

The Riddles Of Distraction

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Into the Silent Land: A guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation

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The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: for learning... the saying: of the sage: and their riddles.

-*Proverbs 1:1-6*

Once the master of the house has got up and locked the door, you may find yourself standing outside knocking on the door, saying "Lord, open to us," but he will answer, "I do not know where you come from."

-*Luke 13:25*

Look, I am standing at the door, knocking.

-*Revelation 3:2*

I am the door.

-*John 10:9*

The doorways of the present moment are each guarded by an elaborately simple array of distractions that works in tandem with the prayer word. Together they open the doorways into the silent land. These distractions are like riddles that must first be answered before the door will open. The riddles, however, are not answered by the calculating mind but by successive silences. These silences are built around a central paradox: all distractions have within them the silent depths we seek, the flowing vastness of Presence that eludes every grasp of comprehension. Therefore, distractions do not have to be rid of in order for them to relax their grip and reveal their hidden treasure. Such is the simplicity of paradox.

The various riddles of distraction are more or less related to the doorway we are entering. However, from the perspective of contemplative practice it doesn't really matter what the content of the distractions is (though this may be of psychotherapeutic interest). The content of distractions will vary greatly. It could be the trivial sort of chattering to ourselves about work, shopping, planning meals, refiguring the budget, or it could be more afflictive struggles with personal pain, grief, brokenness, resentment, fear. What is important is how we meet distraction. This will be my focus. How we meet distraction (not whether or not we experience distractions - this is a given) is what heals and transforms as we move deeper. We may experience mere mental chatter or we may struggle with real afflictions, but to what extent these are distracting will change depending on how we meet these distractions that appear in the valley of our awareness.

The distractions we encounter are the riddles of Solomon's sages (Prov 1:5): they teach us, they train us, and they hold out to us the following riddles. First, are you your thoughts and feelings? Second, what do thoughts and feelings appear in? Third, what is the nature of these thoughts and feelings, and who is aware of them? Again, these riddles are not answered by our reason but by our own inner silence. We can study endless maps of the pathways into the silent land. But the map is not the territory. To discover the actual land of silence requires not information but the silence of God that is the very ground of the mind and that causes us to seek in the first place. When the distractions of each doorway call forth from us the required silence, then the distractions will have served their purpose, and the door will open.

Distraction serves a purpose. Like gargoyles guarding the roofline of a cathedral, distractions first serve to ward off those who lack proper motivation. In an age when people claim to be "spiritual, not religious"—not really knowing what they mean by either—lack of proper motivation is common. We must long for truth, freedom, loving communion with the silent depths of God. In the strange way that common sense is

not very common, many people would rather win an argument than know liberating truth or would rather feel safe than discover what it means to live in freedom under grace (Rom 6:14). If we do not want truth, freedom, God, distractions will cause the door to appear closed.

The Riddle Of The First Doorway: Are You Your Thoughts And Feelings?

The riddles of the First Doorway are real tangles of distraction. Their primary purpose is to pry us away from one of the fundamental traps of the spiritual journey: identification with our thoughts and feelings. If we think we are our thoughts and feelings, we go through life simply reacting to what is going on around us, with little awareness that we are even doing this or that life could be otherwise. When we try to pray, distractions will strike us as being especially ensnaring, even overwhelming. When we try to sit still there is very little sense that there is anything within us other than these videos that constantly play. But usually we are so caught up in them that we do not even notice them, and yet our lives are completely scripted by them. The cocktail party going on in our head is our life.

Distraction at the First Doorway is characterized by this complete identification with thoughts and feelings. When we sit in prayer in the midst of all this, it can be quite an ordeal. For example, we are trying to sit in silence with our prayer word, and the people next door start blasting their music. Our mind is so heavy with its own noise that we actually hear very little of the music. We are mainly caught up in a reactive commentary: "Why do they have to have it so loud!" "I'm going to phone the police!" "I'm going to sue them!" And along with this comes a string of emotional commentary: crackling irritation, and spasms of resolve to give them a piece of your mind the next time you see them. The music was simply blasting, but we added a string of commentary to it. And we are completely caught up in this, unaware that we are doing much more than just hearing music. The example might seem a bit of an exaggeration; the point is that this sort of ensnarement by thought upon thought upon thought, all a mass of blaring music, typifies how we encounter distractions at the First Doorway.

Or say we are sitting in prayer, and someone whom we don't especially like or perhaps fear enters the room. Immediately we become embroiled with the object of fear, avoiding the fear itself, and we begin to strategize: perhaps an inconspicuous departure or protective act of aggression or perhaps a charm offensive, whereby we can control the situation by ingratiating ourselves with the enemy. The varieties of posturing are endless, but the point is that we are so wrapped up in our reaction, with all its commentary, that we hardly notice it happening, though we feel the bondage.

The problem at this early phase is that as we pray we meet what is happening (and distractions are part of what is happening) with commentary instead of stillness. All this reactive chatter prevents the simple, direct experience of our thoughts and emotions and increases suffering immeasurably and unnecessarily. This is why most people do not stick with a contemplative discipline for very long; we have heard all sorts of talk about contemplation delivering inner peace but when we turn within to seek this peace, we meet inner chaos instead of peace. But at this point it is precisely the meeting of chaos that is salutary, not snorting lines of euphoric peace. The peace will indeed come, but it will be the fruit, not of pushing away distractions, but of meeting thoughts and feelings with stillness instead of commentary. This is the skill we must learn.

The struggle with distractions is not characterized only by afflictive thoughts. Many sincerely devout people never enter the silent land because their attention is so riveted to devotions and words. If there is not a wordy stream of talking to God and asking God for this and that, they feel they are not praying. Obviously this characterizes any relationship to a certain extent. When we are first getting to know someone, the relationship is nurtured by talking. Only with time does the relationship mature in such a way that we can be silent with someone, that silence comes to be seen to be the deeper mode of communion. And so it is with God; our words give way to silence.

The reason this doorway requires so much patience is that our awareness is so freighted with thinking. Whenever we turn within we meet chatter, thinking, and commenting. In consequence, while we are aware of spiritual longing, we perceive ourselves to be cut off from the deeper ground of our being, where the Silence of the Word is forever emptying itself out in being-as-creation, the way a vine extends into branches (cf. Jn 15:5). The ground of who we are is completely porous, porous as a sponge immersed in what flows through it. But because the awareness is so freighted with thinking, and the attention so riveted to the thinking and the chatter, awareness as simple, spacious immersion in God gets refracted as the search for God-as-object-to-be-acquired. We all start out here, but it is a highly filtered perception of things. Theologians should be aware that this is not a question of a metaphysical blurring of Creator and creature. It is a question of the transfiguration of awareness, the consummation in silence of grace's initiative in creation, baptism, and eucharist.

The prayer word is of great assistance in answering the riddle of the First Doorway. While the First Doorway doesn't require the depth of silence that others will, the prayer word here helps to soften our reactive response of inner chatter and calms our tendency to react to thoughts and feelings by tackling them with still more thoughts and feelings. By cultivating our practice with the prayer word we learn to face thoughts and feelings directly instead of reacting to them. This is the first of the successive silences we must learn. When we learn to return to the prayer word instead of reacting to the videos and chatter, and truly find refuge in the prayer word, even if thoughts are annoying us, then we will have answered the riddle of distraction that guards the First Doorway.

The Riddle Of The Second Doorway: What Do Thoughts And Feelings Appear In?

The riddle of the Second Doorway is notably different from that of the First. At the First Doorway we are completely, or nearly completely, caught up in and dominated by our reactions. After the First Doorway we become much more aware of what is happening within. One of the fruits of interior silence is precisely this growth in awareness. Growth does not mean that somehow we are no longer going to struggle with our issues. Much struggle remains with us for a very long time. But what does change is how we experience the struggle. We are able to see with greater clarity what is going on within us as it is happening. We move from being a victim of what is happening to being a witness to what is happening. Things keep happening, but we experience them differently. This move from victim to witness is an early psychological fruit of the contemplative journey. It is deeply liberating and gives us a sense of possibility for real change in our lives. People often comment that this growth in awareness of thoughts and feelings, simply letting them be, is something their therapists have been trying to get them to do for years. They could not do this before, because they were too caught up in reacting to thoughts and feelings and acting out of them. They had not cultivated the interior discipline that enabled them to make this shift from victim to witness.

Awareness is the eye of silence. The riddle of the Second Doorway helps us deepen this silence by training the attention not to spin commentary on the thoughts and feelings that we become aware of. This was one of the principle aims of the contemplative training in the desert tradition, and Evagrius is the real master here. He was aware that the attempt to be silent involved one immediately in the struggle with thoughts. He could see the difference between the mere presence of a thought and something within us (he called it a passion) that seized the thought and whipped it up into a frothy, obsessive commentary. These obsessive patterns within us generate anxiety, suffering, and the sense of restless isolation from God and others.

Evagrius is not telling us not to have these thoughts; for the attempt to have no thoughts simply produces more thoughts. As Teresa of Avila would put it centuries later, "The harder you try not to think of anything, the more aroused your mind will become and you will think even more." Much less does Evagrius want us to run from thoughts or to suppress them; this would be more mental commentary on them. His advice is to turn the tables on all this chatter and simply observe without commenting. Observe everything

about the thoughts. "Let him keep careful watch over his thoughts. Let him observe their intensity, their periods of decline and follow them as they rise and fall. Let him note well the complexity of his thoughts, their periodicity, the demons which cause them, with the order of their succession and the nature of their associations." Evagrius wants us to know what presses our buttons, what gets us going. Who winds us up? Under what conditions? Does hunger make you have a shorter fuse? Does a short temper mask a sense of being threatened? Is struggle with shame really pride inside out? When are we more susceptible to these afflictive thoughts? Do they repeat? Do they follow a pattern? How long do they last? What other thoughts do they team up with? Evagrius thinks it is essential that we know all about these torturous thoughts, "so that when these various evil thoughts set their own proper forces to work we are in a position to address effective words against them, that is to say, those words which correctly characterize the one present." If we can name the thought (anger, fear, pride, etc.) instead of spinning a commentary about the thought, which is our usual response, we stand a much better chance of simply letting go of the thought and returning to our practice. Initially this can be rather laborious; for there might be some basic self-knowledge that needs to be acquired, sometimes requiring the assistance of a therapist. However, most people who are drawn to the contemplative path are fairly adept at this business of self-knowledge, and when this discipline is cultivated over time, identifying thoughts is done in a flash, and one quickly returns to the prayer word or to just being in loving attentiveness before God.

Cognitive psychologists tell clients who struggle with depression to keep a catalogue of the negative thoughts that plague them. Cognitive psychology has become aware that much depression is maintained, even generated, by getting caught up in negative patterns of thinking. The more one can recognize depressive thoughts and thought patterns, the more gains are made in managing depression. Evagrius is one of a host of saints and sages with a sophisticated awareness of this very thing and how recognizing thoughts applies not simply to depression, but to a host of life issues that typically bring struggle: sexuality, security, fame, fortune, and so on. We progress in overcoming the illusion of separation from God when we learn how to deal with the barrage of thoughts that pummels us into misery. This is exactly what Evagrius is addressing.

Our normal response to an afflictive thought-feeling is to pounce on it with a commentary. In fact much of what pop psychology calls "feeling your feelings" is precisely this. When we "feel our feelings" what we feel is actually not our feelings but our commentary on the thought-feeling (plus whatever chemical responses take place in the body to produce sweaty palms, a knotted stomach, a racing pulse, etc.). Evagrius wants to heal this by taking it to a deeper level: meet this thought-feeling before it has a chance to grow into a dramatic story, an inner video, which, as Evagrius admits, "we run to see them." Instead, simply observe the thought as it arises. Watch it come and watch it go. It's a subtle art.

This places us in a different relationship with thoughts and feelings (which, after the Second Doorway, we see are made of the same stuff). Take fear for example. What we normally watch is an elaborate array of videos about what or who frightens us, how appalling this person is, our various strategies for avoiding or manipulating him or her. Evagrius is saying don't observe the video, observe the thought-feeling before it whips itself into a video. Observe the fear or the anger or the envy - whatever the thought-feeling - and not the story we spin about the fear, the anger, the envy. It takes practice to cultivate this watchful awareness.

This watchfulness also applies to our tendency to add thought upon thought upon thought. We notice, for example, our anger and how it is quickly followed by another thought that judges it: "I should not be having this angry thought" or "after all these years I still can't let go of my anger" or "I thought I dealt with this years ago." This aggregate of thoughts must also be observed, and we must each see for ourselves that part of the reason we can't let go is that we whip these thoughts and feelings into a great drama that we watch over and over again.

It is not a question of having only acceptable thoughts, but of thoughts thoroughly observed as they appear and disappear in awareness. No thought or feeling should appear in the valley of awareness unobserved. Evagrius says to note their intensity and decline. Are the thoughts burdensome or not? Do they start out with intensity and then taper off? Are you vulnerable to certain afflictive thoughts at certain times of the day? Is it new pain or old pain with new clothes? Do thoughts arise in certain situations or with

certain people? What thoughts set off a commentary? A single thought or a collision of thought upon thought upon thought? Where do they register in the body? It's really not a question of looking for information but of cultivating a contemplative discipline called watchfulness or vigilance (unknowingly rediscovered by modern cognitive psychology) that will eventually give way to meeting thoughts and feelings directly, instead of meeting them with a commentary or even with these questions just posed.

It is precisely this deeply ingrained habit of meeting thoughts with commentary, sometimes frenzied and obsessive commentary, that creates the noise in our heads, a good deal of suffering, as well as the sense of being separate from God and isolated from others. Sometimes these thoughts arrange themselves in such a way that they become a mental strategy. Among these mind games, and there are many, three are especially common: judging the quality of our own prayer, attempting to recreate positive experiences, and ego backlash.

We have a way of bringing into the uncharted land of prayer a false map of what prayer should be like. This expectation is useless, yet we nevertheless use it as the measure by which we judge our prayer. "If I am doing this correctly, my prayer ought to be this way." This judgment is simply a thought, and it is important to see it as just a thought. John Chapman writes in his Spiritual Letters, "One must do [this practice] for God's sake; but one will not get any satisfaction out of it in the sense of feeling 'I am good at prayer,' 'I have an infallible method.' That would be disastrous, since what we want to learn is precisely our own weakness, powerlessness, unworthiness. And one should wish for no prayer, except precisely the prayer that God gives us—probably very distracted and unsatisfactory in every way." Expectations of what prayer should be like can on their own generate enough frustration to prevent passing through even the First Doorway, but they are perilous at any moment along the way. Here at the Second Doorway it is important to meet the judging thought directly, before it whips up a story about frustration or boredom. Meet it with silence. Like most distracting thoughts, it will not survive the direct meeting of a steady, silent gaze. At the very least we will come to see that it is not real in the way we previously thought it to be.

Another common knot of distractions comes after we have had what we judge to be a good period of prayer: the time flies by; there is a sense of calm recollection, even deep recollection. We then try to seize control of it in an effort to recreate it. This effort, moreover, is often coupled with the expectation that our prayer should be like this from now on. And so we pounce on it. We sit just how we were sitting at that magic moment, adjust our clothing in just the same way we did in the prayer time that went so well. Was that a shower before and a quick coffee that helped me focus? Lights dimmed just so? Scented candles? That special bell? Some of these things may help, but the point is to be able to spot the mental game we are playing with ourselves. The purpose here is not to spot the game so that we can then say to ourselves, "now stop that game playing." This is just another game. More chatter. Allow to arise whatever arises, without determining what is allowed to arise in awareness and what is not. Meet everything with a steady, silent gaze. What notices the mind game is free of the mind game.

A mountain does not determine what sort of weather is happening but witnesses all the weather that comes and goes. The weather is our thoughts, changing moods, feelings, impressions, reactions, our character plotted out for us by the Enneagram or Myers-Briggs. All of these have their place. But they are only patterns of weather. There is a deeper core that is utterly free and vast and silent, that no thought or feeling has ever entered, yet every thought and feeling appears and disappears in it. This realization that there is some deeper, silent core that grounds all our mental processes grows as we prepare to respond to these riddle: of distraction with silence and not chatter, and move through the Second Doorway. Breakthroughs do indeed happen. These can, however, be quickly followed by moodiness, irritability, struggling once again with demons we thought had been dealt with long ago. This ego backlash is fairly common at this point in one's practice and not all that complicated. The ego is accustomed to keeping a tight grip on things and always having the last word. Any growth in contemplation is going to loosen the ego's grip, and the encounter with silence will for once leave it speechless. Sometimes the ego then reacts by tightening its grip again, and, after taking a step forward, we're left with the impression of having taken three steps back. It's best to become comfortable with the sense of always being a beginner. St. Gregory of Nyssa thinks it characterizes the spiritual life. In his beautiful Homilies on the Song of Songs Gregory points out that the Bride, no matter how much she has matured in the spiritual life "always seems to be just

beginning the journey." Her beginner's mind is far more spacious and conducive to contemplation than any feeling of being good at prayer.

How are we to answer the riddles of distraction that guard the Second Doorway? Like those of the First Doorway we answer them by our silence. But it is a different sort of silence. At the First Doorway we learned above all how to take refuge in the prayer word as an alternative to getting caught up in our endless dramas. With this refuge comes a certain inner silence and recollection. This silent recollection, however, is very much over and against our distractions: we're over here with our prayer word keeping at bay distractions that come at us from over there. There is nothing wrong with this silence, but the riddles of the Second Doorway are subtler and require as an answer a yet more silent and empty fullness. This is precisely what inner vigilance cultivates. As our silence deepens we are able to meet our thoughts and feelings directly, without commentary, without telling a story to ourselves about them. We simply let them be without being ensnared by them. Gradually we see the simplest of facts, so simple and yet we have missed it all these years: our thoughts and feelings appear in something deeper, in a great vastness. This vastness is not yet another object of awareness but the ground of awareness itself. Now we are close to solving the riddle.

Now that you are aware of these objects, gently shift your attention from them, these narratives that have stolen our attention over a lifetime—our anger, our fear, our envy, our pounding commentaries on how life should be—shift your attention to the awareness itself. Immediately the thinking mind grows still. Then we have answered the riddle of the Second Doorway and we realize that we are silence, fuller and vaster than the mind can grasp.

This realization is subtler than it may sound. The habits of the thinking mind are strong and have great momentum. The tendency will be to make some sort of object out of this awareness and try to visualize it as something out there. This is another mind game. You are the silent, vast awareness. Shift your attention from the mind game to the awareness itself, to the being aware. Here you keep silent vigil, silent awareness gazing into silent awareness.

Moving through the Second Doorway we learn something important about distractions, and really all our mental processes. Before this new threshold, distractions seemed right in our face. Our contemplative practice was a contemplative battle with distractions. But as we gradually learn to meet distractions directly, no longer needing to deflect thoughts and feelings with our prayer word, and not meeting distractions with commentary, but with a steady silent gaze, as we learn all this, the grace-filled dynamic of silence shows us how uncluttered, spacious, still, and calm our awareness is and has always been, majestic as a mountain. We learn that these distractions are no big deal: they are like weather—good weather, bad weather, boring weather—appearing before Mount Zion. Our entire discursive framework, distracting or attracting, appears in silent, vast awareness. This is a simple, clean fact known only after we have been trained by the riddles of distraction at this Second Doorway and have solved this riddle by our own inner silence. "Whoever trusts in Yahweh is like Mt. Zion: unshakeable, it stands forever" (Ps 125:1).

The Riddle Of The Third Doorway: What Is The Nature Of These Thoughts And Feelings, And Who Is Aware Of Them?

The anonymous mediaeval author of The Cloud of Unknowing offers helpful advice as we move through the Second Doorway toward the Third. He says, whenever you are plagued by distractions, "try to look over their shoulders, as it were, searching for something else—and that something is God, enclosed in the cloud of unknowing." The author suggests a creative way to deal with distractions that involves neither getting caught up in them nor pushing them away. We have to allow distractions to be present in order to be able to look over their shoulders. But we do this in such a way as not to let them steal our attention. The television may be going, but we don't have to watch it. In this way distractions cease to be so distracting. If we let them be, we can see that they appear in something deeper: the vastness of our own awareness. This

vastness is God's cloak, what the author calls the cloud of unknowing, "the dark cloud where God was" (Ex 20:21). But we must move beyond this, and this is the purpose of the riddle of the Third Doorway: to see what is the nature of thoughts and feelings and who is aware of them.

By nature I mean: Do they have any substance? Is there anything to them? Are they real in the way we think they are? In light of the fact that a significant contributing factor to our hypertension, ulcers, and fibrillation is often afflictive thoughts and feelings, these questions bear asking. Certainly something may have set them off, but as we try to sit in silent prayer, more often than not what may or may not have set them off is well in the past (if in fact it ever occurred to begin with).

Now that there is enough inner silence to see what these thoughts and feelings appear in, the whole relationship with distractions becomes different. We untangle ourselves from our afflictive thoughts much more easily. Our psychodramas no longer require three acts before they draw to conclusion. Naming thoughts has become second nature. We see very clearly the difference between a simple thought that occurs and the lengthy commentary we attach to it. There is an inner calm that even others can see and is somehow tied to an abiding empathy and respect even for those who do not wish us well. With an inner gaze that is spacious and solid, like Mount Zion that cannot be shaken, that stands forever, we can look straight into these thoughts and feelings and see that they are not real in the way we took them to be. In the beginning they seemed so real, but now we see that they cannot withstand a direct gaze. They are nothing. Empty. Look and see for yourself.

This is the great liberation of solving this third riddle, which we come to soon after the second. Inner silence is such that we meet thoughts and feelings purely and simply without commentary, the way a riverbed receives the water from up stream and lets it go down stream, all the same receptive giving. When by the grace of simple realization we see that our own depths are a luminous vastness in which our painful feelings appear, in which our judgmental thoughts appear, in which our endless mind games appear, our wounds appear, our joy, our recollection, our fear and fragmentation all appear and disappear. And yet this luminous vastness is untouched by the pain, has never been wounded, has always been pure. Pain obviously remains; anger remains; we play our mind games (probably to a lesser extent); passing joys and fleeting fears all remain. This is the human condition. But what we realize is that all these distractions are so much weather appearing on Mount Zion. When we recognize that we are Mount Zion, God's holy dwelling place, and no longer suffer from the illusion that we are the weather, then we are free to let life be as it is at any given moment. We are no longer the victims of our afflictive thoughts, but their vigilant witness, silent and free, no longer requiring pain to be gone if it happens to be present.

To know this is to have answered the third riddle: what is their nature? The thoughts and feelings that have brought us such delight and sorrow are also manifestations of this luminous vastness, waves of the ocean, branches of the vine. And who is aware of these distracting thoughts? Shift your attention from the distraction to the awareness itself, to the aware-ing. There is nothing but this same luminous vastness, this depthless depth. What gazes into luminous vastness is itself luminous vastness. There is not a separate self who is afraid or angry or jealous. Clearly fear, anger, jealousy may be present, but we won't find anyone who is afraid, angry, jealous. etc., just luminous, depthless depth gazing into luminous, depthless depth.

Now we see all this clearly, but years ago we would have taken this experience of being riven with anxiety and riveted to our inner videos as constituting who we are, and we would have grasped at joy in order to avoid pain and anguish. But now we see that this no longer holds identity, and in the face of the same anxieties and videos there is a deeper calm, a tranquility that grounds both feelings of recollection and fragmentation. Evagrius speaks of this tranquility and observes that those who know it are somehow aware of a luminous quality. Moreover, this tranquility abides even as we "behold the affairs of life." Life still happens. Loved ones die; we experience tragedy, failure. Yet in all we are the tranquil awareness that grounds and presides and is one with all, whether things are going well in life or all hell is breaking loose.

Distractions—riddles of Solomon's sages—serve a purpose. If we cannot weather these distractions in stillness, they will give the impression that the doorway into the silent land is closed. But if we are simply still before them and do not try to push them away or let ourselves be carried away by them, they help deepen our contemplative practice. They initiate us into a sort of education by ordeal. The fruits of this

education are manifold, but we have identified in the course of this chapter three that are fundamental.

First, we realize that we are not our thoughts and feelings. It is very liberating to realize that what goes on in our head, indeed the entire mind-stream, does not have the final word on who we are. Life is simplified.

Second, once we have crossed this threshold of realizing we are not the mind-stream of thoughts and feelings, we find the tensions of life easier to live through. Our interiority is not so cramped; indeed it is a vast and spacious flow. It is as though for a lifetime we have been staring at clouds as they move across a valley, but now we see that these clouds that have obscured our vision and our very identities, to the point that we have taken them to be our very selves, exist in something deeper and vaster. Our own interiority is not a cramped space, but a valley of spaciousness. Clouds of thoughts and feelings come and go. We can identify these clouds with precision, but we no longer identify with them.

Third, we realize that what beholds this vast and flowing whole is also the whole. We see that these thoughts and feelings that have plagued us, clouded our vision, seduced us, entertained us, have no substance. They too are a manifestation of the vastness in which they appear.

I think St. Paul would simply have called this the peace of Christ, a realization of the baptismal fact of being in Christ. "I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:19-20). Christ is the way though the door and Christ is the door (Jn 10:9)