

Turning to the Mystics



Dialogue: The Fifth Mansion

Jim Finley: [music] Greetings. I'm Jim Finley.

Kirsten Oates: And I'm Kirsten Oates.

Jim Finley: Welcome to Turning to the Mystics. [bell]

Kirsten Oates: Welcome, everyone, to Turning to the Mystics. We're in Season 2 and turning to the mystic St. Teresa of Ávila. I'm here with Jim, and we're going to be reflecting on his Lectio on Mansion five from the Interior Castle.

Well, where I wanted to start was, I get so confused about the way different people use the term, the soul. And I think the way Teresa uses it and the way you're using it is very specific, so I wondered if you could define that for us.

Jim Finley: Yes. The word soul in the Christian tradition, I'd say especially in the Christian tradition of the kind of philosophical theology of the middle ages through Aquinas, and Augustine, and Bonaventure, and Scotus, and those people, and then how it carries over into the mystics, has different meanings. For example, Aquinas following Aristotle says that the soul is the principle of animate matter. So, for example, plants have a soul, because there is a principle, they have a movement from within. They have a vegetative soul. And then, likewise, animals have a sensitive soul. Dogs and cats, and so on, because they're alive, the soul. And then for Aristotle, too, that soul was immaterial. It was ontological. It was the being. And then for the human person they have a rational soul, so, to think, to reflect, the intellectual interior life, subjectivity.

And in our age today, when we use soul, we tend to speak of a person being soulful, as in deeply felt. I'm speaking from the depths of my soul. A kind of intimate, we think that. So, it's good to clarify what she means by it. And then I also then think of what John of the Cross and these other mystics in these classical texts mean by soul. To me, one way of putting it is what she means by soul is that the soul refers to the mystery of who we are as persons created by God in the image and likeness of God is our soul. That God creates us as persons in the image and likeness of God and that God-given godly nature of ourselves. That kind of divine stature of ourselves as persons is our soul.

And we might say in social justice, and so on, that's the innate value of the helpless, the innate value of the infant, the elderly, the poor. The fact a person is impaired in their ability to function doesn't lessen their essential dignity, it's a spiritual dignity, that they're a person. They're a person. So, the soul has to do with that sense of and faith that there's this godly, spiritual, innate value to all of us as our soul.

When she speaks then, she says, "I'm now going to lead you into a journey through your own soul." So, she says, "Well, you may say to me, well, since I am my soul, how can you lead me into a journey into my soul?" And she says, "Understand there's different meanings, what it means to be in a place." So, for example right now, I'm in my room here as I'm talking with you, you're in your room talking, and the people listening to this later are going to be where they are talking. So, we're all in the place that we are, but the degree to which each of us is aware of and one with the far-reaching implications of what we're talking about as divine union varies greatly from person to person.

So, when she uses the word Mansions or dwelling places, she's talking about the grace states of consciousness in which we're aware of and open to the God-given, godly nature of our soul because she says some people don't even know they have a soul; that is, they're so trapped in the external demands of externality of life, it isn't until they're awakened to the interiority. If my life has an outside, it must have an inside. And, specifically, when for the first time God becomes real to you; that is, my faith matters to me. That point at which it matters, you start to become conscious of your own soul. You always were your soul, but you weren't always conscious of your soul. And so, she says the first Mansion is for beginners. She said they do pray, but they don't pray well, and they don't pray often. So, each of these Mansions are kind of heightened, transformative degrees of conscious, realized oneness with and response to the mystery of our soul, which leads into God in the hidden center of our soul, drawing us into union with himself.

Kirsten Oates: Can you explain how thoughts, emotions, the physicality of us and our thoughts and our emotions, what's the relationship between those parts of ourselves and the soul?

Jim Finley: Yes. For Teresa, I want to use our language. I'm going to use the term ego in our language. And my understanding, a basic understanding of ego—it's good we're doing this because we're clarifying how we use these words—soul, now ego. I understand ego to mean our self-reflective bodily self in time and space in relationship with others and with the earth, open to the mystery. So, our ego is the thinking us, the remembering us, the desiring us, the intellect, the memory, and the will. It is the feeling us, our whole range of emotions. It is the awareness of our bodily sensations within our relationship to ourself, relationship to others, relationship to the earth. So, God wants us to have a healthy ego.

A lot of psychotherapy is the healing of the ego—internalized traumas and abandonments. God wants us to have a healthy ego because if our ego isn't healthy, we suffer, and other people suffer. And so, the issue then for Teresa is that the ego also has the capacity to be open to the realization that we're living in a relationship with God and that God's in a relationship with us. And God's relationship with us is the reality of us. It's through faith. See, the ego is endowed with God with the capacity for faith, which is the gift of faith. It is out of the ego, we transcend the ego. And the gift of faith, of knowing that we're in this relationship with God, and then the freedom to ascent to that, because love is always offered. It's never imposed.

So, what she's saying is when people don't even have a soul, it isn't just that their ego is wounded as may be to hurtful patterns and behaviors, internalized traumas, the things we do to each other, but also it's the ego that's estranged from its openness to the transcendent. And so, the first three Mansions then refer to a graced awareness of our intellect, our memory, and our will, our senses, and how do we relate to these things in grounded, effective, and loving ways that are open to the presence of God in our lives.

And so, the first three Mansions then have to do with effective prayer, *Lectio Divina*, discursive prayer, reflection, applying faith to daily life. And that's efficacious unto holiness. See, that's how God leads us on towards this union with God so that when we die and pass through the veil of death, we go into unmediated infinite union with the infinite, and that's the first three Mansions of holiness.

With the fourth Mansion, it begins mystical experiences, which means God doesn't wait until you're dead to begin to awaken you to God's oneness with you as the very reality of who you are. You begin to get that first stirring. And then the ego, in being so awakened, has to freely cooperate with that, and we have to open ourselves to it, and so on. So, we see in the fifth Mansion, we can then see as it moves deeper and deeper, the intellect is transcended. The thinking you and all that it thinks ceases because it's finite. The finite self cannot be the foundation out of which an infinite union is realized because it's finite. And so, the finite, reflective self, illumined by faith, because in the fourth Mansion you're in that twilight zone between the two. In the fifth Mansion, the finiteness of the intellect ceases because it can't be the basis of what's now occurring.

Memory ceases, desire ceases, sensation ceases, and it's a kind of state in which the ego and reflective consciousness goes into kind of a deep sleep, so you're not there. So, when the moment passes, it's an event that happens to you while you're praying. So when it's over, you don't know for sure whether anything happened because you weren't there, but you know it because you're different. And that's what the fifth Mansion's really about, is what are the signs? We have this experience where we disappear from ourselves, even for a few moments. What are the signs by which we can discern that we are not the same as we were before that happened to us? And then cooperating with those signs is the fifth Mansion.

Kirsten Oates: So, Jim, is it right to say that when we die, we'll no longer have the ego part of ourselves, but the soul will continue? Is that—

Jim Finley: Well, we believe in our faith that Jesus rose with his wounds. And so, we believe in the mystery of the resurrection, the final resurrection. It's kind of a mythic, poetic way of the eternality of all us so that in the kingdom of God, we'll remember who we were. We'll remember our relationships. They'll still be the eternal reality of those things and God will continue, but it will continue as seen and understood with and as God's own mind. That is, we'll see the divinity of the ego, the divinity of the body, the divinity of this conversation we're having right now. Since God's knowing we're having this talk right now and God never forgets, when we die and go into God, we'll go into having this talk forever because everything is forever in God but transcended and permeated as God's own consciousness of this. And that's what starts to happen in mystical states. You start to have God's consciousness of the life that you're living; God's consciousness of the life of everyone around you, God's love, and so on.

Kirsten Oates: So, in the end, it's not that our thoughts, memories, the way you describe the ego, the thinking self, the feeling self, in the end it's not that they're separate from our soul. It's just that they're not infused into the soul initially. Is that—

Jim Finley: There are evolving states of the intellect, the memory, and the will—our evolving thoughts, our evolving memories, our evolving feelings, and so on, and the reality of that, and so on, and so on, and so on. But what starts to happen—I'm going to use the example of falling deeply in love with somebody again, which is going to be key for Teresa and these nuptial mystics—so, we fall in love with somebody, and in the depth of that love when we try to explain to somebody in words that do justice to

who we know the person to be in our love for them, we can't do it.

So, it's in the ego, where the ego's transcended through love and fulfilled through love on this qualitatively-- So then she's saying since God is that love, what would it be like to be in love with God, or what would it be like to know that God's infinitely in love with you? And how do you begin to express that? How do you begin to express even to yourself what's happening to you that you're realizing that God's infinitely in love with you, and has been from before the origins of the universe, but now you're starting to taste it for yourself. And then God's waiting for your response. God's waiting for you to say yes to that, and to give yourself in love to the love, which is the path that she's marking out for us.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you, Jim. That's getting clearer. I think that's a lifelong journey to understand what you just said so beautifully. So, then, just to clarify another--

Jim Finley: I want to add one more thing, too, about listening, spiritual direction. I think talk like this makes sense to the extent we realize that we're talking about something that in some way we've experienced. It's not babble, it's not nonsense. We realize maybe we've only experienced it fleetingly and even in hearing it, we realize in hearing of it, we desire it. And so, it's a kind of language that puts words to these intimate experiences, and how we can learn to deepen them. That's the guidance she's giving us, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. I resonate with that, Jim, and it's more like a warming of my own heart, or an excitement, or a jump in my heart as you talk about these things.

Jim Finley: It is. And then, also, and we'll see this in the sixth Mansion and for John of the cross. Then the path, then, the heart jumps, but then it feels the pain in not knowing how to consummate the longing that's been quickened within it. See? That longing is the path. That is, I wake up inside when I hear it. See? I want it, but I'm powerless by my own power to consummate the longing, God, that you've awakened within me. She says that actually is the nature of the path itself. Really, what do we do with that, or what happens to us when we surrender to that?

Kirsten Oates: Before we move a little more deeply into Mansion five, would you mind just going back over what happens to us in Mansion four, those stages where we go through the quiet, the absorption?

Jim Finley: So, let's say in the first three Mansions, in the third Mansion we can think of it as a psychological, spiritual maturity. See? So, there is our life of faith, there's a daily rendezvous with God in prayer, the Lectio, we take in God's word; we engage in Meditatio, discursive reflection with God about that: How's this active in my life today? And we take that and then the prayer is our desire to be faithful to that: "Help me with this as I go through my day." That's the first three Mansions. It becomes more and more stabilized and habituated as your daily life, your ministry, everything. And that's holiness. It's everything, really.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, that's what you demonstrate in the Lectio practice with Teresa. You take in the text Lectio and then you do your meditation on it. You invite people into a state of

prayer.

Jim Finley: That's right, because she's saying that's what Jesus does in the Gospels that were kind of drawn to kind of just listen to what he just said, and the deathless presence of Jesus is saying it to us. See? It's like that. It's a very personal thing. So, that's the first three Mansions, see?

And by the way, she says there's some people who never had the experiences of the remaining Mansions, and they're holier than some people who have them. She says the currency of the land is holiness. It's to do God's will, to live by love—love for God, love for others, love for neighbor, all of this.

What starts to happen in the fourth Mansion, you're praying that way. You're in your process of reflecting, and she's says what starts to happen—and calls it the quiet—and she says what the quiet is, it's hearing the master's voice. It isn't God speaking to us through the Scripture or through teaching. It's in some way, you're actually hearing God's own voice, see, somehow speaking to you, or God's very presence is somehow infusing itself into your very presence to the point that you're kind of held in a kind of a quiet fascination so you instinctively pause. Your thoughts fall into the background, your thoughts fall into the background. And in that state of quiet, like this kind of quiet fascination because it's very subtle, usually it's very delicate, you enter into a state of absorption. Absorption, Mary Frolich phrases it, is a semi-voluntary state of quiet fascination, like as we are before a work of art or a sunset.

So, absorption is not union we're getting at, but it's a state that offers the least resistance to union occurring. See? And then she says you watch very, very closely, so the prayer now becomes kind of obediently following what's happening to you is the prayer. So, you're not in control at this point in a way. You're kind of into new territory, and she's says you just start to realize-- And she starts using this imagery of water. Instead of God's grace coming to us from afar, you get the feeling that God's presence is welling up from some sudden place inside of you. And instead of reaching it through effort—the effort to meditate; the effort to concentrate—somehow it's welling up of itself without your effort.

And then imagine a basin filling with water, and the basin keeps expanding to accommodate the water. You realize that the love of God flowing into you as transforming you into itself, so your heart is being enlarged to divine proportions, see? That state, see, that's that fourth Mansion state, it's like a dawning. The first few Mansions are still there, and that you still have to constantly choose to renew it when it slips away. You have to renew to open your fidelity to it. You're still there to actively cooperate with this deepening surrender, but the surrender is carrying you qualitatively into this new kind of realm betwixt and between the ego illumined by faith and the dawning of union.

Kirsten Oates: And the surrender happens in the ego? So, I might notice thoughts arising or emotions that might be getting in the way of that surrender and that's where I surrender from, noticing that, and--

Jim Finley: Yes. I think this is the dignity of the ego. The ego, in realizing it's being transcended must freely choose to die to its own demise in having the final say in who we are, which is really the glory of the ego. The ego knows it's in some very deep place beyond itself; and, therefore, it has to freely choose to die or to surrender to having the final say, which is an act of trust,

really, because it knows by its own finite standard it's myopic, or claustrophobic, or it's constricted compared to this expansiveness that's now drawing us into itself. It's a battle. It's an arm-wrestling thing because we're afraid of it. You know what I mean?

A battle ensues because we're afraid to die, and it also brings up internalized traumas and hurt, and the two start feeling like each other. So, wherever we were hurt in the past, how can I be safe and vulnerable at the same time? See, how do I know? Yet, if I don't let go, see, I can't be released into the fullness, but how do I deal with this internalized holding on so I don't get hurt? And I think that's the intimacy part of it, anyway, of learning to undergo this.

Kirsten Oates: That's why when you've taught this before I've really felt that Mansion three is kind of the anchor point. Even if you were to be able to have moments of later Mansions because the ego, until its final death, it's always potentially going to be fighting the death.

Jim Finley: So, what I tell people, what I think helps me, is I hear what you're saying about returning to the third Mansion. You need to check in and see whether or not your concerns are warranted because if you return, notice you're still sitting there, you're still breathing, no one's hurting you. You're not losing your ability to think. You're just not maybe necessarily limited to thinking. You're not losing your ability to choose. As a matter of fact, it's important that you choose. You have a life to live, so you have to check in and see whether that fear is actually warranted because the stature of the self—that's what love of neighbor and love of self is all about—it's even a heightened regard for the dignity of your body, for the dignity of your mind, not a loss of it.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jim Finley: It's just that you're no longer living on your own terms, see, you're living on love's terms, which are transforming you. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). It's even outside of the prayer or the meditation when I'm back out in the world and trying to be the loving presence I might find re-grounding kind of those questions that are asked in the third Mansion is important.

Jim Finley: Yes. And I think this is where the moral part comes in, all of it, too. So let's say I'm infused with this love. I'm moved to go out and realize that everyone around me is infinitely loved by God. And then I realize in my interactions some of these internalized survival strategies formed in trauma and abandonment kick in, and I'm being distant, or removed, or dishonest, or reactive. See? And then I realize that I'm tempted to be down on myself or disheartened. And then I have to remind myself that God's infinitely in love with me as precious in my brokenness. This is the good news.

I'm to live by the mercy of God who loves me in my wayward journey and hit the reset button and start over again. And so, this is always getting sifted back through the habits of our whole life. That's what makes it real actually, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. That's really helpful because I think there's a desire for perfection, or for purity, or for just getting it right. And so, what I take comfort in when you describe the path, is that we won't achieve that in this finite reality, and so the path is actually in our inability to reach the perfection we desire and that we can come back to God's grace and compassion.

Jim Finley: Exactly. We can't achieve the infinite love, but the infinite love achieves us in our inability to achieve it, see? So, perfection is really perfection in humility, perfection in gratitude, perfection in mercy, perfection in the surrender is the true perfection. [music]

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Yes. That's so helpful. Turning To The Mystics will continue in a moment.

Kirsten Oates: I just had one last question around Mansion four. You describe these events happening in a state of prayer, but is it true that they can also happen in moments of relationship with others or in other ways?

Jim Finley: You know she says that in the fourth Mansion. She says sometimes you're not in prayer at all. Like, you're having a conversation with somebody and all of a sudden you realize you're in the fourth Mansion. That is, all of a sudden you realize that in this moment with this person, your heart's being enlarged to divine proportions of the holiness of this moment with this person, or in a quiet hour alone at day's end, or in the darkness of the night. So, it sort of rises of itself, even when you're not consciously at prayer. It becomes more and more habituated.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I know I had an experience when my grandmother was dying, and she was in hospital and not sleeping well. She'd been someone who meditated and did yoga, but she was very anxious and not sleeping well and afraid. She had to have a surgery. I was sitting next to her, and she said to me, "I'm afraid I won't sleep tonight and I won't be at my best for the surgery tomorrow."

And I remember, something absolutely not coming from me, but something coming through me for her, and I said to her, "Well, Nan, you're a great meditator. Why don't we meditate together?" She nodded her head, and I said, "I see this beautiful, golden light surrounding you and covering you, and it seems so warm and trustworthy and beautiful, and I wonder if you can get a sense of that inside of you." I don't know where that came from, and it was hard to talk about afterwards. But when I went in the next morning, prior to the surgery, my grandmother burst into tears when she saw me, and she said, "You know, I had the best night's sleep. I had the best night's sleep ever." She said she wasn't feeling anxious about the surgery.

Jim Finley: You know why I think this comes up, too, a lot, and I think this came up for Teresa when she was writing the Interior Castle, see? And I've had this experience, too, when I've worked with people in therapy who are trained to do hospice work. They were so nervous about being with their first dying person and always they'd come back in a week later, and when they were next to the bed with the family members around, it was given to them, you see, that somehow when a friend is hurting and you say something that helps, and you don't know how you knew how to say it.

So, a lot of this Mansion business is learning how to be more and more habitually receptive and open to the influx of those things that don't come from you, but through you. It's like the artist, where does beauty come from? From the artist or from the violinist, whatever, it's this channeling, because it uses you to fulfill its own purposes, and it just speaks. And so, learning how to trust that and go with that and be more open to that. "By your fruits you shall know them." You start to see a heightened capacity for this flow of words that are

coming through you and not from you as grace.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. And how to work out what's trustworthy and what's not in terms of those kind of very unique and rare experiences, yeah.

Jim Finley: Exactly. And I think sometimes what's trustworthy is so disarmingly simple, it was right there. But sometimes, by the ego, it might not be apparent at first because it's the thing we don't want to say. So, it takes a lot of discernment in the artistry of fidelity and learning how to listen to ourselves and stay open. And it's the journey, you know? Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm. Thank you, Jim. We're going a little bit deeper into Mansion five now. You said in the podcast about Mansion five, that the reflective self goes into a deep sleep. And so, I wondered when we have this kind of Mansion five event, are we becoming unconscious? Are we passing out?

Jim Finley: Yeah. It'd be good to say this, too, with all these mystics, to understand the deeper we get, it's understandable that we might feel the mystics talking about things we might not have experienced yet. But it's nice just to sit with them. And as we listen, maybe we have experienced them, but no one helped us be consciously aware of what was happening to us.

So, one way to put it is this. Let's say that our ultimate destiny is infinite union with the infinite. We're awakened to it in our finite consciousness, awakened by faith. As it gets deeper, deeper, deeper, deeper, the finite self illumined by faith comes to the edges of itself, which in being finite, it can't be the basis for the consummation of that union, see?

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jim Finley: And so, it ceases, it kind of ceases. It disappears from itself in reflective consciousness. Now, when it returns to consciousness, what happened when you weren't there, she says, feels like you could have been asleep. It's like a sleep. And the way you know you weren't asleep is discerning the ways you're different in the aftermath of that. Because in the seventh Mansion, she's saying what's happens in a way, is that, that innermost oneness with you hidden with Christ in God before the origin of the universe is momentarily being actualized standing free and clear. See? Like this. And so, when you then return back from that communion, from that communion, then the you that was so transcended discerns a significance of what happened because of the changes it can see, that's how you discern it. And that's what she walks through then. She helps us to understand that.

Kirsten Oates: She is so clever with her use of the silkworm and the butterfly example. It's just so brilliant.

Jim Finley: Yeah. I put it in the talk that I gave, too, is a butterfly is not a caterpillar with wings. It wouldn't get off the ground. So, when it spins its cocoon, it disappears from view so we can't see it. And then it emerges as a butterfly. In other words, it's the metamorphosis of your very subjectivity that undergoes an utter metamorphosis, so then you emerge as this butterfly. So, she says, in the moment of union, this fleeting union—it's going to become habitual in the sixth Mansion—but in this fleeting fullness of union, you disappear from yourself. But then, what you emerge as is, one, a conviction that you were in God and God was within you. It's a conviction in your heart. You can't explain it, but it's a conviction in your heart. Two, a new desire to only do God's will. And thirdly, that you're a butterfly with tattered wings.

That is, this is not the Beloved.

That is, having tasted infinite union with the infinite Beloved, everything less than infinite union with the infinite Beloved is infinitely less than what my heart will be fulfilled by. This is not the Beloved. This is not the Beloved. This is not the Beloved. See? And yet, she says, you've never been more at peace in your whole life because if you accept that it's infinitely less than the Beloved, you experience the Beloved shining through the simplest of things.

When you try to own it at the level where you can have it, you fall back into what's less than. But when you accept that it's infinitely less than the infinite, through that deep acceptance, the infinity of it in its nothingness without God, shines into your heart, like everything is holy or everything deserves to be deeply respected or even revered, you know? I think it's like that, really.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. I'm surprised to hear you talk about the peace, because in that description the longing, the unsatisfied longing, that didn't sound so peaceful. But you're saying there's something deeper going on that helps us see God more clearly at so we might feel the longing, the lack of the infinite presence, and that invites us into seeing it—

Jim Finley: Exactly.

Kirsten Oates: --where it does exist and how it does exist?

Jim Finley: Yeah. I mean, maybe in a moment, I can look back and remember, maybe not. But somewhere along the line, something happened to me. And it has put me in this state that's so hard to talk about, of the not enough-ness of everything, including myself, like no landing place: "The son of man has nowhere to lay his head, except in the bosom of God." And so, there's no rest for me except resting in the eternal resting in me, and so on. Yet, by accepting this unexplainable thing that's happened to me, like a pilgrim of the absolute kind of roaming about, I've never been more at peace before in my whole life because it amazes me. I'm just amazed. There's something that I can't explain. It's boundary-less and vast in all directions. When I turn to have it, it goes away. But it shines out intimately from here, there, everywhere. I think it's kind of like that, in a way.

Kirsten Oates: I love the way she talks about the house that the caterpillar builds as the house is like our life in Christ, and I wondered if you'd just reflect on that a little bit?

Jim Finley: Let's say our house is our life. And let's say God gives us our life. And when we were given our life, we think we're given our life to have our life. See? At a certain level, that's important in terms of the ego. We have to develop skills and talents and that's real. But when we push that too far, see, so when Jesus says he who loses his life for my sake, will find it. So, you have your life, but then you begin to realize that you can't love and live on your own terms. See, you were given your life to lose your life by surrendering yourself over to what love is asking out of you. And therefore, your house is the house you were given to lose. Given to give up as something you owned, that you don't belong to yourself. You belong to God, and you belong to love. And so, you're dispossessed. See, you're dispossessed by love, which is a heightened sense of authenticity in your life through love.

Kirsten Oates: And that Christ is the transformative engine, kind of, of that.

Jim Finley: Christ is the revelation of the fullness of what's happening to us, see, for me to live is Christ. And so, we see in Christ the fullness of what's happening to us. You can also see the value of Teresa and these mystics. Imagine having her for a spiritual director. She's directing us now as we talk about this.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, yes.

Jim Finley: It's so luminous and it's so disarmingly simple, and rich.

Kirsten Oates: And we realize that a lot of it is, we haven't had anyone to sit with. We don't live in a society that cultivates or invites us to this. And so, the contemplative church, the Living School, all this, it's an ongoing lineage of this kind of mystical Christ consciousness in the world, and realizing it's our turn. It's happening to us, and we're in the midst of it. And so, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Well, I remember when that experience happened to me with my grandmother, there was no one I could talk to that could really help me understand it, or really even celebrate it with me. And I tell it on this podcast because I'm hoping people here might understand. Yeah. And that in sharing it, people might also feel more confident about those kinds of experiences they've had themselves.

Jim Finley: See, imagine we're having a recovery meeting for recovering would-be mystics, see? [laughter] And so, when we share our story, recovery, strength, and hope, like in AA, when we share a little story like that, other people in the room know what you're talking about because in an utterly unique way, they also have had their own moment. So, how do we learn to habituate our faith so not to play the cynic, how to have faith in that, and how can I learn to habituate that sensitivity that was given to me? And what's the path along which that might happen to me?

Kirsten Oates: I will say, just my experience today in sharing that story, I feel very deeply in my being still that connection to that light and my grandmother embodied in it. And she's been dead now for a number of years, but I still feel that deep connection, the gift of that moment of so deeply connecting to her, and I still feel that warmth, and that glow, and that safety of what she was going through.

Jim Finley: See, and that's what makes our conversation here with Teresa to be a contemplative prayer. In other words, again, like Michael Sells' book, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*. So, it's not a language that speaks of this, but it's a language that speaks of it in a way we experience what's being spoken of. It's the language that actually brings us into this state, and open to how could I be even more habitually grounded, even more faithful, even more-- I think it's like that.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. I loved in the podcast when you talked about the caterpillar going on the journey of being metamorphosed, and you said the caterpillar was planning buying the journal, going to a retreat. Then, the trick is that, the part that was going to kind of own and go on tour with the glory of the being metamorphosed is the first part to die. How do you relate that to us in our journey in terms of—

Jim Finley: See, how I put it, Teresa would tell us, all these mystics is that we aspire to this while we should, but we can't help but think of it in terms of the ego aspiring to it doesn't realize it's

going to be transcended in the [process]. And so, then the mystic isn't someone who says listen to what happened to me. Listen to what I've experienced. The mystic is the one who says look what love has done to me. There's nobody left.

Thomas Merton said, "I'm blown down the street like leaves scattered in all directions." See, do I even have a life? Like, "Pardon me, I don't speak English." I can bear witness to it, but I don't bear witness to what I have. I bear witness to what I'm called to share happened to me that by sharing it, it might happen to you. And it's just a very different feeling.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Yeah. I'm sensing into it. It's not like a rising up and kind of standing above, and I know this, I've done this. It's actually a much more humble kind of—

Jim Finley: It is.

Kirsten Oates: --something was done to me, and I'm trying to find the words to describe it.

Jim Finley: Yeah. And I also think another image of it might be, the more deeply I descend in being humbled; that is, I'm powerless in my meditation, I don't know how to go on. The more deeply I'm humbled, the more I discover the abyss-like depths of God welling up and giving itself to me in and as my intimately accepted powerlessness. That's what was so surprising about it, that as low as we went, that Lao-Tze talks about the Tao like water. He said, "The Tao is like water. It descends into the lowest places to give life to everything." And so, the lower we go, we discover the depths of our nothingness drops down into and opens out on the bottomless abyss of this love welling up and giving itself to us in the very nothingness in which we didn't know what to make of anything. And then, it's carrying us along and transforming us into itself. It's pretty much like that, I think.

Kirsten Oates: There was another phrase that I'd never heard, that really when you said it, that you said resurrection is not the resuscitation of a corpse. I'd never heard that, and it really struck me, very powerful. I'd never heard that, and it really struck me as a very powerful thing to say. On the flip side of that, so if the resurrection is not the resuscitation of a corpse, how would you say it?

Jim Finley: Yeah. Let's say I'm still in my ego self, illumined by faith. And let's say I believe I hear about the mystery of eternal life. And let's say I hear about the mystery of the resurrection, there's this mythic language of the final resurrection. The mystery of the final resurrection, which is really the ultimate victory of love over all forms of suffering and death is resurrection: I'll be resuscitated into this life, living here in Marina Del Rey, with my library, walking around wondering what I'm going to have for lunch. I'm resurrected; I'm not resuscitated. I'm not brought back to this, see?

Rather, this is broken wide open and transformed into the boundarylessness of God's own life in which the eternality of this daily life will live on, and on, and on that way, in God. So, the resurrection is to be born again, see? Amazing grace: "Once was lost, but now I'm found. Was blind, but now I see." It's not resuscitating back to something, rather it's being carried forward into a boundaryless state, utterly beyond what we in our still un-awakened state could scarcely even begin to imagine. It's more like that, yeah. And then what she's saying is the resurrection then becomes an event in consciousness, which is mystical union. That even while still on this earth we can taste and live directly the deathless life of God in our

nothingness without God.

Kirsten Oates: Can you describe a little bit more about why does she add that the butterfly has tattered wings? What's that pointing to?

Jim Finley: I'll make it personal. I'm pleased we can do these talks, and I'm pleased that I'm writing six hours a day on my healing book, and I am pleased that my daughters visit me on weekends, and it's fine. But with Maureen dead at 77 years old, I barely get by. I barely get by, and I'm falling apart here, unraveling. And just keeping up with things is too much for me. But if I accept it's too much for me, because I'm old, you know, I'm old, and I live on my own terms. I don't have to keep up with anything. So, I feel like a butterfly with tattered wings. See, I'm just trying to share a few things before I disappear that might be helpful to somebody. I don't know. And so, I think anytime we commit ourselves, anyone who commits himself to being a husband, or a wife, or a mother, or a father, or they deeply commit themselves to teaching little children, or working with people in hospitals, anytime we're of service to a community, isn't it true that it asks of us more than we're able to comfortably give?

Isn't that true? We're always, in the very gift of it all, we're trying to maintain ourself and acknowledging the limits of ourself, otherwise it's hubris. Sometimes I have to back off. I can't do it. It's hubris. I'm trying to live up to your expectations of what I should do in utter disregard for how real my limitations are. And then I honor my limitations and step back into it again, and then reassert myself again in the classroom, or the hospital, or at psychotherapy office, or changing the diaper, watering the lawn. Does that make sense in a way? It's like that. I think we're all, when we live deeply and love deeply, we're always taken out beyond the edges of what we're comfortably able to do. And we have to humbly stay grounded in that, and we're transformed at the crest of the wave at that. And to me, that's being a butterfly with tattered wings.

Kirsten Oates: That's so helpful. Thank you for sharing that, Jim. And the tattering's really—and this is Theresa, the foundation of her entire teaching is in relation to love—but the tattering's in relation to experience, to give, to be the love that's changing me, I realize I have tattered wings,

Jim Finley: And I think it's like St. Paul's the thorn in the flesh. I asked God to remove it, and God said, "Leave it there." Because the place where you still get reactive, the place you're not able to live up to what you should be is your teacher. It reminds you you're not exempt from the frailty of the human condition that God's infinitely in love with and through which you touch people by accepting it yourself. Yeah.

By the way, in the end, see, she says that in the end with mystical union, even the butterfly must die because even that transformed self in love, in divine union, see, becomes nondistinct from the infinite mystery of God. So, she moves into the sixth, seventh Mansion, see, even the butterfly dies. And by the way, the butterfly can die when you're still here, see, "I'm impoverished, but I'm impoverished no more." See, "I'm limited, but I'm limitless everywhere in all directions," and in the way that it becomes paradoxically true for a person.

Kirsten Oates: Wow. What do you think we can learn from the fifth Mansion if we've never entered it. Like

listening to you to talk about it, reading Teresa, but it's not something that we've had the experience of, what can we learn from continuing on to deepen our understanding of the Mansion?

Jim Finley: You know, I think that, one, in the spiritual order, what's given to one of us belongs to all of us, really. And so, what's given to these people who are graced in having come to this in our interconnectedness, it's given to all of us because it's us. I think another grace is that if I calibrate my heart to a fine enough scale, see, I think of it as incremental realizations of infinite generosity. That I realize if I calibrate my heart to a fine enough scale, I can begin to discern in the delicacy of my own unfolding realizations, the stirrings of this very oneness because I also know what it's like to disappear from my own finite gaze. I know what it's like to have a moment in which I disappear from myself in reflective consciousness, either through birth or death, or joy, or whatever. And I know what it's like to have come out the other side and gotten that taste of something in a metamorphosized state that was given to me like that.

So, we can see there are echoes, or variations, or reverberations with this. So, she's always returning us back to where we are because that's what counts on this trajectory or this learning curve, and she lays bare, opens for us what's possible and may already be closer than we realize; otherwise, we wouldn't be listening to these talks with any sense of clarity. We would have tuned out a [long time ago]. So the very fact this isn't gibberish means somehow we already know this because we only recognize what we know. So, the very fact we're drawn to it bears a witness that it's already happening to us. Do you know what I mean? It's subtle, intimate, delicate. It's like that.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well, thank you for sharing that. Maybe we'll all have a moment where we disappear from ourselves listening to the fifth Mansion.

Jim Finley: We might. And by the way, I think the reading of these mystics can be that way. You read it, it's so beautiful. It's so beautiful. It so speaks to everything in you, there's a certain place at mid-sentence, you disappear from your ability to read the next sentence. And when you return a second later or ten minutes later, the very act of reading it was itself the taste of this little thing that illumined you midway. It's spiritual communication, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you, Jim. Well, before we end, I just want to honor what you shared about Maureen and honor Maureen's beautiful life, and thank you for continuing on with the podcast, with all you've been through.

Jim Finley: Yes. And thank you, and just looking ahead to the sixth Mansion too. Let's say the apophatic way, the apophatic part or the hidden part; the cataphatic way is where this starts happening while you're awake. That is, you don't disappear, but rather it is somehow the divinity of manifested life itself so it starts habitually happening to you. You know, that's where we're kind of headed; you kind of disappear apophatically. You're transformed in that, that opens out upon deeper layered deaths ahead in which it just starts happening all the time leading toward the seventh Mansion.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you. A little teaser for Mansion six.

Jim Finley: A little teaser, yeah. Tune in next week for the next exciting episode. [laughter]

Kirsten Oates: Well, thank you for today, Jim, and we look forward to traveling through Mansion six with you, and it's been wonderful hearing your thoughts today, a gift.

Jim Finley: Thank you.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you for listening to this episode of Turning to the Mystics, a podcast created by the Center for Action and Contemplation. Please consider rating it, writing a review or sharing it with a friend who might be interested in learning and practicing with this online community. To learn more about the work of James Finley, please visit jamesfinley.org. We'll see you again soon.