

Turning to the Mystics



Bonus: The Dark Night,
Depression and Suffering
with James Finley, feat. Mirabai Starr

Jim Finley: Greetings. I'm Jim Finley.

Kirsten Oates: And I'm Kirsten Oates.

Jim Finley: Welcome to Turning to the Mystics.

Kirsten Oates: Welcome everyone to Turning to the Mystics. We had so many wonderful questions from our audience that we decided to add in a bonus episode focused around particular topics of suffering, depression and the dark night. And I'm thrilled to say I'm here with Jim, but also Mirabai Starr is with us, who joined us in our introductory episode and has a deep history with St. John of the Cross. So welcome Jim. Welcome Mirabai.

Mirabai Starr: Thank you Kirsten.

Kirsten Oates: And we had a lot of people from the audience asking us to reflect on or asking you to reflect on the difference between depression and the dark night. And I've even heard it suggested that because depression wasn't a term back when St. John of the Cross was alive, did he just mean depression? If he was alive now, would he use the word depression instead of dark night? So, I'd love to just hear your reflections on what the difference might be between depression and a dark night.

Mirabai Starr: Hey Jim, do want me to just start by reading John's words about it?

Jim Finley: Yes, that would be lovely. I have a text in mind, but I bet you had the same one in mind. Go ahead and read it.

Mirabai Starr: Yeah, probably so. And then maybe you can just jump off of that.

Jim Finley: Okay.

Mirabai Starr: So, this is actually my translation, which is a little different than the classic but pretty literal. In the Dark Night of the Soul in chapter nine of book one, which is the night of scents, he says, "One of the signs that this dryness indicates the passage into purification is that while the soul finds no pleasure in the things of God, she does not find consolation in any created thing either." I'm sure this is what you picked out, too, Jim.

Mirabai Starr: "Since God has placed the soul in this dark night to dry up and purify her sensual thirst, He no longer allows her to taste sweetness or delight in anything whatsoever. You can tell that such aridity and bitterness is probably not the outcome of some recently committed transgression or imperfection because if it were, the sensory part of the soul would be drawn to indulge in something besides divine things. When the appetite relaxes into some imperfection, the soul immediately feels inclined toward that thing, either a little or a lot depending on how attached she has grown to it."

Mirabai Starr: "Another indication of the true purification is that the memory is carried constantly back to God with a depth of caring that is actually painful to the soul. She thinks that she must not be serving God, that she's backsliding because there's no sweetness left for her in divine things. It is clear that this kind of aversion is not the fruit of laziness or apathy. If it were, the soul would not care so deeply about whether or not she's being of service to God. There is

a significant difference between spiritual aridity and general apathy. Apathy is informed by laziness, a weakness of spiritual will, devoid of any concern about serving God. But purifying dryness holds within itself a longing, a passionate concern and grief about not serving God.”

Mirabai Starr: And then there’s just one little bit, an extra piece I think is relevant. He says, “Even though this aridity might be intensified by accompanying melancholia,” which I did translate as depression. Melancholia, which was kind of a generalized term for mental imbalance and all kinds of things, depression. “So, even though it might be accompanied by depression, it does not fail to have a purifying effect on the appetite. The soul is stripped of the distraction of all pleasures and our attention is centered on God alone. If it were merely a matter of fell humor, it would lead to nothing but disgust and the ruin of the soul’s nature. She would not be burning with the desires to serve God that accompanies true purifying dryness. At the same time that this purgative aridity evaporates all sweet juices, causing the sensory part of the soul to turn feeble and come crashing down, the spirit has quietly grown ready and strong.”

Jim Finley: Oh, what I’d like to do is I’d like to back up and speak in our language today about depression. And then see where our understanding of depression relates to or touches on the quote that Mirabai just read on John of the Cross. How do they... what’s the different language? What distinctions are we making here?

Jim Finley: So, I want to start first by saying first that depression is a psychological symptom that causes suffering. The characteristics of depression, clinical depression, what are vegetative signs, which is disturbance in sleep or appetite? Either you can’t get to sleep or you wake up in the middle of the night, can’t get back to sleep, or you want to sleep all the time. Or loss of appetite. You lose your appetite. You don’t want to eat anymore. One of the first things to ask someone with major depression is how much weight have you lost?

Jim Finley: So, there’s vegetated signs of being always tired, exhausted, can’t sleep. But there’s also an agitated depression. Restless, nervous energy. There’s also feelings of worthlessness and feelings of utter isolation and a loss of hope. You can’t see any way out of it. Depression can be mild, dysthymia, like a mild depression. It can be a depressive episode. Also, you can be genetically predisposed for depression. If you’re having a mother or father who’s depressed, you’re more likely, too, that you might be depressed.

Jim Finley: Major depression is serious because there’s a high correlation between major depression and suicide. It’s also directly related to other sabbatic disorders, cancer, heart disease and so on. So, it’s really the two main things are in people, in us, in our vulnerability. Some carry it mainly as anxiety, and some carry it mainly as depression.

Jim Finley: So, also sometimes it’s resulted from unprocessed trauma. Can cause depression. It can also result from unprocessed grieving. It was a major loss and you don’t go through the bereavement process, and you get stuck in a depressive state. So this is, it’s kind of a big thing a person has to like that.

Jim Finley: Another way of looking at it, to a broad way, it’s a response to loss. Loss of wholeness, loss of intimacy, loss of hope, loss of feeling normal like that, and you can’t shake it. You can’t. And so then there’s different treatment modalities for depression. So let’s say that’s clinical

depression for us. I think a place where it most directly also meets St. John of the Cross then, because he didn't use this kind of language, is when he's giving the three signs of you're being drawn to the dark night in prayer, and he said at Mt. Carmel, of two on the three signs. He's going to three signs of the dark night, and he says you have to also be sure, this as how it's relating to the quote that Mirabai read, whether this is the dark night or not.

Jim Finley: He said, "Because maybe it could have another cause. One could be lack of fidelity to God or to commitments in your life." And so he's maybe that's the reason it's not going well. When you present your gift to the altar, put it down. Go make amends with your brother, your sister. Come back. The gift will go better. And so you check it out. You go, no more sinful than usual. I don't think that's it. I'm still, it's just me. Then he says the second one is this, you could have a humor in your bile or in your brain, and that's clinical you see. And therefore what you need is a walk around the block, a back rub, a cup of tea. See what you can do to kind of shake it loose.

Jim Finley: And so, it touches and so teasing it out and discerning because then we get into the Dark Night for John of the Cross in the text that Mirabai led. Because now it has to do I think most directly for John of the Cross it's this way, it's the one, it's the loss of a customary sense of the felt presence of God in your life. It goes even deeper for John of the Cross in that you were given a touch of oneness. That is you were given, there was a moment of unmediated oneness with God that was so sweet or so celestial that having tasted it, life without it is forever incomplete. And you're powerless by your own finite abilities to consummate the longing.

Jim Finley: So it's a kind of a sweet gift, which gives rise to self-doubting. So in the text that Mirabai led, he's trying to help people and tell them the spiritual direction. Let's tease out things here and make some distinctions like this. So, that would be my response. Yeah.

Jim Finley: By the way, too, you could be both. You could be in the dark night and depressed. Lucky you. Double header. By the way, if you were prone to depression and going through the dark night, could your dark night trigger your depression? It could. But you don't give someone in the dark night Prozac. And you tell someone in major depression to read John of the Cross. So we're talking about the discernment, how are the psychological and spiritual touch each other in our life, yeah. Go ahead, Mirabai. I'm sorry. I get [inaudible 00:10:45].

Mirabai Starr: No, no, that's beautiful. And there's a book I love called "A Hell of Mercy" by Tim Farrington that, it's a very volume and it's a beautiful... I was going to say distinction, but it isn't. It's a beautiful blending of the gifts of depression and the Dark Night of the Soul and the way they connect. So I highly recommend it. "A Hell of Mercy, A Meditation on Depression and the Dark Night of the Soul" by Tim Farrington.

Mirabai Starr: I was just thinking, Jim, about discernment as you were speaking and how Teresa of Avila, too, in "The Book of My Life," which is really a response to the Inquisition insisting that she document all of her kind of unorthodox visions and voices and locutions and so on. And her response to the investigation was more or less you

need not bother, dudes, investigating me because I have already subjected all of my experiences, each one of them, to the laser of my own inquiry process. She had a very fine, very discerning mind. And she was always examining all of her experiences asking herself the question, is this is a gift from God? Is it a trick of the devil? Or is it an artifact of melancholia? Or in other words, mental imbalance.

Mirabai Starr: And she was willing, like a good Buddhist, to be true to whatever the answer was. But she used a criterion, as you know Jim, to determine whether or not her experiences were gifts from God or manifestations of some kind of imbalance. And that was did it enlarge her heart with a greater capacity to love God? And if it did, that was her answer. This was a gift from God. And I think John is saying the same thing in this passage that I read from *The Dark Night of the Soul*. Tell me if you think this is resonant, and that is that the sign of a dark night versus mental illness is that it is accompanied by a deep longing. A deep longing for God, a passion for God, even. And it's painful, but it has this underlying sweetness that you speak about, Jim.

Jim Finley: I like too, John of the Cross says and Teresa says this too about the longing, the aridity. She said who you are in this powerlessness to consummate these longings, which deepens your dependency on God, who's the author of these longings, drawing you out beyond the contours of your own powers. And she says at one level, she says that if you could choose, and she said you can't. But if you could choose to go back to the good old days when you were so holy, everything was fine, or this aridity, you'd choose the aridity because there's an unmet depth of solace, or an inexpressible depth of a sustaining, guiding intimacy that's leading you on in ways you don't understand, and you can feel the immensity of it, which requires you accepting your poverty to understand because your ability is finite. And so you're entrusting yourself over to being led, unexplainably through this purifying process. And then trusting it or reach a tipping point for effulgence of that blessedness will come kind of rolling through you after you've been weened off your dependency on circling back for finite affirmations in the face of this infinite love that's taking you to itself.

Mirabai Starr: And it seems that that's such a beautiful message for all of us, especially in these uncertain times that even though we're conditioned to tense up against uncertainty and aridity and emptiness, we are also invited to just be with it. If we can actually show up for it and not run away, that's when we get to at least access that effulgence you speak of. But with our culture, everything, even religion conditions us to push it away.

Jim Finley: Want to share something here, too, where also this touches suffering. And for us, like the pandemic, and I want to say it also just working with trauma, people in trauma. I think when people are in the midst of trauma, the person working with the person's always trying to help them keep a certain balance. One, safety first. We're talking about how to feel grounded enough that you're not at risk in your life here. There's a stability and you're cultivating inner resources to cope with what's going on. Resources to deal with what you need to deal with. There's all of that. There's all of that.

Jim Finley: Secondly, along with it is realizing that in the process, you're not in charge. That is

you can not in some clever way just walk right through it. Somehow, you got to lean into it and let it unfold moment by moment, dream by dream, tears by tears, sharing by sharing. And it sifts you like wheat. If you stay with the process, you realize something's happening to you.

Jim Finley: Furthermore, as you go through the process, you realize an unexpected grace is welling up out of the painful journey and you're learning something about compassion, about grace, about an inner peace not dependent on the outcome of our efforts, a tender-heartedness. And so, you end up getting more than you bargained for in the spiritual fruits of the healing journey. You come away with something that no one can ever take away from you.

Mirabai Starr: Yes.

Jim Finley: Turning to the Mystics will continue in a moment.

Kirsten Oates: Can I ask a question about what the dark night might feel like in the body? So Jim, you were talking about very clear signs of depression, like that sped up anxious feeling or the slowed down, tired feeling. Does the dark night have sensations like that? Or is it different?

Jim Finley: I'll answer. For me, first of all, I tend to be very calm by nature. And I tend to be very at peace in my body by nature. I tend to be just quietly present in my body. And I find then that when I pray, there's the deepening of that kind of bodily presence, like a bodily presence resting in this presence, like relaxing into it. No I find that sometimes when I try to get quiet and rest in that, I can't find my way to the rest because I'm agitated in my stomach or sometimes I feel it in my [inaudible 00:18:41] my traumas being retriggered again by something that just happened or something has a hold of me and I can't find my way to resting in a bodily simplicity in the presence of God and this agita like that.

Jim Finley: And I can also know that it can trigger symptoms to bodily pain, or nausea, or dizziness. It really, it's very personal how this happens. And it could either be from the depression or the anxiety, but also it could also be somatic layers of the dark night, and just leaning into it and letting it drain out. Staying with it very patiently. Don't panic. Just lean into it and wait and trust yourself and stay open. That kind of thing. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: And Jim, in that, it feels like you're longing for God in a way has stabilized. Does that change, that sense of longing Mirabai was pointing to?

Jim Finley: Yeah. I don't know how to explain it. I would say this. I'll just put it this way because I've been reading [inaudible 00:19:55] getting ready for Conspire and everything, is I guess how I would put it is this. I think for a long time, our longings are an intentional consciousness, and reflected intentional consciousness. I know this longing for a union that I know is real because I've experienced it. There's a certain point, I think, where you tend to realize that your longing is an echo of God's infinite longing for you. And God is somehow the infinity of the longing itself.

Jim Finley: And so the longing itself, deeply accepted, is the divinity of the consummation of those longings. I think it's that way. It's like in a certain sense the longing vanishes because nothing's missing. In the sense in which even if everything is missing, God's the infinity of all that missingness, God the sum of. And yet in my human level, if something's missing, it's

missing. I don't like it. There's a lot of things missing that I don't care for. It's hard.

Jim Finley: But I know that somehow there's a certain depth dimension of being unexplainably sustained in that which is missing that teaches me and guides me and helps me. And it's kind of like that for me, I guess.

Kirsten Oates: That's helpful to hear, Jim. Thank you for sharing that.

Jim Finley: How about you, Mirabai? How are you on register or the sense of...?

Mirabai Starr: Well, my namesake, Mirabai, the 16th century bhakti devotional poet from India, was all about longing. Longing for Krishna, the god of love. And so, it's in my bones. And the Song of Songs has always, as it did for John of the Cross, just echoed in every chamber of my own being. So longing is my middle name and my first name, but I think, you know I just turned 60. And I feel like it's more like that John O'Donohue poem about grief. When John O'Donohue talks about... I can't remember. I'm paraphrasing, but it's like at first grief is a raging fire. But eventually, it becomes a warm hearth.

Mirabai Starr: So first it burns you and it's dangerous. But eventually it becomes a source of comfort and completeness even. And I think that's my relationship with longing for God now. It's a hearth by which I take refuge.

Jim Finley: Yeah. You're the Irish to it. So now I love it on cloudy days here at the beach. And there's a kind of a lonely, cloudy, unrelentingly slow emptiness that has about at a certain, almost eternal quality to it, like homecoming. Me too, yeah. It's like that. It's true.

Kirsten Oates: Well, just going back to this term you used, discernment, and particularly around suffering. I know we use the term discernment a lot of times when we feel like we're making a decision and discerning something, but so in discerning around suffering, I guess we're trying to discern how to be with our suffering. Is that what they're referring to when you're talking about discernment in relation to this kind of thing?

Jim Finley: I'll go first. I'll tell you what comes to mind. I'll tell you what comes to mind for me about suffering. I think this is key to the traditions really, too, is that, see in a way, we could say that these mystical realizations of oneness, it really does transcend the darkness of this world, in the midst of the darkness of this world. You know what I mean? There's a kind of an unexplainable, like the eternality, the fleetingness of everything intimately realized like that on to death and beyond. There's that.

Jim Finley: And because it is that, we could be tempted to think that once I find it, I'll fly away and I'm out of here. I'll catch you later on the other side. I'm crossing over and I did my thing, and see you over there later. But see, the opposite is the case because one of the marks of the authenticity of this infinite union with the infinite love of God is that we join God in circling back around to be present to the hurting world in a more radicalized way, which is Christ, see.

Jim Finley: So how can I learn to touch the hurting places with love until nothing is left but love? In myself, my own unfinished suffering that I carry in myself. I'm just a human being. In the people of the earth, there's a heightened... and this is the relationship between mystical

union and the corporal works of mercy. Between mystical union is social justice. Between mystical union and going on and putting oneself in the place of the suffering other because we know they're not other because we're siblings of the infinite. And the world lays a claim on our heart and ways that we're providentially called to live that out in our situation. So I think this is a big question to suffering in the world and being in present to suffering.

Mirabai Starr: I think one of the hallmarks of the dark night is it strips us. It has that... I don't know, powerful, potent quality of just melting all of the extraneous concerns that don't actually matter and reprioritizing what does. And so, when we actually enter into that stripped down state is when I think we discover our essential interconnectedness with all that is and each other and the urge, the natural outflow of that to be of service, to help alleviate suffering in the world. It doesn't come from some kind of charitable notion of dispensing alms to the poor other, but rather is an organic response to the recognition of our essential oneness and interdependence. It's a direct experience. It's not an intellectual notion.

Jim Finley: I like in the Dark Night where he's talking about the faults of beginners, takes the seven capital sins he goes through. And one of the faults of beginners is this idea of loving penances, like a chosen path. He said where the true penance is dying to everything but this love. And so having died to everything but this love, you're moved from within. You know what I mean? You can see it in the eyes of the suffering other, and your heart is so opened up by this love. You're so moved by the look in their eyes or you can hear it in their voice when they talk, where you know it so well that the love moves you to be there for and with them within the context of your own limitations and so on. So it's, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: That's beautiful. That's helpful so that on the other side of the dark night is this sense of being connected in the way God's connected to all beings and to move towards suffering rather than away.

Jim Finley: Yeah. We could even say the dark, [inaudible 00:28:14] Mirabai about this purification process. What the dark night does is it heals us from the pervasive disconnectedness that leaves us unable to realize the infinite unity between God, ourselves, others, the earth, and all living things. The dark night heals us from the imagined separateness as having the final say in who we are. And as we're stripped of those internalized fragments, we're born into this oneness now.

Kirsten Oates: Do you have a sense of how long a dark night might last for someone? Is there a timeline?

Jim Finley: What do you think, Mirabai? What would your...

Mirabai Starr: People ask me that a lot. And so, in some ways that I haven't quite sorted out, I feel like the very question is a kind of symptom of the patriarchy. Things need to fit into tidy categories and wham, bam, did your dark night. Check it off the list and we're fine. And then I feel, and that's absolutely contrary to the very essence of the dark night of the soul, which is about embracing radical unknowingness, right? And so, there is just like with grieving, there is no timeframe for the grieving process. In many ways, it lasts your whole life. And but you integrate it more and more. It's like learning to surf with the amputation.

Mirabai Starr: And I feel like with the dark night, it's not a one time deal. That if we're blessed and fortunate, we will experience multiple dark nights of our souls because we're not... most of

us are not perfected beings like a satguru in India or a saint in the Roman Catholic tradition. We are these glorious messes of humanity that are continually evolving and changing. And our capacity I think grows greater and greater for holding uncertainty and unknowingness and periods of deep aridity that where we can't know what's going on like the caterpillar inside the cocoon. And we have the multiple cocoon experiences in our lives. And we have multiple transfigurations.

Mirabai Starr: And I recently heard about when the butterfly emerges from the cocoon, it's very awkward at first. It's kind of stumbling around with these things on its back going what? What do I do with these? And I think that's really true about the spiritual life. It's the series of crucifixions and resurrections and finding our new way. And these multiple dark nights where we just get to melt into the not-knowingness, and then emerge bigger. And then here it comes again. I'm going through a kind of external, circumstantial period of grave uncertainty right now. And it's like here we are again. I've been here before, but this new. This is a new space, but I know just enough to know that I know nothing, and to be... to yield to that for now. Is that helpful at all?

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Oh, yes.

Jim Finley: Yeah, very much so. Yes. Yeah, I would say, too, you know that kind of echoing what Mirabai just said, I guess. That's why I like the saying that coming to me that a butterfly's not a caterpillar with wings. It'd never get off the ground. And the resurrection's not the resuscitation of a corpse, see. And so, when the butterfly first emerges, it's disoriented in its butterflyness, to which it is not accustomed. Because we don't expect the metamorphosis to be so far reaching like this.

Jim Finley: And so there's that. There clearly is that. But also, there is that in us that is in a way has emerged or is emerging as the butterfly. And there's still that in us that's still a caterpillar. And the part that is the butterfly, it transcends earth-bound caterpillar must endlessly circle back around to be there for and with the caterpillar because we're just a human being. And when we're scared, we're really scared. And when we're alone, we're really alone. If it's uncertain.

Jim Finley: And not everything turns out well by human standards. Matter of fact, it often doesn't. But even if it doesn't turn out well by human standards, once you know I've been here before, that there's a depth sustaining me and permeating me through and through and through and through that renders irrelevant how it's going to turn out. And I know that in my heart, even though in my caterpillarness, I'm scared. And that's important because we're not exempt from the human situation. That unites us with humanity, really. We're one with the suffering, that our suffering doesn't belong to us. We're woven into each other in our blessed suffering and freedom. So, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: So, I'm hearing that the dark night is not a one off event. It's once you're kind of in that mode, it's a cyclical deepening potentially.

Jim Finley: I would say that the dark night is a poetic metaphor for a transformation of a perpetual dying to everything less than love in all those dark places along the way. And it has its own moments. There's series of dark. There's episodic dark nights that are situational. Both

psychologically, but they could also trigger the loss of the presence of God because we're afraid. It can reactivate that again. And there's that.

Jim Finley: And then there's a bigger picture that our whole life on this earth is one long dark night, and the light is already dawning in our hearts and has from the very first moment we were born. And you know what I mean? It's a metaphor. It's an endlessly evocative metaphor of the divinization of the immediacy of ourselves as we are and we're helping each other find our way.

Mirabai Starr: And remember, John of the Cross was speaking of the paradox of the radiant darkness, right?

Jim Finley: Yeah, yeah.

Mirabai Starr: It's the brilliant light that blinds our ordinary faculties.

Jim Finley: That's right.

Mirabai Starr: And we hopefully experience it as darkness. So you can look at it as these periods of inflowing radiance.

Jim Finley: That's right, yeah.

Mirabai Starr: Yeah, that the Beloved knows we're ready for that bigger experience of love.

Jim Finley: That's true. He does. He does say that. And that's why I think in a way, you know how you can go into a dark room. You can't see anything. Then your eyes adjust to the dark?

Mirabai Starr: Yes.

Jim Finley: And your eyes kind of, your finite eyes are blinded by this light, the dark night. But really, it's an infinite light that's blinding your finite eyes. But when you give up, you learn to let go of resisting it, see, and let it have its way with you, you learn to see in the dark, which is really infinite light. You're illumined within yourself.

Mirabai Starr: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: So, what I'm hearing from the two of you today is just immolation to suffering. There is a love beyond our suffering that we can find in our lives, but if people are listening and they're in a phase of suffering, even not being able to reach that love at the moment or feeling the depth of the suffering that even the absence of the love is a reflection of that love still being present. And what St. John of the Cross is teaching us is we can live in hope that that love is real.

Mirabai Starr: You can hope and you also must abandon all hope as the philosopher said. And it's very subtle and delicate as Jim has so... I've been listening to this podcast. And as Jim has beautifully spoken about for John of the Cross, this whole mystical adventure is characterized in many ways by subtlety and delicacy. It sounds so much more dramatic than it is, but that there is what he calls this ineffable sweetness that begins to bubble up from basically the scorched ground of our souls when we experience the periods of suffering.

Mirabai Starr: And so that you have to be quiet enough and still enough to be able to access that incredibly delicate, subtle sweetness that is that love, Kirsten, that you're referring to that is underlying the fire of our suffering. If we could only just quietly give it our ascent.

Jim Finley: That's true. That's right.

Mirabai Starr: To be enthusiastic about it.

Jim Finley: That's true. That or if you are, you're just having a manic episode. You know what I mean? Another thought I thought, too, is that look at what you've learned at this phase in your life about things that matter most, and a lot of it probably came out of times of suffering. That when you're shooting the rapids and going through it, not to romanticize it or make light of it. It's real. Some of it can be very regrettable, really. But as you come away from it, although there was immense loss, it wasn't just loss.

Mirabai Starr: Right.

Jim Finley: But out of the loss, you were granted something you never would've known had you not. And I also think that helps with our present losses to know that I'm just in the current phase of a loss that has within it a light that hasn't yet appeared yet, and I can learn to trust the rhythms of the process.

Jim Finley: I also think it's important when we're with someone who's suffering, we have to really help them to slow down and we have to listen to them to help them listen to themselves so they don't skim over the depths of the pain they're trying to share. Because the real pain is depth deprivation. They're deprived of the depth that's unexplainable, sustaining them in their hurt, they're trying to find the words to say it. There's something intimate about these encounters with ourselves in silence or with another person, and why we're so grateful when there's someone in our life that hears us. Someone in our life that is there for us. Then we can return the favor.

Kirsten Oates: And I have to keep being reminded over and over, this mystical path where it's the very fine balance between effort and grace, and how in the end, it's all grace, and the effort can't get us there.

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: And how to give over to that pathway.

Jim Finley: Yeah, it's true. The effort won't get you there, but without the effort, you won't get there.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, true.

Jim Finley: You were granted a taste of it without effort, but unless you freely choose to honor the longings, the unconsummated longings, and lean into it and seek this John of the Cross, to seek it with all your heart. And so, those two are always in a kind of an alchemy with each other.

Mirabai Starr: Trust in Allah and tie your camel.

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: Say that again, Mirabai.

Mirabai Starr: Yeah. Trust in Allah and tie your camel.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, yes. Wonderful. Well, any last thoughts on this question of suffering what the dark night is teaching us about suffering and discernment?

Mirabai Starr: I just want to say that I know that these questions are arising in you all from experiences of deep suffering. And so, I just want to express my love and care to you as you are navigating whatever turbulence and sorrow and loss and fear that you may be going through right now. So, deep bow to you and much love.

Jim Finley: And I'd say, too, here I'll say this in tandem with Mirabai and with Kirsten also, is that I've been so touched by the questions and responses to this reading. And how I get to know it is for so many years, I was traveling around leading silent contemplative retreats around the United States and Canada and Europe several times. And you can feel that communal longing in the room. And you can feel the communal sincerity of people trying to honor the stirrings of something. They don't know where to go with it. And there was a sweet suffering, how do I consummate it? I need help.

Jim Finley: But in the mixture of it is the suffering of the painful things that can happen to us sometimes. Really vile... just working with trauma. The world's a very... painful things happen. And so I also sense in your questions, there's just, you could just feel the depths of your lives. As human beings, we're all interconnected. We're all in this together like this. Makes it such a gift that we can share like this, so.

Kirsten Oates: Well, thank you Jim and thank you Mirabai. And I'm sure our listeners will be thrilled to have had this little extra time reflecting on St. John of the Cross and a little bonus to the season. So thank you for your time today.

Mirabai Starr: Thank you Kirsten for creating the container for it. And Jim, it's always such a joy to be with you.

Jim Finley: Mutual.

Mirabai Starr: Thank you.

Jim Finley: Kinship, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you for listening to this episode of Turning to the Mystics, a podcast created by the Center for Action and Contemplation. We'll see you again soon.