



Meister Eckhart

Listener Questions: Part 1
with James Finley and Kirsten Oates

**Turning
to the
Mystics**

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 seven of Turning to the Mystics, where we've been turning to the German mystic, Meister Eckhart. And we've come to the time in our season where we turn to listener questions. And this season, we've had more listener questions than ever before, which has just been wonderful. And so, we're going to have three episodes dedicated to listener questions. So this is the first of three. But before we get started in looking at the questions, we have a little milestone to celebrate today. And so, I'm here with Jim and with Corey to let you know that, that today's episode will be our hundredth episode, which is so exciting. Jim, I wonder if you have any reflections on reaching this milestone?

Jim Finley: Yes. Yes, I do. For me, when I graduated from high school and went to the monastery with Thomas Merton, it was all these life-changing things. And, it was through Merton that I was introduced to the classical text of these mystics we've been listening to in the series. John the Cross, Teresa, Eckhart, and so on. And so, it's been a lineage of mystical awakening down through the ages. And then, I saw Thomas Merton as a living embodiment of that. I saw him as a living... He was a lineage holder in this mystical consciousness. And, that ageless wisdom of the contemplative way it so touched me and enriched my life.

Then when I started leading and sharing in retreats around the country, I picked up people's hunger for this, just these silent retreats, and sitting in silence, and listening to it. So, when the providential opportunities come up for these podcasts like this, I really see the beautiful response to it as an expression of that hunger to pass on this ancient lineage, to make these mystical teachings as accessible, inviting as possible without watering down the radicality, what we're looking for. So, that's why I find it so meaningful to see this ongoing response, and we reach this point in our reflection. It's a grace. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Well, thank you for sharing that, Jim. And I wanted to bring Corey on, who's been with us from the very beginning, the person behind the curtain of this podcast. And so, Corey, did you have anything you wanted to share?

Corey Wayne: Yeah, I find it fascinating to watch how the show has grown since we started in... Well, for us, we started in 2019. The public started their journey with us in 2020. But, it's been fascinating to watch the show grow and see all of the same names pop up season after season, asking questions and getting new names along the way. So, for me, it's been fun just to watch, not only our trajectory of making the show, but the trajectory of our audience sticking with us and truly becoming what you all talk about as the monastery without walls.

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Corey Wayne: So, I've thoroughly enjoyed it.

Jim Finley: Good.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you so much, Corey. And, I feel like it's just beautiful that this milestone has landed

on a listener question episode, because really, for all of us, I think we just so value the community that comes alongside this podcast. And, yeah, it's the reason that it's gone so well I think is the support of the community, and all the questions they've sent in, and the feedback we've gotten. So, thank you to everyone who's listening and we celebrate this milestone with you.

Corey Wayne: And, thanks for letting me be here with the two of you on a recorded line. It's now recorded for all of history that we've done this together.

Kirsten Oates: It's so fun, Corey.

Jim Finley: Yeah. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Well, it's time for us to turn to our questions. But before we do that, I just need to let everyone know that we had another guest on our hundredth episode, and that was the leaf blower that comes and goes in Jim's yard sometimes. So, in this episode, in a couple of spots, it's particularly noisy, I guess, it's a nice chance for us to practice detachment. So, onto the questions.

Jim Finley: Great questions. Beautiful questions.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Yes. And Corey wanted us to note that this is the largest amount of listener questions we've had so far in Turning to the Mystics. And, we have read every one of them, and tried to distill them into some themes. And so, we'll be as addressing as many as we can today. But we won't have a chance to get to all of them. But the questions are just helpful, Jim, to ground the podcast in the reality of the community that travels along with us. So, it's so great to read every single one that comes in. I've loved that. Yeah.

Jim Finley: Yeah. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: So, you ready to get started, Jim?

Jim Finley: I am. I'm ready. Yep.

Kirsten Oates: Okay. So, the first theme is around the person of Meister Eckhart, and our first question comes from Pam, and she asks, "I'd like to ask about Meister Eckhart's personal mystic experiences. Did he ever write or talk about that, or just focus on teaching the way of detachment?"

Jim Finley: Some mystics do tell us about their awakening. Like Theresa of Avila, for example, wrote a book on her whole life. She wrote her spiritual autobiography about her awakening. And, Julianne of Norwich, remember the near death experience she had in the cross and so on. But, Eckhart doesn't do that. Eckhart doesn't tell us. We know his history that he taught the University of Paris, taught theology, then left and gave the sermons. But we can tell by the depth of his sermon, the depth of his awakening. But he himself doesn't disclose the moment or the ways in which it occurred within him. So, we don't know that. Yeah. That I'm aware of. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Another question from Jeff, "Meister Eckhart experienced difficult and turbulent times

through the inquisition of the church. Do you think that he shows us a way of dealing with such turmoil and opposition in our lives?"

Jim Finley: I do. He was keenly aware of those difficulties and shortcomings. But I think, two things, one, I think he saw the church as a community of infinitely loved people, community of people called by God to God. And, he just saw the brokenness as part of the church community. It should always be repenting of his brokenness. It should always be trying to be less broken and more helpful. Secondly, he himself didn't feel that he was called to be a reformer in that way. He doesn't address any of those questions. Unlike Dr. Martin Luther King, for example, who was a reformer, he wasn't a reformer. Next, with regard to his trial, where he was accused of heretical sayings of pantheism and so on. He simply stated that... He just held to the truth, but didn't get reactive. So he said, for example, that he honestly feels that the church people reading his text didn't understand what he was saying.

And basically, one key insight he says is, he made a distinction between indicative thought, where theology defines what is, like God is trinity, God is eternal, God is love, and imperative thought, which is the language of the awakening of the heart. So, all his sermons are the imperative language of the heart. And they assumed he was speaking indicatively, like systematic, which he knew well because he taught it at the University of Paris. And so, I think, just integrity, not to be reactive or passive, but just walk the walk, be true to yourself. And then, if you're called to be reform, reform.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: But if you're called to follow the interior way, follow it. If you're called to share it with others, share it. And, I think it's a spiritual direction, integrity question. And, that was his response.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Beautiful. And, in the end, if you follow the truth, it has a reformatory quality to it. So, over time, he has reformed the way people approach scripture.

Jim Finley: Yeah. Another way of looking at it, I mean, the church is as crazy today as it ever was. We have no trouble today pointing out like, "Oh my God, I don't believe it." But, there's also just brilliance and holiness in the church. So, who were those bishops and people who read it and condemned it? We don't even know who they were. They're gone. We're still reading Meister Eckhart.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: You know what I mean? So, in a way, there's that long term victory of the truth of oneness over the squabbles that are often involved in the hand wrestling matches with it. And, he was very aware of it, but he just kept going and didn't get caught up in it. He just stayed true.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Yeah. Gives us hope.

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: So, next question is from... And I hope I'm pronouncing this name correctly, Yano, "Could you kindly elaborate on the distinction between Meister Eckhart's views on panentheism and pantheism? Furthermore, I'm curious to understand why the church condemned his teachings in particular."

Jim Finley: Pantheism is basically the teaching that everything is God. A Vedic philosophy of Hinduism, is that God is everything. God is everything. Eckhart's panentheism is not that everything is... He puts it this way. It's very subtle. That God is reality itself, infinite reality itself. Infinitely giving in a self-donating, creative act. God's very reality as our reality, but as our reality in our nothingness without God. So, it's not that we are God. On the contrary, that's why I say, if God would cease loving us into the present moment, at the count of three, we'd vanish. So, we're not God. But, God's self-donating act of being the reality of ourselves, others in all things, and are nothingness without God is panentheism, because it's a very nothingness without God that makes our presence to be the presence of God. It's a very nothingness with the rose that makes God to be the reality of the rose, and it's nothingness without God. So that's the panentheism thing.

And, he was condemned because he was accused of pantheism. And there also are other factors, there are some political elements. He was a Dominican, Thomas Aquinas. And it was an ongoing dispute between the Dominicans and the Franciscans, the Augustinian Franciscan school. So, there were politics involved in it also. And also, as we were mentioning earlier, that his accusation that they didn't understand what he was saying, they thought he was speaking indicatively, a systematic theology. They didn't understand he was speaking poetically, and evocative of the language of awakening. And so, those are the contributing factors, I think, to understanding his condemnation.

Kirsten Oates: That's helpful, Jim. So, panentheism wasn't a recognized theological category.

Jim Finley: Well, it actually was in the mystics. All the mystic panentheists think in this way. St. John of the cross says, "Imagine you're looking at a window and the sun shines through. You see the window insofar as there's smudges on it. But what if the window could be infinitely clean? The sun would shine through and you wouldn't see this. The window would seem to be the sunlight." And, in the same way he says, "When we're purified in the dark night of the soul, the soul becomes so transparent in the dark night, it seems to be God in love, even though it remains a creature of God infinitely less than God. It's experientially divinized through this love, divine union." So, in a way, at the heart of all the mystics in that sense are panentheistic, they're not dualistic.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm. Just not recognized by the academy.

Jim Finley: Well, the academy, meaning academic study of such things, recognizes panentheistic thought. And, as scholars, they recognize it. It's nuanced how each mystic or Thomas Aquinas, different people, how they express it, how they don't. But, the institutional, more structural day-by-day from the pulpit attitudes that people here, they're not invited to pay attention to such things. It's more straightforward, and they just don't go there. It's subtle.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Yeah. And obviously, the powers that be in that period of time.

Jim Finley: Yeah. Even for pastoral reasons, a lot of people can't... It's none-dual. It's a subtle term. See, not dual means, it's not two, but it's not the same either. See, it's not the same, but it's not two. That's the panentheistic subtlety of it. So, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: So helpful. Thanks Jim. And, a question from Saskia, "The sermons of Meister Eckhart always make me feel light and happy, even if I don't understand everything. His words sparkle with joy. I imagine his eyes twinkling when he is talking about horses, and flies, and angels. Do you recognize this joy and could you comment on it?"

Jim Finley: Yes. I think it's true. I think it's true. And I don't think when he was giving his sermons, there was a lot of grinning, and winking, and thumbs up, and so on. But, I do think he conveyed in the depth and beauty of what he was saying, the sense of how joyful it is. It's so wonderful. And the person says, "you don't understand it and don't need to, but something in you does. And what understands it, is that, you recognize that it's joyful, and it's joyful because it's unexplainably true." And I think he lived in that habitually, I think. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: So now, we're going to move on to the theme of detachment. And, I should point out that, in all these wonderful emails and questions, people celebrate the podcast in your teaching, Jim, I think, people are just so grateful. So, I'm not reading that each time, but it's definitely a theme. So, thank you again for everyone who sent us something to read. So, this question comes from Maryanne, and we're now in the theme of detachment, and she asks, "Does detachment mean thinking and feeling negative or impatient ways, but not acting on them? As in the funny example you used of the lawn worker making noise when you were taping the podcast and how you refrained from negative reactions, even though you thought of some very understandable reactive remarks? Or does detachment with Eckhart mean arriving at a place where the nitty-gritty of life does not disturb a balance of graced love filling our heart in every moment? If the latter is true, have you ever met a person who is given such a gift?"

Jim Finley: Yeah, I think that's true. I think that's a good way to see it. I don't think detachment means that we're not disturbed when disturbing things happen, or it doesn't mean that we're not sad when sad things happen, because then we would just be distant, isolated. But rather, it's that we're disturbed when disturbing things happen, but we don't let the disturbing aspect of what's happening cause us to lose our balance, because we're grounded in an infinite presence that's sustaining us, transcending the disturbance and permeating the disturbance itself is something to be sat with, and listened to, and looked at.

So it's much more like that, I think. The middle way of the Buddha is very much like that too. It's really being present. If it is, let it be, God says. So, you accept it as it is, but you accept it as it is all inclusively, the disturbance and the sadness, but you're not caught off guard by it or it closes off your access to the infinite generosity that transcends and permeates the disturbance, permeates the sadness. And I think that's the delicate quality. It's a spiritual direction question, is I think, over time as we mature in love... A lot of psychotherapy is about this too. As we mature in love, we learn to take it in stride, and ride the waves of circumstance, and keep clear minded in the midst of unforeseeably, that kind of thing.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you, Jim. And still going forward with detachment questions, but it's lovely, people have asked questions like trying to apply the path of detachment to their own circumstances. So, we're going to hear about some particular circumstances. And I'll start with Dolores, who writes, "I'm trying on this idea of detachment. I'm so curious about it and also desire to make it part of my growing awareness of who I am in God. Six years ago when my 24-year-old son was killed in a car accident, my understanding of God was blown wide open. I was angry and I searched for some meaning or understanding. Eventually, finding my way to the center of action and contemplation and the teachings of all the faculty there, which has felt like a lifesaver. My relationship with God is greater than ever. In my constant connection with God and communication with God, I also find myself staying connected to my own son as well, as I do believe our loved ones who have passed are still near. This helps me cope with his loss. I wonder if the teaching of my Meister Eckhart would describe this as attachment."

Jim Finley: Well, first of all, sorry for your loss. A son is really painful. I think, Eckhart would say, attachment would be getting lost in the nightmare of the loss, and then clinging to it forever. You're just not going to let go. You don't want to get beyond it, hold onto it. You'd also say it was an detachment, some stoic way, you distance yourself, "Oh, it's not that bad." There would be attachment to your own peace of mind, over stepping into the truth of the laws and walking with it. He would say, that as you go through those phases, and you come into this more inclusive place, he would say, that's detachment. See, it's detachment from your inner peace being dependent on you having it the way you wish that it was, which means your child would be alive. But your child's not alive, not on this earth. Your child's with God.

And so, detachment is, you accept the loss, include the loss, and of somehow the deathless presence of your child is present in the loss. You lose that tangible immediacy, but there's a deeper way of a deathless union that thereon always will be there, and it's detachment. It's just a very detached attitude that you speak of that Eckhart's trying to bring us to. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Thank you, Dolores for sharing that meaningful circumstance with us. Yeah. Very helpful to everyone listening, I'm sure.

Jim Finley: You see, I think, grace says, the fruit of detachment is the birth of the word and the soul, and the birth of the word is a state of realizing the trustworthy, boundaryless, divine generosity woven into life as it is. So, I think here there's echoes of this birthing in you that he invites us to discover that detachment brings us to if we stay there.

Kirsten Oates: Question from Neil. "You reflected a line about detachment. Being detached from anything that isn't your heart's desire. So where does a calling fit into that? Where do you put having a calling for a vocation of some sort and following that calling but without becoming attached, detachment from the outcome and detachment from the very vocation?"

Jim Finley: Yes, my sense is this. I think, following the path that Eckhart invites us to follow all the mystics. If we know in our heart that what we're doing in the moment is why we exist. Now there's two ways to look at that. One would be a way of detachment and that, "I exist because I'm here to make more profit. I'm here to make this go the way I want. I exist to see this turns out the way I want." Which is, really the sadness of attachment. Likewise, one can

engage in a calling in an ego-based way to actualize an idealize image of oneself to get... I mean, whatever, whatever.

But there's another way, is that one realizes that one's called to marry someone, or a child, or one's called to accept loss, or one's called to teach students in a classroom, one's called to be an artist or a poet, or serve the poor or whatever. And one's called to it, but requires a great deal of detachment from the hardships, and burdens, and precarious fragilities involved in being faithful to your calling. So, you get a sense in your heart, you're following the light, it sits well with you, it sits well with you. "I feel I'm on this right path. It enriches me. And I know that it includes my acceptance of the challenges and difficulties that I face because it's transforming my character. And through it, I'm helping others to be transformed." So I think that's the discernment quality of that.

Kirsten Oates: Question from Kate. "I have three of my own children now, one with additional needs. And I was so naive about how my own trauma would affect my experience and ability to be the parent I long to be. My question is about letting go of outcomes. I know this is an area I really want to become more of my foundation with security and strength from he that sustains me. But I struggle to give up hope. Hope of healing from my illness, hope that my children will be thriving, healthy adults, hope that maybe tomorrow will be better than today, hope that I won't always live in fear, et cetera. How do we live without hope? Or do we move our hope elsewhere?"

Jim Finley: I think, the spirit of Eckhart, all these things, the spirit of the gospel, is, I think, the list of things you mentioned, we should have hope. We should have hope that it's going to work out, that we're going to be healthy, that whatever your own present struggle is, you're going to get through it. We should have hope in that. But here's the thing, but we have hope knowing that if it doesn't turn out the way we want, as we walk through the disappointment and the pain, we'll discover not just God's sustaining us in the disappointment, but leading us into realizations we never would've found had we not lost what we lost. See? It's true that we lost what we lost. And not to romanticize it or make light of it, but what Eckhart would say, "We're tempted to think it stops there, which is the idolatry of circumstance. But what if we see that it never stops anywhere?" And as we go through it, we'll discover we were given something in the loss about being tenderhearted, or compassionate, or humble, or trusting. And I think that's the Eckhart sensitivity to hope.

Kirsten Oates: That's helpful. Thank you for that question.

Jim Finley: There's one more thing too about hope. He says, "Eagerness, even mystical, makes one forgetful." That in a way, hope is realizing we hope we get healed from what hinders us from everything we could possibly looking for is already here. That God already is being infinitely poured out as this present moment, as the sun moving across the sky. And I hope with God's grace I might be healed from being delivered from the illusion that anything's missing. I think that's another important piece for Eckhart.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, that's beautiful. It's always those two levels of what's already present and we might not be conscious of, but also, the practicalities of our day-to-day life with choices. And, yeah.

Jim Finley: Another image of that would be, the deathbed of a loved one when the person comes to

acceptance. So, it isn't as if they're not dying, because they are. It isn't as though the loss is painful beyond words, what we can say. But in their acceptance, they are dying, but they're free from the tyranny of death in the midst of death. And in their acceptance, it washes over into us, and we send something deathless and trustworthy, and the grace in being there with them. So, it's like, that he's always has that interplay of how God's present in our life.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. So, I guess, our deepest hope is to experience that presence and that those we love might experience it too.

Jim Finley: Exactly. Exactly.

Kirsten Oates: The next question is from Marcus. And Marcus is from Sweden. Let's see. "Basically, my question is, can one be a mystic in the first half of life? I feel very drawn to the teachings of the mystics you have explored on the podcast, including Meister Eckhart. But it seems hard not to get distracted by first half of life issues. I want to build a life that is ordered in a certain way and I can't seem to truly detach from that desire. What would someone like Meister Eckhart say about this?"

Jim Finley: Here's the way I put it, Eckhart would say, is that when we're graced with the desire to live by this path, when we're in the first half of life, it's the very heart of the desire, it's a gift that transcends the limitations of our youthful ways, because we have work to do. There's a lot of unanswered questions. We have to face tomorrow. But at the very heart of the grace of even desiring such liberation in the midst of unresolved things is the gift. There's something else too, is that the desire to be liberated from the claim these complexities make over us as having the final say in who we are. That's what we're trying to be free from. We realize that the sincerity of the desire deepened in quiet meditation and prayer illumines the complexities of our concerns, and renders them somehow translucent, that God's somehow present in the midst of this that.

So, we learn to roll with the waves, and lean into it, and see what God has in mind, and be open. Because something's happening to us. Our character is being transformed. That's how we are transformed by faith. That's how we mature and grow in that. So, it's not easy. It's difficult to do that. But it's more difficult not to, because if you don't, you're still caught up in attributing authority over circumstance. But here, there's the jagged edges of circumstance, but more, and more, and more they're losing their authority over your heart, because you're more and more grounded that God's one with you in the midst of the unresolved things. I think that's the texture of it, I think, for me, the Eckhart.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, I've also heard you say many times, "We are having these mystical experiences throughout our lives." And so, for Marcus, how to be open and paying attention when they do arise.

Jim Finley: And this is why he didn't pay... So, we need to be very careful not to be attached to these moments when they occur. That's why detachment, because the other key is that when they do occur, the intuition is that this isn't as if something more of God was given, but rather, we were fleetingly gifted to what God has given in every moment of our life. That's the key. The divinity of the ordinariness of everything. And to see how these moments are tended to stabilize, and habituate the underlying clarity that what's always there, and from time to

time we're graced with the realization of what's always there as a reminder. I think that's that Eckhart's tone, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Beautiful. And, I wonder how many first half of life mystics we have listening to us.

Jim Finley: Oh no. I would say this, and I would say this is true of me growing up too. I would say, the first half of life people, the very fact they're drawn to this is indications of the unfolding of mystical stirrings within them. Or they wouldn't be drawn to it. They wouldn't be drawn to it. Yeah. Exactly. The same for people in the second half. We're all in this together.

Kirsten Oates: So true. Our next question is from Rick, and he asks, "How do we pursue empathy as you discussed, without it becoming an attachment? Is it an issue of balance, or is it an issue of it being a both/and rather than an either/or?"

Jim Finley: It's a delicate question, really. And I don't think we're meant to resolve it in some clean, linear way, because I think, when we really love someone or care about someone and through empathy, we feel something of their pain, and we want to know what we could possibly do to be helpful in easing their pain, just to deliver them, at some level, we can get attached to it and that our inner peace will be dependent on the extent to which we're able to do that. Or the extent to which the person's going to be able to get past it. And insofar, as we're caught there, because we're human, because we're human.

And so, we're always trying to loosen our hold on our inner peace, being dependent on the outcome, knowing that it's normal that we care. But our real empathy, I put it this way too, Eckhart would say, is that, by our presence to them, they get in touch with an inner peace that's not dependent on the outcome of what they're going through. We want them to do their best to get past it. Of course, they want to get past it. But we're also bearing witness in helping them to realize that there's something much more going on whether they get past it or not, because the infinite love of God giving itself to them in every breath and heartbeat isn't dependent on whether they get past it, it isn't dependent on anything. And we're trying to help them find their way to that.

Kirsten Oates: So Jim, this question comes from Frank and he asks, "The mystics call us to detach from the things of this world. Other people we love considered things of this world."

Jim Finley: They are considered things of this world, insofar as we're functioning under the perception that they belong to us. And, whether they comply or don't comply with our help, or what happens to them, or doesn't happen to them, is somehow... Our pieces tied up with the outcome of that. And insofar then it is of this world. But insofar as we realize, that these people in our lives are God's presence in our life, shining out from the unique beauty of who they are as a person. That they don't belong to us at all. We don't belong to ourselves. We all belong to God. And therefore, the very love from these people we realize is actually God loving us through these people, and giving us God through the love of these people, incarnate in their relationships with us. And I think that's how Eckhart would invite us to see it.

Kirsten Oates: It's not always easy to see that.

Jim Finley: But again, this is where Eckhart would require us to... By leaning into detachment. To

lean into being detached, being discouraged by how hard it is to learn that. We need to be endlessly patient with ourselves, because God is. But what matters is that we see it and with God's help, we're working on it. We're being refined in the art of this releasement, this *glossenheit*, just letting go.

Kirsten Oates: CDo you think, Jim, we also have to be endlessly patient with humans in general? And how we don't get it, and how we argue, we fight. Yeah.

Jim Finley: Yes. Very much so. I would say this, I think, for Eckhart, is a thing about this experiential self-knowledge on the path of detachment to the birth. We realize in understanding ourselves and being liberated in this way, liberated from the tyranny of shortcomings in the midst of our ongoing shortcomings, being at peace with that, then we realize that each person is a unique addition of the universal story of being a human being. And it makes community possible, because everyone's going through their own unique configuration of this. So the more aligned we are with this pattern, the more we can get lined up with their pattern, and meet them as they're going through essentially the same process of the great letting go in which the birthing happens, but in the configurations of their details. But, it takes one to know one. Judge not, you should not be judged, I think, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, thank you for expanding on that, Jim. So, our last question on detachment's going to be a voicemail. And, Corey who's always in the background supporting us, is going to play that for us now.

John: Hi, there. This is John from northern New Jersey, calling with a question for Dr. Finley regarding his talk on Meister Eckhart. It seems to me that Meister Eckhart is inviting us to live life without the why questions. I was wondering if that approach to life would negate a purpose and meaning in life, which seems to me to be one of the attributes and important points of living a life of faith within the Christian tradition. Meaning in life helps us to know the presence of a God who has picked us to further his loving priorities.

Jim Finley: Yes. There's a way that helps me to understand this. To live without a why, the quote we gave from Eckhart, "You release a horse in the morning out of the barn into the pasture, and it runs across the field with all its might." It runs without a why. The rose blooms. Why does it bloom? It blooms without a with. See? And so, he is saying this in a way. He's trying to free us from the ideology of meaning that my understanding of why I am doing something is adequate to understand what's happening, it's an aspect of it. It's an aspect of it, but it's an ideology, see, of what I'm doing. So what I'm to do is to learn without a why, learn to be free and open to whatever truth there may be in my understanding, there's infinitely more to it that I'll never understand, because it's divine. It's divine.

And then, in that sense, once it comes full circle, see, then we learn to live in the why. But in a radically different way, which we might understand is abandonment to divine providence, or surrender to the will of God unfolding in our life, it's God's why, it's unfolding and pouring itself out through us and the concreteness of our response like this. That's the why. But again, we get back to the, "I don't know." Is, why do you love God? Why are you happy to be alive? He said, "My word, I don't know. But I'm happy to be alive." That not knowing is a humility out of which he's so clear about who he is.

You don't get the feeling when you listen to Eckhart at all that he's confused about who he is. And you look at the sermons, there's a discipline clarity about his mind. But it's not a mind that imposes anything. It's a mind of a flowing, or a sharing of being liberated from constrictions that were not nearly gracious enough, or generous enough. And the unfolding of what's happening. So those would be some perspectives about that point that helps me.

Kirsten Oates: So now, we have a question on longing from Liz. "In the third dialogue, you talked about the longing of never enoughness that we will never consummate in this lifetime. I love reading Thomas Mutton's journals, because you get much more of a sense of how he wrestled with never enoughness, compared to the neat wisdom you get if you just look at his quotes. But wrestling with longing can be exhausting. Sometimes, I long for the simplicity I had. It made life seem easier. Do you have any practical thoughts on how to live in longing?"

Jim Finley: We have things in our life that we long for that they might be consummated. And, either we might long to get past a very painful thing that's going on with us for a loved one. Or you might long that something we want very, very much in our life will actually find it. Not knowing for sure whether we will or not. Let's say there are these litany of longings. And, that's life. So, we do our best to work with that. What Eckhart is saying is this... Several things, I think, Eckhart would say, that what you're longing for, even if it turns out and you would find it, would be infinitely less than what fulfills you.

That anything we're capable of finding or losing doesn't fulfill the longing. And Thomas Burton says, "Our minds are like crows. They pick up everything that gathers. Our minds are like crows. They pick up everything that glitters, no matter how uncomfortable their nest get with all that metal in them." So we're always longing. Longing. And he says, "Whenever I long for something and get it, it burns me. There's one more thing I wanted very much that doesn't fulfill me either." So one, there's that.

Next, is to know that the longing for what you're hoping for actually though contains within it something of God inspiring you to long for it, because it's through the energy of your own happiness, your own fulfillment, the happiness of others. There's a divine dimension to it. Another level to consider is that all your longings are an echo of God's infinite longings for you. It's the reciprocity of longing, like this. And lastly, also to realize that God is somehow infinitely, mysteriously present in the longings itself, it's like the divinity of the longing actually contains within it what you're longing for. And so, there's layers of subtleties about the whole question about longing.

Kirsten Oates: It's a tough one to live with, isn't it? Because, yeah, it's a very strong feeling.

Jim Finley: It showing you the paradox of it. This is why it's a therapy question or a spiritual direction question, a discerning prayer question is, "I long to get to the point where I'll no longer be having to deal with longings." So, even that's a longing. See? So, how can I be free from the tyranny of longings in the midst of my longings, knowing that God is providentially unfolding in the longings? And sometimes too, in the midst of longings, we're unexpectedly blindsided by something we're searching for. It was really why we were longing in the first place, and we didn't see it coming. We were surprised by it. So it's a very intimate question she's asking. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Liz mentioned Thomas Merton as someone who wrestled with never enoughness. Did you sense that in him?

Jim Finley: Oh, Thomas Merton has this lovely quote, talking to God. He said, “Oh, how far I have to go to find you in whom I’ve already arrived? I only wished it were over. I only wished it were begun.” See? That’s lovely. And Eckhart would echo that. See? Because, somehow that’s God’s presence echoing in the dilemma of his awakened heart. And so, he was longing, but the same way in knowing him, he was liberated from longing, because he deeply lived with his sense of nothing’s missing, and that his longings are patterns, like karmic patterns of the unfoldings of discovering that. And then, his writings, like Eckhart, these mystic teachers, they try to help pass on, they try to help us see it too. I think that’s why they teach. They’re trying to help us with this. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: That quote brings tears to my eyes. There’s something just so... Oh my gosh. So Jim, in that same session that Liz asked you about, session three, where you talked about longing, you also talked about this idea of empathy, having the same level of empathy for the neighbor’s child as you do for your own. And so, this question is saying, “Is the empathy of which you speak in the context of non-attachment, to not be undone, to live in the promise that the child that has died still lives, though not here, to empathetically rejoice in this knowing? And how do you approach, how would you mourn every death as if it were your own child? I’d be completely incapacitated.”

Jim Finley: Yes. I touched on this in the talks too. All of Eckhart’s points are subtle, I guess. Of course, at one level, when he says, “We should be as detached, see, from the death of a total stranger to if our own child died.” For example. And of course, we can’t do that. It doesn’t make any sense. I hear on the news that somebody died and I thought, “Oh, well, somebody died. That’s too bad.” But if one of my daughters, I got a phone call, one of them was killed in a car crash, I’d be devastated. It isn’t, “Well, one more person died. What’s for dinner?” Likewise, every time someone dies on the news, I start weeping uncontrollably. So it doesn’t make any sense literally at all. It doesn’t mean that. So, there’s acknowledging the human experience that if it’s the loved one that dies, bereavement, we have to grieve it and walk through it.

Then, when we see someone distant from us who’s died, we don’t feel that. But what Eckhart would say was this, we need to be detached from the closed horizon of our own private concerns, and know that that mother and father who lost her son and daughter is as overwhelmingly grieved as I was grieved when I lost, were I would be lost. And that empathic sense of universally identifying with it. The next point is this, and being an empath, being sensitive, you can be overwhelmed by that. So again, you have to hand the whole thing over to God. In the world God so loved, God sent his only begotten son, of the rise and fall of birth, and death, and gain, and loss, so it’s a matter of accepting an inclusive sense of God’s pervading the totality, just as each of us’ unique portal, it opens out on that totality. And Eckhart’s right, I think, those are the sensitivities that help me resonate with it seems to me Eckhart is saying.

Kirsten Oates: Well, Jim, our hundredth episode is coming to a close. And, it’s been wonderful yet again. Thank you so much for responding to the questions. Thank you to everyone who sent in a question. We are so grateful for all the listeners and for this opportunity to be a part of your

lives through this podcast. See you for part two.