

Turning
to the
Mystics



Mechtild of Magdeburg

Mechtild of Magdeburg: Dialogue 2
with James Finley and Kirsan Oates

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 eight of Turning to the Mystics where we're turning to the German mystic, Mechthild of Magdeburg. And I'm here with Jim and we're going to dialogue about his second session, his second talk from Mechthild. Welcome Jim.

Jim Finley: Yes, yes. Welcome. We are.

Kirsten Oates: Firstly, I loved the talk. I'm really enjoying this season so far.

Jim Finley: Yeah, me too.

Kirsten Oates: But just like last time I thought it might be good to read through the whole piece at once that you reflected on in your talk and we can play the parts like we did last time. I'll play Mechthild and you can be God.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: And just so everyone can find it, we're in Mechthild of Magdeburg's book, The Flowing Light of the Godhead. And we're in book three, page 107 and the section's called How the Soul Praises God and God the Soul For Seven Things of Balsam and Waiting. Oh Sweet Jesus, most handsome image, unconcealed to my exiled soul in distress and in love. In love I praise you through yourself, in distress and in love, in union with all creatures. I yearn to do this above all things. Lord, you are the sun for all eyes. You are the delight of all ears. You are the voice of all words. You are the force behind all piety. You are the teaching of all wisdom. You are the life of all that lives. You are the ordering of all that is. Then God praised the loving soul in fine words. He took great delight in doing so.

Jim Finley: You are the light to my eyes. You are the lyre to my ears. You are a voice for my words. You are a projection of my piety. You are an honor to my piety. You are a life living in me. You are a praise in my being.

Kirsten Oates: Lord, you are constantly lovesick for me, that you have clearly shown personally. You have written me into your book of the Godhead. You have painted me in your humanity. You have buried me in your side, in your hands and feet. Allow me dear one, to pour balsam upon you.

Jim Finley: Oh one dear to my heart, where shall you find the balm?

Kirsten Oates: Oh Lord, I was going to tear the heart of my soul in two and intended to put you in it.

Jim Finley: You could never give me a more soothing balsam than to let me unceasingly lie weightlessly in your soul.

Kirsten Oates: Lord, if you were to take me home with you, I would be your physician forever.

Jim Finley: Yes I want that. Still my solicitude bid you wait, my love bid you labor, my patience bid you keep silent, my concern bid you suffer poverty. My dishonor bid you bear up. My sufficiency bid you refrain from complaint. My victory bid you pursue to the end all virtues. My goal bid you endure many things. For this, you shall have glory when I remove your heavy burden.

Kirsten Oates: Wow, beautiful.

Jim Finley: It is beautiful.

Kirsten Oates: I just had some questions about the beginning of the piece. She starts off like all the mystics you've been sharing with us, Jim, with this worldview of this exile that we're in. But these mystics, they always start with us being in this state of oneness, but we're exiled from it in our experience. It's so different from other versions of Christianity. So it's good to reiterate it and get our head around it.

Jim Finley: And really this is also the tradition, although we don't hear it. So this is an Aquinas also in Bonaventure and so on, is that at the deepest, deepest possible level, the abyss like depths of God is by the generosity of God given to us as the abyss like depths of ourself and our nothingness without God. And that generosity of God, that self donating generosity, which is the person that we are, is our God-given identity. It's invincible, it's sovereign, but our human nature that is given to us not just reason, but our human nature is given to us as a nature. It's one that's capable of recognizing that which is religious experience, and then in recognizing it freely assenting to it like saying yes because love is never imposed. It's always offered. So there's the sovereignty of the person that we are. It says in the scripture, let us create the human person in our image and likeness.

So the image is the person that we are. The likeness is the nature that realizes it. And so the nature is wounded, see then through the fall, so in Jesus calls it blindness and in Buddhism it's called ignorance. Hindus it's samsara. It's the realm of a wounded nature that's wounded in the capacity to recognize this oneness. And so with respect to our nature, we're exiled, we're exiled the soul and distress. And yet in the person you're unconcealed to me, in my exile from you, so I interiorly see your unexplainable oneness with me in my wounded state. And that's the paradox.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Mechthild in writing this is saying she's in this state of oneness. I guess she's saying unconcealed to my exiled self.

Jim Finley: That's right. See in other words, in this interior state of being transformed in your love, you're unveiled to me, you're unconcealed yet concealed because it is obscure. I can't show it to anybody. I can't even grab hold of it. And yet in my heart, my innermost heart, I sense your invincible oneness with me, unconcealed in this concealed state. And that's the intimacy of faith. That's the intimacy of this love bond with God. It's a very subtle way to put it.

Kirsten Oates: It's beautiful. The way she opens with that, it's beautiful. And this next sentence, it was hard to read. It doesn't flow easily. And I think it's just again because kind of this paradox built into it, but in love, I praise you through yourself in distress and in love, in union with all creatures. Yeah, so this in love, I praise you through yourself.

Jim Finley: Yeah, so it goes like this. Let's say before creation, there's just God. And so it's through you in a self donating act, giving yourself to me as the reality of myself and my nothingness without you, that you're presencing yourself as the gift of my presence. So really it's through your self donating creative act, presencing yourself as my presence. I praise you through yourself and that... It's through you giving yourself to me unexplainably in my distress that I recognize you in my distress. Because it's all you. Because without you there's nothing. So that's the subtlety of it.

Kirsten Oates: It's another theme of these mystics that it's all on God's terms. The ego can't make it happen but it's God.

Jim Finley: Exactly. And then she says, and that's true of all creatures, that it's you in the self donating act presencing yourself as the presence of the ocean, of the mountains, of birds and trees. And it's all you as the reality of all the earth and it's nothingness without you. And that's the mystical, that's the spiritual worldview of it. Cosmology, kind of a contemplative cosmology, the divinity of the material world of all things.

Kirsten Oates: And then she rounds it out with another core teaching that you've been giving us about longing. And she uses the word yearn. I yearn to do this above all things, but it's like the path. She opens up the path for us of longing.

Jim Finley: Yes. And another piece too. And this will come up later on in the same section too. And so now that I see this, I yearn to do this constantly. That as I yearn with your help to see you giving yourself to me as me. Am I distressed? Giving yourself to me as a high, high joy beyond the joys of my joy, giving yourself to me like this and I yearn to do this. I long for this constancy of this communal state.

Kirsten Oates: In love and distress.

Jim Finley: In love... In both. So even though love and distress is the wave, rise and the fall, of distress and joy, that the constancy of this love permeates the joy and permeates the distress unwaveringly. See, it's the constancy of God sustaining us in our wavering ways of this earth. That's the thing.

Kirsten Oates: I think you said in your talk that she's so intuitively dense. I can't see why you said that, Jim. So we're only into the first couple of sentences.

Jim Finley: I mean seriously, look how literary she is. She packs every word is such intuitive precision. It's just the poetic preciseness. And yet when you unpack it, you can... Anyways, it's just brilliant. She's so gifted in this way.

Kirsten Oates: Another thing that really stood out for me when we read it together is how God... She outlines seven things about God and then God mirrors back to her the same seven things. And it reminded me about when you learn about how to be a good listener and one of the best ways to listen well is to repeat back what people say to you, to mirror them back and then they feel heard and seen. And so there's something beautiful about this mirroring in this piece.

Jim Finley: There really is. So in therapy, this idea of empathy. So when you say it, and then if

I can repeat it back, I'm bearing witnessed that I heard you, that you're not alone because in fact you said it doesn't mean I heard it. In order to say it back, I have to listen. And so this is his back and forth, this reciprocity between ourself and God. I think I referred to Thomas Merton in the spiritual order to understand is to realize that we're infinitely understood. And so our understanding of the understood and the understood, there's always that kind of interior oneness, the communion.

Kirsten Oates: And so Jim, I thought maybe we could read those seven lines with the mirroring of each and then take a pause and maybe you reflect a little bit on each one.

Jim Finley: Yeah, we'll do each one at a time.

Kirsten Oates: Okay. Yeah, that sounds good.

Jim Finley: Okay, good.

Kirsten Oates: Okay. So I'll start. It's Mechthild first thing God mirroring back. Lord, you are the sun for all eyes.

Jim Finley: You are a light to my eyes. An infinite self donating creative act. The infinite love of God is creating the sun. Then the reality of God is the sun for all eyes. And this is why St. Francis of Assisi, brother sun and sister moon. See the brothers sun and sister moon. So Lord is the sun for all eyes? Because the sun is the incarnate presence of the love creating and giving itself as the light of the sun in and as. And I say in and as because to say as is to bear witness to the divinity of the sun, I say in to preserve the distinction because the sun is nothing without God. So that's the subtlety in all of this.

And then God says to her, to us, you are the light to my eyes. I said in the talk that when a small child walks into the room, the parents light up inside. And so likewise, when God sees us endlessly, God lights up inside, that we're the light of God's eyes just as God is the light of our eyes. And it's another one of the visual dimensions of this love communion of Mechthild, God and really through Mechthild was in God. She guides us to realize this is true of us.

Kirsten Oates: I love the way she talks about the universal and then God talks about the particular of her.

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: So she says you are the sun for all eyes, recognizing this universal oneness. And then God gives her the gift of saying, but I see you individually.

Jim Finley: That's right. So it's universal in that it's the overflowing a God-given godly nature, the totality of all that is. But each of us is the otherly unique portal to the totality. Because if it's not us as the portal, then it's kind of theoretical like a statement of this general. But it's this universality intimately realized through the awakening of our own heart. See to God in this oneness.

Kirsten Oates: So Jim, let's read the next two together and I'll start. You are the delight of all ears.

Jim Finley: You are a lyre to my ears.

Kirsten Oates: You are the voice of all words.

Jim Finley: You are a voice for my words. I want to say too, just this morning I looked up lyre on Google and it demonstrates people playing the lyre as a very simple string medieval instrument. And so it's like a stringed instrument of this music, this divine music.

Kirsten Oates: Beautiful. And in the talk you gave, you shared something very tender about when you tried to listen or watch the video of your ceremony and when you heard Maureen's voice, how challenging that was.

Jim Finley: That is. And it just struck me how... I mean it's visually too. I think I'm more used to seeing pictures of her because around I'm used to it. But there's something about the voice of the beloved. When you hear their voice, it's so inimitable. It's about the presence is in the voice. You say that you are the delight of all ears. But really when she was alive, I delighted in her voice. So really God is the infinity of the delight that I felt in hearing her voice. Her voice incarnated God because she's God's beloved.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, wow.

Jim Finley: And God was being given to me through in and as her, speaking to me.

Kirsten Oates: That made me think of how most people, I would say me included, it is when you hear yourself on a recording, how most people kind of don't like the sound of their own voice. And so just made me think how harsh we are with parts of ourselves. And it's hard we're not always open to this delight in our own voice.

Jim Finley: It's true. And there's another dimension to this too. And I remember the first time I heard a recording of myself, there's that... Because inside our head when it echoes, it doesn't sound like that. We have to get used to that. That's what people hear. But there's another way of looking at it too, and I'll go back to Maureen, is that to hear someone's voice isn't just to hear the sounds that they're making when they talk, to hear their voice is to hear their soulful and everything that they're saying. You hear their voice, that is you hear their presence manifesting itself in and as their self-disclosing words. And that's to hear the voice of the beloved. And that's how God hears us. That's how we hear God speaking to us in this love voice of oneness.

Again, if God is the creator of all things, creator of us. And so God is also in the self donating act, is the creator of our voice. And so you are the delight of all ears. It's you, because the light and the things that we hear that delight us. And you're the voice of all words. All the words that I speak. God is the voice of all the words that I say because without God creating me in a self donating act to say this, then I'd open my mouth and nothing would come out, which is the divinity of my words.

And so then when God says back to us, you're the lyre to my ears, that is just musical thing that brings me... This music. Every time you talk its music to me just hearing your voice and

you are a voice for my words. And by the way, so the mystic, when she's writing this book, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, her words are a voice for God's words. That's how the book started remember. Who's the author of this book? And he says, it's me. God says it's me. Am I powerless not to speak? And so really God is then speaking through her, writing this out. But the same thing is true of her when she writes is the same thing is true of us when we speak. And this is true, I think also it's especially true of us when our words are words of love or they're words of mercy, they're words of kindness, the words of reassurance.

You can see that God is the voice and our words are reassurance, but not all our words are words of love and kindness. So the voice, it's still the gift of God, but the words we're saying have gone astray. And this is why we need to be aware when we've used words that are hurtful like repentance. In Buddhism this would be like right speech. It's a speech that embodies liberation. And so it's a speech that embodies love is the voice that God's speaking through us in our voice. And sometimes when our words are not that way, we need to understand where that comes from to repent of that, to be more consistently truthful and loving in the words that we say to others and to ourself.

Kirsten Oates: Knowing that God still loves us through and through and through.

Jim Finley: Yeah, that's right, even though our words are misguided, God's ongoing word to us speaking through our voice is never misguided, but we kind of slid off the track. So you need to get back by reinstating our words in alignment with love and with truth and so on.

Kirsten Oates: Speaking more from that exiled state.

Jim Finley: That's right. And by the way, and also the reason we drift off the road is that we are in an exiled state. And so the point is, the exiled state is our fragility and God's infinite mercy on us in our fragility, but every time we recognize that we're to repent and come back to the path and every time we drift away to learn from it. To mean we're consistently grounded in this love. So when we speak, we speak with that love constancy or truth constancy.

Kirsten Oates: In that example, the recognition is such a gift because you can repent internally, but also you can recognize if you've caused harm externally to be able to...

Jim Finley: I'll say something else too. I think in an intimate love relationship between a parent and a child. Let's say we're in an intimate love relationship and the other did something that was hurtful and they know they did something hurtful and they come to you and say, I'm so sorry, I had no right to talk to you that way. You can feel in the sincerity of their voice, the truth of it. And it's very healing to hear that tone, the call note where it rings the truth of love. You can hear that.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, that's so helpful. Okay, so we're onto the fourth line. You are the force behind all piety.

Jim Finley: You are a projection of my piety.

Kirsten Oates: And I'm quite curious about this word piety because it's not a word I use. It's not a word I've heard very often.

Jim Finley: Yeah. Pious has a negative connotation for us like pious, like syrupy or pious and all that.

But piety, I think a truer word for it would be devotional sincerity. It's like you mean it with all your heart. It's your devotional sincerity is this piety. So when God says that you are... Instead of the force behind... When she tells God you are the force behind all piety is saying that you're the energizing reality behind all my piety.

Kirsten Oates: All my devotional sincerity.

Jim Finley: All my devotional sincerity is really your devotional sincerity toward... This is what God's going to tell her too. He's going to say this to her. So again, you see this reciprocity of devotional sincerity to devote. Thomas Merton saying, with God, a little sincerity goes a long, long way because they say God's the infinity of sincerity. When you read the gospels too, when Jesus speaks, it's always the truth of the sincerity of love talking to us.

Kirsten Oates: And like the whole beings behind it.

Jim Finley: That's right. And although the translation here is your projection of my piety, I think it's true to say you are the incarnation of my piety. You're incarnating... Your devotional sincerity incarnates my devotional sincerity towards you as my beloved, that we're bonded together this way.

Kirsten Oates: Next one, you are the teaching of all wisdom.

Jim Finley: You are an honor to my piety. Let's look at this too. So let's say when we read the words of scripture... When I was in the monastery chanting the Psalms, it means you're literally chanting God's words, when you chant the psalms. When we read the scripture out loud, we're saying God's own words with our lips. And so you are the teaching of all wisdom and what it's saying that wherever there's wisdom...

One of the early fathers of the church, I think it's St. Justin Martyr, he says that if God is wisdom and Socrates is wise, you have St. Socrates. Wherever you have wisdom, you have God. And so you are the teaching of all wisdom. And so all wisdom, you are the reality of everything wise. When I hear something wise, it's you. It's this presence of you and the reverberations of every word of wisdom, every expression of wisdom like this. And then he says, you're an honor to my piety because wisdom is spoken with devotional sincerity. So you can't speak devotional sincerity and be cynical. You can't be flippant. You can't be dualistic. There has to be a heartfelt sincerity with our whole being when we speak because it means we're speaking and sharing ourself, our sincerity.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, that's quite powerful. So that God's the energy behind the devotional sincerity and that can lead to speech that is wise.

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. So God's the energy behind devotional sincerity is really saying that God is the reality of all sincerity, embodied and reverberating in and as our sincerity. And that's how she sees this intimate communion going on constantly in everything. And when we turn to her for guidance, she guides us and she helps us to see that and ask God for the grace of learning to more consistently see that. Because when we hear it can ring poetically true, even though it's not the way we tend to walk around hearing things. And so she invites us to ask for the grace of constancy in that.

Kirsten Oates: And it's the kind of wisdom that gives us a sense of meaning and place and the sense of wholeness.

Jim Finley: That's what I think the gospels are this way. All the scripture, when you read her, it's like these mystics, it's like everything they say counts. They're not making it up. They didn't get it out of a book somewhere. And it's that constancy of the intimacy of the depth of God reverberating in their words. So when we read it or even read it out loud to ourself, we realize the presence of their words were in the presence of God speaking to us through their words. That's the teacher being the teacher, I guess.

Kirsten Oates: Okay, next one. You are the life of all that lives.

Jim Finley: You are a life living in me. That's good. So you are the life of all that lives. So it's your infinite life. I said in the talk when Jesus said, I came to you might have life and have it more abundantly. The life he spoke of is the life that is at once God's in our own. Because in the generosity of God, God gives us God's own life as our life, in our nothingness without God. So you are the life of all life. And then God says, yes, you are life living in me, that in God we live and move and have our being. We're living our life in the vast interiority of God. So God says, your life living in me because of the entirety of myself, I see you. Because you can't be outside of God because God has no boundaries. There's only the infinite withness with God. And that's how we're living our life. So God's letting us know that. Everything's in God.

Kirsten Oates: And the final one is you are the ordering of all that is.

Jim Finley: God says then to her, to us, you are a praise in my being.

Kirsten Oates: This one's interesting to me because I guess she's saying that even amidst what can feel like quite a chaotic world, there's an ordering and that God is the ordering of things.

Jim Finley: Yes. My sense is this, you know there is chaos in this world. You know the saying, if you want to make God laugh, tell her your plans for the day because everything goes awry. So there is chaos, meaning the unexpected. That's true. But when you really look at it, there's an all pervasive order. For example, the way each day yields to the night and each night yields to the day, there's an order of the sun and the stars moving across the sky. There's the order at the beach of the waves hitting on the beach. There's the order every time we exhale followed by the inhale, inhale is followed by the exhale. One heartbeat follows another. Standing up and sitting down. So these primordial rhythms have a bottom pervasive kind of divinely given order that's there. And so through prayer, through meditation, through love, we learn to move with the rhythms of that order. It transcends and permeates the chaos.

There is chaos, but the order that permeates the chaos itself, and that's why we need to pause and stay grounded because when we speak out of reactivity or fear, then it's part of the chaos. But we can slow down enough, get re-grounded and get our bearings, we get our bearings in the chaos and find a deeper grounding place in the chaos out of which to speak like this, and a good understanding of being healed from trauma. Because in trauma we're carried up by the momentum of the internalized chaos. But the healing is we find our way back to the underlying groundedness that sustained us in the chaos [inaudible] too. So I think that's some of the connotations of that.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, that's helpful. If we're lucky, we will find our way back.

Jim Finley: Yes. And I think too, if we're lucky and with God's grace, we always do. If not on this side of death, on the other side of death because some people don't find their way back. By human standards they don't. But we have to trust that God's unexplainably one with them and as they pass to the veil of death ultimately that we're all woven back into this order, which is the order of love. Turning to the Mystics will continue in a moment.

Kirsten Oates: In this next section where Mechthild speaks to God again, I wanted to ask you, I was curious about this. You have painted me in your humanity and it made me think about the world is a huge canvas and God's kind of painting us all into being in a way and that we're just part of that artistic endeavor in our humanity.

Jim Finley: Yes. Here's another way to see it too for her, along the lines of you're saying, see our faith in... See in the beginning was the word, the word is with God, and the word was God. The opening lines of John's gospel. In the beginning was the word. The word was with God, and the word was God. And all things were made through him. And without him has been made nothing that has been made. And the word became flesh. So the second person of the Trinity, the Logos, the second person became flesh is humanity. So in Christ, a hypostatic union is that Christ on the one hand reveals God to us because God is... And the word was God and is God. So he is that once God revealed through Christ of God's love for us in our brokenness, because when love touches suffering, it turns the suffering into mercy, turns the love into mercy. And this is the mercy of the good news. But also Jesus is truly human. He reveals our humanity to us. So by studying the life of Jesus, he reveals us to ourself.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, I see.

Jim Finley: As the human being. I don't always live up to it, this is true. But the whole message of the gospel, although I don't always live up to it, you're invincibly one with me in my humanity, invited me to see it, to repent, to learn from my brokenness through your mercy. And so really we're being painted that Christ reveals us to ourself and the truth of our humanity. Because all the miracle stories are about this. Because when we fall, we tend to think what's wrong with us. Like a walking mistake, nothing. But if we realize that no matter how wayward we might become, the gift of our humanity given to us by God and revealed to us in Christ remains our humanity, no matter how much we stray from it, it never strays from us. And through repentance, through grace and prayer, we're being reinstated in the conscious experience of the invincible humanity of ourself that miss the gist of it, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Okay, that's helpful. So that Jesus' life gives us the color of humanity, gives us the...

Jim Finley: Another way to say it too, I think, like a visual image. If you think of Jesus and you come to Jesus like a visual meditation. And you come to Jesus and you let Jesus know what it is that's so troubling to you about something you did or something you failed to do or how confused you are, and Jesus is... You're saying earlier about listening, Jesus is infinitely listening and Jesus infinitely understands everything you're saying more than you do. And when you're finally done, what's Jesus saying? And so that's the saving word. So Jesus says, the peace I give you, not as the world gives because the peace that the world gives is the peace that's conducive to conditions to peace. So when everything is peaceful, I'm peaceful. But when

things aren't peaceful, I'm not peaceful. But he said, the peace I give you is an all pervasive peace. The unwavering that sustains you when conditions not conducive to peace are upon you, that there is this peace.

Kirsten Oates: And you can see Mechthild understands that side of things too because her next line, you have buried me in your side, in your hands and feet.

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: She's in the crucifixion as well as the...

Jim Finley: I'm going to share in the next talk, and I think it's book five, she goes on and on and on about her... She was named superior of this congregation of the Beguine women. And she talks about the stress of leadership, these uncooperative members of the Beguine community. She says, they're driving me crazy. She has this honest talk with God. So she's struggling with leadership and she talks to priests and bishops about staying humble in your leadership. So she was immersed. And also she had to worry about being condemned by the church because she was a woman writing this way. So it was always the fear of condemnation. It was struggles. And so she sowed this love that she speaks of, was a love that was woven in to the troublesome challenges of the day. And she went through it and she knew this love was sustaining her through the challenges. And just like us, that stains us through our challenges.

Kirsten Oates: So I love this next bit where she says she wants to pull balsam on God, and God says, well, where will you find it? And she says, I was going to tear the heart of my soul in two and intended to put you in it. And it's like her very passionate response to... Well, what she was talking about beforehand was the crucifixion being buried. You buried me in your side and your hands and feet.

Jim Finley: Yes. I want to go back for just a minute to refine the... I want to loop back then weave it into what you just said. So when she says, you buried me in your side and in your hands and in your feet, it means that my struggles in my daily life are the very struggles you took upon yourself on the mystery of the cross. She's like Julian of Norwich. So your hands and your feet and your heart being pierced like this. So in a way you let me know I'm not alone in my suffering because you join me in my suffering, to let me know that you're one with me in my suffering like this. And so because she sees Jesus suffering on the cross out of love for us, I want to have this balm to soothe your pain. And then God says, oh, one dear to my heart, where shall you find the balm?

Where do you expect some? Where are you going to go to find what would soothe me suffering on the cross out of love for you? Where are you going to get it? So she says, in the zeal of her enthusiasm, I'll tear my heart open and rip it out. It's a zeal of herself as the lover of God. And then the touching words are, you could never give me a more soothing balsam than to let me unceasingly lie weightlessly in your soul. That is, I am lying weightlessly in your soul, but I want you to let me lie there because I'm already there. And it's weightless because it's me without a should, without demand or anything to measure up to, anything to achieve. It's just boundaryless and infinitely free in the peace. And another way we might see it is God's letting her know, I'm not even interested in your spirituality, but I'm interested infinitely in you. And all thy want is to let you rest in my oneness with you, which is already

one with you, but surrender to it. And that's my balm. I say, that's kind of the contemplative communion.

Kirsten Oates: And this is the mystery of our own ability to ascend and the ways we don't ascend, ascend to that beautiful weightless experience in our souls.

Jim Finley: And the example I gave too, which for some reason speaks to me is imagine you're in the middle of the night alone in the dark and you're dying and you know that you're dying, and you turn and see the flowers on the window sill silhouetted in the moonlight. They seem to know all about it. It's like we fear it so, because it's so primordially vast and transparent and it's there all the time. And that's God resting weightlessly in our soul, I think. And we come to moments like that where we're silenced by the beauty of her words or the beauty of... And you can feel this silent... This wordless resting without name or thing. It's a foretaste of heaven really, but the ego panics because it's not achieving anything. The ego...

Kirsten Oates: Would rather rip it soul apart.

Jim Finley: Yeah, rip it apart and drum rolls and trumpets blaring. I'm going to come in to love you. But here it's disarming because it's so already unexplainably precious and simple and simply given to us is love like this.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, I love that. I love that little scene in the... And then Jim, just help us understand this last line of that section where she says, Lord, if you were to take me home with you, I would be your physician forever.

Jim Finley: So what she does is she reverses because Jesus is the divine physician that heals the wound of fear through this mercy of God that gives itself to us as the wounded beloved that we are. And so here you see God, which is the mystery of the cross, grieving for us, and suffering one with us in the mystery of love. And so she reverses it, says since you've freely chosen to be so in love with me, you don't know if you could handle being God without me, which is God's powerlessness to be anything less than infinitely in love with us, take me home with you and I'll be your physician forever. So there's another mystical interplay where the mutuality of the loving communion. And then she goes into this final piece.

Kirsten Oates: So she's offered to be God's physician. And then God responds in this final section. And Jim, could we just go through that God's response to that one line at a time?

Jim Finley: Yes, I'll say it and I'll comment, say it and comment. And God says, yes, I want that. I'd love you to be my physician forever and I'm taking you home with me too. So I am looking forward. And by the way, you already are my physician because you're already being so lovingly open to me. And you're healing me of the distress that I would feel and not having you be infinitely one with me as I'm infinitely one with you. So it's already occurring. You're already healing me. But still I want that, but still my solicitude bid you wait. And my solicitude, that is my concern for you.

Bid you to wait. So I quoted TS Elliot or quartets to hope too soon is to hope for the wrong thing. That is, you haven't loved enough and you haven't been loved enough in order to enter into this love is already unexplainably yours. So I want you to wait to be more time leaning into this sincerity, am my precious in your brokenness, my strength, in your weakness. These

rhythms that will... Because to live on my terms means that you're being unraveled by my love and you're not unraveled enough. You still have a toehold in your own agenda and you're still trying to pull it off and make it work and so on. So my solicitude says, you're not finished yet, being undone by love, there's nothing left but love.

My love bid you labor. But it's my love to bid you to labor in love. And it's the labor of giving yourself in love to me, giving myself to you in love. It's that labor. And it's also, I would think it's the labor in us that doesn't know how to do that yet. But also it's the labor then of accepting we don't need to know how to do it yet, we just keep giving ourselves to God without knowing how to do it yet. And when we accept it, God gives us infinite love to us and our inability to know how to do it. It's that paradoxical labor of giving up of means and ends. My patience bid you keep silent.

I'll say something out of therapy and trauma. Sometimes we can be in the midst of a long-term struggle to be liberated from a hurtful thing. Either this is happening to us or a hurtful pattern we can't get past and we can be inclined to go on and on and on complaining about it or going on and on and on about we don't think we'll ever get past it. Go on and on and on. But what sometimes happens really, it all winds down by itself. You get exhausted in the complaint. And in therapy... This happens in love relationships too. It just winds down into a silence because you're spent with nothing to say like this. And it's that silence, this pregnant with the upwelling of this tender love that sustaining you in the midst of the unresolved thing. And I think you're silent because you're silenced by it. That somehow in the midst of the saga, you're being unexplainably sustained in the midst of the unresolved. But unless we're silent, we're not attentive enough to listen to this love voice that's sustaining us of the unresolved thing, and it's transforming our character.

Kirsten Oates: Those are the times when sometimes the silent tears flow. You don't know where they came from and they just flow silently down your cheeks.

Jim Finley: Exactly. And so a gift of tears, so then the body is speaking, speaking without words.

Kirsten Oates: Out of this silence.

Jim Finley: That's right. And you can also sense too, I think there's a kind of a silence where you can pick up in a person. It's the silence of poised attentiveness. You can tell the person's not daydreaming or drifting off because... So just like there are words that break the silence, they disrupt it. There are also words that embody the silence, but they're words that come out of the silence. And so we have to be silenced long enough so when we do speak, it'll be the word that embodies the silence. Like I'm sorry or thank you or I didn't know or like that, the true word from the heart.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Gives encouragement for the contemplative practices we all engage in, whatever they might be, but they're generally in silence, even if it's walking or gardening or something like that. It's the silence that brings through the...

Jim Finley: It's really true. Yeah, it's really, really true. In Buddhism this would be right speech. It's a speech that comes out of this clarity or this awareness. My concern, did you suffer poverty? And my sense is this, blessed are the poor in spirit. And I want you to suffer poverty until you experience the depths of your absolute powerlessness without me. You didn't bring

yourself into existence. You don't have the power to keep yourself in existence. To be at the deathbed of a dying loved one is tangibly cure. A next breath belongs more to God than to us unless we be presumptuous. The next heartbeat becomes more from God than from us. So the more that we're able then to suffer, suffer meaning here to undergo, to undergo the absolute poverty. Then my concern for you is being fulfilled because in the acceptance of the poverty is the welling up of my presence, presencing itself to you is infinitely precious in your poverty, which is love.

Kirsten Oates: So in a way, the suffering of the poverty is really the ego suffering but coming into a place of blessing or grace. Love.

Jim Finley: Another thing I think this too is that famous line in Rilke, we'll be looking at him later in the series where the poet is mystic. And in letters to a young poet where this young poet sends him his poems. He says, tell me if my poems are any good. And Rilke says, you're looking outward, that you must stop doing. You must ask yourself in the stillest hour of your darkest night, must I write poetry? If the answer is a clear and simple yes, you must build every moment of your life, even its most unassuming hour in infidelity to that.

And so really the true poet or the true artist or the musician, they're not someone that just fabricates it and dashes it off. They're someone who patiently waits like actively waiting and leaning into the waiting, waiting for the outflow. What they can't make happen, because if they made it happen, it'll have the ring of ego. But when the beauty shines through, it channeled itself through them. And I think these are the words of lovers and poets and children like this. And this has to do with this poverty, this love channeling itself through our nothingness without God. I think it's like that.

My dishonor bid you bear up. And I think this is the mystery of the cross. My dishonor that I went through, out of love for you. Bear up. I know it's hard and bear up because I bore it for you. So you bear up and learn to trust in me and learn to draw strength in me and learn to be resourceful in finding the resources to find the grounding place that you're looking for. Don't give up. Don't be impatient. Because it builds character.

Kirsten Oates: Do you think this is also a little bit along the lines of Jesus saying, follow me?

Jim Finley: It is.

Kirsten Oates: There's a way we have to bear up to follow Jesus on the path he traveled.

Jim Finley: Exactly. And that's why I say too... Where he says... That image that I gave to where they pierced his heart with the lance after he died, bled water float out like the birth of a child. Then I say, then there was no more Jesus left in Jesus. And when there was no more Jesus left in Jesus, the only Jesus that was ever really there shines throughout the whole world. So Jesus says, come follow me. Sounds like a good idea until you see where he is taking us. So it's like learning to die of love at the hands of love, until there's nothing left of us but love. When there's nothing left above love, the only me, the only you that was ever really there shines bright because infinite love is creating us in the image and likeness of love. And so it's the substantiality of love.

Everything else is smoke and mirrors passing away. We're learning to find our way to that

love. And you can tell she's found it. And when we sit with her, she's mentoring us because if we didn't resonate with the beauty of her words, we wouldn't understand it. But something we can't figure it out or maybe say it back, but something in us knows that it's beautiful. And it's beautiful because it's true and we only recognize what's already true within us. So she's helping us understand ourselves, that with her guidance it can get stronger and more consistent like this.

My sufficiency bid you to refrain from complaint. And it's kind of a nuance of what was said the previous one. Because my sufficiency bid you to reframe complaint. Don't complain because my sufficiency will sustain you and it will sustain you even if you don't make it. My sufficiency will sustain you. You'll be unexplainably sustained because I'm infinitely sufficient like this. Because when you're complaining, you're acting as if somehow I'm going to be giving you your resources on your terms to get past it. And that's the mystery of however that goes. But regardless of how it goes with you being sufficient or not sufficient, my sufficiency is always with you. Don't complain. I'm sustaining you. And even if you don't make it, I'm sustaining you.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. That's what it feels like to me when you talk about the foretaste of heaven so that when we pass over my sufficiency bids you refrain. No one's going to complain on the other side.

Jim Finley: Yeah, they don't.

Kirsten Oates: Because the sufficiency, they'll be insufficiency. They'll be feeling the sufficiency of...

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. Merton said in one of his talks to the monks, he said, you know the word martyr means witness, but the martyr doesn't give up on life. The martyr gives up on the illusion of having life. And in giving up on the illusion of having life, they bear witness. And that's what I think it also means when Jesus rose from the dead, he rose with his wounds. And so it's the internality of the wounds. So not only shall time be no more, but the suffering shall be no more. But the wounds that we bore are eternal but glorified and transfigured in love. And what she's saying now in subtle mystical dimensions that can even start to happen now. Even though my wounds are ongoing, I'm somehow free from the tyranny of the woundedness over me because the love that sustains me in my woundedness, that's the subtle thing I think.

My victory bid you pursue to the end all virtues. And remember we said the previous dialogue together, virtues here is virtuous strength. So my victory bid you pursuit to the end all virtues, which is the strengths given to you through love, is the virtue. My goal bid you endure many things because my goal for you is me. That's where he says earlier, God says to her that's a petty complaint, because all these things are passing away and you that identifies with these things is passing away. But you that subsisted me as a beloved never passes away. So my goal is for you to endure many things because all these things are ephemeral and time and passing away along with the self that identifies with them.

And my goal... In other words, just wait long enough. All this will be taken care of. You know why? Because you'll be dead and you'll be forever on my terms, not your terms. And what you're learning through mystical love. Even though you're still in time on this earth, you can learn to live on my terms. And so it's a foretaste of your eternal destiny through

love, which is the teaching of all the mystics really, the epistemology of realized eschatology. Epistemology is the art of knowledge. So the knowledge realizes... And eschatology is the final victory of God over all suffering and death. Realize eschatology is the victory is already here but hidden. But through love, it shines out through things.

Kirsten Oates: Which isn't to say, Jim, that we belittle or can ignore our finite circumstances. It's the opposite in a way that we live more fully into them knowing that they don't have the power over us that makes us want to step back from them or be afraid of them.

Jim Finley: Yes, that's true in this sense, I think. Sometimes a temptation with mystical union, it's beyond the suffering of this world. So if only I become a mystic and beyond the suffering of this world, but it's actually the opposite. It actually radicalizes. This is the mystery of the incarnation. It radicalizes our oneness with our day by day ordinary earthly bodily self and relationship with others as incarnate infinity. For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten son. And so it really then heightens our sensitivity to our own suffering and what we can do to lighten it. And the piece not dependent on whether we can lighten it or not. What can I do to be more sensitive to your suffering in response to... Inner peace is not dependent on my ability to lighten it. And that's what I think is the relationship between mystical union and the corporal works of mercy or mystical union and social justice. It's this heightened response like this.

Kirsten Oates: Well bring us home, Jim, last line.

Jim Finley: Okay. For this, you shall have glory when I remove your heavy burden. And this God's saying is me. In other words, it's the infinity of me, beloved, I'm already yours. I'm already yours for this eternal union. And I'll lift your heavy burden. And I sense it in some sense, the heavy burden will be lifted in the hour of our death. I lay my burden down. But there's another meaning I think for her, when I remove your heavy burden and the heavy burden is attributing authority to the circumstances. To have the authority to say who you are and what's happening to you. That's the heavy burden. But when you say that there's no substantiality to the conditions because I transcend, I'm unexplainably permeating the conditions forever. And the more you can interiorly be quickened to realize that, you're free from the heavy burden in the midst of the burden. That's my sense of it.

Kirsten Oates: Beautiful. Well, thank you for your wonderful talk on this section. And then today's just been a lot of joy to go through it together and listen to the words again. And so thank you so much. Beautiful. And I think I just really love the flow of the love language, but the sense of both confidence and humility. It's nice to see the interplay of those two things from Mechthild.

Jim Finley: I was stuck once Richard Rohr was giving a talk and he says, you know when you hear these mystics talk, one with such confidence, they speak of infinity, with confidence. He said, but it's mingled with deep humility. So you get the feeling here, this is very bold. You know what I mean? This is out there. But with a kind of quiet confidence is so disarmingly humble. And that's how she mentors us for us to foster that same sensitivity in us. Yeah, very beautiful.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Well, thanks again, Jim, and look forward to the next one.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: And a big thanks to Corey who's always with us, supporting us, and thank you for being here with us, Corey. 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.