THE SANCTUM

A Manifesto and Book of Values

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For men who have already built something.
Who have lived through something.
And who know that surviving alone is not enough.

Darek Sankiewicz

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For men who choose to give more than they take

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“It is not enough to be good. One must be good for something.”

— Aristotle

PART I

The Gate

Who We Are — and Why You Are Here

WHO WE ARE

and why you are here

There are places that do not advertise. That do not recruit. That do not open their doors to everyone. The Sanctum is one such place.

We are not an association. We are not a networking group or a self-improvement club. We are a lodge — in the oldest, most human sense of the word. A place where men come who have already built something. Who have lived through something. And who know that surviving alone is not enough.

If you are holding this book, someone has already decided you belong here. Or you feel it yourself.

> *The Sanctum is not looking for followers. It is looking for brothers.*

The difference is fundamental. A follower needs a guide. A brother needs another man — his equal, different from him, ready to stand beside him when needed and step back when that is wiser.

What holds The Sanctum together is not a rulebook, not a hierarchy, not a shared interest. It is values. Lived, not learned. Chosen, not imposed. This book is their record.

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ARTICLE I

We Come by Choice

There is a kind of freedom that cannot be granted from outside. A man can be given work, status, security — and still be imprisoned by his fears, by others' expectations, by unnamed obligations. True freedom begins where a man does something for the first time not because he must — but because he chooses.

The Sanctum is built on precisely this principle. Every brother is here because he wants to be. There is no contract. No penalty for leaving. No reward for loyalty. There is only choice — renewed each day, in each act of presence.

The Stoics called this *prohairesis* — the authority over one's own will. Marcus Aurelius, emperor of an empire stretching from Scotland to Mesopotamia, wrote in his private journal — never intended for other eyes — that the only thing that truly belongs to a man is how he responds to what happens to him. Everything else is borrowed.

A brother of the Sanctum knows this truth not from books. He knows it from experience. He has been in places where choosing cost something. And he chose.

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ARTICLE II

We Bring Resources, Not Empty Hands

The Sanctum is not a support group for the broken. That sentence may sound hard — but there is respect in it, not cruelty.

Every man passes through breaking. Loss. Failure. Illness. Grief. The end of something that was meant to last. The Sanctum does not turn away from these moments — on the contrary, they are often precisely what shaped a man. But we enter here as those who drew something more than scars from the experience.

A brother of the Sanctum brings to the community what he has built: experience, time, attention, knowledge, networks, courage. He brings himself — whole, not partial. And he is ready to give that to a brother who, in a given moment, needs wind in his sails, not only sympathy.

> *The altruism of the Sanctum is not a virtue to be displayed. It is a temperament.*

Ibn Battuta, a fourteenth-century traveller from Tangier, covered more than 120,000 kilometres — more than anyone before him. In every place he arrived, he sought not only shelter but people. Those who knew. Those who could show him. And he always repaid in kind — telling, connecting, pointing the way.

In human exchange, what matters is not the balance of transactions. What matters is flow. You give because you can. You receive because you need. And no one keeps count.

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ARTICLE III

We Are Silent When Silence Is Right, We Speak When It Matters

In the modern world, silence has been discredited. Every meeting demands to be filled. Every pause — an immediate response. Every difficult moment — a comment, advice, a ready prescription.

The Sanctum rejects the tyranny of words.

The ability to be silent beside another man — not from indifference, but with full presence — is one of the rarest forms of care. Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk and teacher of mindfulness, wrote about what he called “deep listening”: you listen not in order to reply, but so that the other man feels heard. This is not passivity. It is the deepest form of activity.

A brother of the Sanctum knows when to speak and when to be silent. He knows his words carry weight — so he does not scatter them carelessly. When he speaks — others listen.

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ARTICLE IV

We Are Calm — But Not Indifferent

Calm is widely misunderstood. It is often confused with lethargy, distance, lack of engagement. In reality, true calm requires more strength than most responses that look like courage.

The man who shouts — reacts. The man who is silent and holds his ground — decides.

Nelson Mandela spent twenty-seven years in prison. In conditions designed to break his body and his will. When he came out, there was no bitterness in him — there was something far more dangerous for his enemies: clarity. He knew what he wanted. He knew what he would not do. And he could wait.

Mandela's calm was not resignation. It was a choice — conscious, costly, repeatedly confirmed. This is precisely the kind of calm that lives in The Sanctum. A brother is quiet, because he has *something to draw from*. But when he needs to stand for a brother, for truth, for what matters — he stands. Without hesitation.

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ARTICLE V

The World Is More Than a Place to Live

There is a certain kind of man who is not satisfied by simply being. He must add. To family, to community, to ideas, to those who will come after him. Not because anyone asks him to. Not because he will earn praise. Because otherwise life loses its flavour.

Albert Schweitzer — physician, theologian, musician, Nobel Peace Prize laureate — abandoned an academic career in Europe to go to Gabon to treat people in the jungle. Not from compulsion, not from ideology. From the conviction that whoever has much must give much. Not as an obligation. As a consequence of who he is.

The brothers of the Sanctum understand this logic. They do not walk the world seeking recognition. They walk it looking for places where they can be useful. This is not humility. It is a kind of life elegance.

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Before You Turn the Page

This part of the book is not a preface. It is a mirror.

Each of the five articles you have just read describes not what the Sanctum wants to be — but what you already are, if you have found your way here.

There is no membership form. No examination. There is only one question worth asking yourself before moving to the next part:

Did you recognise yourself?

If yes — read on. The following chapters of this book are portraits of people who lived the values of the Sanctum before it had a name. Their paths are different. Their backgrounds are different. Their eras are different. But in each of them you may find a part of yourself.

And that is the purpose of this book.

— Darek Sankiewicz

PART II

The Pillars

Values carried by those who already know something

“I am a wise man, for I know that I know nothing.”

— Socrates

FIRST PILLAR

Wisdom Without Arrogance

I. The Idea

There is a kind of knowledge that weighs heavily. The man who knows a great deal — and who wants you to know that he does — is exhausting. Not because his knowledge is false. But because he carries it like armour, not like a tool.

Wisdom without arrogance is something different. It is knowledge carried lightly. Knowledge that does not demand admiration. That does not ask for confirmation. That exists in order to serve — not in order to impress.

The Greek philosophers had a separate word for this: *frontēsis* — practical wisdom. Not knowledge about the universe, but the ability to act rightly in a specific moment. Aristotle considered it the most important of virtues — because without it, all the others are defenceless: courage without fronesis becomes recklessness, generosity becomes waste, loyalty becomes blindness.

> *A wise man does not prove that he knows. He shows what follows from that knowledge.*

Arrogance is not belief in your own abilities. Arrogance is the conviction that your abilities release you from the need to listen. The man full of arrogance closed himself to the world the moment he decided he already understood enough. The wise man knows that every conversation, every book, every person encountered on the road — carries something he does not yet have.

This is not false modesty. It is the posture of a man who knows the boundaries of his own knowledge — and who treats those boundaries not as a source of shame, but as an invitation to continue.

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II. The Witnesses

Marcus Aurelius (121–180 AD) — the emperor who wrote to himself

For two hundred years the Roman Empire was governed by a man who did not want to be emperor.

Marcus Aurelius accepted power as a duty, not a privilege. He governed an empire stretching from Scotland to Mesopotamia, led military campaigns, settled disputes, delivered verdicts — and in the evenings, among campaign tents, he wrote to himself. Not for posterity. Not for history. To remind himself of what he did not know and what he needed to watch for in himself.

His “Meditations” — known today as one of the most important sources of Stoic wisdom — are in essence a journal of self-critique. A man holding absolute power over half the known world notes to himself: do not be angry with fools. Be patient. Remember that your own opinions may also be mistaken.

> *“Waste no more time arguing about what a good man should be. Be one.” — Marcus Aurelius*

This is the essence of wisdom without arrogance: not public proclamation of one’s own greatness, but private work on one’s own weaknesses. Aurelius could have lived in the belief that he was above criticism — no law stood in his way. Instead, he chose daily accountability to himself.

That was not weakness. That was the deepest form of strength.

Richard Feynman (1918–1988) — the physicist who smiled at not knowing

When Richard Feynman received the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1965, a journalist asked him what it was like to know so much. Feynman answered without hesitation: “The difficulty is not in knowing. The difficulty is in being honest about what you don’t know.”

Feynman was one of the greatest minds of the twentieth century — co-creator of quantum electrodynamics, the man who dismantled the NASA commission after the Challenger disaster with a glass of ice water and a rubber O-ring. And yet, throughout his life, he had the air of a man who could hardly wait to learn something new.

When he did not understand something — he said so plainly. When someone asked him about a field in which he was not an expert — he did not improvise, did not hide behind jargon. He said: I don’t know, but we can find out together.

He was also a master of explanation. He could take a quantum phenomenon — something that breaks every intuition — and describe it so that a first-year student could feel its beauty. He said that if you cannot explain something simply, it means you do not yet understand it yourself.

> *Knowledge you cannot pass on to anyone is half-finished knowledge.*

Feynman did not carry his knowledge like armour. He carried it like an open toolbox — available, ready to use. And that is precisely what made people want to be around him.

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III. How to Live This in the Sanctum

Wisdom without arrogance is not a state you reach once and are done with. It is a daily practice. A few concrete postures a brother of the Sanctum recognises in himself and cultivates:

> **Say less than you know.** If you know something — you do not need to announce it. Your knowledge will reveal itself in what you do and how you respond. The man who truly understands something rarely demonstrates it.

> **Ask, even when you know the answer.** A question is not weakness — it is a form of respect. When you ask, you give the other person space. Sometimes in his answer you will find something you did not expect to find.

> **Admit mistakes quickly.** A man who defends a wrong decision for more than a day is already doing it not for truth — but for his own image. The Sanctum has no room for that economy of ego.

> **Explain, don’t impress.** If someone in the circle of the Sanctum does not understand — that is your problem, not his. Your knowledge is worth as much as you are able to pass on.

> **Learn from those younger than you.** Age and experience give depth. But a younger man sometimes sees things that the older one stopped noticing long ago. A brother of the Sanctum does not close himself to that perspective simply because it comes from someone with less seniority.

Wisdom without arrogance is not common. In a world that rewards loudness, self-confidence, and the image of an expert — the ability to carry knowledge lightly is a form of courage. Marcus Aurelius knew

this as emperor. Feynman knew it as a Nobel laureate. And every brother of the Sanctum knows it from his own life.

To know much and not let it show — that is one of the hardest and most beautiful gifts you can offer another person.

→ Chapter 2: Loyalty by Choice

“Loyalty cannot be bought. It can only be earned.”

— Jonathan Sacks

SECOND PILLAR

Loyalty by Choice

I. The Idea

The word “loyalty” has been worn out. It is used to describe a dog’s attachment to its owner, an employee’s bond to a corporation, a soldier’s obedience to orders. In all these cases it is loyalty born of compulsion, habit, or fear. That is not the loyalty we mean.

Loyalty by choice is something rarer and harder. It is a decision made each day — not once, at some oath-taking ceremony, but hundreds of times, in small moments, when no one is watching. It is the posture of a man who could leave but stays. Who could be silent but speaks. Who could abandon his brother in a difficult moment but stands beside him.

Loyalty by choice is not blind. That is an important distinction. Blind loyalty is a weakness, not a virtue — it permits the committing of mistakes in the name of solidarity. Conscious loyalty sees a brother’s weaknesses, but does not turn away from him. On the contrary — it tells him about those weaknesses, because it knows that silence would be a deeper betrayal than a difficult conversation.

> *A true brother is not the one who always tells you you’re right. He is the one who tells you the truth when everyone else is silent.*

In a world built on transactions, loyalty looks suspicious. The question “what will you get from it” is asked of every action. Loyalty by choice does not answer that question — because it comes from a different

place. Not from calculation, but from the conviction that certain bonds are worth tending regardless of gain.

Philosophers call this *virtuous friendship* — as distinct from friendships of utility and pleasure. Aristotle wrote that only friendship based on virtue is lasting, because it does not depend on circumstances. When a man is wealthy — he has friends of utility. When he is cheerful — friends of pleasure. But when he is weak, ill, or defeated — only those remain who chose him for who he is.

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II. The Witnesses

Nelson Mandela (1918–2013) — the man who could have hated, and chose otherwise

In 1964, a court in Pretoria sentenced Nelson Mandela to life imprisonment. He was forty-six years old. For the next twenty-seven years he was held on Robben Island — in a cell measuring two by two and a half metres, with a sleeping mat on a concrete floor and a bucket in place of a toilet.

The apartheid system did not want only his freedom. It wanted his spirit. Guards rotated, rules tightened, letters to his family were censored or never arrived. And Mandela — taught his fellow prisoners. Organised discussions. Negotiated with the prison administration for better conditions for others, not for himself.

When he finally walked free in 1990 — at the age of seventy-one — he could have been a symbol of revenge. The country waited for a signal. Instead, Mandela offered something different: he invited his former oppressors to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He designed a state in which black and white people were to govern together. He said the now-famous words: “If I can forgive those who imprisoned me, then you can forgive whoever wronged you.”

> *“True strength lies in knowing not to use strength when using it would be easy.” — Nelson Mandela*

Mandela’s loyalty was not loyalty to a group or an ideology. It was loyalty to values — to the conviction that freedom cannot be built on hatred, even if that hatred would be understandable. This is the hardest kind of loyalty: loyalty to what you believe in, even when everything tempts you to betray your own principles.

Jonathan Sacks (1948–2020) — the rabbi who wrote about what unites us

Jonathan Sacks served for twenty-two years as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth — one of the most influential moral voices of his era. Not only in the Jewish world. He wrote books read by politicians, philosophers, and ordinary people searching for an answer to the question of how to live together in a world full of differences.

Sacks believed that loyalty — to family, community, tradition — is the foundation of every lasting society. But he never confused loyalty with closure. His whole life was proof that a man can be deeply rooted in his own tradition — and at the same time completely open to the other person, different from himself.

He met with popes, Muslim scholars, atheists, and agnostics. In every conversation he sought the same thing: a place where two different traditions could meet without losing their identity. He wrote that diversity is not a threat to community, but its richness — provided each side is true to itself and honest with the other.

> *Loyalty to an idea is stronger than loyalty to a person. A person can fail you. An idea only fails if you let it die.*

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III. How to Live This in the Sanctum

Loyalty in the Sanctum is not something that is declared. It is something shown. A few principles a brother recognises in himself and applies:

> **Be there before he asks.** The most valuable loyalty reveals itself not when someone asks for help, but before — when you can see that someone needs it, even though he will not say so aloud.

> **Say the hard things in private, not in front of others.** Criticism spoken publicly destroys. Spoken in confidence — builds. A brother of the Sanctum does not use a brother's weakness as an argument in a discussion.

> **Do not sell a brother's story.** What you hear within the circle of the Sanctum stays within the circle of the Sanctum. Not as a rule — as an obvious truth. A man who needs a rule not to betray — does not yet understand what loyalty is.

> **Loyalty does not excuse you from the truth.** If a brother is making a mistake that will destroy him — tell him. Not to be right. So that you do not have to watch him later suffer the consequences of something you knew about.

> **Remember your brother outside the circle.** The Sanctum is not only meetings. It is a posture. A brother is a brother even when no one is watching — in a conversation over coffee, in a professional recommendation, in a small act of remembrance.

Mandela held his loyalty to his values for twenty-seven years in conditions designed to break it. Sacks held his convictions for a lifetime, without surrendering his openness to others. Both showed that loyalty is not sentimental weakness. It is the architecture of character.

A brother of the Sanctum builds that architecture daily. Brick by brick. Without announcements.

→ *Chapter 3: Calm as Strength*

“Seek not that the things which happen should happen as you wish; but wish the things which happen to be as they are, and you will have a tranquil flow of life.”

— Epictetus

THIRD PILLAR

Calm as Strength

I. The Idea

There is a moment in the life of many men when they realise that anger does not work. Not because it is morally wrong — because it is ineffective. Shouting does not persuade. Slamming doors does not solve problems. Aggression may force a man to submit, but never to change his mind.

This discovery can be pivotal. But it often leads to a wrong conclusion: if anger does not work, it is best to feel nothing. To cut oneself off. To become cold, distant, unreachable. To call that maturity.

The calm we speak of here is something entirely different. It is not the absence of emotion. It is the mastery of emotion. The calm man feels — pain, anger, worry, joy — but he is not led by those emotions. He leads them. The difference is between a man who holds a lantern in his hand, and a man whose lantern holds him.

> *Calm is not the absence of fire. It is the ability to decide when to use it.*

The Stoics called this ability *apatheia* — which translates not as apathy, but as freedom from the tyranny of passions. The point is not to avoid being moved. The point is not to let being moved become the master of the situation.

Buddhism speaks of this differently, but arrives at the same place. Thich Nhat Hanh used the image of a lake: the surface may be disturbed by the wind, but at the bottom there is always stillness. The man who can reach that bottom — even when the surface is turbulent — has access to something others do not.

In the Sanctum, calm is not a passive virtue. It is a tool. The calm brother sees more, because he is not obscured by his own reaction. He hears more, because he is not waiting for his turn to speak. He decides better, because he does not act from fear or impulse.

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II. The Witnesses

Epictetus (c. 50–135 AD) — the slave who was free against all odds

Epictetus was born a slave in Phrygia. His owner — a freedman named Epaphroditus — was a secretary to the emperor Nero, a man of power and a tyrant’s whims. One day, out of amusement or anger, he twisted Epictetus’s leg. Epictetus said calmly: “You will break it.” When he broke it, Epictetus said: “Did I not tell you?”

This story, recounted by Epictetus himself — never as a complaint, always as an illustration — captures the essence of his philosophy. What is external does not belong to you. Your body, your reputation, your wealth — all of this can be taken away. The only thing no one can take from you is the way you respond to what happens to you.

Later Epictetus was freed, founded a philosophical school in Nicopolis, and taught people from all levels of society — including future senators and military commanders. His students wrote down his words. He himself wrote not a single line. He apparently decided that a life is a more important proof than a book.

> *“Demand not that events should happen as you wish; but wish them to happen as they do happen, and you will go on well.” — Epictetus*

Epictetus outlasted Nero. Outlasted his owner. Outlasted exile from Rome. Outlasted the physical pain that accompanied him throughout his life. Not because he was made of stone. Because he understood exactly what belonged to him, and what did not. That boundary was his fortress.

Thich Nhat Hanh (1926–2022) — the monk who taught the world to breathe

When Thich Nhat Hanh came to the United States in 1966, the Vietnam War was raging. His country was burning. Villages were being bombed. People he knew were dying. And he stood before American students and politicians and spoke about mindfulness, about breath, about inner calm.

Not because he did not care. Because he understood that a man in panic cannot help anyone. That a man full of hatred — even righteous, even justified hatred — produces more suffering than he removes. That peace cannot be built from a state of inner war.

For his teaching he was expelled from Vietnam by both warring regimes — Communist and South Vietnamese alike. For thirty-nine years he lived in exile in France, at the Plum Village monastery he himself founded. Thousands of people came to him from around the world. Not for life advice. For instruction in how to breathe.

He taught that every breath is a choice. Every step. Every moment of attention directed at what is, rather than at what was or will be. Not as an escape from reality — as the only path to truly meeting that reality.

> *If there is no peace within you, you will not find it anywhere. If there is — you will find it everywhere.*

Thich Nhat Hanh was not a man without wounds. He was a man who learned to carry his wounds without letting them lead him. And that ability — not a thesis, not a theory — he passed on to others for sixty years.

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III. How to Live This in the Sanctum

Calm is a practice, not a permanent state. No one wakes up calm forever. Every day brings situations that test this ability. A brother of the Sanctum knows a few principles that help him return to centre when the wind disturbs the surface:

> **Wait one breath before responding.** Not as a manipulation technique — as honesty with yourself. One breath gives a measure of space between stimulus and reaction. Often that is enough to see the difference between what you want to say and what is worth saying.

> **Separate what is yours from what is not.** Epictetus asked: is this within your power? If not — your emotional reaction will change nothing. You can feel it, you can acknowledge it — but you do not have to serve it.

> **Be especially calm when others are not.** In moments of crisis, a calm voice is the rarest and most valuable resource in a room. The brother who does not panic is not indifferent — he is a point of support for those who need to stop.

> **Calm does not mean agreement.** You can disagree calmly. You can refuse calmly. You can set a boundary calmly. Calm is not capitulation — it is the form in which you express your position with full strength, without dissipating it into emotion.

> **Return to the body.** Thich Nhat Hanh reminded us that the breath is always here. When thoughts and emotions pull in different directions, the body is the only thing that is always now. One conscious breath, one step with full attention — that is a return to centre.

Epictetus was born in chains and lived free beyond the reach of any emperor. Thich Nhat Hanh was exiled from his homeland and taught peace from afar for nearly four decades. Both showed that calm is not a gift of circumstance. It is work. Work that can be done in any conditions — even the worst.

A brother of the Sanctum knows that this work never ends. And he knows equally that it is worth every day in which he undertakes it.

→ *Chapter 4: Giving Without Keeping Count*

“The only thing you keep forever is what you have given to others.”

— Albert Schweitzer

FOURTH PILLAR

Giving Without Keeping Count

I. The Idea

There is a kind of giving that is, in truth, a form of taking. You give in order to be appreciated. You give in order to have an advantage over someone. You give so that you can ask for something in return later. That is not altruism. That is an investment under someone else’s name.

Giving without keeping count is something different. It is a gesture after which you do not wait. You do not check whether anyone noticed. You do not remember it for longer than a day. You give — and move on. Not because you are a saint. Because you have something to give from, and you know that it changes something.

Philosophers call this posture *magnanimity* — greatness of soul. Aristotle wrote that the magnanimous man gives because giving is an expression of his nature, not an answer to a need for recognition. The greatness of a man is measured not by how much he has, but by how much he is able to give — and how easily it comes to him.

> *A true gift is one that the recipient remembers longer than the giver.*

In a world that rewards visibility and counts likes, giving without keeping count is an almost subversive act. It says: I do not need you to know. I do not need proof that this changed anything. The act itself is enough.

This posture does not grow from lack of ambition. It grows from sufficiency — from the sense that a man has enough to share without fear of loss. And from the conviction that the world is a place where it is worth leaving traces — not under one's own name, but in the lives of others.

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II. The Witnesses

Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) — the man who had everything and chose the jungle

In 1905, Albert Schweitzer was thirty years old and had everything a European intellectual could wish for. He was a recognised theologian, the author of a groundbreaking biography of Johann Sebastian Bach, a world-class organist, and a lecturer at one of the most prestigious universities in Europe. Before him lay a career many would have envied.

That year he read an announcement in a missionary pamphlet. Doctors were needed in Gabon, in what was then French Congo. Schweitzer was not a doctor. He decided to become one. For eight years he studied medicine alongside his existing career, and in 1913 he left with his wife for Lambaréné, where he founded a hospital in the middle of the jungle.

Not once. For good. He stayed there for the following decades, with short breaks for organ concerts in Europe that financed medicines and equipment for the hospital. His music-making was now a tool, not a goal. The gift from one domain financed the gift in another.

> *"I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve." — Albert Schweitzer*

When in 1952 he received the Nobel Peace Prize, he donated the entire prize to the expansion of the hospital. He made no gesture of it. He called no press conference. He simply transferred the money to where it was needed.

Schweitzer was not a saint. He was a man of character and flaws who made a decision at the level of a life — not a one-time gesture. That is the difference between philanthropy and living by the principle of giving.

Paul Farmer (1959–2022) — the doctor who could not say no

Paul Farmer was born into a poor family in the United States, studied at Harvard, and could have become one of the highest-paid doctors in America. Instead he went to Haiti — and stayed there for most of his professional life.

He founded an organisation called Partners in Health, which changed the way people thought about medicine in developing countries. His thesis was simple and subversive: poor sick people deserve the same quality of medical care as the rich. Not worse. The same.

When other doctors said it was impossible, that there was no money, that the infrastructure was too weak — Farmer found ways. He rode on horseback to patients in the mountains where there were no roads. He woke at three in the morning to take calls from Port-au-Prince. He personally supervised the taking of antibiotics by tuberculosis patients, knowing that otherwise the treatment would not work.

His friend and collaborator, journalist Tracy Kidder, once asked him: how can you do so much for one person, knowing there are millions like her? Farmer replied: “I often think of what was said to Abraham. ‘Save as many as you can.’”

> *Giving without keeping count does not mean giving everything. It means giving without counting what you give.*

Farmer died in 2022 during a mission in Rwanda, at work, at the age of sixty-two. To the end he was writing articles, seeing patients, training young doctors. There was nothing of the martyr about him — there was the energy of a man who knew exactly why he got up in the morning.

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III. How to Live This in the Sanctum

Giving without keeping count does not require a trip to Gabon or founding a hospital in Haiti. It manifests in small gestures, repeated daily, which together form character:

> **Give time the way you give money.** Money can be recovered. Time cannot. When you give a brother your full attention for an hour — you give him something you cannot recover. That is a gift without keeping count in its simplest form.

> **Do not remind anyone of what you gave.** A gift mentioned in conversation ceases to be a gift — it becomes an invoice. A brother of the Sanctum does not keep a ledger of debts. If you give something with the thought “this will come back to me one day” — ask yourself whether you are really giving.

> **Share knowledge without protection.** People often guard their knowledge like capital. A brother of the Sanctum shares what he knows — contacts, experience, lessons drawn from mistakes. Knowledge shared does not diminish. It multiplies.

> **Help before you are asked.** Schweitzer did not wait for Gabon to invite him. Farmer did not wait for full funding before going to Haiti. A brother who sees a need and waits for a formal invitation — often waits too long.

> **Remember the asymmetry.** What has little value to you — a contact, a piece of information, an hour of time — may have enormous value for someone else. A brother of the Sanctum is aware of this asymmetry and uses it deliberately.

Schweitzer abandoned a career as a virtuoso and theologian for a jungle no one asked him to serve. Farmer rode on horseback at night to deliver medicines where there were no roads. Both lived by the same logic: I have more than I need, so I give.

There is no heroism in this. There is simplicity. And that is precisely what is hardest — not the grand gesture made once. But small gestures made every day, without waiting for anyone to notice.

→ *Chapter 5: The Courage to Speak Truth*

“In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.”

— George Orwell

FIFTH PILLAR

The Courage to Speak Truth

I. The Idea

There is a kind of courage that requires no physical strength. That has nothing to do with age, height, or position. It is the courage to say aloud what everyone in the room already knows — but what no one wants to say.

The Greeks had a word for this: *parrhesia*. It translates as “speaking everything” or “free speech.” But the meaning is deeper: it concerns speaking truth even when it is risky. Even when the listener is more powerful than the speaker. Even when the truth is uncomfortable for both parties.

Parrhesia is not brutality. The courage to speak truth is often confused with rudeness, tactlessness, or the desire to wound. That is a mistake. Parrhesia is an act of care — because the man who tells you the truth risks a relationship, a reputation, sometimes his safety. He does this not for his own benefit. He does it because he believes you have a right to know.

> *Silence in the face of untruth is not neutrality. It is complicity.*

In everyday life, parrhesia looks modest. It is telling your employer that the project has a flaw no one wants to see. It is telling a friend that the decision he is making will destroy him. It is telling a partner what

is difficult — instead of preserving peace at the cost of truth. These are small acts of courage that together create a man who can be trusted.

A brother of the Sanctum is a man who can be trusted. Not because he always says what you want to hear. Precisely because he does not always say what you want to hear.

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II. The Witnesses

Socrates (c. 470–399 BC) — the sage who chose death over silence

Socrates did not write a single line. Everything we know about him comes from his students — Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle. And yet he is one of the most recognisable thinkers in the history of humanity. Because his method was so simple and so subversive at the same time that it changed the people who experienced it.

Socrates walked through the Athenian agora and asked questions. He asked politicians what justice was. He asked poets what their verses really meant. He asked craftsmen whether their knowledge of their craft gave them knowledge of anything more. Every time he arrived at the same conclusion: the man who thinks he knows, in truth knows nothing. And the man who knows that he knows nothing — is wiser than all the rest.

The Athenians did not like this. The authorities disliked it especially. In 399 BC, charges were brought against Socrates: corrupting the youth and impiety. It was a political charge in philosophical disguise. At the trial he could have begged for mercy, proposed exile, renounced his views. Instead he delivered a speech in which he once again told the truth. And was sentenced to death.

> *“The unexamined life is not worth living.” — Socrates*

On the day of his execution, his students wanted to organise an escape. Socrates refused. He said that escape would contradict everything he had taught throughout his entire life. The hemlock was drunk. Calmly. In conversation with friends until the very end.

Socrates did not die for an idea. He died because he could not stop telling the truth. It was stronger than his instinct for self-preservation. And that is precisely what makes him eternal.

Václav Havel (1936–2011) — the playwright who became president against his own plans

In 1978, Václav Havel published an essay called “The Power of the Powerless.” Czechoslovakia was then a Communist state in which saying certain things aloud ended in prison. Havel said them in writing. The essay circulated in samizdat — typed on typewriters, smuggled abroad.

Havel was not a politician. He was a playwright, a man of the theatre, who wrote absurdist plays about how the system forces people to live in a lie. But he understood something that many politicians did not: that a system built on a lie is more fragile than it looks. Because it requires every person to make a daily contribution to maintaining that lie.

In the essay he described a posture he called “living in truth.” This does not mean heroism, grand gestures, or demonstrations. It means simply: do not pretend. Do not say things you do not believe, just because that is what is done. Do not sign declarations you do not believe in. Do not nod your head when inside you are shaking it in denial.

> *“The most difficult form of courage is the courage of ordinariness — the decision to live honestly, every day.” — Václav Havel*

Havel paid for this posture with years of persecution, surveillance, and imprisonment. And then, in 1989, when the system finally moved under the weight of its own lie — he became president. Not because he had sought power. Because for decades he had been a man who could be trusted. And when the moment came that required such a man — he was ready.

Havel maintained until the end of his life that he had planned none of these things. He simply could not do otherwise.

> *The courage to speak truth is not a quality of heroes.*
> *It is a quality of people who have decided they will*
> *not pretend.*

— ★ —

III. How to Live This in the Sanctum

The courage to speak truth requires no grand stage. It is practised in small situations, daily, until it becomes a natural part of character:

> **Say what you believe, not what is expected.** In every conversation there is a moment when you can say what you really think, or what the other person wants to hear. A brother of the Sanctum chooses the first — with tact, but without falseness.

> **Name things precisely.** Euphemisms are often a form of cowardice. “You can be difficult” instead of “you hurt me.” “The project has some areas for improvement” instead of “this doesn’t work.” Precision of language is precision of thought — and respect for the person you are speaking with.

> **Do not be silent when silence is a lie.** There are situations in which the absence of objection is a form of consent. When something unjust or false is said in a group — a brother of the

> Sanctum does not look away. He speaks. Calmly, without aggression — but he speaks.

> **Give feedback directly.** When a brother asks for an opinion — give him an opinion, not compliments. Anyone can say “good.” Only a brother who cares will say: “this part is strong, this part is weak, this can be improved.”

> **Dare to speak first.** The hardest moment in saying a difficult truth is the one before the first word. Once you cross it — the rest follows. A brother of the Sanctum knows that often one voice is enough for others to be able to join.

Socrates paid for his truth with his life. Havel paid with years of imprisonment. The price we pay today for speaking truth is incomparably smaller. And yet the same force that makes us silent operates just the same — the fear of rejection, of conflict, of losing comfortable peace.

A brother of the Sanctum is not fearless. He is a man who has noticed that force in himself — and has chosen not to serve it.

→ Chapter 6: Presence — Being There Fully

“The shortest distance between two people is attention.”

— Simone Weil

SIXTH PILLAR

Presence — Being There Fully

I. The Idea

There is a difference between being in a room and being present. You can sit across from a man for an hour and never truly meet him. Glaze over him, respond to his words, nod your head — and at the same time be completely elsewhere. In the next meeting, in yesterday’s argument, in plans for the evening.

True presence is something different and something rare. It is a state in which the other person — his words, his silence, his face — is genuinely the most important thing in this moment. Not one of several threads. The only one.

Martin Buber, the philosopher of dialogue, described two fundamentally different ways of being in relation with another person. The first he called the “I–It” relation: you treat the other as an object, a tool, a category, a social role. A colleague, a client, a conversation to be completed. The second he called the “I–Thou” relation: in this moment, this person is for you a whole person, not a function. And you for him, likewise.

> *Presence is not a gesture of politeness. It is a decision to give someone what cannot be recovered: your own attention.*

Most of our relationships function in I–It mode. And that is not a reproach — life requires categories and shortcuts. But a brother of the Sanctum knows that there are moments which require the shift to I–

Thou. Moments in which the person across from him deserves the fullness of your attention — not its appearance.

In a world of phones, notifications, and endless threads to complete — full presence has become one of the rarest gifts you can offer another person. And one of those which he will always feel — even if he does not know what to call it.

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II. The Witnesses

Martin Buber (1878–1965) — the philosopher who said that encounter is everything

Martin Buber was born in Vienna, grew up in Lviv, studied in Berlin and Zurich, lectured in Frankfurt, and finally settled in Jerusalem. His whole life was in motion — between languages, cultures, traditions. And perhaps that is precisely why he understood so deeply what it means for two different beings to meet.

His most important book, “I and Thou,” published in 1923, is a book so dense that some read it for years. Buber wrote in it that a person becomes himself only through relationship with another. Not in isolation, not through self-realisation understood as separation from others. Through encounter. Through moments in which two separate beings truly touch.

Buber was a man of conversations. His students and friends recounted that when you spoke with him — you had the sense that time had stopped. That nothing was more important than this conversation. Not because he was particularly eloquent. Because he listened in a way that made you want to tell the truth.

> *“All real living is meeting.” — Martin Buber*

Buber lived through two world wars, the Holocaust, the birth of the state of Israel. Throughout his life he worked for dialogue between Jews and Arabs, between believers and doubters, between tradition and modernity. Not because he was naive. Because he truly believed that encounter — real, full, honest — is the only path through which people can understand each other.

He died in Jerusalem, in 1965, in the midst of work on another book. He was talking until the end.

Toni Morrison (1931–2019) — the writer who looked at people exactly

Toni Morrison received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993. But before that happened, for decades she wrote books that many publishers rejected as too difficult, too dark, too uncommercial. She wrote them in the evenings and early mornings, raising two sons alone and working days as an editor at a publishing house.

Morrison wrote about people who were systematically invisible — about Black women in America, about life in the shadow of slavery, about what remains in a person when everything is taken from them. But her power was not in the subject matter. It was in the gaze. Morrison looked at her characters with such precision and such tenderness at the same time that the reader felt obliged: he too must see this person. Really.

In one of her interviews Morrison spoke about how her face changes when a child enters the room. She said: “Does your face light up when you see your child? They notice. They are watching to see whether you are happy to see them — not whether you are proud of them, not whether they meet your expectations. Whether you are glad that they exist.”

> *“Your presence is the first thing a person reads — before they hear a single word you say.” — Toni Morrison*

Morrison was not speaking about raising children. She was speaking about presence. About the fact that every person who enters your life asks the same quiet question: are you glad that I exist? Not whether I am useful to you. Not whether I meet your needs. Does the very fact of my existence make you more whole.

A brother of the Sanctum knows this truth. And he tries to make his face light up — when a brother walks in.

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III. How to Live This in the Sanctum

Presence is an ability that can be trained. Like every ability, it requires a conscious decision — many times, until it becomes habit:

> **Put your phone away completely.** Not face down on the table. In your pocket. A conversation with a brother who feels that at any moment you might reach for your phone is a conversation with a man who is a quarter present. Presence requires a decision to be absent elsewhere.

> **Listen to understand, not to reply.** Most people listen to the first few words and begin composing their response. A brother of the Sanctum lets his brother finish — completely, without hurrying — before he starts thinking about what to say.

> **Ask about specifics.** The question “how are you?” is a gesture. The question “how did that conversation go that you mentioned before?” is presence. A brother of the Sanctum remembers. And asks about what he remembers.

> **Be silent when silence is full.** Not every silence needs to be filled. A man who has just said something difficult does not always need an immediate response. Sometimes he needs someone simply to be there. A brother of the Sanctum knows when to sit quietly and be fully in that.

> **End conversations consciously.** The way you end a meeting tells your brother how important he was to you. A hurried goodbye cancels an hour of good conversation. A brother of the Sanctum ends with the same attention with which he began.

Buber said that all real living is meeting. Morrison showed that a face speaks more than words. Both taught the same thing: that the person across from you deserves more than your physical presence. He deserves you, for real.

In the Sanctum there is no room for half-presence. Either you are there — or say you will return later. A brother will understand. He will not understand if you pretend to be there while your thoughts are elsewhere.

→ *Part III: The Threshold*

PART III

The Threshold

Questions you ask yourself before entering

“Do not ask who you would like to be. Ask who you are —
and whether you have the courage to be that, fully.”

— Anonymous

About These Questions

What follows is not a test. There are no right or wrong answers. There is no one who will check your answers — except yourself.

Threshold questions have a tradition in many orders and brotherhoods — from the Benedictines to the Freemasons, from samurai schools of bushido to modern leadership communities. Not in order to select members. But so that the man who enters knows exactly where he is entering. And what will be required of him.

The Sanctum does not verify your answers. But a man who answers these questions dishonestly — to himself, not to us — will bring that dishonesty into the circle. And everyone will feel it.

Read each question slowly. Give yourself time. If the first answers come too easily — go deeper. The hardest truth is rarely the first one.

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The Threshold Questions

1. **Do you have something to give from?**

   This is not about money or status. It is about inner resources: time, attention, knowledge, emotional energy. A man who is empty cannot fill others. The Sanctum is not a place for those who come to be filled. It is a place for those who have a surplus and want to share it.

2. **When did you last tell a truth that cost you?**

The courage to speak truth is practised, not innate. If you cannot recall a single such moment from the last twelve months — ask yourself why. Not as a judgement on yourself. As information.

3. **Can you lose without looking for someone to blame?**

   Failure is inevitable. What distinguishes a mature man from an immature one is not the absence of failures — it is what he does with them. A man who turns every failure into someone else's fault does not learn. He repeats.

4. **Are you loyal to values — or to people?**

   This is a subtle but crucial difference. Loyalty to a person may mean silence when he makes a mistake. Loyalty to values means telling him about it. The Sanctum needs brothers who choose the second — even when it is harder.

5. **Is your calm a strength or an escape?**

   There are men who are "calm" because long ago they decided that nothing touches them any more. That is not calm. That is numbness. Calm as strength belongs to a man who feels deeply — and who has learned to manage that.

6. **What are you still learning?**

   A man who has stopped learning begins to shrink. This is not about formal education. It is about a posture — about whether, in the last three months, your knowledge and understanding of the world have genuinely changed. Not in theory — in practice.

7. **What are you leaving behind — and for whom?**

   This is not about a will. It is about an awareness of legacy. What you are building, what you are passing on, what will remain after you — in people, in community, in anything larger than yourself. A man without an answer to this question lives only for himself. The Sanctum needs a man who also lives for others.

8. **When were you last fully present?**

Not “engaged,” not “interested.” Fully present — without thoughts elsewhere, without half-listening, without counting down to the end of a conversation. If you have to reach far back in time to answer — that is information worth taking with you.

9. **Do you give without keeping count?**

   Think of the last five things you gave — time, help, knowledge, money. Was there in any of those situations no thought of what you would receive in return? If there was a thought of return in all five — that is not altruism. That is trade.

10. **Do you recognise yourself in what you have read?**

    This is the last and most important question. Not “would you like to be such a man” — but “are you already, at least in part.” The Sanctum is not a place that creates people from scratch. It is a place in which the man who already carries these values — finds brothers who carry them alongside him.

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A Final Word

You have reached the end of this book. That is not by chance.

Most people who are given a book will not reach the final page. They set it down after the first chapter, after the first pullquote, after the first moment when it becomes uncomfortable. That is natural — and in a certain sense useful. The book itself filters out those for whom it was not meant.

You got here. That means one of two things: either you truly recognised yourself in these pages — or you are the kind of man who finishes what he starts. In either case — you are here.

> *The Sanctum is not a destination. It is a beginning.*

In the circle of the Sanctum there are men from different countries, different professions, different histories. Some are united by the fact

that they have been through something difficult and drawn wisdom from it, not bitterness. Others — that they cannot and do not want to live only for themselves. Others still — that they believe belonging to a community of principled men is something rare and worth protecting.

We are not looking for ideals. We are looking for men who work on themselves — and who want to do that in good company.

If this sounds like a place for you — the door is open.

If you are not sure — return to the tenth question. And answer it honestly.