



Meister Eckhart

A Coaching Session on Eckhart's Path
with James Finley and Kirsten Oates

**Turning
to the
Mystics**

Jim Finley: Greetings. I'm Jim Finley.

Kirsten Oates: And I'm Kirsten Oates.

Jim Finley: Welcome to Turning to the Mystics.

Kirsten Oates: Welcome everyone to season seven of Turning to the Mystics, where we're turning to the German Mystic Meister Eckhart. In this special coaching session, Jim will present a summary overview of all we've learned this season. He's going to do this by inviting you to draw a diagram and journal as he teaches. Before we get started, you might want to get pencil and paper ready to draw along with Jim. In the show notes you'll find a diagram that we put together, along with some of Jim's handwritten notes, and those might also be helpful to have with you as you listen. Welcome, Jim. It's lovely to be with you again.

Jim Finley: Yes, glad to be together again, gathering around Eckhart's teaching.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, I'm really looking forward to this coaching session. Jim, why don't you get us started?

Jim Finley: Yes, thanks Kirsten. I think with each of these mystics and with Meister Eckhart, what we're trying to do is to slowly internalize the teachings, and as they illumine our own path and our own search for God. What I want to do here is share with you a way that helps me to do that. I'll share with you this way to do that that helps me, and you can consider doing it also as a meditation practice, but if not just to your own self be true, just listen and take in this poetic overview.

How this works here is inviting you to take a sheet of paper, this is going to be like the cover sheet. On this sheet of paper right in the middle of the page, draw a little circle, maybe about the size of a dime, slightly on the right side of the center of the page, halfway up right in the middle of the paper, about halfway. Right over that circle, write 'God's ground.' Then right next to it, draw another circle about the size of a dime, just to the left of it, and write 'my ground.' Imagine... you know the sign for infinity, the number eight, sideways?

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: Draw that infinity so that one of the circles is in one circle of the circle eight and the other side of the eight is in the other side, so they're together in infinity like this. Imagine that that that oneness in the ground now is the center of the face of a clock. We're going to go around the clock starting at 12:00, midnight. With each point on the clock, I want to give it a name. Give it a name, just a short phrase or a name that corresponds to the name we gave it on the talks on Eckhart.

Then off to the side, take another sheet of paper and title that sheet of paper 'midnight.' That's going to be my reflections on Eckhart. You can go back and listen to the other reflections on the ground at midnight and add those. Then if you care to, you can get a three-ring binder and add your own insight's like a journal, like a Eckhart prayer journal. We'll go around the clock this way...

Kirsten Oates: Lovely.

Jim Finley: ... starting with midnight. Midnight is God's ground. Then off to the side, I take a separate sheet of paper and title that paper midnight. These are the reflections then on the ground. "The ground of God," Eckhart says, "is like a silent desert and it's really the infinity of God beyond all distinctions." This is prior to and beyond the trinity. This is an infinite simplicity, an infinite silent hiddenness, like the abyss-like ground of God. We might think of it as the lofty depths of God. Just on the sheet of paper you would write the ground of God. Then off on the side you would write out this depth, this silent desert, this utter boundary less stillness, and starting to move around the clock, 1:00 is in the trinity and so you get a sheet of paper entitled that paper 'the trinity.' The trinity is that this eternal stillness of God, in the Godhead, is eternally in motion, a poetic motion, which he calls bullitio, like a boiling. It's the trinity.

The trinity is divine relations of knowledge and love, such that intimacy is the first manifestation, the manifested mystery of the ground, is the trinity. In the Trinity, the God, the Father, God is origin. God is origin of God. Through all of eternity, God the Father is eternally expressing the infinity of himself, the infinity of God, infinity of herself as the word. The beginning of the gospel of John, at the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. The logos, and the father and the son's life is they contemplate each other. The Father contemplates himself in the word, the word in the Father, and the infinite love that arises from that infinite communal knowing is the Holy Spirit. That's the Christian revelation understanding of the divine life of God's life, the trinity. Eckhart uses that same Trinitarian imagery and he expresses it in feminine form and he said, "God the Father is like a woman in labor eternally giving birth to God." God's giving birth to God, like the birth divine within God.

2:00 is it isn't just the God the Father giving birth to the word and contemplating God in the word, but God contemplates in the word the eternal possibility of all things. When God says the first words of Genesis, "Let there be light," God speaks light into being. God didn't have to think up what light might be. From all eternity, God the Father eternally contemplates light in the word, and because everything in God is God, God contemplates the divinity of light. When God says, let there be stones and trees and flowers and so on, God doesn't have to think up what a tree might be to create trees. From all eternity, God the Father eternally contemplates the divinity of trees in the word.

That's why philosophy class at the monastery, the professor following St. Thomas Aquinas, "That God is more a tree than a tree could ever possibly be," because God's the infinity of the essence of what it is to be a tree. So too with water, so too with fire, so too with that smell right after a rain. So too with the passage of time. God sees all of this in the word and in the let it be, this is ebullitio, so the boiling of the Godhead is the trinity. Thou it boils over as the universe. We're the overflow of an infinite generosity in which everything is then spoken in eternity is now present throughout all of time.

Kirsten Oates: What should we call this one Jim, number two?

Jim Finley: Number two is God not just contemplating God in the word, but God contemplating in the word the eternal possibility of all things, trees, stones. Since everything in God is God, God's contemplating the divinity of water, divinity of trees, the divinity. That's number two. Number three then is the first word, and God said, "Let there be light." See God then, that

act is absolute and perpetual is the ebullitio. It overflows the ongoing act of creation.

Kirsten Oates: That's really helpful. Jim, for number two, I could write down God contemplating the eternal divinity of all things in God.

Jim Finley: That's right. All things in God, yep. Then number three, is the act of creation itself. That's what we would call it, the act of creation itself. The let it be.

Kirsten Oates: The let it be.

Jim Finley: That let it be, it isn't just that God says let it be then goes off and lets the universe run on its own. Creation is absolute in the sense of, and it's perpetual. If at the count of three God would cease creating us under the present moment, we would disappear. A God would cease creating the universe into the existence. The universe would disappear, so that the world is God's body and that its bodying forth the love that's uttering it into being. The concreteness of things has a divine, sacred givenness to everything in the world of nature, the *rerum natura*, the realm of things.

Kirsten Oates: I'm calling that one Jim, the perpetual let it be.

Jim Finley: That'd be the perpetual let it be of manifested reality. The divinity of manifested reality, the divinity of the concreteness of things. Number four, or 4:00, is God creates us. God creates our human nature like everything according to its nature, trees and stones, our human nature. Our human nature is special in this sense that it isn't just that we're endowed with reason, thought which is science and culture and so on, but also God creates us with the capacity to recognize that we're God's manifested presence. We realize that the infinite reality of God is infinitely giving itself away as the reality of ourselves, others and all things in a nothingness without God. The generosity of the infinite is infinite and we are the generosity of God. We are the song God sings, as is the world and the passage of time and everything.

We would say then in the story of Adam and Eve in the garden, this poetic mythic story, we would say then that Adam and Eve in the garden, it isn't just that they were granted in human nature, the powers of the soul, that's the power to understand, the power to remember, the power to love, but they were also able to live in the light of the ground, that the ground was shining out through their powers. They saw the divinity of everything, the divinity of each other and of themselves and of the whole world. They lived in this state, this primordial state of the powers being illumined by the ground and living the life and the light of the ground, like this.

The 5:00 is the fall, but the fall here is archetypal. It's poetic, because the serpent said to eve, "See, God says you can do whatever you want here. It's all yours." Except right in the middle was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. "You can't eat this." When the serpent speaks to Eve, says, "If you eat this fruit, you'll be like God." Now the point is they already were like God, in the image and likeness of God, but he was offering, Satan was offering, she was offering, he was offering, that it was possible to be like God without God, and they took the bait. In AA they talk about self will run riot, and it is the gift of human nature, the gift of freedom. Because unless we're given not just the gift of recognizing that we are God's manifested presence, we're also given

the gift of the freedom to accept that we are that, because love is never imposed. It's always offered.

The risk of that freedom is it goes awry. The fall then, is trying to be like God without God. Then at 6:00, then it's where we appear for Eckhart. This is our situation. The ground of God is within us, is our own ground hidden deep within us. We're given the powers, the power to understand, the power to remember, the power to love, to desire, the will, but the powers of our soul become exiled from the ground. That's why in the advent sermon, Eckhart says, "Well, what the soul experiences or what the soul acts and achieves, the soul achieves with its powers but not with the essence with the ground." Because we're acting out of our powers, exiled from the ground, we tend to think we are nothing but our powers and we believe that we're real all by ourself and we have to get through the day as best we can.

This is why then it isn't just that I'm struggling with the whole of what I understand and what I don't understand or hope to understand, what I remember, but I forget and I don't remember and I hope I remember, or what I desire and what I love and what I don't love and so on, but because I think that's all that I am. In the passage through time in the approaching of the ability of death and fleetingness, I'm filled with fear, and therefore I cling to this illusion of myself of being real without God. That clinging further closes off access to the ground. That's 6:00. That's the state.

For Eckhart then, the word for this would be dissimilarity. The state of dissimilarity, and that's this image of the mirror, the image of you and the mirror thinks it can be real without you. It's like trying to be real without God and we're images of God. This is the state of dissimilarity, which is the whole realm of a traumatizing world. It's the whole realm of struggle. In Buddhist terms, samsara to this realm of illusion and suffering, unawareness, of the ground that's always there. But the powers in their alienated exiled state in this confused state, we get caught up in all of that.

At 7:00 is faith. Eckhart was a Christian. He's giving sermons. These the sermons of Meister Eckhart and he's in the Christian dispensation of grace of Christ. We see God then illuminating and healing the powers. As the powers, faith comes through hearing. It isn't just then that I'm trying to understand, the understanding self and all that we try to understand, but through faith we're given to realize that we're infinitely understood and we realize then we're Thomas Merton says, "We're set free from the need to understand, because I'm infinitely understood." Merton says that when we go to pray, we begin by reminding ourselves that we belong to God. How can I be led by God to know who God eternally knows me to be hidden with Christ and God forever? My memory, my memory is healed and that I know that God will never forget me. Everything real, so God knows we're having this talk right now. We're together, and God will never forget this.

When we die and go into God, we'll go into this moment forever that the fleetingness of every moment is eternal in God. It's forever. Suffering is eternal, why Christ rose with the wounds, but it's suffering conquered by love. It's all luminous with grace. Christ rising from his wounds is a visual metaphor of the eternity of suffering utterly transformed and conquered by love.

This is a way of life. "Follow me," Jesus says, and so we seek to follow Christ. In our life then every situation isn't just what would Jesus do in this situation, it is a disciple of Jesus. How would Jesus understand the situation that I'm in? What would Jesus's attitude be towards it? What would Jesus say and move me to say, or what would Jesus do then to act? I always seek to be evermore Christ-like as a disciple of Jesus, and my prayer then is lectio divina discursive meditation and prayer. I have a rendezvous with God where I open the scriptures and I speak that when I read Jesus's, "Fear not, I'll be with you always." I know that the deathless presence of Jesus is personally saying that to me and I take it into my heart.

Then Jesus says, God says, "Now I spoke to you, you talk to me," which is meditation. It's a loving exchange between ourself and God. Lord I believe, help my unbelief and how do I help me here. This is so that we might journal it out. Then the prayer is desire. Help me with this, because I can't find my way to you without you. That rendezvous is carried out through the day and that's discipleship, efficacious under holiness.

Then as we ripen in that faith, we deepen in humility, we deepen in gratitude, we deepen in patience, we deepen in amazement, we deepen in every time we fall, we know the fall is met with infinite mercy. The acceptance of our brokenness is the portal or the openness or the infinite mercy of God reinstates is oneness with us, is an infinitely love broken person. We live in the mercy of God and we live that way. 8:00 is living this way. The powers of the soul becomes so refined as that the ground of God is starts shining out through the powers and they're becoming translucent to the ground. They become luminous with the ground, but it's not seen yet. It's just seeing that the powers are becoming more expansive, more gracious, more luminous. What happens then is the moment in which it becomes so refined that the grounds are shining through into the powers.

That was the advent sermon, Saint Augustine. See, it flashed before my soul. If only I could seize hold of it, I would know all truth. Eckhart says, "We must yearn and sigh for it. It steals the soul from herself. For having glimpsed the ground, we see that the life and the powers illumined by grace. As amazing as that is, our destiny is the ground because we know that ground that we glimpse is our homeland." It's the destiny of the depth of ourselves.

Then it raises the secrets question. See where the powers of the soul, where the ground starts shining into the powers and then it starts raising the question then of how do I find my way to the ground? It shines in my powers. I'd long to go there, but how can I being finite, find my way to this ground that's infinite, even though it granted me a taste of it or a glimpse of it? Eckhart then, not 9:00 is detachment, is a path of detachment, because he says the path can't be a matter of attaining because nothing's missing. It can't be a matter of attaining. But what we can do is to learn to discern what's hindering us. What's are the habits of the soul that hinder us from realizing that nothing's missing? What he suggests then is the practice of detachment is one of recognizing that this is just that we're attached to harmful habits of the soul, which we are. We have the moral imperative, we have to work on those with God's grace.

But actually we're attached to the illusion that the finiteness of ourself is the final say in who we are, that we're nothing but the self things happened to. We're nothing but the self that attain. We can tell we're doing it because we get reactive. See, we get reactive and we buy into the idolatry of circumstance, having the authority to name who we are instead

of surrendering oneself over to this infinite love that transcends and utterly permeates the circumstance that we're in unexplainably. Then he gives several examples of that.

On your 9:00 page on detachment, we could go through those examples, and one example is he gives the example of a special love for the people that we love, more than the love of everybody throughout the whole world, the preferential love. In preferential love, then I would be devastated if my daughter died, but on the news and I hear that someone's daughter died and I see the father weeping, I'm not as deeply moved as my daughter would die. I'm to open the aperture of my heart to an empathy with all people throughout the world whose daughters die. The subtle part of it is, and therefore I seek to be liberated for preferential love in the midst of my preferential love. I do have preferential love. My preferential love doesn't have the final say in what my love is because I'm more and more opening my heart to let the world lay claim on me. This empathy.

Likewise, another example he gives us, we're in the midst of a project in the process of time and then we're invested in the outcome of the project. Will we finish it on time, will it be the way we want, and so on. That investment in time, we realize that we get anxious or upset or embarrassed if we can't finish it or if people don't accept it, whatever. Here we are to do our best to have it turn out the best we can, but at the same time be interiorly free and detached from how it turns out, because God's infinite love for me is the sole authority of who I am. How the project turns out isn't an authority of who I am, although in our broken state it feels like it, but it's not true. He has to be freed from the finality.

We try to have it turnout. If it goes well, we're glad going well, but the joy we feel in that is like nothing compared to the infinite joy of God that's given to me in the ground every moment of my life. If it doesn't go well, it's sad, but the sadness can't cast a shadow over this infinite love for me permeating and transcending my sadness. I try to work with that. I try to work on that.

That's the intimacy of detachment. You could make a list of any aspect of your life where you get reactive and where the condition state and the outcome of the condition state is experienced, is having the authority to name who you are. The sad is sad, but it's not just sad. The joyful is joyful, but compared to the high, high joy, the joy isn't the joy that we live for. We start trying to develop that habit. At this point our prayer then becomes *lectio divina* meditation prayer. It's *lectio divina* traditional Catholic word here is examination of conscience. We sit quietly and we look over the day.

When I was in the monastery, we chanted vespers and then when there'd be silent meditation, I think for 15 minutes, and you look at the day in the presence of God, where did I trip it? Where did I trip and stumble today? Where did I get all caught up again? Where did you surprise me with your presence? When I did trip up, help me with this, help me with this. I bring to you this tripping place that's in my heart and I bring it to you because I know you're infinitely in love with me in midst of my tripping. Saint Paul's the thorn in the flesh. I asked God to remove it and God said, "Leave it there as your teacher," because sometime the tripping place is a constant reminder of our need for God's mercy and our need to have patience with ourselves, echoing God's infinite patience with us.

As we practice detachment, it's a lifetime work. We have to also be detached from the ability

to be as detached as we'd like to be because ego's always putting the carrot on the end of the stick like there's some kind of goal. Merton once said in the monastery, we're always setting up an agenda inside. Once I stop doing this and this, then God and I will really get down to business. Once I start doing this, God and I... he's realized with God, there's no agenda. God doesn't have an agenda, but love is God's agenda. We're the ones who create these cul-de-sacs. We're trying to let the light of Christ consciousness shine in and mercy. As we do that, detachment ripens a similarity, and similarity, and he uses the example of the just person. He said, the just person really drawn to justice has no life of his own. She has no life of her own. She's transformed and lives by what justice is.

We might use the example Dr. Martin Luther King as a concretization of justice. They had no life of his own. Her mother, Teresa Calcutta. She had no life of her own, she became compassion. Although they had no life of their own, when you're in their presence of people like this, you feel you're in the presence of someone who's discovered what all life is about. That's why I say then in similarity, find that act, find that person, find that relationship, find that creative activity, find that form of service, find that form of acceptance of long-term suffering, find that surrendering yourself over to the divinity of ordinary details of the day, such that when you give yourself over to it with your whole heart, it unravels your petty preoccupation over yourself and brings you strangely home to yourself, near your origin, near the ground.

This is a life of similarity. The thing about similarity is that it breaks because he says we can turn away from justice and if we turn away from it becomes just legal. We have to transcend being legal and restore justice, but even the break is accepted with mercy. It deepens our humility.

Then this ripens at 11:00 into identity. This is that poetic metaphor of identity of music. What Isaac Perlman plays, he plays with such surrendered rapture. The music isn't coming from him, but the beauty is flowing through him. When we become detached from all distracting influences and we become mesmerized by the beauty, there's a certain point where the listening is as pure as the playing. It's no longer true, the soloist on one side playing and we're on the other side receiving. There's just the rapture of the music that transforms us into itself. He said to realize that's God. In a state, we are the song God sings. See, this is the music of the divinity of our life.

As we free ourselves from attachment, there's this identity where we and God mutually disappear as other than each other. There's this symphonic intimately realized, evermore habitual state, it isn't, I think an identity. It isn't that it doesn't break, but even when it breaks, it never breaks. In Teresa of Avila, the image we gave, the seventh mansion and she's a little horse-drawn cart after big rain and it coming up the other side and the cart tips over. She falls in the mud on her hands and knees and says, "Lord, why are you letting this happen to me?" He said, "Theresa, this is the way I treat my friends." He said, "No wonder you have so few."

I think this is also understanding of acceptance of death, the stages of dying, denial of bargaining, depression, of anger, and so on, that an acceptance and a state of acceptance, is freedom from the tyranny of death in the midst of death. It's tyranny from the midst of brokenness. God's the divinity of our brokenness. God's the divinity of every breath

and heartbeat. God's the divinity of standing up and sitting down. There's an unbroken, underlying continuity or flow of identity. It's 11:00. The 11:00 page is that.

Another thing about identity, it then includes the world. It gathers in the world, because if we look at a tree through ego consciousness, we don't see that the divinity of the tree. We sit in its shade or we cut it down for firewood, whatever. But if we contemplate a tree, then all of a sudden we start to see the divinity of the tree shining through. If we contemplate the sound of running water, if we contemplate the smell of a flower. We start seeing then the divinity of the world. It's like we, God, and the world in a circular dance of God-given mutuality and equality.

Then we ask ourselves, now we're approaching midnight, we're coming back up to midnight. We might say 13:00 because we're beyond time because now we ask ourselves, what could possibly be the origin of such an overflowing all-inclusive divinity of the immediacy of everything intimately realized? The infinity of the concreteness of life itself intimately realized, what could possibly be the origin? This is where we enter the ground and we go bring ourselves back to the ground of the Godhead where it becomes one. What are the qualities then that Eckhart invites us to consider as signs of discerning the ground? What's that look like, such a person? One thing he says, in the ground, is that he says it's like learning to live without a why. He says, "You let a horse out in the morning and it runs with all its might across the pasture. Why does it run? It runs without a why. The flower blooms. Why does it bloom? It blooms without a why," because don't forget, there's no intentionality in the Godhead. There is intentionality in the trinity. God intends to create us. God intends to redeem us. God intends like this, God's will, but there's no will, there's no intentionality in the Godhead.

This is why we would say then that all of life is the anarchy of the ineffable. It all spills over. It's infinite emptiness, pregnant with God, pregnant with the world, pouring itself out without a why. We learn to let go of whys and reasons, conclusions. We live in a spacious child-like freedom. It doesn't mean that secondary consciousness there is a why. Why won't my TV work or why did you do that? But we know that ultimately speaking, everything is dislike. It's like an anarchy of infinite freedom, welling up and carrying us along, and a freedom from the outcome of conclusions or answers. It's like being unexplainably empty-handed in the fullness of the poverty of God, the godhead.

Another example he uses with this, that in the Godhead, in the ground we see that everything is equal, and the original emanation is equal. He says, "If we take an archangel and take a house fly, in the original emanation, they're equal. Why? Because God's a reality of the archangel and it's nothingness without God, and God's a reality of the housefly and it's nothingness without God. We start to see that everything has a stature that cannot be calculated, a single grain of sand, the tick of the clock, looking out the window, everything has this infinity quality to it at the origin, the upwelling of the origin at 13:00, or midnight, the ground.

Then he says lastly, is that in this ground we see that in the ground by the stillness within myself, the sun is moving across the sky. Since my ground is God's ground and God's ground is God's ground, we just no longer know it poetically. We just no longer know it as a consoling insight, but now it becomes the very actuality of realizing that. By the very stillness

within myself, none distinct from the non stillness of God and the bullitio and the overflow by the stillness within myself, the sun is moving across the sky. In the stillness within myself, the axis of the turning world, TS Elliott talks about the stillness. It's like the orbiting outflow of this motion. It's not a motion that disrupts the stillness. It's the motion that embodies the stillness. He uses the example of Mary and he says like a door, the hinge is motionless. Boards of the door swing back and forth. The motions of our life are activities. It's is the divine overflow of an act of stillness.

When Eckhart says God is a circle, the center of which is everywhere, and the circumference of which is nowhere, is this boundary less state of the Godhead. The final thing I would say too for Eckhart, notice for him, this is all lived out in the world, but with the Christ consciousness of what the world is. What is the concreteness of this beautiful graced, brutal, savage, unfair, complicated thing? One zen master once said it would be so much easier if we were asked to be simple in a simple world. We're being asked to be simple in a complicated world. Eckhart says not to let the center of yourself be taken over by the complexity. The complexity's there, but if you can see it out of that center and see how it's illumined, you can walk through it and make an offering to move it in the direction toward goodness, toward God, towards love.

I have found then, that laying out this like I just did with you with these pages, and I also found that when I would give Eckhart talks, this is really how I formed the talks. I would take these quotes and I read out pages, so each 1:00, 2:00, 3:00, 4:00, and it really helped to put it together poetically in my mind. I found it so helpful with Eckhart, too. If you decide to do this yourself, to fill this in, and then over time every so often, go back to it like a journal. In your own prayer life or what's happening in your life, how would you write out this? Because I've had this image too, that, say someone was sitting in a church for the first time hearing Eckhart.

At one level, they didn't know what he was talking about, but let's say they just fell in love and they could tell he was putting words to what just is happening to them. Let's say they just had a child, or let's just say their spouse just died. Or let's just say that it's raining outside through the church. You can hear the rain pouring down. You can tell Eckhart's talking about that. See? That's the disarming intimacy of Eckhart. It goes directly to that immediacy, everything.

Eckhart says a person who has come to the state, 13:00 or the big midnight, goes back to the stable or some other trade knowing that eagerness, even mystical, makes one forgetful, because to be eager for anything is not to realize that the present moment is already infinitely more than everything. There's nothing to be equal for. I like this. Also that quote I gave in the first talk where Shurmann says that when Eckhart's teaching, the fact his clothing was full of holes, meaning it's so ineffable, suggests to us the fire that consumed him because conflict invites paradox and paradox eventually comes to rest in silence. In the silence.

I would say too in prayer, as we move through likeness and identity, go ahead. The prayer, it isn't as if we don't practice lectio meditation and prayer anymore, but it becomes there's more and more moments of just utter stillness, just utter complete stillness. You're just silent, or you're aware, like the swinging of the door. The flow of the words, whether the words of scripture or your own words to God are echoing with that stillness. They echo with it. It's

like a prayer, like the monks chanting the Psalms, that all words have this divinity or flow to them. That's my offering and with how I found it helpful to sit with that Eckhart.

Kirsten Oates: It's a beautiful offering, Jim. Thank you so much. If it's okay, I'd like to go back over the elements of the diagram with you. We started at midnight or 12:00 with the ground. 1:00 is the trinity, 2:00 is God contemplating the eternal divinity of all things. 3:00, God's perpetual let it be, bringing all things into existence. 4:00, God's perpetual let it be, creating human beings. 5:00, the fall. 6:00, we're born exiled from the ground in dissimilarity. 7:00, faith illumines the powers of the soul. 8:00, moments where the ground shines through the powers. 9:00, practicing the path of detachment. 10:00, the state of similarity. 11:00, the state of identity. Then we come back to 12:00, or I think you called it 13:00 because we're outside of time at this point, back in the ground. Jim, I'm wondering if I can draw a line from the state of identity through that original 12:00 and back into the ground in the very center of the diagram, the ground that we drew at the beginning in the middle of the [inaudible 00:40:48].

Jim Finley: That's a good point. Let me put it this way. This middle, God's ground is God's ground. We put the two together, the infinity. That is infinitely shining out as each step around the clock. It's just that when we're in the state of dissimilarity, it's shining through the dissimilarity, but we don't see it.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: See and faith, it's shining out through faith, but it's like the powers of the soul are becoming translucent to the light. See, as in a mirrored darkly, Paul says. What happens is you go around, it's shining out into each thing. It's just that it becomes more and more transparent. Then toward the end, evermore none distinguished from the ground itself, because another thing that Eckhart says, and in regard to similarity and identity is giving birth to the word. He says, "Just like God is eternally giving birth to the word like a woman in labor, God gives birth to the word in the ground of the soul." He says, "They're no differently than in the trinity itself." He said, "When we live this way with a generous heart, we give birth to God back into God's fatherly heart." See? He said, "What we and God, what we in Christ share in common, what we share in common is that we are simultaneously engaged in the activity, giving birth to the word back into God's fatherly heart. God comes back home to herself eternally in God."

Kirsten Oates: That's that idea of being a verb in God that we're...

Jim Finley: Yeah, that's right, it's a verb, an ad verb with the verb and then the oneness beyond that. Yes.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. What I see then, if I look at the diagram starting at midnight with the ground, that the origin of everything is the ground, and then the end point of everything is the ground. Then if I take my line down to the middle, that's like the engine of the whole thing, is the ground.

Jim Finley: Yes, exactly. Here's another way to put it, the way Reiner Shurmann puts it too, is that the Godhead is the pre originary origin. It's the origin, because there's no origin in the Godhead. There's no intention. It overflows. Bullitio. Ebullitio is the trinity. It's the ground is manifested and then it's manifested as us, but it all flows from an infinite nothingness that

radiates out from and permeates the circularity of life.

Kirsten Oates: I do have some questions.

Jim Finley: Okay, good.

Kirsten Oates: One is, I did just want to go back over the states of prayer you mentioned, just to make sure I capture them. One is lectio, when we're in at 7:00, faith and discipleship, we are practicing our lectio. But then what I'm hearing is those practices continue all the way from here, but they deepen.

Jim Finley: It goes like this. They continue, and in a way for some people they continue, but they become, there's more and more spaces of silence. I use the phrase sustained attentiveness infused with love. We're just silenced by the beauty of what God just told us in the scriptures. See? Or we're silenced by what we heard ourselves just say to God. We didn't know that we knew that. Silence. It goes back to the word again. The words become infused with this silence, but also what happens is that there are moments of no words and no thought. See, there are moments of just utter... as matter of fact, this is Teresa, the fifth mansion. You disappear from yourself in reflective consciousness.

For St. John and the cross, it no longer nurtures you. When you try to meditate, you're doing violence to yourself. You have to wait empty-handed in this poverty and this passage through a dark night, and then in that darkness, oh, night lovelier than the dawn. It's very intimate and grace with the patterns are with the prayer. But I would say another way of rounding the circle, then all life becomes a prayer, or all life becomes God praying. God's praying through us. We are God's prayer. Everything has that quality.

Kirsten Oates: And that constant conversation with God rather than, yeah.

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: What I'm hearing you say, that movement from seven to eight, the more stillness, the glimpses that begins to shine through in those ways. Then at point nine you mentioned the path of detachment, which Eckhart lays out, which is really beginning to practice in all of life.

Jim Finley: I want to use the example we used in the talks earlier. Let's say you're in this relationship. You're deeply in love with this person who's deeply in love with you. Let's say you realize that therefore, because of the love, you're very motivated not to do anything to cause sorrow to the beloved, not to do anything to compromise the deepening oneness with the beloved. Therefore you know that there are habits of your heart, maybe halfheartedness or pretending you're listening and you're really not, or not following through and being attentive to the person. As you become aware of that, you're very motivated to deliberate yourself through love. Also when you slip and fall as you do, you bring it to the beloved and acknowledge it, like making amends. You bring it to, and therefore you make your look like, I know this and this and this, but I can't. I wish, but I just can't, but I love you so much, but I want to. Knowing that I want to, I so appreciate your patience with me as I learn to be patient with myself.

That very willingness that I can't itself is a kind of intimacy. When the partner responds back and mirrors that, I think that's why the nuptial mystics, John of the cross, that's why they saw marital love, where Eckhart sees it more as the mind. See, he sees it more as an experiential understanding. He see it more as infused with love.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, that's helpful. What I'm seeing in that example is that the love is already there, it's just not being expressed and manifest. You're trying to detach from the things that are in the way of being in the flow of the love that already is present and existing between the two.

Jim Finley: That's right. It's this thing too, and all these mystics too, is where the mind descends it to the heart. It's a loving knowledge. The one we know is the one that we love. The one we don't love, we don't know. It's a loving knowledge and the two are actually in a reciprocity with each other as this loving knowledge.

Kirsten Oates: It's a detachment from the things that get in the way of the flow of love in the world, which is God. It's also what I've heard you say to Jim, it's a yes. There's a yes to that love, which you're living your life is a yes in a way trying to orient.

Jim Finley: That's right. There's another subtle thing. Example, because I live alone now. Say being alone, say watering the house plants. I don't think Eckhart has in mind where you water the house plants going, oh my God, gods the infinity of this plant. God's the infinity. Oh, I got to go sit down. My head's spinning. God wants us just to water the plants knowing that just watering the plants is the divinity of watering of plants.

Kirsten Oates: I see.

Jim Finley: See, it's like trying to breathe on purpose.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: In a way, we are aware of it. We can renew our intention to renew it, but it almost has turned you into itself. You just being, waking up in the morning and touching your feet to the floor is itself it. You somehow know it without having to consciously know it. It's like habitual realization of the giftedness of the immediacy of things.

Kirsten Oates: This idea of bringing a virgin mind to things, Jim, how would that apply to watering the plants in that way?

Jim Finley: That would be good to bring that in because I didn't bring it in earlier too. He says, the powers of the soul is that, and the understanding, the memory, the loving, the desire, there's also feelings or feelings. But the five senses is how we bring in the surrounding world, through the five senses. As we bring in the surrounding senses, the eye sees the physical reality of the tree. It comes into the eye, and then the act of intellect forms an internal image. At this point, the image is not what God eternal knows the tree to be. The image is what is internalized and us as a Buddhist would say is a perception, like an image. Then we collect those perceptions and they become ideological. I become my internalized opinion, my internalized conclusions, my internalized answer, what I agree with and what I don't agree with.

Therefore he says, "We must have a virgin mind." The person says back, "But how can we have a virgin mind?" He says, "We have all these images." He says, "But if you were detached from them, like preferential love whatever it is, you could know that my image... see God is more a tree than a tree could ever..." Thomas Merton says, "Although I've walked in those woods, how can I claim to love them?" See one by one, I shall forget the names of individual things. See one by one, I will let go of the name I give to something that I might be receptively open to what God eternally knows the tree to be, the divinity of the tree." Really it's freedom, virgin mind is freedom from ideological living.

Kirsten Oates: It's really at the level of experience. It's not that now I look at the tree and go, "Oh, there's God over there in that tree," and that's my new ideology. It's more I'm opening to the fact that if I don't look carefully, I don't see the tree as the divinity of the tree.

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. We have to start somewhere. We give it a name so we can talk about it, but we realize what we're really talking about are habits of the soul that are fostered in daily quiet time and in daily life. We foster the habit of the immediacy of what's happening, being receptively open to the divinity of the immediacy of what's happening. Our breath is just inhale and exhale, inhale and exhale. God's the infinity, God breathe into Adam the gift of life. Every time I inhale, God's exhaling herself into me. That's my breath. Then when I exhale, I exhale myself in love and giving myself in love back to the love that the next inhalation is giving himself to me. I can learn to listen to the reciprocity of my breathing as the music of God giving and receiving, giving and receiving, and everything can start to take on that intimate quality.

I also think in a creative activity like the artist, they might start out first as methods, and you start somewhere, but as they lean into it, John Cage says, "The artist doesn't begin in earnest until they get to the point they no longer know what they're doing." It absorbs you into one, and something flows through the absorption out into the world. That's the beauty of it. Same with the voice of a poet. See, where does the voice of a poet come from? This flow of language, it doesn't define anything or explain anything, but the rhythm and intonations of the poet's voice accesses us as we start to move with it. We start to see that everything has that potential. Gerard Manley Hopkins would call it the inscape of things, the interior of divinity shining out through the concreteness of everything.

Kirsten Oates: You talked about the practice of contemplating something as a way of practicing this virgin mind. I might decide to sit with my tree or to sit with my breath or to sit with something in that way.

Jim Finley: Let's say first to contemplate psychologically means to observe carefully or to pay attention. As we go through the day, most things we're aware of in passing on our way to something else, but something catches our eye, say a tree or a flower or something, something catches. This one poet, someone put a poem on my desk and the poet, Barbara Lutz. The poem was, her in the poem refers to her soul. It takes almost nothing to move her. A soft agitation in the rain, an ant going by that knows where it's going. Anything we pause to ponder, and then if we linger there, the pondering is lengthened. We can feel we're making a descent. We're dropping down into a qualitatively deeper awareness of and oneness with qualitative, deeper interior dimensions of what we're contemplating. Then that descent is endless. It's abyss-like and God's the infinity of that descent. It's like that, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Then you encourage us to choose the act, the relationship, the community where we feel ourselves moving into that flow of selfless love, that sense of the unconditional. That might be something we're already doing, but it's just a matter of bringing this attention to it. Then you talked about we could, to help us with that, use what you did in the monastery, this examination in the evenings, just a gentle examination of the day and where we have areas where we're still clinging or we're still attached and we might want to ask for God's help.

Jim Finley: Exactly, yes. I also think the example I use is if you're on a commercial airplane flight and the pilot over the speaker system announces that everyone knows they're a mystic and they feel a vision coming on, you would just hope they'd fly the plane. We have to be very careful that we don't use this reflectively standing back, the poet, because sometimes it's in the engagement. If you're teaching children, teach. If you're sitting with patients in therapy with trauma, listen to the patient. If you're out in the garden gardening, be in the dirt in the garden. Be with all your heart, be wholly present and engaged and let the fullness of that more and more keep shining out. Then when you sit in the rendezvous, you in turn reflect upon it, but you reflect upon it in a way that's entirely present to the engagement itself. See the act of reflecting is itself as an immediacy, reflect. It's like that, too.

Kirsten Oates: You do that with your whole heart, too.

Jim Finley: With your whole heart.

Kirsten Oates: That makes a lot of sense because we're not trying to detach from the concreteness of our life. We're trying to be more present to it.

Jim Finley: There's another thing too, I would say too. It's subtle. What's the greatest commandment they ask Jesus? All these beautiful things you say, what if we grounded ourselves in that? All these beautiful teachings would fall into place. He didn't say about anything to believe. He said to love God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your strength. The point is, I don't know what all my heart is. See, how do I do that? Then I find there are certain moments where something catches hold of me and I'm present with all my heart. I'm reading a child a good night story, or I'm sitting alone in the dark, or I'm trying to understand somebody who's trying to share something with me that matters and I don't. All of a sudden that is all my heart. There's something blessed about that. There's something like the divinity of that.

Kirsten Oates: When you can notice that, that's something you can cultivate.

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you so much, Jim. What a wonderful, helpful session. I see that you have the diagram drawn in front of you and with some written notes. I'm wondering if you would be willing to share that with our listeners?

Jim Finley: Yes, I'd be happy to do that. Here's an example of where I said 1:00 page, the 2:00 page, and how I do this, so an example. For example, here's my 5:00, 6:00, and 7:00 page.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, wow. Oh, wow.

Jim Finley: I can read it.

Kirsten Oates: It's shorthand. It's your shorthand.

Jim Finley: Yes, exactly. Yes.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. I'm sure people will really enjoy seeing that. I know I love seeing the way you put your notes together. That's really helpful. Thank you, Jim. Then also we wanted to put pop in the show notes some other resources for people that might want to pursue Eckhart further beyond this season of the podcast.

Jim Finley: Other sources, if they want to pursue other sources, one at this pastoral level of trying to make it as clear and accessible as possible. Some years ago I did an audio set with Sounds True, the teachings of Meister Eckhart, Indestructible Joy. I shared it the way it was given to me then. It's always evolving within me, but it's another way. I think it's five hours of audio. They could listen to that. Also, there's the thin little book, *The Way of Paradox* by Cyprian Smith. It's very simple, very paradoxical. There's the audio set with Sounds True, and then there's Cyprian Smith's book. Matthew Fox, I think a mystic warrior for our times is, well imagining Eckhart meeting Thich Nhat Hanh. Imagine Eckhart meeting a sufi, meeting Abraham Joshua Heschel. He bears witness to the universality of these teachings and how they're all in their own voice saying the same thing. I find that enlightening. I think that's helpful.

Then if you want to pursue more academic ones, if you're so inclined, I'll include those sources of Reiner Sherman, *Wandering Joy*. He takes a sermon and he gives the sermon, and then paragraph by paragraph, he goes through each sentence, one line at a time on what the high German meant. This references in Platanus and Augustine and the God and so on. He shows how Eckhart constructed his thought and how he spoke, how he used his language like that.

Then another source is the Paulis Press series of the mystics. They devoted two volumes to Meister Eckhart. One is the sermons in Latin, given the University of Paris, which is basically biblical commentaries and other writings. The other one is his trial, his defense of his trial where he was accused of his heretical statement. The other one is Eckhart, the teacher. Those are collected sermons. It's very nice.

Matthew Fox's book *Breakthrough* is a nice introduction with a nice collection of sermons. Matthew Fox's collection, the two volumes on Eckhart, and then the academic work by Sherman. Also Bernard McGinn's, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart* is very fine also, if those who are inclined toward that kind of lectio.

Another of the academic works along with Sherman and along with McGinn, is Meister Eckhart Mystic is Theologian by Robert K. C. Forman. There's some other books that I have looked at, read about, not studied them, but they look very good. They're excellent sources. One is Meister Eckhart, *Master of Mystics* by Richard Woods. That's good. Then another one is Meister Eckhart, *Mystical Theologian* by Oliver Davies. There are others too, but I've not studied those. I've read them, walked to them, but I've not sat with them and outlined them and so on, but they're good.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. Well, that will be a big help to anyone who's hoping to continue to go deeper with Eckhart. Thank you for that, Jim.

Jim Finley: Oh, I would say too, each person, some different reasons mystics strike us more deeply than others. The same thing would hold with all these mystics. You could read the text itself and then in-depth commentaries, like doing deep Bible study, doing Deep Mystic study. I'll write it out, listen to it within yourself, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, thank you for an incredibly helpful coaching session and for giving us those resources for people who'd like to look further into Eckhart. Just a wonderful session, a wonderful season so far. I think today is going to really be a gift to everyone, so thank you.

Jim Finley: You're welcome.

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@caac.org or send us a voicemail. All of this information can be found in the show notes. We'll see you again soon.