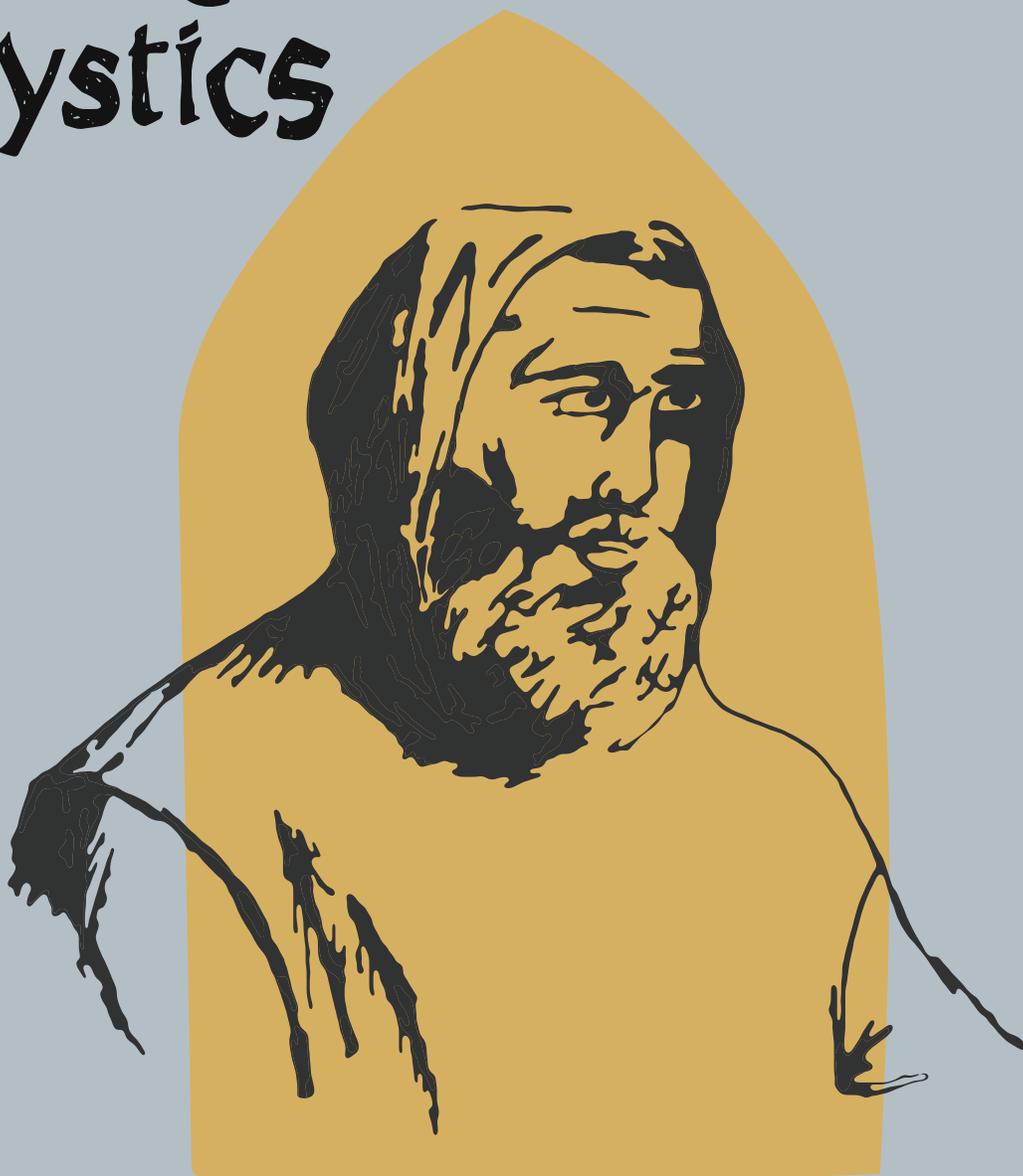


Turning to the Mystics



Guigo II

Turning to Guigo II
with James Finley

Jim Finley: Greetings. I'm Jim Finley. Welcome to Turning to the Mystics.

Kirsten Oates: Welcome, everyone to Season 4 of Turning to the Mystics. I'm so excited to be back with the team Corey in the background. Jim, welcome back, Season 4.

Jim Finley: Very nice. Lovely. So grateful.

Kirsten: This episode is an introduction to the season. We're going to have a little dialogue about the season ahead. My first question to you, Jim is, who is our next mystic, and why did you choose them?

Jim Finley: Yes. The next mystic in our series is Guigo II. Guigo II was a monk who lived in France in the 12th century. The work of his that we'll be looking at is called A Ladder of Monks. It's a letter that he wrote as a monk, a Prior of a monastic monastery to a friend of his who was Prior of a monastic monastery.

These are two monks corresponding with each other. Guigo II is not nearly as well known as the mystics we've looked at so far, so Thomas Merton, St. John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila. He's also not as well known as the mystics we'll be looking at next, the anonymous author of the Cloud of Unknowing, Julian of Norwich, and Meister Eckhart, but I'm choosing him because one, he's among the mystics that have been personally helpful to me.

Also because in this very short work, it's really a letter, 17 pages, he gets very clear, insightful guidelines for the practice of Lectio Divina, and for the practice of discursive meditation, and for the practice of prayer, and for contemplation.

What we'll be doing in the first session, we'll be speaking next time alone when I start this work is I'll be experientially-- He sees each of these ways to pray, Lectio Divina, he sees them as rungs of a ladder to heaven. It's a ladder that reaches from Earth to Heaven has four rungs. Each rung is a grace state of consciousness.

Lectio Divina is a grace state of consciousness that we can actively choose to cultivate that puts us into intimate awareness of God's presence in our life.

Then how that evolves in discursive meditation, the inner dialogue with God, which evolves into prayer, which is desire, to "God help me with this." Then those three rungs are in effect similar to Teresa of Avila, the first three mansions of the interior castle, that it's really building the foundations of psychological spiritual maturity and discipleship, and how we can...

What I want to do is, I want to walk through his insights and I want to practice it out loud, each one, the way I practice it. Hopefully, it'll help those listening, it might have them in their own practice, in the actual practice.

In the next session, we'll dialogue about it, you and I will dialogue to their questions. Then the second talk is all going to be on contemplation, which is mystical contemplation. This is similar, it corresponds to where Teresa is with the beginning of the fourth mansion. You realize your heart's being enlarged to divine proportions, or for John of the Cross, passage through a dark night, or for Merton, this infused contemplation into the summit of the soul.

This is very critical for these mystics on how to discern that this is happening to you.

We'll see his insights, how to discern it's happening, and how to respond so we can cooperate with it, and have a dialogue about that with students.

Then lastly, we'll look at his insights for the Path, like day-by-day life until death. What does it look like to walk this walk, illumined this interior way, and ways to apply it in practical ways to our daily life? That's the outline and who he is and what he is.

What I want to do here with you is share something that the person is important to me. I think it's relevant. Also, I think it's not obvious so I'd like to share it. We can dialogue a little bit, I've moot some examples. What's interesting is some of these mystic teach-- that in the Catholic tradition of Christianity, there are religious communities, prayer, and these active orders, these communities express their commitment to God in a ministry.

Richard Rohr, for example, is a Franciscan so there's a Franciscan ministry, the Spirit of St. Francis in serving parishes and education and service to the poor and so on.

The Jesuits, they call it as a vocation, they commit their commitment to God, parishes, and so on, but mainly through education. The Dominicans, their commitment to God, the care of souls to preaching, the order of preachers in ministry, in higher education, and so on. They have these orders.

What you also have in the Catholic Church are cloistered orders. Cloistered orders are communities of men and women seeking God and they have no active ministry. They never leave the monastery. They don't teach. They don't serve the poor. They don't serve parishes. They don't actively help with anything. Not only that, they make a commitment to stay there and not leave. Not only that, no one's allowed in.

They encourage visitors, Benedict says accept visitors as Christ, but they retreat and stay separate from the community. Really, they live a cloistered hidden life seeking God, and it's to bear witness to God as the ultimate reality of all of life, they bear witness to that. They believe that by their hidden fidelity that reaches out and touches the world in ways we don't understand.

Thomas Merton, at 28 years old, he entered a cloistered community under the Trappist, the Cistercian Order, and he wrote all of his books out of a cloistered monastery. When I read his books in high school, I entered that monastery, and I lived as a cloistered monk for almost six years. Most of what I'm sharing with you here was first given to me in this cloistered, hidden life.

Saint Teresa of Avila was cloistered, the Carmelite Sisters are cloistered, she never left the Carmelites. Frances, the Poor Clares are cloistered Franciscan nuns of no active ministry. Julian of Norwich was a recluse. She lived and died in her hermitage. We don't live in a monastery. We're not cloistered. There might be some cloistered people are listening to these podcasts, but most of us are out here.

When I left the monastery-- See how can I live the way I lived in the monastery, contemplatively seeking God? How can I live it out here where we live with our families and

our commitments, and our schedules and the pace of things and television and the internet? How can I live this contemplative way of life out here? What's the common bond of our life out here, in which what the monks in the cloistered nuns find we can learn out here to find in ourselves? Because the contemplative life is not dependent on the monastic life that nurtures and protects it.

The contemplative life is a dowry of our being, instilled in us by God in our capacity to desire union with God. I'd like to talk about this here a little bit with you. On an insight, it's not trying to reach some lofty goal for this far off, but how to be intimately surprised by what's unexplainably already present but we keep missing it because we walk right past it. See, we're trying to calibrate our heart to slow down enough to see the flow of divinity like that. I think this is potentially helpful in understanding this.

Kirsten: Oh, that sounds amazing. I do wonder if as a starting point, it would be helpful to have a better sense of Guigo's life and this idea of cloistered monasticism. You said he was a Carthusian?

Jim Finley: Yes. Let's clarify first the Carthusian Order, and then these other cloistered, and then his daily life. I'll share by my daily life in the monastery because I know about their life, but I don't have-- didn't live this very similar is among these cloistered orders-- I mean, there's the Cistercians, Trappists that Merton was, that I was in. There is Cenobitic order, meaning they live in community inside. Then there's also the Camaldolese Monks. There are hermits who live in community. They gather each day for Eucharist and to chant some of the songs.

Otherwise, each monk lives in his own little hermitage with a walled-in garden. They spend almost all their whole life alone in silence.

The Carthusians, founded by St. Bruno were hermits. Guigo was a Carthusian hermit. He is writing a letter to another Carthusian hermit, who was his friend, who was Prior of another community of hermits.

What's interesting about the Carthusians is when St. John of the Cross was getting ordained, he was planning to leave the Carmels and become a Carthusian. Theresa of Avila met him and asked him not to do it. Would he help her reform the Carmel to more contemplative and he stayed.

Thomas Merton tried to leave the Trappists to become a Carthusian. The Abbot wrote to Rome and stopped it. He said it would be his scandal and I think really didn't want to lose the royalties from Merton's books. I don't know. [laughter]

Merton had a deep attraction for the Carthusians.

Kirsten: What was drawing both of those, John of the Cross and Merton to it?

Jim Finley: I think it was is this. I was talking once with Thomas Merton in spiritual direction. We were having this talk about how our hidden life there, like it, reaches out and touches the world like a contemplative ministry to the world, just as Christ's death on

the cross to this state ministers, to the whole world, this graced interconnectedness.

He said, "But that's not the deepest thing about our life here, cloistered." He said the deepest thing is this is a place where someone can give themselves completely to God. On his ordination card with Elijah, he says he walked with God and was seen no more because God took him. Then he felt very called to be taken by God, hiddenly by that.

The Carthusians are a very radical expression of that. He was drawn to that. John of the Cross was drawn to it. What we're looking at is how can we be radically drawn to a boundary-less hiddenness in the midst of our daily life. There's something hidden and revealed to us in a hidden way. That's the very touchstone of this path that we're exploring. That's why they were drawn to it, I think.

Kirsten: It's the difference between the cloistered monastery with no ministry and then the hermit, the Carthusian, like hermitage, is it that you just live alone versus living in a community?

Jim Finley: Yes. When I was there, the idea would be part of the discipline of the life is everything you did, you did together. When the bell rang at 2:30 in the morning, you get up for Psalms, it wasn't an option to sleep in, "I'm not in the mood this morning." When the bell rang, you got up. When the Psalms were over it was a time for quiet, spiritual reading. It wasn't an option.

Everyone read together. Everyone prayed together. When time for work, everyone worked together, you ate together. You were always together, but you didn't talk. We were in silence.

Kirsten: Oh my goodness.

Jim Finley: It's Cenobitic that is, it's a contemplative community. You chant. The Camaldolese and the Carthusians, and by the way, the Carmelites are Cenobitic, but there's also some hermits in these orders. There's some Franciscan hermits too and so on.

The Carthusian Camaldolese is a combination. They gather for Eucharist, they gather for-- Then they see significant, long portions of their day, all alone in solitude as their vocation, they see it as a vocation.

Kirsten: Would it be skeptical to suggest that maybe John of the Cross and Thomas Merton wanted some alone time?

Jim Finley: No, no, no, no. I'm sure they did. By the way, with Merton, he was extremely extroverted. He wrote 50 books, I think. Volumes of letters. He was like this. At the psychological level, I think he's saw it as an antidote for his energy because he was also there in the monastery too, he was deeply contemplative. He became a hermit in his life. He got to live alone in a hermitage.

Kirsten: Oh, I see.

Jim Finley: He died when he was a hermit actually. I think in part, yes, but I think they really saw it as a vocation, like a calling. I'm sure it met certain inclinations psychologically. When I was there, this was just before the second Vatican Council, some of this has changed.

I stepped on a straw mattress on boards in a common unheated dormitory. They left all the windows open in the winter, sometimes the little holy water font in your cell would freeze. Sometimes it would freeze. We got up at 2:30 in the morning to chant the Psalms. The Canonical hours to the day chanting the work of God through the Psalms ending with Compline.

There was a chanting of the Psalms. There was daily manual labor, ora et labora, prayer and work. There was times for quiet, spiritual reading, and prayer. You could walk in the woods, you could walk in the cemetery, or you could sit in the church. It was a vegetarian diet eating everything's in silence. One of the monks would read from a spiritual book where everybody read.

When I was there, we didn't talk to each other. We used sign language, didn't talk. You weren't supposed to make useless sign language. It was considered dissipating, you could get proclaimed in Chapter of faults. You had to prostrate on the floor and it was often they had all these. It was very medieval and I loved it. I just loved it.

I thought it was like God's Marine Corps. You know what I mean? I'm in for it.

It was disciplined. It was profound, to me. It really changed my life. It was a good match for me. I practiced these disciplines, you know what I mean? Merton introduced me to the mystics and I would sit in the church and try to just give myself over to what the mystics were trying to help me with.

Out here in the world, when I got married, had two children and started teaching and I was out here in the world, so I said, "How do I find my bearings contemplatively and continue to go deeper in this, in the world?" That's really what we're talking about, because this applies to most of the people listening to these talks.

Kirsten: Jim, just hearing more details about the monastic life, it's a very simplistic life. There's not a lot of complexity. Even though it was busy, it was repetitive and the things were quite, was it? Sounds like?

Jim Finley: Yes. By the way later, some of these talks, I might talk about Buddha, like contemplative Buddhism, contemplative Hinduism and so on. This is very, very much deep affinity to monastic monasteries, to Buddhist monasteries. Where in India where there's an awakened Yogi there and the Sufis, Kabbalah what they all have in common is this in these monasteries.

It deliberately tries to remove complexities and distractions, a way to just one thing. To seek and find and give yourself to God in the simplicity of life itself. It's a life. It sounds different when you listen to it, but when you're living it, it becomes your life. You walk your walk and in the silence, there's no escape from yourself. You're just there alone with God in silence.

It's a calling, you know what I mean? It is that, it just strips it away, strips it away, strips it

away. Kind of opening oneself up to St. Benedict called it the deifying light. Like the light of God that turns us into God.

Kirsten: Did you feel God's presence in that silence when you were there?

Jim Finley: I did and very much so. Yes. That's what I'm looking at here is how do I feel it out here?

Kirsten: When we're not stripped back to those, the simple. There's a lot of complexity and=

Jim: Shunryū Suzuki says you know, it would be so much easier if we were asked to live a simple life in a simple world, but we we're asked to live a simple life in a complicated world. Monks live a simple life in a simple world, but it's interiorly challenging because it's life. You know what I mean?

You can't go in there and twiddle your thumbs and fool around and you feel like, why am I here? Say, why did I even come here? If I'm not going to commit to it. Out here it's so much easier to get lost in the complexities, the chores, the projects, the outcome. How do I keep my contemplative anchor?

That's what we're really talking about here. Especially what I want to get at is the metaphor of the hidden. I think that's what's always there for us is the. intimacy of the hidden and that's what I want to give some examples of.

Kirsten: Before we shift to that important teaching, can you just--is the Prior the head of the monastery?

Jim Finley: Yes, the Prior. In the Cistercian Order, the head of the monastery is called the Abbot. In the Carthusian tradition, it's the Prior. He's elected by the community, he's elected because he ideally at least he's supposed to exemplify the ideals of the order like deep contemplative. He also they see in him a certain basic intelligence, a certain kind of administrative ability.

They see he has a sense of contemplative leadership. They vote and so he's elected as Superior. Likewise in the Carmelite Order of nuns, it's the Prioress. Theresa of Avila was a Prioress.

Kirsten: Then he wrote this letter to another Prior?

Jim Finley: Gervais, yes.

Kirsten: He obviously respected him. What did you think was the purpose of the letter? To get some feedback? Just to share his insights?

Jim Finley: First of all it's a good time to share the people if they get this volume, to recommend maybe just skipping the long introduction of 70 pages long. You can read it if you want to but it's academic, it's all important theological, historical things like how do we know who wrote it, the authenticity of the manuscript, how was it distributed through the ages so if you're interested in that, you can go back and read it.

You can see how scholars in contemplative traditions it's be important for them to look at the historicity of the text and so on. 70-some pages worth is a lot of introduction and just start.

It's a good question because clearly-- so here he is, a hermit, a well-seasoned contemplative. He's writing this letter to his friend, who's a well-seasoned contemplative. This isn't like to inform his friend of things that his friend doesn't already know but it's almost like two people deeply committed to the union with God sharing with each other their insights into this deepening union with God.

One of the things that makes Guigo challenging is, unlike the other-- all the mystics are challenging [chuckles], but what they do is Theresa and these other people, they'll say a unitive statement like a unitive insight and then they flesh it out. They give examples, they broaden it out with metaphors.

Guigo doesn't flesh it out. It's disarmingly simple and he says these very deep things in a simple way, because to the person he's writing this to, he doesn't need to flesh it out, they already know. So what I want to do in this series is how to unpack it, to flesh it out, to look at it to help us see that what he's saying is something really very simple it's very very simple. Like devotional sincerity and it's very intimate.

I think that's what he's doing, he's sharing this, he had this insight about the life that they live. He was out working with his hands, he says, is how he starts. Then it suddenly came to him that prayer is like a ladder to heaven that has four rungs to it, Lectio, meditation, prayer and contemplation.

He said I want to walk up the rungs of this ladder, so in doing it he's helping us to walk up the rungs of the ladder see? How do I enter into the state of Lectio, see, as a path to God, meditation and so on.

Kirsten: Would he have been taught Lectio Divina already? Would that would that have been a practice he was already doing and these were his insights about the practice? Or did he expand on what the practice was?

Jim Finley: Well I don't know about the Carthusians in its details but I'm sure it's similar to this. When you first enter the order, you first enter is a postulant, you can leave any time you want. In Cistercian orders I think you're a postulant for six months to discern whether it's a fit or not, you know if it's God's will. Then in the Cistercian orders, you're a novice for two years, you could leave any time you want to. Then you take temporary vows temporary vows and then you take vows until death.

During that two and a half year period, you're under the guidance of a novice master. You go to the novice master for spiritual direction and so you get guidance in these prayer ways like Lectio Divina. Also since you're chanting the Psalms every day, which is Lectio, it's like chanting Lectio. You would go to your novice master for guidance how's it going? How's it going?

The novice master is watching very closely for stabilizing in these humble, that which is what we'll be walking through here together in this series and they're also looking for that first taste of mystical quickening in the novice.

It's so subtle and sometimes it's very intense, it's overwhelming sometimes. Usually, it's so subtle. I just want to say that which is essential never imposes itself, that which is unessential

is constantly imposing this. There's a higher-order imperative of the awakened heart in which it has gracefully imposed itself with great gentleness like a taste of something and you don't know what to make of it. The guide is there to guide them and so these are letters of contemplative spiritual direction. All these mystics, they're trying to help us. How do we tune into this subtlety? How do we like--

Kirsten: This would have been his practice for Lectio Divina and then he's offering guidance in how this practice opened up on the hiddenness of God, as you were saying.

Jim Finley: Exactly and I think he's also saying something else. When we go to pray, Lectio is all of our practice. What he says Lectio really is is you hear listen to a word, you're reading. Audio Divina too you can hear it comes through the thing, Lectio Divina.

When you read the text say Jesus' texts I'll be looking at when Jesus says, "Don't be afraid I'm with you always." The Lectio is where you sit and your heart is immediately accessed by the beauty, with the deathless presence of Jesus is personally saying to you. That stance of being taken by the beauty is Lectio.

The first step-- so this applies to all of us. You can't skim read the Gospels, you can't read the mystics. You got to slow down enough to pause, to be taken by what's beautiful even before you think about it. Your heart already recognizes the beautiful.

Then in meditation, God says, "Well now I've talked to you you talk to Me." It's like a loving dialogue with God and this is universal, we talk to God from the sincerity of our hearts it's a dialogue back and we journal, we write it out, draw a picture maybe. We kind of personalize, we sign off on it. It's in our mind.

Then the heart is we realize it awakens a longing that we long to be consummated. Like help me with this like from the heart center I can't find this union with You without You, help me. In a way, he did this but he's trying to put words to what we all do and each in our own unique way. There's like grace states of consciousness and he's trying to help us become more conscious of them and how it lies in our power to cultivate them and deepen them and as rungs of a ladder to heaven.

Kirsten: Oh that's beautiful. So he's really translating what could be taught as just a method or a practice but he's translating it into these levels of consciousness so it's-- which can run throughout all of life.

Jim Finley: Yes. Put it this way too. We're looking at-- Let's say that there is this capacity to be accessed by the beautiful, or there is a capacity to be touched by the sense of the Presence of God coming to us in prayer.

It's hard to hold on to it. I mean it's there, but instead of hit and miss, he's saying there's a certain strategy where you can hold it steady. The method is really a way to channel or stabilize. Instead of the hit and miss randomness, you stay in the sustained attentiveness to being this receptive consciousness infused with love and so he's making it conscious, as something you can choose like the artistry of it. "I can learn to do this."

Kirsten: Oh yes, well that's exciting. That's what I'm really looking forward to in this season because I

use the podcast, your recordings as a Lectio practice as you're trying to help us do in the way you present them. To learn deeply from Guigo as he teaches about that kind of a practice.. I'm looking

Kirsten: I'm looking forward to that. Jim, you said that this is a mystic, a not so well known mystic, but a mystic that impacted your life. When did you first come across Guigo?

Jim Finley: It was in the monastery, because I would go to Merton, since we didn't talk to each other, I don't know what the others did. I saw Merton as a living mystic, I saw him as a lineage holder, these traditions, and so I saw I was really honored to be with him. I would go to him and say, I want to read John of the Cross, I want to read. I'd go often, I would come back, and I had my copy with me. I would move to these mystics and he helped me get on the same place with, he helped me find my way. He was one of the people that I first heard in the monastery, and I appreciated what he was doing, the simplicity of it, so pastoral in a way, for the contemplative secret, so practical, it's not a theory or anything. What I mean is, something that you can actually do, which, if you do it with all your heart, brings about transformative awakenings, of deepening your awareness of God's oneness with you in all things, and he offers that.

Kirsten: I love the way you say that, Jim, that if you do it with all your heart, that's the difference between doing a method or engaging in a method versus showing up.

Jim: I want to share something that's coming to me right now. There's a guy who wrote the Zen of Seeing, Frederick Franck his name. He talks about art as a way to meditate, this is on. I took a day-long silent retreat with him at Notre Dame, I used to teach there in the summers with the retreat centers International. We went into this room, we were there all day, and there were maybe 50 of us in this big room. One side of the room was all glass, looked out over the campus, it was very pretty, 50, but I don't know when we were there.

We started out by standing in a circle and he stood in the middle, he bowed to each one of us and we bowed back, went all the way around. He said, we're going to file up, he's going to hand us a big pad of drawing paper and pencils, and we will refile up and he gathered stuff from outside. You would hold out your hand, and he would put a twig in your hand. You were to go sit somewhere, anywhere you wanted, on the floor, wherever you wanted to sit, and you were to put the twig on the paper and he said, draw what you see, don't draw what you don't see. As soon as you were done, you could hang it up on the wall with tape. You come up, he'd hand you a pebble, or a leaf. We sat for eight hours drawing pebbles and twigs and things like this.

When I was drawing my twig, he would go around to each person and whispered to them comment. He's getting closer and closer to me, and I was hoping he would approve of my twig.

[laughter]

He looked at my twig and he whispered, he said, "Do you see on the twig, where the twig right here does this?" He said, "Can you show me on where your twig does that?" He said, "Notice on your twig, your twig does this, can you show me on the real twig where it does that?"

He said, "Why don't you start over, draw what you see, don't draw what you don't see." He told us at one time he was, and it gets very deep, eight hours of this. He said, one day there was a woman there who, she had a flower on the paper and she was crying. He said, "Why are you crying?" She said, "Because the flower is dying." She and the flower were one with each other in the mystery of death, and that's spiritual guidance. That's Lectio, see what I mean, it's really, that's where it come home and sits with you like that now.

Kirsten: One last thing about the monastic life and especially these hermits, I remember you telling me that the people did love to come and visit these places, that there was a sense of something special about them.

Jim: People sensed that, like T.S. Eliot, like Little Gidding, to kneel where prayer has been valid. The fact that this is a community of hidden people seeking God, that then people gather there to pray there, in the place where people give themselves to God. Some people, when I was at the monastery, they had a big guesthouse there, and some people every year is like a pilgrimage, it was an annual event, have a silent retreat, they get so many in the guest house, they get so many. I'll show you another story which fits in with this, sometimes where the retreatants would write the abbot a letter of gratitude.

The abbot would sometimes read these letters to the community. This man wrote this letter to the abbot, and he says to the abbot, he said, "I was sitting in my little room in the guest house, and I was looking out my window, it was springtime, and the apple trees were in bloom. There was a lay brother walking through the apple orchard with two buckets of water and when he passed under one of the trees, he put the bucket down, pulled down a branch and kissed it and picked up the bucket and moved on." He said, "That was my retreat."

He said, "I could have driven all the way down there, watched him kiss the branch, and when I walked to the door, my wife said, how is your retreat this year?" He said, great. Another thing is true, you got to sit for a while before you can see things like that and that's practice. That's what I mean by simplicity. I want to get the hiddenness that reveals itself, in a hidden way it touches your heart. If you were to walk right past, you would have missed it. It was like we're walking right past what we're looking for.

Kirsten: Do help us with that, Jim. We've talked about this very simplistic, cloistered life all the way down to complete silence, so no distraction from your internal life, from the potential of God in the silence, simple food, simple work, how do we translate what's happening now, or what the monks are trying to do out here in the world?

Jim: I'll share with something that had helped me living out here and when I would do contemplative spiritual direction with people. These would be things that listeners can consider. One thing to consider is, how is it come to pass that you've come to be the kind of person who's even capable of being concerned about such things? Seriously, at the level or the degree to which you're capable. If you look back over your shoulder, at the first quickening, maybe it's very subtle at first, subtle, subtle, subtle.

Is it not true that that awakening arose from a hidden place, turning to see a flock of birds, however it came, holding that newborn infant, giving yourself over to the smell of a rose, lying awake at night, the death of a friend or a loved one, the parent or whatever, whatever,

in the art museum reading a poet. Did it not appear unexpectedly from a hidden place, and did it not touch you in a hidden way? That is, you knew not what to make of it, you know what to make of it. Is it not also true, little by little by little from the hidden place in a hidden way, a desire to abide?

Is it not also true, when you're listening to the podcast, is it not also true the very resonance that you feel in hearing the cadences of this language? Is it not also true that the unexpected simplicity of it, is coming from a hidden place accessing me and you, all of us, in a hidden way? It's never out in front of us to grab hold of. It isn't what we can find or lose, we can increase it or decrease it. It's like trying to see your own eyes seeing, so immediate like that. Is that not true?

Another way to look at it, say, if you're fortunate to be in any kind of really deep long term love relationship with somebody, marriage or father, mother, sister, brother, grandparent, child. Anytime there's a very deep love bond that has deeply graced your life, is it not true that your love for each other emerged unexpectedly out of an unseen place? Is it not also true that it accessed you in this hidden source? Is it not also true that it accessed you in a hidden way? Is it not also true that it continues to guide you in a hidden way? That is, the deeper it gets, you'd be less and less inclined to find words that could adequately explain it. Is it not true? Is it not also true that any poet, Mary Oliver [unintelligible 00:40:35] I love these interviews with poets, where they talk about, is it not also true that it came to them and from a hidden place they were cooking, and then in a hidden way they were drawn to try to write it out.

I was on a retreat once and someone had a little poem on my table. I think it was the poet who's there, she then identified herself, Mary Lutz was her name. There was a little statement there, it's about the her refers to her soul, it says, "It takes almost nothing to move her, a soft agitation in the rain, an ant going by knowing where it's going." You're sitting there, and you see this is the line, I want to think, where do you think you're going?

[laughter]

The very fact, you can catch a glimpse, it arises from a hidden place, see the miracle of the simplest thing, and it reaches you in a hidden way you can't explain. You're also called in a way you can't explain, how can I say this? Like, how could I bear witness to it? It's the same with an artist. It's the same with art. This is true of friendship, this is true, and so this is what I'm saying here is that, it's not something far off, and we hear the mystics like, "Wow, this is so deep or lofty, what chance do I have?" Rather, we're to pause enough to be disarmed, by something as simple. Let's say you're listening to your breathing, for example. Just listening to your breathing in the night, and then you ask yourself with each inhalation, from whence does it arise?

Is it not true that the breath arises from an unseen place, and it arises in an unseen way, it grants itself, you can't explain? Is that not true? In faith, then your sense of God is the hidden place, thus, giving yourself to you incarnate as the breath, and you can taste the divinity of the breath in the simplicity of it, and you can give yourself over to that simplicity. Is that not true?

I've a friend of mine, I was going to doctoral program with him in the doctoral work in psychology. He and his wife, they had their first child, their little girl who's now married with children. He said, his wife came home from the hospital, and she went out for the first time alone and left him with the baby. This little infant daughter, he said, he laid down on the sofa, and he put her on his chest, she was sleeping, and she had her ear next to it. She had her mouth next to his ear. He was listening to her breathing and he started crying. Is that not true, see, when a child is born, from whence does it arise? It arises from an unseen place, and God is that place. The parents are smitten, because they know in the presence of the child in the presence of God to be at the death, but if you're dying mother or father or the dying, is it not so mysterious? What I think all this is about is, the whole thing, this is what Guigo was trying to help us do, sewing it way, way down. To be endlessly patient with ourselves, and attentive.

If I'm sitting here in meditation, and my mind is wandering, I can try not to have it wander so much, but I can also sit there and ask myself these thoughts that are arising, from whence do they arise? They arise from an unseen place. Not only that, I can be lovingly aware of my love, my wandering mind, and that echoes of God's infinitely aware of my wandering mind and loves me in my wandering. Am I trying to stop wandering so you can start loving me?

See, I'm so distracted, and so we're trying to be disarmed from our own abilities to be taken up by the intimacy, what's giving itself to us, in the grace and the rhythms of each moment. Practice is the daily rendezvous where we stabilize it, but as we go through the day, we can learn to habituate it like an underlying pattern. As soon as I would think of this noise driving to work in my therapy office. Say, if you're on the freeway, and like rush hour traffic, but another way to look at it, if you're driving alone in your car, your car's like a traveling hermitage, and all these people going with you, quo vadis, where are we all going?

See, we took on an entrance ramp like when we were born, we go off the exit ramp when we're going to die. As someone cuts in front of you, instead of getting upset with them, say, who knows what that person is going through. Seriously, I think I'll slow down a little bit on purpose, say a prayer. We can take every single thing, walking down a hallway, drinking a glass of water, we're trying to move with the rhythms of the presence of God arising out of an unseen place, giving itself in a hidden, unseen way, born and awakened in our heart, to share with people, and I think that's one way of putting words to what this is about.

Rollo May in one of his essays, existential psychologist, talks about the pause, he says, imagine a high diver.

Can you hear the blower out there? Can you hear it?

Kirsten: [laughs] I can. He knew we were starting Season Four today.

Jim: [laughs] It's good, it's great. It is the circumstances of life in the midst of the world, and look, we're having this lovely talk, being cut along by the sound of a leaf blower, because you know why? That person is out there trying to make a living, so he can feed his family. It doesn't mean I wish he'd stop. I do, but it does mean I can go deeper and say, I'm woven into a rhythm of things. There's something holy about it, and I go with it.

Rollo May says, you look at a Olympic high divers standing at the platform, just before

the diver dives, they pause, and they dive out of the pause. The fact they dive out of the pause, that makes the dive eloquent. If the diver would look at it, “all these cameras looking at me what if I mess,” his ego would die and ruin it. The pause is like the hiatus from the momentum of the demand, and I suppose long enough to see that which is arising in a hidden way. In the hidden place, is the very immediacy of my breath, my life, my mind, strand of light across the floor, the hall, and I’m trying to stabilize in that, and then at what point does it roll over and start becoming mystical? It’s just beautiful teachings really.

Kirsten: Jim, can you connect the dots for me around this sense of hiddenness and simplicity, and then another statement you made earlier about bringing your whole heart or being wholehearted in it?

Jim: I’ll share how it comes to me in my work as a therapist, working with trauma. We can apply it across the board to art or married, love, living alone, or being older. Everything really, depending on what life you’re living. I would be sitting in therapy with somebody, and we form this alliance of trust. Then the alliance of trust, they share what hurts the most, and they share it and when they share it, it shows up they’re feeling it, they start to cry right there as they’re sharing it. They’re sharing it as a kind of unresolved dilemma. Like, see the way I am, I don’t know how to.

My sense is, how I would think of it is just like the pause, and I would think I don’t know, how would I know? At a secondary level, I have training like diagnostic training and I have a set of skills, but what I do instead is listen and sit with. The mystery, the two suffering human beings are sitting together in a room. The person suffers, I suffer. If I feel I have to know what to say in advance, it’ll come across as contrived, like pulled out of an- like an answer thing, but if instead, I say to the person something like, because the person, yes, I wander too.

One thing that strikes me was coming to me. Remember a few sessions ago when we were talking about the day your mother walked out of the house you never saw her again. Somehow, what you’re saying right now reminds me of that. The fact I trust what comes to me out of a hidden play, then when I share it, there’s like a pause, and the person pauses, and it allows them to share what awakened in them in hearing what I just said. The depth dimension of the healing, is learning to follow that path together. By following together they can learn to listen to themselves. They can be attentive to themselves and draw from it to apply it in very practical ways where it gets ritualistically reenacted in their marriage or at work or where everyone’s got something going on.

That would be an example, but I think artists do this, poets do this. When someone’s deep in the work, they’re in the flow of something like staying receptively open. I love this poem of Mary Oliver, who was interviewed by Krista Tippett on On Being. Krista Tippett shared this poem of Mary Oliver, she’s like, “I was burdened by so many problems. I walked down to the edge of the ocean. The big waves rolling in. I asked the ocean, ‘Help me. What am I to do?’ The ocean responded back, ‘I can’t be disturbed. I have work to do.’”

[laughter]

The rolling waves of the ocean wash over your dilemma. It’s some kind of something

primordial and vast and pure that's sustaining you in your dilemma. It's not dependent on its outcome. Then you as a poet, Heidegger says that, the vocation of the poet is to evoke the holy. Then she writes what was given to her. When we read it, we're so grateful, she was faithful to the path because when we read it, it resonates with us. That's where this mystic start with me, so grateful. Then normally, with a call to this mystic way, but some people were called the mystic teachers. They were called to share it, and we're so grateful for their fidelity in sharing because it arcs across and centuries later is touching us. It's very mysterious really, seriously.

Kirsten: When you're describing those responses to when I asked about coming with your whole heart, there's a certain kind of attentiveness, but also what I would call vulnerability because I need to be open to not knowing, or not having the answer to what arises, not controlling it, not manipulating it.

Jim: Exactly. Let me put it another way, and this should be contemplation . Let's say, there's a dilemma and it's a real dilemma. It's something unresolved. You don't know how it's going to turn out. You hope like anything that's not going to turn out the way you're afraid it will, but it might. You hope it'll turn out the way you want, in your mind, but you don't know. Your fear is understandable, that what might happen you can do your best to protect yourself from that, and see that it goes the other way you can do your best. We're talking about this, is regardless of how it turns out, this is why God is a presence that protects us from nothing, even as God unexplainably sustains us in all things. Even if it goes the way that we hope that it won't, God will be unexplainably sustaining us in our darkest hour. If we don't panic, maybe we will panic, cry, as it stabilizes, as we look back on it, we realize something was given to us in the darkness. About a trust, about mercy, or about-- I think that's true of a lot of the deep things in our heart, they came out of us in moments we got so lost. As we found our way back into the light, we came out having learned things. We learned it in a hidden way. When we were so hidden, we couldn't even find ourself. We were so lost and we stumbled out of it and we walked away different, if we let it.

Kirsten: Back to your therapy example and relating this to what Guigo is offering us. There was that layer you had a nerve of skills. I know Guigo is offering methods and skills in combination with this attentive, vulnerable, way of being awakened. What is the value of the practice versus the--

Jim: Exactly, yes. That's very good. Say, if you would come to see me for therapy, I wouldn't say anything to you. I'd listen to you to get a sense of where you're at. In our looking at levels of functioning, tolerance for dysphoric effect, survivors [unintelligible 00:55:38]. What I would do, so I would meet you where you're at in your own understanding of it. You could see you weren't alone there. We would join forces together and talk and see where-- likewise, if you could have Guigo as spiritual director or Teresa, any of these people, I'm convinced first they would listen to you first, and then they would meet you where you're at and try to stabilize where you are. What if you spend your whole life in Lectio never even got to the second step. A whole life of Lectio sincerely lived is the holiness of God.

The agenda here is not to reach certain states of consciousness, it's holiness, which is really love, which is really surrendering. How God's precedent calling us in our life. We're always trying to move on. That's why whenever we get confused, Guigo says, "We're probably

confused because we tried to skip the first rung of the ladder. When we lose our way, we know how to find our way back, Lectio.” You turn back around and God’s completely right there in that simplicity. There’s a certain set of spiritual direction. There’s a certain way of assessing where the person is, joining them there so they can see God’s one with them right where they’re at, to appreciate it, surrender to it, walk with it, suggests to see where it goes. I think the whole path is like that, in a way.

Kirsten: Wonderful. Well, I’m looking forward to being met by Guigo and then confused for the rest.

Jim: Exactly.

Kirsten: I’m not met.

Jim: Exactly. What’s scary is it starts to get clear. You go like, “Oh, my God. Oh, no.” [laughs] The only reason why this kind of talk makes any sense to you at all is that, you’re odd too.

[laughter]

We’re birds of a feather flock together, I mean we recognize each other. There’s a inner clarity, intimately understood. Great.

Kirsten: We’re so grateful for everyone listening, can be odd with us.

Jim: Yes, exactly. Walking the walk. Exactly.

Kirsten: Before we close, I could just talk on forever. This is so wonderful to be back with you again, Jim. I’m sure everyone listening feels the same. Before we end, I do just want to talk a little bit about the book. You touched on it earlier, but I’m sure Corey will put in the notes, the translation you’re using. The book, it’s a funny book, like you say it has this huge introduction, which has a lot of- It’s really just giving credibility in trying to identify who wrote the--

Jim: Its historical theoli-- yes.

Kirsten: Then the lead is only 17 pages. That’s what you’re going to be going over. Then there’s another section with 12 meditations.

Jim: Which is another great book. We’re not going to talk-- I mean, it’s just meant to be a walk, like a slow quiet prayerful walk through these mystics. We’ll get a good taste of Guigo. We’re not going to look-- There’s the ladder. As a prologue, chapters on each rung of the ladder. The emphasis is on the contemplation, and then how to live it. I’ll be quoting a passage, and then reflecting upon the passage, trying to apply it in practical ways, so people can apply maybe to their own prayer. That’s it, really.

Kirsten: Wonderful. Well, a great start to Season Four. Looking forward to it. Thank you, Jim.

Jim: You’re welcome.

Kirsten: Thank you for listening to this episode of Turning to the Mystics, a podcast created by the Center for Action and Contemplation. We’re planning to do episodes that answer your

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