



# Meister Eckhart

Dialogue 1

with James Finley and Kirsten Oates

**Turning  
to the  
Mystics**

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 our first dialogue in season seven of Turning to the Mystics where we're turning to the German mystic Meister Eckhart who lived in the 13th and 14th century. And I'm here with Jim and Corey and we're excited to discuss Meister Eckhart today. And Jim, I really like the way you seem to be gently exposing us to Eckhart in this first teaching that you offer.

Jim Finley: Yes, I wanted to be careful. I think, the podcast, the intention is to have them be very invitational and heartfelt, something we can walk around with during the day. And I wanted to be very careful not to get into the details of the academic background, philosophy, metaphysics, philosophical theology and so on and just stay purely with his intention of these teachings as sermons, as dialogue. So, that's been important for me as I set the tone here now.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, wonderful. And I thought, in this session, we'd spend some time just getting to know and getting a deeper understanding of some of his words and some of his metaphors. You say that, these mystics, they share a common worldview but their language, their metaphors can be quite different.

Jim Finley: Yes, I would say that what they all share in the Christian tradition is this importance of living a life that honors the gift of daily life, then honors the gift of daily life illumined by faith, discipleship and the call of discipleship to be evermore Christ-like evermore merciful, ever more present, ever more forgiving and so on. And then hoping that, knowing on our hearts that when death comes as Christ promised, when we pass through the veil of death, we're not annihilated but consummated. So, in death, we move from a veiled experience of God's oneness with us that has veiled in insights, veiled in hopes, veiled in consolation, veiled in aspirations, efficacious unto holiness, we move into unveiled glory. To be one with God as God is one with God in our eternal nothingness without God.

And so, what they're talking about is this grace where God decides start to wait until we're dead to begin to reveal to us this unveiled communion and to live in fidelity to it. And they all share that in common but each one of them is talking out of his or her own experience of that and so you see the uniqueness of each one coming through.

Kirsten Oates: Who was the audience for these sermons that you are going to be taking us through?

Jim Finley: Some of them are through some priests, they were sermons given at the liturgy. So, sometimes they'd be in a church and he would give them as a sermon but some of the mainstay of them also were the Dominican nuns in Strasbourg. And as a matter of fact, when he gave the sermons, because there were no tape recorders or ways to record it, they were so moved by the depth and beauty of it, they took very, very careful notes as he spoke then they got together and came up with the best draft that came the closest and that's how we get a lot of the sermons. Many of them is through the nuns, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: But the sermons would've been offered often to the general public?

Jim Finley: Yes, he was speaking in churches but he was also then speak in the convent to the sisters, yes.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, because they seem quite complex but he obviously felt called to share.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: I think a feeling I get from him is that I think he was probably so present when he spoke and some of his metaphors are so striking. People could just tell, not that they would begin to grasp what he was saying, but they could feel the beauty of it or be touched by it and that's the sense that I ... Yeah, but with these nuns, I think of the deep life of prayer. I think they were more capable collectively of being in residence with him and these teachings.

Kirsten Oates: And what's interesting about Eckhart is that he was a deep theologian. So, if you wanted to break down the sermons, there's deep theological underpinnings to them as well as what you describe as the imperative delivery.

Jim Finley: Well, actually there's two things that we ... One in the collected works and the sources that we have, there's his teachings at the University of Paris and a lot of them are scripture commentaries, very deep scripture commentaries but more biblically based, more philosophical theology of an understanding of scripture and you see that theological framework. But then in his sermons, he's teaching in the vernacular, in German. So, his mystical writings are as German, are the sermons. His Latin writings also have mystical connotations or a depth to it but it's more explicitly biblical or theological in this language. So, you can see both and you can read them both back and forth and see how they go together really, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Amazing. You talked about one thing that's helpful to know about Eckhart is that he lived in a world different from other mystics we've studied who were cloistered in a monastery so that his method came about in a life in the world and also that he faced some trials that we know of in his life being brought on trial for his teachings.

Jim Finley: Yeah, sure. The mystics we've been teaching so far like Teresa Valla was a cloistered nun, Thomas Merton, my teacher, was a cloistered Trappist monk, Guigo was a Carthusian hermit, Carthusian cloistered order and Julian was a recluse, she lived in her anchor hole. But what's interesting about Eckhart is he was out in the midst of the world, both in the academy, both academic, teaching and then, when he moved on with his life, he was assigned a number of administrative duties. So, he had to make long trips on foot visiting the Dominican houses and dealing with the politics of that and there was some issues around certain aspects of his teaching that were considered not to be ... Some people thought, the Vatican on Rome thought that he was pantheistic, too far and he denied that. There was an ongoing series of trials around that and so on.

So, he just lived a complicated, challenging, exhaustive ... And then in the midst of this busy, busy world, he had this beautiful path and that's encouraging for us because most of us live in a busy, busy world. So, he shows us a way that's possible for us to find this unit of state

with God in the midst of the busyness, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, that's a good reminder. As we start to look at his teaching, I find that really helpful to know that about him.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: In this session, Jim, you start out with this idea of discipleship, of working towards psychological and spiritual maturity that Eckhart assumes his audience is doing that and knows to do that. And he uses a word that I hadn't heard before when he describes a way to be self-reflective which is his idea of the powers. And I wondered if you could just give us some insight into that word and how he was using it.

Jim Finley: So, let's say first, the presentation, I start out with this importance of doing our homework and psychological spiritual maturity. So, he starts out first with the importance of just honoring the gift of being alive, just being alive. And also being alive as someone who loves God, that we grow in daily life, in the midst of our daily life, and grow in our daily awareness of God's love for us and loving God and it's how we express that in our attitudes and values and ministry, whatever. But then the next thing for Eckhart is stressing the importance of being a reflective person, that is that we become aware of the interiority of ourselves. So, today, what he calls the powers, we would call our faculties. For example, our thinking to the intellect, memory to remembering things, desire, the will, the desire and to love.

So, instead of using the word faculties, he uses powers to refer to the interiority of the mind because it's what the soul affects that is what the soul brings about by engaged effort. So, in order to understand with the intellect, I have to engage in my intellect to grow in my understanding. In order to love, I have to engage in my will to foster like this. So, he talks about the importance of the powers and the importance of having the powers illumined by grace in our thinking, our memory, our desires and so on. And that's what he mean by powers is effectiveness, self-efficacy. It's just be important to reflect on that and to be aware of that. So, how I put it, we think about this, we think about that but we rarely think about thinking. See, we rarely reflect on the gift of thinking and the nature of thinking and the nature of the thinking mind and of memory. So, he's inviting us to do that, like know thyself.

Kirsten Oates: I see. So, not to just reflect on what's happening inside of those faculties, but actually the faculties themselves and how they might be driving behaviors in ways we don't realize.

Jim Finley: That's right. So, I can Buddhist talk about taking the backwards step. I can step back and I might journal or reflect, not just on what I understand, but reflect on the nature of my understanding and maybe what distortions might be in my understanding through internalized traumas and abandonments and prejudices and biases and how to have a clearer understanding or a more loving understanding. So, it's a kind of examination of conscience and discernment of spirits with regard to self-knowledge, to be present to one's self. And that means also to be present to other people, to be more sensitive to their mind, to their thing because that allows for that empathic

resonance with others at a more interior level.

Kirsten Oates: That's really helpful. And I'm curious, Eckhart uses truth, justice and goodness. Why do you think he chooses those words?

Jim Finley: In a way, they're the transcendentals of being. The key sense of the one, the true, the good and the beautiful. And so, truth is a dimension of being is the truth. How can we claim to be living an authentic life if we're indifferent to the truth? It's not an option. It's really a dimension of being itself, the true. How can I claim to be living an authentic life if I'm indifferent to justice, if I'm engaging in injustice and indifferent to that? So, they're the givens of the human experience, the givens of existence, to be awake and authentically awake and living our life. And I think that's why he chooses those. He's going to see later, we'll see in a later session, he says that one who understands my teachings about the just person understands everything I say. And so, he tries to ground us to find our way through justice or silence or beauty, whatever his pathways to this unit of state he's trying to lead us into.

Kirsten Oates: And for him, Jesus would've been the expression of these values in the world? A role model for people?

Jim Finley: Yeah, true God and true man. He would've been the exemplar, He models the authentic human being. So, when you read the gospels in this way, you see that his mind was lucid, you know what I mean? And his eyes were clear and he was embodiment of love toward everyone, toward God and so on. So, He's the exemplar, He's mentoring us. So, in a way, when Jesus says, "Follow me," it's a transformative journey of a perpetual conversion process into this more Christ-like way of life.

Kirsten Oates: When you reflect on that first section about Eckhart encouraging us towards spiritual and psychological maturity, or assuming we're on that path, he doesn't just point to that, he brings in this hidden side of things and in a very beautiful, subtle way.

Jim Finley: Here's a subtlety of Eckhart, easing into Eckhart. So, he is asking you, "Why do you love God?" And then he says, "I don't know." Then he says, "Because of God." And then he goes, "Why do you love truth? Because of truth. Why do you love justice? Because of justice. Why do you love" ... But then he says, "Well, why do you live?" And he says, "My word, I don't know but I'm glad to be alive." So, what's interesting is there's something we know about being alive but also in being alive to the powers, there's something that's hidden we don't know. And there's something about the love of God that we know, to the grace of God where there's something in the love of God that we don't know. And he says that's why this soul acts with these powers and not with its essence and its essence is what we don't know.

And so, this essence, different word for it, the summit of the soul, the ground of the soul, the depth dimension and that's our true homeland is finding our way to that which the powers, of their own accord, are unable to comprehend. And so, that gently starts to set things up, see how to find our way to the ground or to the essence and live by it.

Kirsten Oates: You mentioned some of the words I just wanted to go over. So, this hidden access,

this essence, the thing that we don't know, he uses words like the ground, the essence, I think you said the spark of the soul.

Jim Finley: The wording that helps me, I have to get the sense of this, the ground, is that this ground isn't a ground you land on but the ground is abyss-like, it's a bottomless abyss. Someone once said and I talked to them, the word abyss had negative connotations like the dark abyss. But this is a bottomless abyss of love or bottomless, oceanic abyss of mercy. So, we say that the abyss-like depth of God, the ground, is by the generosity of God given to us as the abyss-like depth of ourself. So, the epitome of the generosity of God is that he said, "God's ground is my ground and my ground is God's ground." We merge and the generosity of God is that oneness.

And so, we're trying to find our way to this oneness that shines out through the powers but it's filtered through the powers. We're trying to find our way to the transparency of this oneness itself.

Kirsten Oates: I love that word generosity. That we are the generosity of God?

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: And it makes me wonder, when I think about myself and in my powers, when I might do the unjust thing or the hurtful thing without intention but unconsciously or even intentionally, is that the generosity of God? Does it encompass all of that?

Jim Finley: Yes, he would use those as examples. He would say, moments like that, that the generosity of God shimmers and shines in these moments of our own generosity because our own generosity is an incarnate echo, this infinite generosity to us. So, he is going to say, "Well, how to endlessly deepen that and become absorbed in that and abide in that." But those are intimations of this habitual state, this unit of state he's helping us to find.

Kirsten Oates: And Jim, what about when I do the opposite that I might make mistakes or not be generous? Would we call that the generosity of God as well?

Jim Finley: No, it would be this. I was thinking recently of Thomas Merton, when he was in Asia, you can watch it on video, that's where he was electrocuted. He died right after that talk in Bangkok, Thailand. And he's speaking to these monks and nuns, they're in this room in Bangkok, Thailand, and he starts out by saying, he said, "All the mystical traditions of the world's great religions," the Christian mystic, the Kabbalah of Judaism, the deep teaching of yoga, the yoga sutra, the Sikhs' tradition, the Sufi, the Muslim, all the mystic-. So, all these traditions, they all teach us something about daily human consciousness that is impaired. It's impaired in that it's impaired in its ability to see this infinite generosity flowing out in and as our very life, in and as the sun moving across the sky, in and as the sacredness of the immediacy of everything.

And so, the spiritual life then is what is the path along which we are healed from that impairment that it can shine all the brighter by being released from what hinders us from living in it.

Kirsten Oates: So, the mistakes or the behavior that's not loving is more coming from this impairment, this

sense of things, yeah.

Jim Finley: Yeah, exactly. So, the thing is, because we're in this ... So, the curse to this, it is like original sin out in the garden. So, when the serpent says to Eve in this mythic story, "If you eat this forbidden fruit," the one tree that God says you can do whatever you want, just don't eat this fruit, the power of knowledge of good and evil, it says, "You'll be like God" So, at the heart of this, one way of looking at this story is they already were like God, let us make the human person in our image and likeness but they try to be like God without God. They try to be like God on their own and then they broke away from the oneness.

Kirsten Oates: I see, yeah.

Jim Finley: And therefore, because the powers are wounded in this way, we're then susceptible to acting out that woundedness by the traumatizing things we do to ourselves and to each other and to the earth. And so, the whole moral imperative is the healing of that. At a psychological level, a lot of psychotherapy is about the healing of that. So, what we're talking is what is the depth dimension of that healing? How can we restore the vertical depth dimension of the tap root into the ground so that the energies of that can flow out into the powers?

Kirsten Oates: I love this idea about generosity that we are the generosity of God, that I am the generosity of God. And would it be true to say that when I act in generous ways in my life that that is God's generosity?

Jim Finley: See, that's what we would say, every religion has its own language for this. But in the Christian dispensation, we're in this fallen state, this waywardness and so we see in the birth of Jesus that God's response to us in our brokenness is to become identified with us as precious in our brokenness. And then we see that great healing comes in the deep acceptance of our own brokenness and that becomes the opening to which the infinite mercy of God flows into our heart. Father forgiven them, they know not what they do. Judge not and you shall not be judged. And so, this is a experiential salvation of the healing of the brokenness, yes.

Kirsten Oates: So, Jim, you teach in this session that in our day-to-day life, this ground of oneness, and I think you used the word communion as well, this communion with God is covered over by the powers but it's always present and at times we can see glimpses of it and you used this beautiful example of the newborn baby.

Jim Finley: Yes, so let's say the powers of the soul, our faculties, is the grace of the human experience. But because these powers are exiled from the ground, they're subject to these distortions and also to this possessiveness as if we're nothing but the powers. I'm nothing but the self-things happen to, I'm nothing but the ... Meaning it's going to be able to understand or not understand, to attain or not, we think we're nothing more than that. See? But underneath all that, with those assertion, this ground, this abyss-like oneness is always there. And so, that's what I mean by he invites us to look at examples in daily life. So, the newborn infant, for example, in terms of the powers, developmentally hasn't even to emerge yet. It can't roll over, can't sit up, can't feed itself, can't talk, can't... and yet the newborn infant, they're so smitten by the infant.

So, then when the mother clasps the infant to her breast and holds it, she senses the

preciousness is the ground of the infant, the divinity of the infant. Also, in this moment, if she reflects on it, that moment of being so taken of the preciousness of the infant reveals her to herself as capable of seeing the essence knowing that, if she were to die in the act of saving the life of this infant, she would die in the truth. It really has a divine value, it's worth all that God is worth, the generosity of God. And then it helps her to see that's true of her too but it's covered over by the density of the powers. So, she's saying, "How can I then find a gentle path to let the light of my own preciousness shine out through the powers? How can Eckhart help me to find this unit of path toward this experientially lived oneness or essence shining out through and ribbon through the powers?"

Kirsten Oates: It's such a great example because the baby hasn't developed the powers yet and it helps me see in my own life how I can get so frustrated with myself if I don't understand this or I, through the powers, can be quite down on myself.

Jim Finley: And a couple examples, too. Thomas Merton says somewhere one of the gifts of the interior life is freedom from the need to understand because, in the depths of things, I'll never understand, it's infinite. But to accept that you don't understand and deeply accept it is a deeper way to understand, unknowing is understanding. And another subtle thing about this is, although the infant reveals this to us, we also see along the way the artist reveals this to us and the poet reveals this to us, the solitary reveals it to us. There's certain pathways that have this shining through of something. See? Shining through.

And also, what's interesting is to be at the deathbed of the dying loved one so all their powers are unraveling before our eyes yet there's something deathless and beautiful shining out like the essence, like the ground laid bare. So, in the beginning and at the end, it's somehow most accessible. What we're trying to find in between, know that every moment's like that, how can we discover that for ourself and live by it, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: I love the way Meister Eckhart is just so clear on the path of not knowing, just basically, "I don't know," he says.

Jim Finley: Yeah, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: He doesn't try and dress it up but just pointing out how there's certain things he doesn't know even though he knows all of this.

Jim Finley: And I think another thing I about the I don't know this way too is these moments where it flashes forth. You see, I don't know is where we're stunned by the beauty of something and we're silenced. So, we don't know because it's a heightened state of awareness, uncomprehended.

Kirsten Oates: Like purely experiential?

Jim Finley: Yes. When we're trying to become more find, recalibrate our sensitivities, we begin to realize and appreciate the subtlety that's always there is so easily overtaken by the intensity of the day's demands and how to protect or find the path we protect ourselves from tipping over all the time with the complexities of the day.

Kirsten Oates: Those examples you gave, they gave me a sense that it's almost like when you're on the edge



of yourself that you're getting closer to yourself but grounded in a loving way. Grounded in an openness to something loving happening versus-

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: ... being on the edge of ourself in a risky, aggressive, fearful way.

Jim Finley: Yeah. The too thing, Thomas Merton talks about being a boundary person, looking at the edge and he said, "Then you discovered a deeper level, the boundary person is living in the true center." So, it's at the edge but, in another way, it is the depth, like T.S. Elliot, the axis of the turning world, the still point. And so, it's at the edge of the possible that edge is itself the axis of the ground itself. Like that, yeah.

Turning to the Mystics will continue in a moment.

Kirsten Oates: There was a line that I was hoping you'd unpack for me a little bit because I'm pretty sure I heard you say that, when we have these moments, you called it, we might be a momentary mystic but it's in a veiled way. Did I hear that right?

Jim Finley: Yes. In other words, let's say in the powers illumined by grace, efficacious unto holiness. So, when we hear, oh, we open the scriptures, we hear that God loves us. And so, the powers of the spirit that dwells in our heart were moved to know that God does love us, an obscure certainty in our heart. But that knowledge that God does love us is veiled in the idea that God loves us in the insight that God loves us. And so, it's true, it's real but veiled. So, when we die, and pass through the veil of death, it'll be eternally unveiled. What this mystical awareness is, this deep awareness of is, even though we're still alive on this earth, it becomes more and more unveiled, more and more the oneness itself, divinity in all directions.

But here's the thing, that unveiled unit of clarity is itself veiled that it's obscure even to the one privileged to be transformed into it. I know not what to make of it. It's like you're struggling to find the words to say it like this and in that sense it's veiled. It's a veiled unveiled. Yeah, we've said this before with Merton, he said sometimes the most important things in our life are things we simply have to accept where we go crazy inside and they're the very things we can't explain to anybody including ourself. See, I know it, I know it, I know that I know it. And so, it's unveiled but it's veiled and, when I try to find the words to explain to you what it is that I see so clearly, that's the subtlety of it, I think.

I would say this too, it's like people who are deeply in love with each other trying to find the words to express their love that does justice to the love. That the clearer the love gets, the more aware they are of the limitations of language to say it. And yet when they say I love you to each other, the depth from which the words I love you come, the words I love you transcend the limits of language. It's a sacramental understanding of communion or realization, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Eckhart offers us a path or a method and you begin to just give us a little insight into that and I'm really looking forward to learning more about it but it's this path of detachment.

Jim Finley: Yes. What we're building towards here is saying so what is this path along which I can actually experientially abide in the oneness of the ground. And so, the path cannot be a path

of attaining because nothing's missing because the ground is the infinite generosity of God completely being given to us as this death of ourself. And therefore, the path has to be one of becoming detached from what hinders us from realizing it. And what it really is, I think, is modalities where we get caught up thinking how the circumstance we're in turns out determines the fundamental state of my mind and heart. Somehow, the conditions that I'm in, the constantly shifting conditions, and my conditions, state of being affected by those conditions determines the deepest depth of the felt sense of my mind and heart. See?

How to find within one's self a grounded place. And what you do is you catch yourself in reactivity, you catch yourself in absolutizing the relative and he gives a lot ... Well, in that talk, when I do that, I'll show about five or six practical examples that it can allow us to practice this throughout the whole day.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, wonderful.

Jim Finley: And then he's going to say that as that detachment deepens ... Can you hear the lawnmower?

Kirsten Oates: I'm detached, Jim. I don't hear it.

Jim Finley: Oh, that's right. Wow, this talk's working, wow. The thing is, what he's saying is, if you choose to live this way, an empty-handed open process of constantly letting go, everything is having the final say in who you are. You acknowledge it but it doesn't have the final say in who you are, it doesn't have the final say of who you are in the presence of God and so on. So, the more you continue on in that way, it released this *gelassenheit* which is being released from that which hinders and the key phase of this, the metaphor he uses is the birth of the word in the soul. What comes welling up out of the ordinariness of everything is the divinity of everything permeating the details of standing up and sitting down and waking up and going to sleep and everything, the divinity of everything intimately seen. So, he talks about this image of birthing like an eternal birthing of God.

Kirsten Oates: What a great word, *gelassenheit*. It almost sounds like a release of something, almost like (yeah).

Jim Finley: It does. To me, when I first heard the word, it had connotations of *gesundheit* like you'd sneeze.

Kirsten Oates: I was thinking the same thing.

Jim Finley: It's a kind of release only, instead of an instantaneous release ... By the way, there are certain *gesundheit* moments of *gelassenheit*, it flashes forth. But what he is looking for is a habitual underlying state of releasement-

Kirsten Oates: I see.

Jim Finley: ... of this birthing. And then, in the next talk, we'll give examples of what life looks like when one's come to that.

Kirsten Oates: Well, I know in the next talk you're going to go into a lot more depth about detachment but this is a really helpful beginning. And what it sounds like, there is a connotation of the word

detachment where it can feel like you're being coldhearted, detached, I'm not really present to you but it sounds like it's a path of becoming more present to this ground that we tend to be not aware of and so we are stepping back or detaching from what he calls the powers. Would that be one way of looking at it?

Jim Finley: Yeah, exactly. One way of saying it is what detachment is it's moving away at one level to get unexplainably closer to the deeper level. Because it's the intensity of our engagement which has to do with control, it has to do with things that's actually getting in the way. So, it's actually stepping back at one level to be unexplainably closer at a deeper level. I want to give an example from therapy too and someone who's working through their trauma or through whatever it is. As the clinician, I have to maintain a certain detachment but the detachment is I not get in the person's way of bringing themselves out into the open, to express and share themselves, which allows me then, at a deeper level, to begin to discern or to pick up certain underlying attitudes that are contributing to the person's stuck place but then invites me to help that person see them too.

So, there's a detachment that's the basis for the oneness that makes it safe to be so vulnerable and allows for a deeper meeting, really, ultimately with yourself, with the mystery of yourself. That image helps me.

Kirsten Oates: That's helpful, yeah.

Jim Finley: I also think an artist, for example, or a poet, there's a craft and a commitment to it but there's a point of they're always in control. It's just crafts, they're just replicating something. So, they realize in some sense, they have to step back to let something happen that they themselves can't produce but it flows through them in the detached commitment. And so, I don't know, this subtle thing, you can see it plays out in a lot of different ways, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, yes, I'm really looking forward to learning more about it too. You read a second part from an Eckhart sermon and I don't know if you have it there to read it again about the mirror.

Jim Finley: Oh, yes.

Kirsten Oates: I wouldn't mind if you just read it again slowly and it was such a brilliant metaphor, yeah.

Jim Finley: Yes, I have it right here. Eckhart says an image is not of itself nor is it for itself. It has its origins and that of which it is the image to that it belongs properly with all that it is. It does not belong to what is foreign to this origin. That's very important, see? I do not belong to what is foreign to this image. And here he's going to say I don't belong to anything that's not God since I'm the image of God. To that it belongs properly with all that it is. It does not belong to what is foreign to this origin, nor does it owe anything to this, anything to what is foreign to this. An image receives as being immediately from that of which it is an image. It is one being with it and is the same being. Every image has two properties. The first is that it receives as being immediately from that of which it is an image without interference of the will. It's outgoing as indeed natural and thrusts itself out of nature like a branch from a tree. When an image is cast on the mirror, our face will be reflected on it whether it likes it or not. That's the text.

Kirsten Oates: And then you talked about this idea of having a reflection in the mirror but the reflection of us actually thinks it's real.

Jim Finley: Yeah, yes. Imagine you're looking at an image of yourself in a full-length mirror except as a self-reflective thinking image of you. And it's been through a lot of therapy, it's meditated a lot, it's worked through a lot of things and I think the time has come to branch out on its own, that it doesn't need you. And you try to explain to the image as gently as possible that it won't go well without you because it's an image of you but the image just thinks you're trying to hold it back, you're preventing me. And so, to prove your point, you step halfway off the mirror, half the image disappears. It has a panic attack, has to go back on Xanax, goes into therapy, it says, "I'm not real." Now, the image is real, it just isn't real the way it thinks it's real. And Eckhart says that's us with God.

Kirsten Oates: Wow.

Jim Finley: See, we think we're real without God. I think I'm here all by myself.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: But when you think about it, to be at the deathbed of a dying loved one, it's so tangible that our next heartbeat is from God, not from us. We cannot give ourselves our next heartbeat, we can't give ourselves our next breath unless we be presumptuous. And yet we constantly go around imagining, where we're trying to find ourselves as being this perpetual generosity of manifested love, that we are the song God sings. And without God singing the song of us, no us and we're trying to find our way to experientially live in that.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: It's such a powerful story and it reminds me how Corey and I one day want to do the comedy of the mystics. You have some good stories but it made me laugh when I heard it but it's just so brilliant. He was obviously a brilliant man to be so clear about these concepts.

Jim Finley: Oh, yeah, he just-

Kirsten Oates: You must have really understood them deeply, yeah.

Jim Finley: All these mystics we study, God raises up certain people that are gifted to say things with such refined ... That's where they're guiding us, really.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. And it's so simple.

Jim Finley: Yes, so simple.

Kirsten Oates: Because it's something we do every day, yeah.

Jim Finley: Yeah. I had a whole talk, I've been given it for a long time. The whole talk is jokes, mystical jokes.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, yeah?

Jim Finley: And I think the thing is, I used to think about my talks is the pedagogy is that, when you're laughing, you're participating. But you're participating, you get it at a deeper level than comprehending it.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, yes.

Jim Finley: You're surprised by it in a way something comes through and there's a joy in that, I think. Yeah, I think so.

Kirsten Oates: So, when we're stuck in what he calls the powers or our faculties and we can't see beyond ourselves and that operating system, we feel this sense of being separate, we feel this sense of we're on our own, we've got to make this work. And that's that sense of the image in the mirror wanting to be experiencing itself as a separate self.

Jim Finley: This is so mysterious because, see, in a way, we are separate. The Buddhists say each of us breathe through our own nose. I'm me and you're you, we're separate. But the issue gets to be where we absolutize the separateness. And really not just separate from each other, wherever we want -- the thing around me is other than me. But I then imagine, I experienced that I and all of us collectively are other than this infinite reality welling up and giving itself to us as our very reality.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, it was very comforting to hear you say in the podcast that we are real. We are you said but just not in the way we think we are. Because it can be confusing sometimes when you hear spiritual teachers talking about this idea of illusion and it just can feel hard to find your ground as in your own experience.

Jim Finley: You know what? I think another insight into this, and this could apply to our conversation now or this could apply to therapy or anytime two people are in the midst of a very deep talk of mutual sharing with each other. You can tell when you're showing up in a more exposed, engaged and real way. And when you compare how the substantiality of that reality, the validity of the presence of it or even to smell a flower, it's so present, it's so immediately real. It helps you to see how, throughout the day, you get caught up in half realities. You get up, you're wondering mind, your projections and you're skimming over the surface of the depth of the immediacy of everything. And so, I think that's what daily meditation does for us too. Daily meditation helps us to stabilize that sustained groundedness of presence, communal presence.

And so, Eckhart is suggesting what we do in the cloud of unknowing or the ladder to heaven, he's suggesting a way to have that meditative state through the whole day to a detachment that leads to the birth. We'll see, as this goes along, that's his teaching.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. And he also recognizes that this release is not just a release from the faculties but it's also a release from a certain suffering. I think you said that word that he's trying to help us see the way we suffer in these ways.

Jim Finley: Because it's going to say that the root of suffering or the root of traumatization is not found among all the traumatizing things that can and sometimes do occur to us, not the root of

trauma, of suffering. The root of trauma, of the woundedness is a traumatized capacity to be stabilized in this abyss-like love that sustains us in our woundedness. And he's going to say that's really the root of suffering. But once we heal the root of suffering, then there's a groundedness in the midst of suffering that allows us to be present to it in a grounded way and pace ourselves and so on. So, he is trying to heal this depth dimension to then be the ground out of which, on the horizontal dimension, we share in a more grounded way which I think is Eckhart giving his sermons, that was his vocation.

So, whenever we're true to our calling, whether we live alone or married or a parent or a teacher or whatever, whenever we're in the flow of the truth of our calling, this ground, the energy of the ground is flowing through the powers and we just feel that it's real. This matters, this counts in a way that can't be explained. And you can also tell when you're slid off into things that are half true or not even half true and we get caught in that, our diversions. I was distracted from the distraction by a distraction, T.S. Elliot says.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: And so, yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, wonderful. Well, what a great start to learning about Eckhart and I'm really looking forward to the next session on detachment and learning more about this path.

Jim Finley: Yeah, me too. Look forward to sharing it, look forward to sharing again.

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. All of this information can be found in the show notes. We'll see you again soon.