



# Meister Eckhart

Turning to Meister Eckhart  
with James Finley and Kirsan 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 season seven of Turning to the Mystics. I'm here with Jim and Corey, and we're excited to learn about our mystics for season seven. So, Jim, will you welcome and will you introduce us to our season seven mystic?

Jim Finley: Yes, I'm pleased to resume our explorations together in this series on the podcast. So, what we're going to be doing now in beginning season seven is turning to the mystic Meister Eckhart and we'll be exploring Eckhart the same way I did the other mystics. I'll be reading passages and then reflect on the passages with practical examples to make the teachings as accessible as possible in the daily living of our life. Then as we're trying to move back and forth between a man mystic and a woman mystic, then in season eight, we'll do Mechthild of Magdeburg as a woman mystic. So, that'll be our next pair of a man and a woman mystic in this season and the one that follows.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. So, in this session, we'll be able to learn a little bit more about Meister Eckhart before you get into his teaching. So, just wondering, who was this Meister Eckhart? Who was he historically?

Jim Finley: So to begin first, we always try to do is to begin with who he was historically, because that helps us understand who he is spiritually as the autobiographical foundations of his awakening and what he taught. Meister Eckhart was born in Germany in the year 1260 where he spent his life until his death at age 68 years old in 1328 in Germany. As a young man, he entered the Dominican religious order within the church. So, he took the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The Dominican order is known as the order of preachers that their ministry is preaching and also learning education and preaching. So, he joins the Dominican order. There's also a record that he studied at the University of Paris, which at this time is one of the great Christian learning centers in Europe.

Then he taught a theology at the University of Paris, which gives a sense of the esteem that he was held in at the time. He held the chair in theology that was held by his predecessor Dominican. St. Thomas Aquinas was the author of the Summa Theologica. When he left the academic world, he continued on in more of an emphasis. He continued to do writings. By the way, at the University of Paris are his Latin writings, which are scripture commentaries. Later on, we talk about sources because you can read those if you want. It's important to keep them in mind when you read the German mystical writings. He spends time in Strasburg.

He gets the sermons in German to the Dominican nuns in Strasburg, and that's where we get his German works, which are really his mystical works. The nuns were so moved by the depth and beauty of his teachings. They had no tape recorders recording. So, they took very careful notes and then they got together and put together a single, what they all agreed was the closest possible to his actual sermon. So, that's how we have his sermons. It was through the nuns. Otherwise, we wouldn't have them.

Kirsten Oates: Like a work of love from the nuns.

Jim Finley: It was a work of love, which then gave him to the contemplative church, carried it forward through the centuries through time. So, what we see then are two meanings to the word meister, meaning master. One master is an academic sense like we would say today maybe like Dr. Eckhart or Professor Eckhart, but also, what this concerns us in the podcast is he is a spiritual master. He's one of the mystic teachers that we turn to for guidance like the master of the interior life. So, he's really we might say then a mystically awakened theologian who saw the mystical dimensions that was revealed to us in the scriptures and in the tradition and translates it for us into a spiritual path of mystical awakening, which was the heart of his teachings, I guess we could say.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, can you tell us a little bit more about what it means to be a Dominican?

Jim Finley: In the religious orders in the church, you had the monastic orders, the Benedictine cloistered orders, the Carmelites, and so on. But then also, you had these orders where there was a ministry that was a life of the Evangelical Councils, poverty, chastity, and obedience like committed discipleship to the vows and then a ministry. So, for example, you have the Franciscans and their commitment to poverty, the service of the poor, but also to teaching and other ministries. So, the Dominican order is another one of these orders and each order has its own charism or its own ministry. So, the Dominican order found by St. Dominic was the ministry of preaching, which that's why we have the sermons of Meister Eckhart. As a Dominican, he was preaching. These were his sermons and higher learning. So, that's the Dominican order.

Kirsten Oates: Would he have lived in community, in a monastic community?

Jim Finley: He would've lived in a house of Dominicans. Another important thing too for him is just a number of administrative duties. So, he had to make long journeys on foot to visit the different houses and tend to his responsibilities that he did under obedience to serve his order, this community, along with the sermons that he was giving at various places and having a lot to the nuns of Strasburg.

Kirsten Oates: Would all of the Dominicans have gone to the University of Paris to study?

Jim Finley: I don't know. I don't think so. I really don't believe so. I think certainly those who were academically, showed signs that they were academically gifted in that way, that would've been very probable. They would've gone just because of the central role that held at the time, but not necessarily. I don't know that. I haven't seen that in the literature.

Kirsten Oates: Then he would've been a bit of a shining star at the University of Paris, which led him to become the chair of theology.

Jim Finley: Exactly. I think when they saw the brilliance of his work, the fact he was invited to take the chair of theology held by Thomas Aquinas.

Kirsten Oates: Wow.

Jim Finley: It does give a sense of the steam that he was held in his brilliance and his theological acumen

and prowess and so on, very much so.

Kirsten Oates: The University of Paris was also the esteemed university of the time as well.

Jim Finley: Exactly. So, really what he ends up doing is using his profound academic knowledge of the scripture as understood at the time, the history of the church, St. Augustine, all of that. He uses that academic knowledge in the service of mystical awakening. In a certain sense, we'll see this about him. The distinctions he makes are very metaphysical. You have to reflect on a philosophical tone, but then he moves directly into the experience, what's that like to experience that or to live by that and so on.

Kirsten Oates: What's interesting about that too, when we were talking about it, Jim, was to know that someone like Teresa of Ávila or Julian of Norwich who we've studied previously wouldn't have gone to a university. They wouldn't have studied theology in the way that someone like Meister Eckhart did.

Jim Finley: That's right. Yeah. They weren't allowed to. So, for example, in the Carmelite order, St. John of the Cross, he had formal theological training in the seminary to be a priest. Teresa of Ávila, the women weren't allowed to study in seminary. It's very interesting that John of the Cross dedicates one of his books to one of the nuns and he says to her, "You won't understand this teaching in terms of the theology behind it, but you will understand its mystical depth because you're a mystically awakened woman." That's why you see in Teresa how astute she was mystically and how clear her mind was, but she didn't have that training that he had in the seminary just because.

Kirsten Oates: So Meister Eckhart would've retired from that chair before and then gone on to do the sermons.

Jim Finley: I don't know. My assumption is it was an annual post. It was held for a certain time.

Kirsten Oates: I see.

Jim Finley: But I don't know how that worked. It was an annual post. Matter of fact, I recall reading somewhere that he actually held the chair twice. So, I do think that either they offered it to him again, he turned it down, or he just discerned to move on or whatever that is. But he was there for a while then left and moved into the emphasis on the German writings, on the sermons, the mystical writings.

Kirsten Oates: What was going on at the time in the world? Because in the end, he was brought in front of some court, wasn't he, for his teaching?

Jim Finley: Yes. This is another aspect of his teachings really that's important. I would say one aspect, let me say first, because I think it takes a relationship. One of course is this thing about that he wasn't cloistered. In other words, St. Teresa of Ávila was cloistered. There was no active ministry. Guigo II in *The Ladder of Monks* was a Carthusian hermit. Thomas Merton lived as a cloistered desertion. Julian lived as an anchor, as a reclusion solitude. But he as a friar, as a Dominican friar, he lived his life in the midst of the world. So, one were the demands of the academy of learning, but then these long distances he had to travel on foot to tend to administrative duties and so on.

The significance of that is that this deep mystical path that he opens up for us, he found it in the world. It's very relevant because that bears witness that we can find it in the world, that we don't have to be in a cloistered monastery to follow the grace of being a mystically awakened person. I think that's another piece of the relevance of Meister Eckhart for us. I think also, although Merton was cloistered, he was very sensitive to the world. He was very engaged with the world and being aware of the world and so on. So, he is very sensitive to that even though he stayed within his cloister.

Kirsten Oates: Similarly, Teresa of Ávila was engaged in reforming the church, wasn't she? In a way, she was engaged in the world.

Jim Finley: She was reforming the church only in the sense of reforming the Carmelite order to a return to more simplicity, poverty, and prayer, and then traveling to found houses of the reform. There's another aspect to Eckhart, which is also significant to us, I think, particularly how he as a mystically awakened Christian related to the doctrinal forces within the church, trial aspects of the church is that what happened. This is complicated in a way. He was never accused of being a heretic, but some of his teachings were judged by a tribunal as heretical, specifically he was being accused of being a pantheist of teaching the word of God.

What's interesting then, there were a series of trials, as a matter of fact, in one of the volumes of Paulist Press, we'll give the people on the podcast access to these volumes, one of them has his defense against his accusers. You get to see how he defended it. What's interesting about the defense and this has to do with him being a preacher and this relates to us on the podcast. This insight is from one of the main commentators that has helped me, Reiner Schürmann, which will also be listed for the students, for the people on the podcast. Reiner Schürmann says what he thinks is that the heart of understanding this trial is the distinction between indicative and imperative language. Indicative language is the language of the creed, which states what is, belief.

So, I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth and so on. Then there's a history of all those ideas and the Eastern fathers and the Western fathers and the whole theological reflection of the belief of the church, the indicative. Eckhart respected that because he was a theologian. He taught it. An imperative thought is not a language that expresses what is, like stating what God is like the belief, but rather imperative thought is a language that's addressed directly to the heart of a person in the midst of a great turning. It's the midst of their daily life illumined by faith. It's in the midst of being interiorly awakened towards more unitive, mystical dimensions of being aware of understanding and responding to God's oneness in our life.

So, we see his vocation as a preacher. As a preacher, he was calling to this awakening. He's speaking to our heart and guiding our heart in the process of this awakening. We can see also how that paralyzed the teachings of Jesus. Jesus didn't give lectures. What you have in St. Paul, St. Paul was both. Really Paul lays out Christian theology. He's really the foundation of Christianity, the new Adam and so on, but also, we see in St. Paul the mystic. His conversion experience, he was knocked off his horse in the

process of capturing Christians. He heard a voice speak to him saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you doing this to me?" So the mystic Christ is revealing to him that he is the very Christians that he's persecuting.

Paul says a lot of things, I honestly believe that the suffering of this world are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is to come. So, Paul, like Eckhart, was a mystically awakened theologian. So, you see both back and forth. But the thing is Eckhart, this was his defense, is that by judges at these tribunals, these courts, they think I'm speaking indicatively like theology, in which case it would be pantheism, but I'm not. I'm speaking imperatively that we see in all these mystics that we've been studying all from Teresa's *The Fourth Mansion*, "My heart's being enlarged to divine proportions. For John of the Cross, it's passage through *The Dark Knight* into this union. For Guigo, it's a ladder of heaven.

For *Lectio*, meditation, prayer leads to contemplation and there's a boundary crossing for God. He honestly believed that they didn't understand that. They didn't see. There were other complications around it also on a dispute between the Franciscans and the Dominicans and so on. But what's real interesting about Eckhart is he didn't leave the church. He didn't leave because I think he understood all of these layers of authority and structure. He didn't leave. I think what's so significant about that for Meister Eckhart is he's very continuous to this way to Father Richard Rohr in the new orthodoxy, because the new orthodoxy is not a new orthodoxy, like a new set of beliefs to believe in instead, but it's a returned to the original orthodoxy of Jesus, which is the orthodoxy of love.

This is really the message of Meister Eckhart. He understood the complexities of the church. He understood these different and to be respectful of all of it, but not to get trapped by any of it and just be this consistent, clear voice like that. That's a message for all of us because a lot of us have issues with the church and for a good reason.

Everyone has to sort that out in their own way. But that's why with me, who I've been so ahead of my own issues with the church complications, but I came back into the mystical Catholicism. I came back into the Catholicism of these mystics and a whole sacramental eucharistic devotional unit of thing, which is in concert with the mystical dimensions of all the world's great religions. Because every religion has these levels of teaching and orthodox and teaching and so on, but that's another thing for us to consider.

Kirsten Oates: So, Jim, would it be the case that the works of his that were brought on trial weren't the theological works he was doing in the university? It was the sermons.

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: I see.

Jim Finley: Then now there may be certain passages in the Latin works. Again, I don't know because Eckhart comes shining through. He's more indicative there, but you see the depth to which he understood the theologians as the one who prays. So, you see, but I think almost all of them I think were the sermons, where he is speaking of this bold unit of language like this. So, most of the points are taken from the sermons.

Kirsten Oates: Was it the case that you said he didn't leave the church, but I guess also the Dominicans

didn't ask him to leave, which could have happened also.

Jim Finley: That's another important point because it shows how the Dominicans understood him and that they kept him responsible for these duties, administrative duties as a spiritual director, the sermons to the nuns. So, you could see they had a solid respect for Eckhart. Another interesting thing too is that in the light of his condemnation, there was a mystic, we might look at them later too, of fellow Dominicans who had a deep respect for Eckhart, a deep respect for Eckhart, but they also saw how less refined people were misunderstanding him. They thought he was saying that we were God. So, what these other mystics have done is they leave the boldness of Eckhart, but they translated it into pastoral terms to make it more accessible. So, it's less subject to those misunderstandings like that.

Kirsten Oates: So he was pushing the boundaries into the mystical but in a very deliberate way, and he wasn't going to pull back from that in the end.

Jim Finley: Exactly. By the way, one of those mystics I'm speaking of Johannes Tauler and Henry Suso two beautiful mystics. Also, later, we might look at Ruysbroeck, the Flemish mystic Ruysbroeck. They had this profound respect for Eckhart, but all of them put it in these more pastoral terms, so it's less subject to those misunderstanding. But on purpose, Eckhart was pushing the edges of language, so he was trying to go transconceptual realizations and finding a language for that. That's the risk of Meister Eckhart. As a matter of fact, that's a good place to read this quote, Meister Eckhart. This is Reiner Schürmann again.

Schürmann says, speaking of Eckhart's language, his sermons, "Each line of Meister Eckhart testifies to an uneasiness about the fundamental inadequacy of language when confronted by the joy without a cause." Eckhart asks, "What is the joy that death does not have the power to destroy and how can we discover it?" So, the uneasiness of trying to put words to that joy without a cause. There are perhaps illogical murmurings, which mobilize deeper forces in us than does the rigor of constructed discourse. You see this also I think in the poetry of John of the Cross and also in other traditions in the poetry of Rumi in other poetic traditions where there's certain illogical murmurings of more like music which awakens this deep stirring inside of us.

How do we find words to bear witness, not to explain it because it's not explainable, but what's the language that doesn't break the depth of the union, but a language that moves with the rhythms of the union itself? It's like the monks in the monastery is chanting the Psalms. There's something about the rhythm of chanting. Someone once said that when we sing a hymn, we sing a joyful hymn unto the Lord, but when we chant, we deepen our capacity to listen. I think Eckhart's like that too. I think Eckhart's language is highly evocative. It's the language of listening.

Meister Eckhart undertakes the risk of speculative mysticism that is using philosophical, metaphysical language and so on, explaining under a philosophical guise the overwhelming closeness of the origin beyond God, that his clothing is full of holes suggests to us the fire that consumed him. The struggle for the right concept when it has recoured a paradox turns into combat. After reasonings and commentaries, at last invites silence. So, that's a nice thing. I think the depth of Eckhart is a silence that silences us with wordless amazement, gratitude like that. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Wow. That's beautiful.

Jim Finley: It is. Also, what amazes me about this and I think of Merton too, how mysterious is that God raises up people like this whom God graces with the gift of putting words to such things. Do you know what I mean? Go figure where's that coming from. It's one of the god's graces to all of us, I think.

Kirsten Oates: It is amazing how the church bureaucracy can't track with them. A lot of these mystics had trouble with the church.

Jim Finley: But I think the issue is this. First of all, in the depth of the hierarchy, they do track with it, because some of these bishop or archbishop, they're people of deep prayer, but the thing about the mystics is they can't control it. It's because if it's not definable like proof text and scripture, approaching scripture in that way, if it's not controllable, then there's a need to reign it in to keep it controllable. I think that's part of the seduction of empire, like theological empire. You get that creative tension in the church. So, he navigated that. He was aware of it. He navigated that with a clear mind and one of his gifts, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Do you think he was upset by the trials?

Jim Finley: I do. Yeah. You couldn't understand it. Take the edge off your day and it went on and on and on and on.

Kirsten Oates: Really.

Jim Finley: But that's the point where as soon as we get defensive, we ourselves become part of the problem. There's nothing to defend because he is not proclaiming anything that's a fact. He's evoking a realization that's beyond words. So, at the human level, of course, he saw it's one of the things he had to do. We all have things to deal with and he dealt with it. But I think he was because he himself not just spoke of but was himself stabilized in the very oneness of which he speaks the death of himself, he was at peace. Matter of fact, he died on his way to one of the trials.

Kirsten Oates: So was there ever a verdict on him?

Jim Finley: There was. Several statements were claimed to be heretical.

Kirsten Oates: But he died before that is proclaimed.

Jim Finley: He never heard the condemnation of those teachings.

Kirsten Oates: Has his teaching remained central in the Catholic tradition?

Jim Finley: Well, it depends. First of all, for the widespread breadth of the Catholic tradition, it doesn't because no one even knows who he is. Because most Catholic seniors don't even know who mystics are.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: So they don't consider, but for those who are into theological, speculative, prayerful things,



I think what it is there's people that are a more conservative bent. That for those reasons considered, they're not comfortable with him, but there are people like the nuns who have been and are thrilled and amazed and grateful for the beauty and depth of Eckhart's teaching. He's very similar to Merton that way and also I think to Richard Rohr as contemplative teachers. Yeah. So, anyway, that's how I see him.

Kirsten Oates: Would the Dominicans still celebrate him as one of their greatest teachers?

Jim Finley: They do. As a matter of fact, there was an audience of several Dominicans with Pope John Paul, the previous pope. The Dominicans who went on record are saying our brother Meister Eckhart.

Kirsten Oates: Wow.

Jim Finley: So, when you really sift it all out and look at what he was saying and put it into a context, people have a range of based on where they stand themselves on their own comfort level with mystical language and all that.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful.

Jim Finley: But it pertains to us because we're trying to get beyond our own definitions, to be respectful of them, these formulations that we're trying to find our way into a oneness of infinity that's translating us into itself unexplainably. Eckhart's putting words to that and helping us how to understand it and how to cooperate with it. I think that's for the relevance is for us in the podcast, because as we listen to these talks, it just brings up quite what about this and what about that.

We have to do that, but when it all settles down, all the what abouts are transcended by the invitation to listen more deeply to the intimacy, the unexplainable, like a oneness and live by. Then when you're translated into it, then you can speak out of it like Eckhart did, which is really every time we speak out of love, every time we speak out of helping people, every time we speak out of our own devotional sincerity, spiritual direction like that.

Kirsten Oates: It's amazing the way people like that have an impact on the world, the way the nuns so lovingly copied his work to be carried forward.

Jim Finley: It is. I also think how this is true to psychotherapy too, but also a spiritual direction, how a contemplative grounded spiritual director can release a person from certain cul-de-sacs. They can't find their way out, and that they've helped them find a language that's more gracious or spacious or inclusive or open that can have such a healing effect on a secret's life, I think. Turning to the Mystics will continue in a moment.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, you called Eckhart a more of a theological mystic, and I wondered if you'd just talk a little bit about the difference between the natural mystics we've studied and someone like Eckhart.

Jim Finley: I think the nuptial mystics is Saint John of the Cross. They're always both. There's a primacy. Saint John of the Cross, Teresa of Ávila, certainly Julian of Norwich, certainly in a very deep significant way also Guigo II and not as explicitly, but they see the intimacy of marital love

as the primary metaphor that helps understand a union that God brings us to realize. It's nuptial in that it's really a teaching on the primacy of love. So, therefore, what we have with this love language in terms of interfaith dialogue, these nuptial mystics are much very close to the Sufi tradition, to this love tradition and also very close in deep yoga to Bhakti yoga, the Bhagavad Gita, this devotional love path.

Eckhart is a mysticism of the mind, transconceptual mind, and therefore, there's a deeper affinity between him and Buddhism. I have a book here by DT Suzuki, the Zen scholar. He points out as Meister Eckhart being enlightened. So, when you look for these interfaith affinities in terms of contemplative humanism, there is that aspect to this, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you for pointing that out. That's quite amazing. What's true is true and can be discovered.

Jim Finley: Exactly. But again, whichever side is emphasized, the other one's always there. For example, there's a lovely little line in Eckhart on love. I honestly believe if we would just ground ourself in love, it would clarify all these concern. He has a lot of statements like that.

Kirsten Oates: He doesn't use that metaphor like Teresa does so powerfully of the-

Jim Finley: Exactly. Notice John of the Cross does both because he had the theology. So, he talks about substantial union and effective union. He has all that, but really, when you get into the poetry in his actual teachings, he's a nuptial. It's really this love.

Kirsten Oates: I'm so glad you mentioned Meister Eckhart being more aligned with the teachings of Buddhism. Having studied Meister Eckhart through you a little bit, I did wonder would he have been exposed to Buddhism? Because it does sound so similar.

Jim Finley: No, I don't think so. There's a lovely book. We might look at Marcus Borg, who is a scripture scholar. He wrote Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time and other things. I used to go up to his church in Portland, Oregon. I think his wife, I think, was a priest there. But he has a lovely book called Jesus in Buddha. So, on one page, there's a saying of Jesus. On the other page, there's a saying of Buddha and they're identical.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, wow.

Jim Finley: He says, "How do we account for this?" Some people claim that Jesus traveled to India and had exposure to it, but linguistically, that doesn't hold up. There's very little evidence in the language of Jesus that shows he's been influenced by Veda teachings or Buddhist teachings. He says, "The reason is the affinity is Jesus in the Buddha discovered the same spiritual landscape." The same spiritual landscape, which is relevant actually to this, see if I can remember it, is that both Jesus and the Buddha saw that the problem is ignorance. Buddha called ignorance and Jesus called it blindness, that is being blind to the infinite love of God giving itself away as every breath and heartbeat. Jesus said, "You have eyes to see, but you don't see."

There's your God-given capacity to see the God-given nature standing up and sitting down. This is a source of all your sorrow. This is a source of all your confusion. So, the prayer becomes, "Lord, that I might see," and same way with the Buddha in the whole journey and

the whole story of the Buddha is the great deliverance of nirvana is being delivered from this. So, it's ignorance. The thing about ignorance is that this ignorance intensifies clinging and the clinging intensifies the pain and the confusion. The cure for both is to let go.

So, you see these affinities between these two traditions meet at that level. I think that's relevant to understanding the deep dialogue Merton had with Buddhism and Thích Nhất Hạnh coming to visit him and going to see the Dalai Lama just before he died and also as deep as mystical Islam with the Sufis and so on. It helps to understand what I think Merton saw this.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. That really helps to understand Eckhart as well, because he has a method to help us with letting go. Is that right?

Jim Finley: Yeah. So, even though he didn't explicitly address this issue, because he didn't historically have exposure to it, it is as if he had firsthand exposure to Buddhist and Hindus. So, if he did, he would've responded, but he gives us a stance out of which contemplative ecumenical dialogue builds a basis for it to meet each other. Thomas Merton says somewhere, the unfortunate thing about a lot of Christian missionary work is the failure of the Christian missionaries to realize that people that we're converting where in some instances were as or more holy than they were. It's a breaking open of tribal intensities. I think Eckhart's very good about breaking open tribal intensities and at the same time respecting the role that these distinctions have. It's not being disrespectful to anything.

So, to move on, so what we have then and also in Eckhart then, this is where the mystical part becomes explicit is Eckhart will be looking at this in the talks. We might say that on this earth, our experience of understanding and response to God is veiled. So, it's veiled in our minds to the words and insights and how we read through the power of the Spirit in our hearts, we're given an interior understanding through our mind. It's veiled in our emotions, but it's veiled as consolation restored with affect and so on. We'll be looking at all of this. But when we die and passed through the veil of death, we go from a veil to unveiled union. The union's already divinely saturated existence, but it's veiled.

We don't see, except in this veiled way through faith, but through all eternity, it'll be unveiled. There will be living as God's life, God's own life, as completely as God lives God's own life in our eternal nothingness without God in the light of day. But what Eckhart is also saying what happens with some people is that God doesn't wait until we're dead to begin to give us unveiled union. That's the mystical. That you're already being led into this unveiled union, beyond thought, beyond words, beyond emotions, and so on. Now, this unveiled union, which is this unit mystical consciousness itself is veiled because it's obscure, even to the mystic to who is being drawn into this, their own reflective ego. They're beyond what their own ego can comprehend.

So, it's veiled, but it's also luminous and lucid, clear, bright, and true. The person yields to it and they're transformed in it. I think that's what makes them a teacher. I think that's one. It's very close to the Hindu understanding of the guru. It's the one who's been metamorphosized in this unit of experience where Brahman and Ātman are one. They're also given the gift of speaking of it in a way that helps us find it too. So, these mystic teachers were studying the podcast. I think this is a way of understanding who they are and so on.

Kirsten Oates: Do we have a sense of how Meister Eckhart came upon this transformed consciousness? With Teresa and John of the Cross, there's stories that are directly related to that.

Jim Finley: Teresa tells us in her life, she tells us in detail. We know in John of the Cross through the dark night of what he did. Merton tells us in his own life, seven stories of mountain life. But we don't know how Eckhart came. As far as I'm aware of, I'm not aware of any passage where he goes into the foundations of his own way. He just bears witness that he's clearly been transformed in it, but he doesn't. That's true of a number of these mystics too, but they don't provide that.

Kirsten Oates: Well, I guess, too, because his work was carried forward by the nuns through the sermons. No one sat down and asked him to write his autobiographical.

Jim Finley: No, no, no one did. So, we really don't know whether, as a young man, why did he enter the Dominicans in the first place? Did the quickening already begin? Or did it begin when he took his vows? Or did it begin studying theology? Well, he studied theology. We just don't at that level.

Kirsten Oates: But he clearly bears witness to it in the teaching.

Jim Finley: He bears witness. Exactly. So, what he does, so this is the vision of Meister Eckhart. This is the tone of it. So, what he does, he says, "Well, this being so, you'll understand life in these terms. Then what is the path or the way of life along which..." Let's say looking at life in this way is the vision, this luminous vision and this luminous vision of these sensibilities and sensitivities illumined the path. The path is a way of life along which he invites us to follow him because it's along this path that this unit of experience that happened to Eckhart can happen to us to the degree that God so grants. So, the path of Meister Eckhart then see is this way of life.

The thing about Meister Eckhart is significant for him is that whereas the message we've been studying so far, they focus on prayer and how we conduct ourself in contemplative prayer. So, for example, in the contemplative dimensions of prayer, in the cloud of unknowing, you ground yourself in your word. When a thought arises, you're aware of the thought arising, but you don't think about the thought that arises. Rather you reground yourself in the word to keep your tap root or your heart grounded in what's beyond thought, beyond words like this. So, Eckhart is suggesting that same basic strategy, there's a way we can learn to do that all day long. He's suggesting a certain attitude toward the circumstances of the day where we catch ourself getting reactive.

We catch ourself believing that the conditions I'm in have the authority to name who I am or the outcome of the present project has the authority. He gives a strategy to take a deep breath reminder so that only this infinite presence of God has the authority to name who we are. Little by little by little, which he calls us path of detachment that is being or to be *Gloßenheit* to be released. It's being released from the hindrances. This is going to lead us to what he calls the birth of the word in the soul.

That once I'm detached, I live this detached life. Experientially in the birth of the word in the soul, I experienced God welling up in and as the details of the day. I see that God's the infinity of the immediacy of what's happening and the immediacy of what happening is a

concrete immediacy of the infinity of God. So, the birth and the word and the soul is one of the fruition of the fruit of detachment. Then that's going to lead to a final sense, which we'll be looking at in the talks just breakthrough into the Godhead, beyond God. So, that's the tone of Meister Eckhart.

Kirsten Oates: Wow. So, just to repeat back, the worldview, this sense of living in union with God, but that we generally experience it unveiled ways, but once we are dead, it will be revealed and that there's ways that we can take a stance in our lives that might bring on that revelation, an openness to that revelation that we might experience it while we're still alive. That's the general worldview of these mystics. Is that true?

Jim Finley: Yeah. Let me put it another way. Let me put it another way. We'll be walking through all this in the sessions too. So, let's say on earth, the veiled way is as our thoughts, our memory, our feelings, and so on illumined by grace. It's veiled in grace, but it's like a living certainty in our heart, a primitive inner assurance, a guiding light the God is with us. That veiled way lived and shared with others is efficacious under holiness. But when we die and pass through the veil of death, it's unveiled. It's God. So, what he's suggesting is in the midst of the veiled ways, there's the opening up of the unveiled, which is the mystical dimension.

That mystical dimension liberates us from the veils, returns us to being radically present in the veils, because we are living our life. We talk and move and walk. This is Eckhart's fidelity to his path of giving us the sermons. Or like St. Teresa of Ávila, The Seventh Mansion. She's in the end. The only question left for such a person is, "How can I be helpful?" It circles back around to the divinity of ordinary things to deeply realized.

Kirsten Oates: Then Eckhart carrying this worldview of the mystics offers us a unique path that was off given to him as a way to maybe open ourselves to this unveiled experience.

Jim Finley: Yes. Let's say this. In the podcast, each of these mystics is sharing his or her own unique way of bearing witness to how they realize it and the path that they suggest that we might realize it. They're doing that to help us find our own unique way because how's that unfolding in me in a way that's faithful to this path? But the lovely thing about the podcast is we look across mystics. We can see that each one in his or her own way, there's a continuous thread. So, we're looking for the themes they all share in common. Each one is uniquely sharing because it's how they each uniquely experienced it. Then there's suggesting that we're part of that lineage. We're woven into that lineage.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. I was going to say it's helpful to have an opportunity to learn about and practice these different methods. So, for this season, it's going to be a little bit like Guigo and the cloud of unknowing where there is a method that we could practice in our lives. Yeah.

Jim Finley: Exactly. I'd like to show one last thing here that I think is helpful too and important, especially with Eckhart and personally how I experienced this, how I was introduced to Eckhart, and also to clarify about the tone that we're taking in the podcast. When I read Merton in the ninth grade, it had such a deep effect on me and graduated from high school and entered and lived there in the community and got to sit with him personally. I saw him as a living mystic. I just saw him as he held the lineage of the Christian mystical tradition, and he's the one who led me into these classical texts that we've been studying here, John of

the Cross. It was through him. So, I was deeply touched, I think, in the monastery by John of the Cross, most of all, and the Cloud.

I read Teresa. I did read her, but I didn't really take to her right away for some reason. It wasn't until later, sometime later actually, that I was invited with Carolyn Mason to come to Ávila with her to give a retreat, Ávila, Spain, retreats of Ávila lived. That got me immersed in Teresa and then it just caught hold for me about Teresa. The same way when I read Meister Eckhart, I couldn't quite get a handle on what he was saying. So, I could tell he said beautiful things. For example, he says the eye, E-Y-E, the eye with which I see God is the eye with which God sees me. I like that, but I couldn't see John of the Cross. I couldn't see where it fit into a context or a picture like this. Even though when I was first started reading John of the Cross, he just took to me right away like Merton did.

Also, when I read the Cloud, I took to it right away. But when I read Teresa, at first, I didn't take to her at all for some reason. It wasn't until years later that when Carolyn Mason invited me to come to Avila to give retreats on John of the Cross and Teresa, that's what really immersed me in Teresa. So, it's interesting how these mystics, there's a certain timing about where we are in our own life about what we resonate with. So, with Eckhart, when I read Eckhart, I just had access to one translation at the time. I could tell he said beautiful things. For example, he says, the eye, the E-Y-E, the eye with which I see God is the eye which God sees me. I like that, but I couldn't see how it fit. His teaching seemed so metaphysical.

Even though I was studying metaphysics in the monastery, Aquinas and Duns Scotus and so on, I just couldn't see it. But years later, I got married and I was in my doctoral studies for my PhD really in psychology. I started reading commentaries on Eckhart, and we're going to list those in the sources academic commentaries. I really immersed myself in those. That's where I got into Eckhart and started giving retreats on Meister Eckhart and so on. So, I want to say this though and this has to do with the podcast. Reiner Schürmann says he risked under the guise of speculative mysticism, under the guise of this metaphysical language, which we'll look at, the joy without a cause. What we're after here in the podcast is the joy without a cause.

So, I'm going to be emphasizing that when we hear Eckhart say things, we'll hear it and give examples where we can say, "I've experienced that. I've experienced that." I think what Eckhart is doing, he's helping me find a language to understand that. He is also providing a way that I can deepen it. That's the emphasis here. So, I'm emphasizing this experiential simplicity to it. I think two other sources which we'll be mentioning here, one is a little book, Cyprian Smith, *The Way of Paradox* in which he does that very much, beautiful, very similar to what we're hoping to do here. Also, Matthew Fox, when he came out with his translation of the sermons of Meister Eckhart, in the introduction, he starts this idea of a set of the church's emphasis on original sin.

It was Eckhart's emphasis on the original blessing, which is really true. I think what Matthew Fox did, there was a pastoral blessing. Richard Rohr does pastoral accessibility like this. He has that other book more recently, I think it's *Meister Eckhart, the Warrior of God in Our Times*. I think that's the title. It'll be listed. What he does is he imagines Meister Eckhart having a talk with Thich Nhat Hanh, the Buddhist. Then he imagines him having a talk with Abraham Heschel. I think it might be [Martin] Buber. What he tries to show is the

timeless lineage of these traditions as accessibility. In a way, that's what I'm trying to do here. In the podcast, I'm giving emphasis to make this as accessible and invitational and heartfelt.

Then if those who are so inclined, we'll talk about this later in the series, if you want to start doing a more in-depth study of Eckhart, you can do that. I want to give some guidelines for that. Almost like doing deep Bible study, getting into the word, take an in-depth commentary, the sermons, a journal. You feel an interior lectio of getting more into these other dimensions of this metaphysical language that he uses to express these things. I'll say one last thing and this is true of all the mystics, but especially Eckhart, he's just too much. We have to just let him be too much. You know what I mean? Yeah.

We have to let him be too much. But as long as you just stay with him and be patient with yourself, you start getting little glimmers like connecting the dots and stay with them. Probably each person listening to the podcast says his or her own mystic they most might want to sit with and have one of their teachers, but for me, Eckhart's certainly been one of mine. So, I'm very pleased to be able to share it with people. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: How wonderful. So, Jim, just building on what you've just said, that if you were to take the sermons by themselves, they're quite challenging to read.

Jim Finley: They are.

Kirsten Oates: A lot of metaphysical language.

Jim Finley: They're beautiful and we're going to read some. I'm going to read passages, so you get a feeling of how he talks. Then I'm going to try to open it up to make it accessible, but just the sermons all by itself. So, I think you can read it and be touched by the poetics of it. You have to skip whole paragraphs. What in the hell does that mean? But then all of a sudden, there's like three or four sentences you want to write it out. If you stay with it, that grows. But the commentaries really help with that. If you're inclined to pursue it at that level, that's true of all the mystics we're looking at really.

Kirsten Oates: So you'll give us a beautiful taste of his actual words, but then you're going to bring in these real word examples grounded in life today in our own context.

Jim Finley: That's what I've done in all this podcast. That's my pedagogy really. I quote and then I offer practical examples or metaphors to try to line ourselves up. We're putting a language to something as intimately shines and shimmers inside of us, how to talk about it or how to explore it. I think it's what the podcasts are about.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Wonderful. Well, I'm very excited about this season too, and just very grateful, Jim, for you and your teaching and the way you open up these mystics and these paths to us. Well, us would be mystics out here.

Jim Finley: Yeah, exactly.

Kirsten Oates: So here we go, season seven.

Jim Finley: Season seven.

Kirsten Oates: Corey in the background as always helping us along and Corey will be updating those resources so that people can find everything you've mentioned today in the podcast. 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.