

Turning to the Mystics



T.S. Eliot

Coaching Session

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 where we've been turning to T.S. Eliot and his poetry in Four Quartets. Today's one of our special coaching sessions where we offer guidance in ways you might continue on with the text and deepen into it. In this episode, we're going to share a meditation that we've pulled together using seminal passages from the Four quartets. And this is something you can use as a meditation or a prayer in your regular practice. So, I'm going to guide you in the meditation and then after we've meditated together, Jim is going to practice Lectio using the exact same passages that are in the meditation. And he's really going to role model how you might deepen into this meditation through a Lectio practice.

So, what's going to happen is I'm going to invite you to settle in and get ready for a meditation. You'll hear a little bit of music and then the words of the meditation will begin. There'll be a point in the meditation where the bell rings, and that's an invitation to sit in silence. The bell will ring again, there'll be some words to close the meditation and then some music to finish. If you'd like to follow along with the meditation and have the words in front of you, you'll find them in the show notes, there's a document with the meditation there. So, let's get ready to meditate together.

Perhaps just start by focusing on your breath without just trying to change it, but just noticing how you're breathing and use this as a way to settle into your own body and your own space. And then perhaps lowering your attention from the busy thinking mind, down into your heart. You could do this by looking down at your heart, putting your hand on your heart, and just grounding your attention there. And I invite you to join me in opening yourself to God's presence, wisdom and guidance. In God we live and move and have our being. God, please guide us and inform us and give us clarity as we meditate together on these words from T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets.

If all time is eternally present, all time is unredeemable. To be conscious is not to be in time, only in time is time conquered. Come this way, leaving behind being distracted from distraction by distraction. Come to pray where prayer has been valid. Come this way to be redeemed from fire by fire. Be still, descend only into the world of perpetual solitude. Put off sense and notion, let go of the need to verify, to instruct yourself, inform your curiosity or report back to anyone. Allow but a little consciousness, be still and let the dark come upon you, which shall be the darkness of God. Be still, wait without hope, for hope would be for the wrong thing.

Wait, without love, for love would be of the wrong thing. Wait without thought for you are not ready for thought. To possess what you do not possess, you must go by a way of dispossession. What you do not know is the only thing you know. Then the darkness shall be the light and the stillness, the dancing restored by that refining fire. Here, the intersection of the timeless moment, the impossible union, a condition of complete simplicity where past and future are conquered and reconciled. Here is where you are and nowhere never and

always, where time has been redeemed and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.

With the drawing of this love and the voice of this calling, we shall not cease from exploration. And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know it for the first time and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well and the fire and the rose are one. May it be so, amen. So, Jim, I'm just going to invite you to share some initial thoughts about this prayer and meditation and how we might use it going forward.

Jim Finley: Yes, that's very good. When we read the poem, we're listening to it being read, we sense the beauty of it and we can also sense that it's challenging. What I want to do here, and I think this is what matters most really, is how to read the poem as prayer, as a *Lectio divina*. And because that's what counts really with all these mystics, all these mystics teachers are that way. And so, what we want to do is internalize it to help us deepen our experience and response to God's presence in our life and slowly walk through prayerfully this way. And so, what I'm going to do is share with you what comes to me as I sit with it. And if you're so inclined, you could maybe take a journal, like write it out and line by line say what comes to you, because that's what counts as your life this way.

And I also wanted to say that in this reflection, I'll be going faster than we would go if we were doing it in meditation because I want to just touch on a way to approach each one that you can consider your way to approach it. But in real life you just might take one point and be with it for 20 minutes and *Lectio* then do a sitting in silence. And so, you would just be very real and personal with it. So, I'll begin then following the meditation of these seminal passages. If all time is eternally present, all time is unredeemable. And for me, my own experience is this of it for me is in my childhood and adolescence, I went through a lot of trauma.

And furthermore, for years and years afterwards, something would happen that would remind me was similar to the trauma it in my body. So, if all time is time present, all time is unredeemable, it's fixed, it's set like I'm going to go through the rest of my life this way. I went through a lot of therapy and I learned to be more freed up from it this way. And so, the question would be in your own life, where has it been something in the past that's been painful or difficult, challenging, maybe it took a toll on you? And it's part of who you are and maybe in some way it follows you around in some way your remembrance of it.

Or maybe it could be something out of your own brokenness that you did that hurt yourself or others. I've done things that I know that I did out of my brokenness. Meaning it's unredeemable like it's set this way. Then to be conscious is not to be in time, but only in time is time conquered. And it's interesting, remember in the poem he gives two examples of being conscious and really, he means falling into a state of spontaneous meditative awareness. And he talks about starts to rain, you get under the cover of a grape arbor and you hear the big drops of water falling on the leaves or sitting in a drafty church at smoke fall.

And so, the issue would be, notice sometimes these moments are very intense. Sometimes we can look back, we were graced with them when we were very young. Actually, we can look back at this. Very often, they're extremely subtle but the point is this, it's a moment in time in which you fell into a graced sense of sustained attentiveness and a certain depth

of presence and feeling like a homecoming. It was like a quietness, like a qualitative enrichment and a moment of time beyond time. Then time reinstates this claim on you again and you head on. So, every so often in life we go through this way.

And so, we're being invited, I think I've been graced with a lot of these I think growing up for me, just tendency that way I guess. And then when I was in the monastery for six years living in silence, chanting the song, it was almost like a perpetual state of timeless time really. So, mysterious actually. And then in living the monastery too, I've always sensed that this timelessness of time. So, for you what would've been your moments? Maybe real subtle, maybe I haven't thought about them for a long time. Your heart was grazed with something and you rested in it for a moment.

And just to be aware, what are the far-reaching implications of that? Because what it suggests really, and what this is headed for is the intuition that in these moments is not something more is given but a curtain part and you fleetingly glimpse to what every moment is including this moment. And in that awareness then that you realize we're suffering from death deprivation, skimming over the surface of things we're like homesick for the depths of ourselves and in which God's oneness with us is hidden. And so, what have been your moments this way like this?

Kirsten Oates: Jim, I love what you shared about your personal journey and it really resonates with me that if all life is just a continuation of more of the bad things that occurred in my life, whether they happen to me or whether I did things that I regret or the world itself too full of pain and suffering. If that's all there is, just over and over, even my healing is just opening me to be ready for more of the same. And so, this idea that there's something deeper and more trustworthy and more beautiful is very comforting.

Jim Finley: Yeah. I do think too, and there's another piece of this too. We can look back to just a wonderful thing that was in our life for a person and it was lost and you live with the loss of it.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: I would say. And sometimes you contributed to the loss when you look back. So, that's true, there is a kind of existential courage where you make the best of it. But we would hope there's something better than this and the poem is pointing towards that. So, then what starts to grow in us is the desire to abide in the depths of fleetingly glimpsed. And this is the path that starts path talk because what we feel the need to see to come this way, what way is the way of leaving behind being distracted from distraction by distraction. See, don't distract me now, I'm being distracted by this, I'll be distracted by you later. So, how do we learn to be liberated from a string of distractions and settle into this enriched presence?

And this is where we kneel in prayer, kneel where prayer has been valid. And so, a prayer then is we can freely choose a stance that offers the least resistance to being overtaken by the timelessness and the eternity of time in the presence of God. And

so, we kneel where prayer has been valid and for us it's our living room. You know what I mean? That hopefully our home is the place where prayer has been valid because we live there as a person of prayer. And so, we come this way where prayer has been valid. He's going to be giving us a set of guidelines for interior prayer and it's the two different levels.

One level is Lectio divina, meditation and prayer, and Lectio divina is sustained attentiveness. We would take the words of T.S. Eliot as a mystic teacher and we would hear God's voice speaking through us through T.S. Eliot's words. God's personally inviting us to be liberated from the tyranny of time this way. And that's our Lectio, that attentiveness. Then the meditatio, then we reflect upon it as you journal it out, well you have to sign off on it. How does this pertain to me? What sense do I make of this? Or what is it I don't understand about this? You blend it into yourself in your reflective mind that's given to you in the silence this way.

Then the prayers from the heart center desire, help me with this we ask God. Like, "How I can be closer to you without you guiding me to be closer to you?" Or, "I can't realize I'm already infinitely one with you, without you revealing to me that you're already infinitely one with me. Help me this way." The second phase is where in this reflection it reaches such a point of quiet sincerity, it falls into contemplation. That is, it falls into wordlessness, it falls into a oneness, a quiet oneness in which some subtle way we in God mutually disappear as dualistically other than each other and we're resting, it's a foretaste of heaven.

And so, this happens quite naturally, and by the way, we're doing Lectio now. We're doing Lectio now together and each one of us in our own way, I know I am, we're already, there's an intermeditatio going on at first because we're reflecting on this. See, how is this given to you? How's it given to me, the prayer. So, this is a language that embodies that and it also then embodies falling into the silence. But there's another way to look at it too, I'm thinking of chanting the Psalms in the monastery. Sometimes it's not so much the silence, but rather the rhythm of the words is itself are words that are beyond what words can say.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: So, it isn't the words of the poem or the prayer or the Psalms are interrupting the silence, the falling into the silence, but rather this logos, this word, this rhythmic flow and pattern. I think when we read these mystics out loud, they talk that way. I mean their language has this, it follows this thing like this. So, where have you been with this, where you've tasted this? Where have you been when whether it be any of the mystics or the gospels or anything at all? It isn't just the serendipity of a certain moment of transcending time and time, but you freely choose a quiet hour like the rendezvous to be present to this. You listen to it, then you reflect on it, you personalize it, ask for help with it.

And also notice it has to be a practice because it's subtle. So, it takes a while to get slowly habituated to this. You have to be patient with yourself this way.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. So, Jim, that's the suggestion that of the daily time of some kind of meditation practice. And I love in the poem only in time as time conquered, we need to commit a period of time to opening ourselves this way.

Jim Finley: This is right.

Kirsten Oates: So, yeah.

Jim Finley: And we need a moment of time to conquer time.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: If you're not careful-

Kirsten Oates: You need to be conscious in it.

Jim Finley: Yes. If you're not careful, you can be too busy to be.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: And by the way, that can come in different modes, it might be just sitting quietly. It might be a heartfelt dialogue with the beloved. It might be smelling a flower. It might be lying in the dark, listening to your breathing. It has these endless modes, but you look out for them. You have an eye out for these moments and you choose them, you don't leave it up to happenchance this way. Yeah, exactly.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, yeah.

Jim Finley: And so, you come to pray where prayer's been valid, it's here at your home. And what are these places for you in your home, in your life and what has been moments in your past where you've tasted the validity of your own prayer and seeking to make it ever more perpetual this way. Come this way to be redeemed from fire by fire. See, there is the fire of suffering, not just the suffering of traumatizing, hurtful things and not just the traumatizing hurtful things to ourself, but in the world you turn on the news or in the family. There's more suffering in this world than you can shake a stick at.

It is just that and it lives inside of us, but there's also the fire of our discontent. St. Augustine, you made our hearts for thee oh Lord and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee. That anything less in an infinite union with the infinite love of God will be infinitely less than what will put to rest the restlessness of our heart. And God created us this way, just an arranged situation. And so, there's this fire of discontent of hurt, by fire is the fire of Pentecost. It's the descent of the Holy Spirit. And the Pentecost, says on the cross says, "To have no light to guide you except the one that burns in your heart." So, there's a fire of a quiet desire that is an echo of God's desire for you.

And you lean into it that it might transform you into itself. You lean into it that it might have its way with you, this metamorphosis of grace subjectivity. And that's the big one, like where are you at with that? For me too. And it shows you how personal this is and it's almost, it says Abraham was called into a land he knew not. And often the land we know not

is the interiority of ourselves.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: Like we're lonely for ourselves. And what this poem does, all the mystics, they invite us to a homecoming of an enrichment of self-knowledge in the presence of God. This way it becomes foundational to our life really, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Well sometimes when we slow down to be with ourselves, we really experience that fire and it's so hard to be with.

Jim Finley: We do. And here's what's interesting there is the pain of internalized fire. And so, I was distracted from distraction by distraction because if I get quiet, the burning burns.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: Now, underneath that fire is the eternal fire of God's love. And here's the tricky part, there's no detours around the painful fire to get to the eternal fire. We have to go down through the painful fire to get to the liberating fire of God's love. And that's where God strengthens us and guides us. And also, I think even when we're going through the fire, we can already sense the divine fire sustaining us in the painful fire. There's a lot of trauma therapies like this too. The transformation that happens in the midst of what's unresolved and something is being given to us unexplainably in the very midst of the unfinished hurtful thing. That's often true a lot, I think really.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. That's helpful to hear that because I think that speaks certainly to my experience and I think to a lot of people's experience that it's stilling yourself is not always going to feel like a blissful, wonderful connection with God, it's through the fire into God.

Jim Finley: And I felt that a lot, I was in therapy for five years and there was a lot of being in the painful fire for five years. But it's in the painful fire with the divine fire it was sustaining me and transforming me.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: And I think too when Maureen died, it was a painful fire, but then with time with the divine fire shining through it. And so, each of you might ask yourself, what's this like for you? See, this is very intimate. Yeah, we're not used to talking about this strangely enough. And this was as a spiritual direction, is we're a soulmate to find someone with whom they can't explain it either but you recognize that each of you recognizes it and see T.S. Eliot recognizes it. And the very fact we're touched by the poem, we recognize it too.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: Little by little by little, we have to have just be patient as we keep, stay steadfast in the work. Be still, one be still, if you're sitting still not fidgeting around, you're sitting. So, when it goes something deeper than that, see, in the songs, be still and know that I'm God, be still and know that I'm God. Be still in the sense that there's nowhere to go because God's right here. And if I can't find God here, I can roam the whole world looking. Even God's right here and

my inability to experience that God is here, God's here and my inability to experience God is here. And so that's the stillness, that's the deep stillness and we just stay there in a steadfast, quiet, patient, self-accepting way.

And so, for each of you also about this stillness, because sometimes I think we sit quietly and then we get up and walk away when it's just getting started. I say, give it 20 minutes, I would have had lunch. So, we have to stay with it and not just stay with it in kind of unknowing, since when we're sitting, we're sitting in earnest during the day we're with it and playfully through the whole day. And this starts to work on you through the day, like an underlying set of sensitivities. It starts shining out through simple moments of the day. It starts fermenting and working through you, which is contemplative self-transformation, that's the goal here really, that permeates your whole life, be still.

And also, when you act, you act out of that stillness which gives the act and authenticity. Descend into the world of perpetual solitude. And my sense is this is what it means to me, solitude is you're less and less able to explain to anybody, including yourself what's happening to you is solitude. Plotinus says, alone with the alone, because God alone is God and you alone are you, you're the only you. So, you're alone with the alone, less and less able to explain the aloneness. It's really an infinite intimacy actually and it's perpetual solitude. Put off sense and notion. To me it says I have, we all have. It's important too. I have a sense of things that is I have an internalized set of assumptions or attitudes and a certain level that's important, it's real.

Some of them are healthy and some aren't so healthy, we have to work on that. But there is an internalized set of sense of that, but here's the thing about it, they're all finite. See and therefore we leave behind all sense and all notion because infinity is the homeland infinitely more than all of that. And yet it's permeating and is there a very reality of all of that and its nothingness without God. And so, we're trying to set free and I think then when we're praying, I think what it is, if we're in Lectio what it is, when you're an intimate conversation with somebody, you're tracking and you can tell when you got off track a little bit, you went off to a tangent and you bring yourself back.

So, I think for all of us too, when we're in lectio, there's distractions, they start coming in to lead us away. We notice it tugging at us, but we learn not to go there like I'm doing this now this way like this. And also, if we're doing contemplative prayer, if we're sitting in silence like the Jesus prayer, the cloud of unknowing. You're sitting there and you can see thoughts arising and falling off to the side and feelings of memory, but you don't think about the thoughts that are right otherwise you get carried off by thought. And so, there's like an art that's learned over time and sustained sincerity when refines as art form.

And so, each of you might ask yourself, where are you at with that? See, where are you at and knowing that right now I am focusing on this and I had to stop because the truck went by, but I dare not let the truck going by break the thread of the sensitivity here. I have to let it happen and circle back around and get back into the face again. So, it shows you how experiential this is inside, really, it's breath by breath, heartbeat by heartbeat kind of walking this wayless way like this.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: Turning to the mystics will continue in a moment.

Kirsten Oates: And the way we've laid out the practice that we're opening with these little reminders to come this way to be still to put off sense and notion. So, it's like a nice gentle reminder of coming into the place of being open and more conscious, open to God's presence. Yeah.

Jim Finley: Exactly. And you know too, I think some writers, mystics too, they help us out. They give, it's what we're doing here. But T.S. Eliot doesn't help us out, he just says it and this is why we have to sit with it and be patient with it and move in real close because it's so succinct.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. How do we do that?

Jim Finley: How do we do it, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Put a sense in notion. Yeah, let go of these things.

Jim Finley: Exactly. So, hopefully by me sharing with you how I do it in a way too, I think with you or whoever you might be, there's a way you already do this, but you're not consciously aware that you're doing this. It's like the subtlety of an art form and making it more conscious so it can be more transformational for ourselves.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. It reminds me of when you're reading a bedtime story to a child and you're very tired and there's a way you're reading the words on the page, but you've drifted off somewhere and you lose presence with the book and the child. And then you so then want to treasure the moment so you return as best you can to be present to the child's body pressed up against you to the words of the book, to be excited and present in them. Yeah.

Jim Finley: Yeah, that's very good. And there's another subtle thing here I think is important, is that we don't return back to this attentiveness as an attentiveness that we're able to comprehend. I got this one nailed, I got it. It isn't like that at all, you come back to incomprehensibility, see the all-encompassing incomprehensibility, that alone fulfills the restlessness because it's God. So, there's a paradoxical clarity that's not a conceptual clarity. It's an interior realization of what transcends thought, but it's expressed in thought, namely these thoughts. It transcends words but it's expressed in words, namely these words. It's like love language just like this too, I think too. Let go of the need to verify. This is a subtle thing.

We're not here to verify it and see if it checks out, because who's the one holding the clipboards checking it off? It's your ego. See, you're not here to verify, rather you're to surrender over that you're infinitely verified by God and you're also not here to instruct yourself. You're not here to internalize a set of things that you can write out and put on the refrigerator with a magnet like that or right there. You're not here to pin anything down, it's not pin down-able.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: So, there's this deeper way to understand what it means to understand this kind of unknowing. You're not here to instruct yourself becoming wiser by the moment. You're not here to inform your curiosity because that would be, I think I'll practice mystical prayer a little bit then go back and watch television. But I'm just curious to see what it looks like, I'll

take a peek and study it. And you're not back to report to anyone because what do you say? Sorry. So, you can't say it and that's the gift, but he helps us to say it. Thomas Merton once said, "Spiritual writers, people have words that ring your bell," like you underline it. How did they know to say that? They almost put words to the longings of your own heart. That's the awakened teacher that does that really.

And this is what T.S. Eliot is doing a very succinct way, helping us and guiding us along the way. But again, the gift of being with someone who doesn't understand it either, but they do and that's what our gathering here is. This is contemplative church, sangha, whatever. Allow but a little consciousness meaning you have to choose it. See, if you don't allow it, it won't happen. Once in a while there are fleeting moments, it gives itself to you like under the great barber in the church. But to become steadfast in the habituated state of it, you have to allow it by a way of life. You have to choose, this is the kind of person you sense you deep down and you really are and are called to be, to be still.

And let the dark come upon you, which will be the darkness of God. And the darkness is the same on the cross, the dark night of the soul. See, the darkness is the incomprehensibility of the infinity that's infinitely in love with you. So, it is actually when John of the cross talks about the dark night, he says, "Actually it's a light that blinds our finite eyes. And it's an awareness that blinds are finite comprehension of anything." So, you have to be very patient, let the rains fall from your hands to be empty-handed and incomprehensibility. And what starts to happen, and it already is happening, although it's not comprehensible, it shines and shimmers insofar as we're touched by it.

But when we try to explain what it is we're touched by, we can't explain it because it's not explainable like this. It's strange this kind of language is like this. And notice T.S. Eliot is a mystic teacher. Notice the pedagogy is we have to be willing to lean into this sensitivity in order to be with him and so this requires slowing way down. And so, each of us could ask ourself about incomprehensibility where at one level is so bewildering, but if you let yourself be quietly bewildered, there's an inner clarity shining in your confusion, see in the unfigureoutable of what's being given to you and you learn to live that way.

St. John of the cross says, "God grants to some people to understand that everything remains to be understood, and unknowing is the understanding that can't be understood." And that's what this poem is leading us to, "Be still and wait without hope for hope would be the wrong thing." And I know for myself, when I look back, there are things that I hope for. I had my fingers crossed it would happen and I got them. And in hindsight, it wasn't good for me. I hoped for the wrong thing. You're really confused, you're confused about what to hope for.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, that's so true.

Jim Finley: Life is filled that way. And so, for each of you listening, what have been your life's a trajectory of cul-de-sacs and you get stung, but we come away wiser hopefully. Some people do it over and over and over, it takes a long time to catch on. So, pretty long you learn to hold an abeyance what to hope for. And especially you're not ready to hope for infinity with your finite hope. Yeah, it's like that you just let go. Next, wait without love for love would be the wrong thing. And again, the things sometimes that we love, you look back.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: You loved it and, in the end, not good.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, yeah.

Jim Finley: And this is one way of understanding addiction, that you love something very much and it was killing you. But in the humility of experiential self-knowledge, you know that God grants to you the love and the hope that you're not ready for. It's so nice that God doesn't wait until we're ready for it, it would never happen. So, when it washes over us, it's like falling in love. You're never ready for the big things that wash over you. And you look back at your own life when that was true, wait without thought for you're not yet ready for thought. You're not yet ready for thought, insofar as the thought that you're thinking are thoughts that define. Thoughts that describe, thoughts that explain and at a certain level in relative consciousness that's important.

But there is a certain kind of thought that transcends conceptual thought and it's this kind of thought. I also think it's scripture, understood the words of Jesus this way. It's thought or the parables, it's a thought but it's a thought that transcends explanatory thought. And by the way, and it's this kind of language. So, this is the language of lovers, this is the language of talking to children. This is the cry of the poor, this is the healing word. There's a certain language of the awakened heart this way that transcends close conclusions in thought and so on. In this next section, he quotes St. John of the cross, and by the way, when we pointed this out to the Krishna with Arjuna and the Bhagavad Gita references to the Buddha.

So, you can see where he's coming from and that's what makes him a mystical teacher as it's given to him to be a mystical teacher, like the poetic voice, it reaches mystical resonances this way. So, this is St. John of the cross, "To possess what you do not possess, you must go by a way of dispossession." So, it isn't like this, it isn't I want to possess what I don't possess, which is God. And I want to follow a way to the infinity of God that I don't possess and I'm going to try to possess the way to the infinity of God I don't possess. So, I know I'm okay, I can check in with myself, I think I'm tracking well.

So, you have to go by a way of dispossession. And I think in the talk too, I referred to Thomas Merton, he praying, he said, "You who sleep in my breast are not met with words, but with dispossession within dispossession." Being endlessly dispossessed of a footing that you can securely stand on that's less than the infinite abyss of God that you're endlessly descending into forever, it's a wayless way. Back in the good old days when you were holy, it seemed so clear. But now it's all unravelled unexplainably in some unexpectedly beautiful way. And I think each of us get little doses of this too in our life in all kinds of ways that each of us can listen to. Where have I ever experienced this trying to possess the way to something.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: And I had to instead follow a path of being faithful to the spirit of what I'm seeking, rather than me being in charge trying to reach it. It's a subtle art form of healing.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. I remember when I started doing a quiet time in the morning, the 20 minutes of trying

different types of prayer but centering prayer and that the focus initially for me was doing the prayer so correctly and so focused on whether I was letting go of thoughts well or getting caught up in thought. And so, it was much more about feeling like I'm trying to possess the method versus being unravelled by the fact that I can't even sit and be still for the 20 minutes.

Jim Finley: The Buddhist Chogyi Nyima Rinpoche likes to say someone, being an artist, you start somewhere.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: So, you have to learn the craft of perspective and you have to lean into it and do it. But he said, "When art starts, it catches fire." And I was once seeing an artist in therapy, I love this. She talked about the anarchy of the ineffable. So, you don't know where the brush is going to go. You know what I mean? And I think poets are like this too. It's not pre-planned, pre-packaged words, it's like a flow. The poem is the condensed flow this way. So, we're slowing it way down to sit with this, get acclimated because in a way it's already part of who we are see, but neglected. But we can learn to cultivate the habit of fidelity to it and grow in it this way.

What you do not know is the only thing you know. And it's like this is a good one, I think too. See I like Romano Guardini, the Catholic writer says, "Although I am not God, I'm not other than God either. Although I'm not any of you, I'm not other than any of you either. And although I am not the earth, I'm not other than the earth either." I don't know what that means, but I do. That's the thing really, there's like an inner clarity that shines through the unexplainable and leaves it as unexplainable. This is like Zen Koans, the riddles with the parables of Jesus this way, the Psalms. Yes, exactly.

Kirsten Oates: I remember the first time I heard you say that Jim and I was trying to take notes on it, trying to write it down, and I had to keep going back, rewind, repeat, rewind. It took me about an hour just to write down that phrase, but there was something so resonant in it for me that I wanted to get it clear and write it down and say it over and over. And that's become a beautiful phrase for me that I land in a lot of the time.

Jim Finley: Yeah. Another thing about these mystic teachers, T.S. Eliot, all these people, is everything they say counts.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: And it's like a flow of depth. And that's why in my library and here you could open up any mystic, open any page at random and read it, that's it.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: There's no small talk. And that's what we're doing here, we're trying to slow it way down of the pedagogy. You can slow down enough to let it in because in a way you can't figure anything out either but you do. And you do figure it out unfigureoutable insofar as it touches you because to be touched is to know it. That's why I think there's a lot of people who are awakened to this and live by it, the anonymity of God in the world. But there's

some people that are given this and they're given the gift of teaching it as its own charism. This way, I think. T.S. Eliot is one of the, well see what you know is the only thing you know. "Then the darkness shall be the light and the stillness will be the dancing. So, oh, night lovelier than the dawn."

The scripture says, "The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness grasps but not. But although the darkness can't grasp the light, it can be illumined by it." And that's the key, I think really for me, what sense it makes to me. Each of the listeners listening to this, where has that been true for you as well? Where have you been in a moment of obscurity where in the midst of some unfigureoutable of something in your life. And unexpectedly in a dream or in a moment of pause, something shines through and it sheds an inner light into the perplexity. A lot of therapies like this too, I think.

Kirsten Oates: I think Jim too, on the other side of that, where have you offered that to someone else? Something came to you to say like an insight or a supportive word or something like that and you reflect that light into someone else's life.

Jim Finley: Yes. And I think this too, same thing that's very good. They say there's a friend who's hurting and you say something that helps them a lot and you don't know how you knew to say that.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: That's where the heart gives that like that. Yes, exactly. So, then the darkness shall be the light and the stillness is the dancing, the still point of the turning world. This eternal stillness and this eternal stillness be still and know that I am God. And the eternal stillness of God is spinning out as the days of our life, spinning out as the world, spinning out as the unfolding of time. It's like a stillness spinning out as perpetual flowing mandala or flowing movement.

Kirsten Oates: Of the whole of reality.

Jim Finley: Of the whole of reality.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: Right, yeah, exactly. Yeah, exactly. Restored by that refining fire, restored by the fire of Pentecost that burn is so bright this way and we're leaning into this so that this fire burns in us.

Kirsten Oates: It's almost like those three flames you talked about earlier become one. The three fires have been refined into one and it's all trustworthy.

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: The suffering, the discontent, the-

Jim Finley: That's right. And the poem's going to end that way too. And the fire and the rose are one that somehow the birth and the death and the pain and the joy and the aloneness and the intimacy and the divinity of it all are all woven and explicitly as this rose like the divinity of our lives. Like the mystery of our life. Yeah, exactly. Restored by that refining fire. And

so, then there's guidelines for prayer. So, when he says here the intersection of the timeless moment, and what's the here? We were just in it.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: That's the here, this is the prayer, that's where it's here. Here is the intersection of the timeless moment. It is a moment, but it's a timeless moment and we've just been in it because the timeless moment has duration to it timelessly. It's impossible, the scripture, they asked this, how many times do we sin a day, seven times, 70 times, who can be saved? With humanity is impossible, with God all things are possible. And so, it's an impossible union because guess what? It's God, that's what is impossible. The impossible gives itself to us is impossibility incarnate is our own awakened heart. I couldn't have planned this if I tried. Zen master Dogen said, "If enlightenment comes," he says, "It's entirely without human agency.

It may be true that had you not sat with all your heart it seeking it might not have happened." But it's also true, it's not the effect of your effort and that's what this is like too. It's entirely without human agency, it's the divinity of ourself shining bright. See the impossible union, it's impossible what is happening. It's not possible, what is happening. Praise the Lord. A condition of complete simplicity, that's lovely. Master Eckhart talks about the godhead beyond God. It's like an infinite simplicity manifesting itself as a divinity of the unfolding complexities of reality, but it's permeating through all of it is a simplicity.

And you find your way to the simplicity that permeates and is the depth dimension of the configurations of all this, and life is so. And that's why I think too, when we're graced with these moments, we're silenced by it and we're silenced by the complete simplicity of it. And this is why you can break the silence with words but there's also words that embody the silence, the simplicity. And that's these words, it's prayer and this contemplation and so on. Where our past and future are conquered and reconciled. He said, "Humanity spends its time worrying about the past, about the future." But to be in the intersection of time and eternity is the saints is the life of the saint and a life of death and love.

But here, this eternal simplicity reconciles the past in the future. A study of Hebrew thought, Claude Tresmontant, he says, "When the moment God said let there be light," and this moment we're in right now for God, it's the same moment, that's eternity. Here is where you are and nowhere never and always. See it's like this really, here's why it helps me to see this. See, I'm present, I'm present. But where does my presence stop? Does it stop with my skin? Does it stop with the walls of the room? And what if my presence never stops? Here is where you are and it's nowhere. That meaning is in no particular place, it is where it is and all the other places aren't it, that every place is this place.

And it's never and always because it's never, it's not in sequential time. And it always is the unfolding of this generosity of God's presence that alone is real. So, again, this paradoxical language, and this is what paradox is. Paradox is an apparent contradiction and in the impasse and sequential thought, a deeper awareness flows free.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: So, it breaks the thread of sequential conclusions. And again, for each of us, we can ask ourselves, where have we experienced that? This paradox where we were stopped short and

held in the break at sequential thought, a light shined through, insight like this awareness. Never and always where time has been redeemed and this is the redemption of time. See, time is redeemable, which is so comes back to Burt Norton in the very beginning. And then he quotes again, Julianne of Norwich, "And all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well." And again, I think my sense is this, the present moment already is infinitely better than well because it's God. But all shall be well and that with God's grace, I shall realize it. And I believe it because I'm already starting to realize it now.

So, it isn't just that I'm going to realize it when I die through all of eternity. But now in the timeless eternity of time in this very eternality of this moment, this makes it celestial, makes it like eternal life. So, we can be so surrendered over and transformed in dying to everything less than God that when our biological death does happen, nothing will happen. I mean something will happen, but if we've already died completely to everything less than love, and since love is eternal, and so it's like birth and death intermingled and transcended in this contemplative awareness, all manner of things shall be well.

Kirsten Oates: And then Jim, we put in a closing for the prayer. And it's really a reminder of what you often say about that we hope we don't break the thread. And this poem I think speaks to that so beautifully that at the end of our time of silence that this love continues to draw us forward. That we try not to break the thread with that love, with the drawing of this love and the voice of this calling, we shall not cease from exploration. Yeah, just reminds me of how we try not to break the thread, but it always breaks on our end, but it never breaks with God.

Jim Finley: Exactly, that's it. Our confidence is in that.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: Exactly.

Kirsten Oates: And at the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and to know it for the first time. And I feel like this is where going through this poem, you're repeating some of the things you've said throughout this season. But each time I hear them, it's almost like I'm hearing them a little deeper, almost like for the first time I find something new in them.

Jim Finley: Yeah, it's like the refrains of a song. That's why repeating ourselves is not redundant because it's endless. And I also think this mysterious thing about what arrived where we started, see, I think in one sense we look back where we started in our childhood and the first stirrings of these sensitivities, although in reflective consciousness, we weren't even beginning to be able to that sense of wonder that children have. But it goes even deeper than that because it isn't, we had our beginnings in our birth because our conception, our birth isn't where we began, it's where we appeared out of the eternity of God. So, it's the beginning, the Buddhist say beyond beginningless beginnings beyond endless ends, and it has this quality to it. And we'll know for the first time, namely like you say, each time it's fresh-

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: ... like this. See, it's like it never gets old.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. It's the quality of it, isn't it? When it bursts through, it has that quality of newness and

aliveness.

Jim Finley: Yeah, eternal newness. That's right. Yeah, beautiful, yup.

Kirsten Oates: And we end again with an all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well. Which to me, when I read those words, I automatically get tears in my eyes. There's something so comforting and compassionate and compassionate about those words.

Jim Finley: Yeah. And there's something I was doing when we did Julian, and it's true with T.S. Eliot, it touches her. So, she lived as a recluse, the thing is, it isn't just that she said those words, but she was saying what had become of her.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: She was his incarnate presence. And that's what gives the word such power, resonates so deep because of the depth that it comes from in her. Then it touches us because it resonates those same depth in us, which is the teaching, which is the path. So, lovely. Yeah, beautiful.

Kirsten Oates: Beautiful. And the fire and the rose are one. May it be so, amen.

Jim Finley: Amen. And so, I think really, I think we hope that in this time together, it's helped the listeners to write off on this, if they're so inclined to set a certain tone of how they can pray with this or live with this through the years is endlessly enriching for them.

Kirsten Oates: It's been such a beautiful invitation, Jim. Like each line you've gone through, each phrase is an invitation to look at our lives in a fresh light and in this deeper way, so what a beautiful session. And I wanted to let our listeners know that this guided prayer will be available in the show notes. We've written it out so that if people want to read it to themselves or read it to others, they'll have it. And then also we've put in some instructions for Lectio divina and how you might, if that's a new practice for you, how you might go about it with this poem. We've put some instructions there in the show notes as well. So yeah, we hope this has been helpful

Jim Finley: By way, I was glad that you did that with the lectio. And again, they can go back to the archives and listen to Guigo-

Kirsten Oates: That's right.

Jim Finley: ... Ladder to Heaven and listen to that series too because he walks through it very slowly and what you presented summarizes it's the essence that you put together. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. That's wonderful, that's season four and you go step by step through each aspect of the Lectio practice. Yeah.

Jim Finley: That's right. And then he said, then contemplation emerges unexpectedly out of that, this unit of states. So good, beautiful.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, beautiful. Well, Jim, thank you for just a wonderful season turning to a poet. It's been just a real gift and I've enjoyed it so much and just so much depth in such a succinct kind of quality. It's been wonderful. Thank you.

Jim Finley: You're welcome. Yeah, it's good a gift from me too to share it. Beautiful.

Kirsten Oates: So, I think we'll be back next with the listener questions. So, we look forward to hearing everyone's feedback and the questions that arise. And yeah, we're excited to hear from you all.

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 voice mail. All of this information can be found in the show notes. We'll see you again soon.