

Turning to the Mystics



Dialogue: The Sixth and Seventh
Mansions (Part 2)

with James Finley

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Jim Finley: Greetings. I'm Jim Finley.

Kirsten Oates: And I'm Kirsten Oates. Welcome to Turning to the Mystics. [music; bell]

Welcome, everyone. I'm grieving and celebrating as we come to the end of our time with the 16th-century Christian mystic, Teresa of Ávila, and her beautiful book, the Interior Castle. Today will be my final dialogue with Jim looking at Mansions six and seven and getting his help to unpack some of the deep and mystical concepts that Teresa offers us in that book. Next week, we'll be looking at questions that have come in from you all. So, thank you so much for sending those in. We're excited to hear your thoughts and questions next week, but now let's get started with Jim on the sixth and seventh Mansions.

Okay. Welcome, Jim. We're back again, take two or part two, because I've just found these sixth and seventh Mansions so deep, and there are so many new concepts within them that it was hard to get through them both in one session last week. So, we're back again in a dialogue about Mansions six and seven. So, my first question is why do you think the sixth Mansion is so long in the book?

Jim Finley: Yes. Well, it's by far the longest—

Kirsten Oates: Eleven chapters, right? It's by far the longest

Jim Finley: I think because, intuitively, it seems to me, the reason is, is that let's say from the fourth Mansion on, there are the beginnings of these, what she calls special favors or mystical states of the experience of God radiating out from the seventh, innermost Mansion. So, in the first three Mansions, the experience of God is mediated through our beliefs, through our consolations, through our intentions, and efficacious unto holiness. But in the fourth Mansion, flowing directly from God, in the innermost center of the soul, is an unmediated presence of God flowing into and merging with the intimacy of our very presence. So, it's kind of an intersubjective state of oneness beyond thought, beyond emotion, and it starts out very gradually that way. So, you're between two worlds. You're still in the first three—there's this awakening of this nondual, unitive oneness, which creates a state of absorption, which is a kind of a quiet fascination, like, "What's happening?" and this absorption then leads to, or opens out upon, the beginnings of this unitive consciousness.

In the fifth Mansion, it intensifies to the point that the reflective consciousness, illumined by this oneness, the luminosity becomes so pure that the self in reflective consciousness can no longer be the basis for what's happening, and the self goes into a deep sleep. It's a kind of death, really. It's a kind of a foreshadowing of what happens when we die. And in that cessation of self-reflection, of awareness of intentional consciousness, this oneness occurs, standing free and clear, like a unitive state of the infinite presence of God, presencing itself as the very presence of the self. It's kind of uncreated in a way. So, then when the moment passes that washes back over the person, and they weren't there when it happened, but what happened was, one, there was a certainty that they were in God and God was in them. It's like a oneness they can't explain, but they know is true.

Secondly, the desire to only do God's will; you only want to do God's will in all things. And you're a butterfly with tattered wings. You're in this state of everything suffers from a state of not-enoughness, like, this is not the Beloved, this is not the Beloved, this is not the Beloved. Like, what is love doing to me here? That's the fifth Mansion.

So, what happens in the sixth Mansion is at that unitive state, instead of being a temporary event in consciousness that washes back over the self, the unitive event starts becoming ever more pervasively habitual. That is, what starts to happen in states of rapture is that you're carried off by such a wondrous unity that when the rapture passes, it washes back over you, and it keeps washing back over you more and more pervasively.

I think the sixth Mansion is the longest because it's like dying of love, or the divinization of oneself across every aspect of yourself. So, your relationship with other people and what they think of you, your physical health, finding spiritual guidance, one's basic understanding of God and oneself, one's long unconsummated longings, and there is no aspect of the self that's left untouched or left unraveled by this love. And I think that's why it's like the totality of the layered, interior richness and poverty of oneself being completely assumed into this love state, like this.

Kirsten Oates: Is that why she gives so many examples, Jim, because she's trying to give this holistic vision of all the different places where it happens?

Jim Finley: That's right. I think there are several things here. One, she's sharing is what she knows is true because she's experienced it. Secondly, she's writing this for spiritual direction for those who have experienced it because they know it's hard to understand, like what's happening to me? Am I crazy, or what's going on? How can I learn to obey this or follow it or be realistic in it? I think she's also offering insight to all of us because this, the full, conscious realization of this union, the reality of that union washes back over and belongs to all of us. So, even the very first Mansion is itself this very mystery. It's just we've not yet been awakened to the fullness of the mystery to which we've been awakened. So, in a way, this belongs to all of us, to the mystical dimensions of our ordinary experience. And it belongs specifically to those for whom this charism or this grace of unitive consciousness is given.

And so, she's offering trustworthy guidance and, on the totality, how it crosses back and forth. And she also stresses that, and it continues in the seventh Mansion, the suffering continues, the doubt that this feeling of being distant from God continues. It's just that the very struggles themselves are permeated by God. The perceived absence of God is itself recognized to be the presence of God intimated in the very absence of God, and this is so mysterious and so pervasively intimate. So, she's very carefully walking through kind of a pragmatic, pastoral clarity trying to help us understand ourselves at this level.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). It's really helpful to hear you say that. A lot of it doesn't sound pragmatic, reading it.

Jim Finley: It doesn't, but I would say if it's happening to you, it's extremely pragmatic.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Jim Finley: It doesn't seem pragmatic if I've not gotten there yet. You're like, "Wow, that's pretty

amazing.”

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: But any bigger-than-life struggle we're going through—falling in love or losing love—is acutely pragmatic for us, see? And that's why we look for help, for someone to help us understand ourselves, like someone who sees me and understands me. And so, for her, it's extremely pragmatic in this transformative level.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: And we can know the very fact we're attracted to it means intimations of it have already begun within us, otherwise it wouldn't make any sense. So, there's something, maybe it's closer than we realize. We just lean in a little closer, and see what God has in mind.

Kirsten Oates: It's funny you use the word pragmatic, like pragmatic mystery, pragmatic mysticism. It's like it's a paradox put in those two words. Yeah.

Jim Finley: It is, really. It is. Thomas Merton once said at the monastery, he said, “You know,” he said, “we should always be careful not to assume that the collective understanding of the group is capable of helping us understanding what's happening to us,” you know? Like, is it possible this could actually be true? See, is it possible? And she's actually putting words to something that's so close, maybe, but it's not been seen precisely because it's so intimate. It's so subtle, you know? And so, she's providing a language where we can start to be open to such things.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. So wonderful. Can we talk a little bit more about the difference between a psychological and a spiritual experience? The question came up for me when you were talking about the rapture in the imagination. Because in therapy, you can be asked to use your imagination to see parts of yourself, or to relive a traumatic event, you know, and change the ending. Those kinds of ways we use the imagination psychologically. Could you describe what Teresa was talking about?

Jim Finley: Yes. I think it's helpful to do this, and in each mystic, we'll see this happening over and over. It kind of gets us used to reflecting on such things because they're subtle, but it enriches our life when we become intimately familiar with these things. So, let me suggest a way that helps me to see it. Let's say, first of all—and I'm also here now echoing again Bernard Lonergan [whom] I mentioned before in *The Intersubjectivity of the Mystic*—Bernard Lonergan's thought is presented by Mary Frohlich applied to Teresa of Ávila. So, I'm using that because it applies to also what I learned at the monastery. So, let me just say that for all of us as human beings, we're seeking a meaningful life and that the meaning of our life always includes experience, but it's beyond experience.

More specifically, we seek meaning, and sensing we're in a relationship with a mystery greater than ourself, and the meaning of our life is found in fidelity to that relationship. Probably the most pervasive expression of this is love, that a life rich with love is rich with meaning. And that love, that relationship to this love, occurs in

the layered, interior richness and poverty of ourselves in ordinary human experiences, endowed with this meaning-seeking love.

Next, this process of meaning, seeking meaning in love, it starts to become religious when we begin to realize that the mystery greater than ourself, love, or it might be silence, or beauty, or truth, we begin to realize that the mystery greater than ourselves, say love, becomes religious when we realize it doesn't have about it the feeling of that which ever ends. There's intimations of its deathless nature. And furthermore, not only am I in a relationship with this mystery that never ends, but this mystery that never ends is in a relationship with me.

And it goes even deeper when the mysterious relationship with me is the reality of me. So here, God, then—this is where she says the Mansions begin—God starts becoming real to you at this level, see, that somehow God's relationship with me holds the meaning to who I am; that God's presence is presencing itself as my presence, and I'm in a relationship to this presence. It goes like that. And this grows in us in kind of an emerging awareness. Like it grows, we pray, we grow, we grow closer. And this is like discipleship. This is our faith that gets deeper, deeper, deeper. We're living as in a mirror darkly, we're living in this way. And this occurs in subjective, intentional consciousness. That is, I reflect upon it in prayer, and in intentionality, I seek to be ever more faithful to this love that I know through Christ is infinitely faithful to me.

And what happens is I get deeper and deeper into it. The point that I've arrived, that vantage point allows me to see even a deeper union and in intentional consciousness, I'm drawn towards it. And then coming into it, I see even a deeper union, even a deeper union. And then I realize this can't go on forever. And what I'm really searching for is ultimacy. That is, "You made our hearts for Thee, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee," St. Augustine says. What is my homecoming, where it's not endlessly finding an ever-deeper union, but how can I come home to rest in infinite union with the infinite that is drawing me to itself in that? And that's an understanding and deepening of faith, which comes through hope that when I die and pass through the veil of death, I'm going to go beyond all these mediations.

It won't be my intentions, my thoughts, my beliefs, but it will be an infinite union with the infinite mystery of God, his glory is my destiny. Mystical consciousness is where the intimations of glory starts when we're still on earth. It's the intimations of a oneness, and this is what absorption is. It's so amazing. We get very quiet because we intuit that to continue thinking would intrude upon something so amazing and delicate that's pouring itself into and giving itself to me. So, it's the first taste of celestial, unitive consciousness when still on earth, and I think that's the tone of it. For me, that's the tone of it. And so, she talks about it like the aperture widens back bigger and bigger and bigger, it gets more and more inclusive, more and more intimately rich, and more and more-- I become less and less distinct from the infinite mystery that's transforming into itself in time and space. And even, and I'm still here, but heaven's already started, provided I'm willing to die of love to the point that nothing's left of me but love. And so, she's saying, how do we conduct ourselves when

we're graced with this mysterious-- That's the teaching of all these mystics, really.

Kirsten Oates: And so, Jim, with that example, I was giving with the psychological experience of imagination--

Jim Finley: Yeah, yes, yes. So, then the psychological would be—and I say this as a psychologist—see that the ego, the self-reflective, intentional self, the ego, is real in its own right. Ego consciousness—my body is real, my mind is real, my emotions are real. They matter. And I seek to be grounded, and I seek wholeness in mind and body in self and others in the surrounding world. And when I lose that wholeness, I suffer. When I suffer, I seek wholeness, which means how can I be restored to the wholeness that was lost? And I seek to be restored to that. And if I need to, I try to get help from somebody. And this is mental health, but mental health is people try to—There are egos trained to help egos, to be reinstated in the loss, suffering that they've lost, internalized abandonment and trauma, and symptoms that embody suffering, depression, anxiety, addiction, and how can I be restored to psychological-grounded wholeness, in myself, relationship with other people. And, therefore, the psychological means it can be adequately understood at that level.

Kirsten Oates: And Jim, with the psychological, we use all the faculties of the—

Jim Finley: Those are the faculties.

Kirsten Oates: We call those the faculties of the soul. So, we'd use imagination. We use memory. We use the somatic body experience. We use—

Jim Finley: That's right. Yeah. And the powers of the soul use that faculty psychology you're mentioning, which is for her, Teresa, it's the thinking me and all that it thinks; the remembering me and all that it remembers; the desiring me and all that it desires; the emotion, feeling me and all that it feels; the somatic, bodily me and all my bodily sensations. It is experiential self-knowledge of the reality of myself that I'm real. I matter. I'm right here, like this, and that's like intrapersonal, interpersonal, psychological wellbeing. And how do we maintain that and heal from it? Therefore, it could be adequately understood in those terms.

It starts to become religious. It starts to become religious when you realize the inadequacy of having that understanding have the final say on who I am. I sense that although I am all of that, I'm not reduceable to the sum total of all of that. There are certain dimensions of reality, which is where faith begins, is that faith is that as in a mirror darkly and obscure certainty, that I'm in a relationship in that which transcends me. And that mystery is in a relationship with me. And by turning towards that, I find a fulfillment, a kind of a religious kind. This is not religion as dogma; that has its own place. But the etymology of the word religion—religio—ligio is like a ligature or a binding. See, you're to be rebound to the origin. That there is a mystery beyond me. The mystery beyond me is in relationship with me. I intuit the meaning of my life as found in that, and I turn towards it.

And so, different religious traditions throughout the world are modalities of this. So, for us, it's Christ, that we see in Christ God's presence in our life, one with us as precious in our broken humanity, knowing that through love, through a love of God and love of neighbor, love of self, we come home to God. And in that sense it's religious, that I'm in this relationship, personal relationship, with God who's personally in love with me, personally

creating me for love's sake alone, calling me to God through the realities of my day by day life up to the point of death and beyond into eternal life. That would be then religious consciousness, and it's concretized then in our judgments and our behaviors. How do I treat myself? How do I treat the person next to me? What's my understanding of the environment and society? How can I see through my own eyes what Christ saw in all that he saw? And then it's religious in that sense.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. I had a funny experience in therapy once where I was invited to imagine a scene in my life that, you know, was painful to me and to change the ending and have someone that abandoned me come back, and I just couldn't do it, you know? And I had no hope. I had no hope inside of me that that could ever be true. And I just cried, and I couldn't do it. But then the next morning in my meditation, without me making any effort whatsoever, I was taken back to the scene. And the person who abandoned me didn't come back, but like a Christ-like figure came back and sat with me. And it changed. It changed my pain about that experience. It really shifted something, like God was present with me in it. And I wonder if things like that--

Jim Finley: Yeah. By the way, this is where the psychological opens out upon the spiritual or the religious issues at this point because, see, this is what trauma is. The intensity of the trauma closes off experiential access to richer, deeper realms. It would contextualize the trauma, and you can't get past it. That's the traumatized state, but what happens in the willingness—and sometimes it requires someone to be there for and with us to make it safe to do this—is in the presence of someone we openly share with that person our inability to get past it, and we cry. But if we stay with it, with a kind of a courageous gentleness, all of a sudden, a new ending that was always there starts shining through, you know, the broken place.

And I think that's a little taste of experiential salvation because the whole mystery of the cross for us as Christians is the mystery of the cross is, you know, by human standards from the ego, when Jesus says, "Follow me," we realize he's taking us to the cross. This isn't looking good. You know what I mean? Like this is, it was a disaster. It was brutal. But what the resurrection is, is the new ending, which shines through all of death, which shines through all of brokenness. And we can begin to taste that experientially, that God has a presence that protects me from nothing, even as God unexplainably sustains me in all things. And I can learn to abide in that sustaining to give me the courage to face things. And that's where I think disciple, we were saying this in the third Mansion, too, second Mansion, this is where psychotherapy and spirituality touch each other. This is where we do our inner work, where the light of grace shines on the stuck places and trauma places. And how do we let all that open up and move on?

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. The amazing thing about that experience for me was the effort I was putting in, in the therapy session, and then the gift that was given the next morning, no effort required on my part just to be present to the gift of the image that arrived in my imagination.

Jim Finley: Yeah. And what I found in my own therapy because I was in years of therapy for severe trauma, I can remember just a lot of sessions like crying with the therapist. Really, I was experiencing in front of the person, what it felt like to be me in my brokenness. And I would often say to the therapist, "I'm not good at this. Like, I don't know how to do this."

You know what I mean? You don't know how to do it. And by persistently staying with it and listening to the layers of myself, all of a sudden out of that very brokenness, see the light shines in the darkness and the darkness grasps it not, but all the darkness can't grasp it. The light is shining within it. And then vulnerability starts shining through, and that's the miracle, really, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: I was really struck by a phrase you offered, "consciousness as consciousness." So, I think you related it to the intersubjectivity of the mystic.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: So, can you help us unpack that phrase?

Jim Finley: Yes. I want-- Let me use a word. This is what price, she uses as a scholar, she uses that word, God, she's referring to God as consciousness as God. God's not conscious. God's the word we use for the infinity of consciousness. And a word that comes closer for me is presence, that God's not present, God's infinite presence. And the infinite presence of God is presencing itself as the intimate immediacy of the gift of my presence. So, the seventh Mansion is a kind of transsubjective state of communion of a oneness, which is a capacity to be realized that lies ahead of me, but it's my destiny. So, what happens through the Mansions is we move closer and closer and closer to that innermost communal state of oneness. And instead of being a pure capacity through the grace of God, it begins to become actualized.

So, when it actualizes, it's a state of intersubjective communion in which you and God are less and less able to tell each other apart from each other, as God's destiny of sharing in the intimacy of God as infinitely as God shares in your nothingness without God or perpetual nothingness without God is that. So, that point of nothingness like that-- So, in the fourth Mansion, the unitive mystery of the seventh Mansion, radiates out and gives us intimations of that unitive love, which is the quiet. In the fifth Mansion, it becomes so pure, the reflective self can't be the basis for it. It goes into a deep sleep and the unity stands clear and free, like this. And then when you return, it washes back over the self that was transcended. Then in the sixth Mansion, that unity starts to happen to you while you're awake. See, that's the thing is that it has a much broader spectrum of being transformed into this unitive state. That is, our ultimate destiny is starting to be actualized now out of the very ground of the thinking you and all that it thinks, they remember you, they remember me. And also, the pain-filled you, the lost you, the confused you, all this is being somehow subsumed in some unexplainable way into this love that's taking you to itself, like this, and you learn to yield to it and move with it. And it's like that.

Kirsten Oates: That's really helpful. So, in the sixth Mansion, that's why the experience of pain is so much greater because you're actually experiencing the death of all these things that you've placed your meaning in all that--

Jim Finley: Yeah. And I think what's happening, too, another way I put it, this will refer back to Merton and the true self and the false self, is what's happening, it's in our finite ego consciousness that we're awakened to what transcends ego consciousness. It touches us, which is faith. But then in the awakening, there's these little moments of oneness, little tastes of oneness. Then what happens with the people Teresa's speaking mainly to, these fleeting tastes of oneness,

each time they dissipate, it leaves in our heart a longing to abide in the depths so fleetingly glimpsed. But in order for the abiding to occur, the finite ego has to accept the demise of its stance of having the final say in who we are. It's an unto-death struggle. We are dying, but we're dying of love. So, the ego has to learn to trust in God, to guide it's graced demise of having the final say, which we're not annihilated, but consummated in some way that's so beyond what the ego can imagine starts rushing into the soul.

That's the mystery. That's why we need to be so respectful of this process. You can't push the river. We need not to do violence to our-- That's why Teresa says we shouldn't desire this unitive state. It would be the ego desiring to become a mystical ego. We just want to do God's will; we want to walk the walk. We want to follow Christ. But then insofar as these interior dimensions start to unfold, we're turning to the grace of God to sustain us, to guide us because it's never other than the crest of the wave of where we are with respect to it, is always it.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, yes. Being present to our own lives. Yeah.

Jim Finley: Right at this moment is everything. [music]

Kirsten Oates: Turning to the Mystics will return in a moment.

Can I play with the words a little bit? So, consciousness as consciousness versus being conscious of something. So, I can say I'm conscious of God's love for me, but are you saying I might get to a point where I might be conscious as God's love for me?

Jim Finley: Yeah. It's like consciousness without an object. So, let's say you're not conscious of-- Let me put it another way. And this would be closer, actually, to absorption, but it helps. Let's say in the arms of the beloved, or at a sunset, or at an art museum, or a quiet hour at day's end, this awakening occurs, and you sit empty handed in a state of luminous amazement. So, you're not thinking of anything. It's like a vivid awareness of the intimacy. The intimate immediacy of the unexplainable is granting and giving itself to you, in and as your amazement of it. But there's no it to it. See, there's no otherness in it anymore.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: You know, the namaste, the Christ consciousness, I am that. And that's what's so amazing about it, see? And then I think when it passes, I will not play the cynic. I will not doubt my awakened heart. What a fool I am to worry so the way I sometimes do. And so, we ask to be liberated or healed from what hinders us from abiding in that oneness that from time to time we take, and she's offering guidance in that abiding.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Thank you. Turning to the seventh Mansion, what struck me about it is everything gets very simple again in the seventh Mansion. And it's quite powerful the way the sixth Mansion has all these intricacies, and then the seventh Mansion, we drop down into something very simple. Do you have that experience?

Jim Finley: Yes, I did. Let me tell you first what she's saying, how I understand this to grasp intuitively what she's saying. Let's say in the sixth Mansion, there are these raptures. Raptures are such an intensity of the purity of this oneness, that the reflective ego-self is so taken out of, so

beyond it. And it keeps washing back over the ego more and more and more awake, and all that's going on, but what starts to happen in the seventh Mansion, and this is where the rain falling from the river, the water from the rain falling into the river. You can't tell the water that fell from the sky from the water in the river. And that's you, this unitive consciousness, is this. Let's say in the innermost seventh Mansion is the point at which the infinite presence of God is presencing itself as the intimate immediacy of your presence.

This transsubjective, unitive state, which is in God, is your destiny, but it's also in the hidden center of your soul. And let's say as you get closer and closer to it, the love energy flowing out from that gets richer, richer, richer, richer. What starts to happen in the seventh Mansion is the faculties of the soul, the intellect, no longer gather around the ego graced with unitive experience. The intellect now gathers around the unitive experience that is at once you and God. So, it's your consciousness, but in some way, it's God's consciousness nondistinct from your consciousness. And likewise, it isn't just your intention or your desire, but it's somehow God's infinite desire merged in one with your desire. It isn't just your memory, but it's got— It isn't just your body, but it's somehow the godly nature of the mystery of your body embodied as your body, and this is why I think Mirabai Starr was pointing this out, too, in the Hindu tradition of the guru.

And I think in all of these traditions to be in the presence of such a person, you get the feeling you're in the presence of God, because they don't have an ego, or they do have an ego, but the self of myself, the ego-self, they realize itself to be divine. They also know that the ego of you is divine. You don't know it yet. So you're sitting in the presence of someone, and this is why a person seeks to be with such a person. You know, you seek to be in the presence of the person in whose presence you know you're in the presence of God as a kind of foreshadowing or a promise of a call that what happened to them might happen to you. And I think that's why people like Teresa, why the teachings are timeless here they are centuries later. And, because, really, it's the voice of God speaking through her on every sentence, it doesn't come from her, but through her, because she has that, it's like the voice of God echoing in her voice. That's the mystery of mystical Christianity, I think.

Kirsten Oates: And it helps give us hope and meaning in life and in death, hearing from people like that.

Jim Finley: It does. And then she says, also, the importance where the only question is, how can I be helpful? It keeps circling back around to the holiness of the ordinary. Now, since you know the divinity of the ordinary, you live in the divinity of the ordinary, in a community of divine, ordinary people: How can I be helpful? And it is that incarnate infinity experience that makes it trustworthy. It's trustworthy. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. And just a different approach to life, which you speak about so beautifully when you talk about the peace that is beyond circumstance, but they live in that sense of peace. So, the circumstances may not have changed at all, but the peace that they've found is--

Jim Finley: Exactly. I'll put it this way. Say, it's a peace that's not dependent on the outcome of the effort because it's a peace that's grounded in the holiness of the circumstance that I'm in. I seek it, but the circumstance that I'm in seeking it, I know itself to be holy, or even more, the circumstance in which I'm seeking it, I know to be ultimately God pouring herself out and giving herself to me in and as the circumstance of my seeking. It's like looking at it through

God's end of the telescope. Like, what's the divinity of the immediacy of me unexplainably?
It's that kind of thing.

Kirsten Oates: It's just a whole new approach.

Jim Finley: Yeah. It's God's approach.

Kirsten Oates: God's approach. That's beautiful. She gives a few examples of that state of union. So, the raindrops falling in the water, and you can't tell the drops from the water. She has the two rays of light coming in from two different windows, but joining in the center, and you can't tell which is coming from which, the idea of one flame versus the two candles joining in a flame, the idea of betrothal--

Jim Finley: It really is true. And I think another piece of this that's important, too, is let's say that the two flames burn separately—here's my flame, here's God's flame. They merge. Let's say in the seventh Mansion, they're merged habitually, but they're also merged habitually in that God's the infinity of their separateness, otherwise, the ego's reconstructing some goal again. So, somehow, here's another way of putting it. We were talking about it in an earlier Mansion, I think. When I say, "myself," there's the self of myself, which is a self that I worry about myself, I wonder about myself, I'm proud of myself. Then there's the my of myself. Like who's the me who sees me? Now, at an initial level, the me who sees me is the internalized self of myself, formed through past experiences. I internalize that. And I project that internalized past onto myself.

But the more I hold that in abeyance, which is the meditative stance, I begin to see that the my of myself is less and less distinct from the infinite presence of God presencing itself, and giving itself to me as the intimate immediacy of the my of myself, which we might say is the seventh Mansion. But then we see that God is infinitely giving itself, not just as the my of myself, but it's also giving herself as the self of myself. The incarnate situation is unexplainably holy. You know, that's where we're met in the context of what's happening. I'm with this person right now, going through this, and I somehow sense that God is sustaining me and giving herself, giving himself to me in and as the intimacy of this, the miraculous quality of what's happening right here.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I really appreciated, too, in the seventh Mansion, the way Teresa refers back to Scripture and for teachers like you, and Richard, and Teresa, the teaching comes out of the Gospel. And I think we can often forget that and lose that ground, but she brings it back around in the seventh Mansion really clearly.

Jim Finley: Yes, exactly. And she says this also in the seventh Mansion of Scripture is like mystical *Lectio Divina*. So, let's say everything Jesus says in the Gospels, the deathless presence of Jesus is interiorly saying it personally to us. Everything Jesus does for everyone, in the story, the deathless presence of Jesus is interiorly doing for us, helping us to realize that. So, what happens then, every scene in the Gospel is a mystical scene. When you really look very closely about what everything Jesus does, do you have eyes to see, and you do not, see, that everything Jesus says is like the breaking open of what hinders us from seeing the divinity of ourselves as we are? And, yeah, that's Christ consciousness.

Kirsten Oates: I'm going to read from Mirabai's book page 272. "And so one day, while Jesus Christ was

praying somewhere for his disciples—I'm not sure where—he declared that they were one with the Father and with him, just as Christ our Beloved is in the Father and the Father is in him. What greater love can there be than this? We are all included here. Our Beloved went on to say, 'I ask not for my disciples alone, but for all beings.' And then he said, 'I am in them.'”

Jim Finley: Yeah, exactly. See, the last discourse in the Gospel of John, the last supper, is so mystical this way, and, see, “Father, that they may be one even as we are one in the Trinitarian oneness that they may be in that oneness even now,” and that’s then all pervasively recognized everywhere. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Beautiful.

Jim Finley: I also would think for us with the pandemic and political strife, it’s so easy to get done in by that.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: And this is an antidote to that. Do you know what I mean? There’s the grounding of this all-pervasive oneness, unconquered and unconquerable, that pervades us that allows us to be present to it, and with it in a Christ-conscious way as the mystery of experiential salvation in the passage of time. And this is our turn, humanity has been here before many, many times, like the valley of tears, you know what I mean, it’s just episodic waves of grace and pain. And how can I, how can my mystical consciousness, which is beyond the darkness of this world, radicalize my presence in the darkness of this world; see, one, in myself in prayer, knowing that that oneness with God in prayer touches the whole world in ways I don’t understand and how it can translate into my attitudinal stance toward the world and people.

Kirsten Oates: I’m going to read from page 274, which I think is exactly what you were just talking about. “As I was saying, just because the soul sits in perpetual peace does not mean that the faculties of sense and reason do, or the passions. There are always wars going on in the other dwellings of the soul. There is no lack of trials and exhaustion. But these battles rarely have the power anymore to unseat the soul from her place of peace.”

Jim Finley: Exactly. Teresa talks about--

Kirsten Oates: That’s really the message of the seventh Mansion this idea that we’ve just been talking about.

Jim Finley: I think it is in a way. In other words, another way of saying it, to me, is that the seventh-Mansion realization is we’re not exempt from the human experience. Rather, we’re woven into the human experience, sensing the presence of God that permeates the suffering, even as I, myself. And now my suffering then is my empathic oneness with everyone who’s suffered throughout the whole world. My suffering doesn’t belong to me in my suffering, but I’m grounded in the love that sustains me in the suffering. And maybe, by the way I’m present to people, they might get a touch of that, that they not be so overwhelmed by the intensity of suffering, but sense that God’s with them. And I think these are dress rehearsals for death, really. I mean, people will come to acceptance in death. You know, you look into their face, you’ll look into the gate of heaven. It’s the divinity of death and it’s deathless, and we’re trying to habituate that paradoxical quality and share it with people

Kirsten Oates: In the seventh Mansion, she reminds us of humility as the key to all of this. And I think, that's partly what I'm taking away from sitting with Teresa is those hinges on the door. If we stay with those, that's the path of surrender, the type of surrender she's talking about.

Jim Finley: Well, I think it is, yes. I'll apply it to myself for a minute. You know, as I share these reflections of this—and here I am, seventy-seven years old, sitting here with Maureen's ashes next to me, kind of sensitized to these things and called to share it—and I sit out on the porch and look out at the water and the ocean. And I think about my life, like I could not have planned this if I tried. And I'm humbled by it. How can I claim that I've orchestrated this and the enigma and the riddle? And I think everyone's like that. There are certain moments, you're not ever humiliated, but endlessly humbled in that this enigmatic, unfolding richness cannot be attributed to your efforts to it. It may be true that without your efforts to be faithful to it, you might be more habitually grounded in the mystery of it. But it's also true that what we're being grounded in is the mystery that transcends our efforts. We can't attain it, but it attains us in our inability to attain it. And we realize this, we're finding in it a language for what's happening to us and how to be more habitually stabilized in that.

Kirsten Oates: Rather than kind of theological language, we find it in the language of our day-to-day life and those people around us.

Jim Finley: Exactly. Now, ideally, I mean, realistically speaking, you know the theologian is the one who prays. So, theological language, theos, this God language, it becomes poetic metaphors of this numinous quality expressed through stories and the theology. But the trouble is the ego co-opts it, as a set of fundamentalistic answers they can flip back and quote, and it closes off the mystery of it. You know, we're always subjected to that risk.

Kirsten Oates: It struck me how she offers the why in the seventh Mansion. She talks about why these unitive states are granted. And she says, "The greatest favor the Lord could offer us would be to give us the opportunity to emulate the life His beloved son lived. What I know for sure is that these blessings are intended to fortify our weakness so that we can follow in his footsteps and feel his suffering."

Jim Finley: Yes. See, Jesus saying that the bread that I offer is to do the will of the one who sent me. And I think for Jesus, we might put it this way, and this would be like the Christian language for the Buddhist understanding of it, of enlightenment, being enlightened, is that what Jesus is saying is that it's the ultimately trustworthy nature of the intimate immediacy of who I am in the present moment. It's ultimately trustworthy because it's ultimately Divine. It's ultimately being poured out as God incarnate as this moment. And so, what I'm called to do is see that my suffering arises, then I'm exiled from that. I've kind of split off into my own observing self, but the more I can be grounded in the intimate immediacy of the divinity of what's happening and then interiorly assent to it, because love is never forced, it's always offered, then that's how Jesus lived his whole life. So, even if you're hanging on the cross, "Father into your hands I commend my spirit, and that trust extends endlessly in all directions throughout the whole world, and we can learn to surrender over and be embodied in that surrender to God.

Kirsten Oates: She gives some examples of people from Scripture, but then also she mentioned St. Francis, as examples of people who were very surrendered over in their-- They changed their whole

life, but she also, for those of us who might not have that capacity, she also kind of warns us that focusing on a grand strategy isn't what's required. It's focusing on the community around us. That is the place where we should focus our attention.

Jim Finley: That's a big point. She says in the seventh Mansion, she says, sisters, we need to be very careful not to take the big picture. It's always how we live with the people we live with. It's like that little line from Peanuts that Charlie Brown, "I love humanity. It's people I can't stand." And so, there's this grand scale, but it's always grounded in the concreteness—what is love asking me in this situation, with this person? I'll put it another way too. You know, sometimes when we look back, there can be a mother, or a father, or grandmother, or grandfather, or a brother or sister, someone just grounded in the kind of the holiness of their basic goodness and their presence in the world. And often they're not aware of it. You know, they're not aware of it on purpose, but you're so grateful they're in your life, or you're so grateful for their fidelity to their own journey because their fidelity to their own journey shines light on yours. And I think, really, to me, that's what this is about, too, that we realize it's our turn. You know, we're to live this unassuming stance of surrender as precious in our brokenness and walk our walk kind of, this is how we all help each other.

Kirsten Oates: And to not contribute to suffering, but to contribute to the ease of suffering wherever we have the opportunity.

Jim Finley: That's right. How I put it is this: Having glimpsed the holiness of life, that such an awakened person is a respectful, nonviolent person. That is, they're a respectful, nurturing person to life wherever it occurs. They're aware to never deliberately cause suffering to themselves or another, or animals, sentient beings, the Earth and where there is suffering, they do their best to lighten the burden of that suffering as best they can, grounded in a peace that's not dependent on their ability to do it, knowing that the depth dimension of the effort, something of this love can shine through and touch people with something bigger than symptom reduction or something better than problem solution. And I think that's where this gets incarnate. It's social justice. It's incarnate as the moral order, or the corporal works of mercy. You know, it radicalizes that.

Kirsten Oates: Well, it's a type of social justice that holds this ground. It's a type of action in the world that holds this ground you're speaking of.

Jim Finley: Well, when we get to Eckhart, he said in one of the sermons, he says, "One who understands what I say about the just person understands everything I say." And we can use Dr. Martin Luther King here as our paradigm in our mind. He says, "The person who lives by justice no longer has a life of his own, or her own. They were given over to justice." But even though they have no life apart from their fidelity to justice, you sense in their presence, you're in the presence of someone who's found what all life is about. And the same is true with tenderness, or mercy, or love, or solitude, it's that.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. And that's where Teresa kind of focuses us at the end of her book on how do we live this way? And it seems like no matter what Mansion we might find ourselves in, there are opportunities to live that way.

Jim Finley: Yeah. And don't forget, too, another way of looking at it, let's say you spend your whole life,

you're reading all this, and you say, "I have to admit it. I've been in this first Mansion all my life and time's running out. If something doesn't kick in pretty quick, I'm gonna die a first-Mansion person." But if you died a first-Mansion person who learned from God not to trust in your ability to get to the next Mansion, but trust that God's endlessly and hopelessly in love with you as a first-Mansion person, and when you die in the twinkling of an eye, infinity is everywhere. When you die, if you're in the first Mansion, God's not going to say, "I'm sorry, seventh-Mansion people only." There's a big sign over the door. [laughter] We should always remember that.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. So, we don't need to be desperate to get there. It's coming our way at some point, yeah. In a way that sign is over the door: "Seventh-Mansion people only," but we'll all be seventh-Mansion people.

Jim Finley: Yeah. We already are ontologically seventh-Mansion people, which is the seventh Mansion. We're in the process of moving ever deeper towards the realization of that and sharing it. It's all-pervasively everywhere, really.

Kirsten Oates: It sounds so simple and yet it's so, so hard to find. But it feels through this teaching, we can get a little closer

Jim Finley: Exactly. I think another thing that's true of all these mystics is, see, in one sense, it's hard to find as long as you keep thinking there's something you're trying to find. The real issue, what Teresa's raising, is it's not so hard to find, it's hard to stop running from it.

Kirsten Oates: Wow.

Jim Finley: Because, really, it's the holiness of the intimate immediacy of sitting empty-handed without answers and being led by God. Can I be vulnerable and safe at the same time? Can I be empty-handed and filled with hope? Like, do you know what I mean? That's why it's right at the edge of spiritual direction, it's right at the edge of an interaction of sincerity.

Kirsten Oates: Of seeing where someone's running and how they can learn to be empty-handed.

Jim Finley: And that's the disadvantage of a book. If you could sit with her live and feel her presence live, I felt this way when I was with Merton, is that because the thing about a book, you get the feeling she's talking about a topic and, therefore, you can study the topic. And there is, at a secondary level, the topic; there's this infrastructure to this, but really the essence, the transcendental essence, is the vibrancy of your own soul called to this. And that's what shines out from every page, really.

Kirsten Oates: And that's the gift of sitting with you, Jim.

Jim Finley: Well, thank you so much.

Kirsten Oates: So, thank you for sitting with us again today, and helping us with these things.

Jim Finley: Thank you. And thanks for these dialogues with you, because I think they kind of embody the kind of sensitivities of listeners. It makes it more pervasively accessible. So, I think these dialogues is its own gift.

Kirsten Oates: I hope so. I hope it's helpful.

Jim Finley: I think it is. It helps me!

Kirsten Oates: Well. I'm winning, then.

Jim Finley: You are! Really! Seriously, of course.

Kirsten Oates: Well, thanks, Jim.

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