

# Four Doors to Meeting for Worship

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In his Pendle Hill pamphlet, *Four Doors to Meeting for Worship*, William Taber writes that Meeting for Worship is a form of communion for Friends, in which we gather in silence in order to enter a reality that “is always here within us and beside us, available to us as an invisible stream into which we can step at any time.” Worship, then, is not so much something we *do*, but is a state of consciousness which we *enter* which brings us into communion with the Living Presence. He identifies four stages, or doors, to Meeting for Worship.

## **First Door: The Door Before**

The *Door Before* refers to those times when we find ourselves in a worshipful state at any time during the week, day or night. Daily “retirement” (a time, even brief, of reading the Bible or other inspirational readings, or engaging in a spiritual practice) is frequently recommended by those who regularly experience the Living Presence. Going through the Door Before many times a week allows Friends to take their seats on Sunday already prepared for entering the familiar and living Stream. Beginning and persisting in a spiritual discipline is an important step toward personal spiritual growth and a solid and meaningful meeting for worship. Even when just a few Friends regularly go through the Door Before, the entire meeting settles more easily into the deep and living quiet which Quakers call a “gathered meeting.”

## **The Second Door: The Door Inward**

The most “gathered” meetings for worship actually begin when a few Friends focus on the meeting-to-come, long before the official starting time. Perhaps they have lifted up their meeting in prayer during the previous week. Perhaps they simply pause for a few moments the night before, or when they wake on Sunday morning, to visualize being in the meeting-to-come, remembering that “the Living Stream which we can touch at this moment is the same stream which we shall enter when tomorrow’s meeting gathers.” Friends find that assuming a restful posture, (for example, with feet flat on the floor, straight back, and eyes either shut or open) is very helpful toward achieving a relaxed focus. Friends may also use other techniques to help them enter fully into the Meeting for Worship. There are many ways to train our minds and bodies to settle. Some include repeating an inspirational passage such as the Lord’s Prayer; using a few words, repeated with each breath, as a mantra or centering prayer; praying for each

person around the room; using mental images, such as imagining love flowing to each member of the circle, connecting everyone with each other and with God; becoming aware of the Living Presence.

However, the most important thing is to let go of trying to do anything, and just be present. As we learn this, technique becomes far less important than our desire to be fully present. It is also true that God may be very close to us when we are least relaxed and focused. Faithfully attending meeting even when we feel little progress continues to allow God's transforming work to unfold within us.

### **The Third Door: The Door Within**

The *Door Within* describes the experience of a “gathered” or “covered” meeting. This experience of being united with a group which is “waiting on the Lord” can be described in many ways. For some it feels like having been lifted or expanded into and inward. It may feel as if we have stepped effortlessly into a renewing stream which reaches back and forward across time. The sharp boundaries of the self can become blurred and blended as we feel ourselves more and more united with fellow worshipers and with the Spirit of God. The Door Within, also known as “the Inward Work of Christ,” brings a person into a transformed life of both faithful attention to the divine presence and faithful obedience to the divine will. During this time we may experience amazing grace and new perceptions, including becoming aware of something about ourselves which troubles or pains us. The Door Within shows us that the Light which shows us our confusion and brokenness is the same Light which sets us free of it. The Door Within may bring a strong sense of inward healing, accompanied by joy, peace, praise, and an experience of timelessness. We may notice profound but subtle changes in the way we relate to ourselves, other people, animals, and all created things.

Someone may feel an inward motion of the Spirit to rise and speak a few words or offer a prayer – to offer vocal ministry. When we are open to the mystery of the gathered meeting, we *absorb* the words rather than merely hearing and reacting to them, even when the message is difficult to hear, or even when it is long and tedious. Silent ministry, the inconspicuous, invisible ministry of people who may never speak in meeting, is often more important than the spoken ministry, because it helps the meeting reach that state of consciousness in which minds and hearts and wills are opened and united, making possible the work of God among us. The ultimate test of our response to the Inward Work of Christ lies not in the way we feel during the meeting for worship, but in the way we relate afterward to our fellow humans and to all of God's Creation.

## The Fourth Door: The Door Beyond

As we approach the end of the meeting, we know that there are consequences from our having been here. We may discover increased flexibility in response to the world beyond the meetinghouse. Perhaps the “normal” world will seem more beautiful, and more full of possibilities. We may have a clearer, keener focus, and a more accurate way of seeing what is really there. We may experience a heightened sensitivity to the injustice, violence, and pain in the world. We realize that the same Power which allows us to suffer increased sensitivity to social evil also empowers us to reach out more creatively to help heal it. Those moments at the rise of meeting when Friends shake hands have enormous potential for transforming the grace of a gathered meeting into the grace of a transformed life. It may be helpful to take a “token” from the silence into life in the world by asking ourselves, “What new insight has this time with God given me to take into my daily life?” As we return to normal consciousness, we know we will never be the same again. Each handshake is a promise of our new or renewed openness to God and of our commitment to go forth into the world with new eyes and a greater faithfulness in all that we do.

- For more on [Four Doors to Meeting for Worship](#) by William Taber, Pendle Hill Pamphlet #306, visit Quaker Books of FGC by clicking the link.

*Adapted by Merry Stanford with permission from Pendle Hill from [Four Doors to Meeting for Worship](#) by William Taber. Pendle Hill Pamphlet #306*

*First Door - pages 4-10.*

*Second Door - pages 10 - 16*

*Third Door - pages 17 - 26*

*Fourth Door - pages 26 – 28*

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