



Series:

When the Heart Ripens  
*and life turns spacious*

Episode:

A3. ROOTED:

**The Turn from Achievement to Meaning**

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*Welcome to another episode in the series “When the heart ripens”, another theme within the idea of rootedness in reality. Please read the Introduction to this Series for more information about the series of episodes.*

Story

He arrived at the meeting room ten minutes early, as he always had. Old habits die quietly. The long conference table stretched before him, polished to a shine. Sunlight fell in through the tall windows, warming the grain of the wood. It was a room in which he had once felt entirely at home, a space where decisions were made, strategies refined, and results displayed. He had spent years measuring himself by rooms like this.

He placed his notebook on the table but did

not open it. Instead he rested his hands lightly on its cover and allowed his gaze to soften. The quiet before the others arrived felt unexpectedly spacious. Once, this pause would have been filled with the rehearsing of figures, the anticipating of questions, the tightening of the arguments he planned to make. Now there was no inner narrative to sharpen. He felt no need to prove anything. The meeting mattered, certainly, but not in the way it once had.

A memory rose unbidden. He saw himself from years earlier, seated in a similar room, chest tight with the desire to get everything right. He remembered the restless need to secure approval, the quiet panic that trembled beneath his polished competence. It was not shameful, just young. He remembered that version of himself with fondness, as one might remember a child trying earnestly to impress a room full of adults. The old impulse still flickered sometimes, a faint reflex, but it no longer commanded him.

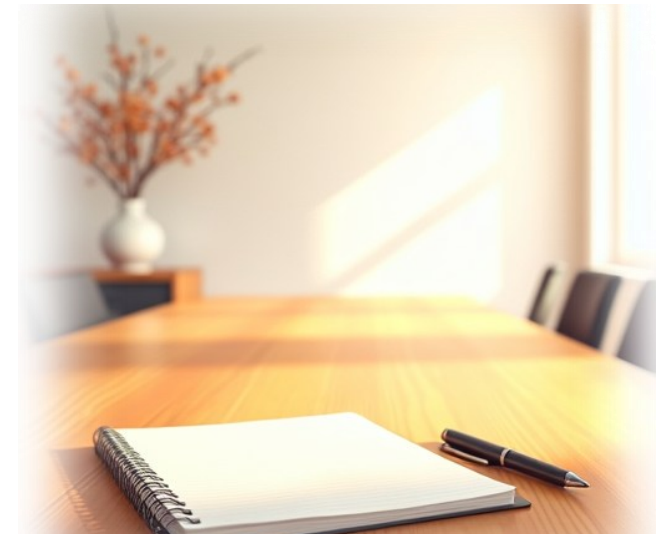
The door opened. A colleague stepped in, carrying a stack of papers, her face marked by the slight strain of too many responsibilities. She offered a polite smile that didn't reach her eyes. He noticed, in a way he would not have done years ago. Before, he might have seen only the papers, the deadlines, the work to be divided. Now he saw her tiredness. Something in him softened.

‘Do you want a moment before we begin?’ he asked gently.

Her shoulders relaxed a little. ‘If you don't mind.’

He shook his head. ‘Not at all.’

She sat, breathing out slowly, grateful for



the pause. He said nothing more. He simply allowed the room's silence to hold them both. It was a small gesture, barely noticeable, yet it felt truer than any show of efficiency or control.

He looked again at the sunlight slanting across the table. Its slow warmth, its steady presence, reminded him of the shift that had taken place within him over the years. Achievement had once drawn him forward with the promise of a worth he felt compelled to earn. Now, the desire was different: he wanted his actions to matter because they were aligned with who he was, not because they earned him recognition. Meaning had its own gravity, and he had settled into its pull without fanfare.

More colleagues entered, the room filling with conversation. He listened, offering brief greetings and a smile for each person, but without the urgency he once felt to impress or direct. He sensed, almost with relief, that the meeting would unfold as it needed to. His contribution would be honest, measured, and sufficient. He

felt anchored in something steadier than success.

At the far end of the table, he noticed a vase of autumn branches someone had placed there earlier. Simple, unpretentious, a spray of gold and rust against the pale wall. The sight moved him more than the agenda ever could. Beauty, however modest, had begun to speak more loudly to him than results.



As the meeting came to order, he set his pen down, gently, on the table. He no longer needed to shape the moment; he simply allowed it to unfold. The difference, long in the making, felt quiet but unmistakable.

He sat back, ready to begin, not as someone performing competence, but as someone participating in a life that no longer required him to earn his place.

In that moment, he recognised the truth: achievement had once built his world, but meaning now filled it. And the filling, he realised, was the deeper work.

## Reflection

There is a moment in the unfolding of a life when achievement begins to loosen its grip. Not through failure, and not through cynicism, but through a quiet recognition that accomplishment, though valuable, cannot finally carry the weight we once placed upon it. In the earlier half of life, achievement is a natural and even necessary horizon. We build, we pursue, we measure progress, we stretch our capacities. Yet there comes a time, sometimes suddenly, sometimes slowly, when the heart whispers that something more enduring is required.

Viktor Frankl (1905–1997) once observed that human beings are driven less by the pursuit of pleasure and more by “the will to meaning”. He wrote that a person can endure almost anything if they perceive a sense of meaning within it. This insight is not an abstract philosophical claim; it is a lived truth. A life centred solely on achievement eventually exhausts the soul. A life attuned to meaning, however, becomes quietly resilient and inwardly whole.

The turn from achievement to meaning is not a rejection of accomplishment but a re-ordering of priorities. The ego’s early hunger for validation begins to ease. The need to be impressive fades. What grows instead is a longing for what is real, what is enduring, what is quietly life-giving. A mature person begins to measure

life differently: not by the number of tasks completed but by the depth of their presence; not by making a mark but by making sense.

James Hollis speaks to this shift with great clarity. In his writings on midlife, he notes that the psyche eventually grows tired of living according to inherited scripts: be productive, be useful, be successful. At midlife or later, these scripts often feel too narrow, too borrowed. The soul begins to ask: “Whose life have I been living?” This question marks the threshold. What emerges is not anxiety but a new desire for authenticity. The person wants no longer to perform a role but to inhabit a life.

When this turn occurs, a gentle honesty arises. A person may find themselves saying, “This work is not mine anymore,” or, “This ambition no longer fits,” or, “What I truly value lies elsewhere.” At first these recognitions can feel disorienting, as if the scaffolding we leaned upon has fallen away. Yet beneath that first disorientation



lies a surprising spaciousness. The world becomes larger when the heart no longer needs to defend a particular identity. One begins to act not from pressure but from alignment.

This turn toward meaning often awakens a new sensitivity to the ordinary. The small gestures, the quiet moments, the unnoticed kindnesses begin to matter more than the large achieve-



ments once craved. One can feel this in the way a mature person listens—attentively, without rushing to fix or impress. Or in the way they choose work that nourishes rather than inflates. Meaning has its own gravity, and the soul recognises it intuitively.

This shift is not merely psychological; it is spiritual. Meaning invites the heart into a sense of participation rather than performance. It asks us to discern where our deepest gladness meets the quiet needs around us. It encourages us to live with integrity, with rootedness in what is

true rather than what is rewarded.

For those who sense this turn awakening within them, the invitation is gentle: trust the questions that arise. Notice where your energy deepens rather than drains. Pay attention to the small moments that feel real, even if they appear unimpressive from the outside. These signals are the beginnings of a meaningful life taking shape.

Achievement builds a life; meaning fills it. And the mature heart knows that the latter is what lasts.



## References

### Academic and scholarly sources

Frankl, V. E. (1959/2004). *Man's Search for Meaning*. Rider. (Original work published 1946 in German; English version first published 1959.)  
URL (valid on 2025-12-01): <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/412889/mans-search-for-meaning-by-frankl-viktor/9781846041245>

Hollis, J. (1993). *The Middle Passage: From Misery to Meaning in Midlife*. Inner City Books.  
URL (valid on 2025-12-01): <https://innercitybooks.net/bookshop/author/james-hollis/the-middle-passage/>

Hollis, J. (2005). *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life: How to Finally, Really Grow Up*. Gotham Books.  
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Jung, C. G. (1933/2001). *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. Routledge. (Original essays published earlier; English edition 1933; Routledge Classics reissue 2001.)  
URL (valid on 2025-12-01): <https://www.routledge.com/Modern-Man-in-Search-of-a-Soul/Jung/p/book/9780415253901>

### Accessible books

**Practice** Notice one task or responsibility today that you tend to approach with a sense of proving or performing. Pause for a breath or two before beginning it. Ask quietly: “What would it be like to do this from alignment rather than achievement?” Then proceed gently, without pressure.

**If you are meeting in a group:** Invite each person to describe a moment in recent weeks when they sensed that achievement was no longer the deepest measure of their life. Explore what meaning felt like in that moment. .

Frankl, V. E. (2020). *Yes to Life: In Spite of Everything*. Rider. (Based on lectures delivered in 1946.)

URL (valid on 2025-12-01): <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/316690/yes-to-life-by-frankl-viktor/9781846046363>

Hollis, J. (2018). *Living an Examined Life: Wisdom for the Second Half of the Journey*. Sounds True.

URL (valid on 2025-12-01): <https://www.soundstrue.com/products/living-an-examined-life>

Brooks, D. (2015). *The Road to Character*. Al-len Lane.

URL (valid on 2025-12-01): <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/185063/the-road-to-character-by-brooks-david/9780241184063>

### Online and YouTube resources

Talk: “Viktor Frankl and the Search for Meaning”.  
Reliable lecture summaries available via universities and educational channels.

URL (valid on 2025-12-01): [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=viktor+frankl+search+for+meaning](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=viktor+frankl+search+for+meaning)

Lecture: “James Hollis on the Inner Journey of Midlife”.

Talks available via Jung societies and depth-

psychology platforms.  
URL (valid on 2025-12-01): [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=james+hollis+midlife](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=james+hollis+midlife)

Reflection video: “What Makes a Meaningful Life?”.

Conceptual explorations available on channels such as *The School of Life*.

URL (valid on 2025-12-01): [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=what+makes+a+meaningful+life](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=what+makes+a+meaningful+life)

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