



Meister Eckhart

Session 4
with James Finley

**Turning
to the
Mystics**

Jim Finley: Greetings. I'm Jim Finley. Welcome to Turning to the Mystics. Greetings, everyone, and welcome to our time together of turning for guidance to the Christian mystic Meister Eckhart. In this fourth session, it'll be the last session I'll be doing alone on Eckhart. Kirsten Oates will be dialoguing with me about it, and you'll have a chance also to ask questions. But in this last one, I want to acknowledge that there's really too much here for one session, but we only have one session. So I'd rather complete my lesson plan and know that I said it all, knowing that on your own, if you're so inclined, you can go back and listen to this repeatedly or take it to prayer or look at the commentaries that are provided if you're so inclined to pursue this. But at least this will round out the picture of Meister Eckhart's teachings.

And I'd like to begin by going back to the beginning and summarizing this vision that he has, his spiritual vision, and how the light shining out from this vision that illumines the path along which he guides us to this deep reunion with God. So we'll begin at the beginning. We begin with Eckhart's bearing witness that the generosity of the infinite is infinite. That from all of eternity, the infinite presence of God is presencing itself and pouring itself out, whole and complete, in and as the gift and the miracle of the intimate immediacy of our very presence, the presence of others and the presence of all things in our eternal nothingness without God.

Moving in closer still, Eckhart would say this is true of all of creation. This is true of God's, the let it be. This is true of the world and plants and trees and animals, the darkness of the night, the change of the seasons. But it's especially true of us, in that God has given us as persons created by God in the image and likeness of God, that the abyss-like depths of God has been by the generosity of God given to us as the abyss-like depths of ourself, this abyss-like depth which he calls the ground. So that in our created human nature, in our created humanity, there is deep within us an uncreated union that is at once the abyss-like depth of ourself and the abyss-like depth of God given to us as the abyss-like depth of ourself.

Next, God then has given us in our human nature, which he calls the powers of the soul, we might say our faculties, our human experience. God has given us the gift of the intellect, the understanding self and all that we seek to understand, our memory, our remembering self and all that we seek to remember, our desiring self, our love and all that we seek to love, in our powers. And this is how we live our life, and our senses and our emotions, all of our human nature and our powers. The difficulty is that the powers have been exiled from the ground, so that when we seek to understand, we seek to understand in a way that's exiled from the ground.

And when we try to remember, we seek to remember in a way that's exiled from the ground and so on. And in this exiled state, which is one way of understanding the fallen state or the broken state of humanity, that we're experientially exiled from this upwelling or this infinite generosity of every breath and heartbeat that alone is ultimately real and we don't see it. And in the powers, then we act out of the powers and not out of the ground. And therefore we tend to think we're nothing but our powers. That is, we're nothing but the self things happen to. I'm nothing but what I'm able to understand or not understand, remember or not to remember, to love or not love. And because I think this is all that I am, which is ultimately an illusion because I'm nothing without God, I cling to my powers.

And this clinging intensifies the estrangement from the ground, which causes distress, the fear of death, possessiveness of heart, the human experience, like this. Next, Eckhart says that the gift of faith, then, the gift of faith and the Christian dispensation of faith through Jesus, through all of scripture, through Jesus, it is revealed to us that God illumines the powers of our soul. And God accesses us and becomes one with us. “The word became flesh and dwelt among us.” And so through faith, Eckhart was a priest, he’s a preacher, preaching the word to awaken our hearts to the presence of God. And so through faith, our understanding is enlightened by the spirit who dwells within us to know that our understanding is liberated in knowing that we’re infinitely understood.

And our memory is illumined by God in being reassured that God will never, never forget us, ever. And that through all of eternity we’ll be held in the remembrance and life and reality in God’s mind in the presence of God. We’re all eternal in God. And in our love we’ll know that God is love, who loves us so much that God has actually given us the abyss-like depths of God as the abyss-like depths of ourself. The infinite generosity, the infinite is within us. And so we live by faith. We live a life of devotional sincerity, our day by day effort to be ever more Christ-like, ever more humble, ever more merciful, ever more attentive, ever more grateful and so on.

And so we grow in faith. And as we grow in faith, the light, the powers of the soul become translucent to the ground. They start shining out through interior layers of understanding, interior layers of being eternally remembered, eternal layers of love and the presence of the love that loves us so, so that we might be moved by this to give ourself in love to the love that gives itself to us. And we might be moved to love others and to love the earth and all living things. And this is a life of lived discipleship. And as this keeps getting refined more and more, it gets to a point where the powers become so translucent in this kind of experiential, obediencial sensitivity through faith, that something of the ground starts shining through into the powers.

So, the advent sermon of St. Augustine says, *“I saw something flash before my soul and I saw that if only I could seize it, I would have all truths.”* And it’s the ground shines through into the powers, this ground, this abyss-like ground. And he says, *“It comes by stealth. You didn’t see it coming. It’s like an inner quickening in your heart, like a streak of something like this.”* And he says, *“It steals the soul from yourself, that having glimpsed it, you know that your life is ever incomplete without it. And therefore there begins a longing to abide in the ground, having seen the ground in my most childlike hour, in my intimate hour by hour of suffering, my hour of service, it comes as it comes. But having glimpsed it within my heart, in knowing it, I’ve known the fullness that is my destiny and how can I go there?”*

And that’s the teachings of Meister Eckhart on the vision. This is our situation, this is our situation. And like all the mystics, then, he’s concerned about how do we discern the way? Zen Master Dogen talks about negotiating the way. See, how do I navigate this way to find my way to the ground that is my eternal destiny? I know that I experience it now kind of obscurely, shimmering and shining in the powers illumined by grace. I know that when I die I’ll move from veiled to unveiled in glory forever. But how can I, in an intimate, obscure way, abide in it now? How can I live in the ground now and live out of it and live by it and share it with others day by day?

And so the path for Meister Eckhart, then, this path that is this way to find a way to the ground, it can't be a way of attainment because nothing's missing, because the infinite generosity's already been given to us. There's nothing missing. And therefore the path consists of liberating ourselves from what hinders us from realizing that nothing's missing, and that's detachment. And what detachment is, and we gave examples of it in the previous session, is that we catch ourselves believing and experiencing that the conditions that we're in, the outcome of the present situation, has the authority to name who we are, has the authority to name who we are.

And because of that, we try to then to hold on, like we can't get past the close horizon of what our eyes can see. We can't get past the close horizon of what our hands can touch. We can't get past the close horizon of what our thinking mind can comprehend, and so on and so on and so on. And therefore, I catch myself in doing it. And I do it because I get reactive. I get reactive. I get invested. "I sure hope this turns out okay. I sure hope this person doesn't do this. I sure hope I don't make a fool of myself again. The way I tend to do when I get..." You have your litany of craziness, I have my litany of craziness. But the trouble is we actually think the craziness of us is fragmentation. We all catch ourselves doing this. We actually think our endless foibles have the authority to name who we are.

But in truth it is only the infinite love of God has the authority to name who we are, who's infinitely in love with us in the midst of our foibles, in the midst of our shortcomings. So how can I breathe easy? How can I catch myself in the act of this idolatry, of my ability to live up to something over my faith in the love that loves me and my inability to live up to anything? And I practice it. I practice it in prayer, I practice it in my relationships. Life's filled with opportunities to practice this. And lessons, like lessons to learn about letting go and seeing beyond the immediate thing to know there's something shining through the immediate appearance, which is this abyss-like love, sustaining me, breath by breath, heartbeat by heartbeat. And that's detachment. And again, last time I think this was very helpful, is that when we love someone very, very, very much and our love for this person, we're very, very careful not to do anything that would cause them to suffer.

We're highly sensitized through love to know that in deep love there's no such thing as a little thing. A glance, a look, a tone in the voice, a gesture, everything is endless. And St. John of the Cross talks about being held a prisoner by a hair that flutters on the neck of the beloved, that in the eyes of love, so now here you're learning to fall in love with the infinite love who is infinitely in love with you. And you're trying to join God and knowing who God knows you to be before the origins of the universe. And this deep bond, this growing bond between the two of you, you're solicitous not to be indifferent towards it, not to be cavalier towards it. So what might look on the outside as pettiness, is actually obedient fidelity to a refinement of a kind of fidelity to something.

This can also be said of poets and artists or teachers, anyone who's deeply devoted to a transformative process. They're very, very solicitous and careful not to be carried off by distracting things that would compromise the purity of the flow as a kind of an integrity. And that's the inner logic behind I think what Eckhart is saying. And as we

tend to live this way, what starts to happen is we start to move then from this state of dissimilarity, like the reflection looking at itself in the mirror and of things of you and the things that can be you without you.

And just like we're images of God, we try to go off and be without God and our images of God. We move from the state into what he calls similarity, that is, all of a sudden detachment, this being unencumbered, by being more consciously aware of the attachments and seeing them and breathing on all of this. Something starts shining through which he calls a state of similarity. And here's a quote then on similarity. This quote is from Reiner Schürmann's commentary. First Eckhart. *"Eckhart says, he who understands my teaching about justice and the just man understands everything I say,"* Schürmann says. *"According to this first model, the just man lives with justice. The just man, as just, does not possess being, he receives the being just from justice. His being is exhausted in this dependence. According to this model, the constitutive principle justice and the constituted derivative, the just man, maintain a relation of actual similarity. Each time and insofar as the just act is accomplished, the just man is just. Receiving his being from justice, he is assimilated to it as wood is assimilated to fire, whereas the ground of the mind is assimilated to the ground of God. He acts not in justice but out of it or with it, that is, by virtue of it. The appropriation of the reflection of justice determines his action. He is what justice is. Were he to commit injustice, the similarity would be broken. He would become alien to justice. That is dissimilar. A just man, then, inasmuch as he is just, has no proper being. His origin is not in him. Devoid of justice in himself, he is summoned to turn towards justice and receive it as being as an image of justice. Whoever loves justice remains so firmly established in it that what he loves becomes his own essence. No thing can distract him from this and he heeds nothing else. The just man no longer looks for support elsewhere. He does not let his acts be determined by external precepts. If he strove for conformity with exterior laws, his acting would be simply legal. The just man who acts out of intimate assimilation with justice is just in the same way that the reflection of a beautiful face is beautiful, totally by another and totally in itself, as just as an image a man engaged on the way to detachment is assimilated towards his origin, near his origin. With it, he finds rest. In its solicitations, he recognizes the call of a perpetual exodus."*¹

I'd like to reflect on this. I think in our collective unconscious, I think of justice of Dr. Martin Luther King. And to say of Dr. Martin Luther King, he had no life of his own. That the justice of racial equality laid claim on him. So in his fidelity to racial justice, he was transformed by the fidelity to racial justice into justice.

And he lived by the solicitations of justice and lived in fidelity to justice. For if he would turn away from it, if he would just get legalistic, it would just be legalistic, he would fall out of it. And he's constantly turning to this fidelity to justice. It's the same way with Mother Theresa of Calcutta. Mother Theresa of Calcutta had no life of her own. She gave herself to compassion, such as compassion laid claim on her life. And she was transformed by compassion into compassion. So she became compassion. So when you were in her presence, you were in the presence of compassion, like this. And yet these people who had no life of their own, we feel that when we're in their

1 Eckhart and Reiner Schürmann, "Woman, the Hour is Coming" in *Wandering Joy: Meister Eckhart's Mystical Philosophy* (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne, 2001), p. 92.

presence, you feel you're in the presence of someone who's discovered what all life is about.

So here's what I think then is the life of similarity. How would this apply to us? What would this mean? It's a call to find that act, find that person, find that relationship, find that creative process, find that fidelity to the inner imperative of your awakening heart. Such that when you give yourself over to it, it unravels your petty preoccupation with your self-absorbed self, and strangely brings you home to yourself near the origin. It leaves you spent, grateful and rich, like this. And this is the similarity of it. You've been so given over to it, to this transformative mystery. And what is it? This might be the beloved, the spouse. It might be the child. It might be a classroom of students. It might be serving the poor. It might be art or poetry. It might be solitude. It might be being old. It might be struggling with a long, lingering illness.

It might be whatever, whatever, whatever it is, that if we give ourselves over to the mystery of it all with our whole heart, we no longer live on our own terms, but on the terms of the depths of the mystery that's permeating us, transcending us and transforming us in life itself. It's like what we're searching for isn't hard to find, it's just hard to stop running from it. And we're we're running from it because we're afraid to be overtaken by such unconditional plenitude, even though in our hearts we long for it and remain unconsummated without it. And this is our situation, always. Now, Eckhart says, imagine you're living this way, more or less. He says, a similarity must itself become overcome, because similarity, we're not created by God to be like God. He said, there's no likeness in God. The persons of the Trinity are not like each other.

We're created by God in God as God in the ground for God forever. And therefore we have to move beyond similarity to identity. He said, what we long for is identity. We come home in identity. So don't forget now, we're really talking about... It's like, the way I put it sometimes, the mystic doesn't say, "Listen to what I've experienced." The mystic says, "Look what love has done to me. See, there's nothing left of me. I don't know how it happened, tell you the truth. Maybe I can look back to a turning, like it was an event, in the aftermath of which I've never been the same. But sometimes like water filling the marshlands, little by little by little, all of a sudden it's become like this. I just am this way.

It is the air I breathe. It is who I know in my heart I deep down am and am called to be in the midst of my foibles and limitations like this. So, identity. This is Reiner Schürmann again, paraphrasing Eckhart. Experience of identity. *"An appeal could be made to the example of music. The hearer of such melodious beauty is all ears. If he does not know how to reproduce inwardly, simultaneously, identically that which his ears hear, if by distraction or incapacity he omits to accompany in himself the sounds that the senses perceive, then he does not know how to listen. Properly speaking, perfect listening implies the distinction between the soloist on one side and the listener on the other is no longer true. Through the unique event of the song that enrapture us, one identical being accomplishes itself."*² I'd like to reflect on this.

I have a specific image in mind, we've all had moments like this, where years ago I went to hear Itzhak Perlman play at a big venue outdoors, Hollywood. And so let's say when we come to something like this, we find our seat and we're looking around. We're in a distracted

2 Eckhart and Reiner Schürmann, "Like a Vase of Massive Gold" in *Wandering Joy: Meister Eckhart's Mystical Philosophy* (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne, 2001), p. 102.

state and we look around, see if we recognize anybody and we hope we don't forget where we parked our car and so on. The orchestra's warming up. And when Perlman starts to play, you move from dissimilarity into a similarity. Right away the beauty or the tonal quality or the purity of the sound starts to have its way with you, and you yield to that. And then there is a moment, and this is identity, in which Perlman is so transparently surrendered to the beauty of music coming not from him but flowing through him. He's channeling this gift of music.

That when you become so surrendered, so receptive, so yielding that in a way that reciprocates the surrender. It's no longer true that the soloist is on one side playing and you're on the other side as the listener. There's only the one event of the music that enrapture us. And Eckhart says, that's what it's like with God with us. That if we could see right now, really, really, really, really, really see, all that this moment really, really, really, really is, we would see that we are God's ecstasy. That God is utterly poured out, see, and utterly giving the abyss-like depths of God away. Eckhart said, God must do it. The generosity of the infinite is infinite, holds nothing back, whole and complete as the mystery of yourself in the ground without God. And when you, in moments of deep attentiveness, you get close to it.

We talked before about these examples in Merton, like turning to see a flock of birds descending, or knowing love in your own heart, or reading a child a good night story, or being unhurriedly sitting in an art museum, or lying awake at night listening to the rain, or listening to your own breathing, whatever, the quiet hour at day's end. There's a certain moment where you're so surrendered over and kind of empty-handed in the immediacy of the moment that you and God mutually disappear as dualistically other than each other, and there's only an all-encompassing blessedness. If you turn to look at it, it recedes. If you try to have it, it recedes even further. But if you surrender over to the oneness that's already unexplainably there, that's identity, he says. Now, and I think I'm using this example because that's what we're after here.

How does this apply to us? And I think this eludes us because we're not used to becoming this attentive to the incomprehensible stature, what's most simple and immediate in our life. We're not used to it. We notice things in passing on our way to something else. And so we're always being invited to slow it way down, to become more attentive to the depth-like nature of what's so unexplainably happening. Like each breath that we take, from whence does it arise, really? And so to deepen this sense then of identity in Eckhart. *"According to Eckhart, human existence seeks to fulfill itself in identity. This trait appears particularly in the most decisive acts of life. In the foundations of a family or of a community. In a dialogue that actualizes two words of existence. Or again, in the acceptance of one's destiny. These events always unite those whom they affect, they're destined for us. It is not someone's will that has favored the course of things, it is the course of things that favors us. We say, "it so happened," or we say, "there were circumstances," where there is being. Hidden under the anonymity of these neuter forms is a power that gathers us together in our fate. When anonymity befalls us, it delegates destiny to us. Such emittance is not a matter of the will and aestheticism. One has to be very released, gelassen, to respond properly to what destiny sends."*³ I'd like to reflect on this.

I think one of the most important experiences of our life is we can all look back. And we were walking along, minding our own business in a way. And all of a sudden, in a certain

3 Eckhart and Reiner Schürmann, "Like a Vase of Massive Gold" in *Wandering Joy: Meister Eckhart's Mystical Philosophy* (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne, 2001), p. 102.

way, we discovered within ourselves a gift that we didn't know was there. And having discovered the gift, it might be poetry, it might be art, it might be music, it might be a bit of creative process. And you discover as you lean into it and circle around it and work with it that it starts taking on an energized life of its own. And you also discover, what you can discover, it's possible, that only infidelity to being surrendered over to whatever it takes to be faithful to this gift are you to be who you know deep down you're called to be. It grants destiny to you. You didn't see it coming, you didn't plan it, you didn't look for it. But there it is. There it is.

And you also know if you walk away from this, you walk away from who you're called to be, like this. Relationships are this way. You're going along, minding your own business, you turn a corner, you meet somebody. You're never the same. You're just never the same, like this. And this can be anything from a spouse to a lover to having a child, it can be. But also it can be, say you're teaching a classroom of elementary school little children. And you start out, you choose it as a career. And then you realize you're falling in love with these children. And when you're in the presence of the children, they radicalize your presence to yourself. And it's a transformative identity of a preciousness that has no name. And they enrich you in your time with them.

Same with anyone committed to healing, either medical healing or psychological healing, any committed to healing. So again, find that act, find that person, find that event, and surrender yourself over to the event that's surrendering itself over to you. It starts out as similarity. It starts out as likeness or resonance or affinity. But as it deepens, you become more and more non-distinguished from the gift that's non-distinguished from you. And this is identity, like this. And so it raises an interesting question, I think, really. It's almost as if, not almost as if, he's saying, from whence, what is the providential unfolding of this unforeseeability? It's God as the infinity of the unforeseeability of the unfolding of our own existence.

Like we look back over our shoulder, how did I get to this place? I couldn't have planned it if I tried. I could not have planned it if I tried. I'm on a path not of my own making. It's true I have to surrender to it. It's true it requires a free... Because love's always offered, it's never imposed. But what I surrender to is what's already given, and it's calling me to fulfill itself through me, that I might be who I'm called to be as I gravitate more and more toward the ground welling up out of this very proximity that we're speaking of right now.

"Eckhart suggests an example to explain this. Consider what happens in an intimate conversation." And I want to say too about intimate conversation. In a way, I think it's the conversation of these podcasts. This isn't light stuff we're doing here. We're not having a chat. This isn't what people typically talk about over lunch. I think so, seriously. And also when I was with Merton, when I would hear him talk, I always... Whereas Dan Walsh and metaphysics. I just felt like there's a depth of language here. It's unexplainably substantive, like this, in a conversation. So there's an intimate with the lover, the deep friend, brother, sister, mother, father, student, patient and therapy. Someone you're helping, someone who's helping you. You're going back and forth, back and forth. But you're talking with each other, conversation.

Through your words, a clearance of understanding opens up which points toward the word of

existence murmured in all that you say and do. I have something to say and I can't say it. But there's something that's resonating in everything that I say. And when the person listens and they listen closely, it can be a growing effect where it starts to roll over and they get it. They can kind of tell, except there's no it to it. It's not an it that they get. It's like a resonance or a clarity of using words in the service of the unexplainable. This is also, I think, the vocation of poets and the poetic voice. But it's also the language of lovers, the language of children, the cry of the poor, the healing word that offers solace.

But the event of such an opening is the work of neither you nor me. That is, it's not me. If this event happens here, it's not me making it happen. I'm not fabricating it and you're not fabricating it either. It's bestowed upon both of us, all of us as we listen to this, like a communal grace unfolding. *The "we" is not the achievement of the "I" or of the "you", rather it comes to be of its own accord. When it occurs, there is nothing else besides itself. In such moments, two existences are determined as identical. Identical in the event.*⁴ So here at the point there is the union, is like a verb. It's so happened, it came to pass, this flowing activity of this call to this oneness.

You see why I said at the beginning, don't worry if all this isn't crystal clear, okay? Because I realize that. Because I mean, seriously, we could have an hour session on each of these points and do a sitting together and have a discussion and journal and come back. We'd get a little closer. But at least if I can give you a taste of it, like the poetic flow of it, if you're so inclined on your own in prayer and in reading and so on. Next quote on this tape. He's talking about Mary, Jesus' mother. *'And however much our Lady lamented in whatever other things she said, she was always in her inmost heart in immovable detachment. She detached from everything except this infinite love, be it done unto me according to thy word.'*⁵

Let us take an analogy of this. A door opens and shuts on a hinge. Now, if I compare the outer boards of the door with the outward person, I can compare the hinge with the inward person. When the door opens or closes, the outer boards move to and fro, but the hinge remains immovable in one place and it is not changed at all as a result. So it is here. In other words, you got to go with the flow. The door swings back and forth in the wind, see, in the unfolding of the day. But in your heart is the hinge of the door, like an immovable center within yourself that is actually flowing out and giving itself as a swinging back and forth, as a divinity of unfolding circumstances. But there's something within yourself. You don't get carried off. Well, we do get carried off. But every time we get carried off, we keep returning again to the oneness, until the swinging of the door and the stillness are one.

It isn't as if it's a stillness that you dare not move or you break the stillness. But it's a movement like a dance. It's a movement that embodies the stillness as a flowing movement. He also says, I like this quote it's good. He says, *"In this identity,"* meaning everything is identical. *"It also then,"* he says, *"includes the world. It includes things."* So it is true in a kind of... We can speak of ourselves as gift with the awareness, this interior awareness and reason. But we're gift with the awareness of the divinity of the smallest of things, a grain of sand. Gerard Manley Hopkins called it the inscape of things, the shape of leaves, like the divinity of configurations, like this. And it means that I have sometimes, it's like sitting alone in your

4 Eckhart and Reiner Schürmann, "Like a Vase of Massive Gold" in *Wandering Joy: Meister Eckhart's Mystical Philosophy* (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne, 2001), p. 102-103.

5 From Meister Eckhart's sermon, "On Detachment"

living room, and the configuration of the furniture is God's mandala.

That somehow it's a configuration that has a certain divine mystery to it, the patterns, the unfolding patterns, like this. And so it includes, then, all sentient beings, the earth that sustains us all, the darkness of the night. Everything is drawn up into it. We see that it's all woven and it is all identical. So, like Romano Guardini says, *"Although I am not God, I'm not other than God either. Although I'm not any of you, I'm not other than any of you either. Although I'm not the earth, I'm not other than the earth either."* This underlying awareness is the essence of awakened consciousness, this oneness, like this. And so Eckhart says, in identity, "In this identity, God gives the pouring out. God gives to all things equally. As they flow out from God, they are all equal. Indeed, angels and men and creatures are equal in their primitive emanation, or they all flow out, by which they flow from God.

*"Someone who would get hold of things in their primitive emanation would get hold of them as they are all equal. If they are thus equal in time, they're still more so in eternity in God. If we take a fly, in God, it is more noble in God than the highest angel is in itself. This is how all things are equal in God and are God himself."*⁶ I'd like to reflect on this. Let's say you're sitting in your room praying, and you go into a very deep contemplative state and an angel appears to you, an archangel. And the archangel, you're kind of amazed by this, and the archangel is whispering to you the deep secret things of God. And you keep leaning in closer so you can hear what the angel's saying. But it's hard because there's a fly buzzing in the window. So you say to the angel, "Excuse me just a minute."

You get up and you go over and swat the fly. You come back over and sit down and say, "I'm sorry, what were you saying?" And the angel goes, "You just swatted God. That's what I was trying to tell you." That's right. As a matter of fact, let's say the archangel was an angel with an attitude. It was really into itself as an angel. It's less than the fly, because everything in God is equal. Now, in relative consciousness and relative reality everything is unequal. But in the ground, in the equality is intimately... This is what I mean by the incomprehensible stature of little things. The eye of the artist, the voice of the poet, the ear of the lover, the parent, the child, is attentive to the incomprehensible stature of little things as being worth all that God is worth. That everything has a value that cannot be calculated because of the *Gelassenheit*.

Everything that's worth all that God is worth, and everything is God, unexplainably forever in its eternal nothingness without God. Meister Eckhart talks about, he says, *"I'm trying to talk about what happens to the person that encounters the same. That everything without God is the same, it's nothingness. But in this equality, everything is God, being poured out immeasurably forever. The events of the day unfolding so unexplainably."*⁷ It isn't as if when the painful thing happens, it is not painful. And isn't as if we realize it's painful, we should try to heal from it. And we should also try to be a healing person, a nonviolent, protective person to prevent this. But it's also to see that as painful as the event is, it's not just painful, for permeating through it, through and through and through and through, this abyss-like generosity carrying us along in and as the pain itself is a mystery.

6 Eckhart and Reiner Schürmann, "Like a Vase of Massive Gold" in *Wandering Joy: Meister Eckhart's Mystical Philosophy* (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne, 2001), p. 105.

7 A paraphrase of Meister Eckhart, not an exact quote.

Imagine, an image that came to me a long time ago. Imagine you're alone in the dark and you're dying in the middle of the night. And you know that you're dying. And you turn and look at the flowers on the window sill, silhouetted in the moonlight. They seem to know all about it. That's identity. Everything is so unbearably, so unexplainably, so overflowingly divine in its oneness, like this. And Eckhart's path, he's inviting us with these images to see certain aspects. Because I think we might not be at a place where we can see them with the habitual constancy that Eckhart did. But we can see moments where it glimmered forth. There were moments I got a taste of it. And the very fact we're drawn to language like this means we're already on the path that leads towards it. Where we wouldn't be drawn to this at all.

The intimate immediacy, the unexplainable, without which the explainable makes no sense, like this, really. There's another little nuance I see in this too. With similarity, he says the just person, if they would turn away from justice, the similarity would be broken. Have to keep turning towards justice. He seems to suggest here, with identity, it becomes unbreakable. And if you recall when we were doing Teresa of Avila and the Seven Mansions of the Interior Castle. And the sixth mansion is spiritual betrothal, it's like being engaged to God. So she said, if you take two candles, you light your candle and then there's God's candle. Sitting in deep meditation, the two flames touch and they burn his one flame. But then when the cellphone goes off, they separate. And so betrothal, under optimal conditions the one just burns bright. See? But in the demands of the day, it's difficult.

But, and she says, in spiritual marriage, this story where she's heading somewhere in a little horse-drawn cart after a huge rain, and the little horse is pulling the cart across the swollen river. And as it comes up the other bank, the cart tips over and she falls in the mud on her hands and knees. She said, "*God, why are you allowing this to happen to me?*" He says, "*Teresa, this is the way I treat my friends.*" She said, "*No wonder you have so few.*" And so the thing is, even the broken places are God, being poured out unexplainably, in and as the trustworthy nature of the broken place. If God is lord of life, God is lord of death, God's the infinity of life, God's the infinity of death. And there's kind of an unexplainable generosity that unwaveringly permeates our wavering waves. And we can intimately live by it and breathe it and walk by it.

We can't explain it. We don't need to explain it. We just know it's like a granting and a calling, like this. We're almost done. Just two more. I know it by heart so I'll just say it. I can't find it. It's one of the most well-known quotes. He says, "*It's so normal in our life too when we come up on things is to ask why. We need to comprehend something, like why is this this way? Why is this this way?*" He says, "*We let a horse out in the morning and it runs with all its might across the field.*" He said, "*Why does it run? It runs without a why.*" He said, "*The rose blooms. It blooms without a why.*" He said, "*Learn to live without a why.*" And he says this, I'm going to paraphrase philosophy class of Dan Walsh, Duns Scotus. "*That in a way, in a sense. God's love for in creation is greater than the love of redemption of Christ on the cross, because the love of redemption had a reason. Salvation. The love of creation has no reason. It's the anarchy of the ineffable. Because the destiny of the ground of the mind,*" this Eckhart's understanding of God, is, he says, "*The ground of God, this abyss-like depth,*" he says it's like a silent desert. It's void and completely empty. There's no intentionality in the ground. He said, "Nothing ever peeped of Father, Son or Holy Ghost. This is prior to the Trinity. This is an infinite emptiness, pregnant with God, pregnant with the world, utterly empty and void. And it

said, emptiness, that is the destiny of the ground of the mind.” And he says, then, “This eternal stillness is an eternal activity.” He calls it (?) of boiling, which is the Trinity. See? So intimacy is the first manifestation of intimate emptiness, relations of knowledge and love. And he said, this boiling activity, relations of knowledge and love boils over, and that’s the universe.

We’re the boiling over of this infinite emptiness, manifesting itself as the intimacy that’s intimately giving itself to us and to all things. And in the Godhead, there’s no intentionality. There’s no why in the Godhead. In the Trinity, there’s a why. Let’s make man in our image and likeness and so on. Salvation, the Spirit. There is a why, divine why. But that’s not our final resting place. Our resting place is an emptiness without a why. It has no why. It’s the anarchy of the ineffable. And so to end, then, with a couple lovely quotes on this as our way to end. Eckhart says, “An existence that dwells in nothingness is one in which everything just begins. It abides in the origin of the creator. In this pre-originary origin, only silence maintains itself.”

Reiner Schürmann says, *“At the outset of this odyssey of our detachment, we did not expect this much. Our path appeared to be one of voluntary poverty. But now it has led us into a region beyond God, where we no longer recognize ourselves. We feel as if we’ve reached that point of wandering the Japanese Zen masters depict by a canvas totally covered with black. God, man and the world are no more. There’s only the unspeakable interdivine ebullience without a purpose and in which nothing lasts. But our wondering exploration of the origin has changed us. We have become playful. We ask no more for meanings and goals. As the pre-originary origin opens the play, it grants itself as an illusion. Earlier, God, man and the world had appeared reconciled by the play of this identity, but wondering identity, that is identity without a cause, or a joy without a cause, or dehiscence, unless the grain that we fall into the ground and die as it remains alone. That if it dies, it brings forth fruit a hundred fold.”*⁸

Goes a step further. *“The three subsist no longer. They allude to a oneness that preserves the manifold in the unity of origin and imminence. A person who has experienced this illusion,”* Meister Eckhart says, *“goes back to the business of the world, the stable or some other trade. He is no longer eager to hold God. He knows that eagerness, even mystical, makes one forgetful. Eagerness wants to get hold of God as though to envelop his head in a cloak and put him under a bench.”* Why? See, one who has come to this goes back to the blacksmith shop of some other trade. Why? Because the concreteness of God’s the infinity, the concreteness of the blacksmith shop. And why does eagerness make us forgetful?

To be eager is not to realize that anything you could ever hope for and infinitely more beside is already right here. See, there’s nothing to be eager for. It’s like eagerness only betrays the inability that one doesn’t see the infinity of the immediacy of the present moment, regardless of the moment. Regardless of the moment. And so you can see here what an extraordinary person Eckhart was. And he lived it in the world. He lived it in the world. And it has such poetic depth and beauty to it. And it has such intimacy to it. It’s really, to talk about it like this only begs the question. See, that’s why I say if you were sitting in church listening to Meister Eckhart... Oh, let’s go back to this. I want to repeat the quote that I said on the very first session. We started out on the very first session. This was a quote. This is Schürmann

8 Eckhart and Reiner Schürmann, “Like a Vase of Massive Gold” in *Wandering Joy: Meister Eckhart’s Mystical Philosophy* (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne, 2001), p. 117.

again.

“Each line of Meister Eckhart testifies to an uneasiness about the fundamental inadequacy of language when confronted by the joy without a cause. There are perhaps illogical murmurings, which mobilize deeper forces in us than does the rigor of constructed discourse. Meister Eckhart undertakes the risk of speculative mysticism, explaining under philosophical guise the overwhelming closeness of the origin beyond God. That his clothing is full of holes suggests to us the fire that consumed him. The struggle for the right concept when it has recourse to paradox turns into combat, and after reasonings and commentaries that lasted by silence.”

And so I’ve been sitting with Eckhart for a long, long time. And he’s been such a immensely helpful teacher in my life. And so I hope here in our times together, returning to guidance to Eckhart, that each of us in our own way might trace out where there’s something in us that resonates with what he’s alluding to, and to sit with it and walk with it and live by it and so on. So, let’s end with a sitting.

We slowly say the Lord’s prayer together. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen. Mary, mother of contemplatives, pray for us. Meister Eckhart, pray for us. Matilda Medford, pray for us. Blessings till next time, our little chat with Kirsten about this session. So, blessings to all of 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 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.

9 Eckhart and Reiner Schürmann, “Introduction: in Wandering Joy: Meister Eckhart’s Mystical Philosophy (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne, 2001), p. xxi.