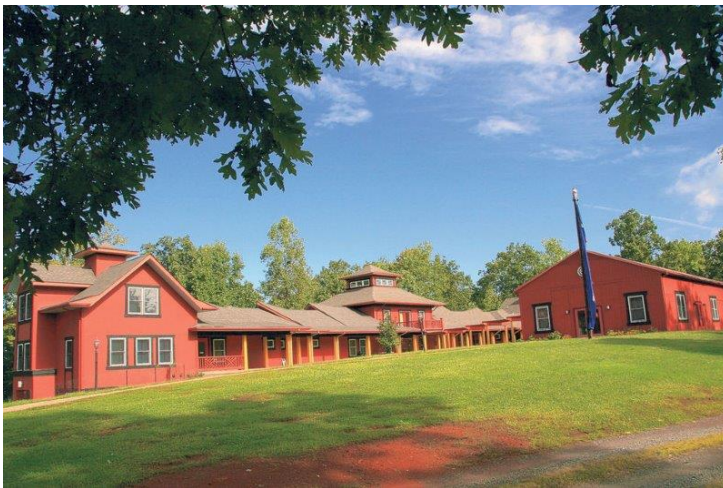




Investing Our Attention in Openness

The 3 Doors Sixth North American Academy Begins in October



The 3 Doors will begin its sixth North American Academy October 6-12, 2021, at Serenity Ridge Retreat Center in Virginia. The intensive two-and-a-half-year program is led by senior teachers Marcy Vaughn and Gabriel Rocco. ÂÂ Joan Oliver, an Academy graduate, recently talked with Marcy about the Academy and the benefits of attending.

What is The 3 Doors Academy?

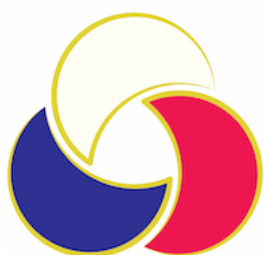
The 3 Doors Academy offers participants an opportunity to engage deeply in meditation and the process of self-discovery. We explore practices of body, breath and movement. We explore generating sound and resting in silence, and we rest and abide in open awareness. We are encouraged to reflect on the limited patterns we're living with as they show up in our actions and as they are held in our body, speech and mind. These are the three doors.

A great benefit of meditation is that it supports us to realize that our habitual patterns are not fixed. We may have repeated these patterns for years, but as we become aware, habits can loosen and open. We invest our attention in that openness, and fresh possibilities emerge. We change, and we can express change in ways that benefit ourselves and others.

Why do people attend an Academy?

Often someone will come into an Academy with the motivation of wanting to meditate more regularly or needing support for their practice. We may think we can do better, or that we have more potential than we are expressing. So some unique mixture of inspiration and exasperation motivates us to look more deeply into ourselves. And interestingly, the process of opening more fully to be with ourselves, just as we are, brings the benefit of being both kinder and freer. We discover that life has more possibility than any one of us may be accessing at any given moment. There's a motivation to express the goodness in yourself and connect with the goodness in others. This is exponentially supported by spending time with others in meditation, reflection and sharing.

The Academy can support participants to reflect on what limits one's capacity for creative and positive expression in life and to engage practices to bring open, nonjudgmental attention to those limitations as we experience them in the body, in speech, and in our thoughts and feelings. As we bring open and kind attention, we can awaken new possibilities and express them. We come to know and accept ourselves more deeply and to bring love to fearful places. To be willing to sit with what might look like a block or an obstacle or discomfort and to realize it is not fixed or solid is amazing. So much becomes workable, even relationships we may not have envisioned as possible to heal.



THE
3 DOORS

TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH MEDITATION

How did The 3 Doors begin?

[The 3 Doors](#) was founded by Tibetan teacher and meditation master Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche more than 10 years ago. Rinpoche realized that in his tradition there is a treasury of wisdom, knowledge and methods that have been tried and applied for centuries and have had results in transforming confusion into wisdom and bringing forth compassionate actions.

The very core, the pith essence of the teachings, is like pure water, meaning that everyone can drink it and benefit from it. But if the water is in a container that you don't recognize, or you feel *I can't drink from a blue container, I can only drink from a yellow container*, then the 3 Doors says, *Here are teachings that are available that don't mean you have to believe in what I believe in or wear the clothes I do or even vote the way I do.* You just need the motivation and curiosity to explore further.

The 3 Doors Academy is its signature program. The Academy meets for six in-person retreats of six days each over a two-and-a-half-year period, with supplemental online group and individual mentor meetings plus individual work in between. The fifth North American Academy finished in spring 2021 and will graduate in fall 2021, shortly before the sixth North American Academy begins. About 150 people have participated in North American Academies. Additionally, two Academies have been held in Europe and two in Latin America.

Is the Academy primarily geared to beginners, or is it also effective for more seasoned practitioners?

The Academy is open to everyone. Perhaps it has even more meaning for people who've had a taste of meditation and its benefits. It's not just that you're going on another retreat; you're living your life and integrating your practice with your life. Each one of us has a relationship with a body, is a member of a family, and is a member of society at a particular time in history. How are these relationships? You will be given an opportunity to sit with yourself and come to a more robust and compassionate relationship with yourself, your family and close friends, and the larger world.

The heart of the program is that our habitual patterns become an identity of who we think we are. And this is not true; this identity is full of holes. You are in a constant state of change. You

can explore your relationship with change in a way that will allow you to manifest creative and positive energies. The motivation, the inspiration is self-arising: you get a taste of what's possible and you want to activate that. So the limitations are just a door, and that door can open. But you have to be willing to sit with your blocks, your limitations, and realize they're not solid.

What is the retreat experience like for participants?

Retreats are held at Serenity Ridge, a beautiful 100-plus acre retreat center in a wooded area near the Rockfish River in Shipman, Virginia. Each retreat combines periods of meditation with periods of group reflection and expression. Included are periods of silence and the opportunity to engage with others informally, supporting the integration of meditation and life.

Retreat days begins at 7 a.m. with the yogas of breath and movement, usually held outside on an upper deck with a beautiful view across the valley. There are four additional group teaching and meditation periods during the day, plus a small group meeting, with the final meditation ending at 8:30 p.m. Members of each small group stay together throughout the two-and-a-half-year Academy, offering an opportunity to form strong bonds and deepen the ability to relate to others. The day includes free time for reflection and journal writing, walking in the natural environment and interaction with others.

In the six months between each retreat, Academy students have four Zoom meetings each month for meditation and sharing. They include two practices for the full academy led by Gabriel or Marcy, plus a mentor group meeting and a meeting of your small group. Between each retreat you have an opportunity for a private meeting with your mentor.

Is the group process an important part of the Academy?

Absolutely! One of the hidden jewels of The 3 Doors is how much we learn and receive from our fellow participants. We are given the opportunity to express practice experiences and hear the journey of others. The Academy offers a protective environment, a container in which we can safely explore and express both verbally and in writing, along with developing a deeper appreciation for the power of collective silence.

People help each other just by showing up. You end up realizing you are a support for other people's journey as they a support for yours, even if someone irritates you. We're all triggered by other people. In the Academy we become interested in what triggers us, our own reactivity. It's the beginning of transformation. We also discover that just being in the presence of others in meditation is a support. There is tremendous support and power in taking this journey in the presence of others.

What are other potential benefits for participants?

The Academy is an opportunity to question, to be curious, to be willing to sit with and investigate life. As I loosen and open, certain things arise that I wasn't expecting. Can I allow my feelings to have the room they need? Can I realize what happens when something releases and there's a new space and something else becomes available? Can I recognize what is present in this very moment? People usually interfere with their own process. They don't trust openness, so they block it. Or something comes up and we try to get rid of it, which is another block. Or if what is present leaves or changes, we don't know what to do with that feeling of, *what next?* We're looking into all these states of being because our openness allows for a movement of expression that is waiting to be discovered.

We don't mature easily. We're often familiar with the expression of pain, but we're not as familiar with our expressions of joy and kindness and compassion, among the many positive qualities that we have. Through the practices of meditation we are exercising opening in the presence of difficult places, opening in the presence of painful places, and opening when we feel hesitation and doubt.

The view of who you are is an infinitely creative person capable of spontaneous acts of kindness and humor and love. But you may not experience yourself that way, or only infrequently. So the motivation is to look more deeply at what is limiting you. Are these limitations fixed, permanent? According to the dzogchen teachings upon which the practices of The 3 Doors are based, they're not permanent. But in me they might feel fiercely entrenched. So I want support to look more deeply into that. This is where the practices come in. They help open up these patterns and support us to become more familiar with openness, to trust this openness and begin to rely on it.

Is there anything else you want people to know about the Academy?

Participating in a 3 Doors Academy is a deep, intensive process of self-discovery. It is an investment of time, of energy, of resources. And it's an investment in where you put your attention. Your attention is your gold. Invest it well.

[Learn more or apply to the next North American Academy](#)

For those who are unable to make the journey to Serenity Ridge, consider the [Compassion Project](#), a nine-month online program starting in October 2021 that also supports you to engage with these practices in a small group and to integrate them into your life.