



# Meister Eckhart

Dialogue 3

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 Season Seven of Turning to the Mystics where we're turning to the German mystic, Meister Eckhart. And I'm here with Jim and we are going to dialogue about Jim's session three talk. Welcome, Jim.

Jim Finley: Yes, feels good rejoin you for our Eckhart chat.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, what a rich session this one was, session three. There was just a lot in there to digest. I really enjoyed it and I think I could listen to it over and over again to really capture everything and digest everything that you offered. So, I hope today we can explore a few of the concepts and again, if people want to send in their own questions, we do a question and response with listener questions at the end of the season, so I'm sure there'll be some additional questions that will be helpful to everyone coming in for that. So to get started, Jim, you said towards the end of the session that Eckhart is not teaching a method; he is instead inviting us to be more consciously aware of choices we can make throughout the day. So would you say this is a way of life we're trying to adopt?

Jim Finley: Yes. Let's say for Eckhart, the point of departure is the generosity of God. So the glossenheit, generosity of God is that the abyss-like depths of God, the ground, is by the generosity of God given to us and our nothingness without God. So God's ground is my ground. My ground is God. So there's a communion already given, like an infinite self donating generosity.

Then he says that the powers of the soul, the things as we go through the day, today we would say our faculties or our personality, our experience and ego consciousness in our language, he would say maybe the interiority of our ego or the interiority of our faculty, that our knowing self and all that it knows, our remembering self and all that remembers, our loving self and all that it loves is exiled from the ground. So that which we attain, we attain through our powers, through our knowing, our loving, our remembering our senses, but not the ground.

And because we're exiled from the ground, we're subject to this notion that we're real all by ourself without God. And that everything around us is real all by itself. And because we think that there there's nothing to us but what we experience ourselves to be getting to another day from life to death, we cling possessiveness of heart to understanding, to knowing, to having, to loving. And that clinging is really clinging to an illusion, namely the illusion of a self being real without God because God is being poured out as the very reality of ourselves and our nothingness without God. And that clinging then is the hindrance that keeps pervading our discontent. So the next level for Eckhart I think is our faith. For in our faith, God accesses our powers so that God accesses our understanding. So when we hear in the scriptures that God loves us through the power of the spirit that dwells in our hearts we're given to a certain interior knowledge that God does love us and in that sense then our understanding is transformed in knowing that we're infinitely understood.

Likewise in our memory is through faith, is to know that God will never forget us ever, ever, ever forget us. We're eternal in God, this moment is eternal in God. Everything is forever in God, that we'd never be forgotten. And also in this infinite love, so infinitely in love with us that has given us the very abyss like depth of itself is our own depth. In this phase we might call similarity. So we moved from dissimilarity, possessiveness of heart at the image looking in the mirror and we think that we're real without God to the similarity through faith, discipleship, a devotional sincerity. And as that ripens over time, we get to a place where we come to the edge of ourself. We're really the hidden center of ourself. And he says there flash forth before my soul say. If only I could attain it, I would possess all truth.

It comes by stealth to steal the soul away from itself and what you're really glimpsing is the ground. And having glimpsed the ground, you realize it's your homeland and then you seek longing for the ground. But how do I do that? And that's the path of Meister Eckhart. So we gets some practical strategies as we go through the day that we can practice finding our way to the ground day by day consciousness by being sensitive to certain tendencies in our heart. And that's kind of the setup I think for Eckhart and pass.

Kirsten Oates: You talked about he's trying to help us with this sense of discontent and is it discontent the way that we might feel it with life in general or is it a particular this discontent with not being able to access the ground, is it, or both?

Jim Finley: You know Saint Augustine, you made our hearts for thee oh Lord, and our hearts are restless until they arrest in thee. That God has created us in such a way that nothing less in an infinite union with the infinity of God will ever be enough for us. And that's our discontent. That if we're even capable of attaining it or losing it's infinitely less than what fulfills us. But it takes a while to come into focus to understand that. And everything suffers from not enoughness. No matter what it is, it's not enough because it's not infinite. It's not infinite.

And so that's the longing. We get a taste of this infinity given to us as our very life and our nothingness without God, and having tasted it, we're just content. Especially in the gift of having tasted it. That's the grace dilemma. Now that I've tasted it, I don't know how to consummate the longing that the glimpse is awakened within me. So the teaching of Meister Eckhart, and these are the teachings of all the mystics, notice, but each one has his own language for this. So having glimpsed it then what is the path, and he's living out in the world. He wasn't cloistered. He's living out in the midst of a busy world. So how can we in the midst of the busy world follow this path to consummate this longing?

Kirsten Oates: You talked about the way, through faith, God accesses our powers and starts to illuminate them. And just listening to this path of detachment, there seems to be something in the way the powers get illuminated that we can be more open to suffering as part of life so that we're not going to cling to joy or reject suffering in a certain way. Would that be true to say?

Jim Finley: Yes. And in the session where I gave some examples that he gives and one of them is whether or not we're in a state of joy or a state of sorrow or suffering. We should be detached from that. So if we're in suffering because suffering is ribbon through life, we should always do our best, first of all to be a non-violent, nurturing, protective person that doesn't contribute to suffering. And when suffering occurs, there's the moral imperative of doing our best to liberate ourself and others from suffering. But insofar as we're not able to do so, or it's a

process where it's still there, we are not to let the suffering lay claim on us as having authority to who we are, for the innermost depths of ourself is this ground that we've been quickened, where we've glimpsed innermost and the surrounding levels of ourself there is the suffering, but to hold fast this liberated hidden center, that the suffering can't touch.

Thomas Burton says that it is not subject to the brutalities of our own will because it belongs completely to God and we're to hold fast to it. And this is where meditation practice comes in too. I think the daily rendezvous would've practiced this in a quiet space. So during the day we live that way. And likewise, if we're having a joyful, then we should be happy for joyful times and be delighting them and be grateful for them. But to know that the joy that we experience in the powers illumined by faith is infinitely less than the infinite joy, the joy that death doesn't have the power to destroy is being given to us in the ground because the joy that we experience in condition states is ephemeral, is passing just like the suffering we experience is passing and the self that suffers and joyful is passing.

But in the midst of this journey through time unto death, there's that in us, it never passes away and we're to hold fast to it within our heart and practice. Every time we catch ourselves getting reactive, every time we catch ourself acting as if the outcome of the situation has the authority, we're to take a deep breath and remind ourself that it's not true that there's this hidden unfelt, deep abyss dislike center in which we're being unexplainably sustained in the midst of the circumstance.

Kirsten Oates: It sounds a little bit like removing ourselves from the sense of cause and effect in the world that we live in.

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: That we're open to something beyond just the day-to-day cause and effect that we might experience.

Jim Finley: That's a good way to put it. And Buddhist language this would be karma, deliverance from karma. Buddhist language too I think is that we live in a world of cause and effect, and we do in relative consciousness of relative reality. We live in cause and effect. We put our hand on a hot stove, we get burned and if we're late for work, we're late for work. That's really true. But there's infinite generosity that completely permeates cause and effect unexplainably forever. And we're trying to be ever more habitually stabilized in the heartfelt sense of that.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: Not to be disheartened by outcome. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: The word detachment, sometimes it can have connotations of being cold and detached and that's not the sense I'm getting about this. You don't become a cold detached person.

Jim Finley: Yeah, the example we use is that if we love someone very, very much like the beloved

and who we see the beloved to be and our love for the beloved, we're very moved by love not to do anything that would cause discomfort to the beloved, not to do anything that would cause the beloved sorrow. And then we realize these habits that maybe we get little signals that cause sorrow, quick to anger, withholding intimacy, being impatient, unkind. We realize that these hurtful patterns are ingrained in us. So we have to actively work on being detached at the patterns of the heart that compromise the fulfillment and love that we long for. So actually detachment is actually coded language for radicalized attachment to this infinite love, this infinitely maybe word is bonded rather than attached. It's for love's sake. The same way with an artist, a poet, that when a poet is in the stream of poetry like the flow.

So do you know Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet, we'll look at him later as one of the mystics and this Letters to a Young Poet. A young poet writes to Rilke and says, here's some of my poems, tell me if they're any good. And Rilke says, you're looking outward. He says, you must stop doing that. You must ask yourself in the stillest hour of your darkest night, must I write poetry? If the answers are clear and simple yes, life most incidental moments in fidelity to that inner necessity. So you have to be detached from diversions where you'd be led off of that fidelity. So it's actually a radicalized bonding and love. Obediential fidelity is detachment, your detached from what compromises the consummation of the deepest God-given longings in your heart.

Kirsten Oates: I see. That's really helpful. So this idea of the journey in faith and the idea of the measure of our faith is love and we're trying to be a loving person to ourselves and others and the world. So we can do that wholeheartedly. We're not detached from trying to be a loving person or to the love that we want to share, but it's something different to that.

Jim Finley: I see what you're saying. Detachment is kind of confusing in this way. Let's say to follow Jesus discipleship, follow me. And so the disciples heart is bonded to the Lord, the Lord of your true self would say, to love the Lord, you got to with your whole heart, your whole mind, your whole strength. Instead of detachment, you would ask God for the grace not to be led off that fidelity by passing, by passing things, by things that are contrary to love or compromise love. And so Eckhart uses the word detachment in that sense because the trouble is we are let off by those things. We are led off the path by those things and there's a perpetual conversion process of being transformed by love into this fidelity in love and to pass beyond the gravitational field of these compromises. And that's the detachment for Eckhart.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, that's really helpful. So in the pursuit of being loving, I can be wholehearted in that, but where I might catch myself is if I see myself not being loving and I might attack myself for that or kind of be down on myself for not being a loving person. Is that the moment where I might be needing to detach?

Jim Finley: That's another great example. Thomas Burton once said, one of the talks with the novices, he said, we should always meditate on discouragement after a fall, after we do something like, oh, I did it again because he says it reveals our secret agenda, a holy me.

Kirsten Oates: Oh wow.

Jim Finley: How you or you or you could do something like that, but me? But me. And therefore what we're to do, actually that's why I say we catch ourselves in the act of perpetuating violence on the part of us that needs to be loved the most. And this is where the eyes of Jesus, it's mercy. The deep acceptance of ourselves has fallen is the aperture through which God's infinite mercy touches us in our heart which is salvation. See, father forgive them, they know not what they do. And so Eckhart would say attachment is attachment to an idealized sense of self and we get discouraged because we can't live up to it.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: Thomas Burton once said, we're all walking around with a little agenda in our heart. Once I start doing this and this and this, I'll be close to God. He said to realize with God there's no agenda. God's not waiting for you to stop doing anything. We're just start doing anything. And it is just that we can't bear being infinitely loved 'cause there's no control in being infinitely loved. No.

Kirsten Oates: That's helpful to hear because I do feel like a lot of times our responses are not conscious. They come out of somewhere we didn't see it coming, like the reactivity, the anger, the ways we are not loving, they don't feel intentional. And so it's helpful to hear that.

Jim Finley: Yeah. See, this is why Eckhart would invite us to become a reflective person where we reflect on the way we think, the way we feel. And this is what discernment is. See, I think discernment begins in becoming aware. There are aspects of ourselves we tend not to be aware of. And the relevance of that is becoming aware that these aspects or these tendencies we tend not to be aware of are deeply influencing the things we are aware of. So it behooves us to bring them out into conscious awareness, which requires a reflective, quiet, receptive attitude to come out to growth and experiential self-knowledge, like know thyself in the presence of this God who's infinitely in love with us and is given to us in our nothingness without God. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: This clinging or attachment that you've talked about, does that happen in the powers and is it in a particular power? Is it our emotions that clings or is it our intellect or is it all of them?

Jim Finley: Yes, it happens in the powers, attachment happens in the powers and through faith to the desire to be liberated from those tendencies is in the powers illumined by grace. And it's all of them. It depends on which one's getting activated at the time. So for example, if I really feel the need to understand something and I can't understand it, I get impatient with myself. In which case it's the powers trying to push through and force its way through.

In love, like the brokenness of love or love lost, whatever, then it's through love. So it depends on which aspect of ourselves is being activated at the time but it runs through all of them because we're estranged from the ground, because we think we're nothing but our ability to do this and this and this. That's what perpetuates. So through faith we're refining the powers illumined by grace in a state of similarity. And then it's fair to say the similarity, we're able to come to the edge of ourselves for the light of the ground start shining through.

Kirsten Oates: That makes sense. So even a memory that keeps popping up into my mind and makes me

feel terrible, that would be another way this happens.

Jim Finley: And here's what I think also psychotherapy touches spirituality that if I have a memory that keeps coming up, something that I did or failed to do that caused suffering toward myself or another, and I feel terrible. See what psychotherapy's all about is to provide a safe place to sit and try to understand why you feel so terrible. And it must mean because you feel terrible is you wish deep down you would've never done it. And that's the goodness in you that's deeper than the weakness in which you did what you did.

Kirsten Oates: Or that it was was never done to me.

Jim Finley: Exactly. And so this is where we keep coming to clarity, like my heartfelt clarity, a tender-hearted, courageous clarity like this. And so psychotherapy does that in the layers in ego consciousness. Then illumined by faith, it would be spiritual direction and guidance to this. And then the fruition of spiritual direction, it can bring us to this mystical state of the ground shining through. And then how do we navigate that? How do we consummate to the ground? Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: I heard you share five ways of practicing this throughout the day and I wanted to just touch on each of them if that's okay. And my understanding of the five practices were there there things that hinder us from experiencing the ground. So the first one you talked about, and we've touched on it a little bit already, but whatever state we find ourselves in strength or weakness, joy or sorrow, whatever we find ourselves attached to, we must abandon. And you gave this example of going in to see Merton when you were the monastery and he would ask you how you were and you would say not so great. And he'd say, don't worry, it'll pass or you'd say, I'm great, don't worry, it will pass. And I just wondered if you can remember how that felt to you when he would say that and do you think he was trying to teach you this way, this practice?

Jim Finley: I do. I think he was a gifted contemplative spiritual director. I felt so grateful to be in his presence really because I feel he embodied lineage of the Christian tradition and he had that kind of astute empathy. And I was only 18 too when I first entered. I was just right out of high school. And I think he was very aware of that too. So I think he was trying to help me to be more even minded and to see these rhythms within myself because what happens, we get caught up in the moment and we can't see past the moment. So if we're in sorrow, we can't see past our sorrow. We don't see that it's already starting to give way to something and when we're in joy, we try to hold onto it, but we can't hold onto it. And so he was trying to sensitize me to the awareness of that, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Think. And do you remember how you felt when he first started doing it? Was it shocking?

Jim Finley: I laugh because it was true. Yeah. He would say things that made me laugh because they were so clear they were true. Someone just says something, this poetically so clear and as soon as you hear it that it's true. And he was so gifted that way. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, that's wonderful. So that first one is really about an inner state.

Jim Finley: So let's say I'm sorrowful about something and so it's got all of us, then I say to myself, yes, this moment is sorrowful, but it's not just sorrowful. For in the deep down depths of myself

there shines this invincible depth that doesn't take the sorrow away, but unexplainably transcends and permeates it unexplainably.

And I take a deep breath because I know it's true. I will not absolutize this condition state as having the authority to name who I am because only this infinite generosity is the authority to name who I am and sustaining me in guiding through my sorrow to face it, to work through it, to understand it, to whatever. And the same with joy. So there's the unwavering platitude that utterly permeates our wavering ways and we're trying to stay in touch with that. That's one way that helps me to see it.

Kirsten Oates: So the second one, Jim, you talked about something that might hinder us from experiencing this ground is about the family of people. So this idea of making no distinction in the family of people, and this one was challenging for me partly because there's like a natural organic arising of a kind of love for family that I feel like I don't make happen, that it arises on its own. And so I'm just wondering how we differentiate between that experience and not experiencing that for someone else.

Jim Finley: Yes. It was coming to me right now. If you think of the gospels and the crucifixion and in the story of the gospels Mary's there at the foot of the cross, at the cross where she's keeping the mournful mother weeping and his love for his mother and hanging next to him was the thief who is crucified. Remember me when you come into your kingdom, the thief says, and so what you see in Jesus is his love for his mother completely enveloped his love for the thief, his love for his own executioners.

So there's also the human experience we're moving toward that Christ-like all-inclusive love, but it's always a human experience. And so the example I gave is if one of my two daughters would die, I'd be grief-stricken. But if on the news I see a young woman died and I see her father weeping, I'm sensitive to his pain, but I'm not grief-stricken over it. So I'm trying to let that deep love for my daughter, because she's my daughter, extend out into kind of an empathy that spreads out through the suffering through the whole world like this. But at the psychological level, there is the preferential love because she's my daughter. So this is freedom from the tyranny of preferential love in the midst of preferential love. I'm not trying to get beyond preferential love because I've never asked to go beyond my humanity.

Kirsten Oates: I see.

Jim Finley: But I'm asked to have my human experience become more and more inclusive, more and more open. I think that's the subtle thing in all of Eckhart's things about all of this.

Kirsten Oates: It's really subtle. It's helpful to hear it that way. So because the ground and Jesus was a reflection of someone who was recognizing himself as the generosity of the ground, he loved in this equal way.

Jim Finley: And also God created the powers, God created humanity. So in a sense we might say God created preferential love, that God created the emotional reality, the human experience. And so we're trying to see to it that it's illumined by faith and that it's receptively open to the ground. But in a way we'll see in the last talk to a circle background and radicalizes ordinariness, the incarnate infinity intimately realized in the ordinariness of myself.



Turning to the Mystics will continue in a moment.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, would you also flip this one about the making no distinction in the family of people, could you flip it the other way round that if you were from a family that caused you trauma or wasn't good to you or put you down, those sorts of things that this would be an encouragement to detach from that having the say over who you are and how you see yourself?

Jim Finley: Yeah, this is a big issue in psychotherapy where there's a history of childhood trauma and a little girl cannot see her own preciousness. She has to see a mirrored in her parents' eyes. And if she looks into her parents' eyes and no one looks back or the very adult she needs to love her are the people who are abusing her. She internalizes their blindness towards her and she becomes her own blind spot to herself.

She loses the preciousness of herself. So in therapy, she lets the preciousness emerge, which allows the grieving to start, to grieve and to reclaim yourself. And then you have to be true to your boundaries. Depends on who your parents are today and how they treat you and so on. And some people simply can't be in contact with their family of origin because they're so abusive. But at the deep level that you forgive them or you're open to them, but you have to honor the boundaries of not passively allowing anybody to treat you in ways that violate your deep essential worth and value in the eyes of God like that. So sometimes you have to navigate your way through those things.

Kirsten Oates: So the next one has to do with time and a commitment to a project. And I'm just going to read the quote. It said, "Every such attachment, every premeditated work which deprives you of this ever new freedom." So I was wondering what this freedom is that Eckhart's talking about?

Jim Finley: Yes. Examples I use is that whenever we undertake a project or a worthwhile goal, say we're a teacher, we're going to teach the class or say the effort I put into wanting these sessions to go well with the mystics, I have to invest myself in an effort to bring myself to the... I have to prepare for it. But if my inner peace is dependent on how it turns out, that's attachment. So I want it to turn out well. I have to do my homework to do everything in my power to do the best to make it turn out well.

But to be at peace if it doesn't turn out well, because it might not. It doesn't always turn out well. And if it doesn't, I prosit to see what I learned from that. Why didn't I learn? So the next time I'll be better prepared to do that. So that's what he's talking about, not having this foundational depth of myself dependent on how it turns out, wanting to finish it on time, if it's going to measure up to someone's... I hope that it does, but I'm going to be detached from absolutizing those concerns because there's something within me which is this love that utterly permeates me through and through, regardless of how it turns out.

Kirsten Oates: And that would be the freedom, finding that place, that's a sense of freedom to choose that over the work or the goal having the say.

Jim Finley: Yeah. That's why I say God's not ringing her hands hoping we make it on time because we're infinitely judged with mercy and God's given us the ground, and God's given us the ground. So we're in the midst of an overwhelming in God we live and move and have our being.

We're living in the vast interiority of the generosity of the ground and yet the idolatry of the outcome of the condition state. Anyway, I think that's the insight.

Kirsten Oates: I feel like a lot of workplaces push people to be attached to their goals and outcomes and-

Jim Finley: They really do.

Kirsten Oates: ... it can be a scary place to feel like if you don't achieve the goal, you might lose your job or you won't be valued by the organization.

Jim Finley: There was a book that came out years ago, which I like when I was seeing people in therapy is called, I think the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. And one of the habits is unaffected people are always behind. He said, but he knows one habit of highly affected people like say an administrator is when you come in to see the person, the administrator in effect says, I got eight minutes for right now. If we need to reschedule later, we can. Sit down.

And during those eight minutes, you're the only person in the world. You're the only person in the world. And they're effective because they're present where other people, because they're behind, they're not present to you, they're always looking at their wristwatch because they're already late to the next meeting and they get this burnout. So in a way, Eckhart is the depth dimension of that habit and you also get the feeling when he gave his sermons, he was very present. He was very present. And so I think it's sensitivities like that.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. That's really helpful. And I think the inner work too of when you have a performance review or when you hand in something and you later get it back and you see those mistakes, it is watching that inner dialogue that we've been kind of programmed to have since going through school and now workplaces too.

Jim Finley: Yeah. And I also think this in spiritual direction too. Sometimes there's long-standing habits of compromise who we sense deep down we are in our call to be, and it's a learning curve. It goes on for years sometimes, and sometimes we get disheartened or impatient, but we're trying to realize in our sincerity on the learning curve, along with 10,000 setbacks along the way. In AA they talk about slow progress marked by heavy setbacks. There's deep lessons for us to learn in our progress because God's infinitely accepting of us in this because otherwise we're tempted to be discouraged. And yeah.

Kirsten Oates: You talked about the generosity of God welling up in the situation in and as the outcome, regardless of the outcome. And so would you say that the generosity of God is in both what we might experience as the positive and the negative outcomes?

Jim Finley: I would, and to me where I think the prime lesson there is death. So Elizabeth Kubler Ross on the stages of dying, you're in denial, anger, bargaining, then depression. Those stages are all the ego coming to the end of itself and that's that, but she says acceptance is beyond that. And she said it's such a profound experience to be in the presence of a dying loved one who's come to acceptance because it's freedom from the tyranny of death in the midst of death. And something deathless shines out through their death. And so that's a nice metaphor for Eckhart. Why wait till the 11th hour to learn that? Why not learn it now?

Kirsten Oates: I was thinking about that too when I was listening to this episode because there's a way we naturally being detached from things as we age and move towards death, things that we might have enjoyed clinging to, the way we looked or our athletic ability or those sorts of things we're being forced to deal with letting them go.

Jim Finley: But the Buddhist talk about hungry ghosts clinging to the branches of trees. And so there was an ability that we used to have, or a pleasure we used to have, or an engagement we used to have is no longer there. But even though we pass it, we try to hold onto it. And we suffer. And example I use in my talk to is what if I died in my sleep tonight? And there'd have to be this announcement or sad to say that Jim will not be able to finish the series. He died last night. And there you go. But it's true. See, Eckhart's trying to help us to say, well, if God's Lord of life, God is Lord of death, God's the infinity of life, god's the infinity of deaths. And we're trying to come to a place where we can't comprehend it, but we can live in fidelity to the sensitivity of our heart that that's true.

Kirsten Oates: Well, I do not enjoy thinking about that, Jim, but we'll-

Jim Finley: And what if you died in your sleep? And then we record this talk and everyone could hear you say, you didn't want think about me dying, and I'd say, listen, isn't this strange? And here she's the one who died. Eckhart would say, right on, of course.

Kirsten Oates: Corey's now hoping we don't mention him.

Jim Finley: Of course. And then Corey died the next night and I'm all alone and I'm saying, well forge on without them somehow.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, no. I did have the curiosity about this one to do with time and commitment to a project because for Eckhart, he was committed to the project of traveling around and giving these sermons. And as a result of doing that, he ended up being treated quite badly by the church and being put on trial. I'm curious, I wonder if you think about how he might have reacted to that or how that brought him to understand this experience more clearly?

Jim Finley: Yeah, it's kind of complicated. You can read about in the resources that we'll give the people. But basically what it was a Reiner Schurmann talks about in theology, his Latin works at the University of Paris, or like the creed is indicative thought, thy God is trinity, God is eternal, god is love. But as a preacher, it's imperative thought it's not a set of beliefs. It's words directly to the midst of the heart, in the midst of a transformation like the parables of Jesus, Jesus didn't give lectures.

So as parables are callings to the heart and his judges thought he was speaking indicatively, which would meant he'd be guilty of pantheism. He never said that. He said just the opposite actually. So he would just true to himself in an unreactive way. He just walked his walk and walked and I think that's a deep mystery about this is that this invincible light is kind of a fragile shimmering light at the circumference of a confused world. But it's a true center. And as soon as you try to institutionalize it like empire, let's institutionalize it, then you're falling into attachment.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: So it's like me being vehement about mystical union and how we need to understand it and get with it. And then I'm betraying what mystical union is, which is always childlike and unexplainably simple and upwelling of the immediacy that carries everything along to itself. So that seduction of empire. So I think he was free from it, he felt it, but it was part of the mystery of the church is a community of infinitely loved broken people. And he walked his walk.

Kirsten Oates: And complied with what they were asking him to show up to the trials.

Jim Finley: Yeah, he wasn't bitter, he wasn't cynical, he didn't leave, but he didn't give in either. So he just held his own. That would be my sense, I would assume, that he saw through all of that.

Kirsten Oates: I like the way he spoke up for himself that you're telling us the way he spoke up for himself because detachment is not becoming passive when you need to be active.

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: The next one was about prayer. So one of the ways we can be hindered, that's an interesting one 'cause we can be hindered from finding the ground in our prayer life. But you talked about when we show up for prayer and have no felt sense of God, it reminded me of when you talked about this kind of thing with John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila how the prayer life changes. And I know they came after Eckhart, so Eckhart's not referring to them, but is this similar to what they were describing in their path?

Jim Finley: Yes, it's really like the dark night for John of the Cross. It's the loss of the felt sense of the presence of God. And again, we love that sense of consolation of God. It's a gift. But if we pray and we can't find it, it's attachment because it's circling back around. I'm praying for myself so I can have this experience. So if it's not there, I'm going to be detached from it. And the way I put it poetically that God's the infinity of my experience of the absence of God and the experience of the absence of God is the poverty of God.

And later in the last talk we'll see breakthrough into the Godhead, and likewise, if there's a lot of consolation, John of the Cross somewhere, there's some people that think a great deal's going on in their spiritual life and not much is going on. Thomas Burton once said, he said as if we're all walking around hoping someday we'll hit the jackpot and have to prop us up in the corner and fan us because we got our fingers crossed and John the Cross says some people think nothing's going and a great deal is going on because we're being weaned off our dependency on feedback loops to ourself, Cloud of Unknowing and all these mystics are saying that.

Kirsten Oates: And the feedback loops within the powers, I guess is we're being weaned off.

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. They're in the power. Where the more detached we are, the high joy, the joy that we feel in prayer is impoverished compared to the high, high joy, that death does not have the power to destroy. So the joy is there, but we remain empty-handed in the midst of joy and the sorrow and the loss. We remain empty-handed in the loss. And then in that equal mindedness and joy and loss, the light of the ground starts shining through the powers, I think, to be even minded.

Kirsten Oates: Okay, the last one, the last hindrance and the last way we can practice was the way of having a virgin mind. And so the virgin mind is designating being devoid of images, foreign images he called it. What struck me about this section was that science confirms now the way the mind works, that we do create images in our mind of trees and things like that, it's the way the mind functions. And do you think these mystics, they were just so aware of things like this, this seems like well ahead of his time, what he's offering us here?

Jim Finley: Yes, there's more to it than we can go into in this series, but just for right now in this context is that the example that I use in the talk is when you see a tree, so Eckhart says, if to be real in the fullest possible sense of the word is to be the infinity of reality itself and therefore only God is real and therefore the tree unto itself is not real. And therefore he says, we must be detached from the image of the tree because when we look at a tree, we take in the sensory information through our eyes or touch the tree with our hands, and then we form an interior image of a tree. And then that interior image of the tree is how outside world comes into the senses. And then we had that set image, and then we get attached to the image.

And so we have internalized ideas of ourself about other people, about the world, about God. We have all these images in our mind, and he says, we must be detached from all those images as if we were not yet. Because in and of themselves, they're images of nothing and of itself. When we buy into those images, that's ideology. That's our ideological living. So that's one thing he says about the nothingness, to be empty of all images, all set ideas about anything, no idea of God is God. Every idea God's infinitely less than God. No idea of myself is I'm not any idea of myself. And the mystery of myself is infinitely more than all my ideas of myself. So I'm to realize the limitations of ideas and set ideas and be detached from them, even though they're there, we're detached to them, and Eckhart's using ideas because he's talking, but he's detached.

He's detached from said images. Then the flip side, Eckhart says, but if we sit and contemplate a tree, as we contemplate a tree, we become aware of the presence of the tree. And we become aware then that the infinite generosity of God is that God is the reality of the tree and it's nothingness without God. So to be in the presence of the tree is to be in the presence of God. And so he says, to see a tree, to really, really, really, really see a tree, you'd never have to listen to another sermon again. It doesn't mean you wouldn't listen to one. He's giving a sermon, but you wouldn't need to because you would know in your heart, I saw a tree, I saw everything is God and there's nothing that's without God. I can't not be in the presence of God because I myself am the presence of God and my nothingness without God. And it's like the subtlety of Eckhart.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. That's really beautiful. So I can bring to my mind right now, images of people I love, images of a tree I can, and we kind of move through the world that way, more invested in images than actually what's right in front of us. And so there's a practice, a way of opening ourselves to seeing the deeper truths of things.

Jim Finley: But I'd put it this way. That's a good example. People we love, and we do have images of them. And so the example I use, I think in one of the previous sessions too, is let's say you've been fortunate to have found your way into a very deep loving union with someone and someone who hasn't seen you in years, say you went to high school with them, they're in town and you're talking, you tell them about this relationship they're in and you speak about

this person and you show them a picture and what the person's like and so on. And the other person says, no, no, no, try to put words to who the person to be and your love for the person. See, then you're beyond images. And when you try, you can't say it, and your heart breaks when you try because we're carried in deep love, we're carried beyond images into the presence and God's infinity of that.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. It really stops us from objectifying things.

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. And when you think about it, that's what prejudice is. Prejudice is we take an image of a group of people and we think they are our perception of them, and we don't see them at all because the only people we see are the people we love. If we don't love them, we don't see them. Same with ourselves because God is love.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Yeah, these teachings just seem to be so relevant to today. It's amazing. He'd lived in the 13th and 14th century.

Jim Finley: Yeah, it's true.

Kirsten Oates: Last question I have for you today, Jim, is around application. Do you have any suggestions for those of us who are wanting to travel this path of detachment? How could we get started? Is there something we could do each day?

Jim Finley: Well, I would say first of all, anyone who benefits from listening to the podcast is already on the path of detachment. Because if you weren't on the path of detachment, you wouldn't be moved by it. See, we're touched by it and therefore continue on, and basically find your practice and practice it. So there's the daily rendezvous where there's no agenda but love, whether it be lectio, meditation, and prayer or wordlessness, whatever your practice is. And every day when you end your practice, ask for the grace not to break the thread of that as you go through your day and eventually all life becomes practice. Next, the teaching, which are these teachings and the teachings is that which bears witness to the infinite generosity pouring itself out as every breath and heartbeat and offering guidance in how to abide in it. And these mystics are doing that.

And you take your teaching to heart, and then you learn that you're always being taught by life itself, like all of this. And then community. Your community is your oneness with God, God's oneness with you, and then also just one other person and whose presence you're not alone on this path. So even though all the people listen to this podcast, 99.9% never met each other, were mysteriously one with each other. See, we formed this community of seekers and kinship, this sense of kinship, and then that spreads out to the whole world then becomes your community. God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son and the world he's claimed on your heart, which is how Jesus walked this earth, really bringing them to this very message really, it's about love. So I would put it that way they're already on the path and they follow those foundations of this contemplative way and it just keeps deepening. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: What do you think, Jim, about me setting a goal for myself of becoming detached and measuring myself each evening about how well I've done?

Jim Finley: Yeah, John of the Cross, I shared this image, I was giving a retreat, fly on a plane somewhere

giving a r on St. John of the Cross, a detachment from sensory gratification on the night of the census. And I had my John of the Cross open, my fountain pen I was writing, and when the attendant brought my coffee, I said that it was cold. So I turned around and tried to get her attention, but she didn't hear me.

So I kept writing on my detachment from sensory gratification, and I rang the little button, you know how you ding like this? And I kept writing. She didn't come back. So I ding. I rang it three time, ding, ding, ding. Can't you get some damn service on this plane? And I kept writing about, and I caught myself and I was so embarrassed. And then I saw I was attached to my image of myself as a detached person but didn't retreat. So it's good to set a goal, but the goal is a goal, and the trajectory toward that goal is where all the lessons are learned.

Kirsten Oates: Wow. Yeah.

Jim Finley: Because it's like a goless goal, it never ends really, but it's good to set goal in that relative sense. it's good to set kind of a marker as a direction to head in, I think. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. That's really helpful. But not to be attached to the goal.

Jim Finley: Exactly.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Beautiful. Well, thank you so much, Jim. This was a bit of a longer session, but there was so much to talk about and really loved the conversation. Thank you.

Jim Finley: Thanks for the dialogue. It was really helpful. Thank you.

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 and 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.