



Turning to the Mystics

The Cloud of Unknowing

A Coaching Session on Centering Prayer
with James Finley and Kirsan Oates

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, where we are turning to The Cloud of Unknowing that was written by an anonymous author. And this is the last episode of this season before we take questions from our listeners and in this episode, Jim and I are going to have a little coaching session where Jim's going to share with me about this practice and I'm going to give it a try. So, Jim, thank you for being here.

Jim Finley: Sure. Yes, good. Yes. What I thought would be helpful here is I'm going to speak as if I'm the author of The Cloud of Unknowing. Since in the cloud, the author's clearly talking to a directee, someone who's been going to him for direction and so I want to be speaking to you as if you're that person that I, as the author of The Cloud, is talking to as my directee. I'm assuming too that as I listen to you as the author of The Cloud, I discern that you've come to a very mysterious place in your spiritual path, that for some time you've been in the special way of the life of devotional sincerity of Lectio Divina, Consolations of God, aspirations, living the Christlike life.

Jim Finley: I'm also assuming that from time to time, you've experience this blind stirring of love that's in your inmost being. It's not a stirring of devotion and reflective consciousness, but a stirring in the hidden center of yourself with the indwelling presence of God. It radiates out and you can tell you're in the state of oneness with God and that these fleeting stirrings are hollowing and gracing your life. But what I also discern is you come to this singular way that is these touches of oneness or of communion. It says you live now at that deep solitary core of your being, that is there's a very deep desire having tasted it to abide there.

Jim Finley: And because this is so mysterious or because it's so subtle or so elusive, the author of The Cloud is saying, "I'm going to suggest you a way to pray, to help establish you in a stance that offers the least resistance to that abiding." Each of these mystics offers us in his or her own way. Fourth mansion for Teresa, passes through a Dark Night in John of the Cross, for Guigo on the ladder. This point of this deep longing for God. The fourth one, you can't consummate. This is his strategy or a way to respond to this and so this is not say through centering prayer where anyone can practice this.

Jim Finley: And anyone who practices it who's in the special way, they'll experience the graces of the special way as God's gifts. They'll say, "I'm more patient. I'm more kind. I have more empathy. I have more..." And well, they should. The author of Cloud is assuming the person experiences that, but they're saying, "Yes, all that's true, but that's not really the essence of it, is that what I've experienced is God's come to me, not in God's gifts, but like very God is access to me and is given to me. And I feel called in response to give myself and love to God who's given to me with every breath and heartbeat. So this is a way to pray that establishes that stance.

Speaker 3: I see.

Jim Finley: And so I say to you, then the suggestions are, the guidelines are to sit in a quiet place to

remind yourself you're in the presence of God, all about you and within you, closer to you than you are to yourself as Saint Augustine says and you're sitting there because you've experienced God accessing you in this unexplainable way with this deep communal stirring.

Jim Finley: And God is also the author of your desire to abide in it. And so with God's guidance in this quiet time with God, you're going to surrender yourself over to that stance of vulnerability to the abiding. Essentially what I'm telling you is the author of the Cloud, to you sit very quietly and you recall the moment of the stirring. You're not feeling it now, but you remember it that moment, whatever it was. And you know that deep down it's always there because it's constantly there. And so in your intentional consciousness, you interiorly turn towards that inner interior place that's stirred and you lift it up and give yourself in a self donating act of love to the infinite love of God that's stirred it and stay there. As you sit there in that simple intention, because this is very subtle, really very subtle.

Jim Finley: You'll notice thoughts arise, feelings, let them but your gaze is fixed on the singularity of this love. As soon as you can tell that a thought or a memory or a feeling has carried you off, you establish yourself in this stance by taking a word or phrase and you use the word to reground you in the purity, that simple intention to give yourself in a self donating act of love to this infinite love that's giving itself to you as your very life and you need to be patient, you need to be humble, you need to be sincere. And so this is the practice. And so I would say to you this is real life. I'll see you next month for a monthly session and why don't you try this say 30 minutes a day. And when I see you next month, we'll talk about how it goes with you.

Jim Finley: So you and I are going to do here symbolically. Now you're sitting now as a beginner, you're taking this in and you're going to sit now in silence, say for one or two minutes. And then when you start to speak again, it's you coming back at the end of the month. You have some questions like what happened when you did that? And then we'll go back and forth this way. We'll go in and out of it and we'll see if this doesn't help this people listening in to shed light on this very... Because it's experiential, it's not a theory. And the essence isn't a method, it's what happens to you when you sit this way. That's what it's all about. The transformations that it brings about. So does this sound clear? Does this sound... We'll do this? Okay. So why don't we do this?

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Thank you.

Jim Finley: Why don't you sit for just one or two minutes and then when you feel ready, let me know and we'll talk.

Kirsten Oates: Okay.(Silence) Okay, I'm ready.

Jim Finley: Good.

Kirsten Oates: Well I would like to begin by sharing the moment that I'm trying to orient myself back to, as you suggested. This is a moment, it was a big moment in my life that really made me want to commit to a path like this. And so my sister-in-law went in to have what we thought was minor heart surgery. It turns out her heart was in a lot worse shape than any of us realized. And she ended up in ICU for three months and then passed away. She had one son, they were both estranged from her husband and his father and he was about 20 at the time. It was just a very shocking, traumatic experience, hoping that she was going in to be made well

and in the end we lost her. And so the last day and night of her life, through strange circumstances, it ended up that just Will, her son, and me were in her hospital room.

Kirsten Oates: So it was late at night, just the three of us together. She was unconscious and Will and I had been chatting a little bit about his fears. His greatest fear had always been the thought of losing his mom, because it was just the two of them. And so we chatted for a bit and then tried to sleep. And as I was lying in the hospital room between two chairs trying to sleep, listening to the sound of the machines, I started to feel a severe pain in my heart. And the thoughts ran through my head. "I think I'm having a heart attack, lucky I'm in a hospital because I may need someone to help me." And then I had this very clear, not like a picture vision, but a sense of a vision of Meg and God in relationship with me and Meg saying to God, "I'm not leaving until you've put enough love in her heart for my son."

Kirsten Oates: And I cried out to them both. I'm like, "I can't take anymore and I've got enough. I really, I can't take anymore." I was in such pain and I've got him. And from that moment on, I wanted to, with my whole being be the love that God had put in my heart and not like as a passing through me, but to be so one with that love that all my actions and my presence to Will would be that gift. And so when I started my practice, when I started this practice that you are guiding me into, each time I'm trying to sit and reestablish myself in that moment of feeling one with this love pouring into my whole being, starting with the pain in my heart, but connecting with everything, the whole room became this experience of being held in love having love poured into me.

Kirsten Oates: I sit and I bring that very full experience I have, the thought, the things I said in my mind, the experience in my heart, the whole tingling in my body, as it was happening. So I ground myself there, try to hand myself back over to that to let go of everything. I used the word love. I chose the word love to help me in my distractions. So that's the context of how I started. What I noticed very quickly is I ground myself in that experience and I have a lot of physicality goes on. I feel a whole tingling and a warmth in my heart but very quickly I drift away from all of that. I'm thinking about something going on at work or I'm thinking about something going on with my family or I'm thinking about... I lose touch, I feel like I drift away somewhere else.

Kirsten Oates: And it feels like over to the left off to the right and some part of me has drifted out of this loving, grounded place and I have to find my way back. So I'm using the word love to do that. I get very frustrated when I sit for 30 minutes and that's happened most of the time, that I've drifted away and have to use the word love by the end like this word love feels more like, oh my gosh. And so I'll start with that.

Jim Finley: Okay, beautiful. I want to paraphrase. That's very good. I've seen people's spiritual direction or psychotherapy or just my own life. I love these stories people have. Sometimes they come as a very painful moment like this, sometimes it's a blissful moment or a solitary moment, but what strikes me about it, is there are moments where there's a stunning deepening of presence. That's the word that comes to me. It's like a vast density of presence. It's unexplainably over all pervasive. And we would look on that then maybe [Lester John Rosenberg 00:13:59] calls it the touch.

Another thing way look on is being initiated into the way. And also notice it's self-authenticating, it's beyond doubt. And also notice in that moment you weren't the thinking that as you weren't figuring out anything, you weren't trying to attain anything, you were just momentarily beyond all that.

Jim Finley: That's the first thing. The second thing is this, it's you would know deep down that in that moment that nothing more was given to you, but you momentarily experienced where every moment is, every beat of your heart, every breath is this way. You got a little taste of the divinity, the fleetingness of every moment like that. You were initiated into the divinity of that. Next, you then notice that there's this moment that happened. And then knowing there's the desire to abide there you say, wow, this would be amazing. Having been there. I see how shallow my day by day preoccupations are compared to that moment. And therefore wouldn't it be wonderful if I could live there, see what if I could stay there as a depth out of which I would live every moment. It isn't like something curious or something "I think I'll try it."

Jim Finley: But it's a very deep thing you can't explain, but it tugs at your heart, it's a thing. And Thomas Merton said to me once in *Spiritual Direction*. He said, "Once in a while you'll find someone with whom to talk about such things, they're hard to find." He said. And so really when you come to the author of the *Cloud*, to the teacher and you share this, the teacher right away knows what you're talking about because not only have they experienced it, but they're established in it. Because that's what he says in the forward. I don't say the continually experiences stirring as experienced contemplatives do implying that it is possible that your heart has not deceived you. This longing is a gift. And so we say, well, this is really special, this you're really in an amazing place.

Jim Finley: So I give the guidelines for the practice and you can hardly wait to get home, to get started. You light your candle and bow and gargle holy water, whatever you do. And you get started and you're so sincere. And at the end of the 30 minutes, minute and a half, you are off here, off there, off here, see? And the next day, same thing, same thing, same thing. So you come back a month later and you say, I tried it every day, but I'm discouraged by it. And so then the author of the *Cloud* says, "It is only discouraging if you're assuming that progress is dependent on your ability to do this." But what if you can't do this? What if God's achieving it in you like when you were lying there, when she was in bed dying, you didn't achieve that?

Jim Finley: And therefore it is actually passing beyond your ability for your efforts to achieve it because those are also the gifts of God, but God is calling. So what you do is you accept your inability to do it, but you hold fast to the sincerity to give yourself in this love, this infinitely in love with you and your inability to do it. That's really the key to this, really that God's infinitely in love with you and your inability to do it. And you're met there as a powerlessness deeply accepted as the gate of Heaven. And that's the unexpected nearness in this. So does that make sense what I'm saying here? Does that resonate or...

Kirsten Oates: It does. Would that help? Would that sense of arising frustration that happens when

I'm for the 10th time, dragging myself back from thinking about the grocery shopping or and I actually feel like a frustration arise in myself. What do I do with that?

Jim Finley: Yeah, well, first of all, I think up to a point the frustration is normal because you're sitting there, very sincere wanting to a very simple thing that matters and every 10 and a half seconds from the grocery list or the phone call or, you know what I mean? Really? So.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: But what it does, another way to look at it is making you are consciously aware of how unaware you tend to be. We're always one wondering around, but we're unaware of how our mind wanders around. T.S. Eliot says somewhere I was distracted from the distraction by a distraction. We were distraction. We don't even know we're distracted, but to have this taste is the undistracted mind, but having tasted it... So what you do is you know that every time you renew the effort, you take your word, you're really regrounding you in God sustaining you in the midst of your distraction because God's never distracted.

Jim Finley: See God's stabilized in you as God's beloved like this and God finds no obstacle in your distracted mind. And this could it take a while. Doesn't like, I tried it for a week and nothing happened. I think I'll watch television or I don't think I can do this. If you feel called to do it, like the fruits that are very subtle, you have to discern it, you stay with it. And a month later, two months later, six months later, three years later, you're in a qualitatively different place that you couldn't have imagined when you started but is so subtle. See this strange communion and that's the qualitative feel of the way.

Kirsten Oates: I have another question. When I start the practice and I'm tapping into that heartfelt connection and longing to be back there. I do situate myself back in the room. There's a surrounding where it began and I situate myself back there and let the memories come a little bit. When I'm in the practice and I'm using the word, is it helpful to do that again? Like let the memory arise and put myself back in the space that I felt when it started the first time?

Jim Finley: Yes, very good. I want to say this back. This is very good. Let's say there was a moment where you were in that room where this happened to you. We would say spiritually, since God came to you in that moment and since God never forgets, God remembers you in that moment, that specific moment. So see. So in a way, the room you're sitting in, when you meditate is that room.

Kirsten Oates: Mm.

Jim Finley: So if it helps to visualize that way you go back to the place. So the interiority of the room you're really in is the interiority of the room where the awaking occurred. And so now you're sitting there that way. See, but whatever helps stabilize in this delicacy little by little by little, then you that the need to do that falls away because you can open your eyes. The configuration of the furniture of the room is infinite in all directions. Standing up and sitting down is the way, so whatever helps to ground oneself. Sometimes we need a holy place to ground us in the holiness of every place we need a holy moment or the holiness of every moment. So you go back to that grounding place, but noted that God, that moment in that room is this moment in this room. And you it's like that.

Kirsten Oates: That's beautiful. And another question, there was a number of days in the month where I had very uncomfortable physical sensations and they didn't feel connected necessarily to thoughts or but just being in this way, much more present in my body I had. And not like a sports injury type sensation, but if I were to describe it, maybe like a real tense anxiety in my stomach or a tight anxiety in my chest. Yeah, so that was surprising. Do you have any help with that?

Jim Finley: I do. Let's say something that at the psychological level, what we're doing in this practice is letting go of our defenses. Our defenses is our customary patterns of conscious thinking. Our schedule, our preoccupations. But notice in this unguarded love alone sincerity grounded in the word, all the customary configurations that guide you in your sense of who you think you are through the day, they fall away. And what starts to happen is that layers of internalized suffering, sometimes they're somaticized in the body, sometimes it's a hidden memory of a past trauma or a loss or an immense sadness. All that can come welling up to the surface. And typically I think what happens in the practice itself, you would notice it, you'd be aware of it, you would stay with the practice, but later after the practice, you would journal about it or process it because as each layer comes up, it's another layer waiting to be healed. See how can you be present to that, to touch it with love so that it might dissolve in love?

Jim Finley: If sometimes too much comes up all at once and it's overwhelming, you should back off because safety first. Sometimes let's intensive silent meditation retreats where people are all sitting together in silence and someone will start crying, they can't stop crying and here maybe a year earlier their spouse died, they didn't process the grieving. Or a child died. And then the unguarded silence, all this starts coming out like this. And so it's a willingness really for all the hurt to come out into the open so grace can touch it. But you're always putting safety first that you don't get in touch with too much at once. You're always pacing it.

Jim Finley: So this is experiential self-knowledge. It's like bringing all the brokenness of oneself that needs to come out in a pace so that it can be transformed in this love. Experientially, not just theoretically. If you think you need to talk somebody, you would. If you think you need therapy, you'd go get therapy for it. Post traumatic stress disorder, repress memory, whatever. So it is part of the grace of it. It's not a glide path into heaven. It's not an effortless thing at all. It's letting all the layers of yourself come out and be transformed into the love of God, sustaining you like this.

Kirsten Oates: That's surprising to hear because in the moment that I try and go back to, I felt so whole and so complete and so... But what you're saying is that didn't just heal everything all in that one go. So going back to that, because I did feel, I wouldn't even say the word vulnerable, just I guess open, open would be the word. I just felt opened up and completely open. So when I try and recreate that in my sit, I hear what you're saying is that openness. Now I might see things I hadn't seen completely or things that I haven't healed or...

Jim Finley: You want to share something else I think is significant. What's interesting about this moment you described she's in the bed unconscious, your nephew, was he there too?

Kirsten Oates: Right next to... She was on my right and he was on my left.

Jim Finley: It was in the dark before... Actually it was an immensely sad moment. Seriously. She's going to die soon. What's so stunning about the moment is how immensely sad it was in illuminosity that transcended and permeated the sadness that even in the midst of sadness, the divinity that transcended it and permeates it came welling up and touched you. Does that make sense?

Kirsten Oates: Yeas, oh yeah.

Jim Finley: That's what's striking about it. And so what often happens though with us is that in the day by day, the overriding habits of frustration and so on, they tend to close off experiential access to that depth. They tend to take over. And so what we're really doing is practicing staying vulnerable in a vulnerable place long enough for the divinity to come shining out through. I don't know if I shared this before in the series, but what strikes me is there's a, I heard once, I forget where I heard this, but there's a Hindu practice of counting your breath up to 10 for an hour every morning.

Jim Finley: And there's a Yogi in the city where you live, who leads a discussion group every morning at six in the morning. So very devoted people before work, they gather together to do this practice. And so the teacher explains the practice. And so you just sit very quietly and you inhale real deep and slow and you hold it for just a second. Then you exhale real slow. You inhale real, real. Say one inhale real slow, exhale 2, inhale 3 to 10. And you go to 10 until you have the least distracting thought, you have to go back to one. See? That's it. And so the person rings the bell, everybody bows, it's your first time. And you're sitting there like that.

Jim Finley: And at the end of the hour, he says, "Any questions?" You raise your hand and say, "Yes, I didn't get very far." He said, "There's no rush. We're going to do this every day until we die. There's no rush. I'll see you tomorrow." See? And so you come back the next morning, a little bit daunting and you start and the whole room is sitting there this way like this. And you sit there with all your heart. Five years later, halfway through the practice and you didn't see this coming. You get to two, you get so excited about it. You got to go back to one.

Jim Finley: See and here's the thing. All things are possible for the one who goes back to one, because one is a hair's breath from zero and zero is the infinite poverty of God pouring out and giving and taking us to herself in the midst of our powerlessness. As long as we think we're trying to achieve something, "I don't know if I'll make it." So somehow we have to be brought to the end of that very gently so that the love that shines through and gives itself to that in our powerlessness, which is really foreshadowing the very moment of our death, that his mother's death, her death, he got inhaled and this infinite love took her home. And so we're trying to experience that now in our breath, if that makes sense? Poetically to me.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. That story raises one of my other questions. When I go back to that memory and open myself to that stance. I feel different than when I'm sitting at my computer, doing my work. I feel more grounded, I feel more present. I feel... But it's not the same, it's not that, it's still missing something. And so I did find, after trying this practice for a while, like, "God, where are you? Why aren't you showing up?" The memory of that experience is not the same as that experience and I just have this deep longing for God to show up. Yeah, to have what was at the heart of that experience, which like you said, I can't create in with my memories or with my visions or with the way I'm breathing or grounding myself.

Jim Finley: Yeah, that's a good point too. I want to say it back first. We've had this moment and we're committing ourselves to the practice and infidelity to the practice. Even throughout the day, we can notice there is more of an affinity with that. There's more of a resonance with it or a sensitivity to it but it's not the same. It's like an obscure echo of it. Does that make sense in a way?

Kirsten Oates: Yes, yeah.

Jim Finley: Yeah. And so responses is, "Yes, of course." So let's say this, the insight would be that you're on a path not of your own making and you know that this infinite love of God isn't measured by the depth of which you experience it. For the infinite depth of God is giving itself to you in each incremental taste of it. So even the subtlest awareness of it is the presence of God as that level of awareness. And here's the next thing about it. The next moment the fullness comes, you won't do it. It'll wash over you like in the middle of the night, like in a quickening, like that. And that's what it's, if that makes sense in a way, see? And that's the whole point. That's what makes it mystical. We passively receive God coming to us, not as God's gifts, but God coming to us as God divinizing us unexplainably like this.

Jim Finley: Now what happens over time? This is so unique for each person. It was little by little those unexpected resurgence of that primal divinity that comes unexpectedly. Over time as they come along, you learn not to be so surprised by them. And also you start to notice that somehow sitting at the computer and looking out the window is itself overwhelmingly divine. There's like an obituated state where there's less and less distinction between the full bone experiential divinization. And you realize the divinity of the least moment this moment. Again, I think, moment of falling in love, with the birth of a child or the death of a loved one, with the midst of a thunder or a certain moments. But once we're on this path, we get more and more sensitized to becoming ever more habituated. So when he says it's not the stirring and all as experienced contemplatives do, so it's possible to live in an habituated state of the divinization of the ordinariness of the moment as an underlying awareness. And the author of *The Clouds*, one of those people.

Jim Finley: And I think that's why when I was with Thomas Merton in Gethsemane, I think that you sit with the teacher and when you're in the presence of such a person like you know your heart has not deceived you because you discern you're in the presence of someone and whom has been realized. And the point is, you sit with the teacher so what obviously happened to the teacher might happen to you, I want to stay close by so it happened to you. As it does occur in sincerity, it happens, you're blindsided by it. By the way, I also think in these traditions, the recognition of the teacher as teacher. The teacher knows you recognize a teacher as teacher only because you already know it. Because if you didn't already know it, you wouldn't recognize the teacher.

Jim Finley: The teacher also knows it's completely true of you as well. Everything is true of the teacher, is true of you. The teacher also knows you wouldn't believe the teacher if they told you that. And so because teachers don't argue, they temporarily accept your recognition of the teacher until you realize the teacher is just a well seasoned student of being divinized by this love. That's one way I see it. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Well, the last thing I wanted to tell you is that I feel very committed to the practice. I

feel like this is a practice for me because in the moment that it happened in the following moment after I had that moment, because in that moment I wasn't really thinking or I was just... Yeah, but in the following moments, I prayed to God to help me be true to what was given to me to give to Will. And I don't know what else I can do apart from sit like this, to be true to that. And so I feel like I've made a commitment to show up every day as my commitment to be a flow of love to Will, that he will know the love of his mother that was the love of God. And that I will try and open myself to be a vehicle for that as best I can. And so I do feel like when I sit this way every day, it does, to use your words, concretize that desire, that commitment. And so I do feel this is the practice for me.

Jim Finley: Yeah, that's a good respond to that. That's important, I think. The thing about this path is it's always universally personal and it's personal in some unexplainable, deep way. So in that moment, you know that you're called to be there for Will as much as you know you are called to mother this kind of, the divine motherhood of God as a call and the prayer embodies that. And the same with me, this early onset, severe trauma that I went through. I know that in my prayer, the monastery, the prayer embodied that. And then later when I left and became a psychotherapist, I sit with trauma all day long. And I really felt that my, what I was in silence in the morning and sitting with suffering people all day long was my way. I had to be true.

Jim Finley: You just have to be true to your way. And it's a very deep thing, really. It's like, it's a very depth of the path of your own unfolding life and that's where it rings the truest. That's why the Cloud also says at the end, "if this isn't..." But sometimes, by the way, this way can involve great struggle. You're struggling very hard, but you still feel called to do it. It goes in waves. He said that sometimes it's not for you, then don't do it. Because holiness, God's presence is all pervasively everywhere. Whereas for you in that broader sense of the gifts of God that is helping you be more this, more this, more this, more this. So never try to force it like mystical union or bust you're going to make it happen. You're always just being true to your heart and following it along and like that. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: The last question I have then is based on that, what you've just said there are times when I go in the opposite direction of love with Will, where I notice I've done something selfish or trying to get a need of mine served or not listening well and I don't know, I just hoped this practice might have more of a direct correlation, but I do notice and find it difficult when I behave in ways that aren't loving. And I just wonder how I'd relate that back to this practice.

Jim Finley: Yeah. I like it. Yeah, first of all, we should always try to be more loving and start all over again. Tums [weren't well 00:38:57] said in the monastery. He said, "We should always meditate on discouragement after a fall." You know, when we do something that was unkind or loving or judgmental, right? Because what discouragement reveals is the secret agenda of a holy you. In other words, you know how you or you or you could do something like this, but me? And so really as St. Benedict says in the [role 00:39:25], what are you monks doing in the monastery all day? He said, "Fall down and get up, fall down and get up, fall down and get up." So every fall is a reminder that we're caught by God in the fall and were infinitely loved by God in the brokenness of ourself, deeply accepted, which is salvation.

Jim Finley: So there's the moral imperative we should always keep trying like this. But the deeper lesson is the moments when we slip sometimes are more important or more meaningful than when

we don't. And because we're always being touched by how God's merciful love sustains us and guides us. And over the years we can't see where we have grown. If we look back to where we were back, we're not as crazy as we used to be or as reactive as we used to be. It isn't as if nothing's happening, but you'll be on your death bed. See you're trying, you hope you get there, you're going to die right. So right at the very end, you're going to be an infinitely loved, broken person, being taken by God in death, trying to be sensitized to that. I think, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: That idea of looking back and seeing maybe the ways that I've changed or been supported by the practice, I do feel like when on either side of that moment, like I can't even remember who I was before that moment happened. There's something so significant that shifted that I can ground myself back in that moment. It's hard to ground myself back in who I was prior to that moment if that makes sense.

Jim Finley: It really does. I think this is an insight into reincarnation that maybe the purification of love till there's nothing left but love, might not end with biological death. It's a Catholic inside of purgatory. And I think also in our lifetime, we can see reincarnations. We can remember back to the way we used to be. And there's some qualitatively sense we're no longer that anymore. Or the image that I use is imagine you're up in the attic going through things and you come across a journal you wrote 10 years ago or 20 years ago and you even forgot you wrote it. And you sit down and you start to read the things you worried about, the things you thought about. And what's interesting about it is you that wrote that journal could see the you that's reading it now, she'd faint.

Jim Finley: And yet we labor under the illusion, we finally figuring it out. And I think these are rehearsals for death. I think when we die. So there's this constant unfolding. Sometimes people would say to me in therapy, they'll be in the midst of their trauma therapy, like several years into it, let's say. And they'll say, "I wish this didn't take so long." I'll say, "Yes, I know." But I'll say, "You know something? If we would've video recorded your first session here three years ago and play it and we could watch it together, look how far you've come. That woman or that man who sat there and said that they had no awareness at all of where you are right now." It's important to see that because the changes are incremental. We don't see the them, but it's nice to see the arc and that God's not done with us yet. So. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. Well, that's all I had to share today.

Jim Finley: Good. See you next month. Keep going. You're doing great and it's a gift. Blessings.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, thank you so much, Jim. I hope the students or the listeners find this helpful.

Jim Finley: I do too. I just finished this dialogue with Kirsten and we were having a few little comments afterwards. So I observed something that she thought would be good for me to add as a clarification. So I'd like to do this now as an afterthought. And that is that in this session, this where I was, is contrived in a way where she was coming to me as a beginner and in real life, she'd be coming back to me once a month for spiritual direction. So just to know that in a sense, this was very [contense 00:43:40] and content driven.

Jim Finley: In other words, the things we went over in one hour is if you were seeing me in Spiritual Direction or anybody in this, the things we might explore over a period of 10 sessions or

30 sessions. So this was very thematically driven and isn't as if in a single session of Spiritual Direction, all these things would come up at once because each one would require a dialogue or sitting with it and it would have connotations and connotations for you. So we were touching on core themes that tend to occur in this practice. So I think it's an important thought about it. So that's the insight actually.

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 or send us a voicemail at cac.org/voicemails. All of this information can and be found in the show notes. We'll see you again soon.