



# Meister Eckhart

Dialogue 2: The Hidden Ground of God  
with James Finley and Kirsten Oates

**Turning  
to the  
Mystics**

Jim Finley: Greetings. I'm Jim Finley.

Kirsten Oates: I'm Kirsten Oates.

Jim Finley: Welcome to Turning to the Mystics.

Kirsten Oates: Welcome everyone to Turning to the Mystics. We're in season seven and we are turning to Meister Eckhart. I'm here with Jim and we've got our fabulous producer, Corey, in the background supporting us. We're going to be reflecting on Jim's second talk on Meister Eckhart. Welcome, Jim.

Jim Finley: Yes, yes. Good to pick this up again and move on together in Eckhart. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Well, you covered a lot of ground in that session and I hope that if I don't delve into an area that someone's interested in that they'll send in their questions because we do that special session at the end of the season where we take questions from people who have listened to the season. And so there's just a lot of good stuff in this session, so I'm sure others will add their own questions and help us all delve deeper into this topic.

The frame we're in, you're guiding us through aspects of Meister Eckhart's teaching, and I just wanted to feed back to you what I'm hearing is the frame and just help me understand it. There seems to be four aspects to Eckhart's teaching. The first one is the ultimate or divine nature of our existence that we can experience, and then what you described as diagnosing a dilemma that we're estranged from experiencing this reality. And then Eckhart offers a path where we can be delivered from this dilemma, which you've named as the path of detachment. And then Eckhart talks about the birth of the word in the soul, which I think you describe as a conscious state, what life starts to look like when we experience this divine nature of our existence coming full circle, back to that.

Jim Finley: Yes, that's right. He starts out by bearing witness to the divine origins of our very existence and to God infinite reality giving itself to us as our very reality in our nothingness without God. That's the god-given godly nature of our situation. Next, he talks about that we're exiled for the experience of that, because the powers of the soul are faculties are to think, to remember, to love, to see, to touch because they're restrained from the ground, they're exiled from it. Therefore, in our experiential day by day self, we're not aware of this ever-present divinity of ourself. That alone is ultimately real.

That whole image of the person looking in a mirror and that's our predicament. Then, he says, well, once we see this predicament, then what's the remedy? What's the path in which we're healed from all that hinders us from living in an habitual state of the divinity of our life, which is the birth of the word in the soul. And he's charting out that path. And this is his language for what each mystic and his or her own way marks out that same path. This is the mystical spiritual worldview of the mystical traditions of the Christian faith in Christian terms is also continuous with the mystical traditions of all the great world religions. This is universal inside understanding of ourselves.

Kirsten Oates: He's going to offer us a method, which you'll go over in the next talk. I'm not going to focus, I'm going to follow where you went in this talk. So the method is this idea of the path of detachment, which is you're going to go into detail about in future talks.

Jim Finley: Yes. I'd say this too. I'm spending time where I said it with all these mystics, there's a vision aspect, which is the spiritual worldview of a mystically awoken Christianity. And then the path is a method in a way like, "How do I concretely stabilize myself in that?" I've been spending a lot of time in the vision aspect, the poetry of it, the inside of it, such a broad and rich understanding. In the next session we'll get into the concreteness of a day by day practical thing is open to all of us that we can practice that.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. Well, I look forward to that. And in this session we'll focus on this vision aspect like you did in that last talk. You talked about that people are graced with this dilemma. I think you said Eckhart is talking to those of us graced with this dilemma, the seekers' dilemma, and it's a gift to live in this dilemma. And I'm wondering why you say that? What's the gift of it?

Jim Finley: Yes. My understanding of it is he's saying yes, there is this way in which we were in this realm of the power is completely exiled from the ground. That we were real unto ourself without God. Everything around us is real all by itself without God and that we're attached to that. See, because we think that's all that we are. We're afraid to lose it. That's why we're afraid to die. That's why we're afraid to... Then I think he says, well then faith comes in and God illumines the powers of the soul. So when we see through Christ, when we hear that God loves us through the power of the Spirit who dwells in our hearts, we're empowered to know that God does love us. There's an experiential understanding. And when we know that God's infinitely in love with us, God is love, infinitely in love with us or God's beloved, then the spirit in our hearts we're empowered to know that we are loved.

See, so we understand that we're infinitely understood. We learned to love the love that infinitely loves us and so on. And so the powers are transformed or illumined by faith. They're more closer proximity to the ground. But it's still, it's like in a mirror darkly, an obscure certainty. And so we live this path of faith, discipleship, your life, my life, live our life. And as we keep maturing in that we reach a point where in this reflective consciousness, in the powers illumined by faith, the ground starts shining through. So he says, "Something flashed before me and I see if only I could seize hold of it, I would possess all truths. But I know not what to make of it. See, I know what happened, but I know not what to make of it, but I'm lured on." He said, "We must sigh for it." And that's the dilemma.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: I have seen within the powers of my soul, illumined by faith, the ground that is the infinite ground transcending all my powers and it has shined through and revealed itself to me. And now that it's revealed to me, I can tell that I long to abide there in the ground and I don't know how. And that's a grace dilemma.

Kirsten Oates: That's a gift and a gift because it's-

Jim Finley: It is, which motivates us to turn to God for help, "Well, how do I? What is the path in which I am set free from the hindrances that I might abide?" And that's the guidance that he's giving us. And notice this what all the mystics are doing. In their own way they set up this grace dilemma, which of ourselves were powerless to resolve, which radicalizes our dependence on God for this union in which it is resolved unexplainably. Eckhart's following

that same path.

Kirsten Oates: That you mentioned earlier about that we're meant to cipher God and he also used the word "yearn" for God. So it's almost like we're coming into ourselves, we're built for that. Is that why it's a gift?

Jim Finley: Yeah, we're created for that. He said, "God must do it." See, God must create someone that God can completely give God to. That's us. See that must to it. Also, where he says, "Once we've gotten a glimpse, this grace glimpse of the ground shining through, it steals the soul from herself. That is, it steals from us the ability to be fulfilled without being able to be grounded in that which gives itself to us. That everything else is infinitely not enough." He says, "We're the one who's had this glimpse of God, you could give up the whole world as easily as you'd give up peas and lentils. You'd see the nothingness compared to the infinity that is at once your ground also because God already gave it to you." But we're finding a way to be consciously and experientially grounded in it to live by it and share it with others day by day. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: I love this section where he talks about the mystery coming like a thief, that we can't make it happen. But one interesting thing that you mentioned was that it can happen as we listen to Eckhart and that he wants us to become more open to that, whatever that is. When we listen to him or when we listen to these podcasts, there's a opening that lets that thief sneak through, I guess.

Jim Finley: It's like listening to music. When you listen to music, you lean into it and you let it have its way with you and it creates a transformed state of awareness. The same way when we attentively read a poet like this in the rhythm of the poet's voice, we're carried through and something's being conveyed to us interiorly.

And so his sermons are really like that in a way. It's like reading Jonathan Cross or any of these people. In a way it's listening to music, like you're listening to the words. But in the rhythm of the words, something's being conveyed that's beyond what words can say. And because he was speaking from the depth of himself when he gave his sermons that same depth from which he was speaking accesses the hearers, it touches that same depth in them like each unto each. And it creates a sense of union.

We're saying here that that's what these podcasts are about, that it isn't just Eckhart says, "This experience at which I speak, this glimpse of the ground." You might have it before you leave this church today, but I'm saying we might have it, it might wash over me as I speak, and it might wash over as the listeners, as they listen. And that's really the substance of the talks. And it isn't a topic about something. It's about the divinizing of the ordinariness of yourself. It starts to shimmer and shine and you sense the truth of it and you're drawn to go deeper.

Kirsten Oates: And for you, Jim, Eckhart's one of those mystics that helps restabilize you in this depth that you teach from?

Jim Finley: Yes. When I was in the monastery, it didn't affect me that way. I was very affected by John of the Cross and the cloud and so on. But after I left the monastery and started

reading the commentaries and getting into it, for many years now, he's been just a foundational teacher for me. I've been so moved by the depth and beauty of his teachings. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: I do want to delve into this idea of what it means to be real. We're talking about what it means to be real in the fullest possible sense. There was this line that if we're talking about the fullest possible sense, then only God is real and we are not actually real. I heard that, right?

Jim Finley: Yeah. Eckhart said that to be real in the fullest possible sense is to be oneself, the infinity of reality itself. So when God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush, and God sends him on this mission to tell the Pharaoh, "Let my people go." And Moses says, "Well, whom shall I say sent me?" And Yahweh... See, I am, who am. See, you go tell the Pharaoh that infinity of reality itself sent you and see how that flies.

If that's what it means to be real, then by that definition we're not real. We're not real. I don't say they're small, but they're nothing at all. He says. But the paradox says, "Although we of ourselves are nothing at all relative to this fullness of it means to be real, that the infinite presence of God is presenting itself and giving itself to us as the reality of ourself and our nothingness without God."

That's why he says to be trapped in the nothingness of things without God is if it's real, we're back again to the estrangement of the powers from the ground. But if we start to realize that it's in my very nothingness that the infinite presence of God is the reality of myself, given to me and my nothingness without God. That's why he says, "This is why a person endowed with this sensitivity." Say would see a tree and see it in its nothingness to see the God is the reality of the tree and it's nothingness without God. Just to see a tree once, you'd never have to go hear a sermon again the rest of your life.

He said, "Every creature's like a book filled with God". And that's where you get Brother Lawrence practicing the presence of God. His whole awakening, he was looking at a tree, and while he was looking at the tree, there was this vivid realization of the divinity of things and practicing the presence. That's the paradox, not just whether ourselves, but all of reality.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, so not just the way we experience ourselves, but the way we experience everything in reality? Yeah.

Jim Finley: I would say too, Eckhart's inviting... Who'll be talking about this in the next session too, that there are certain moments, we gave examples already in solitude or in intimacy or art or music or poetry or birth or death, we're stunned with a sensitive, like a primordial depth... The presence that's welling up and as the very moment that we're experiencing it unexplainably. We get a taste of it like that. So he's inviting us to become students of those moments and how to free ourselves from what hinders us from being habitually one with those moments in our life. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: And you said with Brother Lawrence, that was his whole path of transformation was unpacking that moment?

Jim Finley: It was. And he was the cook for the community. So among the pots and the pan, it was all God. He wrote essays on practicing the presence of God, which is contemplative living in the midst of the world. See, how do we?

Kirsten Oates: This word that's particular to Eckhart, the Gelassenheit, and this is God's self donating love, that we are the generosity of God. Is that correct? The Gelassenheit?

Jim Finley: Yes. He says, "The acting and becoming are one." And so the act refers to God, the infinite presence of God, infinitely giving the infinite presence of itself away as the reality of us and of all things. And this just generosity, this... seemed to be released like God's released from being in God. He's very gelassen. He's very laid back about being God. He's so relaxed about it. He just infinitely gives infinity away as us. And then the act of receiving, the act of becoming. God's act of giving is not that God performs, it is the act that God is. God is the generosity, the infinite joy.

And likewise, our receiving that. The point where the two touch each other. Our receiving that, is not an act that we performance, the act that we are. We are the act of receiving the infinite generosity of God. And it's not an option. We can't say, "I'll pass on that. I'm busy," because if we pass on it, we're nothing. And it's like you can't pass on your next inhalation, you can't. They day won't go well without it. And so we're the point verge, we're bound together. And this is looking at the ground as a verb, see as a perpetual activity. The ground dimension of the rhythm and flow, the eternity of the passage of all things.

Kirsten Oates: Is the ground these two acts, God acting and my becoming? That's the ground?

Jim Finley: Yeah. We say God's ground is my ground and my ground is God. And we see that poetically as if there's this thing called the ground, this one ground. See, but here he is inviting us to see that God's ground is being completely given in the act of God giving God's ground away as the act of me receiving it.

Kirsten Oates: I see.

Jim Finley: So now it makes it a verb like a... It's almost like, I think, why meditation practices the emphasis on the breath, like inhaling, exhaling, inhaling... And the rhythm of giving and receiving and inhaling, exhaling, embodies that rhythmic activity of the ground as an act of giving and receiving. But they're one, so he says, "There're one, that's where the ground is one."

Kirsten Oates: That's really helpful. That's even clearer to me. Thank you, Jim. I love the sentence God acts, and I become. I was thinking that could almost be like a breath meditation practice, morning meditation, God acts and I become, God acts and I become, yeah.

Jim Finley: The example that I used about the mother holding her newborn infant or in terms of the powers, the infant is just can't walk, can't talk, can't roll over. So in terms of the powers, it's like the essence of limit, but that's what makes it transparent, where the ground, the essence shines out. And so when the mother clasps the infant to her breast, she's smitten, removed by that. And then also, it awakens her and her capacity to experience that. As a miracle, she knows not what to make of it.

And then it also reveals to her that that's what shining out that ground, that divinity shining out from the infant is in her, but is buried under the complexities of her powers, her schedule, her regrets, her plans, her goals, her imaginings, her conclusions. And therefore is it possible for her to be liberated, not be buried under the debris of these complexities so that she too might live in this essence shining out through the details of the day?

Kirsten Oates: In a way, when she's holding the baby, she's witnessing the God acts and my baby becomes, or with the puppy, God acts this precious puppy becomes, or the flower, God acts this beautiful flower becomes. And then we might feel God acts and I become?

Jim Finley: I think in these moments, that's why I say we're a momentary mystic. See? Because that moment is like a flower of this oneness. I think what the grace is, I don't think everyone has those moments. They're often very fleeting and extremely subtle. But the grace is, I think, being interiorly drawn to abide there. I don't think everyone experiences that consciously. I think everyone is drawn to it in different dimensions of life through intimacy and love and family and art and... These are all modalities of this, but in this transparent sense to abide there.

I think Eckhart's talking to that in us, see, and sermons are to awaken that in us and offer encouragement like a path. This is a contemplative spiritual direction.

Kirsten Oates: Can you help me understand the example you gave around fire transforming wood into itself? Because in my mind, the fire disintegrates the wood, the wood doesn't exist anymore, but this sense of being real like we are here in our bodies, there's some kind of... We're not completely disintegrated into God. Can you just help me understand that one?

Jim Finley: Yeah, that's true. The metaphor doesn't work when you look at it that way. You see, because which lifts ashes, and we're not turning into ashes like this. It means this, the wood is placed in the fire so the wood doesn't turn fire into the wood. The fire is turning the wood into fire and it gets to a state of oneness in which it become like red-hot coal. It becomes like a burning oneness. And he's using that as the example that we're being transformed by God into God, nothingness without God, not just ontologically in the truth of things, but in the depths of our awakening heart. See, this union where God and ourselves mutually disappears other than each other, and everything glows with this oneness.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, that makes sense. There's a way that we feel in our day-to-day experience, we can feel like this separate piece of wood over here, separate to the fire of God. And so this is more pointing to the path towards union from feeling that separate objective piece of something to this sense of union back to the ground.

Jim Finley: That's why I use that example. We can't get the ocean into a symbol, but we can drop the symbol into the ocean and we are that symbol. So it isn't as if we're gathering God up and fitting God into us with our consolations, our insights, our... See, that that would be the powers trying to acquire something, but rather it's relaxing into this *Gelassenheit*, this generosity. There's this infinite generosity in the intimate simplicity of things. We realize as we lean into it and yield and let it have its way with us, we enter into this boundaryless communion. It is a once God in ourselves. So when Jesus said, "I came to you might have life and have it more abundantly," the life he spoke of is God's life in our life as one life. So

Eckhart's saying, "Well, how do we experience that oneness?"

Turning to the Mystics will continue in a moment.

Kirsten Oates: When you use that quote from Jesus, it sounds like we are deepening into our life, that we're actually becoming more alive. It's hard to place these words like, "We're moving into nothingness, poverty, with this sense of actually deepening into our lives." Can you help me put those together.

Jim Finley: For a couple of years I was one of the Christian speakers with the Buddhist Christian conference in Boulder, Colorado, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, who met with Merton when he was in Asia. And so there are a lot of Buddhists there and Christians there and Jewish people. And Thomas Keating was speaking and he says, "These Buddhists talk about no self. Whenever you're sitting with a zen master who teaches no self when you're with them, they're always such a self. They're always just shining for... They're so them, themselves." Like that.

That's what's so strange that you get the feeling that we'd have that feeling with Eckhart to meet him. He was just very there. He was very present, but he was present as manifesting this very thing of which he speaks. So nothing's ever destroyed, nothing's ever lost. Everything coalesces and an incarnate infinity intimately realized. I'm mysteriously more myself than never because I'm less and less able to be anything other than God being poured out as the uniqueness of me. If I don't live my life, nobody will see. If I don't become whom I'm called to be, nobody will become called to be. But for me to be who I'm called to be is to become the person who yields to this is transformed in this, so God might use me to achieve His purposes in the world by me living from my heart, me being true to my own convictions, my own daily walk.

Kirsten Oates: If we were to add another definition to what it means to be real, we had this ultimate definition to what it means to be real. But if there's a way to be real in the way that Eckhart's guiding us towards, because there is the reality of our bodies and our lives. And so we're actually finding a path to become more real in our humanness.

Jim Finley: Here's an example. This would be more John of the Cross because it's more like nuptial love kind of thing. Let's say when a person is holding the beloved in their arms, the person in their love for the beloved, they're holding the beloved in their arms, but they're not just holding the beloved's body. Rather they realize the beloved's body embodies the presence of the beloved. See? And it's love that empowers the person to see that. And then that's the sacrament of God. See? That the world is God's body and that it's bodying forth the love that's uttering and into being. That's what I mean by incarnate infinity intimately realized.

The generosity of God is so complete, it completely gives itself as the unexplainable stature of simple things of standing up and sitting down, looking out the window, listening to your breath. You start realizing... Writer, Sherman says, Eckhart's talking about what happens to the person when they encountered the same. Everything's the same. Without God, it's absolutely nothing. But in the generosity of God, it's God completely being poured out as if grain of sand in your hand, your breath like this. And it's nothingness without God. And there's an habituated sensibility to that, which is what Eckhart's trying to invite us to find



our way. The path is a path that leads to an ever more habitual sensitivity to that union.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. Well, I do look forward to next week where we get some more guidance on the path aspect because it's really only in our powers that we can be present in the world. So it's about learning how to operate within our powers.

Jim Finley: It's in and through the powers that we transcend the powers and having the final say in who we are.

Kirsten Oates: I see. And this idea of possessiveness of heart, which is from this conversation, what I'm hearing is if we think that the powers are all we have, and so the possessiveness of heart is clinging to the powers as our soul self, the image in the mirror who wanted to possess itself as an image.

Jim Finley: I say to another way, say it along those same lines, we realized that the possessiveness of heart in the powers is I fall into thinking that this situation I'm in and how this turns out has the authority to name who I am. My ability to achieve this goal that I'm striving for or my inability to achieve, my failure to achieve it has the authority to name who I am. See, it's like absolutizing the relative and relativizing the absolute. See, it's the idolatry of condition states over the infinite generosity that transcendent permeates all condition states.

And we can tell we're doing that when we get reactive... clinging like this. So that's what we'll be talking about, how to become more experiential self-knowledge, like the depth dimensions of psychotherapy is like this too, in spiritual direction. We become more consciously aware of these points where we get snagged and we use them as teaching moments to learn about ourselves and how with God's grace to accept it and let go of its hold on us.

Kirsten Oates: And you had this quote from Merton that if we could move in this direction, he said it would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish. What's the vanishing he's talking about there?

Jim Finley: Another mystic one said, "To see this, it'd be like a snowflake falling on a red-hot stove." Where Jesus says, "You have eyes to see, but you don't see." That is your God-given capacity to see your God-given godly nature and your nothingness without God, and yet you don't see, and in this lies all your fear, all your confusion, all your sorrow. But if you could see, so the prayer is, "Lord, that I might see through my eyes, which you saw in everything that you saw," you would see this infinite light, this infinite presence, invincibly shining bright and wholly permeating the present moment just as it is, endlessly, in all directions forever.

That's why Merton says in the quote, it is that place, that point bears, that point of contact that belongs completely to God. It is not subject to the brutalities of our will. And so no matter how confused and how broken we are, that in us belongs completely to God, remains completely God's. And God shines out. This is why very often Cardinal Newman has often in life or we're transformed more by the acceptance of our failures and by the attaining of our achievements. Because in our failures, we despair or we go deeper. We go deeper by seeing how through the mercy of God we're sustained and transformed out of a moment of loss to go deeper. So there's an invincibility, a shining right, transcending and holy permeating conditioned states. And we're talking about interiorly seeing that.

I think there are moments we do see it. I think the wisdom that comes with the years, we sense it. But he is trying to deepen or enrich the intimacy with which we see it and live by it.

Kirsten Oates: The quote from Jesus, Jesus still faced the cruelty of the cross so that at one level the cruelty remains. But it's his experience was that wasn't the final say on who he was or what his life was about.

Jim Finley: See, that's why the cross means anything. See, it reveals a... See, that's why God is the presence that protects us from nothing, even as God, unexplainably sustained us in all things. So his torture was real, his torment was real, his death was real. And yet, "Father forgive them. They know now what they do." The invincibility of the love permeating at all, unexplainably was manifested perfectly in the world. That's the example that I use. The gospel says that when he died, they pierced his heart with a lance and blood and water flowed out like the birth of a child. And then there was no more Jesus left in Jesus. And then the only Jesus that was ever really there was manifested perfectly throughout the world to this day. So when Jesus says, "Follow me," sounds like a great idea. Do you see where He's taking us? See?

But it's a crucifixion of our dreaded and cherished delusions that anything less in an infinite union with the infinite love of God will be enough for us. Or the illusion that this infinite generosity of God is not already perfectly given to us in the intimacy of ourselves, heartbeat by heartbeat, breath by breath. That it says in the gospels that when Jesus died, that they pierced his heart with the lance and blood and water flowed out like the birth of the child, which is us. It's a church.

Then when the blood and water flowed out, there was no more Jesus left in Jesus. And then the only Jesus that was ever really there was manifested throughout the whole world to this day. And we're going to see this is going to be key to Eckhart on the God had the infinite emptiness of God. It's so full, it's empty. It's an emptiness that's pregnant with God and the world and everything. And so we're trying to be emptied of having anything.

Eckhart says, "As long as you're still a place in you to dwell with God, you're not yet poor. You have to become so poor that is God's going to dwell on you. God has to be the place where God dwells in you." Because as long as there's a place left where God couldn't dwell... We'll do that at the end, that's a sermon on-

Kirsten Oates: There's too much you. As long as there's a-

Jim Finley: Yeah. I think that we're talking about something where when we listen to this or where the talk ends, where we're reading this, these little moments where we're silenced. We're just simply silenced by the depth and beauty of what was resonating in the words beyond the words. And were moved by it subtly. And we learned to let that have its way with us. See, we learned to be transformed into the realization of that which we already infinitely are, but we're moving into the actualization of it in our experience.

And it's the foretaste of eternal life. When we pass through the veil of death, it'll be in the full light of glory forever. And right now, it's forever already in us. But it's obscure. It's subtle and deep. And we're trying to dwell that way day-by-day in the world.

I want to say something about our conversation. See, in a way, it would look as if we're wandering around with just observing this, observing that. I think too, say if we could have Meister Eckhart as our spiritual director, the encounter would be like that. It's not subject matter. It's not giving a lecture. And then, "What do you mean by that? What do you mean?" But you say, "Let me share with you what stirred in me when you spoke. Let me show you what I'm wondering about." And he'd engage you there. He would meet you in your way because it's endlessly playing itself out.

Kirsten Oates: Well, that's it. And the deeper levels of... So, if something's confusing, but I hear it again or then I'm like, "Oh, wow. That's..." Yeah.

Jim Finley: Yeah, that's right. Exactly. Yeah. That's what I mean. Discernment. See it dawns on us in the searching for it. And sometimes it dawns on us even when we weren't searching for it. And so we go to Eckhart and saying, it's there, but it's so elusive. See, how can I become more habitually stabilized and guided by this sense, but it keeps moving around on me like this? And Eckhart would join us there with how we're specifically living our life, "See you next month for your next session... Spiritual direction." So it's always shines into our life. So each one listening to this, that's what matters. It's like listening to music. What in you is touch? What lead you to wonder about this or that? Or how Eckhart's helping us put words to something that matters very much, but it's very hard to put words to it.

Kirsten Oates: I also think hearing you in dialogue too, Jim, hearing how you sit with something and there's something, like you said, like listening to music. There's a transmission of something, a way to be with questions, a way to be with someone that's really helpful too.

Jim Finley: That's why I think I compare it to psychotherapy so much because it's really so much a way of listening and then asking the person a question about what they just said. And in order to respond to the question, they have to pause for a moment to listen to themselves and know what to say. And then they're becoming more present to themselves in my presence. And then when they share it, I say, "Let me say it back. Edit it for me." And we start to form an alliance with each other, like an intimate alliance of the interiority of the person's life. I think when we follow the mystics like this, Eckhart sermons and journal it out or take it to prayer, it's very much like that. It's non-objectifiable death-like intimacy that he's helping us find our way along the path to be stabilized in that.

Kirsten Oates: That's the big point, isn't it? To be non-objectifying to ourselves and to other things, which we tend to be in our more busy human state, we tend to objectify. Everything's two-dimensional in a way. I can say this about it, I can say that about it.

Jim Finley: In the next talk, when we're talking about the path of detachment, he talks about to be as free of all images as if you were not... didn't even exist yet. And by all images, he means all internalized thoughts or ideas or conclusions about things, like factually what we know them to be. You don't reject any of it, but you're free. You're detached from all of them. The non-objectifiable clarity of a releasement. It's freedom from ideological living. It's freedom from this set ideas for... Because it's a reality of a presence that transcends what the mind can comprehend that the whole being can intimately realize. And then that gives a certain, it's a deeper way to understand what it means to understand.

Kirsten Oates: Do you think, Jim, sometimes you can have the opposite of being silenced, because sometimes when we are talking, you say something, I'm like, "Whoa." I just want to scream, it's so amazing.

Jim Finley: Yeah. It's like in deep moments of awakening, you want to start crying or burst out laughing. Or just you can't stop it, just want to... That's the depth of the self being moved like that. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: It's a great feeling.

Jim Finley: It is a great feeling.

Kirsten Oates: It is a wonderful feeling. It's always a good reminder for me when we are talking about these, the pathway and these concepts to go back to, so what can I do in my day by day life, which is to go back to this living life of discipleship. Would it be fair to say based on this discussion about our powers, that we can experience faith through our powers, but we can also try and effect love through the powers? So we can try and be a loving person right now calling on God's grace and support, but we can be working towards becoming more loving?

Jim Finley: This is my sense, you know I talk about the three foundations of the contemplative way of life. To find your practice and practice it because it's like a daily rendezvous with God in which there's no agenda but love. And so it's, for some people listening to the podcast is their rendezvous with God, and then they sit with it afterwards in the afterglow of it. Because unless we commit ourselves to a daily rendezvous to go deeper, we're just experiencing it, in passing, on our way to something else. Then each time the daily rendezvous ends, however it ends, we ask for the grace not to break the thread of that as we go through the day. And by doing that over and over and over, that becomes more and more realized. It's underlying habitual attentiveness in the midst of a task or conversation and so on.

Secondly, define your teaching and follow it. And the teaching is the teaching that bears witness to this. And this is why we turn to the guidance, to the mystics, because these are the teachings. See, they're bearing witness and they also offer a way to realize it. Not all teaching does that. Sometimes like the poetry of TS Elliot or Emily Dickinson or Mary... They bear witness to it, but they don't necessarily tell you the way to it. Except listening to the poetry is the way to it in a way.

And so you find your teaching and you follow it, and then you find your community and enter it. And the depth of the community is God. It's also just one other person and whose presence you know you're not alone on this path. That's all the people listening to this podcast. And it spreads out in circles all over the world really. And then eventually what it leads to is find your practice and practice that as your daily life becomes practice. And the truth is the truth of your life. It's the truth of the teaching. There's no end to the guidance. There is no absence of guidance. There's only the absence of the awareness of the guidance that's always being given.

To be sensitized to it, "How can I be led day-by-day?" And the community then becomes the whole world. God so loved the world, he gave us only begotten son. And so the whole world claims us as the beloved. Includes the whole world in all of humanity and all of that. So that's the tone of it, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, that's really helpful. I do remember from Teresa Avila, and I think Eckhart too, this aspect of self-reflection so that we're trying to understand ourselves... know thyself, through those three things that you mentioned. That's-

Jim Finley: Yes. What the soul attains, she attains to her powers. If she would understand, she does that with the intellect. If she would love... and so on. And what he is really inviting us to do is to become a reflective person. See, really how I put it, we think about this, we think about that, but we rarely think about thinking.

Kirsten Oates: I see.

Jim Finley: Yes. And, "How can I be more consciously aware of the gift of mind?" See, I love, I desire, but how can I become more consciously aware of and grateful for the mystery of my desire, the gift of desire? I remember. But how can I in faith, if God says, "Just as a mother will never forget the child of her womb, I will never forget you," and to know that it's revealed that God will never forget us. This is the eternality of ourself and the mind of God. And so we should become more to the mystery of our body. I think our meditation, a lot of this awareness of the body, the breathing, the body, the mystery of our body.

In a way, it's very intimate and concrete and real. It's not some far-flung vague idea. It's really sitting with the immediacy of mind, not as a theory, but my mind. My mind, my desire, my fear. What's the texture of my fears? What's my fear made out of? The stream of my emotions? This is meditation practice. We become acutely present to the mystery and immediacy of ourself that opens out upon this mystery giving itself to us as our body, as our mind, as our... Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. That's a really helpful encouragement. Thank you, Jim. I wonder, just to close, if you wouldn't mind reading some of the quotes from that final advent sermon that you read at the end of the last session. It went by so quick and they were such beautiful things you were sharing. And so-

Jim Finley: This is in the collected works, the complete mystical works of Meister Eckhart, these resources will be listed so the people can have access to these books, if they care to get them. So in the complete sermon, this is the first sermon. It's an advent sermon. It's the first sermon in the collected sermons-

Kirsten Oates: Jim, before you start, by the way, I was thinking about the people who showed up for that sermon. You know, you have the people that only come to church at couple... like at Easter and then at Christmas, and maybe the people that were there every week. But I wonder if they were so blown away when they heard these amazing words coming out from Meister Eckhart?

Jim Finley: You know what I think? Yeah. I don't want to think. Yeah, I think there's some people that would just go, "What?" I mean a lot of they were... But I also think, and I've seen this too, where people come to a silent retreat. They'd never been on anything like that, ever. And sometimes I put it this way, let's say a person was sitting there and they had just fallen in love with someone or just had a child, or their mother just died. And you could tell Eckhart was talking about the depths of what they were in the midst of.

Like, “Oh my God, do I mean, he’s invited me to?” And I think that’s how some people are unexpectedly led to these four mystical paths. We’re blindsided by it, by finding ourselves listening to someone who’s speaking out of it and sheds light on an event that we’re going through and offering. Yeah, it’s interesting how we find our way. We could all look back for each of us, how we found our way to this. What were the awakening moments? How did we end up on this path?

So this is sermon one. This is an advent sermon, and he’s preparing for a spiritual understanding of Christ’s birth for Christmas and advent. Here in time, we are celebrating the eternal birth, which God the father bore and bears unceasingly in eternity because the same birth is now born in time in human nature. St. Augustine says, “What does it avail me that this birth is always happening? If it does not happen in me, that it should happen in me is what matters.” We shall therefore speak of this birth of how it may take place in us and be consummated in a virtuous soul whenever God, the Father speaks his eternal word in the perfect soul.

Then he gives a scripture quote from the book of wisdom, he’s basing his whole sermon on, “When all things lay in the midst of silence, then they’re descended down into me from on high, from the royal throne, a secret word. The sermon is about that word.” That’s how he started. And so what I say in the talk then is so on one hand the word is born in a moment of time. And so the silence is the silence of Bethlehem in which Jesus was born in the stable. And then he says, “It was born in time,” which is to say, then he says, “In human nature.” So it was born in our experience of ourself in our passage through time. That God is through Christ is entwined with me and interwoven with me at the eternity of my passage through time. But I don’t realize it. I don’t realize it, I don’t know it.

And this birth in this moment of time, and through all of time in me is always happening in God because God the Father, like a woman in labor, is giving birth to God. See, is the word, because the word was with God and the word was God. See? So he pairs up the birthing of God inside, in the divine life of God, the birth of God in the moment of time in Bethlehem, the birth of the word, through time... This, and within ourselves in our nature.

And then when Augustine says, “But what good is it do if it doesn’t happen to me?” He said, “All this is lovely, but I’m late for work.” You know what I mean? “All this is lovely and my back hurts, or I hurt. So how can I experience this? How can I realize it?” And that’s what the sermons are about. See, what is the path that hinders us from realizing this birth that’s always happening?

Kirsten Oates: Amazing. It’s beautiful the way he lays... started in a moment in time, and then talking about the eternal within that framework. Thank you, Jim.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you for this season so far. It’s been a real gift, and I look forward to our next discussion.

Jim Finley: Yeah, me too.

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.