

Turning
to the
Mystics



T.S. Eliot

Turning to T.S. Eliot
with James Finley and Kirsten 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 10 of Turning to the Mystics. And I'm here with Jim. Jim, welcome. And we've made it to double figures to season 10.

Jim Finley: Yes, we did. I'm grateful for how well this has been received and we can continue on sharing these insights with people.

Kirsten Oates: With that, let's get started, Jim. Let's have the big announcement. Who is our new mystic for season 10?

Jim Finley: Yes. In all our sessions so far, we've been turning for guidance to the Christian mystics, and we're going to continue doing that in further sessions. But here, for the first time, I want to start turning to poets with a strong kind of mystical tone to their poetic voice. And this time we'll be turning to T.S. Eliot in the poem Four Quartets. And as with the mystics, I'll be reading a stanza in the poem and then translating the message of the stanza to serve our purposes here on how we can experientially allow these words of T.S. Eliot to deepen our experience in response to God in our life. And so, we'll be walking through this poem in that way.

Kirsten Oates: Beautiful. I'm so looking forward to it. And Jim, I think it would be helpful just to talk through what a mystic is. Now we're shifting from these classical Christian mystics we've been studying into poetry. How do we think about mysticism and how the poet might join the mystical?

Jim Finley: It would be good to keep doing this every so often because the term is so atmospheric to the essence of what we're saying, guidance from the mystics. And so, what does that even mean and how does that apply to us? We'll take a few minutes to walk through this. And here I want to share to say first that there are vision aspects and path aspects to mysticism. The vision aspect is a spiritual worldview, we might say, of contemplative Christianity, of the contemplative traditions, of the world of religions. And here I want to be returning. We saw this in Merton. We saw it in others Karl Rahner puts the vision this way, "... understands that the grace of God is God's self-donating presence, giving itself away as the presence of ourselves, others, and all things. So, it's the divinity of the immediacy of everything.

And this is why then every event in our life where we're awakened by the value of life, we're awakened to the goodness of life for the call to be true to ourselves as God, even though we might not be explicitly thinking of God as God, it's the divinity of the immediacy of life itself as holiness. And then when we think of it in terms of religion, like for us in the Christian dispensation of Christ, it makes explicit that divinity in our tradition. And so, there's two ways of looking at this. There's the mysticism in the broad sense, which is the mysticism of daily life. And so, mysticism is basically this; it's all the ways that we experience God's presence in our dreams, in the providential nature by the unfolding of the events of our life and our relationships. That felt sense of knowing that we're being sustained by, and God is one with us in life itself. And the call to be faithful to that through love and through

gratitude, through fidelity, and so on.

And so there's that. It's the mysticism of devotional sincerity this way. Then we saw it takes a turn of the mysticism of the masters, which are the mystics that were like St. John of The Cross, Teresa of Ávila, Meister Eckhart. And the mysticism of the masters is where that sense of God's oneness with us becomes so refined or so luminous or delicate. It starts becoming a sense of infused contemplation. It's like God's experience of being God accessing us and given to us as our experience of God and who we are in God, which is the mysticism of the masters. And this is a very delicate point for all of us because that devotional sincerity is kind of a subtle tipping point where there's a strange sense of an intimate oneness where we and God mutually disappear as dualistically other than each other. Very subtle, subtle, subtle, but for some people it becomes an underlying habitual state that they learn to live in the mysticism of the masters.

What we find in Four Quartets is both of those. T.S. Eliot was a devout Anglican, his faith, he lived devotional sincerity. But we find in his poem, he quotes the mystics, he quotes John of the cross, he quotes Julianne of Norwich. There's allusions to the Buddha. There's allusion to the yoga sutra of yoga, namaste, I am that, and of Rumi, the mystical Islam. So, it's just woven with these mystical innuendos of the masters, but it's woven into the concreteness of life itself. So, when we read T.S. Eliot, it's a Lectio Divina where we drop down into being... He's guiding and helping us to be sensitive to that mystical dimension of ourselves. So, to read the poet, it's like a way to pray, or it's a way to carry it over into daily life. So, I think that's one way to understand what we're about here, about the mystical.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. That's really helpful, Jim. And why do you think poetry is a helpful vehicle for dropping into this kind of mysticism?

Jim Finley: Yes. I think it's because there is a language that's logical. It moves towards conclusions, towards definitions, and that's important. But there's also a language that bears witness to the undefinable. In this sense, for example, when two people say to each other, "I love you," it's something mystical and that their love for each other is not a fact. It isn't something they can turn to like, "There it is." So, it's the language of lovers. It's the language that comes up when we're speaking to children. It's the cry of the poor when the person's crying out, or it's the healing voice. It's the voice of reassurance. And so, that's the poetic voice. It's endlessly evocative that it somehow evokes and embodies and invites us to rest in the intimacy of what we can't explain. But it's a substance of what matters more than anything and it really is the value of everything. And that's the poet.

So, for example, when we saw St. John of The Cross, the illumination he experienced, it came out as poetry. And likewise, in the Muslim tradition, when Rumi, when his teacher Shams was lost, he started spinning around a pillar and poetry came out. So, I think that's the poetic voice. When I was in the monastery too we chanted the Psalms back and forth every day throughout the day. And so, the poems of Psalms are poetry. And so, it's the poetics of our life. And the poet puts us in that space. And I think that's one way I understand it.

Kirsten Oates: Mechtild of Magdeburg is another one that comes to mind that chose poetry as well as prose to share her mysticism.

Jim Finley: She really did. I think of that one quote I love when we refer to her is that she said, in prayer, God revealed to her that He is so freely chosen to be so hopelessly in love with her, he doesn't know if he could handle being God without her. And she says, "Take me home with you; I'll be your physician forever." See, that's poetry this way. And I think if we would listen to the listeners who are touched by this, this is the way they're touched by this, because it's the dowry of our being. We're practicing being habitually established in sensitivity to these dimensions of our life that are sacred and ultimately divine really.

Kirsten Oates: Beautiful. So, in a way, our life is an unfolding poem.

Jim Finley: It is. It's an unfolding poem, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Let's get into a little bit of detail about T.S. Eliot and the poem that you chose, the Four Quartets. I'm curious why we're starting with this poet and this poem, T.S. Eliot, the Four Quartets.

Jim Finley: Yes. I'm going say, mainly with the poets that have touched me over the years, T.S. Eliot was one of the very first ones. I was introduced to him by Thomas Merton in the monastery. And so, when I read Four Quartets, I was so touched by the depth of it and the beauty of it. I've been reading it ever since, really. He's one of these people, like these mystics, who have been part of my inner world and have helped me. And so now to share this with people, I think that's why I'm choosing him, that they might find him helpful to them also. Also, I think then there's another thing, we're going to start right ahead as always, like with the mystics, on who T.S. Eliot was historically to help us appreciate who he is spiritually.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: And I think there's significance of the autobiographical foundations of the mystic's voice, and I think really the lesson is-

Of the mystic's voice. And I think really the lesson in this for us is how we might be more sensitive in realizing that who we are spiritually transcends who we are historically. As historically, I'm living in a situation, there's this and this and this and this and this. Gabriel Marcel says is to realize that the being of my life is richer than the facts of my life. A detailed diary doesn't add up to some total of the mystery of who I am. And so I think by looking at the autobiographical foundations of his life in which he discovered and bears witness to the spirituality of his life, helps us to do the same as we listen to this. But that's my personal story with TS Eliot and why we're starting with him.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. That's wonderful. Wow. You were really introduced to a lot of great mystics in the monastery.

Jim Finley: Through Merton. I was so bless actually. It's kind of amazing to me. And also... Well, later I want to start doing the non-Christian mystical traditions too of Islam and Buddhism and all that through Thomas Merton and just stayed with me. It had a deep effect on me.

Kirsten Oates: So Merton was a big fan of this poem?

Jim Finley: Yeah, he loved this poem. He was a poet himself and had a poetic voice, wrote poetry and spoke very highly of TS Eliot. He says somewhere in his journals then when he reads Four Quartets, it's so good, makes him never want to try to write a poem again like I can't do this. That's how good he is. So anyway, he is very good. He's a lovely poet.

Kirsten Oates: I can imagine he was intimidated because TS Eliot was also known as quite an innovator in his time, right Jim?

Jim Finley: He really was. Later we'll be looking at Gerard Manley Hopkins too. He was very bold in using poetry to boldly set the message before a custom syntax. And he did it in a very disciplined way. It wasn't haphazard or reckless. It's like well-chosen boldness in how he says things, which is one of his gifts.

Kirsten Oates: Amazing. Well, let's get into some of the details of his life then.

Jim Finley: Okay. I want to say too, at the beginning, we'll be doing this too, is that the poetry Four Quartets is public domain. And you can go on the internet. The website is actually coldbacon.com, weird name for it. And the whole poem is there. You can print it out. It's only like 30 pages.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: So anyone can have that. You can buy a copy if you want. So just so you know that. And also there's a lot, we'll be referring to these sources later. There's some lovely in-depth commentaries on Four Quartets that people can listen to, and if they're inclined to help them, go back to the poem itself if they're so inclined. So first let's look at Eliot's life. And I want to say right up front what I think because often in our life, I think there's a core riddle at the heart of our life. We spend the rest of our life being true to it. And his riddle, I think is one, the death of his faith. He was a very devout Anglican, got baptized into the Anglican church, deeply devout in his Christian faith. And the other thing it touches we'll see is suffering. And especially, as we'll see, is the suffering of his age. We'll be looking at this. And one of the reasons, in thinking about getting ready to do this poem, I think makes us so relevant is we're living in hard times.

Right now there's so much uncertainty at a number of different levels. And so what we see in his poetry is so honest about how hard the hard times are. And he's very graphic about it. Then he says, if we look very closely, we see that there's a light shining in the darkness. A light shines in the darkness and the darkness grasp but not. Although the darkness can grasp it, the darkness can be illumined by it. And he's going to gravitate toward the mystery of the cross of Christ. It's where the light of God and suffering or intermingled in our lives, and that's kind of the brilliance of his mysticism, we'll see here. So that as a background about the facts of his life.

TS Eliot, Theodore Stearns Eliot was born in 1888 in St. Louis Missouri. He was an academic young man. He studied at Harvard University, he studied at Oxford

University, he studied at the Sorbonne University. And as a fairly young man left United States never to return, moved to England, renounces American citizenship and took an English citizenship. So he was very English. He very much identified with England and being English. And he lived in England for the rest of his life until he died in 1965 at 77 years old. And so the thing about TS Eliot then, so there's this faith, which we'll be looking at very closely in the poem itself. But in suffering, one is the world. World War I broke out in 1914, he was 26 years old and it was catastrophic. I mean, World War I, the devastation of World War I. And he wrote a poem at *The Waste Land* on the devastation and darkness of war. And then the years between the war, World War II started in 1939. He was 51. So he lived through two world wars.

Kirsten Oates: Wow.

Jim Finley: And so you can see the extent he was so aware of suffering and he gave a voice to suffering in this way. And so the suffering in the social order merged with the suffering in his private life because when he went to England, he met this woman, Vivian, and they married in a secret ceremony. And it was a very unhappy marriage, very troubled marriage. They were poor and they struggled and she had emerging pattern of ongoing mental difficulties and problems. And so a lot of his suffering was the falling apart of his marriage and the despair of the marriage. There's a famous mathematician, philosopher, social activist, Burton Russell. And Burton Russell let Eliot and his wife live in his apartment with him. He knew them both. And he announced that he had an affair with T.S Eliot's wife. And so it was like devastation upon devastation, and Eliot fell apart. Later on, that she was admitted against her will by her brother to an asylum, to a mental hospital, and she died in the mental hospital. He never visited her there. He just thought there was nothing there.

So you have the suffering of his social order, the suffering in his marriage, and the unhappiness of not finding love. Searching for love, just like, that eluded him. And this is where his poetry... So for example, in *The Waste Land*, the earlier poem, it's very dark. But when you see an *Ash Wednesday* in *Four Quartets*, you see this very Christian sense of the light of God shining in the darkness and the consolation, which is really what the poem is about. Also, what's interesting is as he got older, he stayed single for a long time, took a vow of celibacy, and I think he was planning to stay that way. He was even thinking of retiring, living in a monastery. And he met this woman who was his assistant. And at the time, I think he was in his seventies, she was 30, and she was very taken by him. At 14 years old, she read his poetry. She couldn't believe she even got to work with him. And here they fell in love and got married and lived together very quiet like home bodies.

And he wrote, he said, "We stay home a lot together alone. We drink Drambuie, eat cheese and play Scrabble." And he had this sense of ordinary happiness that had eluded him. So I think the light of the sacred merged with the light of the happiness of his daily life. Also with noticing with him is he was a very public poet. Some poets are very anonymous. They are appreciated after they die. William Blake, we'll be looking at him, Emily Dickinson and others. But he was famous for the voice of sadness in the war. And then when he wrote *Four Quartets*, he was seen as a sage. He founded a journal called *Criterion*, which is a very esteemed and exclusive literary journal. He became editor at Farber and Farber at a publishing house. He won the Nobel Prize for literature. So he really enjoyed the sense of recognition of himself, and he was very aware of that too, I think as a calling that he had to

be faithful to that. He also wrote essays and literary criticism, essays on history.

He was a kind of Renaissance man in a sense. And so that's T.S Eliot's life. Turning to the Mystics will continue in a moment.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, you said his faith played a big role in his journey and his poetry. Can you tell us more about that?

Jim Finley: Yes. I think what we see first in *The Waste Land* and the early poetry, it was there, but the devastation was so devastating, the poem was as dark as the war itself. You could just feel that. But what started to happen through his faith is he began to realize, in faith, there is the presence of God that transcends and wholly permeates the suffering itself. And if we can learn to see the light of God that permeates the suffering itself...

... see the light of God that permeates the suffering itself, shining in the suffering. Then he began to see really, this is a kind of a spiritual awakening, like a great turning of being at peace, again, which the whole poem culminates toward the cross and the resurrection. And so he's trying to write a poem that helps us experience that too. What's this trajectory? Sometimes in here we talk about that God is a presence that protects us from nothing, even as God unexplainably sustains us in all things.

And for me personally, I think as a trauma survivor, and for 30 years I did trauma therapy. And what you find in trauma, and you see this in T.S. Eliot, is that trauma is traumatizing. You can lose your way in it. But when we walk with it and sit with it and find someone to be present to it, we can start discovering down in the depths of trauma, a deeper depth of a sustaining presence. And we realize it isn't that we're not grateful for the path of healing and recovery, if we're fortunate enough to do that, but we know it's so important to never forget what we learned in the darkness about the light and the dark and birth and death, so on. So I think this became very much in the forefront, this is very much at the heart of *Four Quartets* for them I think.

Kirsten Oates: And I guess his audience were living through the same social trauma as him, so there was a core experience that everyone was in that he really spoke to.

Jim Finley: Exactly right. But I also think something else, for the life of devotional sincerity, like mysticism in the broad sense, his poetry invited the devout Christian person to be deeper, more radicalized in their faith and its mystical dimensions of the divinity of the day by day. So I think he inspired many people that way.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, beautiful. Yeah, it's so interesting that he was experiencing the kind of trauma you were describing, but in the social order as well as deeply in his personal life so that-

Jim Finley: Exactly. That's exactly right. And so the poem then itself, *Four Quartets* is actually four poems, it seems like *Four Quartets*. It was very interesting and has a musical theme. So in chamber music where there's a quartet, the people playing in the quartet have to listen to each other. And so in each poem, the stanzas interplay with each other. So *Four Quartets* is four quartets, but all four resonate with each other.

So see, it's like a symphony, movements of a major symphony. There's a kind of a symphonic

movement, and he tries to help us get in touch with the symphonic nature of our life. Each of us, we're living in these phases, but the phases have different layers to them and dimensions to them. But each phase is related to the other phases. So the poem also does this for us. So we're going to start, just like I did with the mystics, we're going to start with the first poem, Burnt Norton. And what I'm going to do then is I'm going to read a stanza and then share with you what has helped me in that stanza about my own life, my own sense of God, so that the listeners can see what they see in the stanza.

Because really, I think it's very dense, intuitively dense like a lot of these mystics are that way. It's not a light read. You know what I mean? You can't skim read a mystic. It's very, everything they say counts. So how can we take it and make it more experientially accessible without watering it down? That's been my thing, so that we can realize that actually, we're not used to listening to such language because we're not used to listening to the simplicity of it. We're touched by it, but we don't stay long enough to be transformed by it. And so the poem helps us stay there in a meditative state. And so that's how we're going to go through the poem.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, beautiful. In a meditative state or a state of confusion and frustration.

Jim Finley: Exactly. And also how to be meditatively confused, to be meditatively frustrated. Because often when we're frustrated, we're frustrated because we can't figure it out.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, exactly.

Jim Finley: But what T. S. Eliot is saying, but what if it's not figureoutable? You get a spiritual hernia trying to figure out the unspiritual. Not everything's reducible to a conclusion, and neither are you. Neither am I. Because it's the divinity of who we are. So that's what we're going to see how he does this over and over and over again through the whole poem. It's delightful, really, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, I'm so looking forward to it. And Jim, the historical context of the poems is important too. They're located in real places, and there's some historical context that is the context for his poetry for those [inaudible 00:25:04]-

Jim Finley: Let me give an example of this,...and also you see this in Celtic spirituality too, the spirituality of place. And so the first poem is Burnt Norton, I'll be repeating this when we do Burnt Norton, I'll say it now to give an example because each poem is like it's a place, that Burnt Norton is an actual place in English. It's a manor house.

In the 17, I don't know when, there was a wealthy person who lived in this manor house in England, and he fell in love with this woman. And he brought her to his estate to the manor house, and he started courting her so on, and she said, "A butterfly needs wings, and therefore if you build an extension on both sides of your manor house, like the wings of a butterfly, I'll marry you." And he did. He actually built this whole thing to win over the beloved. She moved in with him, they were living together and she was an alcoholic and cheated on him. He killed her, set the place on fire and killed himself.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, wow.

Jim Finley: That's *Burnt Norton*. So the poem opens there. But what the whole poem's about, see, it opens at a tragic place. But the poetry shows it's not just tragic because children are there, the dead are there, the divine is there. So that's the paradox that runs through the whole poem and where we are in our own life and our own passages and so on.

So every of the four poems is a place that has its own meaning, and we'll talk about it. And then that helps us to see the meaning of where we live, the internalized inner landscape, the configuration of the furniture in our living room. The concreteness of where we live out our lives. And the poem tries to help us be sensitive to that.

Kirsten Oates: That's really helpful to know upfront, because I know when I first started to read the poem, it was hard to make sense of a lot of things without understanding that broader context because he's really assuming that context as he writes the poem.

Jim Finley: One of the things about T. S. Eliot because he was so educated and bright, he assumes a lot. And some poets, the more they reach out to us, he doesn't reach out to us, he just stays where he is. We have to go to him. And so some of it's intuitive. That's what I want to say here, it's mystical. If you just sit quietly with it, how do you decode it? Some of it has historical reference, theological references and so on. And so we'll be filling those in so we can kind of see, he doesn't explicate those innuendos, but they run through all of his poetry.

Kirsten Oates: So I'm so grateful for your guidance in that, Jim. That's going to be wonderful. Another theme that comes through the poem, you've discussed place, you've discussed suffering as a theme. You've discussed divinity as shining through. Another one is time and how we experience time as human beings.

Jim Finley: That's really true, time, and I think that just runs through all of it. So in one sense, it's the passage of time. I seen this the other day, when we look at old pictures, T. S. Eliot talks about an evening with a photograph album sitting there. So when you see a picture of yourself as a child, you are that person, but you're not. In our own past, we say it so happened, it came to pass. But what Eliot is saying, the things that lived in the past and they live on inside of us.

So there's like the past is actually the depth dimension of the present that we carry with us into a future. And ultimately, what he's talking about is the eternity of time. So that in time is that which endlessly passes away. So everyone who's born, dies. It's a temporary arrangement in time, but this bodily self that's dying in time, the depth of the bodily self is God's beloved who never dies. So can we discover the eternity of time in the passage of time. It's another big theme in T.S Eliot?

Kirsten Oates: Amazing. Well, that's a great introduction to T. S. Eliot himself. I'm curious, Jim, have you ever written poetry? Has poetry been one of your genres?

Jim Finley: Yes, Merton was a poet, and I was there studying the mystics under his guidance and also studying medieval philosophy, Duns Scotus and Aristotle and Aquinas, and so on, or Dan Walsh, but also I wrote poetry. And I shared this in my memoir, but when I was sexually abused at the monastery, I had a breakdown and I burned all my poetry. And I haven't written poetry since. I can't bear to write it. But I feel that my language is very poetic. There's a poetic language, like a poem in blank verse.

... language, like a poem in blank verse because listen very closely to what I'm saying, I'm not explaining anything. Seriously. There's things to be explained and as sidelines, we explain thing. He did this, and there's little sidebars where we do that.

But it's not about explaining. It's about opening our heart to the intimacy of the unexplainable in which alone our fulfillment lies hidden, which is God, ultimately. So, yeah, I think that's another reason I relate to poets that way, you know?

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. I'm so sorry to hear about you burning your poetry and, yeah, the trauma had that effect on you. That's...

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: I myself have never been gifted at writing poetry. But there was a time that I went through just some really terrible suffering, and one of the ways that I was able to manage it was this poetry started coming out of me.

What it really was, in my experience, was I was out in nature, and it was almost like nature was revealing the love and divinity that was all around me. It was revealing it to me in my suffering. So I was really just writing down what nature was revealing to me in my heart, and yeah.

Jim Finley: Yeah, yeah. You get a feeling of all poets, that's what it's like for them. Only I think it's a vocation, they're called to stay there. Because you can sit for a long time sitting with what flowed out. It's like an intuitive resonance of something that's revealing itself to you.

I'll share two of my poems that I wrote.

Kirsten Oates: Oh.

Jim Finley: They may want to edit this out. I was 18 years old when I entered, so just two of them are coming to me now. And I told this, too, at the time when I took simple vows, I left Merton. I was with John Eudes Bamberger, who was a psychiatrist. He was father master of the simple profess, and I shared this poem with him.

In the poem, I said, "And here we sit now beneath the blanket before the flames, and I, gazing into the flames, your eyes." And John Eudes Bamberger said, "I hope that was written a long time ago," because he's a monk. I said, "It wasn't. I wrote it yesterday."

Another one was Elijah, the prophet... He's in the lion's den and Habakkuk, an angel, takes Habakkuk with a pot of porridge and lifts Habakkuk up by his hair and carries it into the lion's den to feed Elijah. It's a great poem.

So I wrote a poem about, "Here comes Elijah, held by his hair by an angel, holding the boiling pot of porridge between his scalded knees." I said, "How strange God's ways are of deliverance."

So I would write little poems like that. I had a whole set of them, and I burned them.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, wow. Well, what a gift they're just coming back now this way.

Jim Finley: Yeah, they stay with me.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. That's sweet, Jim. Thank you for sharing that. I love it.

I know many of our listeners write poetry. We've received some beautiful poems from listeners over the years-

Jim Finley: That's totally true.

Kirsten Oates: ... in response to your beautiful teaching, Jim.

So I think we've covered everything we wanted to cover today. I wonder, Jim, if you just want to give us a little taste of T.S. Eliot before we leave?

Jim Finley: Yes, let me do that. This is one of the most famous passages. It's in *Burnt Norton*. We'll be walking through it slowly, and let us read the stanza.

"At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;

Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,

But neither arrest, nor movement. And do not call it fixity,

Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,

Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,

There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.

I can only say, there we have been; but I cannot say where.

And I cannot say, how long, for that would be to place it in time.

The inner freedom from the practical desire,

The release from action and suffering, release from the inner

And the outer compulsion, yet surrendered

By a grace of sense, a white light still moving,"

Kirsten Oates: Wow.

Jim Finley: And we'll be walking through this together because it's like the still point, the still of the turning world. The still point is the divinity of us that runs through the center of our body, runs through the center of the world, it runs through the center of everything. And that still point is radiating out as us so the dance is really the dance of the divinity of the still point.

But what the poem is about is in the centrifugal force of the day's demands. We keep spinning out away from the all-encompassing center, which alone is real. So what the poetry does, what the mystics do, what Jesus does, is keep luring us back in to the center so that the

dance of daily life embodies that center to presence, sincerity and gratitude and openness and so on. So that would be like a taste of how he talks.

Kirsten Oates: Wow. Well, thank you for that, and it's beautiful to hear it read in your voice, too, Jim. So yet again, I look forward to another wonderful season, and thank you for bringing us T.S. Eliot and the Four Quartets.

Jim Finley: Yes, look forward to it. Thank you.

Kirsten Oates: So next session, Jim will be diving into the first of the four poems called Burnt Norton. And we're very fortunate this season because this book, the Four Quartets, is available for free online. So we're going to put a link in our show notes so that you can download the poem for free and read along with Jim starting next session.

Thank you to Dorothy and Corey in the background supporting us, and look forward to session one. Thanks, Jim.

Jim Finley: You're welcome.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you for listening to this episode of Turning to the Mystics, a podcast created by the Center for Action and Contemplation. We're planning to do episodes that answer your questions. So if you have a question, please email us at podcasts@cac.org or send us a voicemail. All of this information can be found in the show notes. We'll see you again soon.