



Turning to the Mystics

The Cloud of Unknowing

Dialogue 4: The Perfect Life
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. We're in season five of Turning to the Mystics and we are turning to the anonymous author of The Cloud of Unknowing. And I'm here with Jim and I've got some questions for you, Jim, about your talk last time. I wanted to start with something you said during the talk last time, which was, you said that God's always meeting you where you are. I find that quite comforting, but I just wondered if you'd unpack that a little bit in relation to what you're teaching about the cloud.

Jim Finley: First of all, in the spiritual worldview of the Christian faith in concert really with the spiritual worldview of all the world religions, but for our way in the Christian tradition, Judeo-Christian tradition, it is that God's with us first in the ongoing self donating act of God in creation like let there be light, let there be stones and trees and so on. So, what we have then, and it is a self donating act where the presence of God is presenting itself in and as the presence of ourselves and everything. And it's nothingness without God. So, in the ontology or the very being of things, we see that the world is God's body and that it's bodying forth. The love that's uttering it into being. So, there's that.

Jim Finley: Next, there then raises the question as persons were created as persons, the word endowed with the capacity, not just with reasons, science and all that and culture really, but we're also endowed with the capacity to awaken to that as we were called with the capacity to be quickened by the divinity of ourselves and all things, which is religious experience, and then in the quickening, in the sense of the divinity or the wonder of each moment of life, we're then called freely surrendered to it, to this love, because love is never imposed. It's always offered. And the level at which are the ways in which we're aware of the divinity of our life and the ways in which we respond to it, that God's always present in that way, that God's always waiting for us where we are. So, even at the most rudimentary level, the first stirrings of the holiness of life, God's wholly there, wholly giving yourself, giving himself to us in and as the sincerity of that.

Jim Finley: And then the author of The Cloud, all these mystics, the gospels are showing us how that can go deeper and deeper, deeper, deeper, deeper. So, we're always trying to find out where we are, be present to that, because that's where God is with us and see the mysterious path we traveled so far to get here and then keep leaning into it, to see what God has in mind because it's eternal and endless into this arc. And it being divinized really for all of eternity.

Kirsten Oates: That's so beautiful. It made me wonder about people who have found this podcast and I wonder how God's meeting them in the way they found the podcast and as they listen to it.

Jim Finley: And that's what I think too, when we first discovered the Mystics, when I first read Thomas Burton issue, serendipitously come up on it. But then you can tell, they're talking about what your heart has tasted. I can't explain this, but I can tell what's being spoken of is what my own awakening heart is being awakened to. And that makes it a real find and I find your community and enter it. And yeah, I think so too. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. I do remember when I first found your teaching, Jim, I just didn't know life could have this kind of depth I've been longing for it to have, the kind of love and forgiveness and acceptance that I've been longing for it to have. The book *Turning To The Mystics* or turning to *The Cloud of Unknowing*, you talked about how this book is for a particular kind of people that have this longing for God, a stirring and a longing for God in a deeper way than they have right now. Am I saying that correctly?

Jim Finley: Yes. And in this sense, and this is what I was really focusing on or turning to chapter eight, say we start first with chapter eight and this will get us back to the forward in *The Cloud of Unknowing*. So in chapter eight, he's offered this way to pray, grounding yourself in this love, seeking God for God's sake enough for any of his gifts. You ground your heart's desire in this one word and thoughts rise and fall within you. But the image I have, all these thoughts of God, revealed thoughts, true thoughts of God, they're like love letters from the beloved, but now you've been quickened to desire union with the beloved beyond all the thoughts of the beloved and this means disidentifying or letting go of one's tendency to let all your thoughts of God determine the ways you understand God. You have this understanding born of this love, this unexplainably transforming you into itself.

Jim Finley: So, then he says in chapter eight, because this is spiritual direction, it begins by chapter eight with this directee and by implication, all of us. Say, if you say that we're to put aside all these thoughts of God, why do I find them so helpful?

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. That's a good question.

Jim Finley: That's a great question. I opened the gospels, for my Alexio and Jesus says fear not, I'm consoled by that and I'm touched by that. We saw this with Guigo, too, in the *meditacio*, the reflection. So why is that? And he says, what you just said, "That's a good question." He says, and he said, "Let me try, but it requires some explanation." So chapter eight, I think shows us how this whole path calls upon us to be a reflective person, like to sit very quietly, to kind of quietly take unto ourself a kind of broader, more enriched understanding of these matters. And this is where he makes this distinction between the act of life and the contemplative in the higher and the lower and each, and we're thinking pertains to each one.

Jim Finley: And so in the very first one, for example, is in the lower stages of the act of life. It's your act life. It's the way you treat other people every day in your life, your attitudes towards them, how you act towards them. And you're trying to act in ways every day, as Christ calls you to act. How can I be more loving, more engaged, have more empathy, more sensitivity, be more supportive as well, you should, you should do that. But in the higher phase of the act of life, you realize there's a need to kind of pause and sit with the richness of that, rather than throwing myself constantly into this activity, how can I ground myself in the depth dimension? That's guiding my activity and that's the higher dimension of the contemplative... The act of life. And then it goes on to say, "However, even in this stage about thinking, well, you're still thinking, you're reflecting on all of this." And you're like, "No, the thinking too, we need to see not so much thought itself."

Jim Finley: And he says, "First of all know that all thought is good." Because God creates thought. God creates the mind to think. And so in this sense, all thought is the gift of God. It's a gift of God to think, the mind to think. He said, the question is, what do we do with it? So even in

the lowest level of the act of life, if our thoughts inspire us to be more loving, more kind, we see the goodness of thought. But thought can also, we can be judgemental. We can be proud. We can be kind of grounded in our position on something. He says, "So, we're always, even at the lowest level, we're discerning out." To always discern the quality of our thought and the light of love. And so that's kind of where he starts.

Kirsten Oates: I like hearing that. What can come across as a method, but relating it back to everyday life because this is really about how we ground ourselves in God in everyday life. We're not looking for a method, but a way of being.

Jim Finley: Yes, exactly. In other words, let's say in the practice, we sit in a certain way this way and what we're doing at the end of the each session of quiet prayer, is we ask God for the grace not to break the thread of those attitudinal sensitivities as we go through the day. So, little by little, by little, the way we habitually go through the day, is more and more non distinct from the way we pray. And that's what we're really looking for, is spiritual character transformation. It permeates every moment of our life. That's right, exactly.

Kirsten Oates: Just a reminder. I think it would be helpful, Jim, to just give a little reminder of the method you've started to do that, but we're sitting in silence and we are there for an encounter with God. We are committing to saying yes to our desire for God. Not knowing what to do with it really, but we might have this desire for God. We sit grounded in the desire and a yes to the desire. Is that the starting point?

Jim Finley: Yes. Let's start there because that's where he starts. That's where the author starts. And then we can see how starting in this way, we're all invited to try it. And this is what with the movement of centering prayer, it's the method that we open. We're all invited to try this, try, give it a try and see. So what the author is saying in the Cloud is that he has more in mind first, a very specific thing that he's talking to this directee, who's coming to him for a direction and by implication, all of us and the directee isn't saying, "How do I apply the truths of Jesus to my attitudes towards my spouse and towards my children? How do I apply it towards how I see the suffering of the world?" All those are very important questions. How can I reflect on this?

Jim Finley: He begins to pick up in the person, not just that they've had these moments of a blind stirring of love in their in most being of the spirit stirring them to love, that is its innermost, is that hidden place, deeper than feeling, deeper than thought. But when it stirs, it's reverberations echo out into reflexive consciousness, like something wonderous is happening. And then he also is saying in these stages of the Christian life, the act of life, the common way of living the Christian life, the special way, devotional sincerity, the singular way. The singular way is where these stirrings of oneness, I think happened to everybody from time to time. We're all grace like that. And I think what they tend to do is they tend to hallow our daily life or quicken it, or they alum our prayer or activity.

Jim Finley: But he's speaking to the person for whom those fleeting turnings, those leading quickenings. He says, "You live now at the deep solitary core of your being, that

you've come to a place where some unexplainable way, it has become an imperative of your heart to habitually stabilize in that divinized state. And here's a way to do that." Here's a way to do that. And then he gives his method. Now the method then is not really a method as anyone can just try it. The method concretizes a way to stabilize in a stance that offers the least resistance to being taken by God and to the depths of God beyond thought.

Jim Finley: And so it's similar in all these mystics, Teresa of Avila starts out the first three mansions of the interior castle. We might say are the act of life, psychological, spiritual maturity, but in the fourth mansion, she speaks to something starting to happen to you, namely your hearts being enlarged to divine proportions. She says, now let me share with you what I've learned about how to surrender to that. So, her method is really a way of obedience or fidelity to this deepening event. Same with John of the Cross. He says, we have to follow Christ in all things, but in order to follow Christ, in order to imitate him, we have to study his life like open the scriptures, sit with it. But then what you do is you start to discover the loss of the felt sense of God's presence. Drawing us into a passage through a dark night, this deprivation. And I'm here to help you to surrender and understand what's happening to you.

Jim Finley: Likewise, with Guigio, lectio, meditation, and prayer, the prayer reaches a threshold of desire, that becomes an unbearable desire that you're powerless to consummate. And so, the whole steps for the person who's reached that point is to stay there at that place. So it can have its way with you. So that it drops down and touches everything. So, it's in that same way, the author of *The Cloud* is suggesting there's not as a method, but concretizing, a stance that offers the least resistance to being habitually stabilized in that mysterious quickening of your heart in this infinite love beyond all thoughts of God, beyond all emotions of God. So, in that sense, it's kind of the act of aspect of cooperating with the grace.

Kirsten Oates: That's helpful, Jim, to hear you explain that. It's so counter cultural, like we want to grab a method and say, if I do this, I'll get to unit of consciousness, start tomorrow.

Jim Finley: Exactly.

Kirsten Oates: I'm excited, but this is much more about finding something that helps extend something that's already happening, helps concretize it. I like the way you said that.

Jim Finley: And so there are some people I've talked to a lot of people this way in retreats. They're not going to try it because they're not inclined to try it. If some people are inclined to try it, then try it. But the way you experience it, will reveal the level at which you're experiencing it. So, for example, the person who say, "I practice centering prayer, I find it so helpful." And then they'll say, "Well, why did you find it helpful?" They'll say, "Well, it really does help me to become more centered, more grounded, more present, more humble, more open as well it should." But those are the gifts of God. So, you're using centering prayer to deepen where you are in the special way of deepen the gift to God. The cloud of author and was saying, "Yes, of course, then do it. Do whatever helps do it. What it doesn't help. Don't do it." But he's listening for

something else. And he's listening for the person says, "Yes, all that's true. It's true."

Jim Finley: But right now what's more important than all of that is I feel within myself, a burning desire that I can't feel. It's a desire that I do not understand. And I feel in some way not God's gifts, but the very presence of God as God is accessing me. And I passively received it into myself and I want to know, how do I surrender to that? And so in chapter eight, he's saying, "It isn't either or you're in this act of states and you hit the mystical threshold, you throw the switch in your mystic. It's a continuum." It isn't either or, but it's a continuum of discernment of like where we are in the way that we might find this way to pray helpful to us.

Kirsten Oates: So, then in the method we are grounding ourselves in a word and we are looking for a word that does concretize, like in our hearts, it's kind of concretizing that openness, that desire. That's how we can see the word, not just as a word of distraction or a word of...But it holds. It holds our own kind of hope and longing and desire. And then there's this idea of the cloud of forgetting and the cloud of unknowing. So we are letting go of two different kinds of thoughts. Is that right, Jim, how to think of those clouds?

Jim Finley: Let's say that we find ourselves being drawn into this mysterious realm where it isn't just that there's been this fleeting flashes of the stirring, but a deep longing to abide there or to let it have its way with us. So, he's saying what to do? What to do here then? You have to stabilize in a daily rendezvous to stay vulnerable and open to it long enough to let it have its way with you. So, what you do is you take a word and he said a simple one's better than a long one, but choose one's, this meaningful to you. So, Jesus or mercy or yes, or whatever. And then you use that word to ground yourself in the desire beyond all thoughts of God, you ground yourself, in a word to ground yourself in finding way beyond what any word can say, including this word.

Jim Finley: Now in that stance then what happens, is that when you're sitting there, there's still these thoughts of God come of understandable that they would through the liturgy, with the scriptures they would. And so you don't reject any of them. But you notice then that even the thought of God's infinity is a finite thought of God's infinity. That even the thought of God's eternity is a fleeting thought of God's eternity. And therefore what you do in an equal minded way, you realize the thoughts about God for all their gifts to us, are impoverished. When compared to the infinite mystery of very God, beyond all thoughts of God. So, the cloud of unknowing, then it's an attitudinal stance of refraining from the inclinations to think about any of the thoughts that arise and the way you do that is you keep turning to the word like Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, whatever, God, God, God to stabilize in this mysterious inner place of sustained receptivity to this love beyond all thoughts of God.

Jim Finley: And the thoughts of forgetting, the cloud of forgetting is knowing that all these thoughts of God came to you through your memory. You remember, you heard it when you read it in scripture, in a homily or whatever. And also it also applies to all your thoughts about yourself. It applies to all your thoughts about the earth, all your thoughts about people, the whole realm of thought. Because ultimately speaking you're unthinkable. No idea of you is you because who you ultimately are, is who God eternally knows you to be in giving the very gift to God to you is the depth of your very self, the very divinity of yourself. This identity in God, in your nothingness without God. And therefore it's really moving beyond the frontiers of ideological living. It's moving. You don't reject all these thought.

Jim Finley: Notice this person who wrote this book was a scholar. What I mean is he had a very astute intellect. He was a very clear thinker. He's inviting us to take this stance of a surrendered realization of this love that utterly transcends and utterly permeates all thought all memory. So, this is the way. For those who are called to it. And you're called to it because having tasted the oneness is a discontent with anything less than the oneness, a oneness with the mystery you cannot feel, cannot grasp. You can attain it, but it's attaining you and your inability to attain it. And you're called to surrender in this love, yeah. Turning to the Mystics will continue in a moment.

Kirsten Oates: So, this directee in the chapter you focused on was really concerned about letting go of thoughts where he or she experienced God's presence in the thought as a gift like you're saying, and it's almost like a fear of letting go of those thoughts because is there a God beyond or am I rejecting God? Is that part of what feels like a death? Because you talk about this practice can feel like a death. Is there a fear of there's something clinging to those thoughts, that's anxious about letting them go. Does that part go through a kind of death?

Jim Finley: Let's say this in chapter eight, we kind of fans this out, this broad based way. We kind of starts at the lower level of the act of life in which we're actively engaged in our thoughts that guide our daily activity. As well you should, example, I used to want to of the talks I think is that if you're flying in a commercial flight and the pilot, you're 35,000 feet, comes over the speaker system and announces that he's mystic and feels a vision coming on. You'd hope he'd fly the plane. In other words, the holiness is in the concreteness of what love is asking out of us. We need to think and think clearly. Likewise, in the more interior phases of reflection, we need to think clearly. Metastasio is the mind clearly processing what's received, being accessed and touched by God to that, it reflect upon it, take it to heart, get deep into the word. He says, "So you should do that.

Jim Finley: You should do that. What he's saying is this. There comes a point then where a person says that is this all there is. In a way I'm consoled by it. Because if I just keep reading more books, study more things and you will, might be right and keep reading. Keep turning the pages of scriptures, what you should. But yes, is there more? That's the way the cloud puts it. Is there more? And what's more is God, is the infinity of God, not God in his gifts and in the thoughts of God, but very God, as he said, naked is God is in himself. And that it's infinite. Not only is there more, but it's infinitely more than more. Good, better, best. It's infinitely better than the best. So, we're not called to the best, which is com comparative, but we're called what's infinitely better than the best, which is the infinity of God being given to us is our deepest self called to realize his destiny. So, that's what he's saying.

Jim Finley: Now it's very scary because there's a comfort in our reflective thoughts and it can be disquieting when our present assumptions about ourselves and everything are no longer adequate to understand what's happening to us. And that's why it requires a kind of a trust. Thomas Merton said, "When the great gifts of the contempt of life is freedom for the need to understand." And because anything we're capable of understanding in our finite mine, alum by faith is finite, but there's a deeper way to understand what it means to understand which is being called. And we begin to sense it by the inadequacy of what we're capable of understanding because of this love, that stirs in our heart. It's a very subtle matter for spiritual direction.

Jim Finley: And I think especially in monasteries, everything's intended to cultivate this or protect this, out here in the midst of the world. The world doesn't invite this at all. Therefore, how am I in the midst of my daily life, in everything that's going on, how am I to believe is such a thing pertains to me and how can I be faithful to it? So, when I left the monastery, I started giving these silent contemplative retreats around the country, a few times in Europe. And these are people in the world like college students, married people, mothers and fathers, divorced people, widows, so on, people in their professions. But when they heard the retreat was in silence and the meals were in silence and there'd be silence sittings in the mystics, they came because it finds whom it finds, it gives itself to whom it gives itself. And you can feel something tugging at you.

Jim Finley: So, when you open up the cloud or we listen to these mystics, it's like a homecoming, like I found my place. You know what I mean? There's something about it that rings so true to who I believe I'm called to be.

Kirsten Oates: In this chapter, there's the focus on the thoughts about God. But I also wanted to ask about, in the cloud of forgetting, I remember when I started this practice, there's a lot of thoughts that come up that aren't just about myself or about the earth or they are about myself or the earth or others, but they're critical, they're judgmental, they're kind of... I start thinking about what's for dinner. And so I can see I'm frustrated the way my mind wanders around, but I wonder those kind of thoughts, how do we handle seeing this stream of thought, seeing things that we might not appreciate about ourselves or we wish was different or might be disconcerting to witness.

Jim Finley: In *The Cloud of Unknowing*, there's a chapter on how to handle distractions and it's chapter 32, and he says this, he said, "When these thoughts come at you like this, he's getting some stress... And they won't let go of you. They're persistent." He said, "What to do?" He says, "To look over their shoulder as if you're looking for something else." He says, "Which of course you are." So, the thought arise and you go, "Very interesting." That's not really what I'm looking for here. And precisely, because you're a thought, that you're not what I'm looking for. You look over, what's beyond my thought. And so they kind of just fade away because we don't energize them by getting reactive to them either by clinging to them or rejecting them, or equal minded with respect to all thought. If they're a good thought, like what's for dinner, you're meant to think about what's for dinner when it's time for dinner.

Jim Finley: And if you're practicing prayer, it might help you to be more present preparing dinner. But in the time of prayer, you might say, I appreciate that, but that's not what I'm about right now, this anchoring my heart and what it was to present, likewise when I realized that I'm jealous of someone or angry about someone, it is also another thought that brings up an attitude. So, it just noticed, and we pass beyond it. But then later what we do when we reflect upon it, we would say, "Where did that come from?" So, way I put it, is just beneath the anger is the pain, just beneath the pain is the powerlessness. And, so we're to become more contemplative, be present to our anger. What's underneath it? Where is it come from? What's feeding it? And the God given emotion that restores the boundary that was violated.

Jim Finley: And likewise, what is jealousy? Jealousy is the fear that we're replaceable. Where jealousy is so taken by how gifted somebody is. It blinds us to how mysteriously gifted we are and being who we are. And so sometimes outside of prayer, these thoughts that come up that we're not

to think of in prayer, it's the time of prayer. It's very similar to psychotherapy in a way. It's to kind of alum and teasing open and laying bare with feeds and nurtures these thoughts. So they would become more aware of them or accepting of them or understanding them and not get caught up in thoughts, which hold us back and lead us astray.

Kirsten Oates: That's so helpful because I think a lot of people get confused that the goal is to have no thought. And what I'm hearing you say is to be this witness to our thought and that every thought counts in a way that we might want to unpack the thoughts later, but there's a self-knowledge that's arising. And so we can learn to be better, witnesses to ourself internally, externally in our own lives. Is that a part of what happens?

Jim Finley: Surely there are certain moments say we're on this path. There are certain moments, no thought. There's just no thought. Just God in all directions, unexplainable. There are those moments. More often, however, this way of love and God beyond all thought is realized in the midst of thought. The example I used in one of the talks is a couple, deeply in love with each other, sitting in a secluded, darkened restaurant over a candle, a table holding hands. And they're not in a trance. They see the waiters go by. They hear the ambiance, but they're fixed upon one another. And so, I think it's in the midst of thought, we transcend our thoughts. And in a way, this is the voice of the poet. When you think about a poetry as a language, I also think is every word is scripture contemplatively understood.

Jim Finley: Notice the Bible's all words if you put it that way. It's a lot of words, thousands and thousands of words, and we can approach it as words, proof text, flipping back and forth. And I do this, but there's another way of looking at it the Logos what is this word, this living word that silences me and speaks to me unexplainably and being infinitely in love with me, drawing me to itself like this, which is the essence of everything Jesus says.

Kirsten Oates: So then when I get up from my time sitting this way, I might approach everything that arises with that kind of grounded confidence and care.

Jim Finley: Exactly. Because I think what it does and say for the author of the cloud, it grounded him and his commitment to teach this. You can tell you very committed to it. So, it circles me back around is what is the incarnate infinity that's present in the classroom of students that I teach every day, but what is the divinity that's present in my terminal diagnosis as I go day, by day, by day? How is it present when I water the house plants? Or I sit quiet at the end of the day or I'm engaged in going to work in the morning in via like on the way, all my brothers and sisters in Christ heading somewhere, where do we think we're all going? And what's the holiness of this passage. And so, it habituates these kind of sensitivities I think to the concreteness of the divinity of everything. It becomes more and more habitual, sensibility or sensitivity that we have.

Kirsten Oates: And he affirms that in the guidance he gives to the directee around being able to discern thoughts more clearly like back in the world-

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: To follow the path of love that this practice would lead to better discernment.

Jim Finley: That's right. Yeah. And this is why I ended it by saying that about the prayer and the

guidance and the prayer. Like this is your way [inaudible 00:35:45], but at the very end of the book, chapter 74 and 75, he says, "This might not be for you. Sorry to take up your time. I'm just trying to help." But it's nice to know it's not for you, then don't hesitate at all. Because God's always waiting for you where you are. That's what holiness is. It's not trying to reach some states of consciousness. It's trying to surrender to the will of God and how God is present to us. Then he is going to say, but how are we to discern that it's for us. And that's where he gives these signs of saying that the first sign that to the practice of this prayer, you're completely committed more than ever to do the will of God, which is to live by love.

Jim Finley: Also when it goes away, when the ability to sit like this goes away, there's just nothing but thought there's no there. Is that God sometimes takes it away to let you know you're powerless to do it, let you be presumptuous and think you can do this like a method. You can't do this. If you could do this, it would be just more of you see, but you're being this sweet infusion of God, beyond what you can do. And so it's humbling. And it's what you learn about yourself when you can't do it is its own contemplative mystery because God's... The infinity of your inability to do it deeply accepted. And then he says, "And then when it does reach turn, you can do it." And he said, "Times when you can't do it, you realize something's missing. You can't name it or explain it." And it's just missing. And then when it does return, you know it by the joy you feel in its return.

Jim Finley: As a matter of fact, the joy is even heightened by its painful absence when it returns and gives itself to you again. So, he gives like discernments of our heart to know it is for us. And so he says, "Read it, sit with it, take it to heart as it's given to you to do so." I think all his mystics are saying that, but they circle back around and say, but they're always paying particular attention to the one who's being particularly called to this more contemplative wordless way, because it's very hard to find somebody to talk to about this. That's the thing. And that's why we treasure these mystics in case you are in the midst of all the unresolved matters of your heart. You realize in the residences of this, that maybe this pertains to you.

Kirsten Oates: So, almost in a way you are describing those three discernment pieces, which called to do God's will in all things, but the way we move towards this is this deep longing. So we're already in the state of kind of missing something.

Jim Finley: Exactly.

Kirsten Oates: But what you're saying is, even as we continue on this path of longing and desire that might keep happening again and again and again. So, it may be the reason I start the prayer, which there's something missing and I've tasted it and it was joyful. And I long for it. Are you saying this might happen again and again, the loss and the gain.

Jim Finley: Yes, exactly. And here's another way of saying it too, is that there is this long... Say it goes away, you got to taste of it. And all of a sudden advantages, there's just nothing but the thoughts of God. And then there's this longing for its return. And even when you're in the stream of it, there's a longing to radicalize it ever more and more and more and more and more and more. But then you realize that your longing is an echo of God's infinite longing for you. See, that's the key. And in some way, God's infinity of your longing. Next mystic, we're going to be looking at Julian of Norwich. And she picks up on this love crucified, where Jesus says, "I thirst. I thirst." And so more than the deer longs for running streams, so

Lord is my soul longs for you in the Psalm.” And know that our thirst for God is an echo of God’s thirsty for us.

Jim Finley: And therefore, even there’s a contemplative mystical understanding of unconsummated longing. That’s unexplainably being consummated in your power. This is to consummate it. On this earth when we cross to the veil of death, what we’re obscurely the perfect way goes on for eternity, but it can begin here in this way, but it’s perfect in some obscure, subtle but deep way. But when we pass through the veil of death, it fully in the light of glory, which is God.

Kirsten Oates: That brings me back to that sense. You spoke about this can feel like a death or it’s a foreshadow on your death that can have an experience of dying. Can you just describe that a little bit? What’s happening? What might that feel like?

Jim Finley: Let me give some examples for psychologically and then spiritually about addiction when applied to terms of addiction. We can be deeply invested in a habit of our heart. It’s perpetuating our suffering, but we can’t let go of it because we’re convinced that it’s true. St. John of the Cross has this lovely image. He said, imagine your chest is made out of glass. And imagine there’s a light from your heart shining out. So you see everything in the light shining out from your own heart. So if your heart is filled with fear, everything or everyone you see something to be afraid of. If anger’s in your heart, everything you see is something to be angry about, et cetera, et cetera, something to attain possessiveness of heart. One more thing to attain. And then what happens to a person is they come to a point where they realize something’s not working here for me.

Jim Finley: I’m not happy. And as they slowly look at it, a lot of like say psychotherapy or 12 step recovery, you start dismantling your assumptions and the intensity of your conviction. You see their bankruptcy of their nothingness and in accepting their nothingness, the light that was always there shines through. It’s a conversion process because you that has been addicted to that, doesn’t quietly step aside to set you free. So, there’s this wrestling process and surrendering to God and the struggle to let go of what hinders us from finding what alone fulfills our heart, like that. And there’s that. What the mystics are saying is we’re addicted to the finite. It’s having the final say in who we are. It’s real, even though it’s holding in good, our finite understandings, our finite thoughts, our finite consolations, our finite of everything. And we hold fast to it that forms what we think is the horizon of what’s possible. And then when we get a glimpse of something more, it can be frightening to us because it implies an act of trust because of the loss of control.

Jim Finley: We’re afraid to lose the control that we think that we have over the life that we think that we’re living, even though it’s claustrophobic. And so it implies in a passage of trust of surrendering yourself over to a boundaryless presence, this permeating your body, your mind, your thoughts, and this is why we need to be careful with this. We need to pace ourselves, whether it be in therapy or recovery or anything, not to retraumatize ourselves, but I think we’re going to force our way through because that’s disrespecting, the part of us still afraid, disrespecting the part of us still confused. We’re always circling back around to be there for and with the part of us that doesn’t get it yet. To be there with compassion and tenderness and to carry ourselves along. So I think the path has that quality to it.

- Kirsten Oates: This discussion about the active and the contemplative life or way reminds me of, are both on a podcast for The Center for Action and Contemplation, Richard Rohr's organization that we both work for and how Richard says the most important word with action and contemplation is the, and. And I'm wondering just with our dialogue so far, how might we think about that? What's the end in the way we live?
- Jim Finley: Yes. The author of the cloud says in chapter eight, there is this active life and the contemplative life. And the thing to know is each one is incomplete without the other, no matter how active you are, it always has this contemplative depth image to it. And no matter how contemplative you are, the activity's always there because you have to eat dinner. You know what I mean? You're already late for your appointment. So, there's the and like the inclusiveness of both, I think what the mystics are saying, it's also what Richard is saying, is it in the way the and it dissolves. So the very activity is itself like Merton contemplation in action. And I think this is the connection between the mystical awakening and the corporal works of mercy. This is the relationship with the mystical awakening and social justice.
- Jim Finley: It isn't as if I could be so mystical only I didn't have to live my life. You know what I mean? I look at my daytime where I get disheartened. It isn't that... So what we're do is we're trying to find this balance of the and which is incomplete without the other. But if we just keep going, we discover that each is present in the other. And I think that's Christ's consciousness. So when Christ walked this earth, there was no and. It wasn't God and all of you, it was all of you that I eternally knew in me in God, before the origins of the universe concretely present. And so all these healing stories in the gospels and the healing event was really, they were quickened by what we're talking about. They had to go live their life and Lazarus was raised from the dead, but he had to go die later. They're all dead. Every single one of them, they've been dead for years and we'll be dead soon ourself.
- Jim Finley: So how can we concretize or consecrate the ordinariness of activity with this depth dimension and how can this depth dimension beyond all activity into God, discover God in us, present in all these activities. And we just had to find our own harmony based on the givens of our life. You have your life. I have mine.
- Kirsten Oates: Before we end, I'm just going to say, when I asked you the question about my thoughts come up, they're judgmental, they're critical. And you pause for a bit, I thought you were going to say, "Oh dear." That's not normal.
- Jim Finley: Sure. With this weird image, it comes to my... I used to lead this contemplative prayer group at St. Monica's church. There'd be like 60 to a hundred people there. And I'd give a talk like this on the mystics. And then we would turn out all the lights like candles around the room. It was at night and we would all sit together in the dark, between sitting then we'd do walking meditation and we would sit and [inaudible 00:47:41] donation for the poor and a dialogue. It was very nice. So I had this image that I'm sitting there in meditation like this, and we're all sitting there. So poised, sitting straight in the dark. And what if you're sitting there like that in the room full of meditators and you don't know it, but there's a big TV screen over your head. And everyone in the room can see the thoughts that you're having while you sit there and you hear giggling and laughing and you glance up and you see that they see it too. It is so embarrassing.

Jim Finley: But if everyone had a screen over their head, one of the monks of the monastery of father, Matthew Kelty was such a holy guy, [inaudible 00:48:20] he said, when we chant in choir, the monastic choir, we didn't talk to each other. We use sign languages and we're chanting the songs back and forth in choir. He says, "You wouldn't know this because we don't talk to each other." He said, "But I'm having a very hard time living in this monastery. And when I stand in choir, I look across the aisle about why life is so hard for me here. It's all of you." And he says, "You're probably having a hard time too." I just get the sense is probably true and you're looking across it, "Why it's me?" The issue is it's not working here. At the end of each song, glory beat of the father into the sun. So Burton talks about communal dread. You know, this is impossible. So there's this thing, Desolation Row. Who's just this rock singer, who sang Desolation... What was his...

Kirsten Oates: Oh, I'm not going to be able to remember.

Jim Finley: Yeah, he's so big. He is like him so much Martin like him. So he had a song him about Desolation Row. He said, we're living our life on [inaudible 00:49:21] the ending of a relationship. And you know why, you're the reason why it ended, you're the one Desolation Row. So there's something unworkable here, which look at the cross. Jesus says follow me, sounds great to see where he is taking us. This crucifixion of our dreaded and cherish solutions that anything less than love has the authority to name who we are, but we're attached to those illusions. And we're all caught up in this together, which is the divinity of the communal fragility of ourselves, infinitely loved. And I think this whole path has that feeling to it. You're like, oh my, I just told Jim that I had judgemental thoughts. I mean, seriously, I don't believe how did you, oh my gosh. So upsetting. Now I have a judgemental thought about you for having judgemental thoughts.

Kirsten Oates: Oh and that's so the dilemma.

Jim Finley: That's our dilemma.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, well thank you Jim, for guiding us and helping us in this beautiful and broken dilemma that we live in. Yeah.

Jim Finley: Yeah, exactly.

Kirsten Oates: And now we'll turn to our end, which is Corey and say thank you Corey, for helping us in the background and thank you Jim for today.

Jim Finley: Thank you. Thank you. And Corey both, that's it. Yeah. Thank you. It's a gift.

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 voice mail at cac.org/voicemails. All of this information can be found in the show notes. We'll see you again soon.