



# Turning to the Mystics

## The Cloud of Unknowing

Intro to The Cloud of Unknowing  
with James Finley

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 season five of Turning to the Mystics. I'm here with Jim. And in today's session, we're going to introduce our season five mystic. Jim, who will we be guided by this season?

Jim Finley: In this season... On all the previous seasons, we always start out by referring to who the mystic was historically, to understand who the mystic is spiritually, but we can't do this because we don't know who the mystic is because he's anonymous. And so really his spirit lives in his work, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, so his teaching and his presence are embodied there. So *The Cloud of Unknowing* then is the title of his book written in 14th century England. And the next season after this one will be Juliana of Norwich, a contemporary of his, also in Middle English. So that's what we're doing here, we're turning to this book, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, for the spiritual guidance that it offers us.

Kirsten Oates: And Jim, would you say that the author of this *Cloud*, and then Juliana, who you're planning to do, are two of the main English mystics?

Jim Finley: There are others. There's some others, but these are the two main ones, I think, that people most know of. I should say this too also, is I think most of us today, many of us are familiar with the teachings in *The Cloud* because of how it's been popularized by Thomas Keating and Basil Pennington, and also Father William Meninger, three Trappist monks. And also with Cynthia Bourgeault and her teachings also. And there are others. So I think what we're really presenting here is centering prayer. The centering prayer as taught directly by the anonymous author of *The Cloud*.

Kirsten Oates: Okay. So Jim, just on that note, this season we'll be learning a way of praying. So similar to last season with Guigo.

Jim Finley: Exactly. And we'll also be comparing the two. And also comparing it to Teresa and John, which is also a way of praying. We'll see how they're all related, but how they're distinguished from each other. Yes, we see how these mystics are in concert with one another, but each one has his or her own unique voice.

Kirsten Oates: Lovely. Do just a question about the author. What do we know about him? What was his vocation? Do we know his vocation?

Jim Finley: Some people, I've heard writings where he may have been a Carthusian hermit, like Guigo. I've heard also a Dominican. People... But we don't know. The one you hear most often is Carthusian. What we do know is he's writing it to a directee, as a contemplative spiritual director. And so he's writing it because he discerns this person that he's directing has come to this place in their life. But he's also clearly writing to all of us, because he's writing it as general principles. So as we read it, we can discern the degree or the way in which it applies to us. And I think anyone who's nurtured by listening to this sequence of sessions, it applies to us by that very fact it nurtures us. And so far as this mystical language touches us, or

access as us, it bears witness, that this pertains to us and we have helpful things to learn from this teacher, this mystic teacher.

Kirsten Oates: Lovely. So we think he was a monk. We're not sure what-

Jim Finley: We don't know. Yeah, we don't know.

Kirsten Oates: And then the book is, like a lot of these mystics you are helping us understand, Jim they are, they're very pastoral. It's spiritual direction. It's-

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: ... meeting someone in their own life and in the stage of their journey, but it spreads out to help us all because we go through similar stages.

Jim Finley: Yeah. So I think what they're doing really, because they sat with people so often in contemplative spiritual direction. And because when people come to this mystical phase of their journey, they know how hard it is to find someone with whom you can talk about it. And also, how to find trustworthy guidance in it, because it's hard to figure out what's happening to you. And how not to get in the way of it, how to understand it. It has that very personal pastoral kind of practical thing to address to the heart of the person who's being led along this journey. All their writings have that quality to it. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. Well, I'm really excited. And I know our last season really helped people with their prayer life. So I'm excited to see how this season might continue to help people develop in their prayer life.

Jim Finley: I can't remember when I first discovered *The Cloud*, whether I saw it at the monastery or right after I left, but over the years it's been, author of *The Cloud*, been one of my main teachers. I give a lot of retreats on his teachings. And it's always been a companion for me. It's very readable. It's very inviting that way in the language of it. So it's a really beautiful book

Kirsten Oates: When you found it, Jim, did it impact your prayer life?

Jim Finley: No, I wouldn't say it impacted it. I would say, because of the monastery, I was already well into this way. It's just that I found the clarity and directness of his voice. I found it very helpful. And I also found it then in giving retreats on *The Cloud*, that people find it helpful for that reason. It's so down to earth in a way, so clear about these subtle things. It helped me in that sense. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, that's wonderful. Well, I know you want to give us a little taste in this first episode.

Jim Finley: Yes, yes. What I want to do here is, as in previous sessions, talks, what I'm going to do is read a passage in the text. And then share with you what I see in the passage, how it's affected me, what I see in it and so on. So as you listen to the text and listen to my, what I see in it, as you sit with it or listen to it, it might help you, what you see in it. So we're passing on the teaching in this way. And I want to begin here with chapter one. And I'm going to read the whole chapter. A lot of these chapters are short. They're just one page long or two paragraphs long. So this is a chapter one. And what he is doing here is setting us up to get the context

for what he's about to say. To create a context for it. So this is the context, chapter one.

Jim Finley: "My dear friend in God, I would like to pass on to you what I've roughly observed about the Christian life. Generally it seems to progress through four ascending phases of growth, which I call the common, the special, the singular and the perfect. The first three may indeed be begun and completed in this mortal life. But the fourth, though begun here shall go on without ending into the joy of eternity. Do you see that I have arranged these stages in a definite sequence. This is because I believe that our Lord in his great mercy, is calling you to advance by these steps. I discern his call to you in the desire for him that burns in your heart. You know yourself, that at one time you are caught up in the common manner of the Christian life. In a day by day mundane existence, along with your friends. I think the eternal love of God, which had once created you out of nothing and then redeemed you from Adam's curse to the sacrifice of his blood, could not bear to let you go on living in so common a life far from him."

Jim Finley: "So with exquisite kindness, he awakened desire within you. And binding it fast with the leash of love's longing, drew you closer to himself, into what I have called the more special manner of living. He called you to be his friend. And in the company of his friends, you learned to live the interior life more perfectly than what's possible in the common way. Is there more? Yes. For, from the beginning, I think God's love for you was so great that his heart could not rest satisfied with this. What did he do? Do you not see how gently and how kindly has drawn you on to the third way of life? The singular. Yes, you live now at the deep solitary core of your being, learning to direct your loving desire toward the highest and final manner of living, which I have called the perfect."

Jim Finley: Like to reflect on this. I think what he's doing here, what the author is doing is inviting us to consider our faith, and here speaking in the Christian tradition. But I think this would apply any religious seeker in any tradition. He's really inviting us to consider the degree of our intimate, personal commitment to our faith life in that tradition. And so in the common life, we might say, are those people who are in the Christian tradition, because it provides certain psychological needs. Or it provides a sense of community, or it provides moral guidance or a community that offers service to the world in different ways and so on. Helps them try to be better people. See, and therefore we might say, it's the holiness of human existence. It's the holiness of the ordinary life. Sincerely lived, the common way of life.

Jim Finley: He says, "The special is a point at which God personally becomes real to you in an intimate or tangible way." And we might say, it's the life of devotional sincerity. Where there's a kind of intimate exchange or intimate sense of communion with God, or God's communion with you drawing you to God in devotional sincerity. As that spills over into your attitudes, the way you treat other people, the way you live in the world. And he says, "You seek the company of kindred spirits, of friends." So you seek out the company of other people who have been so awakened, through Bible study, or hopefully let's say liturgy. Assuming the person leading the liturgy is a person of prayer. The sense the liturgy is a prayerful time in a community of people to

deepen this commitment and so on.

Jim Finley: And the special way of life is efficacious under holiness. That this is how God leads most people, in this ordinary life illumined by faith and so on. To live by love and to live as Christ calls and prompts us to live in sincerity, efficacious under holiness, like this. And he said, "Then this leads to the singular way of life." And now he's getting closer to what his books about. And to get at the singular way of life. This is the last two paragraphs of the forward, the book.

Jim Finley: "There are some presently engaged in the act of life who are being prepared by grace to grasp the message of this book. I am thinking of those who feel the mysterious action of the spirit in their in most being stirring them to love. I do not say they continually feel the stirring as experienced contemplatives do, but now and again, they taste something of contemplative love in the very core of their being. Should such folk read this book, I believe they'll be greatly encouraged and reassured."

Jim Finley: Like to reflect on this. See, let's say, now I want to go back here to previous teachings on Thomas Merton, and other writings. Let's say you're living in this special way of life, devotional sincerity. And here's where imagine, like you draw a circle and the circle represents the interiority of yourself. Or maybe you might say your soul. And what you experience in the special way of life is that God who is utterly beyond you accesses the interiority of your soul, and awakens it with consolations, with inspirations, with aspirations, with insights, with devotional clarity and so on.

Jim Finley: So your very subjectivity becomes kind of translucent to the presence of God guiding you like this, they translate it into daily life. But here he is saying, there's something happens. You're going along this way. And God, here's how I think of it, poetically. God, utterly beyond you, accesses you, but passes right through the interiority of your soul. Like a shooting star, into the hidden innermost center of you. The imminence of God within you. God's closer to you than you are to yourself, within yourself. So the God who's hidden beyond you is hidden within your innermost, deeper than feeling, deeper than thought, deeper. And God within you, like a shooting star, passes out through you out to God beyond you. So you're momentarily transfixed in God. See, the ego self is in a state of amazed wonderment or a sense of oneness like this.

Jim Finley: And this taste of contemplative union. I say poetically, it's where you and God simultaneously disappear as dualistically other than each other. And sometimes these moments are very intense. They can be very intense moments. They come in all kinds of ways. But very often they're extremely delicate, like they're very subtle. That if you weren't careful, you would've missed it. But there was unexplainable oneness or a sense of resting in God, resting in you unexplainably. In which fear has no foundations. The end of sorrow, like sense of homecoming, like this. And then it passes.

Jim Finley: And when we go on, what happens? Either nothing happens next. Or what happens is these flashes, when they come, they render the reflective self more and more translucent to the divine. Like it glows with a gentle or light because it's illumined by these momentary flash, like this. And we might say, this is fairly common, I think,

where people who sincerely live the special way of life. Everyone has tastes these moments in nature. Your arms of the beloved, in the presence of children. And a quiet hour at days end alone in the midst of nature, prayer or poet. We all know these little, this moments. It's so hard to talk about. Like this.

Jim Finley: So he says, "What the special way of life is, is you realize that for you, what's happened is a growing desire to abide in that oneness. It's like a longing that you don't understand, for a union you don't understand, but you know it's real because you experienced it. And you live there. That is for you in some way, it's uppermost. And as in some way, it has a certain quiet importance to you. Yet, it leaves you all the more perplexed."

Jim Finley: What do I do with this? See? What do I... What's happening to me here and how do I respond to it? And I think this is the intimacy of the book. All these mystics, really, when you think about it, they're trying to help us listen to ourself and be very attentive to something. It unfolds within us in utterly unique ways in each of us. And then he says something really amazing, which is at the heart of all these teachings. He says, "These first three, the common way, the special way and the singular, they begin and end on this earth. But they lead to the perfect way, which goes on through all eternity."

Jim Finley: So the perfect way, be ye perfect, even as your heavenly father is perfect, see? That when we die and pass through the veil of death, we'll pass beyond these veiled ways of experiencing God. Through insights, through prayer, through consolations and so on. And will love God with God's own love of God. Or know God with God's own knowledge of God. Will be one with God as God is God, and our eternal nothingness without God. So it's not that we're God, but our ultimate destiny, that the infinite generosity of God giving God away, in this oneness and a life that is, it wants God's in our own, fullness of glory. Now, what he's saying is this, that with some people what happens is that God decides not to wait until they're dead to begin to grant them a taste of the perfect life. So there's a kind of a boundary crossing.

Jim Finley: So even though you're still in time and space on this earth, the glory of the perfect way God's own life crosses over and is accessing you, as a for taste of paradise like this. And see, that's really, I think that's the subtlety of all of this, see? But the point is, even though this deathless life of God accesses us unexplainably while we're still in time, he's saying, but we can't find our way into that perfect life until we pass beyond, let go or die to everything that's less than an infinite union with infinite love is the sole basis of our security and identity. That's the thing. So it's learning to die of love, really. In this kind of subtle unfolding as something we don't understand. Like this. So he's really speaking to this. See, this is who he's really speaking to.

Jim Finley: So I think for each of us, as we listen to this, we're listening to it in the way of which or the degree to which we've tasted this. Or we know of this, where we long for this, because we can tell the author of *The Cloud* is addressing to that in us, see? That recognizes this or resonates with this. And I'd like to end here then, before he then goes, chapter three's going to say, well, what am I to do with this? He says, "Here's what you do." Then he tells us what to do, which is the way to pray. By the way, I would say this too, is that for Guigo. Guigo begins at the beginning. *Lectio Divina*, discussive meditation, and prayer. And that corresponds to where the common way of life becomes special. See, it's devotional sincerity of the *Lectio*,

the meditation and the prayer, but it opens and spills out upon the contemplation.

Jim Finley: Likewise for there Teresa of Avila, in the Interior Castle, the first three mansions are the mansions of psychological spiritual maturity, of prayer, of effort of work and see the act of life, meaning actively engaged in the commitment to live this way. But with the fourth mansion, your hearts being enlarged to divine proportion, she starts there, see? And for John of the Cross, he starts also, we have to live by our life by imitating Christ. But we can imitate Christ only by follow Christ, but to follow Christ, we have to study Christ's life. Live by him. And the author of *The Cloud* says that also later in the book. He said, unless we follow Christ and meditate on Christ, we'll go astray here if we don't ground ourself in doing our homework and psychological spiritual maturity, see? And so now he's starting right in. But instead of starting at the beginning, like Guigo with *Lectio* or Teresa, the first mansion, he starts with contemplation. But he's saying, but he's assuming it's only because you've come to this place, see?

Jim Finley: In the midst of things, we're strangely being called to this. So it's a kind of a discernment question like this. So before he tells us how to do this, see, he then helps us to understand better that it's a method, but it's not a method. It concretizes a desire, a God given desire. And these are attitudes of the heart. So before we head out on this journey, we prepare for the journey. By knowing the attitudes of heart were going need to carry us to the journey to reach this. And the first is, take courage now, frail mortal though you are. And the courage I think is this, is this possible that this kind of language could actually pertain to me? In the midst of my complexities in the midst of my, all the unresolved things, see? Is that possible? What will happen to me if I surrender to these longings? Or what will happen to me if I don't?

Jim Finley: But since I long to surrender to these longings, I don't know how to surrender to them, because I don't understand them. So we need courage he says. And he says, "Do you think you're someone special, or you've deserved the Lord's favor? How can your heart be so laden and spiritless, if you do not also see how halfhearted you are in being called to this?" It isn't like you're a living Saint. You're just trying to get through another day. Just remind yourself of the ongoing halfheartedness, and so on, in which you're being touched in this way and called in this way. So it grounds itself in humility. And then he says, "Besides...", he says... I'll paraphrase. The thing is, you'll be miserable if you don't follow it. That's the thing. It's like the poet called to be a poet.

Jim Finley: It's like Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*. In the stillest hour of your darkest night, ask yourself, must I write poetry? If the answers is a clear and simple, yes, you must spirit your whole life on an inner necessity, even at life unassuming moments. So this is like an inner necessity urging you, realistically speaking, that true love never imposes itself. It always invites us. But by a higher order imperative of the awakened heart, there's the inner necessity of following this, see? Because if I don't follow this, I won't be who in my heart. I believe in, since God's calling me to be. That's the integrity of it I think. And he says, "Then pursue your course relentlessly. Be relentless, because you need to be very patient here with this. You need to be quietly persistent and keep leaning into it. And learn to let God lead you in this mysterious inner journey."

Jim Finley: And so that's the introduction. See, that's kind of where he is at. It's a great, you can feel



him drawing us in and how real this is to him. And how he knows that somehow the very fact that we resonate with it, it's real to us. But it's vague, see? So how do we stabilize and get more and more clear in it and more confident in it. And he's says, that's why I believe those who read this book will be greatly encouraged and reassured. Why? Because the whole book is about how to ground yourself. That's why you're going to be, walk around with it, keep it under your pillow. This kind of, it's like your faithful guide to fulfillment. So anyway, that's the introductory.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Your faithful guide to, for what you long for so deeply.

Jim Finley: Exactly.

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

Kirsten Oates: Did you plan Jim? The sequence Guigo, and then Cloud of Unknowing, they seem to just flow beautifully together to start, like you said, Guigo starts at the beginning.

Jim Finley: I did in a way. How it started for me personally, because I'm trying to be true to myself personally in passing on what was passed on to me. So I started with Merton, because I started with Merton. But I also thought pastorally, he's a good place to start because he's contemporary. And then I did John of the Cross next, because that was a mystic that most touched me in the monastery, deeply. So, because that was next for me with Merton, so I did John of the Cross. But also because he takes us directly into the mystical, through The Dark Night. And then Teresa as a companion, is the Spanish mystical tradition, contemporary, as a mystic starting. But she, again, unlike John of the Cross, she give careful attention to these beginning stages, to the mystical. And then Guigo, I thought was a natural place to do next, because he's so practical.

Jim Finley: He's so puts words to the interiority, even the first step on the ladder is filled with God. This Lectio consciousness, and the holiness of that. And so it just seemed like a natural way to take it beyond theory into the concreteness of concretizing a desire. And so then The Cloud seems to follow next, because The Cloud's so practical. But he's so practical, in Guigo's fourth rung of the ladder of contemplation, he assumes the others. Then he says, "Now let's... Where do we go from here?" So in that sense, yes, I suppose. And then Juliana Norwich is next, she's really something else. It's just really, you know what I mean? I'm very... Anyway. We'll look at her next.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: Yeah. Anyway.

Kirsten Oates: Well I'm excited because like you said, Guigo starts at the beginning, and what I liked about Guigo was the practical nature of what he shared. And so to have the Contemplatio piece, now a whole book on it, a whole teaching on it, a whole kind of understanding we can move into.

Jim Finley: Here's something else I think is important. See, for a person who is being gently drawn to this, for such a person, this is practical, see? This is practical with respect to what in your heart, you know matters most, it's extremely practical, see? But it's highly impractical to the



one who's not yet been awakened to it. Like, what are you talking about? And even though you're called to it, there's a part of you that doesn't get it yet either. But some, to the inner quickening of this awakening, is supremely practical, see? It's like loves necessity. Like that. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Yeah. What you're saying is so subtle, and I've been trying to grasp it in our dialogues, but because it's, at one level, it's a kind of a method, but it's really just giving a path to a desire that has its own compass and orientation. And it's just trying to get us pointed in the right direction, really?

Jim Finley: Exactly. This is why in previous sessions too, we said just like, see, it's like people in a deeply committed, loving relationship, can't make their moments of oceanic oneness happen. But they've learned together the interior stance that offers the least resistance to being overtaken by what they make. The poet can't make the poem appear. But the poet has learned the [inaudible 00:28:45] of poetry, the discipline of the inner stance that sets it free to flow. The one committed to healing can't make the healing happen, see? So there are methods as in the sense, strategies, like provisional strategies to heighten the vulnerability to be overtaken. It attains us in our inability to attain it deeply accepted. But it isn't big, it's a strategy, it's concrete. Like, here's how you assume this posture, see? And with practice, you'll get more and more confident. Otherwise, if it wasn't for practice is just beautiful thoughts, really. And it even wets your appetite, it's like a tease, see? So unless there's a concreteness in which it's intimately realized, see it's grounded that way. And all the traditions do this. They offer it, they concretely do. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. I think that's just going to be so helpful to everyone listening for this season. I liked the way too, Jim, when you talked about Guigo's ladder, that although it has a sense of ascent that God is perfectly present in every rung of the ladder. So it's the way we show up to our practice that is, with our whole heart and our whole selves is the way God always shows up to us at every level of practice.

Jim Finley: Yeah. I want to share something. Remember we said, we were doing Guigo and we said, what happens? He says, "You're in this ecstatic state of contemplation." He said, "Then if God would throw us..." "And the image I have is like falling backwards in slow motion. And what do you land in? The first rung of the ladder. The scriptures open on your lap, your fingers on the text, see? But now it's different because see, now you know that in any moment, all that can blossom like this, see?

Jim Finley: And it's like people first falling in love with each other. The first time they touch each other, once they've quicken in the realization, now they know what a touch makes possible. And so in this way, notice something, notice he's not speaking way up here somewhere to this person, or to us notice. Notice how he so naturally speaks in such a direct, like he's talking to us. He's talking, he's right on the level. It's not a one up, one down. It's like incarnate infinity that meets us in the sincerity of our desires. That's the holiness of circling back around to meet us where we are. And I think the whole spiritual life is like that, that's Christ consciousness, I guess.

Kirsten Oates: It's just such a grace to learn from these mystics who you can tell, just their experience of this was so real and so true. So even if I haven't had that direct experience that I know they've

had, I really have a trust and a faith and a sense of wonder and aspiration that comes with listening to them.

Jim Finley: That's true. But I also think this is true also. It's true that when we listen to people like this, they're habitually established in what they're saying. They're sharing what's happened to them, because of the clarity of their voice. Doing this is not, it like that. It's also true that you're not saying that's true of you, in the fullness of which is so true of them, but it's also true you're no stranger to it, because something in you recognizes it, see? And therefore we're listen, like the still quiet voice, see? There's something, I don't know it yet in its fullness, but it's already giving itself to me and has quickened me in a way that allows me to know that the mystic is talking about what I've tasted, see? And therefore we're together in this one. And we just keep leaning into it and see what God has in mind. You know what I mean? Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Beautiful. Jim, when we were preparing for this session, we were talking about how God language has, we've lost kind of the central nature of God language and how these, mystics really speak the true God language. And for those of us who have that language as our central way of accessing our spirituality, our spiritual selves, these mystics help us with that as well.

Jim Finley: Yes. This is a fundamental sense I have, I listen a lot to Krista Tippett, On Being, the website, all these great dialogues. And also Super Soul Sunday, Oprah thing. And also to other podcasts and books, it's so interesting that people on a spiritual path, the themes they discuss are the themes of the Saints and mystics down through the ages, back into Christ, the gospel. Which makes sense in a way. And a lot of it is, how can we on a spiritual path share this awakening to help and be there for and with others, see? How can we let the quickening inspire us to move and help, and be sensitive to a lot of it... So really a lot of it has to do with how the spirit moves in us and stirs in us. But Karl Rahner, the Catholic theologian, says we could remove Richard Rohr's, the students book on the Trinity.

Jim Finley: We could completely take the Trinity out of all of it, and no one would even know it was missing. But I would suggest you could take God out of it, no one would even know it was missing. They rarely even talk about God, really. I don't under.. And I think I know why in a way, it's because of the ideology of God. Some super structure, some power, some kind of... And we kind of sense the natural aversion to that. And so we seek it. But I think what the mystics are saying, clearly, is that it's really, God is the bottomless abyss of eternal love. That is reality itself. It's the infinite presence of God, infinitely giving itself away and presenting itself in and as the gift and the miracle of the immediacy of our very presence, and our nothingness without God.

Jim Finley: And we're touched by that, see? Incarnatively. So if we look at Jesus. Jesus, whatever else about Jesus, Jesus is a very God conscious person. You spent whole nights alone in prayer. He sees the father, like this. And we return to the father. The whole, mystery of the whole cross is returning to God. In your hands, I commend my spirit. So I think in a way, these mystics help us get a sense of God, in a way that delivers us from ideologies of God. This is all these mystics are about really, how do we pass beyond these ideologies of God to be this sense of being divinized by God unexplainably, and this abyss of love as a sense of communion. And I think that's very helpful in all these mystics that they help us do that.

Kirsten Oates: Me too. And Jim, you talk about, it's the universal truths that the mystics are bringing forth. It's the truths that have always been true about humans and God, and-

Jim Finley: Exactly. So let's say our God given capacity to realize this union is universal, because it's the dowry of our being. Being created by God, as persons in the image and likeness of God, it's universal. But when a person is awakened to this, the language they use, they draw from the culture in which they were awakened. So in Judaism, you have Kabbalah, see? The Ein Sof, the Jewish mystic, the great of mystics. And for the Christian tradition, you have these mystics, see? And in Islam you have the Sufi's. The Sufi way, see? This love. This love. And in yoga, the Patanjali, the yoga Sutra, namaste, see? The Yogi, to be yoked to God, like this. And in Buddhism, the dharma, see? The infinite, what is it to see reality free of delusion, free of craving, is to see as infinite and boundaryless in all directions, the divinity of the immediacy of... So these are languages, like cultural, specific languages.

Jim Finley: And this is why when contemplative people meet each other, they recognize each other, see? And it's the underlying unity of all world religions in these traditions, which is really a source of the underlying unity of the world. How do we bring that unity into the social order, and into... Which is the essence of social justice, or the essence of service? What would it mean to be a contemplative politician? See? See, what would it mean to be a contemplative... What is it to be a contemplative scientist? What is it to be a contemplative author? So we're always grounding it in the day by day, and carrying it forward to help others.

Kirsten Oates: I think that's a beautiful reminder. And sounds like someone was trying to call you.

Jim Finley: Yeah. In the background. I had to recharge my phone, and I didn't turn... It's out in the living room, but I didn't think I would forget. Anyway. I was... Anyway. Yes. It's-

Kirsten Oates: No problem. No problem.

Jim Finley: It's their problem. Sorry.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Well that was, that's a beautiful reminder of the deepness of what the mystics are teaching and the way it's so relevant to every aspect of life, and the way we treat ourselves and each other. I know for me, it's helpful because of some of the ways Christianity has been taught and been brought into our culture to start each mystic with a beginner's mind. To try and be letting go of any assumptions about God I might have.

Jim Finley: Exactly. And that's why I think I always try to speak this way, because it's the way they speak, because it cuts through assumptions. There's something disarming about its directness in a way. And by the way, I know we said this before with the leaf blowers, the phone that rang. See, how do we understand that, see? One, it could be like an unfortunate interruption into the depth of our talk, see? And in a way it is. But we could also see that it's the unfolding of God's presence and the immediacy of things happening. I think that's what Jesus meant by doing the will of God, that the will of God is the immediacy of what's happening, it's trustworthy, even if you're hanging on a cross. And so we're being sensitized to the immediacy of things. So we're not closing ourselves off to some separate, the Buddhist's would say, don't grow a separate head. We're trying to ground ourselves in the divinity of the immediacy of the details of the day, in a grounded way. So, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Well it was a pretty ring. And I was thinking too, that we were supposed to start much earlier. So maybe you were missing your midday appointment with God today. God was calling.

Jim Finley: Maybe that was God calling. Actually what I think, I think it was one of my daughters touching base with me, seeing I'm okay.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: I think that's probably who it is. But yeah, or God calling. Same thing.

Kirsten Oates: Well, I'll just share too. We talked Jim, about how God language... I had an experience recently, because I recently lost my big dog Winston, who has been very loyally by my side at every podcast recording we've done. So was very sad to say goodbye to him. But when my little nieces and nephews were asking me where Winston had gone, although my sister's not bringing them up in Christianity. I just had to say, he's in heaven, because I want to communicate that he's in a safe, beautiful, he's still with us in this safe, beautiful. Yeah. Special way.

Jim Finley: Exactly. Here's another way of putting that, to me, in a way. I shared this once, when I was studying medieval philosophy at the monastery, in Thomas Aquinas. I asked Dan Walsh, who was teaching the class. I said, "Could we say that after the geographical Tokyo no longer exists, they'll still be Tokyo?" He said, "Absolutely. Because Tokyo is eternally in God's mind. So everything is eternally real." This conversation we're having, God never forgets. So the eternity of a leaf or a tree or a dog or a bird, that everything is worth all that God is worth, and it's nothingness without God. And that this eternity, the fleetness of everything. And so really the celestial state is realizing that in glory. But now we can realize it obscurely, because our heart knows that language like this is true see? That when we die, we're not annihilated, but consummated. And it's the foreverness of everything.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. Well, this has been a great introduction, but before we finish Jim, which book will you be you using?

Jim Finley: This is coming right now, I don't know why. We can cut this out, if we need to, I don't know. In the New Yorker, they had a cartoon and it shows a dog and a cat sitting together. They have their back to, and they're looking into a corner. And it's an empty corner, there's nothing in it. And the next picture, they're still looking. The next picture, they're still looking. And the next picture the dog turns to the cat and says, what in the hell are we looking at? That's a good insight into emptiness. Anyway.

Jim Finley: Yes. So the translation that I'm using is that right? So what I'm using is, and I think this can be posted. I think Corey can, yeah. So they'll have these, those forward... So this is William Johnson's translation of The Cloud of Unknowing, it's the one I've always stayed with and used Image Double Day. And by the way, William Johnston was also a Zen sensei, at Sophia university in Japan. And he wrote his doctoral dissertation on The Cloud of Unknowing. The theology, The Cloud of Unknowing. And Thomas Merton wrote the forward to it. And Johnston came to visit me and we talked about things like this and so on. So it's always been... But I also know that, excellent too is, Ira Progoff, the intense in journaling person, the translation. And then also, what's her name? Butcher?

Kirsten Oates: Carmen Acevedo Butcher.

Jim Finley: Yeah. Very beautiful. Yes. I-

Kirsten Oates: That's the most recent translation.

Jim Finley: Yes. And I watched a video of her. Very fine. Very, very good. I know Cynthia Bourgeault thinks very highly also of her work. But I'm sticking, just because it's the one I know. It's the one I've walked with and so I'm using that.

Kirsten Oates: Lovely, well season five, can you believe it?

Jim Finley: I know all this in heaven too. Geez.

Kirsten Oates: Well, thank you for a great introduction session, and I'll look forward to a dialogue after your first kind of Lectio session.

Jim Finley: Yes, exactly.

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're planning to do episodes that answer your questions. So if you have a question, please email us at [podcasts@cac.org](mailto:podcasts@cac.org), or send us a voicemail at [cac.org/voicemails](http://cac.org/voicemails). All of this information can be found in the show notes. We'll see you again soon.