



Meister Eckhart

Dialogue 4

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 Meister Eckhart, the German mystic. And I'm here with Jim to unpack his beautiful session from last week. And welcome, Jim.

Jim Finley: Thank you. Glad to be with you again.

Kirsten Oates: So there's a lot to unpack from the last session, and what I heard in the session was you describing that if we follow this path of detachment that Meister Eckhart outlines, in this last session, you went through these states of consciousness that we might find ourselves being brought into. And these are states of experiencing ourselves in God, experiencing reality as it really is. And I thought perhaps what might be helpful today is to go through the states of consciousness and describe them a little. And just tell me, Jim, if these are the four, if I'm headed in the right direction. So we start with dissimilarity.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: Next we move into similarity.

Jim Finley: Right.

Kirsten Oates: Then identity.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: And then break through into the Godhead.

Jim Finley: That's correct.

Kirsten Oates: Okay, great. So we'll go through those today, but it seems to make no sense to start going through the path of detachment in these stages of consciousness without grounding ourselves in Eckhart's worldview.

Jim Finley: Right.

Kirsten Oates: The core foundation of this path. So perhaps we might just do a little reminder of that.

Jim Finley: That'd be a good place to start. And I want to share also that those four stages, one of the key sources that've been so helpful for me is Reiner Schurmann's book, Meister Eckhart, Wandering Joy. And they'll be able to see it and the resources, we'll list it there. Because different in-depth commentators lay it out a little differently. It's a certain way to schematize his sermons, which are more holographic. Each one contains it in a way. So it lays it out in a certain structure, where you can see a grace progression. And also, again to say that I realize, said at the beginning, that I'm aware this is way too much for one talk, but it allows for closure where you can see the arc. And the listeners on their own, if they're so inclined, can

slow it down and go back and so on.

So let's start first with his vision. Where he starts from. Where he starts from is that if we try to understand what it means to be real in the fullest possible sense, in the fullest possible sense, to be real means to be oneself, the infinite actuality of reality itself. And if we define being real in that sense, then only God is real. And likewise, by understanding reality in that sense, we in contrast are not real. We are not real because we are not the infinity of reality itself. The next point, he says, is that then God in an ongoing, self-donating act gives the infinite presence of God away, *Gelassenheit*, this letting go. God gives the infinite presence away, in and as the intimate immediacy of the gift and the miracle of our very presence, in our nothingness without God, the presence of others and the presence of all things.

So it's very paradoxical that in one sense, we're nothing without God. That if God would cease loving us into the present moment, he says everything would vanish. But precisely because we're nothing without God, our very presence is the presence of God, and our nothingness without God. And he's going to start saying that if we start to see reality in this way, we need to understand, accept the fact that we tend not to realize this. And therefore, how can we be healed from what hinders us from realizing it, which sets Eckhart off on this path. That's his poetic beginning of the divine nature of our situation in our nothing. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: So then we start in this state of dissimilarity. What's that state of consciousness for Eckhart?

Jim Finley: Yes. Let's say that God, let there be light, stones and tree. God's pouring itself out as a reality of stones and trees and water at the darkness of the night without God. Then with us as persons created by God in the image and likeness of God, God creates us with a human nature capable of realizing this. And so the glory of human nature isn't just reason and all that comes from reason, literature and science and culture. It's the gift of reason. But the deepest gift of our nature, which he called the powers of the soul, we would say the interiority of our faculties, of the intellect, the memory and the will, of understanding, remembering and desiring and loving, is that these powers are endowed with this capacity to realize this. And furthermore, they're also endowed to begin to realize that God not only is being poured out as a reality of ourselves and our powers, but God has poured out where the ground of God, which is the abyss-like depths of God, has been given to us by God as the abyss-like depths of ourself.

So that God's ground and our ground are already one ground. So there's an infinite unit of mystery hidden down in the depths of our powers. This is our situation. But our situation is that the powers are exiled from the ground. So we tend to, and this is one way of understanding the mystery of fallen human nature of the original sin, not as a blight on the soul, but rather our capacity to realize that we are God's manifested presence is traumatized. And we tend to think we're nothing but the self things happen to. We're nothing but my ability to understand or not understand, my ability to remember or not remember, my ability to love or not be loved, to find love and lose love. We think that this is all that we are, this is everything. Even though the ground is within us, in this exiled state, we're oblivious to the ground shining out from within and to God pouring from without.

And we don't see that. And because we think we are nothing but our powers of our temporal self through time, we cling to this experience of ourself, which is the fear of death, the

fear of growing old, the fear of loss and so on. We don't realize that anything we're even capable of attaining or losing is infinitely less than what alone fulfills us, which is given to us as a plenitude of the ground. And that clinging, then, further closes off access to the ground, which is suffering.

So he's saying what is the path? What is the path to be liberated from this clinging, which is going to be his path of detachment, which leads to similarity? And this clinging state, this similarity, that's the image of the image in the mirror, a full-length image of the mirror that can think and walk. And it thinks it can be real without you, it's going to launch out on its own. And you try to explain to the image of you, it won't go well without you because it's an image of you. And he said, "This is what it's like with God. There's this perception we're substantially real all on our own, and we're nothing but that." And so he's saying, "How are we liberated from that delusion like that?"

Kirsten Oates: And is it true, Jim, that in this state of dissimilarity, there's something that arises that gives us the desire to go on a path of detachment or to look for a path to find this? Yeah.

Jim Finley: Yes. Because Eckhart, he's a preacher, he's preaching the word of God. These are sermons. And so he begins by saying that through faith, we know that God illumines the powers and transforms the powers. And so it's through faith, then, and the Christian dispensation of grace through Christ, we know that our understanding is transformed by God in intimate realization that we're intimately understood, which is freedom from the need to understand. And we are who God understands us to be in God. And we turn towards that. And our memory, our remembering self and all that we remember, don't remember, we realize through God that God will never forget us. Will a mother ever forget the child of her womb?

And so everything is eternal, because every moment of life is eternal in God. And we trust in the eternity of our passage through time. And in our desire, we know that our desire's an echo of God's desire for us, that God has this infinite love that loves us so. That God has given us God's very ground as our own ground. And so at this point, we're aware of the ground, but we know it through faith. So we don't experience it yet. But this is the state where grace transforms the power. It's discipleship, the life of devotional sincerity. And as we follow that path, day by day, walking the walk, we're transformed from within by this path of detachment, which is how the path starts.

Kirsten Oates: And Jim, is it true to say that the faculties are initially transformed in this relationship with Jesus, recognizing Jesus as the one giving us our understanding of ourselves to know who we are? Those-

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. So when Jesus-

Kirsten Oates: To desire what Jesus desires?

Jim Finley: Yes. So when Jesus says, "Fear not, I'm with you always." Through the power of the Spirit who dwells on our hearts, we're empowered to know that God loves us

always, and therefore fear has no foundations. Even in the midst of our fears, there's freedom from the tyranny of fear through this faith in Christ. It's like that. So this is his path of discipleship. And so when Jesus says, "Follow me. Follow me into the bosom of God, follow me." So on. That we then follow Jesus by freeing herself from what hinders us from fully living in this Christ-consciousness through a path of detachment. So the path, then, is not one of attaining anything, because in the ground nothing's missing. So we're really trying to recognize and liberate ourselves from what hinders us from realizing that nothing is missing. And then Eckhart gives practical examples of that.

Kirsten Oates: So if we live this path of detachment, we might move from this state of dissimilarity into what Eckhart calls similarity. So I think you called this the first fruit of detachment.

Jim Finley: That's right. So let's say, he gives practical examples. I'll just give one again, my dear. He said that when we're involved in a project which unfolds in time, attachment is being attached to the outcome of the project. "Am I going to finish it on time? Will it turn out as good as I hope it will?" And so on. And so we're not free. So what we're to do, he says to practice detachment is to do our best, that it would turn out well. But ground it in a peace is not dependent whether it turns out well or not. Because our peace is dependent on this being infinitely loved by God in the depths of our self, beyond understanding. And the project, as it turns out, doesn't have the power to name who we are. But when we're cut off from the ground, when we're cut off from God, it does. Because if it's criticized or we fall short, we feel shame.

We feel regret. If it goes even better than we thought, we walk around more amazing than we thought we were. Hope people can realize that and so on. So he said that happens in relationships. All these examples in life, they're real. We experience them, but we catch ourselves absolutizing the relative. It's contingent, it's ephemeral, but we give identity, and we cling through fear and reactive. So every time we notice that we're to take a deep breath, it's relatively real, but deep breath that this infinite generosity of "God is present with me" in the midst of the relationship, in the midst of the project, in the midst of whatever. And we cultivate that in our net, which is really Christ-consciousness, is that ripens, maturing in discipleship. Then we move from dissimilarity to a state of similarity.

Kirsten Oates: And the similarity, is it a similarity to the qualities of God or the ways we experience God?

Jim Finley: Yes. So we would say then, was going to use the example of the just person, the person who's just. So God's the infinity of justice, God's the infinity of mercy, God's the infinity of humility, God's the infinity of love, God's the infinity of beauty. So the more, then, we turn towards something greater than ourselves, say, justice, we're moved towards justice, and we give ourselves over to justice. The more we give ourselves over to justice, he says about the just person. We use Dr. Martin Luther King as an example, that we have no life of our own. And the thing about the state of similarity, it can be broken. That is because if we turn away from justice, it becomes merely legal. See? And we turn away a lot, actually. We're just human beings. And we keep

turning back again, turning back again, turning back again to become more and more habituated.

So that's why I use the phrase, "Define that act. Define that person, define that community, which when you give yourself over to it with your whole heart, it unravels your petty preoccupation with your self-absorbed self and brings you home to yourself." That you don't live on your terms, you live on these divine terms, embodied in a classroom full of students or in a patient in a hospital, or helping somebody at the store find the product that they're looking for, or helping your child read a goodnight story, or accepting your aloneness. So every aspect of life has this possibility of this great letting go, of absolutizing contingency. And what's shining forth, then, is this similarity with God, to be with God always, who's with us in all things.

Kirsten Oates: These aspects, you outline justice, mercy, humility, love, beauty. Are they all aspects of love? Is that one way we could look at it?

Jim Finley: You could say that, yes. You could say that that love is the effulgence or the fullness of justice. Love is the fullness of mercy. Love is the fullness of beauty. Because God is love.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: God is love. And we're created by love in the image and likeness of love. And so it finds us as a calling in our situation, in the relationship or a ministry or a task, or a fidelity to something. And we're transformed in our fidelity to that and ever-deeper realizations that God's fidelity to us concretized in that path.

Kirsten Oates: So the act is something where we might feel this sense of love flowing through us.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: Something coming from beyond us. And do you think it has a sacrificial feeling at first?

Jim Finley: It does, because what it is. In the Merton sessions, I said, Merton once said, "We should all get down on our knees right now and thank God we can't live the way we want to. God doesn't let us get away with it." He said, "You can't love and live on your own terms." And see, this is where detachment comes in. My fidelity to the spouse, to the child, to my own solitude, to the Earth, to poetry, to art, to the acceptance of growing older or dealing with a long illness meets with resistance.

It meets with resistance because we keep trying to pull it back to deal with it on our terms. So he says, "We have to be very released." See, we have to keep giving over ourselves to this generosity which is infinitely richer, that what we're capable to experience when we're clinging to something.

Kirsten Oates: I see.

Jim Finley: If we just let go with the plenitude of the flow, more and more we become acclimated to the generosity. And little by little, we're liberated or freed up by grace to live on God's terms, concretized in what the present moment is asking out of us.

Kirsten Oates: Because in our innermost being, we are this flow of love.

Jim Finley: Exactly.

Kirsten Oates: And so the detachment, it's surrender and letting go into what we actually already are in our being.

Jim Finley: Yeah. It's almost, another way of saying it is that there's attachment in this negative sense, this hindrance.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: But there's also a kind of an attachment like we're bonded to fidelity, to infinite love's fidelity to us. The etymology of the word "monk" is "one." To will one thing is the will of God revealed to me, and what my awakening heart feels I'm being called to be faithful to. And yeah, there's a quiet seal to it, a quiet commitment to that.

Kirsten Oates: You talked about the act that we engage in having an energy of its own. You could come upon this experience of it having an energy of its own, and that it grants destiny to you.

Jim Finley: The quote that I gave from Reiner Schurmann, he says, "It so happened or it came to pass." And so we were going along, minding our own business, we turned a corner and we met someone. And we didn't realize it, but our life was about to be changed. Where we decided on a certain career, "I think I'll teach kindergarten students. I could make a living. I can." But then you realize you're being taken over by your love for all these children. It so happened. It came to pass that I was inclined to lean in this direction, and unforeseeably, see, it grants destiny. And what this starts to suggest is that God's presence is the infinity of the concretizations of the unforeseeability of life itself. See, because see, who's guiding this?

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: See, who's guiding this? And so this is a sense of abandonment to divine providence. Dave (?)'s book, this which is a mind of "I came to do the will of the one who sent me." So we learned to trust the unfolding flow of things. So the transformations, I love Dag Hammarskjold saying, "For all that has been, thank you. For all that will be, yes." For all that has brought me right up to this very moment, where I'm even able to care about such things. And I don't know what the future holds, but I know if my heart is open, I'll be more of the same. See, because you're not done with me yet. That's the feel of it, I think.

Kirsten Oates: You said that we remain in this state of similarity while we can turn away from the act, and we lose that sense of being in that divine flow of love. And so as we're engaging in the act, it's bestowed on us that we come into a state of identity?

Jim Finley: Yes. What he says is that he says there's no similarity in God. The persons of the Trinity aren't like one another. You can't count the persons of the Trinity. They're the divine relations of knowledge and love and trans-subjective oneness like identity. And we're called to that. By the way, to back up on similarity for a minute, is that another thing, a part of the path, I think, also, is that every time we slip and fall and have to renew our commitment, we're tempted to be disheartened about ourself. But what we discover, the whole message of

Jesus is the love. When this infinite love touches brokenness, it turns the encounter with brokenness into mercy.

And so we place our faith not in our ability to be faithful to what we're called to be. Our faith is God being infinitely in love with us, and our inability of living up to what we're called to be. So even the slippage is grace. See, even the slippage, but it takes time. We don't see it yet in similarity. We're still leaning into it, and I'm going to try harder and so on. But as that process ripens, we realize that we need to go beyond similarity, being drawn by God into this identity, into a state of identity. And that's where he uses the example of listening to music.

Kirsten Oates: Do you think, Jim, in that slippage, if we're on this path, that is just another opportunity to practice detachment?

Jim Finley: It is. As a matter of fact, in the depth dimension of psychotherapy, a person comes in with what hurts, psychological symptoms that embody suffering. And when you start to look at it in a vulnerable, safe way and start laying back the layers, you discover that an aspect of yourself that causes suffering, it's actually a survival strategy formed in trauma and abandonment. And one learns to be more insightful, more reality-based, more compassionate, more accepting. And one integrates and moves through these things. And so that's the feel of all of this. We become more and more inclusive in our understanding. It's like Jesus, although we slip away many times, God never slips away from us and is infinitely one with us in the slippage. And so mercy really actually deepens our dependency on God and our gratitude to God.

Kirsten Oates: Identity is what we long for.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: Moving beyond this similarity to identity. And you said that the mystic says, "Look what love has done to me." So this is done unto us, this movement from similarity to identity.

Jim Finley: Yes. There we're on a path not of our own making. I mean, it is our making because we have to make choices. But the choices is a kind of obediential fidelity to an infinite choice God has made, to give God to us as our very life. See. So we've all been judged, but we've all been judged by mercy. So on a path not of our own making, because we're always surrendering to this oneness which is already achieved, it's secretly within us in the ground. We're drawn like a gravitational pull toward this oneness. And so oneness, then, is a state of consciousness. It first dawns on us as an event. So for example, listening to music where the soloist is pouring, the beauty is flowing through the soloist, the soloist is surrendered to it. So when you listening becomes so surrendered, like you just give yourself over to the beauty, it's no longer true that the soloist is on one side giving it.

You're on the other side receiving. There's only the event of the music that enraptures us. Next it starts dawning on you that it's always like that. There's a certain point. It is true that God's on one side creating us moment by moment by moment by moment, heartbeat by heartbeat. And it's also true God would cease, that we'd vanish. But it's also true because of the generosity of God, it's no longer true that God's a creator on one side and we're the created on the other side, this identity that enraptures us. And for Merton, see, then that's

the point vierge. That's the oneness. That God is being poured out as the act that God is. And we're receiving that as the act that we are. So that's why I say our next inhalation is not an option. The day doesn't go well without it. And so we are the act of receiving the generosity, and God's the act of giving.

And so there's a point of meeting, but here the ground is understood as a verb. See, it's understood as a process. And then we can see that that can be cultivated in fidelity to a meditation practice. We can sit and refine our awareness with the breath is that, the unfolding of time is that. And little by little that can become habituated. And the idea here, I think, the distinction here with identity is that it becomes unbroken, that the breaking doesn't break it. So for Teresa of Ávila, but when we turn *The Interior Castle*, she says, "In spiritual betrothal, in the sixth mansion, there's the flame of God's candle. And then there's our flame. And when the two flames touch, they become one flame." So under optimal conditions in deep meditation, we experience the oneness. But when the cellphone goes off, it breaks. See? But then she says, "But in the seventh mansion, it's not like that."

And she uses the example of crossing a river after a raging rainstorm, and the river's swollen and it's a little horse-drawn cart. And as a horse pulls the cart at the other side of the river, the cart tips over, she falls in the mud on her hands and knees. And she's, "Lord, why are you letting this happen?" He said, "Teresa, this is the way I treat my friends." She says, "No wonder you have so few." So even the break, God's the infinity of the breaking points. See, God's the infinity of the laws. And I think a metaphor for this is the stages of dying. When someone comes to acceptance. See, it's freedom from the tyranny of death in the midst of death. See, it's freedom from the haphazardness of life in the midst of the haphazardness, that the grace has ribboned through all of it in some unbreakable way, some habituated, subtle state.

Kirsten Oates: So would it be the case, then, in this state of identity where we described in similarity, we can turn away from love or justice or compassion, in the state of identity, we stay connected, but it doesn't mean we won't slip in our finite way of behaving? So we might slip, but in the slippage, we still stay connected. Is that a way of looking at it?

Jim Finley: Yes. It's good. I put it this way. I do think there's growth in virtue. And so as we mature in this, we slip less.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: But we still slip. The difference lies in how we understand the slip. Insofar as we attribute the slip as having the authority to lessen God's infinite oneness with us, we're still in attachment to condition states. Insofar as the slip, the quote I gave an earlier session when they asked St. Benedict in the fifth century, founded monasticism, monastic life in the West, "What do you monks do in the monastery all day?" He says, "Fall down and get up. Fall down and get up. Fall down and get up." And so in the falling, we're caught in the free fall by God's mercy. See? So even the broken places are lessons in liberation, lessons of this unwavering plenitude of love that permeates are wavering ways. And it doesn't mean we still don't try to improve on that, because it hurts people, hurts us, like everybody, but it does mean it's infused or permeated by this bountiful generosity that includes the brokenness itself.

Kirsten Oates: What comes to mind is Mother Teresa, because we now know that although she on the outside and in her acts looked generous and loving and merciful, internally, she wasn't experiencing God's presence in that way.

Jim Finley: She didn't. That's right. So in a way, she's like the patron saint of the dark night of the soul. But the thing is, she was at peace in it, because she was surrendered over to God's will, which freed her up to channel this love that she couldn't feel. And sometimes it's that way with us, too. I think sometimes, we're powerless to feel it. But the powerless is there's a kind of providential powerlessness to feel. By your fruits, you shall know them. And you can tell that God's purposes are being achieved through you in your poverty. See, by the way you're present to people or to the Earth or to time. And so it has all these very personal ramifications and forms it can take.

Kirsten Oates: And that would be identity.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: A state of identity.

Jim Finley: Exactly. That's exactly right. That's exactly right. And it's heading toward the ground. And we're getting closer now to the ground.

Kirsten Oates: Closer. So this idea of being surrendered, so surrendered, so accepting, so yielding, Eckhart says this can happen in the foundations of a family or of a community, in a dialogue that actualizes two words of existence, that it can happen in really simple things. This unfolding into identity.

Jim Finley: How I put it, is an intimate realization of the incomprehensible stature of simple things. Like an intimate realization of the divinity of standing up and sitting down, of laughing and crying, of waking up and falling asleep. There's an underlying habituated sense of the divinity that, see, falls into the fullness of the details of the day. And so we're back again, "Like it so happened, it came to pass unforeseeably." And an example he uses too, if you're listening to a teacher, say, like Eckhart listening to, I can remember sitting with Merton, listening to him or philosophy. You don't get it at first. You get little pieces and you start connecting the dots, and all of a sudden the Gestalt clicks. "I get it." See, Lonergan would say insight. It's a moment of insight. And likewise, in relationships, you can be in a relationship with somebody, and you can tell they're coming to the point, they get you.

There's still ways that they don't get you yet, because you don't get yourself yet. You're on a path, but they get you. And when you can return the favor, to love in the daily rhythms of the day. When two people realize they get each other, they see each other, you would say God's the infinity of that. See? And so there's a single word that gathers up the essence of everything that you're saying. So when Eckhart says, "The eye with which I see God is the eye which God sees me." If you sit with Eckhart, it clicks and you realize that these succinct aphorisms are embodiments that are echoed through everything that he says.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Now it's just like that example he gives of the music, because there's a moment with a piece of music that we love. I like the idea of the music as an example, because it's not just the ears that become one with the music. You have to let it influence your whole being. It

overtakes you.

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. And then you can also then see as it crystallizes that way, Yo-Yo Ma in his interview with Krista Tippett, *On Being*, he said when he's playing the cello, he's always very aware that he's not there to prove something. He's there to share something. And so everything we have, we've been given, and we've been given it to give it. See, and then you realize as you listen to the symphony, then every movement of the symphony is an embodiment of this crystallization because it holds together. Life is like a song. You know what I mean? It's like the symphonic nature of our life.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. That's what's coming through. And the conversation or the music can be coming from someone who's no longer living.

Jim Finley: Exactly. Gabriel Marcel, not only was he a great philosopher, but he was also a playwright and a musician and composer. And he was very close to his mother, and she died when he was young. And he says, "It's amazing how present a dead person can be." That's the deathless nature of the beloved. It's shining through the ongoing unfoldings of your day.

Turning to the mystics will continue in a moment.

Kirsten Oates: This feeling of destiny that you talked about. So we find the act that brings us into this harmonic kind of flow and of love, and we get this feeling of destiny. Is that because we are destined for love?

Jim Finley: I would say two things. One, I want to start first with the patterns of love, the configurations of love. And so I'll say this about myself, but I'm sure this is with you or Corey or any of the listeners. When I look at where I'm at right now, where I'm at within myself and talking like this with you, and I look back at my origins, being born in Akron, Ohio. When I look back at the winding path of my life, I couldn't have planned it if I tried. See, I couldn't have planned it if I tried. See, and I think that's a destiny.

Kirsten Oates: I see.

Jim Finley: It's not by accident that I can sit here like this. See, it's the unfolding of destiny. So we're in the midst of the unfolding realization of the providential nature of destiny. See, and there may be a lot within us still that's unresolved. But we know that as we sit with the unresolved, that too is destiny. Because as we keep leaning into it and waiting and staying open, T.S. Eliot says, "To hope too soon would be to hope for the wrong thing." And it's like to think too soon would be to think the wrong thing. It's like we're not yet ready for hope. See, but we ripen and mature. We're sifted like wheat, and we're transformed that way. And this is what Eckhart's all about, because he was living this in the world. See, he was living this in the unfoldings of the day and like Jesus lived.

Kirsten Oates: And we certainly don't start off surrendered and yielding and accepting and all those things. So that's part of the unfolding the destiny. If we get to a place where we can look back like this.

Jim Finley: I think that in infancy, we're the embodiment of this trust. Embodiment of this trust, because it's the love bond. And if all parents were infinitely loving and generous and kind, we

would internalize the love glow from the parent, but the parents impose on us the unfinished business of their life. You look into your parents' eyes and no one looks back. The very one you depend on to keep you safe is the one who's hurting you.

And also, by the way, this paradox is woven into birth itself. Because being born is not a picnic. That's what I'm saying. And the very first thing they do to you when you get out there, they hold you down and give you a smack. Like "Welcome to life on this Earth." So from the beginning, there's the transparency of the infant's trust, and then the very ways that deepens, but also the ways we've internalized traumatizations and hurt. And so this path toward identity and toward the ground is we're being healed from the ability of those circumstantial unfoldings, to have the authority to name who we ultimately are and are called to be in the midst of unfoldings. See, that makes sense.

Kirsten Oates: And that's just a part of our destiny.

Jim Finley: It is. It is our path-

Kirsten Oates: It's built into our reality.

Jim Finley: Yes. And that's why I think the mystery of Christ rose from his wounds. It's the eternality of the wounds glorified by love. And so there's a certain holiness to the story. Not to romanticize the trauma or the tragic, because it's nothing just to violate it, really. The tragic really is tragic. But the point is, it's not just tragic. Because nothing is just anything except an unfolding of a love that hasn't yet completely shined through it yet. But when we pass through the veil of death, it will forever. And now through detachment, it can start to shine through it now. See, you can be at inner peace in the unresolved matters of your life.

Kirsten Oates: So Eckhart identifies Mary as someone who lived, I think the words were, in immovable detachment. And she went through birth and life and death and resurrection. And-

Jim Finley: Yes, she did.

Kirsten Oates: And I love this idea of this state of immovable detachment.

Jim Finley: It's a nice image, because he says that the boards of the door swing back and forth, but the hinge is stationary. So the hinge is this axis of stillness.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: But it isn't as if I'm hidden in the axis of stillness, but if I do anything, it'll break the stillness. It has to be that the stillness permeates the action itself.

Kirsten Oates: I see.

Jim Finley: Like Richard Rohr, Action in Contemplation. The action doesn't disrupt the contemplation. The contemplation is the depth-like nature of our actions. And that's the mystery of Christ, too. The word made flesh and dwelt among us. So we're trying to find this axis of this deepening identity, and see how the deepening identity is ribboned through the fluctuating patterns of gain and loss and birth and death and sorrow and joy and life.

Kirsten Oates: Mary's like the archetypal-

Jim Finley: She is.

Kirsten Oates: ... hinge on the door, so to speak, with a life that included the birth and the death and the loss and the-

Jim Finley: She's like an archetype of us. Even the age-old, "Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee." See. The Magnificat, he's looked on his servant in her nothingness. "Henceforth, all generations will call me blessed." See, the Mater Dei, the mother of God is giving birth to. And Eckhart say we give birth to Christ, out of this identity. We give birth to Christ back into God's fatherly heart. See, we both give birth to the word through the activities of life itself.

Kirsten Oates: Last thing, an identity you talked about. And Eckhart points to this way we begin to see everything as equal. So Eckhart says, "I'm trying to talk about the person who encounters the same." What a great statement.

Jim Finley: It is. So see, as we move closer and closer to the ground, now, this is where, first of all, it's equal in identity. Because everything are infinite variations of this incarnate infinity intimately realized, it's like this. So this would be a good way to segue to the ground. And I already started this by the quotes which I gave, which is what you just referred to one. So I want to go back over those quotes again, but make them more explicit in the ground.

Kirsten Oates: This is the movement from a state of consciousness that Meister Eckhart calls identity, into a state of consciousness where we break through into the Godhead.

Jim Finley: That's right. That's right. So I want to go back and let's summarize this, make it more explicit. Because this is really the endless endpoint for Eckhart, is the Godhead. Well, one way to say it, and this gets very subtle and delicate because you have to sit with it and reflect on it and so on, is that by the Godhead... And this, I refer to it as the abyss-like depths of God... The Godhead is prior to and beyond the Trinity. And really, this is the apophatic way of the infinite unknowability or the infinite emptiness of God. Because this is God, because there's no distinctions in the Godhead. There is in the Trinity, distinction and non-distinction.

Likewise in the Godhead, there's no intentionality in the Godhead. There's no divine will in the Godhead. See, it's like an infinite stillness or an infinite void. It's very close to the Buddhist understanding of emptiness as paradoxical, overflowing fullness with this. So this infinite poverty of God, this infinite emptiness, this impartible desert or this stillness, he says, is poetically, he says eternally in motion. And this motion, he calls a [foreign language 00:42:29] or a boiling, where the infinite emptiness is manifested as the Trinity. And the Trinity, infinite relations of knowledge and love and trans-subjective communion. So intimacy is the first manifestation of the manifested mystery of God.

Kirsten Oates: You said that the Godhead is prior to and beyond the Trinity.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: But then at the same time, it's boiling over. It's boiling-

Jim Finley: As the Trinity.

Kirsten Oates: As the Trinity. Oh, I see. So it manifests the Trinity as its first act of-

Jim Finley: Exactly.

Kirsten Oates: ... creation.

Jim Finley: So the Godhead, which is really the ultimate destiny, the ground of the mind, our homeland is not the Trinity. It gets to a point where the Trinity is not enough for us. See, we're headed toward the Godhead, we're headed toward this infinite nothingness that's pregnant with the Trinity, pregnant with the Earth, pregnant. So this infinite emptiness, though, there's no intentionality, but it gives itself as the Trinity. So it's the ground of God, but given as the Trinity. So it's not like there's a Trinity and the ground. It's very subtle. It's like unfolding dimensions of infinite boundarylessness beyond intentionality, beyond, but then manifesting itself in the intra-divine life of God as these divine relations, which is this activity of love. And by the way, we refer this earlier with Merton, I think. To understand the persons of the Trinity is God the Father, and the poetry of this God is mother, God is origin. That God is eternally speaking herself, speaking himself as the logos or the words of God's eternally speaking the infinity of God as the word.

The word was with God and the word was God. See? And because God is infinitely giving infinity of God away as the word, it would mean if we would go looking for the Father, that is in any way whatsoever, other than the word, we'd never find the Father because there is no Father. Because the Father is infinitely giving. The infinity that held nothing back. And likewise, if we'd go looking for the word that's in any way whatsoever other than the Father, we'd look and look and look. There is no word, because God is the infinity of the infinite generosity of God. And their oneness, they contemplate each other. And the Holy Spirit is the love that arises from that oneness. So if we look for the Holy Spirit, there is no Holy Spirit other than that. And that's the trans-subjective communion.

Kirsten Oates: Distinction and non-distinction.

Jim Finley: That's right. And so when Eckhart creates us, we participate in that.

Kirsten Oates: When God creates us?

Jim Finley: Yeah. Before God creates us. From all eternity, see, in the beginning was the word and the word was with God, and the word was God, and all things were made through Him. And without Him, nothing has been made. So through all the eternity, see, stones and trees and stars. When God created water, God didn't have to think of what water might be. Through all eternity, God is contemplating water in the word. And since everything in God is God, it's the divinity of water. So when God says, "Let there be water," the water flows along. And so in ego-consciousness, we don't see this. We just take a drink of water or wash our hands. Now, if we sit at the edge of the ocean or like Carl Jung, "How can we claim the years have taught us anything if we haven't learned to listen to the secret that whispers in the brooks?" We get intimations of the divinity of water when we gaze into the flames, when we listen to

silence like this.

And likewise, when God created you, God didn't have to think of who you might be through all eternity. See, God eternally contemplated you in the word as the word. So Eckhart says, "The amazing thing about a word is that when it goes out, it doesn't cease to be what it is before it went out." So when I share with you what I might know about Meister Eckhart, my knowledge of Eckhart doesn't cease to be because I shared it with you. Likewise, although we're being manifested by God now in this moment, we're still infinitely who we were before God created the universe. And it's coming back full circle to complete itself back to our homeland.

Kirsten Oates: And that's the idea of the way we're the same is that origin and our destiny?

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. Everything's caught up in this flowing circularity of this generosity. And it carries us along with itself, and we learn to [inaudible 00:47:10] to it and go with the flow and share it. And so Eckhart says then, as this ripens, this oneness, he said, "Then it includes the world because all things were made through Him." It's the divinity of water and stones and trees and stars, and the smell of cinnamon, and I mean, whatever. And then he says, "You realize that it's like a dance with God, ourselves and all of creation holding hands in a dance of infinite equality given by God." And you're so amazed. See, it came to this. Geez. Like this. And then see where the Godhead starts. You say, "What could possibly be the origin of such wonderment?" And now you begin to think of the origin. From whence does this miraculous unfolding arise? And not arising in the beginning, but it's an eternal arising, giving us the eternal origin, the beginningless beginning. How can I now trace my way back to the origin? And this is where he starts moving into the Godhead.

Kirsten Oates: Wow. There was a statement you made at the outset of detachment. "We did not expect this much."

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: It's beautiful.

Jim Finley: Yeah. Because in the Godhead, when you look at this, it's like the rains fall from our hands. The rains fall from our hands as we become one with the Godhead, this realization of this eternal perpetual origin. And this is why he says in the one who's come to this realization goes back to the blacksmith shop or some other trade, knowing that eagerness, even mystical, makes one forgetful. See, because eagerness is a symptom that everything isn't already infinitely present.

Kirsten Oates: I see.

Jim Finley: There's nothing to be eager for, because nothing's missing. So you go back to the divinity, the ordinariness of the unfolding of things intimately realized in your heart.

Kirsten Oates: This idea of living without a "why" was something new to me. It's tell us more about that.

Jim Finley: The insight is that when I was starting medieval philosophy, so many would done Scotus and Aquinas, to this very similar to with Eckhart, is that in a way then, Eckhart sees the love of

creation is greater than the love of redemption. Because the love of redemption had a reason. Redemption. Because there's no intentionality in the Godhead. See? So there's no reason for creation. It's the anarchy of the ineffable. See, it's an infinite anarchy. He says, "Why does a horse run all of its might across the field? It runs without a why. Why does the rose bloom? It blooms without a why. We should learn to live without a why." Because the why is trying to find our footing in circumstance. Because a why would be a finite why. "I think I'll write that down. I got a reference point." But what if there's no reference points?

What if everything is the infinite generosity and the concreteness of everything, is an intimate state? Oh, we also gave the quote then where he says, "You're sitting still, you're sitting in this stillness. Since God's ground is my ground or my ground is God's ground. So the infinite eternal stillness of the Godhead is now the infinite stillness of me. Not in principle or poetically, but experientially. So by the stillness within myself, the sun is moving across the sky. By the stillness within myself, the rivers throughout the world are flowing."

Kirsten Oates: Oh wow.

Jim Finley: "To the stillness within myself, because I'm not none distinguished from, but Mary, like the swinging door, it swings out into the flowing rivers, into the passage of time." And this is where Eckhart's trying to bring us to.

Kirsten Oates: So it's like every experience of reality. It's not just even our own life experience.

Jim Finley: Exactly. That's why Thomas Merton says, "As long as you're still there to have an experience of God, you can't have one." See, and no longer. And notice, too, in deep moments of love, or deep moments of surrender to beauty, we're not there in reflective consciousness. And yet in hindsight, it's the fullness of being there.

Kirsten Oates: What's subtle about this for me is that we come upon this desire, this desire to follow a path like this, this desire for this homecoming. And it feels sometimes the desire is looking for a why. "Why am I here?" But where we end is living without a why.

Jim Finley: Yeah, that's a very nice point. I want to raise a question. Martin Heidegger reflects on this. There's this lovely passage in Heidegger, and it's the front piece of Reiner Schurmann's book on at least my edition, the original edition Meister Eckhart. I don't know if it's in *Wandering Joy*. It's so Eckhartian. And Eckhart, had a deep respect for Eckhart, Martin Heidegger, the philosopher.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: He says, "What seems easier than to let a being be just the being that it is? Or does this turn out to be the most difficult of task, particularly if such a project to let a being be as it is represents the opposite of the indifference? This simply turns its back up on the being itself. We must turn towards the being. Think about it in regard to its being, but by such a thinking at the same time, let it rest in its own way to be. Ever notice when you're with someone that will love you under the condition you measure up to what they want you to be? But when they just accept you where you are, it sets you free to change." So Martin Heidegger has a lovely little book called *Introduction to Metaphysics*, and he starts out by saying, Dan Walsh's translation, "See, why is there something rather than nothing? Why the

universe? Why?”

He said, “This question,” Heidegger said, “Grazes our heart in life’s most fundamental moments, in birth and love and loss and death. Why is there anything at all? And you go wandering off across the property, leaning up against trees. Why is there anything?” This is philosophy. And Dan Walsh says, “The real question is why is there someone rather than no one? And I’m that someone?” Because of the anarchy of the infinite generosity of God is my life. See? And so the Godhead has these kinds of rich poetic intimations, and they allude to it. And I think we’ve all had intimations of these experiences, but as the path deepens, they become more habituated. See, and to be lived and shared day by day, which is Eckhart’s path.

Kirsten Oates: It’s interesting that when you come back to your work, you come back to where we started with similarity, finding that act and entering into it or the acts that you are to perform to do them in this way, in a loving way. Because you could think that without a “why.” Why? Why would I bother with anything?

Jim Finley: That’s true. That’s right. “I’ll just sit here and die.” I mean, I-

Kirsten Oates: Exactly. But it’s not the kind of “why” that we look for in our egoic consciousness. It’s a different kind of quality.

Jim Finley: Yeah, I would say two things. One, we start somewhere, and we start with a why. So we get a taste of something and “Why is this elusive to me? What could I..” Even though we pass beyond the “why,” but we started somewhere. And the other side of it is, what you’re referring to, in the rule of St. Benedict “Ora et Labora.” To pray and to work. So the daily labor of the monk, maintaining the monastery, the growing the farm, whatever, isn’t a rude interruption to mystical union. See, the labor is self embodies mystical union. Because when you’re really given over to the work, notice there’s always an unfinished, messy piece of it, which is the concreteness of God, of being a human being. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: That’s the part to come back to, to the concreteness of our own life. So what’s interesting about this path is whether you’ve had the experience of the Godhead or not, that the way we live it out the path of detachment, it’s the same way at every stage. This desire to surrender, yield, accept.

Jim Finley: It’s true.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Beautiful. Last question. The Godhead is that our destiny, that when we die, we’ll return completely to the Godhead.

Jim Finley: Yes. Let’s say this. That what we’re saying is when we pass through the veil of death, we’ll pass into the eternity of this oneness with the Godhead, which is our death. Because it’s already been given to us, but then it’ll be given to us in the full light of glory, which will also embrace and include the eternity of the fleetingness of all that we were. Our stories will still be there. We’ll still be there, but transcended and permeated by the Godhead. What Eckhart is saying is that journey toward that Godhead that will live in glory, “I go to prepare a place for you,” Jesus says that, “Where am I?” You might also be, “Father, that they may be one even as we are one.” See, it can start here. And that’s Eckhart’s path. And matter of fact,

all these mystics, each one has his or own unique way of this exactly the same thing.

That is not, we don't necessarily have to wait until we're dead to realize this unmediated infinity of every breath and moment, under the condition that we're willing to die to anything less than the infinite love of God as a sole source of our security and identity. And also, to die to try to actually figure out how to do that, because we can get attached to that.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: And the ego's always hooked onto something of things that has to do first so this can happen.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: But it's possible to know that everything's already unexplainably happening, and through prayer and sincerity and love and life, one can more and more. And I think that's why we turn to the mystics for guidance. And the very fact we're drawn to listen to talk like this shows us we're already on that path where we wouldn't be drawn to listen to talk like this.

Kirsten Oates: So I'm feeling a little dizzy and overwhelmed. Do you think I'm on the path today?

Jim Finley: I do. I actually do, actually to be dizzy and overwhelmed.

Kirsten Oates: Like I'm just in the midst of a beautiful symphony just taking me over.

Jim Finley: I put it sometimes with myself, back in the good old days when I was holy, it was so clear. But for quite some time now, I've become perplexed, see. But perplexed is humility, and humility is a door through which this comes to us. I think it becomes more and more intimately unexplainable in all directions. That's why I love that little quote. It says when Eckhart preached, "The fact his clothing was full of holes, it just show us the fire that consumed him." That conflict turns to paradox and at last invites silence. See, there's nothing to say. Everything's unexplainably self-evident.

Kirsten Oates: When we were getting ready today, Corey was talking about the Marvel universe, and how now they're going into these alternate realities to bring back superheroes and all. Anyway, I think if you wanted a second career, you could write scripts for-

Jim Finley: I thought of that, actually. Writing a mystical comic book.

Kirsten Oates: Oh yeah?

Jim Finley: And by the way, this is Joseph Campbell's point, too. The power of Star Wars and Lord of the Rings, is more explicit in Lord of the Rings, is that it's veiled, oblique innuendos of this very thing that we're talking about.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, yeah.

Jim Finley: In meaning, mythic dimensions of meaning through the power of stories and meaning is.

Kirsten Oates: I don't know if you can remember, there was was a prayer you cited earlier, and I was hoping

we could end on it, but I didn't write it all down. It started with "For all that."

Jim Finley: Oh yes, I have it. I know it by heart. Dag Hammarskjöld was head of the United Nations. So he was like a mystic political leader who contemplated the leadership of the Tao. And his little prayer was in his book *Markings*, which is like his journal. "For all that has been, thank you. For all that will be, yes."

Kirsten Oates: What a beautiful way to end. Thank you so much, Jim.

Jim Finley: You're very welcome. Thanks for the dialogue. I think it really helped bring this out. I think it'll help the listeners.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, good. I hope so.

Thank you for listening to this episode of *Turning to the Mystics*, a podcast created by the Center for Action and Contemplation. We're planning to do episodes that answer your questions, so if you have a question, please email us at podcasts@cac.org or send us a voicemail. All of this information can be found in the show notes. We'll see you again soon.