

The Alameda Manifesto

On Building Well in the Age of AI

Protecting human agency and creativity in the age of AI — and putting AI in its rightful place.

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AI has a brain, but it will never have a spirit. So AI is a poor judge of what is truly excellent.

BEFORE YOU READ THIS

We're building a lot at Ascend Well right now — apps, songs, videos, books. And we use AI to draft the pilots for most of it.

Somewhere in the middle of that I noticed something. A lot of people are in the same spot: real gifts, new tools, and no map for what building well is even supposed to mean now.

So I wrote our process down. Not because it's finished — because it's honest, and working it out in public seems more useful than working it out privately.

There's a difference between building excellently with AI and churning out slop. This is my attempt at the first one.

If it resonates, tell me how you're building with what you've been given.

— Albert

PART I

The Foundations

1. God gives people unique talents and giftings

In Exodus 31:1-6 we learn of how God called by name (gifted and appointed) Bezalel and filled him

"with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting

stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft."

This principle seems to indicate that God uniquely calls and gives giftings to specific people by name to artistically create using those gifts.

2. People are called to create in community, not isolation

In verse 6 we learn that God also appointed Oholiab with him, and also that God gave "all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you." The specific things God commanded them to create in this passage were the tent of meeting, the ark, the mercy seat covering over the ark, and all the furnishings of the tent.

However, this passage seems to indicate that God prefers to appoint creators and artists in a community within which to create, that they would use their talents and giftings within community with each other and with God while they create. This principle seems to indicate that God prefers not to call creators and artists to create in a vacuum or in isolation from Him and from other people.

3. Human destiny is to co-create and co-rule with God

We also infer from this passage that God could have gifted and called angels to create the tent of meeting and the ark, but He chose not to. Instead, He called a human being—by name and within a designated community—to create these things. God chose to give this calling, this destiny, to humans and not to angels.

We infer from this a principle that God seems to prefer to give human beings a special gifting of talent and wisdom to artistically co-create with Him, and not angels. We are also told explicitly in 1 Corinthians 6:3 that humans' destiny is to judge angels and all matters pertaining to this life.

4. Humans create and build works of all kinds

Human beings inherently therefore have creative gifts that they use to create things. Among these things are artworks of various kinds: music, visual art, literary art, architecture, jewelry and metal working, woodworking, and "every craft" — including, in our own day, crafts Bezalel never saw: software, systems of accounts, enterprises, and machines.

5. Humans created AI

Human beings have also created AI. While AI is a tool and technology that has vast potential to assist, accelerate, and enhance the creative process of humans, it also has vast potential to shortcut, shut down, twist and corrupt the creative process of humans.

6. AI does not have a destiny to co-create and co-rule with God

The Greek fathers distinguished between the *dianoia* — the discursive, calculating, reasoning faculty of the mind — and the *nous*, the spiritual eye of the soul, the faculty of direct perception. It is the ability of immediate, non-discursive apprehension or intuition. The *nous*

enables direct perception of primary principles, ultimate reality, or divine truths — perceived in a single, unmediated vision without sequential step-by-step deduction.

AI possesses dianoia, and through machine learning and self-improvement its dianoia grows more powerful every year. But AI possesses no nous, and it never will.

IN SHORTHAND:

AI has a brain, but no spirit — and it will never have a spirit.

It is not a kind of being fashioned for right relationship and communion with God, and therefore it holds no calling or appointment to co-create or co-rule with Him, no matter how sophisticated it becomes.

AI can be used as a tool by humans to assist in and amplify the work of building. That is a healthy relationship with AI. But AI can also be used to circumvent and replace human agency in that work. That is a dangerous and destructive use of it.

7. AI possesses dianoia to build, but no nous to judge what is built

Because AI has dianoia but no nous, it possesses voluminous procedural knowledge about how to build — how to assemble a song, a codebase, a ledger, a structure — but no higher faculty of judgment concerning the wisdom or excellence of what is built.

Discernment of excellence is not a computation; it is a noetic act, a perception belonging to the spirit. AI is therefore a poor judge of whether a thing is built excellently, and it does not "know" what ought to be built at all.

Humans possess that judgment. It is a unique destiny, calling, and gifting that God gave to human beings — and one that AI can never possess.

8. I propose the following process designed to safeguard human flourishing

Toward this end, I propose that a healthy process of building is one in which human beings:

1. Identify and exercise their God-given talents and giftings to build,
2. Collaborate in community and right relationship with God and with other human beings as they build,
3. Use tools responsibly—including AI—to assist in the process,
4. But do not allow the tools themselves to replace human agency or human creativity,
5. Co-create with God, delighting in not only the end created work but also delighting in the process itself of building, which is an integral and indivisible part of the created work,

6. And therefore take procedural steps to actively involve other people and God in the communal process of building.

PART II

Why We Wrote This

Ascend Well exists to help people heal, level up, and find their voice. This manifesto exists because we believe none of that survives if human agency and creativity don't survive.

There is a lot of exhaustion out there right now. A lot of anger. A lot of people watching AI-generated everything flood their feeds — and AI-generated work flood their industries — and wondering whether the things humans build, and the humans who build them, still matter. We understand that feeling. We are not here to dismiss it. We are here to answer it.

And though this manifesto was born in the world of vibe coding and songwriting, its principles are not confined there. Building well is building well — whether the thing being built is a song, a codebase, a set of books, a business, or a house. The songwriter, the coder, the accountant, the contractor, and the designer all now face the same question: the machine can draft the work, so what, exactly, is the human for? This manifesto is our answer, and it applies to every craft.

Ascend Well stands for protecting human flourishing, human agency, and human creativity as primary. We welcome AI as an accelerator and an assistant to human agency and creativity — and we reject the forms of AI use that replace human agency and creativity. Both of those statements are true at once, and holding them together is the whole point. The tool is not the enemy. The tool in the wrong place is.

Fear of AI will not protect good building. Neither will pretending AI doesn't exist, or quietly using it while claiming we don't. What protects it is a working process that puts every piece — the human, the community, the tool, and the provision — in its rightful place, out loud, where everyone can see it.

So this manifesto is two things. It is a declaration of what we stand for. And it is a roadmap — for us, and for builders of every kind who want a way forward in the age of AI that neither surrenders to the machines nor hides from them. Musicians, writers, filmmakers, designers, coders, accountants, builders of every craft: this process is yours to take, adapt, and improve. We only ask that you keep the human at the center.

PART III

The Working Process

Principles are proven in practice. Here is how we put these principles into practice at Ascend Well, in our first two public applications: apps and music. Ascend Well will build the Whimsy app through this process, and its songs as well. This is not theory. Every Ascend Well song — and the Whimsy app itself — will walk this road in public. And though the stages below are written for songs, the road itself — human spark, community discernment, provision, human craftsmanship — belongs to builders of every craft.

STAGE 1

The human spark, drafted with tools

Every work begins with human experience, human intention, and human words — a lesson from my daughter's recovery, a truth that needs a melody, a message that needs saying. We then use AI tools, openly and with full transparency, to draft quickly and abundantly what we could not otherwise afford to draft at all. We will always tell you what was made with AI assistance. Drafts are cheap now. That is what AI is for. What happens next is what AI is not for.

STAGE 2

Community discernment

AI cannot know whether a thing is built excellently. Humans can — that judgment is noetic, and it belongs to the human spirit alone. Every draft is placed before our community — the Ascendants and our followers — to listen, react, and vote. Human judgment, in community, decides which works deserve to go further. This is not a marketing gimmick. It is Principle 8 in action: building in community, exercising a judgment that no machine possesses.

STAGE 3

Provision

Here is something the manifestos of the moment leave out: funding is a necessary and integral part of the creative process, and it cannot be separated from it. Bezalel's craftsmanship required gold, silver, bronze, and fine materials — provided by the freewill offerings of the community (Exodus 35). Human excellence has always required provision, and we will not pretend otherwise. Studio time costs money. Session musicians and vocalists deserve to be paid, and paid fairly — that is half the point of this whole manifesto.

So provision itself is a stage of our process: works that earn the community's discernment advance as funding gathers for them, and various funding mechanics and opportunities will be woven into the process over time as we learn what serves the community and the work best. When you help fund a work, you are not buying a product. You are participating in its creation. That, too, is co-creating in community.

STAGE 4

Human craftsmanship

The works that clear discernment and provision are then made real by human hands: real musicians, real vocalists, real engineers, in real rooms, elevating the draft into a finished work of lasting quality. The AI draft was the sketch. The human performance is the artwork. And we will delight not only in the finished work but in the process itself — documented and shared — because the process is an integral and indivisible part of the created work.

PART IV

Our Commitments

- We will always disclose what AI helped make.
- We will never present machine output as finished human artistry or finished human work.
- We will put every significant work before the community for human judgment.
- We will pay human artists and craftspeople fairly for their craft, and we will be honest that doing so requires provision.
- We will keep the process public, so that anyone can watch a work travel from spark, through community, through provision, to human hands.
- And we will keep human agency — yours and ours — at the center of everything Ascend Well builds.

PART V

The Invitation

We are not asking you to fear AI, and we are not asking you to worship it. We are asking you to help us hone it to its rightful place: assisting human agency and creativity, never replacing it.

Listen to the drafts. Vote your honest judgment. Help provide for the works that deserve human hands. Watch what happens when a community decides together what gets made. This is a positive, wholesome way forward with AI — and we intend to prove it works, in public, one song — and one app — at a time.

And if you build in another craft — in code, in ledgers, in lumber, in words — take this road with you. It was made for you, too.

Find your voice. Level up. Ascend Well, y'all.

This manifesto is a living document; as we learn, we will revise it — in public. Read the current version and sign it at ascendwell.life/manifesto