



Series:

**When the Heart Ripens**  
*and life turns spacious*

*Episode:*

**B2. SPACIOUS**

**- Love as Gift Rather than Possession**

*Tony Macelli*

*Welcome to another episode in the series “When the heart ripens”, now introducing a new theme—spaciousness of heart. Please read the Introduction to this Series for more information about the series of episodes.*

*The point is not to map a path but to name the movements that tend to emerge when the soul grows freer, when the ego grows quieter, and when the inner life takes on a more spacious tone.*

*You may recognise some of these qualities in yourself already, or in someone you know who has lived long enough, and humbly enough, to be gently transformed.*

As the heart ripens, affection learns to breathe. This Episode explores how love grows freer when it releases its subtle grasp, offering warmth without clinging and blessing without needing to hold.

## STORY

The house was quiet when her daughter arrived. Not the heavy silence of early morning, but the looser quiet of late afternoon, when the light has begun to slip and the day no longer insists on itself. Francesca was at the kitchen counter, slicing tomatoes, when she heard the key turn.

There was a time when that sound would have tightened something in her chest. She would pause mid-motion, listening not just for footsteps but for clues – how fast they came, how firmly the door closed – trying to guess what sort of visit this would be. Short or long. Open or distracted. Enough, or not enough.

Those habits had eased. She still noticed the sound, but it no longer pulled her forward.

“Mum? You home?” her daughter called, already moving down the hall.

“In the kitchen,” Francesca replied.

Her daughter came in with colour in her cheeks from the cold outside. She leaned in to kiss Francesca’s hair, then rested against the counter, fingers tapping once or twice on the wood. She looked alert, half-arrived.

“I can’t stay,” she said. “I just need that book I left. We’re heading out again soon.”

“All right,” Francesca said. “It’s on the table in the sitting room.”

The hallway filled briefly with cool air as her daughter went to fetch it. Francesca kept slicing. She noticed that her shoulders hadn’t



lifted. She wasn’t arranging sentences in her mind, or wondering how to keep the moment from passing.

Her daughter came back with the book tucked under her arm, coat not quite fastened, scarf slipping. She was already angled toward the door.

“Thanks,” she said, then paused. “Dinner smells good.”

Francesca smiled. “It’s just tomatoes.”

“They smell good anyway.”

Once, Francesca would have heard an opening there. She might have suggested staying, or reminded her of something they used to cook together. She didn’t do that now. The thought passed, and went.

“You off somewhere nice?” she asked.

“Just meeting friends. Might be late.”

“Enjoy yourself.”

Her daughter looked at her for a moment, as if registering something she hadn't expected to find. Then she stepped back and kissed her again, slower this time.

“Love you, Mum.”

“Love you,” Francesca said.

The door closed with a soft click. Francesca stood where she was, knife still in her hand. The room felt no emptier than before. If anything, it felt wider, though she didn't dwell on that. She set the knife down, wiped her hands on the tea towel, and glanced through the window.

Her daughter was already crossing the street, walking quickly, head lifted. Francesca watched until she turned the corner, then went back to the counter. She found herself humming, without knowing when it had started.



-o-

## REFLECTION

There is a form of love that holds on because it does not yet know where else to rest. It stays alert, attentive, sometimes anxious, not because it wants to control, but because it fears disappearance – its own, or the other's. This is

common, especially in close bonds formed under pressure or longing. Psychology names it attachment need. In spiritual language, it is the heart still learning where it is held.

Over time, if the inner life is given room, something begins to loosen. Not dramatically. More often it happens in unnoticed moments – a pause that no longer fills with worry, an invitation not extended, a silence that is allowed to remain as it is. Love does not withdraw, but it stops reaching ahead of itself.

Ruth Burrows, the Carmelite writer born in 1923, spent much of her work tracing this shift. She was clear that love rooted in self-protection, however sincere, still circles around the question of return. But love grounded in God does something quieter. It ceases to measure. “True love seeks no return,” she writes – not as an instruction to empty oneself, but as a description of love that already knows where it belongs. Such love remains alert to harm and does not confuse generosity with disappearance. But it no longer presses for reassurance.

Thomas Merton came to a similar place from another direction. After years of wrestling with identity and usefulness, he wrote of a love freed from the need to justify itself. In that freedom, affection does not panic when it is delayed. It does not insist on being central. It leaves room, and finds that the room itself becomes a form of closeness.

Julian of Norwich speaks even more simply. She describes divine love as blessing because it is love's nature to bless. When this begins to shape a person's own loving, something steadies. Affection no longer depends on response. Letting go no longer feels like loss.

In daily life, this change shows itself in small ways. A parent does not press an adult

child to linger. A friend listens without steering the conversation back. A partner allows an evening of distance without reading it as rejection. An elder steps back, not in resignation, but in quiet trust. These gestures are not dramatic. They are recognisable by their lack of strain.

Love shaped this way does not thin intimacy. It alters it. Possessiveness narrows attention. Gifted love widens it. Boundaries become clearer because they are no longer defended. The other person is met as they are, not as a support beam for one's own stability.

Earlier in life, love is often braided tightly with need. Reassurance feels essential. Certainty feels protective. As that urgency softens, love simplifies. It becomes less busy. Less concerned with being seen. More willing to remain present without performance.

For those drawn toward this change, the practice is modest. Allow someone to be different without correcting the feeling that arises. Offer warmth without checking whether it is returned. Let relationships move in their own rhythms without naming absence as abandonment. These are not heroic acts. They are permissions.

Love given this way is not naïve. It does not excuse harm or erase limits. But it refuses to bind another to its fears. It trusts that love does its deepest work when it is not gripping.

When love ripens, it asks less and gives more freely. It discovers that in releasing another, it has not become unmoored. It has found its ground.

-o-

## PRACTICE – Awareness of Gift-Love

A gentle caution. Practising these invitations will not by itself mature your heart, as that is not really up to your own direct will. But practice can sensitise us to the nature of the ripened heart, softening old reflexes and widening the space in which grace might work.

Set aside a few quiet minutes today. Let these invitations be touchstones, not tasks. You are not trying to achieve anything. You are simply noticing.

1. Let someone be themselves. Allow a person close to you to be entirely as they are, without nudging them toward your preferences. Notice the inner space that opens.

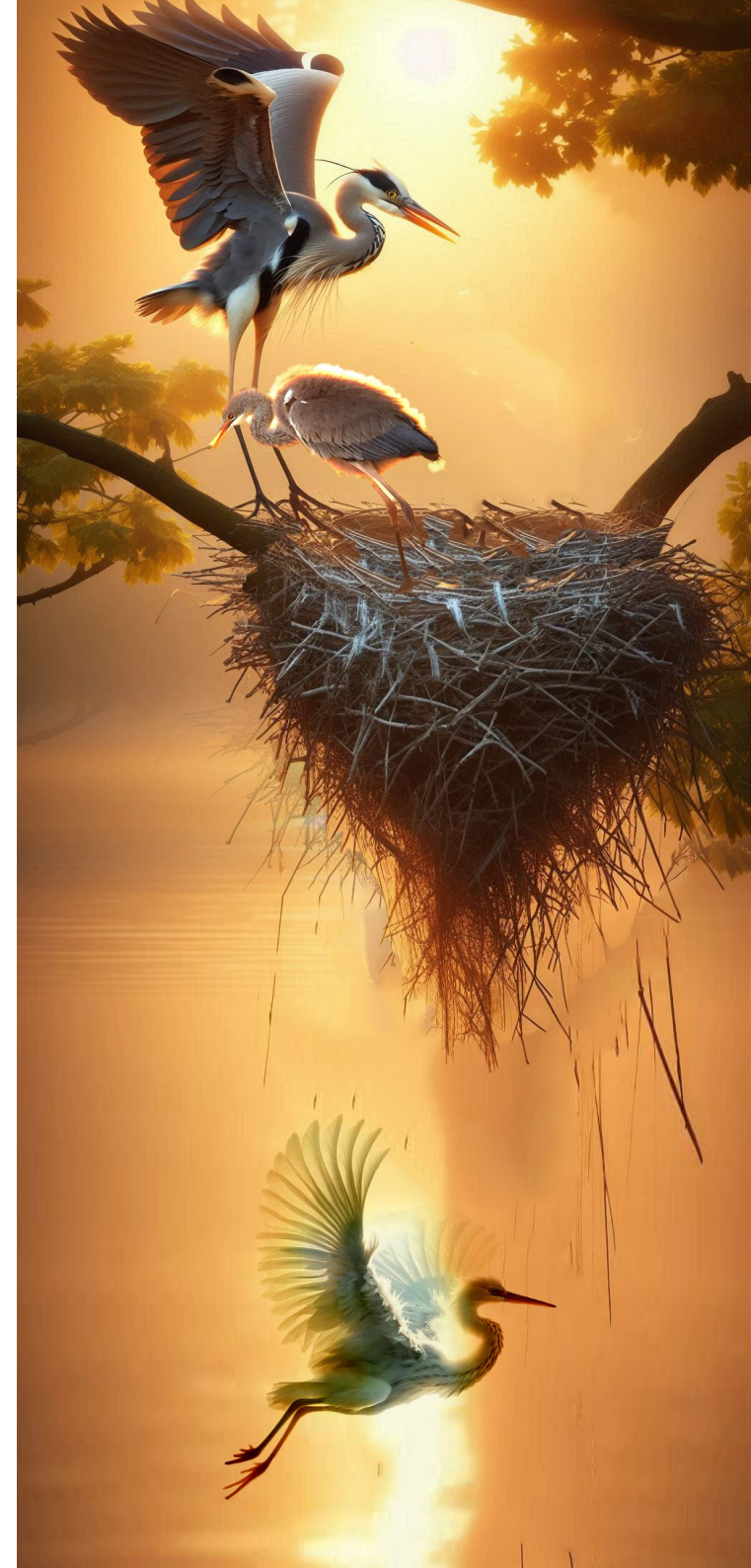
2. Do not take another's mood personally. Recall a moment when someone was distant or preoccupied. Gently ask whether you interpreted it as about you. Feel the relief of releasing that assumption.

3. Hold affection without gripping. Bring to mind someone you love. Feel your warmth for them, and also sense where fear tightens around that warmth. Breathe into the tightening until it loosens.

4. Practise cheerful spaciousness. Let someone you care about make a choice today without your guidance. Let their freedom bring quiet gladness.

5. Notice when fear contracts and when it relaxes. Observe one small tightening in your body during an interaction. Soften it. Let the moment widen.

6. Offer a silent blessing. Bless some-



one quietly without expecting them to know or reciprocate. Let the blessing be free, light, ungrasping.

7. Remember younger love with compassion. Recall a moment when your love clung. Do not judge it. See it with tenderness. Notice how much has changed.

8. See another's freedom as beautiful. Imagine someone you love moving into their own life, step by step. Let their freedom touch you with beauty rather than threat.

9. Close this practice by giving thanks not for your efforts but for any small shifts of awareness that emerged and may emerge in future.

**If you are in a group meeting:** Invite participants to describe a recent moment when they allowed another's freedom without anxiety. Explore the difference between loosening control and withdrawing care, and notice how quiet blessing feels in lived experience.

-o-

## REFERENCES

### ACADEMIC AND SCHOLARLY SOURCES

Burrows, R. (1979). *Guidelines for Mystical Prayer*. Burns & Oates.  
URL (valid 2025-12-01): <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/guidelines-for-mystical-prayer-9780264673937/>

Burrows, R. (2006). *Essence of Prayer*. Burns & Oates.  
URL (valid 2025-12-01): <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/essence-of-prayer-9780860124383/>

Merton, T. (1966). *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. Doubleday.  
URL (valid 2025-12-01): <https://merton.org/ITMS/Resources/Conjectures.asp>

Merton, T. (1968). *The Other Side of the Mountain: The Journals of Thomas Merton, Volume 7*. Harper-Collins.  
URL (valid 2025-12-01): <https://www.harpercollins.com/products/the-other-side-of-the-mountain-thomas-merton>

Julian of Norwich. (c. 1373/1998). *Revelations of Divine Love* (trans. E. Spearing). Penguin Classics.  
URL (valid 2025-12-01): <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/18343/revelations-of-divine-love-by-julian-of-norwich/9780140446736>

### ACCESSIBLE BOOKS

Burrows, R. (2015). *Love Unknown*. Bloomsbury.  
URL (valid 2025-12-01): <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/love-unknown-9781472909137/>

Merton, T. (2005). *A Year with Thomas Merton: Daily Meditations*. HarperOne.  
URL (valid 2025-12-01): <https://www.harpercollins.com/products/a-year-with-thomas-merton-thomas-merton>

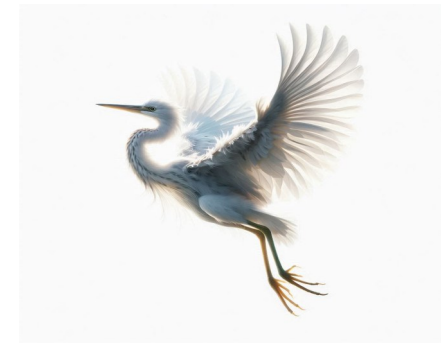
Nhat Hanh, T. (2015). *How to Love*. Parallax Press.  
URL (valid 2025-12-01): <https://www.parallax.org/product/how-to-love/>

### ONLINE AND YOUTUBE RESOURCES

Talk: "Ruth Burrows on the Nature of True Love."  
URL (valid 2025-12-01): [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=ruth+burrows+true+love](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=ruth+burrows+true+love)

Talk: "Thomas Merton – Reflections on Love and Freedom."  
URL (valid 2025-12-01): [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=thomas+merton+love+freedom](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=thomas+merton+love+freedom)

Teaching: Thich Nhat Hanh – "Loving Without Clinging."  
URL (valid 2025-12-01): [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=thich+nhat+hanh+loving+without+clinging](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=thich+nhat+hanh+loving+without+clinging)



Contact:  
chat, comment, ask, suggest, correct:  
[imagnetony@gmail.com](mailto:imagnetony@gmail.com)