



Series:

When the Heart Ripens

This Episode:

C2. SURRENDERED

– Freedom from the need to win

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At a small East African port, a decision is left deliberately unfinished. Two people part without agreement, yet without rupture. What remains is a freedom, quieter than certainty – and the question of what it means to stay present when nothing is resolved.

Story 1

Reflection 4

Practice Box – *remaining grounded across outcomes*

Discernment Box – *freedom from winning, and its look-alikes* 7

The Witnesses – *across fourteen centuries* 7

Past Episodes in this Series

See or download past PDFs here:

<https://laikosblog.org/blog-by-tony-macelli/>

*THE SERIES is about the spiritual heart, a spiritual organ. More specifically, the Series tries to cover the witness-attested qualities of the spiritual heart when it has “ripened” – by grace and lived experience. Please read the **Introduction** online if you are new to the Series.*

Group A. Rootedness in the Real. Episodes A1–A3 traced how the ripened heart becomes grounded in ordinary life as it is. Attention settles, imagination softens, and the drive to secure meaning through achievement or improvement eases. What emerges is a stable presence able to receive reality without needing to escape or embellish it.

B. The Spacious Heart. Episodes B1–B4 explore the inner widening through which love and attention become less anxious and less possessive. The heart learns to hold others, uncertainty, and time itself with greater ease. Relationship deepens as control, performance, and premature interpretation lose their grip.

C. The Inner Surrender. This current group of Episodes turns toward the relinquishing of subtle forms of inner compulsion. The ripened heart releases its reliance on image, outcome, and self-justification, allowing life to unfold without being driven by the need to prevail. Surrender here is neither collapse nor withdrawal, but a growing freedom to remain present, truthful, and responsible without securing oneself through winning, approval, or control. Episode C1 explored surrender as release from image and role, showing how the heart loosens its dependence on recognition, usefulness, and social identity in order to remain grounded and free.

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Story

By the time the light began to thin, the harbour had quietened. The tide was turning, drawing the water slowly past the stone steps below the veranda. From where Elias sat, he could hear the sound it made as it slid along the wall – a sound he had known since childhood on this stretch of the Swahili coast.

The back room smelled faintly of cloves, salt, and old wood. Against the far wall, above the shelves where sacks of copra and sisal were stacked, a painted sign leaned at an angle, its letters darkened by age:

دكان البحر

Below it, in smaller Latin script, someone had once painted the name again, carefully: DUKA LA BAHARI.

On the table lay an open ledger. The last entry had been made that morning, the ink still sharp. At the top of the page Elias had written: Mombasa, 17 June 1908.

Amina stood near the doorway, where the light fell unevenly across the floor.

“They still want us to shift part of it inland,” she said. “Not everything. Just enough to see whether it holds.”

Elias did not ask what she meant. The proposal had been discussed for weeks now, first in fragments, then in fuller form. Goods that had always moved along the coast would be sent inland instead, loaded onto the new railway that cut north and west before rejoining the trade routes further on.



“You’ve read the figures,” she said.

“Yes.”

“And the timetable.”

“Yes.”

She stepped closer and rested her hand on the table. “If we wait, we’ll be late. That’s what worries me.”

Outside, someone called to a child in Kiswa-

hili. The child answered, reluctantly, and the call was repeated, firmer this time. A cart rattled past on the quay road, iron rims striking stone.

“It’s not abandoning the harbour,” Amina went on. “It’s adjusting. The trade is already moving. You can feel it.”

“I can,” Elias said.

He closed the ledger, not to end the conversation, but because he had finished looking at it.

“They’re asking for a commitment,” she said. “Capital, men, time. Not all of it. Just enough.”

They had spoken about this earlier, walking back from the docks while the sun was still high. The arguments were familiar now – the railway’s speed, the changing routes, the risk of standing still while others adapted.

“And if it fails?” Elias asked.



“Yes.”

She waited. Elias felt the familiar urge to marshal his reasons – the steadiness of the harbour trade, the way it had weathered changes before, the cost of scattering attention. He noticed the urge, and did not follow it.

“It changes the shape of things,” he said. “More than the figures suggest.”

“That’s not an argument,” she said.

“No,” he agreed. “It’s an unease.”

She shook her head. “We can’t run a business on unease.”

“I’m not asking to,” he said. “I’m asking not to force it to settle tonight.”

She moved away from the table and stood by the doorway, looking out toward the harbour. A dhow was being pushed off from the quay, voices calling softly as it caught the current.

ing softly as it caught the current.

“You realise,” she said, without turning, “that choosing not to move is also a decision.”

“Yes.”

“And that the costs of waiting won’t announce themselves in advance.”

“I know.”

She looked back at him then, searching his face – not for agreement, but for resistance she could press against. What she found instead was a steadiness that did not harden into insistence, and did not withdraw into indifference.

“You’re infuriating,” she said.

He did not respond. There was nothing in him that needed to counter it.

Somewhere inland, the call to prayer was beginning, its cadence softened by distance and evening air. Elias reached for the kettle and poured what remained of the tea into two cups. He handed one to her. She took it, though she did not drink.

They stood there for a while, the disagreement fully present between them, unsoftened and unresolved.

When he began to clear the table, Amina stepped forward without comment to help. The ordinary work of closing up continued – the ledger placed back on the shelf, the cups rinsed, the shutters drawn partway in.

At the doorway, she paused.

“We’ll speak again,” she said.

“Yes, we will, Amina,” Elias replied with a gentle kindness.

Elias took her shawl down from its peg and handed it to her. She gathered it around her shoulders and face, and waited by the doorway. They stepped out together.

The street was quiet. They lived only a few steps away. They walked side by side, watchful of the shadows. Work was momentarily forgotten.

She went inside. Elias stood for a moment, listening as the door closed, then turned back toward the harbour.

“Then we learn,” she said. “And we haven’t lost everything.”

He nodded. He did not dispute that either.

“What is it, then?” she asked, a trace of impatience in her voice. “Because you haven’t said no.”

“No.”

“But you haven’t said yes.”

“No.”

She turned fully toward him. “Do you know how that sounds?”

He returned to the office and barred the door behind him. The ledger lay closed on the shelf. The decision had not been made. The disagreement remained, intact and real.

What did not remain was the pull to master the situation. He felt no need to secure the outcome by delay, nor to press it by decision. Whether the matter eventually settled in her favour, his own, or somewhere between them no longer carried the weight it once would have. The work would continue. The relationship would remain. The decision, when it came, would come without needing to prove anything.

Later, lying on the woven mat near the cane

curtain, he listened as the town settled into night – a rope knocking once against a mast, voices passing below, the scrape of sandals on stone. With no watchman to guard the office, he slept there. The figures and routes did not return to claim him. Sleep came calmly.

Amina's sleep did not come quickly. The conversation replayed itself despite her attempts to set it aside. Not because Elias had refused, but because he had not taken possession of the outcome. She could not decide whether that unsettled her or steadied her.

At home, she lit a lamp and sat for a while without touching the food she had set out. The figures, the routes, the risks – all of it remained clear. What stayed with her was something quieter: the way the conversation had ended without leverage, without conclusion, intact yet unbroken.

When she finally lay down, the night held. The argument did not find a way to complete itself.

Reflection

There are moments in relationship when disagreement does not move toward resolution. Words have been exchanged. Positions are known. Nothing more can be clarified without repeating what has already been said. And yet the relationship continues.

For many, this is where the heart tightens. Something in us still wants the conversation to tip – toward agree-

ment, acknowledgement, or at least a sense of having been right. When that does not happen, we may feel unsettled in ways that are difficult to name. The issue itself may no longer be the problem. What presses now is the unfinishedness.

A ripened heart meets this moment differently. It does not require that the disagreement be settled in order to remain present. Nor does it retreat into distance or silence as a way of managing discomfort. The relationship is allowed to remain intact even when understanding does not converge. What loosens here is not care, but compulsion.

You may recognise this shift in small ways. There is less inward replay of the conversation afterwards. Less need to rehearse what should have been said. The body no longer braces itself around imagined future encounters. One can remember the disagreement without being drawn back into it. The matter remains unresolved, yet the heart is no longer organised around its outcome.

This is a form of freedom, although to some it might appear as apathy.

Earlier in life, winning often serves a hidden function. To prevail in argument or interpretation helps secure a sense of coherence. Being right reassures us that our way of seeing is valid, that we are not foolish, mistaken, or out of place. In this sense, winning is rarely only about the issue at hand. It carries the quieter task of stabilising identity.

As the heart matures, this need begins to loosen. Identity no longer depends so heavily on having one's view affirmed. The self is less at risk in disagreement. This does not make a per-





son vague or non-committal. On the contrary, they may speak with greater clarity. But clarity is no longer driven by the need to prevail.

This shift becomes especially visible when differences concern belief or understanding. Theoretical disagreements can easily awaken the urge to defend one's position, not only intellectually but existentially. Ideas become extensions of the self. To see them questioned can feel personal.

A ripened heart relates to truth differently. Thought remains careful. Language remains precise when precision is required. Convictions are not abandoned. What changes is the way these convictions are held. They no longer function as armour.

One may articulate a view without requiring it to be adopted. One may listen without preparing a rebuttal. One may allow another's interpretation to stand, even when it seems incomplete or mistaken, without experiencing this as a diminishment of one's own integrity. The need to have the final word fades.

This is not relativism. Truth is not treated as negotiable. What loosens is the identification of truth with personal standing. The heart no longer needs to carry truth as a possession that must be defended. Truthfulness becomes an orientation rather than a victory.

For some, this loosening is also shaped by a long familiarity with silence. Over time, the habit of resting without content, without needing to resolve experience into clear formulations, can subtly alter how truth is held. Words are no longer required to carry everything. Contradiction, even within one's own thinking, becomes more bearable. When this has taken root, intellectual

disagreement with others often loses its charge. What once felt urgent no longer presses in the same way, not because truth matters less, but because it is no longer confined to what can be secured in argument.

Conversations of a ripened heart grow simpler. Energy once spent on argument becomes available for attention. The mind still engages, but without heat. Silence becomes possible without signalling defeat.

This freedom also has consequences in institutional life. Systems move slowly. Decisions are often fragmentary, inadequate, or even misguided or plainly evil. Processes frustrate. Earlier patterns of engagement may have relied on pressure, insistence, or strategic conflict. When these no longer yield the desired result, one might once have been tempted either to escalate or to withdraw.

A ripened heart does neither reflexively. Responsibility is still carried. Participation continues. Yet engagement is no longer adversarial in its inner posture. One can advocate without being consumed by outcome. One can resist without personalising opposition. One can accept limits without interpreting them as failure.

Here again, the difference is subtle but decisive. The person has not stopped caring about what is right. They have stopped needing to win in order to remain whole.

Across these contexts – relational, interpretive, institutional – the same interior movement can be observed. The heart no longer tightens around being correct, vindicated, or successful. Disagreement is no longer treated as a threat to belonging or fellowship. Loss of influence does not equate to loss of oneself.

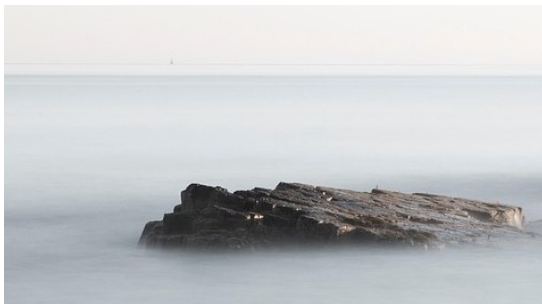
This does not happen through resolve or discipline. It arrives as a consequence of deeper grounding. The heart has learned that its coherence does not rest on outcome. Trust has shifted to a more stable centre.

Spiritually, this is a form of surrender that often goes unnoticed. It is not dramatic. There is no moment of triumph. One simply realises, over time, that certain battles no longer attract. The urgency has gone. What remains is attentiveness, responsibility, and a quiet willingness to let reality be what it is.

There is dignity in this posture. Life continues to present disagreement and difference. The heart continues to respond. But it does so without the inward struggle to secure itself through winning.

In this sense, freedom from the need to win is not a retreat from truth or engagement. It is a way of inhabiting both, without being driven by insecurity, anger, or pride. The heart remains open, present, and grounded – even when the matter at hand remains unresolved.

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Practice Box

– *Remaining Grounded Across Outcomes*

This practice will not ripen the spiritual heart; such ripening comes through grace and through years. What this practice offers is a way of recognising inner tendencies that may already be present. As these tendencies are noticed rather than acted upon, awareness becomes more sensitive and more familiar. Over time, this recognition can support a more habitual, gentle attentiveness to what is already unfolding within.

Bring to mind a situation in which you care about the outcome. It may be something that ended well, something that did not, or something that has not yet resolved. Choose one that still carries a small charge.

Notice first how the body responds when you recall the situation. Is there a subtle tightening, a leaning forward, a sense of relief, or a trace of disappointment? Do not analyse this. Simply let it be noticed.

Now attend to what the heart seems to require in order to rest. Does it depend on having succeeded, on having avoided failure, or on the matter remaining open? Or is there already a steadiness that does not lean on any of these?

Allow the situation to shift gently in imagination. Let it move, for a moment, toward success. Then allow it to move



toward loss. Then allow it to remain unresolved. Notice whether the heart's sense of coherence changes with each movement.

If you find yourself rehearsing, justifying, or securing your position inwardly, recognise that impulse without following it. Return attention to the quality of presence that remains when nothing needs to be defended or completed.

Stay here briefly. The aim is not to detach from the situation, but to recognise whether your inner balance depends on outcome – or whether something deeper is already carrying you.

This Practice is not about apathy or resignation. It is about discovering a steadiness that can remain intact whether things turn out as hoped, turn out otherwise, or remain unfinished.

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Discernment Box

– *Freedom from Winning, and Its Look-Alikes*

Freedom from the need to win can resemble other inner postures that are quite different in spirit. Careful discernment helps to tell them apart.

Sometimes restraint arises from withdrawal. The heart pulls back to avoid discomfort, conflict, or cost. What looks like calm may carry a quiet closing, a loss of engagement, or a reluc-

tance to remain present when matters press.

At other times, detachment masks a subtle form of superiority. The disagreement no longer stirs because the other is inwardly dismissed, or because one's own position is felt to be beyond contest. The absence of urgency here does not come from freedom, but from distance.

There is also a form of passivity that avoids responsibility. Decisions are deferred indefinitely, not because the heart is settled, but because action feels burdensome or risky. The language of surrender may be used, yet the underlying movement is hesitation rather than willingness.

Freedom from winning has a different texture. Engagement remains intact. Care is still present. One can speak clearly, act when needed, and remain involved without inner pressure to prevail. Calmness does not depend on avoidance, silence does not signal retreat, and unresolved outcomes do not diminish responsibility.

A helpful question in discernment is this:

Does this posture leave me more available to relationship, truth, and responsibility – or less?

The ripened heart tends toward greater availability, even when it no longer needs to secure itself through victory.

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The Witnesses

The following witnesses, drawn from across fourteen centuries, quietly confirm the heart-quality described in this Episode.

• **Benedict of Nursia (c. 480–547)**

Through the Rule attributed to him and its lived tradition, Benedict offers a witness to communal life where disagreement, obedience, and authority are held without rivalry. Stability and attentiveness are prioritised over triumph, confirming a form of freedom that does not depend on prevailing.

• **Francis of Assisi (c. 1181–1226)**

In a well-known episode from early Franciscan tradition, Francis speaks with Brother Leo while reflecting on what might constitute *perfect joy*. Rather than naming success, recognition, or spiritual achievement, he imagines being unrecognised, misunderstood, and firmly rejected. What he points to is not the value of rejection itself, but the freedom of a heart that remains settled without needing affirmation, vindication, or victory. Read in this way, Francis offers a vivid witness to a heart no longer organised around winning or being received.

• **Evelyn Underhill (1875–1941)**

Underhill's mature work reflects an increasing capacity to live with ambiguity and disagreement without anxiety. Conviction remains, yet interior steadiness no longer depends on interpretive certainty or persuasion, offering a quiet confirmation of freedom from outcome-based self-support.

• **Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945)**

Bonhoeffer's prison writings reveal a form of freedom that persists under moral pressure and institutional failure. Responsibility is carried without ideological triumph or self-justification, making him a strong witness to non-adversarial faithfulness in extreme circumstances.

• **Thomas Merton (1915–1968)**

In his later journals and correspondence, Merton displays a loosening of argumentative identity around ideas and positions. Clarity remains, but without urgency to persuade, supporting the Episode's exploration of truth held without possession.

• **Henri Nouwen (1932–1996)**

Nouwen's later life and writing show a marked release from the need to prevail relationally or intellectually. Misunderstanding and criticism are no longer treated as threats to vocation or belonging, making his witness especially relevant to relational conflict carried without defensiveness.

• **Rowan Williams (born 1950)**

Williams exemplifies a posture of clarity without adversarial insistence. He speaks precisely while allowing disagreement to remain unresolved, particularly within ecclesial and institutional contexts where pressure to win or dominate interpretation is strong.

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