

From "Four Doors to Meeting for Worship" by William Taber, Pendle Hill Pamphlet 306

The first of these doors is the "door before", or those moments when we find ourselves in a worshipful state of mind at any time during the week, whether day or night. It is almost axiomatic that once we become serious about the spiritual journey, we discovered, sooner or later that the once a week worship on Sunday is not enough to feed us, and so we discover the importance of the "door before." It is no accident that most traditional Quaker communities found it important to meet for worship in the middle of the week as well on Sunday, and that some still do so. It is also no accident that daily "retirement"- a time of reading of the Bible, inspirational writings, personal prayer, reflection and worship-has been frequently recommended throughout Quaker history. Quaker journals and letters tell us that earlier Friends often went through the "door before" many times a week so that when they took their seats for Sunday they were already deeply prepared for entering the familiar and living Stream. If it be true, as we so often believe, that modern life is far more fragmented and stressful than the life lived by earlier Friends, then it becomes all the more important that we, like them, find ways to enter the "door before" many times a week so that we, too, may enter the meeting room already prepared in mind and heart and spirit for engaging in the deep communion that is possible there.

There are some very practical reasons for entering the "door before." A person who has already experienced times of spiritual nourishment during the week will require less time to let go of the rhythms and preoccupations of normal life and can therefore answer more quickly and easily into full attention to the living presence, to the stream which is always here. If the Sunday meeting for worship is our only haven of peace and quiet during the week, the luxury of that silent, private space can become so precious that we may even resent spoken ministry- especially if that ministry seems inappropriate to us- so that we may feel unfulfilled and frustrated when the meeting is over. On the other hand, people who have gone through the door before, week after week, find it easier to stay in touch with the living Source which can renew and guide them, even in the midst of distractions. Furthermore, when even just a few meeting attenders have regularly gone through the door before, the

entire meeting tends to settle more easily into the deep and living quiet which friends of long called a "gathered" meeting.