

Turning to the Mystics



T.S. Eliot

Dialogue 3: Dry Salvages
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 Turning to the Mystics where we're turning to T.S. Eliot and his poetry in the Four Quartets. I'm here with Jim to discuss his third session. Welcome, Jim.

Jim Finley: Yes, thank you. Thank you. Glad to be together again with our listeners.

Kirsten Oates: In the third session, you focused on the third poem in Four Quartets called Dry Salvages, and you open with sharing that it's actually a place off the northeast coast of Cape Ann, Massachusetts. I actually looked it up. There's images online for the place. It helped me to look at the images as you discuss one of the key themes of this poem, which is our interface with the primordial.

Jim Finley: Yes. It shows you his sensitivity to the spirituality of place because when he would vacation in the summers at Cape Ann and look out he could actually see it as a small outcrop of rocks-

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: ... with a beacon to warn ships so they wouldn't crash on the rocks. Then he saw layers of meaning. He took something like that, and that becomes the leaping-off place. You know what it reminds me of? There's a passage in Gabriel Marcel, and he talks about a deep thought. He said, "Well, what is a deep thought?" He said, "It's like standing at the shore of the ocean, and you look out in the distant fog in the distance in the water, there's an island. The deep thought is you realize the island is inside of you." See, that's T.S. Eliot. He sees the mythic layering of concrete places in our life and invites us to be sensitive to that also.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Well, looking at the pictures of it, it looks very primitive. I'm going to use the word raw, which in my accent people don't normally understand. R-A-W, raw. Although it has the beacon, it's very untouched. There's birds that cover it. There's seals on it. It's surrounded by deep blue water. The sky. All you can see is sky above it, so it feels really untouched by the industrial age, by technology, by those sorts of things. I just encourage listeners to perhaps look that up to get a sense of what he's pointing us to. Jim, in the reflection on the poem you said, "Nature is God's first scripture." I wonder if you could just... Who said that? Maybe you could help unpack that?

Jim Finley: That's found in the classic text, I think of all the world of religions in different ways, and because... See when God said, "Let there be light, and let there be stones and trees and stars and so on." What we have in creation is God's ongoing self-donating act of the manifested presence of God is the gift in the miracle of the world, of the passage of time, the way the light of the day yields to the darkness of the night, and the night to the day, the smell of roses. All this is created and is being perpetually created by God, so that the world is God's body and then it's bodying forth the love that's uttering it into being. We can... So deep in the Christian tradition too, the contemplation of the world as incarnate infinity is holy.

Kirsten Oates: Because if we think about the Bible and Christianity and the scriptures, they came about at a certain point in time-

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: ... well beyond the beginning of time, and so this primordial way of looking at things that God was always present and there was a spirituality to humanity even prior to the Bible and scripture.

Jim Finley: In indigenous peoples and shamanistic lineages and so on. In primitive cave drawings that they found. There's something like a primordial primitive spiritual sense. What the scriptures, the revelation of scripture, it explicates the divine origin of the holiness of the world. "In the beginning," God said, but it's explicating what is there, the divinity, different lineages of that revelation through world religions.

Kirsten Oates: It's really helpful to step back and see things in that way. It's helpful to see why nature is so illuminating to us where it can be a ground for these spiritual experiences. Well, let's move into the poem. It starts off, "I do not know much about gods, but I think that the river is a strong brown god." What a wonderful opening to see the river as a god. Jim, you show us that there's ways that these primordial aspects of creation that we've lost touch with them, we've forgotten their power both on the positive side, how they're life-giving, we die without water, but also how they have their own life that we can't control.

Jim Finley: When the river... The primordial reality of the river, a great brown god, experienced by the ego and sequential time. It's experience as a boundary like, "How do I cross this? How do I deal with it?" Then when we build the bridge, which is science and technology and engineering, it helps us to move in linear time more effectively. The traffic rolls on and on, and so in a way we're relieved that we don't have to deal with the river. But the river keeps its own time. It's almost personifying. It just waits.

Every so often when the floods come it reminds us of what we try to forget that we're not in charge. Until it recedes, then we forget again. And so there's tornadoes, fires, earthquakes, floods. It isn't just that there's that, but because we've lost experiential contact in the universality of the primordial it's in the nursery bedroom, in the rank smell of flowers, in the smell of grapes at harvest time. We've lost this timeless time of the primordial world, the divinity of it. The poem is all about how the price we pay for being exiled like that, and how through the poem are the ways we find our way back to this ground, and how do we be healed from that estrangement?

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Jim, you say one of the deeper problems he's trying to show us is this worshiping of the machine. He talks about in the poem that we've chosen to forget. We're not honoring the sacred nature as sacred, but also our oneness with it. We try and control it and objectify it, and he's trying to help us see that.

Jim Finley: There's this critical little phrase where he says, "The river is within us," because our body's primordial.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: Our breathing. Our heart is beating. It's almost like it isn't there until something goes wrong with it. Then how do we fix it to get back so that I don't have to be aware of it again? Notice how... There's something to that. When something does go wrong and hurts we try to get better. I try to get better. But it's almost like the Jesus Prayer, these mystical traditions like the breathing, the sitting. We're trying to find ourselves to the primordial divinity of the immediacy that our own body embodies. Like we're exiled from ourself.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. I love that line in the poem, "The river is within us. The sea is all about us," really pointing to that sense of the sacred within us, but also our oneness with nature with the world.

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Beautiful. Then, Jim, even right from part one, T.S. Eliot continues with what he's doing throughout this poem, which is to try and help our consciousness shift into not only this deeper connection to the primordial and the sacred, but also the release from time. Just reading from the poem, "And under the oppression of the silent fog, the tolling bell measures time. Not our time rung by the unhurried groundswell, a time older than the chronometers, older than time counted by anxious, worried women." He's starting to help shift our consciousness in relation to time.

Jim Finley: That's right. I want to paraphrase it. I want to paraphrase it.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you. Yeah.

Jim Finley: T.S. Eliot in this section speaks of buoys and sometimes speaks of groaners. I looked this up, it's confusing on the definition of these words. In some sense that a buoy is a thing floating in the water to warn ships not to crash along the rocks. There's a bell, and so the rise in the fall of the water clangs the bell. The woman at night who can't sleep trapped in time hears the clang of the bell in the dark, which is this primordial time. In other places, the groaner it sounds almost like a whistling sound or a noise that it makes, and so it seems that there were these different floating devices to warn ships for not crashing on the rocks.

That's the point about Dry Salvages is that there's also not the buoys but there's a beacon, that is there's a light, and so it's very paradoxical. There's a light, but it's a light that warns people not to hit on the rocks drown and die if they don't. It's another one of these subtle little paradoxical refinement of insight that T.S. Eliot keeps constantly making about our life in the midst of time in the places of this world. There's a sequential time, and that's true, but there's a primitive timeless time. Lying awake at night, you can be caught up in sequential time. You're frustrated you can't sleep, but also if you would just listen to the clanging of the bell and the dark and the swell of the water. It's a gateway into timeless time. It's like an opening into a deeper place.

Kirsten Oates: It's amazing the way he keeps expanding our vision of time within the world that we live in, like looking at a longer arc of history, looking at different ways time is measured. That's one way he's opening us, expanding our consciousness of time, and then always towards this eternal time.

Jim Finley: Also, I think another thing he's helping us do when we think about it is notice when say we're in an intimate conversation with someone, deeply absorbed, or the sunset or the art museum or listening to the rain. Notice that if it's sustained, when the moment's passed you have to look at your watch. You don't know... You weren't in time. See? That was in the earlier poem, "Under the grape arbor in the drafty church at night at smokefall." He is inviting us to be sensitive. We all taste this timeless time. Just tasting and being aware of it the poem is helping us like a meditation or a way to pray to be more consistently in that interconnectedness of the timeless time, which is the deathless presence of ourself.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. I'd love to hear a little bit more about your sense of sleep and insomnia. I'll read the last section because it so reminds me of nights where I've lied awake worrying about something. It says, "Time counted by anxious, worried women, lying awake, calculating the future, trying to unweave, unwind, unravel, and piece together the past and the future. Between midnight and dawn, when the past is all deception, the future is futureless before the morning watch when time stops and time is never ending, and the groundswell that is and was from the beginning clangs the bell."

Jim Finley: Let's say a sleepless night, and let's say a sleepless night you're concerned because if you don't get to sleep you won't do well the next day. You're lying there awake, but you can't turn your mind off. See? The running of thoughts, of thoughts, of thoughts. That's real. You do your best to cope with it. But what T.S. Eliot is suggesting... I was once leading a retreat somewhere, they talked about never wasting a sleepless night. He called it power lounging. You lie there in the dark. Yes, that's really true. I can't get to sleep, but notice sleep is primordial. Every night I disappear from myself in the world and I go into my dream world. In the morning I come back. It's very mysterious how we move back and forth. Sleep is primordial.

But if the sleep is primordial, insomnia is primordial because I'm not in charge. The sequential me can't make it stop. What if instead of simply fretting over this duration of a time without purpose, what if instead we would ponder insomnia? See, lest we be presumptuous about sleep. Presumptuous about the ability to take our next breath. That sleep... We should never take anything for granted, and so the insomnia then is itself primordial. If instead of it, just quietly listen and gaze into the incomprehensible depths of insomnia. I'd probably be asleep in five minutes. In other words, if I would just accept the primordial immediacy, which is deeper than my concern about what I want to do the next day. It also allows me to drop down into the timelessness of insomnia in which sleep has a much better chance of happening to me.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Do you find, Jim, part of the way of dropping down into the primordial nature something is to sense how throughout history people have struggled with insomnia, and so in my insomnia, I'm one with everyone who's ever had a sleepless night?

Jim Finley: Yes. When we were doing this section on Thomas Merton of Turning to the Mystics, and he's lying awake. He had insomnia, and he is lying awake in the middle of the night on a straw mattress in the dorm, and they're in the monastery. He's lying there. He can't sleep. He says suddenly the bed becomes an altar. In a distant city somewhere someone is suddenly able to pray. See? Somehow our insomnia doesn't belong to us.

Our insomnia, the empathic sensitivity unites us with the sleeplessness of people all over the world who can't sleep. Our suffering doesn't belong to us. Therefore, we can let our insomnia be an empathic sensitivity to the sleeplessness throughout the whole world and be tender-hearted towards it or walk with it and be merciful towards it. Exactly. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: I love the way it ends with, "Clangs the bell," because it's like the meditation bell at the-

Jim Finley: That's right. It is. By the way, let's say... Sometimes when we do these recordings you can hear my clock chime.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: In the middle of the night, I'm lying there in the dark when I can't sleep because sometimes I go walking around all night in the dark. I can be there in my sleeplessness and the clock chimes. When it chimes, it reminds me of the timeless time.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: Yeah. It's like it's always there.

Kirsten Oates: It's a beautiful chime your clock.

Jim Finley: It is. Yeah. It is beautiful. It's a ship's clock too.

Kirsten Oates: Is it really?

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Okay. Well, part two of this poem. We could talk forever about just about every line of this poem.

Jim Finley: But we can't. You know why? Because we don't have time.

Kirsten Oates: We don't have time.

Jim Finley: We have to move on in our timelessness.

Kirsten Oates: Okay. Let's see. This section, there's a play on the word annunciation. It starts off where annunciation is spelt with a lowercase A, and then about halfway through it moves to an uppercase A. Could you just help unpack that word and what he's doing there?

Jim Finley: Yes. The word annunciation is like an announcement, a revelation. The lowercase annunciation, "The silent listening to the undeniable clamor of the bell of the last annunciation," which is death. "To whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee." That's the last annunciation in lowercase letters, but hidden in the depths of the annunciation of death in the lowercase letters is the annunciation with capital A. "The bone's prayer to Death, its God. Only the hardly bearable prayable prayer of the one Annunciation," with the capital A. The one Annunciation with the capital A is the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that you going to bear the fruit of your womb, Jesus.

The whole world is waiting for her acceptance, her yes to surrendering to that. That's the deathless annunciation of the eternity shining out through her life, through our life, all the way through. The little annunciation in linear time is real to the little linear self because you're dying and I'm dying. But to hear the Annunciation with a capital A is the eternity of the birthless deathless mystery of ourself as God's beloved. See? "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us," and so he starting to merge those two realms.

Kirsten Oates: It's pointing to the fact of if it's only just life and death, life and death, life and death, never ending, it's a time to despair and the suffering has no meaning, but this annunciation that comes in through Mary can give us a shift in consciousness.

Jim Finley: That's right. There's another way to look at this also is that the Annunciation with the capital A is the virginal newness of the present moment. See? Because from whence does it arise? If you're lying awake at night listening to your breathing... To be at the deathbed of the dying loved one is so clear. Your next breath doesn't belong to you, it belongs to God. The next time you take a breath, from whence does it arise? That's the Annunciation with a capital A. That the welling up of the eternal gift. It never passes away. This shines out to what's endlessly passing away. That's the subtle meditative stage trying to help us be sensitive to that and learn to live there.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. It doesn't change the present moment, it just deepens... We find something deeper in it. This reminds me, Jim, I did want to bring up that image you created at the end of the episode because I think it's so relevant to touch on throughout this poem. But you talked about the time, the horizontal, drawing a horizontal line and then a vertical line. Can you just... How would that apply to this annunciation section?

Jim Finley: Yes. It is a poetic image. It helps me to see this. These metaphors can be very helpful. Let's say the horizontal line is our experience of ourself and our passage through time from birth to death. You and I are on this line right now, and breath by breath we're moving closer towards our death. We'll vanish away as mysteriously as we emerged. Here we are in time. I can look at my wristwatch right now and see what time it is. Time is clicking away. That's always there. But if right in the middle of that line is the vertical depth dimension of the eternity of God, and the eternity of God is welling up and giving itself as the reality of the horizontal line as His manifested presence.

When we're in the midst of the busyness of the day, we're nowhere near even the awareness of that intersection because of the next meeting. Life is labor-intensive. It's hard. But in meditative states, in these moments that he's reminding us to meditate on or even being meditatively present in the poem is helping us to stay there. In meditative states, we can start drawing closer to the intersection. There is a moment where the inner quiet can become so subtle, so delicate. It's so delicate, we can't maintain awareness of ourself in reflective consciousness. That's the moment of the intersection of time and eternity, a moment of oneness prior to the difference. There's a moment prior to the... The indistinction, prior to and beyond the distinction. In that moment we're a momentary mystic.

Kirsten Oates: That moment is where time and eternity are one.

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: When we come out the other side and return to time we remember that moment, and we experienced it as homecoming. It graces us or it gives experiential vibrancy to what faith proclaims. I know it's true because I experienced it, but then it starts dawning on you that deep down every moment is that moment. Then I become aware of how unaware I tend to be of the zero variance, and become aware that I'm unaware is the longing to abide there, which is the path. The poem is *Lectio Divina*, is the prayer that lures us toward learning how to habitually be stabilized in the divinity of the unfolding of the present moment. It's the eternality of the present moment.

Kirsten Oates: Beautiful. That's so helpful, Jim. This next section just seems to really speak to exactly what you just described. This is one of T.S. Eliot's ways of saying this. I'll just read it and you can comment. "It seems as one becomes older that the past has another pattern and ceases to be mere sequence or even development. The latter, a partial fallacy encouraged by superficial notions of evolution, which becomes in the popular mind a means of disowning the past. The moments of happiness not the sense of wellbeing, fruition, fulfillment, security or affection or even a very good dinner, but the sudden illumination we had the experience but missed the meaning, and approach to the meaning restores the experience in a different form beyond any meaning we can assign to happiness. I have said before that the past experience revived in the meaning is not the experience of one life only, but of many generations not forgetting something that is probably quite ineffable."

Jim Finley: My sense is this, really, is that there are moments where we experience what this is inviting us to discover.

Kirsten Oates: It's what you described is that where the intersection of the vertical-

Jim Finley: The awe moment.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: Yeah. It's in the midst of nature, the arms of the beloved, looking into the upturned face of a small child, the long slow walk to no place in particular, the quiet hour at day's end. Whatever. Whatever. Sitting at the deathbed of a dying loved one. There are moments where this washed over us. We experienced it, but we missed the meaning. We walked right past the eternality, the deathless presence of ourself in the passage of time. An approach to the meaning, but through the help of the poem I can meditate on the meaning.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: Really a lot of therapy is this way too. It's like refining the subtlety of allowing you to listen with greater clarity to the interior stirrings of your own experience. Not to walk right past it, but to be present to it and approach to the meaning restores the experience. Notice once I go, "That's right. I remember that." That fleeting wonder of... That moment didn't have about at the feeling of that whichever ends. By reflecting on that it helps me restore the true nature of the experience, which was the gift of experiencing that, appreciating that.

When we reflect on it, it reveals a meaning which is quite ineffable. Namely, unfiguroutable.

It's not something that if you just think about it enough you can figure it out. But if you sit with it long enough in receptive openness, you can realize although you can't understand it by comprehending it you can intimately realize what you cannot comprehend. Because if you could explain it, it would just be another fact of the self in sequential time. But when you're sharing a moment from your heart of intimate stirring of the unexplainable, it's the divinity of life, this sacredness of life. It's like that.

Kirsten Oates: It's so hopeful too that the way he says, "The past experience revived in the meaning is not the experience of one life only." But it's that sense that I can look back on my life and see the meaning in it even though I might not have experienced it in the moment that nothing's wasted in a way.

Jim Finley: Yeah. Two examples I'll use is imagine you're going through an old drawer up in the attic somewhere or something, and you find a diary you kept say 10 years ago. Even forgot you wrote it. You sit down, and as you read it the things you're worried about, the things you were certain of, the things you were surprised about. What's so amazing if the you that wrote it could see the you that was reading it she'd faint. Yet we labor under the illusion we're finally figuring it out. We write it in our journal.

But if the you that's writing tonight's journal could see you that's going to read it 10 years now, if you're still alive, you'd faint again. What if that goes on forever? What if you could learn then the unfiguroutable unfolding of the plenitude of life. It's also not one life only because everybody's life That each of us is the unique addition of the universal story of being a human being. It's unfolding as my life, as your life, for the life of everyone who lives. For the more experiential we have of ourself it allows us to have this knowledge of everybody, like empathy.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Beautiful.

Jim Finley: Down through the ages. Turning to the Mystics will continue in a moment.

Kirsten Oates: Well, let's move on to part three. We're going to where it talks about, "I sometimes wonder if that is what Krishna meant." Now we get an introduction into Hinduism and the Bhagavad Gita. It's amazing T.S. Eliot's range of understanding of these mystical lineages.

Jim Finley: You could tell he was... He went to Harvard at Oxford. Not only was he an academic scholar in literature, but you could tell he very seriously studied mystical traditions. As a matter of fact, his poetry embodies those traditions.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: The very people he quotes are the very people that are illuminating the poem.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: This is what makes it Turning to the Mystics for guidance. See? This is what makes it a contemplative text when we see it this way.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Yes, it's beautiful. Jim, can you just tell us a little bit about the Bhagavad Gita? You

actually read from it in the session.

Jim Finley: Yes. In each world religion there's texts. There's also primordial texts of indigenous people. There's oral traditions, but in the written tradition there's the text. In Judaism you have the Torah and the prophets. In Christianity you have also Old Testament. Jesus was a devout Jew. Really a Jewish mystic if you look at it phenomenologically. It's the Christ. We have the Gospels and the letters of the New Testament. Then we have the Holy Quran given by God to Muhammad the Prophet, blessings be upon him. The prophet's this way. Then we have the sutras of Hinduism in India. The Yoga Sutra, and the branches of yoga this way.

Kirsten Oates: What's a sutra, Jim? What's a sutra?

Jim Finley: A sutra, the root word of Sutra means a thread.

Kirsten Oates: Okay.

Jim Finley: It's a thread that weaves us into the divine so that when you read the sutra, you're woven into this logos that embodies divinity when you read it with an open heart. We would say that the sayings of Jesus are sutras in that way.

Kirsten Oates: Wow.

Jim Finley: They're like threads of divinity. When we read it... The Psalms are that way. Chanting the Psalms. We could use that. They're like threads that weave us into the texture of we and God form one fabric together this way. What we have then in this Hindu tradition then you have in the Hindu tradition these deepening layers of realizations. In each one you have the mystical understanding of those texts.

Kirsten Oates: I see.

Jim Finley: Then you have mystical text, which is what we do in Turning to the Mystics podcast. This is our wheelhouse. This is where we hang out, this way. In the Hindu tradition, and one of these collected texts is the Bhagavad Gita.

Kirsten Oates: It's a mystical text in the Hindu tradition?

Jim Finley: It's a mystical text, and it's a mystical text like a lot of these texts in the... It is a story. It's a story about someone going into battle. Really it's a metaphor for the battle of life. Arjuna, who's in the chariot, he's with the Lord Krishna, who's seen as an avatar of God, like an incarnate presence of God. They're going into this battle. In the midst of as they go into the battle, Arjuna tells Krishna, "I don't want to do this," because it was a fight among the clans in India this struggle, and, "I don't want to do this because I don't want to kill these people, and I don't want to die."

It says Krishna listens to him and he says, "Your words sound wise." He said, "But what you don't see," and this is Advaita, "nobody dies. Their body dies but they're not reducible to..." By the way, if you die, you're not going to die either. It's Atman, the Brahman, the Atman, the inmost self is the manifested presence of Atman. I am that. But we in Christian language, if we think of God as generosity... This is paraphrasing Meister Eckhart. "If we

think of God as generosity, the generosity of the infinite is infinite, and we are the generosity of God. We are the song God sings.” See? “We’re the deathless beloved.” Go to the battle with clarity, and the battle might be the conflicts of your life of uncertain outcome.

Thomas Merton was said, “Those committed to social justice must be very careful not to be too caught up in the outcome of their efforts because maybe by human terms it’s going to go down in flames,” but that’s not the point. That’s not the point. There’s the indestructible truth of the love that you’re bearing witness to in the world this way. That’s the tone of the Bhagavad Gita. The whole poem, it’s a dialogue back and forth of the different layers that if we follow the poem like we’re following T.S. Eliot it leads us into deeper awareness of the deathlessness of ourself, the divinity of ourself and our eternal nothingness without God. It’s a lovely text. It’s a beautiful text the Bhagavad Gita.

Kirsten Oates: And written a long, long time ago, before the Bible?

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: This is before the Bible.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. The fact that it’s situated in a battle is probably reflective of the time and place that there would’ve been a lot of battles going on.

Jim Finley: There were because it was, they divided up in clans, small clans, they were always battling with each other.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: Just like we’re in a period of history. This was written in a period. But notice in our period of history, there’s also our awareness, like the troubled times of our times.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Yes.

Jim Finley: How do we learn to ground ourself in an eternal presence that allows us to be present to the troubles of the times without drowning in the troubles of the time? That’s the timeless relevance of text like this.

Kirsten Oates: Of the Bhagavad Gita. Yeah. How amazing. Yeah. There’s always been troubled times. Jim, in the discussion about the Bhagavad Gita you mentioned three gods I think. Yeah. Could you just help unpack that for me?

Jim Finley: Yes. Let’s say that all of us are created by God in the image and likeness of God, and being created by God in the image and likeness of God we’re also created with the capacity to be awakened to ourselves as the manifested presence of God and our nothingness without God. We’re also then graced with the freedom to assent to it because love is never imposed, it’s always offered. That’s the universality of the sacredness of the human condition. Each world religion is a person being awakened in a specific culture or a specific time in which they transcend the limitations of the culture and the time. But also, it is culture bound. Then

when they try to put words to it, they use the words of the culture.

Really they're like dialects of ineffability. They're different dialects of the universality of awakening. Just like in our tradition, we have the Trinity. I love Raimon Panikkar, the philosophical theologian on the trinity he said, "The Trinity is Christ's mind," because God sometimes referred to God as Abba Father. He sometimes referred to himself, "He who sees me sees the Father, and I will send you the paraclete the awakener of your hearts. The Trinity, the dance of God of the Trinity, Richard Rohr's book too on the Trinity, that's the Christian contribution to the transcendence of God, transsubjective communion. What you have in Hinduism is a Trinity. You have Brahman, and Brahman is the source, like paralleling to God, the Father, is the source. It's a self-donating act of infinite reality giving reality.

Then Shiva is the destroyer. In statues of Shiva, you see this dance of Shiva in one hand in the dance he's holding castanets, which is the clicking of time. In the palm of the other hand is the flame of eternity. The eternality, the clicking of time. But in the ending of time, Brahman then recreates anew. The eternal birthing of Brahman's self-donating is born out of the eternal death. That's the cyclic nature of how it understands things. Now, in that Trinity, in that Trinitarian understanding, is in Vishnu, the sustainer God, sends avatars. Avatars are messengers to teach this to humanity. The Lord Krishna, who's on the chariot drive, is an avatar of Vishnu. They see Jesus as an avatar of Vishnu.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, wow.

Jim Finley: You can go to these temples, there's one up the road here, this ashram, and you see the saint, the world religions, and they see Jesus there along with Vishnu, and they see him as an avatar of Vishnu. This is a story then about a battle, metaphorical story. The metaphorical story is that Arjuna, the chariot driver, is in sequential time. He sees himself in time, and his guide is Krishna, this avatar of Vishnu, and so a dialogue takes place. He's being instructed the Advaita on the divinity of everything. The deathlessness of everything. That's the Bhagavad Gita.

Kirsten Oates: Okay.

Jim Finley: It's really Bhakti yoga too. It's a love yoga. It's a love path from the heart.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Amazing. Wonderful to learn about that. Then T.S. Eliot, I guess he sees these people on the train, the passengers on the train, almost like in their chariot.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: The parallel of the day he's in is passengers on the train blind to this eternal sense of things.

Jim Finley: That's right. He's seeing then, just like Arjuna was caught in time, the people on the train are caught in sequential time with their periodicals and being caught in time. Therefore, the voice of Krishna is this mystical awakening, but it's also the voice of Jesus. It's the voice of all the teachers down through the ages trying to help us wake up from this dream. The only me that's real is the me that things happen to. The only me that matters is the me that's going to be dead someday very soon. It's not true, and so we're trying to wake up to the deathlessness of ourself.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Okay. Well, let's turn to part four, Jim. This is just a very small section. Just three stanzas. It's asking Mary to pray, and at the end it has this perpetual angelus. Can you help me understand this little section?

Jim Finley: First of all, the beacon on Salvages, the light, it now has the image of Mary. See? "Lady Mary. Lady who shrine stands on the promontory, pray for all those who are in ships." It's almost Mary's there with her hand out like this praying for all those who are in ships, "Whose business has to do with fish," those just trying to make a living out in the open water. "Those concerned with every lawful traffic, and those who conduct them," cause we have to monitor the complexities of all that world. "Repeat a prayer also on behalf of women who have seen their sons and husbands setting forth and not returning." Then, "Figlia del tuo figlio," the mother of the Jesus. Mary is holding her son. But if the son, Jesus, as a human being is her son, but Jesus as the second person of the Trinity is the father of Mary. You get the circularity of time and eternity in the image of Mary.

Kirsten Oates: Just thrown in there. Let's just remind you about what this is actually about.

Jim Finley: Like a little three sentences, just toss it in with no explanation. "Also pray for those who were in ships ending their voyage on the sand, in the sea's lips on the dark or in the dark throat, which will not reject them or wherever it cannot reach them. The sound of the sea's bells. Perpetual angelus." In other words, pray for all those who died without being aware of the eternity of their life.

They just died. It's true of a lot of people, actually. I pray for all of them, but also know the sea bell's perpetual angelus is a kind of a timelessness that they're caught up in because sometimes this realization isn't given to us this side of death. It's only in passing through the veil of death that is given to us, but a lot of people die just fall off with no of this that all. Many people do, but God's infinitely in love with all of them. They're all deathless and sustained by God in time. That's the prayer.

Kirsten Oates: I wonder if you see that this little section teaches us something about prayer and our own prayers?

Jim Finley: Yeah. Here's one way I put it. Let's say you have Aunt Mildred who's sick, and she's dying. You say, "Dear God, please, Aunt Mildred's dying. Please help her." It isn't as if... God isn't going, "Dying? I didn't even know she was sick. Thank me you told me. I'll get over there right away." See? What you're really saying, "Aunt Mildred is dying," and God says, "I know she's dying. If I'm Lord of life, I'm Lord of death. I'm the infinity of life. I'm the infinity of death." Let's pray for Aunt Mildred that she'll realize the unexplainably trustworthy nature of her deathless death, and for you that you might realize it also this way. This doesn't mean that there shouldn't be the prayer of petition, knock and you shall open. Seek and you will find. But it's always a seeking in the knocking that's in the light of this underlying trust that God hears us and is resolved in God's ways and often not in our ways. We pray for that, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Kirsten Oates: Beautiful. The way we do that for each other, I feel in that image, the *figlia del tuo figlio*, so you're saying it shows mother Mary is the mother of Jesus, but Jesus is the the author of Mary. Like this-

Jim Finley: God the Father eternally contemplated Mary and the Word before the origins of the universe. When God said, "Let there be Mary," God said, "Let there be the woman I'm contemplating in Christ. Let her be." Therefore, the Christ that she's holding is the logos through whom God created her. See? But it's true of Mary is also true of us because God contemplated you in the Word before the origins of the universe. That's the circularity of all of us in time and eternity.

Kirsten Oates: In a way that's what you are describing about our prayer life is really it's the hope and trust in that and the pointing to that.

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. That's exactly right. Later, like in Buddhist language. The Buddha said, "Whatever's made apart falls apart. Strive with diligence." That is to say everything made apart falls apart, but there is that which is not made of parts. Can you find it? Which is nirvana and we're saying Christian language, which is salvation. See? Can you find the eternality of yourself and of all things this way?

Kirsten Oates: Beautiful. The way he just slots that line in this sense of this cycle of this place of the people that go out in the ships and the women that pray for them and... Yeah. It's beautiful. The people that are lost there. Yeah. Beautiful. Okay. Final part. Part five. This starts out this section, "To communicate with Mars." You said it's the God of Mars, "Converse with spirits to report the behavior of the sea monster. Describe the horoscope." This opening section is talking about the way we as human beings have tried to decipher the past or predict the future through these methods.

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. We're trying to foretell things with the palm reading or tarot cards or whatever. We're also trying to decode the past. We're preoccupied with the present, with the past and the future. What's missing in the middle is the present. That's where the poem is headed.

Kirsten Oates: When you're talking about the present, so the presence that it's missing, is it at that point where the vertical and the horizontal intersect like that in-

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Your image?

Jim Finley: Because the poem says, "But to apprehend the point of intersection of the timeless with time is the occupation for the saint. No occupation either, but something given and taken in a lifetime's death and love." That is, it's given to you to see this. It's the granting of the intersection timelessness. But also it's taken, and that once... It takes from you the ability to live on your own terms as a gift. You live on the terms of this timelessness, the perpetual timelessness this way. There's only the unattended moment. See? I pull a number. Wait your turn. Moment. "The moment in and out of time. The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight." There is a moment, but you turn and see a shaft of light across the floor.

For a fleeting instant, the immediacy is something as simple as the light momentarily delivers you from the sequential time that you're trapped in. "The wild thyme unseen or the winter lightning or the waterfall or the music heard so deeply is not heard at all, but you are the music while the music lasts." In other words, in the moment that you're absorbed in the

beauty of the music, of the flowing divinity of reality, you are the flowing divinity of reality while the music lasts. Lasts me as long as it's lasting in your consciousness. Even when you're not conscious, it goes on and on and on because it never stops. "These are only hints and guesses, hints followed by guesses and the rest," so we're guessing it. In other words, we're right at the edges of something very deep. It's not academic. It's not challenging because it's academic. It's challenging because we're not used to someone talking about something so atmospherically all-encompassing this way. We're right at the edges. "Hints followed by guesses, and the rest is prayer, observance fidelity to live as best you can as God would have you live through love."

Discipline. The discipline that love ask of you all things considered. What's the most loving thing I can do right now for my body, my mind, this person, this animal, whatever? The thought and action that's true to that. To think the thoughts that promote love and are grounded in love and the action that's the loving action. "The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation." That's the insight actually. God's one with us in the sincerity of trying to get there. It's not as if there's some place we're trying to get to and we can't find our way to get there yet. Instead, it's realizing God's infinitely one with us in the sincerity of our inability to get there, or God's one with us in the sincerity of our effort.

Kirsten Oates: Is it also saying, Jim, the gift half understood is incarnation. It's how you keep drawing us to God's presence is the presence of all things?

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: It's incarnation.

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. That's what I meant, I said at the very beginning too. See, when we read this poem, it is just too much. There's too much for me, and thank God it's too much. See, what if the only thing in life was everything that wasn't too much. It would just be more of the finiteness. "You made our hearts for thee, O Lord. And our hearts are restless until they rest in thee." It isn't until we rest in thee that we cannot comprehend, and so the sincerity of being receptively open to we cannot comprehend. You are the infinity of that, which makes this a lectio or a prayer when we sit like this.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. The infinity of our incarnated experience, whatever it is.

Jim Finley: That's exactly right.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Wow.

Jim Finley: Yeah. Yeah. It's true.

Kirsten Oates: I love the way he differentiates in that section you just read between at the beginning, starting people's curiosity searches past and future and clings to that dimension. Then he uses the word apprehend, "But to apprehend." Making that distinction that you always make, it's not analyzable, it's not figureoutable, like people clinging to the dimension of past and future.

Jim Finley: Exactly. Another way that I put it is this, we cannot attain it, but it unexplainably attains us

in the deep acceptance of our inability to attain it.

Kirsten Oates: Wow.

Jim Finley: It came to pass. It washed over me in an unlikely hour. See? Where I was quickened by this. I know what the poem's about because it's putting words to what I've experienced this way.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, just moving to the final piece of this part it points us to Buddhism. Now, we're in this poem now into another deep mystical tradition. He draws a very important word or very important thing out of Buddhism this idea of right action is freedom. You were helping us understand what the Buddha teaches about right action.

Jim Finley: I said before that in every religious tradition there's a way to articulate that dispensation of divinity that is given in that. In Buddhism, it's how the Buddha expressed what was given to him the night he was enlightened. The infinite divinity of the immediacy of what is. In that night of his enlightenment he became the Buddha. Once someone said to the Buddha, "Are you human or are you divine?" He said, "I'm awake. I'm awake." He articulates this in the Four Noble Truths of the Buddha, and the Four Noble Truths is the truth of suffering. The suffering has a cause which is craving an aversion, and there's a path that leads out of the tyranny of suffering. It's expressed in the Fourth Noble truth, which is the eightfold path. Right understanding, right attitude, right thought, right action. Right. Right. Here the word right means effective in inviting enlightenment.

Kirsten Oates: I see.

Jim Finley: There are all these different attitudes towards all of life, but what is the attitude that's receptively open that invites the realization that I might realize within myself what the Buddha realized, what Jesus realized? What is the attitude that offers the least resistance to allowing me to see through my own awakened eyes where Jesus saw in all that he saw, which was God? That's the whole business of what right means.

Kirsten Oates: In a way that line mirrors what he said a little earlier where he says, "Hints followed by guesses, and the rest is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action." It's like the Buddhist-

Jim Finley: That right.

Kirsten Oates: One of the Buddhist teachings on that.

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: Just to close out the poem, "For most of us, this is the aim never here to be realized who are only undefeated because we have gone on trying. We content at the last if our temporal reversion nourish not too far from the yew tree, the life of significant soil." This to me points to what you teach us with each of these mystics that it's the desire for God that is the path, and so we're undefeated because we go on following our desire for the infinite.

Jim Finley: That's really true. We're undefeated because we don't stop trying. But also we're trying to realize that although we're not defeated because we have not stopped trying the grace of the

willingness not to stop trying is itself the fullness of what we're looking for. Little getting is going to bring us to that point.

Kirsten Oates: Okay.

Jim Finley: The very end then, "We, content at last, if our temporal reversion," that is our rethinking of time, which is what the poem is helping us do. Like sifting it out in the light of eternity. "(Not too far from the yew-tree) The life of significant soil." We were saying earlier, the yew tree is poisonous, but it is also seen to be a metaphor for death and life. Yew trees are often planted around cemeteries, around this way. We live not too far from the oneness of birth and death. Not too far from the oneness of birth and death. "The life of significant soil," and the soil is the hummus or the soil like the earthy ferment of which we live our day-by-day lives.

Kirsten Oates: Bringing us back to that primordial sense of things like the river, the soil. Yeah.

Jim Finley: That's right. Also, it helps us too. See, the etymology of the word religion, religio, the ligature, religio, is a binding. We have to be rebound because we slipped away from it. But although we slipped away from it, it never slipped away from us with us. See? With us, and one with us is precious in the slippage and the poem and all these voices of God that speak to us like this poem, it puts us in sensitivity to that and renews our awareness that it's true.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. Well, thank you for taking us through The Dry Salvages. It's got a lot in it. Thank you for helping us unpack it, and I'm really enjoying getting to know this poem. Thank you, Jim. Look forward to next session will be your final session, the-

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: ... fourth and final poem.

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: Thank you for today. Thank you Dorothy and Corey in the background, always helping us. 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. 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.