



5 Sheltering the Soul

WHILE SHELTERING THE BODY IS TRADITIONALLY ABOUT responding directly to nature, sheltering the mind and the heart can relate to elusive things or events. We may want to express power or wealth, cultural habits or beliefs, or aesthetics. These less tangible goals have both influenced and been influenced by the design of all types of buildings and our ritual passages through them. In a house, the rituals are often personal inventions as, for example, seasonally moving the porch table. In a great cathedral, the rituals are celebrations of shared belief. In either case, rituals very often correspond with the rhythms of actual experience in a place. When the rhythm is complex rather than simple, the matching rituals are more elaborate and tell an expanded story. The result, sometimes quite modest, has at other times been architectural invention of transcendent beauty.

The Two-Door House

Spatial intersections such as thresholds, stairs, hearths, and windows are “territorial passages” between inside and out, upstairs and down, warm and cold. Although associated with sheltering the body, they can as well be the counterparts to a pattern of social behavior, a ritual. It is the repetitive use of such sheltering elements that sooner or later bestows symbolic importance on them. The pattern, once set, begins to have an independent life and power. Consider the symbolic value of two doors where one might just as easily have served.

THE SHAKER HOUSE

“Forever separate, Shaker sisters and brothers passed quietly in the wide hallways.”¹ They did not of course live totally separate lives. They shared spaces where they ate, played, and worshiped,