

Turning
to the
Mystics



The Way of a Pilgrim

Turning to The Way of a Pilgrim
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 nine of Turning to the Mystics. I'm here with Jim and we're so excited to be launching a new season and a new year of this podcast. We're so grateful to all our wonderful community of listeners. Jim, why don't you get us started. Tell us where we're headed this season.

Jim Finley: First of all, yes, it is good to start a new season and just a kind of ongoing grace, this time we have together, Turning to the Mystics. In this season, it's going to be more of the same. I'm going to speak from my heart, drawing from text, the mystics that have deeply affected me and drawing from it in a personal, poetic way that I hope will arch over and touch people, touch the listeners in their own search for God. But also in a secondary sense, we're beginning a new phase here in the reflections and that up until now all the mystics we focused on have been mystics in my own Roman Catholic tradition.

I grew up as Catholic and I went to this Catholic monastery, Merton Catholic Monastery, Thomas Merton, and it was him who introduced me to John of the Cross and Theresa and The Cloud of Unknowing down through the ages in this way. But also in the monastery, it was through Merton that I was introduced to the notion that the Christian contemplative, mystical heritage, to know that every religion has its own mystical, contemplative heritage, so that in all the world religions you have an exoteric and an esoteric aspect. The exoteric is specifically cultural, political, historical, creedal differences in customs and rituals and texts and the structure, you can look at each religion. But the lifeblood of the religion is really this deepening of this surrendering ourselves over to this infinite love, this infinite presence, this infinite mystery of this.

We're going to be turning then to these mystics and these different traditions that have affected me, a text, so we'll be looking at the Jewish mystical tradition, the Muslim mystical tradition, the Sufis, the Daoist mystical path, the Hindu, and the Buddhist path, this way. I also want to look at some poets, mystical poets, and also I want to look at some philosophers, mystical philosophers. We're going to be branching out in terms of the context, but I'm not going to get sidetracked into complications about history and theologies and so on.

The sense I make of it is this. Remember when we were doing The Cloud of Unknowing? We talked about these phases, he says, of engagement in the Christian life. There's the common life where just serves certain social needs and so on. There's a special way of the Christian life, a devotional sincerity or discipleship in God's presence in your life is intimately real and substantial to you about your life. Then in the midst of living the special life, you can experience the grace of a quickening, like a taste of oneness. The oneness can awaken the path to abide in the one as that you tasted, a oneness with God beyond Lexio, beyond reflection, beyond words, beyond concepts.

That becomes such an intimate kind of necessity of your heart because of the singular way of life, which is really a foreshadowing of eternal life. It's already the beginning of heaven,

lives still in time, but beyond time and so on. Those same gradations are present in all the world religions. All the world religions are people living just the common day-by-day cultural life as a Buddhist or a Jew or a Muslim, whatever. There are those who are sincere in their devotional life of experiencing the divine in their life within that tradition. There are those who are interiorly quickened with the taste of oneness in the tradition, and there are those then who seek to yield and be transformed in that divinization and their nothingness without God. Then there are those who are called to be teachers who have been so awakened to offer guidance to those who are awakened.

What we're going to be doing is moving across those mystic teachers in each one, and I want to limit myself to just the few texts that have personally touched me so we don't get sidetracked into exoteric historical things and stay with this so we can see the universality of this mystical union that's ribboned through all the religions really this way. That's the tone.

With that said, then in the light of that, in this session, we're going to start with a text called *The Way of a Pilgrim*. The interesting thing about *The Way of a Pilgrim* is that it is Christian, it's Catholic, but it's not Roman Catholic. Later Kirsten will be dialoguing about clarifying this. This is the Eastern Orthodox Catholic traditions not in union with Rome. We're going to look at it as a mystical text leading us into the Jesus prayer and prayer of the heart and so on. Then the next season we're going to continue then by looking T.S. Elliot *Four Quartets* who was Anglican. I'll still be doing Catholic mystics, Roysbruck, a number of them going through, but I'll be weaving in these non-Catholic, non-Christian teachers. It'll give more breadth to the singularity of these unitive realizations to see how it might enrich our own life because sharing with you the paths have enriched my life. That's kind of where we are right now.

Kirsten Oates: Mm, that's really exciting, Jim. Just for people who are new to the podcast, *The Cloud of Unknowing* you mentioned was covered in season five, so if people wanted to go back and listen to that, that was a beautiful season and that was helpful to kind of ground these traditions in that way, that they all have this mystical component within them.

Jim Finley: Yeah, I want to add something too where there's something similar about this text we're going to be looking at, *The Way of a Pilgrim* and two ways it's very similar to *The Cloud of Unknowing*. The first, and in both texts, the author's anonymous, we don't know who the author is. *The Way of a Pilgrim* you'll see is written as a personal narrative. It's like the pilgrim talking to us about his story and how he was awakened. But we don't know whether it was actually the pilgrim, we don't know the pilgrim's name if it was, or if actually it was a mystical teacher and the genre of a personal narrative was actually offering guidance. It's also like *The Cloud* and that both *The Pilgrim* and *The Cloud* lead to a way to practice contemplative prayer on the use of a word to pass beyond words, beyond thought, and so on.

Because you'll notice in these other mystics, they don't teach a specific way to pray. You're just praying and something starts to happen to you while you're praying. You start surrendering to what's happening to you, being led by God beyond words, beyond thoughts, and so on. But this is an anonymous author that leads to contemplative prayer as a way to enter into these more mystical phases of experiencing God's presence in our life.

Kirsten Oates: Mm, beautiful. Jim, the book is *The Way of a Pilgrim*, and when were you first introduced to it?

Jim Finley: When I was in the monastery, 1961 to 1967, Thomas Merton would give talk to the novices and the one-on-one and spiritual direction. He would base a lot of his talks on these different mystics. In spiritual direction, he guided me in how to read these mystics. *The Way of a Pilgrim* was one of the mystics that he spoke of, hesychasm, this Eastern Catholic tradition of mystical prayer. That's how I first discovered it.

Kirsten Oates: Hm, lovely. You said it's an anonymous author, but we have a bit of insight into when it was written because of things mentioned in the book.

Jim Finley: Yes. It's mid-19th century and different resources try to pin it down closer more and more, but it's mid-19th century in Russia, is where it starts.

Kirsten Oates: We know the author was Russian.

Jim Finley: It was Russian.

Kirsten Oates: Likely living in tsarist Russia.

Jim Finley: That's right in tsarist Russia. You'll see too, I want you to say this also, is that in my reflections, I'm only going to be exploring chapter one of *The Way a Pilgrim* because in chapter one, it lays on all the foundations for the mystical teachings. In the subsequent chapters, it keeps nuancing the different ways to look at this.

There's another work called *The Pilgrim Continues His Way* and he moves into the Ukraine and he continued and extends his travels this way. It's all lovely reading, but I think the first chapter allows us to kind of experiential poetic level to touch the essence of the teaching and how we can follow it in our own life.

Kirsten Oates: Just to reiterate, you'll just be going through chapter one and you're going to actually go through the entirety of chapter one, yeah.

Jim Finley: Also I think another thing I'm doing here too, always I guess but here specifically, is I'm kind of sharing with you how I read the mystics. I'm literally going to start with the first paragraph of chapter one. I'm going to read it and then I'm going to reflect out loud on what it evokes in me. As the listeners listen, it can help them to listen and see what it evokes in them. For each paragraph I'll be saying, "Although it's a personal narrative, like a story, he's actually drawing out a certain, a graced principle of transformation that's there." I'll be kind of walking through those.

I would also suggest also we could take all these mystics we've been doing so far and all of them and see how these principles are going to be marking out here. Each mystic in his or her own way bears witness to his or her own way of saying the same principle. You can see the underlying unity of mystical awakening down through the ages, through all the religions, through the different cultures and so on, the end scape of graced awakening.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, what I love about this book, it's a little different than the ones we've studied in the past in that it tells a story. It tells of this pilgrim and his longing for God and the path he takes to find God. Can you tell us a little bit more, Jim, what is it to be a pilgrim? Who is this kind of a person?

Jim Finley: I want to say something about, comment on what you just said too. Another way that this is similar in the ones we've looked at so far is Teresa of Avila, not in the interior castle, but it's called *A Life*. It's her mystical memoir. It's a personal story as a young girl, how she was first awakened, the stages of her awakening, and so on. In that way, it's similar to *The Pilgrim*, that's *A Life*. Another similarity would be St. Augustine, the *Confessions* of St. Augustine and how his own transformation, his own journey this way. Also more recently in Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, which led him as a young man to enter the monastery and changed his life.

The reason this is significant is that we experience this as our life. It's not a hobby or an item of curiosity. It's actually the way that you actually live your life. It's incarnate in your life. Thomas Merton once said in the monastery, he said, "Why have we come to this monastery?" He said, "We come here to live. That's why we come here."

When Jesus said, "I came that you might have life and have it more abundantly," the life he spoke of was the life that is at once God's and our own. How do we discover that one life lived out daily and our life, the givens of your life, the givens of my life, with all its sorrows, with all its joys, how is this incarnate in the mystery of life? I think that's another reason I like this text so much. It grounds it in, I guess, a lived experience of life.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, yes. Jim, can you help set more of the context for the book? So it was written in tsarist Russia in the mid-19th century, so it was a time when there was a lot of poverty and was prior to the revolution and the end of that era of the tsar era. There was a lot of poverty, a lot of people were unhappy, and this person is a pilgrim and it seems like it's a way of life to be a pilgrim.

Jim Finley: The tsarist Russia, so it's really under tsar, under an emperor in a deeply Catholic country. It was a religious culture, very religious culture. It's a very similar in the West, in the Roman Church from the 5th century on and the Middle Ages. Because what happened in Christianity for example, and it's similar to some other parallels here too, is that in Christianity, the first phase of Christianity was the age of the martyrs. What happened then when Constantine, the emperor, made Christianity the official religion of the state, the martyrdom ceased. What happened is you get the councils of the church, Council of Nicea, the councils of this Christian culture. But some people felt that Christianity had lost its radicality where Jesus said, "If you lose your life from my sake, you'll find it." They went into the desert, third, fourth century, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, to live out an interior martyrdom of a deep death to self.

One of the stories of the Desert Fathers, and this is Eastern Christianity before the split in Egypt, and one of the stories of these desert hermits is a monk comes to the abbot and says, "How can I save my soul?"

The abbot says, “Keep the Rule and love the brethren.”

He said, “I do that.”

The abbot stood up, stretched out his hands and his fingers be taken like 10 lamps of fire. He said, “Why not become all fire?” That’s the mystical part this way. The writings of those Desert Fathers reached the West in the 5th century. St. Benedict was living as a hermit and he read the Eastern Fathers. It inspired him in the founding of monasticism. Prior to pre-Benedictine monasticism in the West and also throughout the East, you had these pilgrims which were people on a holy journey seeking God. But they were on a journey literally also en via, on the way, traveling or seeking in this great pilgrimage. He was one of these pilgrims.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, because the society and the culture was quite religious where the pilgrim was, there was support for this kind of life, this kind of journey, so he was able to travel around and he would be given housing and food by people along the way.

Jim Finley: Yeah. It was so sense of the divine or transcendent dimension of reality to see monasteries and pilgrims and hermits and people. It was just woven into the texture of the culture. It doesn’t mean that everyone was like that, but it does mean the cultural milieu had this kind of religious atmospheric feeling to it where he fit right in with that historical setting.

Kirsten Oates: I see. He’s on a journey to find an answer to a question that arises for him in church one day.

Jim Finley: That’s right. He is what we’ll be looking at in detail. He’s living the special way of life, the devotional life. He’s in church and it’s 24th Sunday after Pentecost, which celebrates the birthday of the church, the descent of the Holy Spirit. But he’s there at the liturgy during his prayers like he would do every Sunday, and here’s a passage being read from the Thessalonians to pray always. That question, he said, “How’s that even possible?” This awakening from God comes in all different ways, in finding love and losing love, in sorrow, in death, in inspiration and service, in the solitude of the night. The quickening of our heart comes as it comes, and sometimes it comes as the urgency of a question you can’t answer. See how is it possible? He says, “How can I find somebody who can help me?” That’s what leads him to is mystically-awakened teacher, his starets.

Kirsten Oates: His starets. Yes, I hadn’t heard that name before, starets.

Jim Finley: Yes. Basically what a starets is is a monk in a monastery who gives spiritual guidance and it’s a mystically-quickened spiritual director, see? It’s a monk who’s a Christian, gives spiritual guidance, a director, but he offers guidance to this mystical, unitive way in this tradition, which is this way of hesychasm this inner silence of the heart. He’s providentially led to one of these starets. In the dialogues between the starets and the pilgrim is the essence of the teaching and it lays down the foundations of the practice of the Jesus prayer and it’s how to follow its interior dimensions. That’s really the essence of the whole thing really.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, when you said that it teaches us a method, the staret or the monk teaches the pilgrim the method, and we can kind of walk alongside and see what that teaching is and how it impacts the pilgrim, but are you suggesting we could also be trying that way also? We could follow the same instructions?

Jim Finley: This is another sensitive point though. I think it's important is really. See, what really happens, we'll see this too when we look at this, is he meets the starets, he said he's looking, and the starets ask him, "What kind of teaching are you looking for?"

St. Benedict says this in his Rule too in the 5th century. He says, "When someone comes to the gates of the monastery, don't let them in right away. Make them wait for a few days out in the street and let one of the senior monks go out and ask him, 'What are you looking for? What do you want?'" What he's listening for is that pilgrim tells him his story, he lays out his whole story. What he tells them is the awakening of this longing that he can't fulfill. That's what he was listening for.

He blesses himself and says, "Thank God, my brother, for gifting you with this longing because the longing is the way and the prayer embodies you in the longing. That's an echo of God's longing for you, see?"

If he wouldn't have said that, he might've said something else, you still might've invited him, but it would've been more in the direction of *Lexio Divina*, meditation, prayer, the living of the Christian life. I think we hear these things the way we hear them. It's like Centering Prayer, like the way of The Cloud of Unknowing. Anyone can practice Centering Prayer, it's a lovely prayer, but I think those in the special way of life, they experience it by raising questions of the special way. See how can I be more insightful, more attentive, more compassionate? What do I do if I can't find anyone to understand me? How could I ... These are all real questions of people in the special way.

Kirsten Oates: Right.

Jim Finley: But the longing is you said, where you've had a blind stirring of love in your inmost being. See, how can I consummate this longing that I don't understand for a union that I don't understand, but I know that it's real because it accessed me. It meets us where we are, I think. That's what the starets does with the pilgrim.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, the pilgrim is on a journey to find a teacher to help him find his way to God. Do you think these kinds of journeys or pilgrimages still take place today?

Jim Finley: Yes, we could say first of all, a pilgrimage could be a metaphor for the search for God in your life. For example, the labyrinth, where people walk the labyrinth, this intricate design, and you walk it. It's a circuitous thing and eventually little by little you find yourself at the center and it becomes like a visual metaphor for the labyrinth of life. Sometimes people will go on a pilgrimage to sacramentalized their whole life as a labyrinth, a searching for God.

A more specific understanding is this. What the pilgrim does is he has this question, "How can I pray always?" He says he goes to a lot of churches and listens to sermons, and he said, "People define prayer, they describe prayer, they encourage prayer, but no one talks about this," what he's looking for. Then he says, "Where can I find somebody who's well-seasoned in these things?" See, that's the intuition. See, there must be somebody, which is the pilgrimage to the gates of monasteries, to the gates of the sangha, to the gates of whatever the tradition is. You're in the ashram. This is the universality, this where can I sit with the teacher?

Because what happens is that the seeker can tell when they're in the presence of the person who's so grounded in what they're looking for. It's the teacher who embodies it and they embody it because they themselves have been transformed by it. The teacher and the students sit together. I think really with Richard Rohr and the Living School, it's a variation of that right at the heart of Richard's teaching is you have the core of the mystical lineages of the Christian tradition translated into service to the world. How do we teach? This is where this Turning to the Mystics podcast comes from.

It takes on various ways, but we're in this lineage where we're trying to not just honor everyone's invited, it's this broad sense of pilgrimage, we're all in this together, but what is the stirring in our heart for this deep, deep union beyond thoughts, beyond words and so forth, and where can we find someone?

Once a priest asked me, I was leading a retreat somewhere, and a priest was a friend of mine talked to me about my talk about the mystics. He said, "Sometimes you get the feeling you're preaching to the choir this way."

I said, "I hope so because no one talks to the choir." You go to church and no one talks about this. No one talks about a God who's infinitely in love with you and is drawing you in closer to transform you into the infinite love of God in your nothingness without God. Where can I find somebody who talks about this and offers encouragement and so on? I think that's what makes these mystical texts so graced for people. You open it up and you can tell they're talking about what your heart has been awakened to, and you can find out this is real. I can follow this. That's it, I think for me, I think, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: I'm curious to know just a little bit more about the Eastern tradition. It seems like we don't need to know a lot of the history or the differences to understand the book. He's still going to church and the text comes out of the Bible, but there was a split, Jim, in the church at a certain point.

Jim Finley: Yeah, this is a shorthand version of it, and if you want, you can go on the internet and there's tons of books and this is a shorthand version of it, is that you have the age of the martyrs, then you have Constantine of the church, and then you have the councils of the church on who is Jesus, divinity of Jesus, humanity of Jesus, the church of these councils. The church then, there was the Western Church, which was Latin speaking. It had a seat in Rome. Then you had the Eastern Rite, churches of Russia's, Greek, Syria and so on, the Eastern, the Slavic countries. But it was a unity. They all saw themselves as patriarchs, the sees were founded by apostles and so on.

Then little by little there began to divisions to grow between the Western church, the Latin Roman church, and the Eastern church. Several things contributed to it, really. One is the bishop of Rome proclaimed himself as the head of all Christians, and the Eastern patriarch said, "Whoa, wait a minute. We didn't buy into this deal. You can't just split off like that and you're over us." There was a division this way.

There was another division in that in the Western church there were fighting a heresy called Arianism, and Arianism taught that Jesus wasn't God, that he was a human being like anybody else. Because it was struggling with Arianism in the creed, it says, "The Holy

Spirit proceeds from the Father.” In order to combat Arianism in the Western church, they inserted, “Proceeds from the Father and the Son, [foreign language 00:26:16], proceeds from the Father and the Son.”

The Eastern church said, “You can’t change the creed like that. We respect the fact you say you’re fighting Arianism, but you can’t go back and meddle with the creed.” There were other different things, dates of Easter, different things, and a lot of it has to do just with the difference in the cultures too, between the Slavic Eastern Rite and the Roman Rite. But little by little in the year 1054, it ends up schism, this split, where you have this Catholic tradition, the East, and no longer connected to a union with the Pope this way.

It’s like later on in the Protestant Reformation, you’re going to have Christians that split with Rome, the Christian, so you have Roman Catholic Christianity, you have the Eastern Orthodox Christianity, you also have the Eastern Catholic traditions in union with Rome, and you have the Protestant traditions.

Richard Rohr stresses the emerging church, they’re all modalities all under Christ, under Christ, and you have these differences. Today, there’s a lot of work being done on the underlying unity in these divisions. There’s a lot of serious ongoing dialogue between these different factions. But our point is this, what we’re saying, it’s true this whole historical thing was going on. Our interest isn’t in that. It’s those who went off into the desert, the Desert Fathers and the Desert Mothers and the gnostic traditions, and so naming this mystical unitive way that went into monasticism. We’re looking at this esoteric, transformative, mystical dimension. It isn’t that those exoteric structures aren’t real and important, you can study them, understand them, and so on, but here, we’re limiting ourselves staying focused on this interior transformation through grace.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, even though it’s a more contemporary writer written in the 19th century, the time in Russia was pre-industrial. It was kind of still a time of peasants and poverty, and yeah. It might not feel as contemporary in terms of ...

Jim Finley: That’s right-

Kirsten Oates: ... the way it tells story.

Jim Finley: ... it’s really true.

By the way, there’s a manner of interesting things that’s going to come later when we look at William Blake as a mystic poet and Tolkien, Lord of the Rings, also in literature, is that what they saw was in the birth of the empirical sciences and the Industrial Revolution, for all of its benefits for us health-wise, changed our whole life, they saw it as a loss of the sense of the sacred. Really this is before that, so even though it’s 19, it’s still very much that ancient timeless ethos of the sacred dimensions of time and life and so on. That’s a good point actually.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm. It’s actually really beautiful that way, taking us kind of into that sense of the way community welcomes the pilgrim and this journey’s just a part of life in that community.

Jim Finley: That’s right. Also I think there’s a lot of work being done now also on the reintegration of the

empirical sciences industry, the reintegration of faith and science is a unitive vision. I think there's people very seriously committed to that, that they actually mutually illuminate each other really instead of being against each other, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, it sounds like you are going to do your own Lexio Divina with the text, reading each word of chapter 1, just taking us through that whole first story. You said that you're only doing chapter one because the rest of the book is more of the same in a way. Did I hear that right?

Jim Finley: I want to do chapter 1 in this sense, you notice with each of the mystics, say I do three sessions alone, but each mystic, we really took the teaching of the mystic, we could spend a whole year on one mystic, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Meister Eckhart. All's we're doing is getting a taste of the intimacy that runs through everything the mystic says. It's the same way here. We could take a year and go through the pilgrim that continues his way and it's lovely, it's just layers of new insights. But we're not taking on these teachings as a whole. The listeners, some people might be drawn to do that. I found it very helpful myself to do that. You can read them and outline it and sit with it, but really I feel what we're doing here is a very light touch to very heavy things because it's intimate. We're just trying to bear witness to the unexpected closeness of this and how to live it out in the givens of your own life, whatever they might be. But basically, yeah, that's the tone of it, I guess, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm. Jim, do you remember the first time you read this book?

Jim Finley: I do. I do. Merton spoke of it to the novices. I was moved when I heard it, and they had a copy there. I liked the translation by French and I just thought it was so pure and a transparent. Teresa of Avila's like this too, really, so in a non-academic, non-theoretical way, the experiential vibrancy of divinization in the Heart. I just thought it was brilliant. I just thought it was so inspired.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm. Was it usual that a Roman Catholic monastery would read a book like this or was that the influence of Thomas Merton who read kind of across traditions?

Jim Finley: No, I would say generally, say in our time, European, Roman Catholic monasteries, cloistered and uncloistered, the Benedictines and so on, they'd be very open to all these lineages. But Merton was the one who really saw the underlying unity in them. Also when we look at all the other world religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, and so on. For example, Thomas Merton, there was a famous Zen teacher, D.T. Suzuki, and he's a real scholar in the Buddhist tradition. He wrote a lot of these Buddhist stories about awakening and enlightenment where the person meets the master and they're enlightened.

Merton wrote a book called *Zen and The Birds of Appetite*, and in that book he says that he was reading these lovely stories of Buddhists being enlightened. He writes a letter that's in the book, he writes a letter to Suzuki, and he said, "When I read these stories, something leaps off the page of me and says, 'This is true.' I'd like to know if I as a Christian could talk with you as a Buddhist about our common ground." In his whole talks then with the Jewish, the Muslims, and the Daoists, he was always looking for this underlying unity of these mystic dimensions of all the world's religions this way. Merton really, I think, upped the ante on that or increased the sensitivity to that, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, what a gift. That really took hold in you, that idea.

Jim Finley: It did, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: Merton once said, he said, “The world will not survive religion based on tribal text,” and it’s really true. Look at religion. He said, “But if those who have been mystically awakened within their tradition to the mystery of God that transcends their tradition, like meeting each other at the center of an all-encompassing circle, they’ll recognize each other. If they would speak up, religion could be a source of an underlying unity of the whole world instead of based on theologies and doctrines and differences.” I found that to be true in my own life, has had a big part of my own life, really. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Beautiful. Really saved you after you left the monastery-

Jim Finley: It did, yes, it did, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: ... to be able to dip into Buddhism.

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: When I found my way back into the Catholic tradition and mystical Catholicism, then I brought Daoism and I brought it back all in with me, this polyphony of dialects of transformation. It’s been a big part for me. This next phase, as we keep going through Turning to the Mystics podcast, we’ll be expanding out to take a look at some of these things, but always in this very intimate, interior, heartfelt way. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Yeah, I’m very excited about it. I’m sure everyone listening is as well. As we start on our first little step away from those Roman Catholic mystics and into The Way of a Pilgrim, seems like the right way to start on a pilgrimage into this.

Jim Finley: I’ll say something else too. I think this is so true. Merton said this too, is that just before he died, he died in Asia, he was electrocuted there, and he went to meet the Dalai Lama. He wrote a letter to the monastery and he said, “The more I’m with my Buddhist brothers and sisters, the more I appreciate my faith in Christ may live in the hearts of all of us.” Because Merton felt the more we learn from each other about other traditions, it should actually refine our gratitude for our own tradition this way. I found that to be true for me also, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Well, I love what you said earlier about this really plays out in our life, and so the more we learn from others through their lives, and it just opens up the human experience to seeing more and understanding more and, yeah, grounding our lives in what we long for.

Jim Finley: Yeah, it’s true.

Kirsten Oates: Well, I think that’s all we wanted to cover today. Thank you for this wonderful intro and we’re excited about the season. I’ll just give a little bit of detail about the book you’re going to be using, Jim. It’s The Way of a Pilgrim, and it also has and The Pilgrim Continues His

Way, and the translation you like is by R.M. French?

Jim Finley: Mm-hmm.

Kirsten Oates: Corey will put the details in the show notes.

Jim Finley: That's right. In my talks I'll be mentioning other sources in that tradition, the Philokalia and different sources, so we'll be doing that as we move through the talks, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Excellent, I'm looking forward to learning about those things. Thanks, Jim. What a great start to season nine.

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.