

Turning
to the
Mystics



The Way of a Pilgrim

Listener Questions

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, where we've been turning to the way of a pilgrim by an anonymous author. And I'm here with Jim, and in this session we're going to be going through the listener questions that have come in. So welcome, Jim.

Jim Finley: Yes. Glad we're doing this. I was touched by the questions because there are the kind of questions that seekers ask, they're real questions, so it's good when these texts bring forth these dimensions of ourselves like this. So lovely.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, yes. And just a big thank you to everyone who sent in a question because they're helpful to you and I, Jim, in crafting the podcast going forward, but also I know they'll be helpful to everyone who's listening. So thank you for taking the time. So ready to dive in?

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. The first question comes from Maryanne and it's after listening to session one. She says in session one, you said, our effectiveness in the world isn't dependent upon the ways we are physically present to and help others. It's important to do that, but what really matters is that we follow our vocation, our interior vocation of being led by God into ever deeper paths to union with God. Could you say more about that? It sounds to me like you are setting a distinction between the two, or are you meaning that in following our interior vocation to union, the service to others will follow and free us up from even the question or concern with effectiveness?

Jim Finley: Yes. My sense in the spirit of these contemplative traditions is that the norm is that our deepening faith in God and our deepening relationship with God and prayer and so on, quite naturally transforms our attitudinal stance towards ourself, our behavior towards other people, and it translates itself into be more Christlike and more loving and service to others and so on. Another level of this is that while that's true, it's also true that there's a dimension of our deepening relationship with God that touches the whole world in ways we don't understand, that is not dependent upon the physical contact, but it rather permeates and touches the world according to God's providential grace. And the third level is that it's a deepening union with God that's infinite and eternal like our eternal destiny and like the hiddenness of eternal life in us. So those three quite naturally just flow together according to the uniqueness of each person's experience.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. Thank you, Jim. Another question from Alicia, and she's talking about vocation and she says, I hope you'll see a kindred spirit in my genuine wish to integrate the quickening that has been tapping on my door for some time. To that end, James, you have mentioned that the pilgrim is called to solitude as an example of any number of callings that might be expressed. I feel called to my profession and to bring a mystical stance to my work as an IP lawyer, however I scarcely know how to begin. Do you have any thoughts or guidance for a stumbling soul like me?

Jim Finley: Yes. I would say this, and I would say this about law for example, and I would say this also about teaching or different careers, is that there's something deeply spiritual about the inherent value of helping people. So when you're using your training in law to be there for and with the people in the midst of their needs, there's an inherent spiritual value to that. And the spiritual depth of it might be implicit, might not be explicitly stated at all. It's just there. The next level I think has to do with people that we work this way as students or law, whatever it is. I'm just thinking, I just had a talk yesterday on the thing with my cardiologist, my heart doctor. And there's a genuine feeling of gratitude that he's there, just that he's part of my life, that he's there for me. And I think that's another depth dimension of this.

Then there's another level of saying then that the presence of God is the infinity of those dimensions of value, that there's something inherently holy about the engagement and the process with these sensitivities in mind this way. And so I think, yeah, that's how we grow, I guess.

Kirsten Oates: Lovely. Okay, next question Jim is from Michael. And he says that he teaches drumming to kids. So he says, I continue drumming with kids and adults in many different venues now with a strong sense of sharing God's presence without mentioning God. Often I will share, it's difficult to play a rhythm on a drum and think at the same time. I believe this is similar to practicing the Jesus Prayer. What are your thoughts on this?

Jim Finley: Yes. Let's say, first of all, by thinking we typically mean linear thinking, figuring something out, concluding something. And I think that's really true. When we're in the rhythm of music, it's nonlinear, it's a flow. But also when you think about it, also walking is nonlinear, breathing's nonlinear, our heartbeat's nonlinear. So somehow when we get into the stream like the Dao, like the flow of things. But then what's also true is this, there's a certain kind of thinking, there's like the musicality of the words. So the teachings of these mystics, they're not defining or explaining anything, but there's a certain musical, it's like the words of Jesus, or in the Psalms, there's a certain, we're in the flow of using language in a way that expresses the spiritual divine dimensions of our lives. That doesn't mean that the linear explanatory modes of thinking aren't important also because they are, but the qualitative depth of things is in the flowing dimension. And so yeah. That's true.

Kirsten Oates: And so for Michael, Jim, the way he says that he shares the drumming with a strong sense of sharing God's presence that, that sense of drumming might catch fire with others. There's something deep about it. Something-

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: ... Yeah. Beautiful and true.

Jim Finley: There's a famous jazz singer, musician, I can't think of his name right now. He's so famous and he was known for practicing the scales every day. For years he was told that every day over and over. And they ask him why he did it and he said to become a saint like that. And there is something about the deepening presence of the artist in the act of sharing.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: They're moved and then we're moved to be in the presence that touches places in us. And

what's also interesting though too, is that the way of the pilgrim, then the Jesus Prayer moves into the flow, but notice in his talks with the star. The star sheds light on the meaning of what's happening to him in the flow. So I think there's another example of how these two modes interface each other.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, yes. Lovely. A question from Saskia. In the story of the pilgrim, I recognize the longing to be alone. I also recognize his growing ability to meet and be meaningful to others on a deeper level. I find it difficult to navigate between the two, alone time and sharing time with others. Every so often I end up being irritated towards others or towards myself. I wonder what would help me find my way in this? What would the Russian pilgrim say?

Jim Finley: It's so personal. I think some parameters would be it's a gift to appreciate and desire solitude. Platin is never less alone than when alone, and the intimacy of solitude. It's also a gift when there's one or two or three people in our life that we can share with them substantial things about the interior life, whether just have somebody like we're doing right now, besides if there is someone that you can talk with, but a lot of times the people that are like family members, whatever it is, we can't talk about this with them, but they're living their life. They're living their life. And so I think it's natural that we, one, don't have... It can be a impatience with chatter or small talk. A little of it goes a long way how to politely listen because their life matters. That's their life and how about those Yankees and whatever. But then you're polite, but you're politely true to yourself. You keep the edges to it and so on.

I also think with these day by day chats with people, there's little moments where you can look for openings or they're more self-disclosing where there's a moment where there's a more substantive kind of connection and just roll with it and be patient with yourself with it because it's-

Kirsten Oates: Do you feel Jim too, that sense of irritation is always an opportunity to bring more of God's love and compassion into yourself to notice the ways you fatigue, the ways you get irritated as a human being and to invite God's love and compassion into that?

Jim Finley: It's really true. At one level there's just someone who's annoying is annoying, you're just being real. But there's another way of say someone is talking on at a certain level. So you could say to yourself, it's important. God's infinitely in love with this person, and the value of our life is not dependent on the degree to which we're able to reach experientially the depth of our life. The depths are always there because they're a person this way. And so I can listen and join them in it because the most casual conversation matters. If I listen to it at that level where it's a real encounter with the person and then see you next time.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. And if I can't listen at that level, I can connect into God's compassion for my inability to listen at that level.

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. Maureen and I, because we were both therapists. The thing about therapy, the therapy is like spiritual direction. The dialogue is substantive and therefore you don't really engage much in superficial talk. You just don't this way.

And so I think it's a matter of being grounded within ourself in silence and with God, with the people, with the mystics, whatever. And then just being in the flow of appreciating people as people like Jesus walked the earth. He didn't say, only mystics need to apply, or if you're not deep enough, don't bother me. He walked the streets of the world. God so loved the world, he sent his only begotten son. And the world's us. And so we can ask God for the grace to be sensitized along those lines.

Kirsten Oates: So a question from Melanie about session two. I was intrigued by this statement Jim made, capture the mother and you'll find the children, and the mother is prayer. Once you find the mother, the children, they're not far off because the mother never lets the children get far off. It almost sounds as if one could catch the mother like a fish in a net or some kind of bird. What do you mean by capture and what do you mean by finding the children? Is this like finding our spiritual brothers and sisters? Your statement, the mother is prayer, so warms my heart. Reminds me of Elizabeth, a mother of seven children who told me she's like the tabernacle of her family.

Jim Finley: Very good. First of all, I think when we're reading the works of the mystics, it's like reading scripture too. We always want to have a sense that the intended meaning of the word is true to the spirit of the lineage itself. So surely to capture the prayers the mother, it surely doesn't mean to capture prayer. I got you. Like you hold onto it and you have it. It just doesn't mean that. So clearly they don't mean that. I think more to capture means really is that the beauty of prayer has captured you where you have really learned that it's infidelity to the quiet times with God in prayer, that your deepening awareness of God's love for you is growing day by day. It is clearly along those lines. And then the children then refer to the gifts of God and the providential unfolding of things, the flow out of your fidelity to prayer, the unfoldings of the day that in your quiet time with God, you're more able to recognize the more interior levels of incidental things this way that everything has a certain graced dimension to it.

Kirsten Oates: That was really big in the way of a pilgrim that this idea of, like you said, being captured by the prayer rather than the way a lot of churches were teaching and that the pilgrim felt like wasn't what he was looking for, this way of praying out of duty or praying as the first thing. Yeah.

Jim Finley: Yeah, you're exactly right. So in the beginning when his heart is touched by that word to pray always, then he sees the discontent where people were talking around it but no one was speaking out of it. It's really true. And that's why I think the contemplative traditions, like Thomas Merton in the monastery, he said, when we go to pray, we start by reminding ourself that we belong to God. And he said that to know that spiritually speaking to understand is to realize you're deeply understood and you trust that you're infinitely understood. So there's something about this contemplative language that's so heartfelt that goes to that deep place.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, beautiful. Thank you for that question Melanie. So the next question is from Jasmine and it's about dialogue three. In dialogue three, I want to thank you for saying those beautiful words. I think for all of us, there are moments when we are graced with the sense of God's presence in our lives. I know this is true to my

experience. The question I would like to ask you is how to forgive myself when I keep getting in the way of my efforts and my longing to be home with God. I keep falling off the path and I know I'm a hypocrite to my deepest desire to be more with God. I want to act from my center which is held in power by God's love so I can embrace the wounds and brokenness of my life from a source of compassion, open-heartedness, both towards myself and towards my father and husband who hurt me so that I'm healed and can let that go.

Jim Finley: I remember we touched on this in the session, but very briefly really. See what I think it's key. Notice when the stars tells him to say that Jesus prayed 3000 times a day than 6,000 times a day. And he said, be very careful to not intentionally do one more or one less. This is key. Don't do it, because this is obedience to the will of God, like you're surrendering your will over to the will of God. But here's the key this, in actual practice, because the pilgrim is just a human being who'll lose count a lot. It isn't like, oh my God, I hope I don't lose count. I want to be one off. The whole thing's worthless. It isn't like that at all.

So actually the essence of the prayer is realizing the mercy of God is coming back around every time you lose count, knowing that with God, the deep acceptance of yourself and your inability to keep the count is an echo of God's deep acceptance of you is infinitely precious in your wayward ways. And that's the mercy of God. And so what we're really trying to do, another way I put it, sometimes we catch ourselves being punitive toward the aspects of ourself that need to be loved the most really. And really that's what's so beautiful about the Jesus Prayer is oceanic mercy that holy pervades and transcends brokenness in all directions. So I would think too, it asks for the grace to be experientially sensitive to this is what the essence of it. This is experiential salvation really I think.

Kirsten Oates: And these parts that have been hurt, as Jasmine talks about, have been hurt by people that were close to her. These are often the parts that you find it difficult to really believe that God loves them because they've been treated badly.

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. And that's the whole thing in itself too because one, if it's things in the past where the spouse is no longer doing the hurtful things, but you can't let go of the resentment, then you're asking for the grace to let go of the resentment if they mellowed, if they're still doing it. Part of loving the person is the courage with God's grace to set boundaries, but we need to talk about this. And so it's how do you stay honest with the person in a loving, real engaged way? And I think spiritual direction touches psychotherapy. They're about boundary setting and staying real because sometimes our resentment is actually the truth. We resent it because it's resentful. I don't deserve to be treated that way. I don't. So it's a matter of discerning that. And the rendezvous with God in prayer can give us the courage and the light. Sometimes we might need some help to learn to do that, but I think it's where these things all touch each other, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Question from Justin about session four, the recent episode session four included a part where the teacher in the book is talking about the powers of darkness trying to interrupt the pilgrim's practice. James touched briefly on two possible lenses to look at this through, darkness in terms of our own limited understanding and darkness in terms of spiritual entities. This brought a question to mind I have had for some time since reading Richard Rohr's work. Why is it that the mystics seem to spend so little time discussing concepts like heaven, hell, or entities such as angels and demons? They seem to spend very little time on

the concept of evil at all.

Jim Finley: This is my sense of it. Teresa of Avila says in the Interior Castle, if heaven is the word we give where God lives and in the imminence of God, of God lives within you, the kingdom of heaven is within you, then your soul is God's heaven. So heaven is really the realized oneness with God's oneness with us that is heaven. So it isn't so much heaven then as a place. The heaven is the divinity of the oneness itself with God that is heaven this way. And likewise, hell isn't so much a place. Hell is the state of being exiled or estranged from this infinite love of God that's infinitely in love with you and your estrangement from it this way. So I think that's why they don't speak of it so much as a place, but really as grace unfoldings of our soul, never greater state.

So when Jesus said, I came so you might have life, have more abundantly, it's a deepening awareness that the life he was speaking of was that once God's in our own. Realizing the oneness of that is heaven, it's celestial and not to realize that it's sorrow as hell.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, this is where the Christian worldview over time diverted from this worldview of the mystics and was taught about heaven and hell as places we might go, but that's not really true to this original interpretation of Jesus.

Jim Finley: No. You can see why, because it's so natural to think of it as a place because Jesus sometimes talks about it as a place. So I think when a person just listens, it's so natural to do that. But I think the more in prayer and reflection and so on, the more able we're seeing more the interiority or the unit of the metaphorical nature of this language.

Kirsten Oates: And they're really about helping people find that. So that the concept of evil is really the way you describe it, about this sense of being exiled and what arises in that state.

Jim Finley: The evil yes is being exiled, but also the evil has to do in believing that the exile is possible with God because no matter how many times the thread of oneness with God breaks from your end, it never breaks from God's end. And so the evil is really attributing authority to the brokenness as having the power to name who we are instead of the love that loves us so in our brokenness.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Yeah. A question from Jenny. I have a question from dialogue four. I'm taken with the phrase, the graced metamorphosis of our very subjectivity. That's a phrase you said in our dialogue. I'll read it again. The graced metamorphosis of our very subjectivity. I really wish you could delve into that more. Is achieving this only something that is a gift from God? As I'm trying to praise you, describe and carry the thread of inner peace through the day, will this bring about freedom from our own passions and instincts? Is my subjectivity, I guess my ego that is slowly falling away. As much as my old wants and needs have fallen away, I still struggle to know how to let go of some old friendships or social engagements, which do not seem to have much of a place in my heart anymore.

Jim Finley: A couple of things came to me as I was sitting with this. One, Piaget, was this person who talked about early stages of early childhood development. And he has a film of a mother sitting on the floor with her little child, very small child, and she's rolling a ball around the child's just developing motor skills to touch the ball and there's a blanket there. And she rolls the ball under the blanket and the baby starts to cry because it doesn't yet have

object constancy. So the baby thinks the ball's gone. This is why little children never tire a peekaboo. They can't figure out how you do that. It's endlessly funny to them. The same child on the floor, a year later she rolls the ball under the blanket and the baby pulls the blanket off the ball. And Piaget says, this child is in a qualitatively different universe or they're very subjectivity is metamorphosized into a higher developmental state.

So we can think of that process happening over and over and over again at deeper levels. Another way to look at it is this, that when we deeply love someone, a child, the beloved or solid, whatever, the years of deepening love metamorphosizes our very subjectivity. It's not just a sentiment or anything but the very depth of the very subjectivity of our very cell is being metamorphosized by the love and the solitude. So then you think, well then that goes on endlessly because what happens is a self-metamorphosizing process rolls over. It's where you and God mutually disappear as dualistically other than each other so that the infinite subjectivity of God is realized to be accessing you and giving itself to you as the gift of your very subjectivity, which is the mystical experience, the trans subjective communion of the eternal oneness with the eternal and your eternal nothingness without God. So it has these unfolding layers, one's very self and nothing less than oneself.

Kirsten Oates: Wow, that's a helpful explanation. Thank you Jim. A question from Aaron. In session five, when discussing the star, its direction to pray the Jesus Prayer 3000 times, you comment that the practice was intended to help the pilgrim die to his own will. I felt a pang of fear with these words that I heard a lot growing up. I often still worry whether I'm actually following Jesus. For most of my life, I have distrusted myself and have a difficult time discerning God's direction. I generally assume that anything I want or desire is wrong. I'm not suggesting that that was the intention of the commentary. In fact, the gracious discussion that followed helped me start to see things differently. Later in your discussion, you mentioned that in our practice we should be sure we're practicing in concert with what rings true with our identity. To listen deeply to our experience.

This feels true to me, but I'm wondering about the nuance and balance of self-denial and trusting my own identity. I feel in my soul that this isn't contrary. I also fear and shame that I am not following Jesus and simultaneously a fear of what God will take from me. I think this has often led to me to feel like I'm only following God if I'm miserable. I often think of Merton's prayer that the desire to please God pleases God. Most of the time I'm lucky to have that desire for the desire. I don't know if there's a word for this, but how might you explain these tensions between self-denial and self-acceptance?

Jim Finley: Yes. I would say first of all that I think each of us in our own way lives with internalized beliefs about ourself and childhood experiences of trauma and abandonment, intended and unintended. And they get triggered in different ways. They flare up and we're dealing with it. And then sometimes those get projected onto God this way by dying to our own will. And how do I know and how am I... So I think one is just to know that's so normal and to know what your patterns are, but also the very tone of the person's question is you know it's not true. It's troubling to think that because you're caught getting hypnotized by... You're caught in it. So you're asking for the grace to see in the light of the truth what in that is not true? It's not true. So with God then, I'd put it this way, how this comes with God, this is I say that I'll be God.

And so if you're telling me that you're confused, you're not... And I'll be God and I'll say, and I think you are confused seriously, but I don't know if you notice this or not. I think everybody is. Everyone's walking around confused. But here's the thing to remember, I'm not confused about you. And what I want you to do is have more faith in me as being infinitely in love with you and not to be confused about that. Don't attribute authority to your confusion over my love for you in the midst of your confusion and ask for the grace. This is to be surrendered over this way in love and to sift this out. Like St. Paul, I have a thorn in the flesh. I ask God to remove it. God said, leave it there, or you depend on my mercy. So sometimes these persistent patterns that we know from our own... I know what mine are. We all have different ones.

If we let them, they're our teacher because it's a tripping place into what we know isn't true. And so there's part of us in prayer, we know it's not true, but there's still a part that doesn't know it yet that it's not true, because we still get reactive. And so we're being endlessly tenderhearted toward the part of ourself that doesn't know it yet. And that gentleness towards ourself is an echo of God's gentleness towards us. So I found these kind of approaches to be helpful, with this is always deeply personal with each person.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, it's always touching to me when you take on the voice of God, a little teary. That was beautiful. Thank you.

Jim Finley: Turning to the Mystics. We'll continue in a moment.

Kirsten Oates: So we had quite a few questions about the Jesus Prayer, so we'll just go through those now.

Jim Finley: Yes. Yes. Good.

Kirsten Oates: So Jim, we have a voicemail to listen to with a question from Elise.

Voicemail 1: This was another incredible and beautiful sensitive podcast. I'm interested in knowing the practice that you mentioned here and you keep mentioning it, how does it relate to the other practice which you taught us, where you breathe in, I love you, and then you breathe out, I love you too? I think in this instance that you're suggesting that you breathe in, just breathe in the love of God, and then when you breathe out, you breathe out the Jesus Prayer. So it's beautiful. I've tried it both ways, but I just wondered what are the similarities and differences? Are they to achieve the same end, different ends?

Kirsten Oates: Beautiful question.

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: That's good.

Kirsten Oates: Lovely. Do you want to start, Jim?

Jim Finley: Yeah, sure. This is my sense of it. I think that what really matters is different ways to pray, is sincerity. Thomas Burton once said, with God, a little sincerity goes a long, long way.

And it's the sincerity of the rendezvous with God in prayer. That through our prayer, God might help us to deepen our experience, understanding and response to God's oneness with us in life itself. That's the essence of it, is the sincerity. Next, this sincerity though is granted in a specific way to embody the sincerity. It's not an abstract idea, it's a concrete way that embodies that sincerity. So what we basically have then in prayer, this sincerity, this rendezvous with God in prayer, is that, and then we saw this in the earlier session on A Ladder to Heaven, is it starts out first with modes of Lectio Divina, meditation and prayer. So in the Lectio Divina, it sustained receptivity to a beauty not yet thought about.

You take in the word and you recognize right away that the word is beautiful. It's beautiful because it's true and you believe that God is personally saying that to you as you sit there in prayer, you take it in. And that's the Lectio. The meditation then that initiates a dialogue with God about what God just said to you. You might journal processes and then the prayer. So notice in the prayer, help me with this. It's a cry from the heart this way. So notice that it's a reflective process. You're taking in words, you take in the truth of the words, you reflect on the words. And then from the heart center, help me with efficacious unto holiness is prayer. Then what happens is that this prayer can move toward worthlessness, that it can move toward a state of resting wordlessly in God, resting wordlessly in you. And it comes at first as an experience like contemplation, like it touches you.

So then when it touches you, you look for a way that embodies that touch. And then these are modes of contemplative prayer. See, there's this awakening event. This is what happened to the pilgrim in the church, the 24th Sunday after Pentecost. So you're quickened. So then there are ways of being in the presence of God that transcend words, that transcend emotions, transcend this way. And so we've talked about the I love you prayer. It's a form of contemplative prayer, because it's passing beyond reflection, passing beyond this way. So when we inhale, we listen to God's silent I love you because God's exhaling the infinity of God into us as a very life. Merton says, it beats in our very blood whether we want it to or not. And then when we exhale, we exhale our I love you to God. So we exhale ourself in love to the love that with the next inhalation is going to inhale itself into us.

So in the reciprocity of love, it's deepened this way. And then we said that as we sit this way, different things arise in our ego like fear, confusion, whatever. So if we're afraid of something, then the essence of the contemplative prayer is that in the fear, when we inhale, we inhale God given the infinity of God to us through and through and through and through fear and all. Finding no hindrance in our fear to being infinitely in love with us. And when we exhale ourself in love, we exhale ourself in love, fear and all to the love that loves us, fear and all. So too with confusion. So too with whatever it is. So what we're doing is we're realizing that only this oneness is the substantiality. That's true, that permeates the variations of our life. And the contemplative prayer embodies that.

So the Jesus Prayer's the same thing, but it's a different historical. It's a form of contemplative prayer, passing beyond reflection, beyond this way. And so when you inhale, you're inhaling the presence of Jesus, you're inhaling or really you're asking God to deepen your awareness that the presence of Jesus is already within you. So when we ask, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, we're asking for mercy that's already there, because the mercy is oceanic. And so what we're really asking for is a grace to be quickened by the experiential of the awareness of the love that's already there. So then when we exhale, then we exhale the Jesus Prayer,

the power of the name of Jesus and the sincerity. And notice that in the Jesus Prayer, it's a mantra that as you say it in the constancy, but it's a relaxed constancy. Similar to the monks chanting the Psalms in the monastic choir.

It is a flow of words to transcend words this way, and that's the prayer. Notice the cloud of unknowing, however, it is not a mantra for you sit in the presence of God, but you use the word only as needed, use it only as needed. And he says, take any word you want or a phrase. The shorter, the better. And you use it to ground the taproot of your heart in this oneness with God beyond the gifts of God like very God. He says God naked as God is in himself, just as God is this way. So that's really so in a way then there are variations, like modalities essentially the same thing, a contemplative prayer that establishes us in an evermore habitual state of resting in God, resting in us beyond words. And we could also look at similarities in the non-Christian contemplative traditions like deep yoga, the deep Dharma of the Buddha, Sufism, mystical Islam. You see the same patterns of mystical dimensions of faith realized states of oneness, and living that oneness day by day. So I would answer that way. That's how I see it relates.

Kirsten Oates: That's really helpful, Jim. This idea of these prayers is more a surrender over into the love of God versus conversing with God as almost like a separate entity, but we're surrendering ourselves into God's presence that's in us and all around us.

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. You know what's interesting too, in the Catholic tradition of the rosary?

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: When you say the rosary, you meditate on a mystery in Christ life like say the enunciation, the angel coming to Mary, and we meditate on our angelic visitations, but how do we do it? We do it by counting the Hail Mary. So what the Hail Mary does, the first half is words from heaven. It's the angel, Hail Mary, full of grace is our response. Mother God have mercy now at the hour of our death. Amen. So by the use of the Hail Mary, it dislodges us from getting caught up in thinking about it and frees us up to resting in the mystery of it. So it shows you there's a mystical, the quality to the devotional practice of the rosary. And notice in the Jesus Prayer, the use of rosary, the Muslims also be as a sacramental of a oneness beyond sequential thought.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Yeah, beautiful. What I took away too from the season about the discipline of committing to a particular lineage or method of prayer is this sense of I'm not only surrendering my thoughts, emotion, sensations, but my will in my discipline to committing to the prayer.

Jim Finley: That's right. There's another insight into this too, I think. See, when we're in the presence of a teacher, a mystically awakened teacher, they stay within the voice that they're in like the Jesus Prayer or whatever. It's a Zen master with the Dharma. And the reason is this, is that the mysterious process of being carried by God into God unexplainably is very delicate. We're subject to self-deception. And the teacher who's grounded in this one, this is listening almost like a psychotherapist might deeply listen, and they're helping us catch ourself where we're unwittingly going off into cul-de-sacs and kind of thing. So in purity to the lineage, it's a purity of managing the delicacy of the transformation that we're into, we come through

this awakening. Now the delicacy can be misunderstood, fundamentalistically we have to stick to it in prayer, then we're missing the point.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: Really, we're missing the point. So there's a certain specificity to the way in which we transcend dependence on methods like the method that transcends method, which is an attitude of our awakened heart.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, that's so helpful. I just want to mention the two seasons you just spoke about. So in season four we did the Letter of Monks by Greco, where you take us through the Lectio practice, and then in season five we did The Cloud of Unknowing by an anonymous author. And so if people want to go back and listen to those there are in the archives, I think. Yeah. Wonderful.

Jim Finley: That's good. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Thanks Jim. This is a question from Sharon. This episode on the Jesus Prayer was particularly precious to me. It clarified some of my ongoing struggles with faith and my attempts to connect strands within my practice that include Jesus as well as Buddhist thought and practice yoga and others. Still, I feel I'm a stranger to Jesus. Am I saying the Jesus Prayer to a person, an idea, a dream? Perhaps it doesn't matter as it is the practice itself that creates oneness, but perhaps Jim can address that question of our relationship to Jesus himself and the idea of Christ catching us when we fall.

Jim Finley: First of all, I think this what we're to do is we're to follow the path that's been given to us and it's given to us because it works. For example, deeply in the Christian tradition, we're profoundly affected by the Dharma, by the Buddhist tradition. And so Guanyin, the bodhisattva, Guanyin, and the thing about the one who hears the cry of the poor. Some people, their path to divinization isn't Jesus, it isn't Jesus. And so there's a language that the Bhagavad Gita and Lord Krishna and whatever. So one were to find the channels that the energy circuits of this grace are there for us and follow that.

The next thing is this though, I think, is if you're so inclined, it isn't relating to an idea. You're asking for the grace of relating to Jesus. And so it's like asking Jesus, you'd open the gospels and read what Jesus says in the gospels to someone and know that the deathless presence of Jesus is saying that to you. And what Jesus is doing for someone in the gospels, the deathless presence of Jesus is doing for you. So you're asking Jesus to help you step into this luminous presence of this way. If you're so inclined to expand your repertoire or little by little, the beauty or the depth of Jesus starts becoming more and more vibrant for you if you're so inclined.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, would you say too, that the archetype of Jesus on the cross, that the way Jesus died is a symbol of that mercy? So Lord Jesus Christ had mercy on me. There's something about that symbol where, yeah, Jesus's willingness to suffer.

Jim Finley: So Stephen Colbert, who's a devout Catholic really, and one of his jokes is that if on Easter morning Jesus would've come out of the tomb with a machine gun, Easter Sunday would've gone very differently. So imagine Jesus on the cross cursing everybody, and you'd go, what?

What is it? So what the power of the cross is, Father forgive them, they know not what they do. The oceanic mercy is sovereign, absolute and boundaryless in all directions, that there's no authority to the brokenness, that the only authority is the authority of love who loves us in our brokenness.

And so the whole mystery of the cross then, the mystery of love crucified is all of this. See, the way I put it too, is how can I learn to die of love at the hands of love until nothing's left of me but love. And so nothing's left to me, but this love that I'm infinitely, I'm the beloved in a brokenness that's completely bereft of any authority over the love, that alone is real. And so I think it's asking Jesus for the grace to... That's what the Jesus Prayer is all about really. The same with visual, like a Mandela, like an icon, like an image of that's your path to let it soak in this way. Like [foreign language 00:45:01] love is this devotional love for the beloved.

Kirsten Oates: A question from Walter. I'm working with the Jesus Prayer and wanted to ask why we use the feudal term Lord when referring to Christ. I have a feeling that the man, Jesus wouldn't have liked it. For myself I'm treating my repugnant for the word Lord as egoic and practicing obedience to the pilgrim's teacher. It is helping to steal my rebelliousness. But nevertheless, I wonder if you have thoughts about such words.

Jim Finley: Yes. In religion where the more noble the aspiration, the more delicate the vessel that carries it through time. So it requires a structure to carry it through time. But the trouble with the structure is the seduction of empire where it turns into having et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera like this. But I think, Lord, it's true there is that medieval use of the Lord, yes, my Lord. But again, we're returning to the intended meaning in the scriptures, my Lord and my God. You're the Lord of my true self. You're endlessly creating me for love's sake alone. And your mercy upon me and my brokenness is taking me unexplainably to yourself as the beloved. In that sense, you're my Lord, my Lord and my God, not in the medieval sense of the Lord. Although in the imagery of feudal society, actually the two were seemed to resonate with each other actually. Yeah, we lost that. We don't-

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, the translation got a bit enmeshed.

Jim Finley: Yeah. It did. It did. Yeah. We lost the-

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: There's vestiges of it with the Queen in England, but also it's got so much layered with layers of gold and rubies and diamond, but there's a certain primitive intuition about a certain divine dimension to the structure of society this way. So anyway.

Kirsten Oates: So do you like this approach of alters, of just practicing egoic obedience, seeing it as egoic and practicing obedience?

Jim Finley: Read this sentence to me again where he says that.

Kirsten Oates: He said, I'm treating my repugnance of the word Lord as egoic and practicing obedience to the pilgrim's teacher.

Jim Finley: Yes, I do like that. See, that's a good point. Let's see. I don't like it, but what if my dislike

is ego-based? It bothers me. And so what I'm learning is asking for the grace to be healed from that because just that's clearly not the essence of who Jesus is, and it's clearly not what metamorphosized the pilgrim. When he said one morning, the prayer woke me up. And actually what it is, it's the unraveling of the ego until nothing's left but love is not egoic. It's really being liberated from the ego, having the final say in who we are. And only God's love has the final say in who we are, which we discovered through our ego, which gets touched and transformed. Yeah, I like that. It's good to see that.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, it's an interesting unraveling of the ego, unexpected-

Jim Finley: It is. It's an insight.

Kirsten Oates: ... with the word.

Jim Finley: Yeah. It is.

Kirsten Oates: It reminds me of the previous question and then my own experience with the prayer of I'm really trying to find Jesus's mercy through the prayer. I'm really trying to get in touch with that. And so that word, if it's getting in the way of that mercy, I need to let go of what in myself is letting that word get in the way. Yeah.

Jim Finley: That's what's so deep about it. See, that's the thing is the mercy. See, when we ask for have mercy on me, we're asking for the mercy that's already given because it is given. And so what we're asking for is a gift to experientially realize it's already given. And therefore the mercy is the irrelevance of any obstacle we might come up with, real or imagined, that we might have mercy for attributing authority to obstacles.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Yeah. And all the obstacles that in our being exiled from this truth have put in the way for ourselves like poor translations of the Bible, for instance.

Jim Finley: And the church itself and it's brokenness and our failure. Yeah, exactly.

Kirsten Oates: Lovely. A question from Monica. The Jesus Prayer I always knew and loved was Lord Jesus Christ, son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner. You present a different shorter version. I was wondering why, especially after listening to the most recent podcast where you explore different interpretations of mercy where suffering meets love. I'd love to hear your interpretation of sinner.

Jim Finley: Yeah. It's been a while since I read about this, history of this, is that when the text of the pilgrim first began to emerge in the 19th century, it starts to emerge with different variations of the text.

Kirsten Oates: I see.

Jim Finley: So Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner, is one, but another one is the shorter one. So the translation that I'm using by French is the shorter one. It's like the Lord's Prayer in one gospel it ends, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory now and forever amen. In the other gospel that's not there. And so they think probably the shorter one is the original one, really. And then in another faith community it got add. And so these

texts are like this. I think that's what it is really.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. That's helpful. Do you have any comment on if in the longer version why they would include a sinner?

Jim Finley: Yeah, because we're sinners. We all qualify. [foreign language 00:50:51] he says, about being Catholic, he said, there's only one Catholic. That's Jesus. All the rest are sinners. That is God's infinitely in love with, which is Ecclesia. But being a sinner is my credentials to get in. It's like AA, everyone's welcome, but in order to be admitted, you have to admit. See, if you don't admit you're an alcoholic, you're not admitted. But only if you're admitted, you get in, which saves you from dying from it. So that's paradoxical, liberating the very word sinner as a twist, has a paradoxical little, like a coin or a riddle to it. It's a great deliverance, really.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, yes, yes. It's like the ultimate thorn in the flesh.

Jim Finley: Yeah. I like Flannery O'Connor and one of her short stories, a Catholic author, she said she had this vision of all humanity at the end of time being led to the gates of paradise by the fools of the world topping up and down, turning somersaults and so on, followed by the righteous concern, whether or not they were singing on key. A sinner has that kind of have mercy on me as the same thing. Also, and the Exsultet on the Easter vigil where they turn out all the lights, they light the new fire on the Christ resurrection and they light the Paschal candle and they sing the Exsultet or *felix culpa*. Oh, happy fault! Mary, such a redeemer. Thank you Adam for messing everything up, because Jesus came. So it's a lovely hymn, really.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, yeah. A note from Scott who says, I personally prefer the prayer with just the seven words which emphasize our Trinitarian God's mercy and its power to transform us. Our need for redemption seems implicit in this simple prayer.

Jim Finley: Me too. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you for your wisdom. Question from Helene. I'm wondering if the practice loses power if you pray divine love rather than Jesus, or help me or abide with me rather than mercy, can sinner be dropped? All words, suggestions welcome. From what I can summarize and in my experience with other contemplative practices, it seems the Jesus Prayer practice could be followed with other words if you do it with devotional sincerity without ceasing in the quiet of your being. What other components am I missing, if any?

Jim Finley: First of all, I think the power of the prayer is the presence of God. This experience and the sincerity of your openness to the presence of God, that's the power. So the question is though, there are certain lineages or paths where our oneness with that graced power of God, the presence of God is followed by specific lineage. For example, the Jesus Prayer's of specific lineage. It's like if you're practicing Buddhism, Zazen, there's a specific Zazen. If you're sitting with the Roshi, he's in the lineage or the Rabbi with the Jewish mysticism. So there are certain channel like ancient lineages, and this is one. And so we follow it because it's ancient and people have been transformed in God in it over long periods of time. And we feel called to do it, but not rigidly we do it, because as you drop Jesus out of it, you're not dropping God out of it, but you are dropping Jesus out of it. That's how I see it.

I think there's these specific lineages and we can feel, call it if it feeds us and we can outgrow it too. We can be in a certain lineage this way and outgrow it or take on another lineage. We can have more than one. We can move back and forth over time. You have to just be open to our heart on how we're moved by God to follow. And in the end, I think really that all these lineages come to fulfillment when they all fall away. No, there's no means left. There's just the oneness this way. Someone once said in Buddhism that the way that this is true of Jesus too, and the teachings of the Buddha, the end and the means become increasingly ambivalent. That is the eightfold path, which is the means to Nirvana, which is the end. That Nirvana, which is this ultimate liberation, starts showing up in the ground beneath your feet on the path that leads to it.

So there's this increasing non-distinction between the path and the ultimacy that's welling up and giving a self to and fidelity to the path. So I think that kind of insight has always helped me too.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Yeah, beautiful. I'm resonating with a lot of the questions around how do we find Jesus? Can we drop the word Jesus? Because although the mystics are all very Jesus centered, this sense of divine love and infinite love is really what I've focused on too. So I've seen this as an opportunity to connect with and discover how I might find that mercy in the presence of Jesus. Yeah.

Jim Finley: I would say it too, and I say this is in psychotherapy or contemplative spiritual direction, let's say someone in person would ask that. And so I'd say, well, tell me about yourself. Where are you at? Does that work for you?

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, yeah.

Jim Finley: Does that work for you? And so do you want to pursue that and why? And so ask God to help you work with that. In other words, the way is never other than the crest of the wave where we sincerely are in our desire to follow this path, that is the path. And so it isn't like, what if and where's the answer and how can I find it? It's my open sincerity and sitting with it is the way, and I see where it goes. I let it take me where it takes me and just relax. You know what I mean? Just relax and trust and just stay open and what rings true to you and go with that and see where it takes you. And that kind of... To me, that's the feeling.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Yeah. Well, what I love about the podcast is the opportunity to explore these different lineages, like you say, and even the nuances within the mystical lineages and finding ones that really resonate.

Jim Finley: That's right. As we go through these mystics, each mystic in his or her own way embodies this way. They just speak because they are it. It's not a theory or something out of books, they just speak out of it. So as you move to the different ones, it allows us to move back and forth and freely become more freed up like a weightless way in the midst of the present way, which could change at any minute.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. So Jim, we have another voicemail to listen to, and this one comes from Tina.

Voicemail 2: Hi. My question is from the intro session of this season where Jim talks about the

commonalities that the mystics have between different religious traditions. And I find that teaching so beautiful, and I was wondering how Jim would respond to someone of Christian faith that would say that scripture where Jesus says, I'm the way, the truth and the life, and no man comes to the Father except through me, that versus often used to say that Christianity is the only way to God. And I wondered how Jim would respond to that verse or teaching or that point of view. Thank you. Really appreciate all the work that you guys do on this podcast.

Jim Finley: That's a big question. In a way, how do we understand this? First of all, they do say that, and Jesus said it. You can open it up and read it for yourself. And since scripture is God's word, since God himself said it, Jesus said no one comes to the Father, but through me. So if you don't come to the Father through Christ, you don't come to the Father. This is why those who take this approach as evangelical, not certain evangelicals take this approach. This is why if you're saved, that is you do take Jesus as your Lord and Savior. You should always pray for your relatives who aren't saved because they won't get into heaven. Likewise, all the millions of Hindus, none of them are going to heaven because none of them believe in Jesus. All the Buddhists, millions and millions of them, none of them are going to heaven. No one gets into heaven but us because we believe in Jesus, because Jesus said so. All the indigenous peoples, none of them are going to heaven either. None. You go really? Seriously. Give me a break.

Now, we don't know whether they're burning in hell forever for not believing in Jesus, or they're just stuck in a limbo state. They don't get in. But either way, it's not good.

Kirsten Oates: Not good.

Jim Finley: It just isn't good. By the way, I want to share something. How do we understand this? As in a Catholic monastery, and I never had any really in-depth exposure to evangelicals. But when I got my scholarship from my doctorate, it was five years of a PhD program at Fuller Theological Seminary, which is an evangelical seminary. They taught this. All of them didn't teach this. It's interesting. And I can remember being exposed to Protestants for the first time. I can remember thinking to myself how could these people be so bright, grounded in scripture and sincere about Christ and be Protestants. I don't get it. So confusing to me, really. And this is why what you really do when you meet these people, what really matters is holiness. And also in the words of their hymns, it is really mystical this way.

So everyone has their own little thing from the outside, and there's historical reasons why they think this. Not to go into all of that with the enlightenment period and the reformation and so on. But the Catholic Church, in the past has taken that approach too, in a way. So, Peter and up upon this rock, I'll build my church. So the Roman Catholic Church is the one true church. So all Protestants are heretics because they're not in the one true church founded by Jesus Christ. And that goes on and on and on. But a more contemplative approach, which I think is more pervasively at the heart of the mystical traditions and most of theologians today, I want to share a broader point of view. It doesn't concur with that. It doesn't see that approach. The approach is different. I want to offer some ways to look at it.

When Jesus says, no one comes to the Father except through me, though Jesus who's speaking there is not the historical Jesus, simply, that is, unless you believe in me, the

historical Jesus, you don't come to the Father, but who's speaking is Jesus, who's the second person of the trinity. In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. And all things were made through him. So no one comes to the Father except to the second person of Trinity, because all persons are created through the word. God eternally contemplates us in the Word and then creates us through Christ the Word. So it's the universality of the divinity of the word this way. Another way to look at it is this, use this example to languages.

Each language is the language that it alone is. So right now we're speaking in English. So if we wanted to have this conversation in French, we'd have to learn French. We'd have to learn vocabulary cards and syntax. And if we had the motivation to do it and the ability, we could get to the point, we could talk in French. And some people are bilingual culturally, and some people know four or five languages and they can move back and forth across different ones. If you're really good at it, you can think in different languages. But if you look across languages, you see that all languages are language. You can see the quality of language, which is really to see that the quality, the nature of consciousness, which is the nature of the mind, which is the nature of the person. So likewise, you can look across religion like historically, culturally specific languages. And each one is different. Each has its own creed and so on.

But if you look across those who live in that lineage and are transformed in it, and you look across it, you see the universality of spiritual awakening in faith. Thomas Merton once said, the real way to understand Buddhism is not to read a lot of books on Buddhism. It's to meet a Holy Buddhist. And the real way for them, for a Buddhist to understand Christianity isn't to read a lot of Christian theology, is to meet a holy Christian. Merton once said, the unfortunate thing a lot about Christian missionary work is they failed to realize the people they were converting were in many instances as holy, or more holy than they were. They were not holy because we believe, but we believe is the historically culture specific way with God's grace or learning to be holy.

That's the approach that makes most sense to me. If you want to see Merton's approach to this, his book, *Mystics and Zen Masters* and the other one, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*. That's where you see his approach to the universality of discovering in other religions, this oneness. Thomas Merton, he wrote a letter to DT Suzuki, the Zen Scholar, and he said, when I read your stories about Koans, about enlightenment for the master, with the teacher, with the student, and the students enlighten, he says, something leaps off the page at me and says this was true, and I'd like to know if I as a Christian could talk with you as a Buddhist about our common ground. So with the Dalai Lama, with the Muslims, he was always looking for this breaking down hardened lines of tribal differences for the underlying oneness that pervades all traditions and transcends all traditions this way.

So that's what makes sense to me, and I'd like to read this passage by Karl Rahner. There's a lot of passages in Merton like this too. This is in an article by Harvey D. Egan, *The Mystical Theology of Karl Rahner*, who is one of the great theologians of the Second Vatican council where you see this approach we're taking here. So I just want to read it, because it's very nice. Rahner is the 20th century's preeminent theologian of grace. In his view, grace is primarily God's universal self communication, not the sporadic bestow of certain divine gifts. And all human beings are the addresses of this communication. Therefore, all truly human activity is a free positive or negative response to God's offer of self, the grace at the heart of human

existence, because God offers nothing less than God's very own self to everyone. The human person is to Rahner's way of thinking, a Homo Mysticus, that is a mystical person.

This relationship stamps all personal experiences with at least an implicit yet primordial experience of God because we do not have an immediate preconceptual experience of God through the experience of the limitless breadth of our consciousness, which is always there. Rahner writes, there is such a thing as a mystical component to Christianity, and it's a mystical component that's shared with all religions, which is the divinity of the immediacy of what is intimately realized. And so I would say that would be the difference, the respectful difference between those who hold that evangelical position you're suggesting, and the one we're saying in a Catholic position. Catholic meaning universal, the universality of God all pervasively throughout all of human life. It's the beloved. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Beautiful. I just so appreciate that simple logic that you shared, Jim, I hadn't really heard it said that way, where if Jesus is the Christ, the third part of the trinity that brings all life into being, that everything's created through Jesus, then we come to God through Jesus because we're created through the Christ. And that's beautiful. So it's an event. It happens. It is. There's nothing to believe or-

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: Another interesting thing about Merton is DT Suzuki, the Zen scholar came to Gethsemane to visit him, and he went to New York to visit Suzuki and he died. He had sessions with his holiness, the Dalai Lama, was electrocuted in Asia, died there this way. So he was so immersed in this universality of the Dharma in Christ, and he wrote a letter to the monastery and they read it in the refectory. He said, the more I get to know my Buddhist brothers and sisters, the more I appreciate my faith in Christ, may live in the hearts of all of us. And he would know the Dalai Lama would return and say, the more I know my Christian brothers and sisters, the more I appreciate my faith in the Buddha on the night of enlightenment. May that enlightenment shine through all of us. And so there's a polyphony of this mutual recognition of each other in these different dialects of the divinity of life.

Kirsten Oates: For people who have that level of consciousness, that openness.

Jim Finley: And you know where I think it comes from? Is contemplation, because contemplation is boundary-less. It's not an answer or a conclusion. The rains fall from your hands in a state of quiet amazement as a revelation of the nature of God. And so I think that's another significant thing about the mystics, is they draw us toward that.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. And there's really an infinite number of lenses that we could put on that experience.

Jim Finley: That's right. That's exactly right.

Kirsten Oates: I am one of those people who came into Christianity as a Protestant, Jim.

Jim Finley: Thank God you found the true troops. Oh no, you're Episcopalian, right?

Kirsten Oates: Well, yeah. In Australia it's-

Jim Finley: Are you Episcopalian?

Kirsten Oates: In Australia it's Anglican. We call it Anglican.

Jim Finley: You're Anglican. So close. Not Roman, but you're just so close. We're praying for you.

Kirsten Oates: Well, I was going to share, just based on the listener's question, what really got me questioning that belief was when my grandmother died, she wasn't a Christian, but on her deathbed, she was in a bit of a state, almost like in a coma on the last day of her life. And the hospice chaplain came in and said to her, Norma, are you happy with your God? And she opened her eyes and she said, I am happy because God is pure love. And then she died soon after. And so for me, that really just started to undo that sense and that she really offered that to me is her teaching to leave me, can I find that pure love and live into it before I die? And so that started me searching for the mystical path.

Jim Finley: Another thing about this too, about the creed, all religions belief, like creed, I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth and all things visible and invisible. And so when we stand and say the creed at liturgy in the Catholic tradition, we don't just say it as a formula, we mean it. But at this level, we mean it as a configuration of the divinity of giving itself to us in life itself. That's why in the Catholic tradition, when we receive the Eucharist, we receive holy communion, not holy communication. It's a communion. But the gospel and the homily and body, the cadences of that communion, it's like the words I love you back and forth to each other are these words of an invitation to a realization that can't be explained, which is love.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, I'll recommend one book as well, which is Richard Rohr's book, *The Universal Christ*, where he really just tried to lay out what you said, the historical ways this teaching got distorted throughout by the church. Well, thank you. Wonderful. So we got an email from John and he had some information about the rosary that's mentioned in the book. So he says, regarding your episode where you mentioned the rosary and the Jesus Prayer, I thought you might like to mention that there is a specific rosary just for saying the Jesus Prayer. It is used mainly in the Eastern Orthodox churches. It is called a Chotki or a Komboskini prayer rope. There is an interesting legend about its origin.

St. Anthony of the Desert was said to have made one of wool to count his prayers, but the devil kept untying the knots to distract him. So he devised a more intricate knot made of multiple cross type knots, thereby the devil could not unite them. Sorry, untie them. The Chotki today are made with these multiple intricate knots for each bead. They're usually made with 33, 50 or a 100 knots piece. Always we begin again.

Jim Finley: First of all, I love stories like that about the knots, like the devil going, damn, I can't untie these knots. Anthony's praying away and foiled again. This is a great story. Yes, I'm aware of those rosaries. I have one here.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, right there. Yeah.

Jim Finley: And this is 33 beads. And then I also had one of cloth, where they're knots and I lost, I want to get another one.

Kirsten Oates: I say that, can I say that it's, oh yeah, look, there's quite a bit of knotting in between each here. That's a beautiful one.

Jim Finley: And there's 33. You say Jesus lived for 33 years, so you have 33, but then you have 50, then you have a 100. And so you use them to count, and it's just a nice devotional too, just to keep. So yeah, I have one.

Kirsten Oates: You have that one. Did you know it was the Chotki?

Jim Finley: I did.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, you did?

Jim Finley: Yeah. I knew of it from the pilgrim. So that's why I got it. And when I first discovered this, when I was in the monastery and I was aware of the tradition and so on, so I got one.

Kirsten Oates: You've had for a long time.

Jim Finley: I have a set of rosaries, yes.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Beautiful. Okay, here's a comment from Nigel, which is lovely. So Nigel said, I have fairly advanced Parkinson's and I'm prone to falling over, particularly when out walking my dog. I have for a long time silently repeated the Jesus Prayer to myself, both to help me stay on my feet and to give me courage. This, despite the many strictures I have read, saying that it should not be used like a mantra. It is a source of great comfort to me, a blessing, as is your podcast. I would very much value your thoughts on this.

Jim Finley: Yeah. First of all, I don't know what that means, it should not be used as a mantra. First of all, let's define terms. Okay. A mantra is a word or a phrase repeated over and over and over and over again. So because of the Jesus verse, say you say it without stopping, it is a mantra. It's like the Desert Fathers, also the International Christian Meditation Society, Father John Mains and Father Lawrence Freeman, they said it as a mantra. They said it without stopping. And I compare to being in the monastery, chanting the Psalms so they don't pause. So it's not a force or contrived. It's a flow that allows the mind and the heart to go deeper, a mantra.

But notice in the cloud of unknowing, it's not a mantra. You only use the word as needed. So you sit, you ground yourself in this unknowing heart, and then when the mind drifts off into this or that distraction, you say the word quietly within yourself to get re-grounded in worklessness. So it is a mantra, but it's very touching to have this image of this person walking along with their dog with a... You know what I mean?

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: And falling over and praying. That's very lovely-

Kirsten Oates: So beautiful. That's something more than a mantra. It's almost like something laying along the path with him. Yeah. Being with him on that path. Yeah.

Jim Finley: Yeah. I love this phrase when St. Benedict founded the monastery, and someone asked him once he was out in town buying supplies or something, and he said, what do you monks do in the monastery all day? And he said, fall down and get up. Fall down and get up. Fall down and get up this way. So there's something beautiful about the person's sincerity and faith in their physical fragility has a certain cathos to it, and it's touching. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, very. Judy asked a question about if there's a translation of the Philokalia that you prefer, Jim.

Jim Finley: No, I'm only aware of one. I don't have it right here with me. Maybe Corey could get, I'm only aware of really, could look up. Maybe there's another one. So I just have the one. It's lovely. It's beautiful.

Kirsten Oates: Okay, very good. A question from Ken about quickening. I've heard Jim often use the word quickening for the moment of awakening or the aha moment. Does that word come from a particular mystic? What other words have the various mystics used to describe this connection? Does Jesus or any scripture verses use some other words to describe this experience?

Jim Finley: Yes. I use the word, I like it. I don't know where it comes from exactly, what specific one. Other words for it would be touched, is a touch. Another phrase I use is a moment of spontaneous spiritual awakening that you're interiorly moved. See, you're interiorly moved. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* in the little introduction, he talks about saying our prayers and so on. And he talks about a blind stirring of love in the inmost core of your being. That is the inmost place within yourself that you don't know how to find. It stirs and it spills over into... It echoes in your emotions this way, and it sets your life on a whole new... Teresa of Avila talks about sitting in prayer in the fourth mansion, and you're just sitting there in the sincerity of your prayer, and she says, a mansion, a basin filling with water and it's overflowing. But what if the basin didn't overflow but kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger? And you realize that's what's happening to your heart.

You're sitting there and your heart's being enlarged to divine proportions. So there's different words where you're interiorly quickened or moved or stilled. It's like the intimacy of a quickening or a touch and you know not what to make of it. But you surrender, it's the gate of heaven. And then what happens, I think we all have little moments like that. Sundays are very intense actually. But what starts to happen, is that in these quickening or these touches or these being kissed by God, these stirring, there begins to grow in us a desire to abide in the depths of fleeting glimpse. And that's the path. I know that I fleetingly tasted that without which my life will be forever incomplete. So how can I be more habitually stabilized in it knowing that in the taste it isn't something more was given, but I fleetingly tasted divinity what every moment is. Where can I find someone to help me? That's the pilgrim, that's the archetypal search for the teacher.

Where can I find someone who's well seasoned in this? And in those presents that can help me to stabilize in it. That's the lineage.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Yeah. Wonderful. That leads perfectly into our next question from Lee. Longing exists in duality. As long as we long there is duality. Resting, being in God, there is no longing. To me, it seems to be essential to feel the longing. Is the feeling of the longing actually the knowing? To feel the longing is very subtle and deep. Is the longing a bridge into non-duality, the heart loving presence? Does the longing transform into a simple, gentle fire of beingness?

Jim Finley: We touched on this earlier in the little phrase about the Buddha, about the path, the nirvana, the ultimate goal starts showing up in the path beneath your feet. So I want to paraphrase it here also from Bernard Lanigan. His work on mystical consciousness and so on, is that there is a longing, but it's a longing that incarnates the consummation of what you're longing for. And it's a longing because it's still an intentional consciousness. So it's like an intentionality because the depth to which you've come provides a vantage point where you can see there's still a deeper depth. And once you see it, you want to go there. So the longing is an ongoing longing that actually incarnates the fulfillment of what you're longing for is religious consciousness. The purity of mystical consciousness is there's no longing. It's just God in all directions this way. And that's mystical union in the strict sense of the word.

And so in the broad sense of the word, like we're going to begin with saying, it's all the ways we experience God, understand God in our dreams and our life. And that's mystical path. It's all an intentional consciousness of a longing that incarnates the presence of God that we're longing for, because that longing is an echo of God's infinite longing for us. That way deep in it. But it's also possible for there to be the cessation of longing, which is death, the eternal life. So these mystics are gravitating towards their guiding us to discern how to go deeper and deeper toward that point.

Kirsten Oates: So the statement that longing exists in duality, as long as we long there is duality. What you're describing, the longing, there's no duality-

Jim Finley: I put this way, there's no duality as in being dualistically other. But there remains distinction. There remains distinction. So it's like an underlying in distinction, permeating the distinction, but it transcends duality. It isn't like someone dualistically other. It's like people deeply in love with each other. And so in moments of loving union, they say, we are one, but in realizing they're one, they don't cease to be two, because if they could cease to be two, they couldn't be there to know that they're one, but they don't live by the two-ness. And that carries over into prayer this way. So it's an indistinction that permeates the distinction this way. But then there's a oneness beyond distinction, which is a foreshadowing of eternal life, which is the mystical union, the strict sense.

Kirsten Oates: So in a way, surrendering to the longing is the end of duality for us. It's like-

Jim Finley: It is, because when we were doing Mechthild OF Magdeburg earlier where she said God revealed to her that he has so freely chosen to be so hopelessly in love with her, he honestly doesn't know if he could handle being God without her. And she said, take me home with you. I'll be your physician forever. And so really, see the longing is really, God loves us first. God longs for us. And so God creates us to have someone to long for and to long, to completely give God to us as our life. And that's what all this is about, really. I think it's one way of putting it. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Lovely. Lovely. Okay. Last question for today is from Anne. I'm curious about what you name as the gift of tears. My teacher, Sufi tradition names one of the teachers in the lineage crying so much in India, her blue handkerchief was bleached white. In this tradition, the crying is associated with longing that on its own will take you back to God. I'm experiencing great waves of grief that seem unconnected to anything in my life and wonder about both longing and the Christian understanding mentioned in this season as the gift of tears.

Jim Finley: First of all, different ways of looking at this. Sometimes the tears are actual tears. In another way, what it is where the actual... The body, the somatic dimensions of the body praying, but really the gift of tears is being loved unexplainably without foundations. It's like a free fall. It's the gift of tears. There's no footing anywhere. And a lovely image in when we did A Ladder of Monks, Guigo II. So he says, we start out with Lectio Divina, the sustained attentiveness, listening to God's words in scripture, whatever. Then we meditate on it in the presence of God, like discursive meditation, and then there's prayer from the heart. Help me with this. And he said, what happens if we're sitting this way that there can begin to grow in us an unbearable longing for infinite union with the infinite, which we're powerless to cross with our finite abilities. And the urgency of unconsummated longings, which is given to us by God.

He says, then God cuts us off mid-sentence and there's a boundary crossing, and God crosses over and grants the infinite union with the infinite that we're powerless to grant this way. And then he says, when that oneness happens, as it passes away like falling backwards in slow motion, you fall and where do you land back? You land back sitting there with the scriptures open on your lap, your finger on the text. See, it's like you fall back into the ordinariness of your ways. But now you know that at any moment it can catch fire. And that's Guigo on it. So that's the longing, the waves of longing, consummated, unconsummated that carries us along. So all these mystics, I think are trying to help us learn to live with.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Beautiful. Well, we've come to the end of our listener question session, and unfortunately there's never enough time to get through all the wonderful questions that come in. But I know, Jim, you read them all. I read them all, and they're so helpful just overall, don't you find that?

Jim Finley: Yes, very much so.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Excellent. And in this season, we also ask people to send in stories of pilgrimage, and we've had such an overwhelming response that we're going to take some more time to develop that episode, and that will come out as a bonus episode after season 10. So be looking out for that. We're excited to share some of the wonderful stories that have come in. So thank you everyone who sent those in. So Jim, we'll be back with season 10 in the fall, but thank you for this wonderful, wonderful season, The Wave of Pilgrim.

Jim Finley: That's great. Thank you. Thank Corey. Look forward to working with Dorothy too down the road.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, yes. Thank you, Corey in the background, and Dorothy, who's going to be working with us in the fall. 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.