

- Jim Finley: Greetings. I'm Jim Finley. Welcome to Turning to the Mystics.
- Jim Finley: Greetings everyone, and welcome to our time together, turning for trustworthy guidance to the teachings of Gabriel Marcel. In this session, I'm going to be reviewing and refining some of the main points that Kirsten and I went over together in the introductory session, and expanding on it.
- Jim Finley: The thought of Gabriel Marcel, I think it's very helpful to understand what makes him so accessible. What makes him so accessible is that he's inviting us to become more aware of the quality of our awareness. It's very important. And this is very similar to psychotherapy in a way. When you're in psychotherapy, you present your whatever, depression, anxiety, whatever, the therapist listens. But what they try to do, they form an alliance with you, in which they point out there are certain aspects of your awareness, certain assumptions that you're making, that are actually contributing to the symptoms you're experiencing.
- Jim Finley: And they also suggest a more spacious, gracious, reality-based way to understand this situation, which enhances self-knowledge. And this is what Marcel is doing. Marcel is always staying in the intimacy of our mind and our awareness as we listen to him. He's offering guidance, insofar as we listen, the observations he's making, they ring true. They ring true about direct observations of this.
- Jim Finley: I'm going to begin with Kenneth Gallagher's book, The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel. And I'm going to begin with the first chapter of his book, the Winding Path. He says this about Marcel's thought. He says, "His whole thought invites a certain attitude." And he said, "The attitude is at the same time learning to listen," really listen to reality, listen to yourself, to listen.
- Jim Finley: And then he says, "And the manner of listening is strangely tranquil, unafraid, patient, and expectant this way." He also says, in this first chapter, he said, "A certain attitude must be brought to the portals of thought. It's humility." And we're kind of establishing a humility. And also, it brings us to a kind of deepening clarity. And so we're following him, sharing a series of insights and observations.
- Jim Finley: So he's mentoring us and guiding us, in this vision, this way that he sees the vision aspect, like what the world looks like through awakened eyes. And he's sharing his awakened eyes. So as we listen, we're being awakened. And then this will lead to the remaining talks, which is the path.
- Jim Finley: What is the way of life where it become habitually established in this awakened state? So right now in the vision aspect of being aware of the quality of our awareness.
- Jim Finley: I'm now moving to chapter three of Gallagher's book, Problem and Mystery. This is a nice practical place to start. First a problem. A problem is an inquiry which is set on foot in respect to an object which the self apprehends in an exterior way. And so the thing about the problematic is that it's exterior to us or dualistically other than us. And so examples, again, that Kristen and I went through. For example, if your car won't start,

that's a problem. Some insect is destroying your vegetable garden or your flower garden, that's the problem. If your roof is leaking, that's a problem. And so these are problems.

Jim Finley: So he said, "The thing about a problem is that it is a problem, and what you search for is a method to solve the problem." And sometimes we go to someone who's trained in that method. So if your car won't start to go to a mechanic. Flower garden, you go to the flower store. Show them a leaf and they'll tell you what to use. There's another kind of problem too, that's closer, but it's still a problem.

Jim Finley: Let's say you have a pain in your stomach, so it's your pain, but it's a problem, because it's a symptom. It's not me, I know who I am, but I have this problem. And so you go to someone who's trained with such things, you go to a physician. Likewise, if you're having psychological symptoms, depression with suicidal ideation, or anxiety with panic attacks, or whatever, you go to a mental health professional, if needed. So that's the realm of the problematic.

Jim Finley: And then once you get your answer, or once you solve it, you move on. You're done. Until you face the next problem. So life has this problematic aspect to it. Then Gallagher said, "For Marcel, a mystery, on the other hand, is a question, in which what is given cannot be regarded as detached from the self. There are data, which in the very nature, cannot be said over against myself, for the reason that as data they involve myself." And examples he then gives is this, examples we could give, "If we ask what does it mean to be human? It's I as a human being that's asking what it means to be human. In a way, it's kind of the answer, asking the question. If I ask what is consciousness? It's I in my consciousness asking what consciousness is. So consciousness is not a problem, it's a mystery. Being human is not a problem, it's a mystery. What is love? It's me who experiences love, seeks love, that's asking what is love? So love's not a problem."

Jim Finley: I mean, love can be a problem. There's problems in love. But in essence, it's always a mystery. Even the problems of love are mysteries, really, because you can't separate them from yourself. "What is death? It's me, as being unto death asking what is death? So death is not a problem. See, death is a mystery. And so the mystery then are mysteries because we can't objectively set them over dualistically other than ourself, because the mysteries are aspects of ourselves are mysteries."

Jim Finley: But here's the thing about Marcel, and this is key to his thought, his key, one of his big insights. He doesn't mean this in a reductionistic sense, where everything's reduced by my opinion, my emotions. It doesn't mean that at all. It means the opposite. When I ask, "What does it mean to be human?" it means that my myself extends out into, is woven into the mystery of humanity itself. When I ask, "What is consciousness?" It isn't my private consciousness, but my consciousness extends out into and is woven into the mystery of consciousness.

Jim Finley: When I ask, "What is love?" I'm woven out into the mystery of love. That's mystery, from Marcel. I want to give an example that helps me to see this distinction. As you listen to this, see if it rings true to you. The poet, Robert Frost, has a poem where someone in the middle of winter in a snowy landscape is writing in a little one horse

open sleigh, going at night through the woods, through the snow, off heading somewhere. And in the middle of the woods, they're in the dark alone, he stops. This is the poem. Robert Frost is the person in the sleigh stopping in the woods. Says, "Whose woods these are, I think I know. His house is in the village though. He will not mind me stopping here to watch his woods fill up with snow. My little horse must think it queer, to stop without a farmhouse near. He gives his harness bells a shake, to ask if there is some mistake. The woods are lovely, dark, and deep, but I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep, and miles to go before I sleep."

Jim Finley: The fact that he has miles to go before he sleep, because he's on an errand, that's problem-solving. He's got to get an answer. He's got to do. He has something to take care of before he goes to sleep. And it's true. That's the problematic.

Jim Finley: Thomas Burton once said, "Some people don't see a tree until they're ready to saw it down. And they don't see themselves as a commodity to be used." Am I efficient enough yet? Am I clever enough yet? Am I productive enough? Yet hence the fear of growing old, the fear of not keeping up. And that's why we think the more we do, the more we are, which is problematic, it's just solving of problems.

Jim Finley: The mystery in the poem would be this. See, the person would say in the sleigh, "But I promises to keep." But then the person says, "But you know what? I'm going to come back here a lot. And I'm going to sit in those woods, and I'll sit in those woods so I can be immersed in and deepened, lovely, dark, and deep. That's the mystery of me."

Jim Finley: And we would say this about Robert Frost, the very fact he's a poet, he sat in those woods a lot, and that's where the poems come from. That's mystery. So Gabriel Marcel then, is trying to always move us beyond the problematic, which are real. You have your problems, I have my problems. But what he's talking about is how can we be healed from what hinders us from moving towards this mystery?

Jim Finley: There's another in the problem and mystery chapter, also, where he gives another key insight about this. He makes a distinction between primary reflection and secondary reflection. Primary reflection is the problematic, which is the proper realm of science. By the way, the empirical science is problematic. He says, "Secondary reflection is a quality of reflection in which you see the inadequacy of primary reflection as being adequate to understand the mystery of who you are, about what life's about."

Jim Finley: And so he says, "A state of secondary reflection process is because you're immersed in the presence this way." Now what Marcel is really after is this, really, and this is in chapter one again of the Winding Path. What he really is talking about is how can I become aware that the mystery of my soul extends out into, and is woven into, the mystery of being. That's what he's really after, being.

Jim Finley: And then he says, "Well, what's being?" And he says, "We can't say what it is, because that would be defined as characteristics. But that which is the reality of all things that have characteristics, as itself can't be explained in terms of characteristics." He said, "That's why it doesn't come to us as an answer or a definition."

Jim Finley: This is a key word from Marcel, "It comes to us as a presence, that in the mystery of being like the person in the middle of the snowy woods, we know we're in the presence of being in moments there's a qualitative enrichment of our presence." Rollo May, the existential psychotherapist, he talks about an Olympic high diver at the edge of the platform standing there for just a moment. He said, "Just before the person dives, the person pauses, he becomes present." And he said, "They dive out of the pause, which makes the dive eloquent."

Jim Finley: And the person would say, "All these people are watching me. The cameras are on. What if I mess this up?" His ego would dive. And so there's a kind of a deepening of presence. There's even something more, to Marcel would say this, "It isn't just that I'm more present, but I realize that I'm present, and that I'm immersed in a presence."

Jim Finley: And I like to give a couple examples of this that we used in the mystics too, with Thomas Merton. Let's say, the example we use in nature as an example. So let's say, for example, you're driving home at the end of the day and the sun is setting. You don't pay much attention to it, it sets every night. And you have miles to go before you sleep. You're busy, you're on an errand. But this particular night, the sunset's particularly beautiful. And so you pull the car over to the side of the road, you get out, you go down a little embankment, and you sit there alone.

Jim Finley: And here's the key, you give yourself over to the beauty of the setting sun giving itself over to you. You're becoming more present, immersed in the presence of the beauty of the setting sun. He said, "That's being expressed in nature." And one of the key examples that Marcel uses is the example of thou. This is chapter two, being in a situation, being in a situation.

Jim Finley: He raises a question of the thou. And here he's kind of echoing the Jewish philosopher and mystic, Martin Buber, in his book I, It and I, Thou. He said, "I, it is what Marcel calls the objective order of the problematic, is I, it. "The thou dimension," Buber says, "the thou fills the entire horizon of your being is thou." And so Gallagher says, paraphrasing and quoting Marcel, "The thou which is given to me in an encounter is not a mere repertoire of facts. Furthermore, he himself is not the subject of a factual description. The reality of the thou cannot be grasped by a series of predicates. Our awareness of the thou is not the awareness of something. But of that which super abounds, above every attempt to grasp him as something. We do not know what he is, but only that he is. Only an absent third person can use at reference, can use the answer to a questionnaire, "What is this person's background? What are his talents? What pleasant traits does he possess?" All these questions bear on he about whom our curiosity is aroused.

Jim Finley: Who are you is the only question which can be asked with a thou. And it is not a request for information, although it appears as one. It is really a form of an invocation. Be with me. The thou who is present to me alludes all characterization, precisely in respect to being present.

Jim Finley: And I'd like to reflect on this key theme, really through Marcel. And I want to use the example of marital love. But really, father, mother, sister, brother, dear friend, teacher,

whatever, anyone that we have a deep love for, is in the love for the person, we realize the thou of who they are.

Jim Finley: But I'll use the example falling in love with somebody. When you fall in love with somebody, you know who they are objectively. You know what they look like. You also, as you get to know them, you know their personality, and their background, and their qualities that you admire, all of that. But when you fall in love with them, the thou, they fill the entire horizon of your being, and they become undefinable. That is, the more in love you are, the less inclined you would be able to say anything that would do justice to who you know the person to be, because they're a thou.

Jim Finley: I want to go a little bit deeper. When the beloved sees that you see them that way, you reveal the beloved to themselves as thou. Like, wow. Because I'm either tricking you and seeing me this way, I'm pulling something over on you, or guess what? I'm a mystery unto myself. See, I can't open my arms wide enough to receive the mystery of who I am as thou. Gabriel Marcel adds this point. But it's inconceivable that you would be aware of a thou without being aware of the thou dimensions of yourself. It's your very ability to see the person as thou. It's the thou in you that's able to see it.

Jim Finley: And when the thou returns the favor, and lets you know that your thou is thou, and this is what Gabriel Marcel is trying to help us to gain. So you can see then what he sees here. I'd like to add something more about the thou. Lying awake at night in the dark, listening to your breathing, you sense the thou dimensions of that. Reading a good night's story to a child, looking down into a child's upturned face, you see the thou dimension.

Jim Finley: Watering the houseplants. A pet, an animal, thou. That is everything, the sun moving across the sky. The artist sees the thou dimension of a vase of flowers. And through the discipline of learning to be an artist, they help us to see the thou dimension of flowers. And that's why when we go to an art museum, there's a kind of a collective quietness about it, because it's thou. It's the visual dimensions of the thou.

Jim Finley: Same with music, same, we're moved by music. And Marcel himself was a musician, and he was a composer. And he explored the musicality of reality, that there's a musical flow, like an undefinable... You can't freeze-frame the music, because the music stops. It's like the thou that can't be spoken. It's not the eternal thou, Lao Tzu says in the Tao Te Ching. See, there's this flowing mystery.

Jim Finley: So he is trying to help us, and I think, see the thou dimensions of everything. Holding a pebble in your hand, what are the thou dimensions of everything? And really what we're getting at is this. He's really talking about the thou is boundary-less. Being is boundary-less. He said, "Being is a eternal."

Jim Finley: I'd like to give another example of this. Let's say there's a moment of, you're in one of these moments of deepened awe of all. They'd say the sunset, or the beloved, or giving yourself over to the smell of a flower, whatever that moment is. And you're in this sense

of presence, deepened presence, in the presence of this presence. Marcel said, "Also, the thou being is transcendent."

Jim Finley: Martin Heidegger said, "The transcendent is that which actively surpasses all set limits." So let's say you're in a moment of awe, where you're in one of these moments. And let's say, if you're going to try to draw a circle around the awe that you're experiencing, you're going to try to circumscribe it, like hem it in with an answer or a definition. That no matter how big you'd make that circle, even if you'd make the circle infinitely big, I don't know if there's such a thing as an infinitely big circle, but let's say there is. Even if the circle would be infinite, the awe that you're experiencing would breach the circumference of that circle.

Jim Finley: And it would do so playfully, and effortlessly, as that which it delights to do. That's being. And that's who you are. Your cell is extended out into that boundary-less, un-circumscribe-able, overflowing beauty. That's the mystery of the self this way.

Jim Finley: If this rings true to us, rings true to me, if it rings true to you, it means that somehow Marcel's mentoring us, he's helping us put a language to interior dimensions of our own experience, of ourselves, and of reality, of the mystery of ourself. And Marcel goes on to say this, "Despair is the loss of the sense of being." And he said, "We live in a world that almost promotes the loss of being."

Jim Finley: I'm nothing but the self things happen to. How do I find an answer to this? Find an answer to that? It's despair, because death is coming. Saint Augustine says, "What is wisdom?" He said, "Wisdom is understanding in what true happiness consists and how to find it." And then he concludes, "In order to know and what it consists, we know that happiness has to be eternal. Because unless your happiness is eternal, it's temporary, and fleeting, and precarious."

Jim Finley: And this is what Marcel is saying. Gallagher points out necessarily too, "Marcel is very Augustinian in this way." So this is the tonality of Marcel's teachings for us. Now this raises a question. I want to end this reflection, with, it'll segue into what's coming next. Let's say that we say, "Yeah, I've had moments like that. Thank God."

Jim Finley: Sometimes it can be very intense. Sometimes there's moments of awakening, in the aftermath of which you're never quite the same. Sometimes when quite young, you're quickened. Sometimes you experience that as a call, to be faithful to it, and to pursue it, and following it, like this, like a calling. But often they're extremely subtle, like so delicate. Like if you weren't careful, you might've missed it, the delicacy of it.

Jim Finley: And they tend to be fleeting. And so the question is, yes, I've had moments like this, but I get so caught up in the problematic, I lose access to it. Because you get the feeling that in these moments, it isn't as something more is given, but a curtain parted, and you realize what every moment is, including this one.

Jim Finley: But I'm experientially exiled from the thou dimensions of this very moment, the divinity of standing up and sitting down. My next breath, from whence does it arise? And

therefore, there's certain moments we're quickened by the wonder of it, like this. But I'm all caught up in the complexities of the day's demands.

Jim Finley: So then the question is this, then what is the path? What is the way of life, which I can become ever more deeply, ever more habitually sensitized and established in, the abyss like nature of the mystery of myself extended out into the very infinite thou, because the infinite thou is the thou of God. "Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name."

Jim Finley: And then we know through faith, and this is later when Marcel became Catholic, but now it's implicitly in being, that in faith, were thou is thou, we're all siblings of infinite love is the beloved. What if we could all close our eyes right now and be interiorly awakened, so that when we opened our eyes, we'd see their own awakened eyes what Jesus saw and all that he saw.

Jim Finley: What would we see? We'd see God. Because Jesus saw God in all that he saw. Really, when you read the Gospels in a prayerful way, it's stunning. It didn't matter whether he was at the joy of those gathered at a wedding, or the sorrow of those gathered at the burial of a loved one. It didn't matter whether he saw his disciples or his executioners, whether he saw his own mother or a prostitute, a flower. Jesus saw God in all that he saw.

Jim Finley: And Jesus said, "You have eyes to see, but you don't see." You don't see the God-given godly nature, the very immediacy of yourself, and your nothingness without God. And that's what Marcel is saying. And there are certain moments that we see. I realize it. See, it's not to play the cynic. I will not doubt my awakening heart. What's the path this way? And Marcel's going to lay out this path for us, this poetic experiential path.

Jim Finley: And he's going to talk about it in terms of fidelity, and he's going to talk about it in terms of hope, and he's going to talk about it in terms of love. And as I was saying with Kirsten at the introductory session, I want to feel very free here to kind of explicitly put in mystical terms, what's very much at the heart of Marcel, but it's implicit. And that's why, when we talk about fidelity, hope, and love, I want to be sharing ways to meditate and pray with Marcel. In a way, how is Marcel Lectio Divina? And how is he guiding us towards a way to pray, and a way to live, and so on?

Jim Finley: So that's the end of our first reflection. So as always, as we end this, let's end with the sitting. "So be still to know that I am God." See, this is practice. This is the rendezvous of a hiatus from the sequential matters of life, to open ourselves to this presence, in the presence that's always there. This is the practice.

Jim Finley: We can't make these moments happen, but we can assume the inner stance that offers the least resistance to be overtaken by the renewed awareness of what we can't make happen. And so this is our practice. And so, as always, we'll do the same thing. We're going to fold our hands, and bow. Shunryu Suzuki says that when we bow, we give ourselves up. If ever you get to a place in life where the only thing you can do is bow, you should do it. That's a nice statement.

Jim Finley: So as contemplative women, as contemplative men, the least and the most we can do is bow, like a liturgy of the body, in communal gratitude, to be in the presence of the gift of these teachings, these grace teachings.

Jim Finley: So we'll fold our hands, we'll bow. I'll ring the bell once, and then we'll do a sit. And this suggests that you sit for 20 minutes. You sit as long as, to your to your own self be true. I'll ring the bell once. At the end of the sit, I'll ring the bell once. We'll bow again in communal gratitude. It was more than enough. It's always more than enough.

Jim Finley: And then to give witness here, that we're in this path of the Christian contemplative tradition, one with the contemplative traditions of all the world's great religions, we'll say the Lord's Prayer, and name three mystics.

Jim Finley: So I invite you to sit straight, fold your hands, and bow.

Jim Finley: I will slowly say the Lord's prayer together. "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Amen.

Jim Finley: Mary, Mother of Contemplatives, pray for us. St. Theresa of Avila, pray for us. St. John of the Cross, pray for us. Blessings. Till next time.

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