

# Turning to the Mystics



**T.S. Eliot**

Session 2

with James Finley and Kirsten Oates

Jim Finley: Greetings. I'm Jim Finley. Welcome to Turning to the Mystics.

Greetings, everyone. Welcome to our time together, turning for guidance found in T.S. Eliot's poem, Four Quartets. In the previous session, we reflected on the first of the four poems, Burnt Norton. And now we move now into the second of the four poems, East Coker. And right away, we can see the continuity of these poems and they're just as Burnt Norton refers to an actual place, East Coker refers to a place. Or now the place East Coker is a town in England instead of a more specific place like Burnt Norton is a town. Another source of continuity which is more relevant is he's going to begin by reflecting on the town from the standpoint of time and then he's going to roll it over to look at time from the standpoint of eternity and the town.

Another interesting little shift is he's looking at the town from the standpoint of time with respect to the buildings that people build to live in in the town and to conduct the business of the day, and that's how he's going to start. I'll begin then with the opening stanza, East Coker. "In my beginning is my end." And so he starts now with himself just where he left off before, but now he's moving out of the buildings of the town. "In succession houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended, are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place is an open field, or a factory, or a bypass. Old stone to new building, old timber to new fire, old fires to ashes and ashes to the earth, which is already flesh, fur, and feces, bone of man and beast, corn stalk and leaf." So this is the slow eventual crumbling away of all structures.

"Houses live and die." And now he quotes scripture. "Houses live and die. There is a time for building and a time for living and for generation and a time for the wind to break the loosened pane and to shake the wainscot where the field mouse trots and to shake the tattered arras woven with a silent motto." So first of all, there is a time for living. We're in time, we're living in these buildings. There is a time for living. And also, there is a time for building. And there is a time for living and for family, for generations, the ongoing... There's a time for all of that, but also to always know as true as that is, it's also inevitably true that there's time for the wind to break the loosened pane. In other words, imagine an elegant house in East Coker and the people who lived in that elegant home are all dead and maybe the people who live there after them are gone and now it's abandoned.

And in that abandoned building, this elegant home that's now empty, the wind is breaking the loosened window pane, cracking, the cracked window. And to shake the wainscot, wainscot is one of those words you got to look up to see what it means, in these elegant homes, a wainscot there would be expensive imported oak and they would've put it along the bottom of the walls at the floor a few inches or a few feet high. It was considered elegant looking this way. And now along that wainscot, the field mouse is trotting in the abandoned falling apart house. And to shake the tattered arras with a silent motto, and arras were tapestries, huge woven tapestries hung on the wall to hide an alcove. So now that it's faded and it's woven with a silent motto, and we could say the motto might be death, but the ending of everything is a silent motto, the cloth of the fabric is woven with that.

From there, the poem shifts, the scene changes. And now we're going to move from the perspective of time into the perspective of a moment of eternity, a moment of consciousness when we're not in sequential time. And the scene begins with himself again. "In my beginning is my end. Now the light falls..." And the scene is that you're alone in the

countryside in an open field. “Now the light falls across the open field, leaving the deep lane shuddered with branches, dark in the afternoon, where you lean against a bank while a van passes, and the deep lane insists on the direction into the village, in the electric heat hypnotized. In a warm haze, the sultry light is absorbed, not refracted, by grey stone.” So now we’re coming to the moment of consciousness in which we’re not in time. Remember in *Burnt Norton*, this way too. But instead of it being a moment under the Great Barber as it starts to rain or you’re in a drafty church at Smokefall, now the scene is that you’re there in an open field leaving the deep lane shuddered with branches.

So there’s a little lane and there’s overarching trees, shudder the deep lane, where you lean against a bank, you’re all alone and you’re leaning up against a bank and a van passes. And the van is passing, it insists in the direction into the village the electric heat or hot things are happening. And all those people having a big night in town, they’re all going to be dead eventually too. And the buildings are dancing and they’re all going to be crumbled and everything this way. “... into the village, into the electric heat hypnotized. In a warm haze, the sultry light is absorbed, not refracted, by the grey stone. The dahlias sleep in the empty silence and they wait for the early owl.” Dahlias are bright-colored flowers to grow in Mexico through South America, and I hate this image about plants. So now the moment of consciousness, you’re alone out in the country in this field and there’s these dahlias. The van goes by, you’re all alone now and it’s quiet.

And so here’s the image that came to my mind is, it came to me once to say, imagine that you’re alone in the middle of the night and you’re dying and you know that you’re dying. And you turn to look at the flowers on the windowsill, silhouetted in the moonlight. They seem to know all about it. So there’s a way of being all alone in the middle of a forest, in the middle of nature, the flowers, the primordial life of plants, and somehow you drop down into the primordial life of the flowers and the plants and they’re sleeping in the empty silence. See, there’s no content. They’re sound asleep, awaiting for the early owl to come, to start the beginnings of the night.

“In that open field,” namely, the field that you’re in when you’re about to have this experience of being conscious and leaving time. “In that open field, if you do not come too close, if you do not come too close, on a summer midnight, you can hear the music of the weak pipe and the little drum and see them dancing around the bonfire the association of man and woman in daunsinge, signify matrimony, a dignified and commodious sacrament. Two and two, necessary conjunction, holding each other by the hand or the arm, which betokeneth concorde. Round and round the fire leaping through the flames, or joined in circles, rustically solemn or in rustic laughter lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes, earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth, mirth of those long sense under earth, nourishing the corn. Keeping time, keeping the rhythm and their dancing as in their living in the living seasons the time of the seasons and the constellations.”

So the constellations are a reference to the stars, the timelessness of the constellation of the stars overhead. “The time of milking and the time of harvest, the time of coupling a man and a woman and that of beasts. Feet rising and falling. Eating and drinking. Dung and death.” I like to reflect on this. Poetically, see, especially in the light of where this poem is headed this way. So you’re in a field and you look out across this empty field. I had this image once when I was... Maureen and I, we used to have a therapy office and we were going together three

days a week, and one day I went in alone for the fourth day.

And there was a cemetery on the way to the therapy office, an old cemetery, and I would stop at that cemetery and sit on a bench there and I would be struck by the fact I'd look out at all the tombstones this way and realize that six feet under the ground were all those coffins. And the thing about it is, they were all empty. No one was in there. The remains of their body was in there, but the shine in their eyes, the sound of their voice, the one that you loved and loved you because we're all eternal.

No one's in there. It isn't just that all those who were in time and across to the veil of death are now in the eternity of God, which they are. But here's another way of looking at it. It isn't just that we're eternal, but the daily rhythms of our life are eternal. So the rhythms of your life, like getting up in the morning and going to bed at night and preparing your meals and sitting and taking a walk, God knows all those rhythms and God never forgets. And so the primordial rhythms of the daily life, they're also eternal in God. Not only are those who have died not dead, but the rhythms of their daily life is not over because it's never over. If you don't get too close, if you don't get too close, you can see the eternity that never passes away and all the rituals of the day that are endlessly passing away.

He's inviting us to have this kind of poetic sensitivity to this about ourselves too. "Dawn points, and another day prepares for heat and silence." It's all going to start again tomorrow, the next day, the next day, goes on and on and on. "Out at sea the dawn wind wrinkles and slides." So out in the middle of the ocean, no one's there. The wind is moving the waters back and forth as he's sliding back and forth in the wind. "I am here, I'm there or elsewhere. In my beginning." So in my beginning I'm all pervasively present and the endlessly falling away of the eternity of what never falls away this way.

And he's trying to help us go into a meditative consciousness where we're not subject to linear time to be sensitive to the spirituality of our lives because our life on this earth and our bodily being is a temporary arrangement. We're not here for very long, really. But in the deep down depths of things, it's the endlessness of ourself so that when we were born, our life did not begin we were born. It's when we appeared out of the eternity of God's heart. And when we die, we're not annihilated. We vanish away in time, but everything is forever. And here we're trying to be meditatively sensitive to this. Roman numeral two. I'm going to skip it, the very first part because what he does is this. He tries in a very condensed way to explain this.

Let me tease it apart and define it and break it down. And then he says about his ability to explain what he's saying, like make this clear. He says, "That was one way of putting it, not very satisfactory. A paraphrastic study of worn out poetical fashion, leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings. The poetry does not matter." It's futile. In other words, it's not explainable, it's not definable, but it's intimately realizable by entering into consciousness in a meditative state to the interior truth of the divinity of our lives and our nothingness without God. "The poetry does not matter. It was not to start again what one had expected." So when you started the poem, the poem ends up being what you didn't expect it to be. It

always sticks as the pricing, like life. “What was to be the value of the long looked forward to, long hoped for calm, the autumnal serenity and the wisdom of age?”

I’m going to skip down now about five lines to the sentence that says, “There is, it seems to me, at best, only a limited value in the knowledge derived from experience.” I’d like to reflect on this. And you’re talking about the elders and the age who claim wisdom over the years and the relative value of that. Here’s what I think the insight is, that when we go through life, we internalize experiences. The experiences form a pattern. Those patterns form the ascent of a rise by which we interpret future things. And there’s a relative truth to that. There really is. But the very fact they’re patterns formed in time, they’re relative value because they’re finite. And if you stop there in linear time with limited thoughts and patterns, you don’t fall into the boundarylessness of the consciousness of eternity that transcends time. I like that there’s one poet who said, “I write my poems for lovers in their beds all over the world who don’t give a damn about my poetry.”

He said hey, he doesn’t give a damn about his poem because it doesn’t matter. But the poem is bearing witness to something that matters more than words can say and embodies that Alexio in trying to help us realize it and live by it this way. The knowledge imposes a pattern and falsifies because the Buddhists and the Thich Nhat Hanh says, “Where there’s perception, there’s deception.” And a perception is a fixed idea rather than the flowing Tao of things, like the boundarylessness of Buddha nature of the divinity. It imposes a knowledge. Let’s start back again. “There is, it seems to me, at best, only a limited value in the knowledge derived from experience. The knowledge imposes a pattern and falsifies, for the pattern,” but now he’s going to say but in consciousness, “for the pattern is new in every moment.” Every moment, life begins all over again. Amen.

See, it’s the virginal newness of now, the unforeseeability of now when we see it with an awakened heart. “And every moment is a new and shocking valuation of all we have been. We are only undeceived of that which, deceiving, can no longer harm.” That is, we’re only undeceived, but it can’t deceive us because we no longer know it’s not true enough for us. That’s why we don’t get caught up in it this way. We see the inadequacy of internalized assumptions and so forth. “In the middle, not only in the middle of the way but all the way, in the dark wood in a bramble...” A bramble is a marshy, a bog area. “... in a bramble, on the edge of a grimpen...” That’s the swampy area, the grimpen, excuse me. “... where there is no secure foothold and menaced by monsters, fancy lights, risking enchantment,” this way.

Let’s reflect on this for a moment. There’s a lovely little scene in Carl Jung’s memories, Dreams and Reflections, and he’s talking with Sigmund Freud and Jung broke from Freud because Jung thought we need to have an essentially spiritual understanding of the interior depth dimensions of ourself. And Freud was really very like positivism. He wrote a bit on the future of an illusion. He thought religion was an illusion, but then they would break it open. And this is one of the main reasons why they split waves. And he was talking with Freud about the will-o-the-wisp and in the swampy areas in the south in the morning, if you’re taking a boat very slowly through the swamp, there’s little clouds that float about a foot or two over the water and they’re

called the will-o-the-wisp. And he said when he told Freud about it, Freud lost consciousness because he was surprised by the numinous by the unexplainable.

So we're now in this boundaryless place with no fixed reference points because they're all inadequate, because all fixed reference points no longer serve the realms that are awakening within us, which is our ultimate destiny and the divinity of everything. And in the middle I think he's referring to Dante, the divine calm, he starts out this way in the middle, meaning in midlife. And also in Buddhism, reference to the middle way of the Buddha, which is the way of Nirvana. See, in the middle way. Not only in the middle of the way, but all the way in a dark wood, in a bramble, at the edge of a grimpen, where there is no secure foothold. There's no secure footing to stand on to define or explain what's happening to you any longer.

"And menaced by monsters, fancied lights, there are 10,000 worlds and I've traveled through them all, like waking dreams and layers of interior realities that rise and fall within us. Do not let me hear of the wisdom of old men, but rather their folly." Even so far as they claim for a wisdom accumulated through time. "Their fear of fear." So Jesus said, "Fear or not, I'm with you always." Jesus didn't say, "Don't be afraid. I'll personally see to it that no scary things happen to you." But rather, "No matter how scary the things might be, don't be afraid because I'm with you in it." And the fear of frenzy, the fear of ecstasy.

See, the fear of losing control, the overflow of boundaries. And their fear of possession, the fear of what... I think what it means, it's a fear of adequately and authentically claiming anything or the fear of belonging to another or to others or to God. The only wisdom we can hope to acquire is the wisdom of humility and humility is endless. And this is the dissent. The reins fall from our hands. We're becoming more and more bereft of claiming anything anymore because we're being transformed by the depth we're falling into and it's transforming us into itself unexplainably forever this way, which is the truth of our awakening heart.

"The houses are all gone under the sea. The dancers are all gone under the hill." Now we're back in death again through time. "O dark, dark, dark. They all go into the dark," meaning death. "The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant, the captains, merchant bankers, eminent men of letters, the generous patrons of art, the statesmen and the rulers, distinguished civil servants, chairmen of many committees, industrial lords and petty contractors, all go into the dark, and dark the sun and dark the moon and dark the Almanach de Gotha." The Almanach de Gotha, look it up. It's a kind of a history of the royalty of Europe, different countries. They're all dead too.

"And the Stock Exchange Gazette, the Directory of Directors, and cold the sense and lost the motive of action. And we all go with them, into the silent funeral, nobody's funeral for there's no one to bury." See, the caskets are all empty. See, there's no one to bury because nobody's dead. And yet in their bodily life and time, they're all gone and we're next. We're about ready to go too. Even though we're about ready to go in time, we're trying to find that even though we're in time, we can drop down to a consciousness where we're already living in eternity even though we're still here. This is mystical awakening. So in other words, I die to the illusion that who my reflective ego is in time can be even begin to be adequate to who I deep down really am and I'm called to be as the beloved of God, the deathless presence of

myself.

“I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you, which shall be the darkness of God.” St. John of the cross. He’s starting to lead into John of the cross now. St. John of the cross talks about the dark night of the soul and he says, “What the dark night is.” You kind of lose your way in the spiritual life is your finite eyes are being blinded by an infinite light. So really, the dark night is really the infinity of a light your finiteness can’t bear and that infinite light is drawing you into itself and transforming you into itself this way. Lovely image right here. “As, in a theater, the lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed with a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of darkness on darkness, and we know that the hills and the trees and the distant panorama and the bold imposing facade are all being rolled away.”

In other words, it’s a lovely image. You’re sitting in the theater and at the end of the scene it goes pitch dark and you can hear the stagehands rolling the scenery away, rolling a new scenery. So when the lights come back on again, you’re in a new place, act two. And he’s saying a lot of life is like that. A lot of life is like that. The scene that seems so real at the time and it was real at the time and the passage of time, we fell into a darkness, it all rolled away and we woke up in a different place. We don’t know how we got there. And this place that we’re now in seems so real and it is, but it too is also going to get rolled away. It goes on and on and on. That’s the imagery here this way. Or he’s going to give another image of this.

“Or as, when an underground train, in the tube, stops too long between stations and the conversation rises and slowly fades into silence and you see behind every face the mental emptiness deepen leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about.” So you’re in the subway under the ground, it stops unusually long. See, as long as I keep thinking, I think I’ll be okay. As long as I keep reading my newspaper, I think I’m all right. But if I just stop, namely, if I stop to become conscious to fall into time, the me that thinks I’m nothing but the me that I think I am is scared, but actually it’s the opening into paradise and the collective ongoing unconsummated longings of society is the collective being caught up in that this way. “Or when, under ether, the mind is conscious but conscious of nothing.” There’s a Hindu saint who said that dreamless... See, there’s the waking mind. There is the dreaming mind and there’s dreamless sleep. And dreamless sleep is not the lack of presence. It’s being present to nothing, but the nothing is infinite. It isn’t in dreamless sleep you’re annihilated.

It’s like a deep consciousness without an object. “I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope. For hope would be hope for the wrong thing.” Because if you hope too soon, you don’t know what to hope for, except to perpetuate the discontent of your heart, like the not enoughness of everything, like you’re not yet ready for hope. “For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love, for love would be love of the wrong thing.” And your confusion about even what does love even mean? Like, the fullness of love of what it really is.

“There is yet faith, but the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.” It occurs to me sometimes to put it this way. A lot of the spiritual life is learning not to do violence to the fragility of our waiting because the fragility of our waiting is itself the presence of what we’re waiting for. See, it isn’t like we’re waiting for something to happen, but in the waiting is something that’s already unexplainably happening, which is this infinite presence giving



itself to you breath by breath, heartbeat by heartbeat. “Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought.” And this is what deep meditation is. We saw this in the Jesus prayer too, *The Way of a Pilgrim*. When you’re sitting in meditation where there’s breath awareness, whatever these meditative states are, you’re sitting in awareness and out of the edges of your mind, thoughts arise and fall away.

So you’re aware the thought is arising, but to stay in the meditative state, you do your best not to think about the thought that’s arising because if you think about the thought that’s arising, thought will carry you off again and you won’t be conscious. And yet every time it does carry you off because you’re just a human being, you circle back around in humility because it keeps reminding you of your absolute dependence on God. You can’t even be present in the present moment. No wonder you’re having trouble with everything else. You’re having a hard time being here and that’s the problem. But when we lay the problem bare, we see the presence of God sustaining us and illuminating that we’re infinitely loved and it’s infinitely present to us and our inability to be present and the poem is luring us. Notice to stay with him as Alexio. The poem itself is helping us stay there.

“So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing. Whisper of running streams, and winter lightning. The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry, the laughter in the garden.” Remember the children at Burnt Norton laughing in the trees and so on. “Echoed ecstasy not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony of birth and death. You say I am repeating myself, I’ll say it again.” And here he’s going to quote St. John of the cross. And I like my translation better than I’m used to. We did say John of the cross earlier in the series. This passage in St. John of the cross is such a lovely passage. This is the Ascent of Mount Carmel of book two, chapter 13.

He said, “I want to give guidelines for entering into the night in which the light of God is lovelier than the dawn. Endeavor to be inclined to always: not to the easiest, but to the most difficult.” That is be inclined always not to what is easiest to the great lie within yourself, but what’s the most difficult to the great lie within yourself. And what’s the great lie? That anything less than an infinite union with the infinite love of God will ever be enough to put to rest the restless longings of our heart. That’s the great lie. Not to what is most delightful, but to the most distasteful to the great lie within yourself. He goes down to Litany this way and then he says this. “To read satisfaction in all...” This is that same chapter now chapter 13, the Ascent of Mount Carmel book two. “To reach satisfaction in all...” What he really means by all is capital A-L-L, the all of God. Present in all things. “To reach satisfaction in all, desire satisfaction in nothing.”

Don’t pretend that anything, no matter what it is, will ever be enough to begin to fulfill you because you’re the beloved this way. “And to come to possess all,” to possess the all that is God present in all things, “desire the possession of nothing.” Because it’s not for the having. Why? It’s not for the having because there’s no have-er, the very you that has. If you’re even capable of finding it or losing it, it’s infinitely less than what a lung will fulfill you. It’s already washing over you and taking you to itself unexplainably this way. “To arrive at being all,” the all that is God, “desire to be nothing. That is desire to be no thing. Desire to be no thing that can even begin to do justice to the mystery of who you ultimately are this way. “... desire to be nothing and to come to the knowledge of all,” the all of God. “Desire the knowledge of nothing.” To come to enjoy what you have not, you must go by a way in



which you enjoy not. Namely, this.

Just like the alcoholic is dying because they're addicted to alcohol, we're addicted to finiteness because there's no control in boundarylessness. When I was in the monastery, once I had a nightmare that I was tied to a railroad track and a train was coming. I could feel the ground vibrating, the train was coming and I woke up, my heart was pounding. And what the nightmare was about, when the train ran over me, I'd be sizeless. See, where do I stop? Do I stop with my body? Do I stop with the walls of this room? Or am I boundaryless in all directions? We're afraid to lose the control that we think that we have over the life that we think that we're living this way. And that's why we need to be endlessly tenderhearted for that in us that doesn't see it yet. Because it's just the ego, it can't help itself this way. We need to be merciful and kind and be present because God's infinitely in love with that in us, it doesn't get it yet this way, and we should be too.

"To come to enjoy what you have not, you must go by a way in which you enjoy not." That is, the ego self doesn't enjoy it. Some things are very fun and enjoyable, but superficial and inadequate. Other things are very arduous and extremely fulfilling because they're so rich with meaning, the truth of ourself this way. "To come to the knowledge you have not, you must go by a way in which you know not." Like, "Pardon me, I don't speak English." St. John on the cross says, "God grants to some people to understand that everything remains to be understood." And so really, it's a deeper way to understand what it means to understand. See, we think in the ego and time, to understand is to comprehend. I get it. But here, the deeper way to understand like quoting Merton is to know that we're infinitely understood and we subsist in that. "To come to the possession you have not, you must go by a way in which you possess not. To come to be what you are not, you must go by a way in which you are not." And he ends this way.

When you delay in something, that is when you pause to pretend that what you're in will be enough for you. "I think this will do it. Flat screen TV, I think I'll be fine." I mean, whatever it is. When you delay in something, you cease to rush toward the all. "For to go from the all to the all, you must deny yourself of all and all." Meister Eckhart once says, "Imagine you're sitting there and God brings before you one at a time across the stage, everything in the whole world, and you're waiting for the thing to come by that'll fulfill you. And a few centuries later you say, 'I don't know what else you got back there, but I don't think it'll do it.'" Because it's a setup. God made our hearts in such a way that nothing less than the infinity of God will ever be enough for us.

"For to go from the all to the all, you must desire yourself of all." You don't hate it. Matter of fact, you're very grateful for it, but it's not enough. But once you see it's infinitely not enough, you see God shining out if it's not enoughness. See, once you see that it's not enough, you can see the gift of it, like incarnating the presence of God in a glass of water or the furniture in the room with a view out the window. Whatever, anything really. "And when you come to the possession of the all, you must possess it without wanting anything." He has a picture that he drew in prayer and he has a mountain going up with all these paths going up to God, John the cross does, about attainments and excesses and so on. And there's one that goes straight up and it says, "Nada, nada, nada, nada, nada, nothing, nothing, nothing."

And he said, "When you finally get to the top, nada." It's the infinite nothingness that

is a reality of everything. And we're being led into that because ultimately, we are that. We're trying to be healed from what estranges us from it. "Because if you desire to have something in all, your treasure in God is not purely your all." In this nakedness, the spirit finds its quietude and rest. For in coveting nothing, nothing tires it by pulling it up and nothing oppresses it by pushing it down because it is in the center of its humility. When it covets something, by this very fact, it tires itself. Thomas Verton once said, "Anytime I want something very, very bad and I finally get it, it burns me." It's just one more thing that's infinitely not enough for me this way. But in the not enoughness of everything, we see the divinity of everything.

Roman numeral four. I'm down in the next stanza. Here now it gets specifically Christian. The wounded surgeon, that's Christ. "The wounded surgeon plies the steel," the scalpel. "The wounded surgeon plies the steel that questions the distempered part; beneath the bleeding hands we feel the sharp compassion of the healer's art resolving the enigma of the fevered chart." And so the scalpel touches the distemper... And what's the distempered part? The restlessness of ourself and coming to the brink of the fulfillment that we long for. And here's the image that comes to my mind now about Jesus. The story is that when Jesus is on the cross, one of the thieves being executed with him said, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus didn't say, "Well, it all depends. We have to check this out. Let's run down the list. I'm not so sure. You don't sneak in the last minute."

"Father, forgive them. They know not what they do." And so a question of the distempered part, the painful doubting of the abundance of mercy taking us to itself in the midst of our unresolved matters of our heart. We place more confidence in trying to measure up to something than we do in the love that's infinitely in love with us and our inability to live up to anything, really, I think. And that resolves the enigma of the fever chart. "Our only health is the disease." See, our only health... It's like in AA. We have come to admit that we're powerless over alcohol and our life has become unmanageable. See, if you admit, you're admitted. But to admit that you're powerless over what's destroying you would be despair, unless a power greater than yourself can achieve something in you you're powerless to achieve. Our only health is accepting our poverty of spirit, our helplessness.

"If we obey the dying nurse whose constant care is not to please but reminds us of our, and Adam's curse," the fall. Trying to be like God without God when we were like God because God created us in the image and likeness of God. So the dying nurse is reminding us of Adam's curse. We're hypnotized by that illusion of trying to be real without God. "And that, to be restored, our sickness must grow worse. The whole earth is our hospital endowed by the ruined millionaire, wherein, if we do well, we shall die of absolute paternal care that will not leave us, but prevent us everywhere." It's almost as if, if you look back at your life, you start heading down different tangents and it ended up being a dead end. And at the time, although it was frustrating, you realize it forms a kind of a grace pattern of endless cul-de-sacs and a grace arc of deliverance.

It's leading you right up to this very moment that we're listening to this poem this way. "The chill ascends from feet to knees, the fever sings in mental wires. If to be warmed, then I must freeze and quake in frigid purgatorial fires of which the flame is roses, and the smoke is briars," this way. And so to myself in time, I can't bear it. See, no footing anywhere and yet how sweet it is. Because wouldn't it be sad if the only thing real where things I could

bear? Wouldn't it be sad if the only things I could ever understand is what I'm capable of understanding? Think how myopic it would be. So there's certain things we just need to let love burn it away in us with tenderness and just keep leaning into it by taking life on life's terms as they say in AA and learning to love.

"The dripping blood our only drink, the bloody flesh our only food: in spite of which we like to think that we are sound, substantial flesh and blood, again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good." Good Friday. See the cross, the crucifix. And out of the cross shines the eternal light of the resurrection, which the poem is headed towards. So now the end. "So here I am, in the middle way..." Again, the middle way of the Buddha, the middle way between the two wars. Here I am in my own midlife. Here I'm in the middle way. "... having had 20 years, 20 years largely wasted, the years between the two wars trying to use words, and every attempt is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure." This isn't it either because one has only learned to get the better of words for the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which one is no longer disposed to say it.

"And so each venture is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate..." on the unspeakable. "... with shabby equipment always deteriorating in the general mess of imprecision of feelings." The awkwardness of it all, like the clumsiness of trying to say something. You're saying something that you are not adequately able to say, but if it's said out of the depth of sincerity, the one who loves you can hear it in your voice, just like we can hear it in his voice when we listen to him as the poet.

"And so each venture is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate with shabby equipment always deteriorating in the general mess of imprecision of feeling, undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there is to conquer by strength and submission, has already been discovered once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope to emulate, but there is no competition." It's like this, look. The very thing you're trying to say, and now we look at all these mystics we've been studying, has already been said by people we can't even hope to emulate them. But there's no competition. Why? Because spiritually, what's given to one of us belongs to all of us. See, there's no competition. It's the generosity of God being poured out to all of us.

"There is only the fight to recover what has been lost and found and lost again..." And it's a reference to Julianne of Norwich. She said, "I sought him and I found him and I lost him." And I think that's the way it should be on this earth. See, I sought him and I found him. And every time I lose him, it sets in motion seeking him more, which is the path in which we're being transformed by this love drawing us to its soul. "... and found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions that seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss." Maybe gain or loss isn't a helpful way to look at this. The first shall be last and the last shall be first is turning everything upside down and inside out this way.

The end of the poem, last stanza. "Home is where one starts from. As we grow older the world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated of dead in living." This seems so clear about the dead and the living and being alive and dead and all. Back in the good old days when we were holy, all this seems so clear, but for quite some time now. "The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated of dead and living. Not the intense moment isolated, with no before and after." So it isn't just the moment under the grape harper, the pause, or

alone in the field as a van passes and you look at the dead...

It isn't just these little singularities of clarity but a lifetime burning in every moment so that somehow even life's most incidental moment burns with this fire of the unexplainable divinity of standing up and sitting down of the reality of ourself. "And not the lifetime of one man only but of old stones that cannot be deciphered." There's old stones and like the hieroglyphics of an ancient language, and in the stones you can't decipher what the stones are saying. The unfigurability of it all this way. "There is a time for the evening under starlight..." Lying out under the stars. That's true, there is. "... and a time for the evening under the lamplight," in East Coker in the city streets. "The evening with the photograph album." You sit there quietly and you're looking back at the picture and you look at yourself as a little baby. Are you that person?

You are but you're not. And you look back at your parents on their wedding day before you even conceived or born and their parents are now dead and your grandparents. There is a time to look at that, the passage of time. And you're sitting there alone in the quiet looking at these pictures this way. Sometimes I've had this image, you know they have time-lapse photography. So they'll take a rose and they'll stack a frame like once a minute, then they speed it up regular speed, and you'll see the rose bud open up like this and then all the petals fall away. So what if on the day you were born, your picture was taken? And your picture was taken one click once a week right up to this moment. And it's going to be taken all the way through to the day you die and then it's going to be taken every day in your casket or you're cremated or in the casket and they would play it at full speed.

You'd watch yourself fading away. And that's what it's like. That's what it's really like. It's over before we know it. And yet there's an eternal value that cannot be calculated, never passes away. The Buddha said, "Everything made apart falls apart. But there is that which is not made of parts. It never falls apart, and can you find it?" And that's what all these religious traditions are about that can I discover that which never passes away, this unfolding unexplainably in everything that's passing away? Which is a mystery myself too as the beloved, the deathless beloved of God. "Love is most nearly itself when here and now cease to matter. Old men ought to be explorers, here or there does not matter. We must be still and still moving into another intensity..."

I think I can right now or you can or the listeners can that this moment that I'm speaking, I'll speak for myself or the moment that the listeners are listening, if they would stop this way. In the light of this poem, here or there doesn't matter. Namely, this here, the here we're in right now as you're listening to this, doesn't matter because it's already ceasing to be. And where you once were, you're no longer there and everything's passing away. Everything is unexplainably unfolding in the boundaryless nature, sitting here listening to these words, which is the prayer of our life. "... into another intensity for a further union, a deeper communion..." Where his head? What does the future hold? I don't know, but it'll be more of the same. The inadequacy of everything less than a deeper union that I'm going to fall deeper and deeper into the union. This is my eternal death of all of eternity.

I'll be falling deeper and deeper into this communion, which is my destiny. "... through the dark cold and empty desolation, the wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters of the petrol and

the porpoise. In my end is my beginning.” Now, the petrol is the oil of the ships and the porpoise and the sea, the fragilities of the world between the wars and our life and so on. And that’s the poem. So let’s end this meditation by sitting together in silent meditation. Again, we’ll sit for one minute, but on your own at home, sit as long as you’re moved to do so. So I invite you to sit still, sit straight, fold your hands and bow and repeat after me. Be still and know I am God. Be still and know I am. Be still and know. Be still, be.

And bow. We’ll slowly say the Lord’s prayer together. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into you temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen. Mary, mother of Contemplatives, pray for us. Saint John of the cross, pray for us. Julianne of Norwich, pray for us. Blessings till next time.

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