serves the present!"

I was stunned and speechless. All I could muster was to nod in agreement. Gazing at me intently, his face broke into a subtle smile, and then, ever so softly, he closed his eyes and turned his head to the side to rest. The interval of absence now lasted longer. I figured his reserves for my visit had been depleted. I kissed him softly on his forehead, stood up, and walked towards the rest of our company. We thanked his wife and left. And when I checked back later that day, I learned that Mo had not regained consciousness since our departure. Nor would he ever. Our dialogue would be his last.

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The people who practice this teaching are its most powerful lessons. They etch indelible marks on our understanding that books and lectures never could. We learn from their struggles, their contradictions, their failures and successes. And we learn the most by witnessing the final chapter of their lives—always the most dramatic, the most poignant—for as much as our three bodies differ throughout life, they prove the most different at the point of death.

The condition in which these bodies arrive at that final moment depends entirely on how we have farmed them. So we must begin promptly, and the safest way to start is by grappling with the question: *What do I really want?* The attempt to answer this question itself highlights our internal fragmentation. And as the divisions of our

psychology become more observable, we ultimately tap into an Essential aim, one that cries firmly through the thick layers of encrusted Personality. Such an aim empowers us to overcome the obstacles that will certainly arise throughout our farming, for our land will not easily bend itself to our will. Mo was able to delay his Physical Body's demise long beyond its fatal prognosis through the power of aim. Likewise, we will move mountains if only we tap into the force of our Essence. This is the spirit of January, and the farmer who comprehends this has firmly pushed open the gate to intelligent work, for he now understands that when his shovel meets the resistance of his land, the outcome will depend, not on the force of his heel, but on the clarity of his aim.

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This is the first chapter of the book titled *Old New Method* that will be published in 2027 / 2028.

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