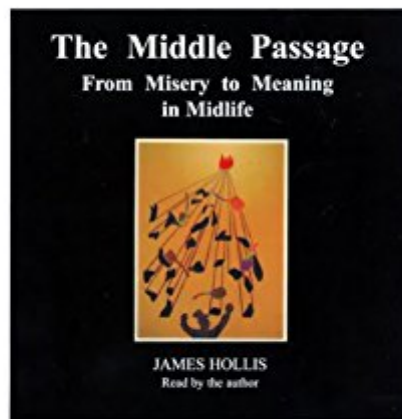




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# The Middle Passage: From Misery To Meaning In Midlife



## Synopsis

Author James Hollis' eloquent reading provides the listener with an accessible and yet profound understanding of a universal condition - or what is commonly referred to as the mid-life crisis. The book shows how we may travel this Middle Passage consciously, thereby rendering our lives more meaningful and the second half of life immeasurably richer.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Dr Hollis covers the passage into the middle years, the second adulthood, so thoroughly and completely it is a wonder this isn't standard reading for all adults! This may be a small book (certainly smaller and more concise than his similar and later work *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life: How to Finally, Really Grow Up*) but it covers the topic so well. It seems especially recommendable to people interested in depth psychology and finding a map to navigate this critical and challenging passage. What I especially enjoy about Hollis is the literate sensibility he brings to his writing (often utilizing appropriate references from literature both old and modern), combined with his wise and welcoming experience of being human (every stage and experience has its place and value.... It's all good when we find it's meaning, and the struggle and suffering make it all the more recognizable and significant. The real problem is our modern culture is lacking in clear guidelines, maps and support from wise elders.... The challenging part is it's up to us here and now to create these essential functions.) This book covers an overview of the four stages/identities humans experience in a complete life (childhood and adolescence, which lead to the second adulthood beginning at midlife, leading to acceptance of mortality in old age). It clearly

points out how the first half is about establishing our egos, and fitting in to expectations, while the second is about finding our individual voice and real meaning (the resolutions of often long buried questions). As Hollis says, "if we are fortunate to suffer enough, we are stunned into a reluctant consciousness and the questions return to us again." (Pg 19) I could quote so much more to give a taste of his gentle wisdom, but I will share just one more. "During the Middle Passage, the insurgence of the shadow is part of a corrective effort made by the Self to bring the personality back into balance. The key to integration of the shadow, the unlived life, is to understand that it's demands emanate from the Self, which wishes neither further repression nor unlicensed acting out. The integration of the shadow requires that we live responsibly in society but also more honestly with ourselves. We learn through the deflation of the persona world that we have lived provisionally; the integration of inner truths, joyful or unpleasant, is necessary to bring new life and restoration of purpose." (pg. 44) Enjoy.

The eruptions that occur for most of us in midlife are troubling and bewildering: loss of an established identity, depression, boredom, anxiety, perhaps even addiction, and the overwhelming feeling that something is dying and something else needs to be reborn. For some these seismic shifts break out in the stereotypical displays of the midlife crisis (jettisoning relationships and careers, for example) while others stew in quiet desperation and perhaps seek therapy or simply hope the disturbing rumblings will pass. In the author's words, "Anyone in midlife has witnessed the collapsing of projections, of hopes and expectations, and has experienced the limitations of talent, intelligence, and, often, of courage itself." James Hollis, a Jungian therapist with decades of experience as an analyst and teacher, has written this remarkable book which is the best I have seen at elucidating what the midlife passage means and the creative response it demands. Approaching the topic from the rich, poetic, and mystical perspective of depth psychology, Hollis maintains that our second lives call for nothing less than a renegotiation with the universe. In the first part of life, the ego is in charge and has projected unrealistic demands upon people, jobs, institutions and other aspects of the outer world. In the second half of life, Hollis maintains that these projections must be withdrawn and that we must undergo a new, inner journey based on what the soul demands. While this may at first sound theoretical and impractical, in fact Hollis describes aspects of what such an odyssey would entail as it relates to relationships, vocation, and other aspects of living. Hollis says that we already have everything we need to make this journey, however fraught with fear it can be. It's already inside us. I think you will come away convinced. At only 117 pages, concentrated and learned--but not pedantic--almost every paragraph has a

sentence that can be pondered, underlined, and returned to. I expect to do this many times. As frightening as the midlife passage can be, Hollis gives us hope. He writes, "We are in the sea-surge of the soul, along with many others to be sure, but needing to swim under our own power. The truth is simply that what we must know will come from within. If we can align our lives with that truth, no matter how difficult the abrasions of the world, we will feel healing, hope, and new life." If you have entered the dark wood of midlife--as Dante referred to it--you will find this book to be an immensely rewarding companion that offers not a way out, but a description of a path through that will be uniquely your own.

James Hollis draws from clinical practice and Jungian analysis in describing mid-life journeys toward (or flights from) individuation and wholeness. Hollis describes the Middle Passage as the breakdown of the "First Adulthood" (roughly from the teen years up to about forty), when the ingrained coping mechanisms of young adulthood finally break down against the realities of life history and its progression. The author explains how Jungian individuation can proceed (or fail to proceed) in modern life's existential crises. Good advice and thought-provoking analyses from a working therapist who is also a very clear writer.

This short, superb book is one of the best works on midlife that I've ever read. Hollis is NOT offering simple answers or formulas; instead, he's making clear just how difficult but rewarding the Middle Passage (as he names it) can be. I especially appreciate his oft-repeated dictum that the goal of life isn't Happiness so much as it is Meaning. Isn't this perpetual struggle to find & grasp an elusive happiness precisely what gets so many of us tied up in knots? His insistence that we must be willing to go into our own dark places, that we must be willing to acknowledge & discard our illusions, is far better advice than most of the Self-Help industry offers ... and far more helpful. A book that provokes thought & reflection, this slim volume of inner treasure is highly recommended!

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