The Serenity Space

by Stu Webb
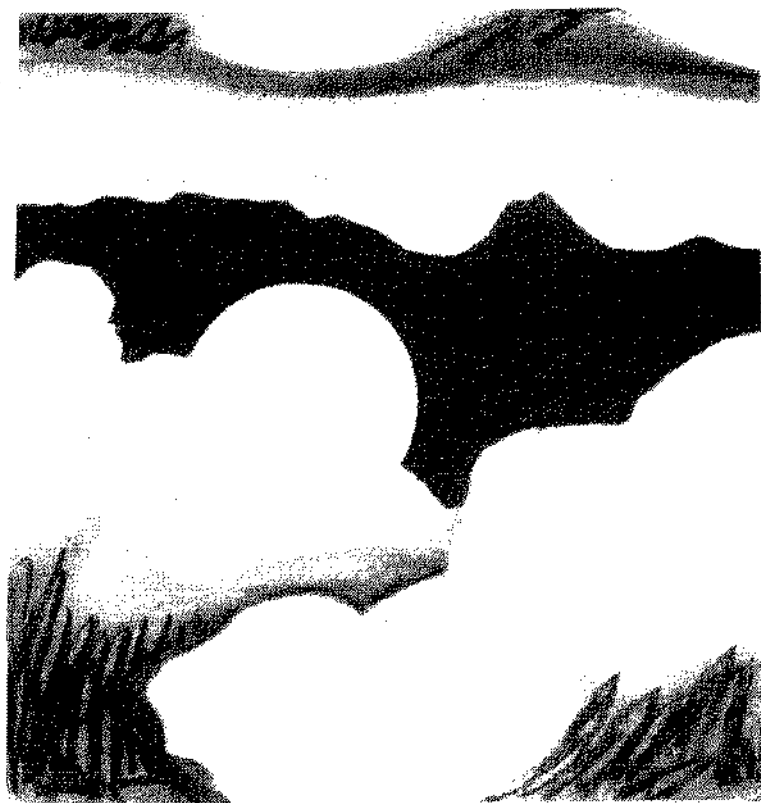
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THE SERENITY SPACE

There is a "space" or frame of mind in which you have available to you, moment by moment, all the "common-sense" wisdom necessary or desirable for optimal functioning in your everyday life. This space we will call the "Serenity Space". It is not, however, some mysterious realm of consciousness only attainable after years of dedicated meditation or practice at some higher-consciousness discipline. Quite simply, this "space" is just your frame of reference or feeling-tone when you are relaxed and feeling good about yourself and not trying to "figure things out".

Close your eyes and imagine yourself at a beach of your own choosing (or some other place the thought of which gives you good feelings), doing exactly what gives you the most pleasure. Stay there long enough in your imagination to experience the feelings of relaxation and peace of mind. Get in touch with the accompanying body sensations. If you can do this to any degree, then you have experienced to that degree the "Serenity Space". That's all there is to it.

It has been discovered that in the Serenity Space (or whatever you might want to call it) we all have the natural ability to tap into the collective common-sense wisdom of the universe and act, respond and communicate in a loving, responsible, flowing manner with what is going on in our world.

It may come as a surprise to you but our state of mind in the Serenity Space is our natural state—our birthright—the state in which we truly experience who we are.

The predominant types of emotions you will experience in the Serenity Space are those of happiness, joy, peace of mind, serenity, kindliness, tolerance, good

will, anticipation of good, interest in what's going on, etc. Again, make it a point to notice the body "tone" or sense of well-being that accompanies these emotions.

What you will begin to experience in learning to operate from this center is an ability to flow with the world around you as a participant in life in a responsible, synchronous manner.
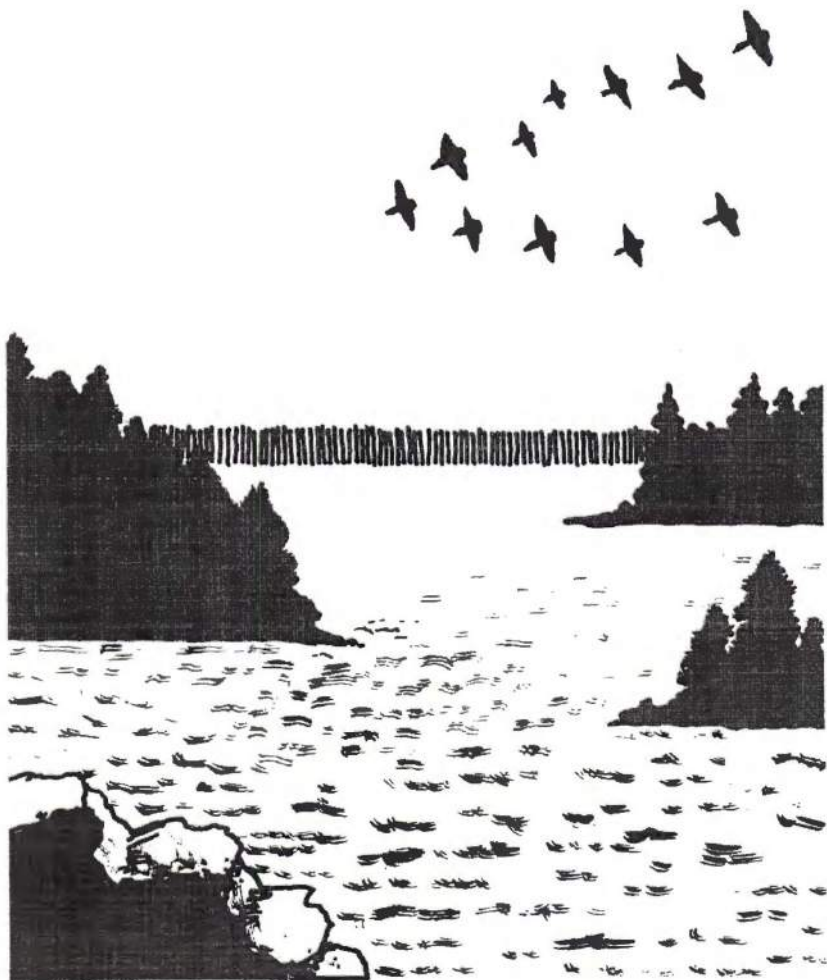
The more time you spend in this space (and it is your choice), the brighter your world will appear. Your world will literally change, over time, to match your higher mood—and the better your world appears to you, the more pleasant your feelings. It creates a nice positive, releasing spiral of higher levels of consciousness (as opposed to the vicious circle of lower consciousness we otherwise create).

All you need do is learn to stay in this space with an open mind and trust your instincts or intuition and whatever comes to you in the way of insights or notions of what to do.

I repeat, the trick is not knowing what to do in that positive frame of mind. The trick is to trust what comes up for you and to learn to stay centered in the Serenity Space or frame of reference—without trying to figure things out.

THE INSECURITY SPACE

There is only one other possible frame of reference or "space" from which we live our lives—and, unfortunately, it is a mind set with which we are all too familiar, many of us having spent most of our waking consciousness operating from here. This frame of reference will be called the "Insecurity Space".

The Insecurity Space is the domain of your thought system—of "figuring it out". Your thought system is an elaborate "computer" system consisting of all your beliefs about everything. Your thought system has gone even further and operates from the basic belief that everything in this system is essential to your survival: that all the beliefs, opinions, judgments, etc., you have made through the years, consistent or contradictory, are vital to survival. These "programs" are built on a fear

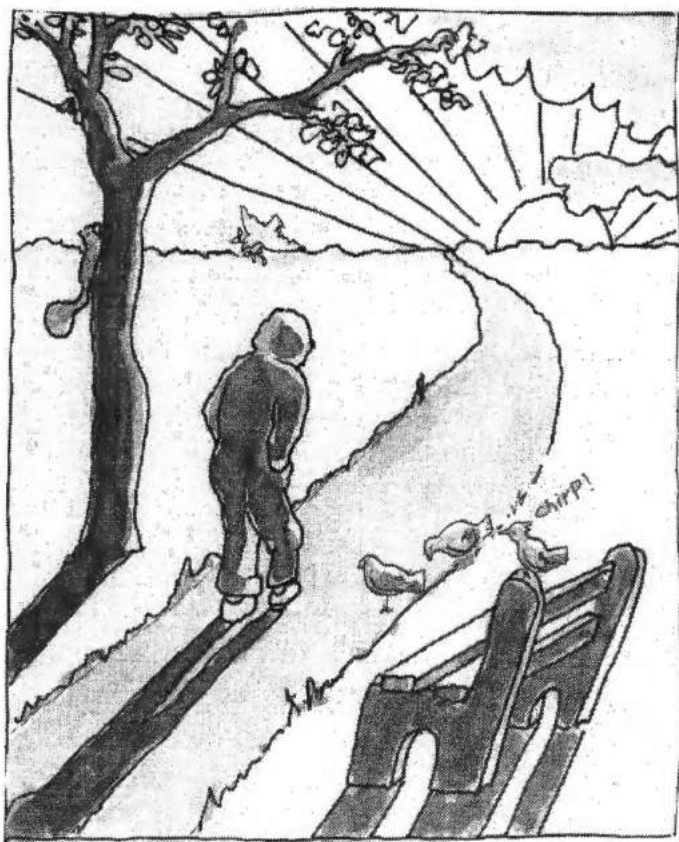base and have the result of drastically limiting your view of life and your ability to function in the world.

Your thought system literally creates your world-- the world you see and how you see it--how it looks to you. Since your thought system is unique, your view of the world is different from that of every other person. It follows, then, that every other person in the world has his or her own separate world-view or apparent reality, each as different as snowflakes. Is it any wonder our composite world is a shambles and lacks so much agreement?

Your thought system is presided over by your "ego". Your ego is not you any more than your thought system is you. Whereas your thought system is the software of your mind computer built up around the theme of "survival", your ego is a pseudo-entity created by your thought-system programming that "pretends" to be you--your very essence. The ego is not you. Your ego is merely a shadow image created by your thought system.

The goal of the thought system is to ensure that this shadow creature called the ego survives. It does this by assuming that everything in the world is out to "destroy" the ego and therefore everything needs to be defended against on behalf of the ego. This explains the elaborate nature of our survival programming and its ingenious design based on fear and survival. This survival, remember, is not even survival of you but of your ego--an imaginary creation of this thought system. This thought system also has you convinced that you are your ego! That is why we feel threatened by input disturbing to our thought systems. You are not your ego. You are not your thoughts. You are not the little voice in your head. You know, the little voice inside your head that carries on a nearly constant monologue, dialogue, or even group discussion. (The little voice that at this moment probably is saying, "What voice?") This voice is just

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another facet of your thought system.

When we operate from the Insecurity Space, we don't act—we react. We respond to everything we see in our world through our "filter" of beliefs, judgments, opinions, etc., that make up who we think we are. From the Insecurity Space, our filter will reflect our thought system in what we see and this will result in the appear-

ance of negative feelings such as anger, fear, jealousy, condemnation, mistrust, etc.. Negative behavior then follows. Assuming that the other person with whom we are interacting is also positioned in his or her Insecurity Space, then that person will respond to our negative behavior through his or her own assortment of opinions, judgments, feelings and behaviors which make up his or her own unique filter. We then will react to that, the other to us, etc.,—a description all too accurately depicting many of our day-to-day "interactions".

There is no common-sense wisdom available to us in the Insecurity Space. We are all on our own individual "automatic pilots" when we operate from this space. We are literally immersed in our machinery, circuits, and programs when we come from this space. Once again, as when in the Serenity Space, our world takes on the coloration of our thoughts. But here, the world gives confirmation to our negative thoughts, which makes our world look even more fearful—and we're into a downward vicious circle of negative emotions.

You need to know that, contrary to most opinions, utilizing your thought system while operating from the Insecurity Space is hazardous to your health (physical, mental and emotional), others in your life, and ultimately to the survival of the planet.

NAVIGATING THE SPACES

It may be helpful to answer two questions to enable us to stay in the Serenity Space and out of the Insecurity Space:

1) How can we recognize when we are shifting from the Serenity Space to the Insecurity Space? and
2) If we find ourselves in the Insecurity Space, how can we get back to the Serenity Space?

1) Recognizing the shift from the Serenity Space to the Insecurity Space.

The transition from the Serenity Space to the Insecurity Space starts with a single negative thought or judgment about something. The movement to the Insecurity Space is signaled by an emotion. The identifying emotion and/or body sensation that lets us know we are about to move from the Serenity Space to the Insecurity Space is a feeling and/or sensation of insecurity. Learn to key on this feeling/sensation. Practice becoming aware of the onset of this emotion and what it feels like physically for you. Learning to recognize the first onset of this emotion of insecurity makes it relatively easy to learn to shut off your thinking and choose to stay in the Serenity Space. You don't need to avoid the circumstances in your outer world that appeared to create this emotion; just choose to stay in the Serenity Space in whatever manner works for you. With a little practice you'll develop your own tricks for responding to this "early-warning" that you are about to enter the Insecurity Space.

2) How to get from the Insecurity Space to the Serenity Space.

Until you get some practice at early recognition of the onset of feelings of insecurity, you will probably find yourself feeling entrenched in the Insecurity Space before you are even aware that you are no longer in the Serenity Space. The more firmly enmeshed in the Insecurity Space you are, the more difficult you may find it, at first, to get back solidly into the Serenity Space.

You'll have to find what works for you to enable you to "climb out" of the machinery, so to speak. For some, the idea of "letting go", deeply felt, helps---perhaps accompanied by a deep breath of release into thoughts of a peaceful place. For others, it may be doing something

physical which they find relaxing and pleasurable. For others, quiet meditation using one of the many techniques found in a good book on the subject might do the trick. Some find it helps at first to escape the negative trap by expressing briefly to an understanding other what's going on with them—not to change the other, but to express that they are caught in their machinery.

Some find positive affirmations, such as "There is nothing to fear" effective to remind them of the Serenity Space and help point the direction back to it.

Most importantly, however, it needs to be stressed that it is your thought system in which you find yourself stuck at such times, so it is you who must find what works for you by trial and error. Use whatever works to get yourself back to the sunshine and creative wisdom available in the Serenity Space.

There is a danger in focusing on techniques for getting out of the Insecurity Space as I have been doing in the above discussion. That danger is that you may start thinking the power or "magic" is in the technique—or any technique. It is not. It needs to be stressed that no technique is really required to make the mood shift, any more than a technique is required to move your hand from your knee to your nose. It's just a return to your natural state. You just learn to do it instinctively once you experience the tremendous value of living in the Serenity Space. You don't need a technique to be who you really are. You only need to learn to drop some old habits—by remembering who you are!

COMPUTER ANALOGY

Your negative thought system in the Insecurity Space is counter-productive. Its only "purpose" is to create your negative reality. This system, composed of the totality of all your judgments, ideas about everything, considerations, beliefs, opinions, etc., has been built up by you over the years just in the process of life itself. Nothing seems ever to be taken out of this elaborate system's programs. Individual programs are added to, modified, or, in some cases, converted to different conclusions. Thus, your brain–your computer–contains all these programs which to all appearances cannot be erased or removed from the machine (your brain). These old programs affect the output of your computer. Your individual world, then, isn't available to you fresh in each NOW moment, but is perceived through this elaborate thought-system programming from the past. And each of us sees a different world because we all have uniquely different thought systems.

Suppose you were in the market to buy a personal computer. Would you buy one in which the previous programming could not be eliminated or blocked? Of course not. The effectiveness of the computer to you would then be limited by the programming that had previously been put into the computer. Also, everything you added to the computer's programs would be there always to add input whenever you used the computer. Your computer would have a personality, just like you do! Let's suppose, for example, some time in the past your computer had been programmed with the statement "Love equals danger to survival". In that case, every time you attempted to work with the subject of love, the computer would be pulling up its survival programs. What conclusions would you be making about love? That it's dangerous? Keep your distance from it? Attack? This type of constant use of old programs is exactly what goes on in our brain-computer when we feel insecure.

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Imagine we were stuck with such a computer with unerasable prior programming. How could we work with it? One way would be to figure out a method to block out these programs from the past. Let's assume that we discover that just prior to accessing these programs there is a slight change in the voltage in the computer and that by shutting off the computer temporarily we could avoid accessing these old programs. We could then convert this voltage change into a signal—perhaps a red light or a buzzer—which would alert us that the computer was about to use its old programs. We could then shut off the computer and let it "cool down" and avoid contamination of our computing functions by the old programs.

GOOD NEWS!!! Recent insights and research into how our mind/brain works have demonstrated that we can devise a "warning system" that will let us know when we are about to access our own negative programming which prevents us from seeing the world as it really is. This signal is the feeling of insecurity. This feeling—like the light or buzzer—is a signal to shut off the computer by relaxing, letting go, dropping our thoughts, or whatever other way you find works to stop the "figuring out" that is about to happen. Instead of grabbing hold of the feeling of insecurity and running with it into the past-programming jungle, find a "good" feeling or body sensation within you (analogous to the hum of a computer ready to access new information) and let it build.

Teach yourself to use the feeling/sensation of insecurity as a biofeedback signal to shut off the computer temporarily. This will absolutely change your life, because it will allow you, over time, to stay with your happy feelings and begin to see that your world is not really frightening and threatening to your security (as your programming has been telling you in its persistent and unique way) but is rather a—well, I'll leave it to you to find out for yourself what joyous adventures and

miracles await you from the perspective of positive NOW programming created by you from your natural Serenity Space.

The longer you operate your computer without "contamination" from your old programming, the easier it gets to operate in the NOW mode free of past programs, and, the higher your level of consciousness and the clearer your world view.

Some people may view my description of living in the Serenity Space and my advice to stay out of our bad feelings and our negative thought systems as a form of denial. Let's look at this possible charge in the context of our computer-with-personality analogy. Let's assume we used our computer without paying any attention to whether or not it was calling up the old programs that had been entered into it previously. Our results would clearly be affected by the old programs comprising the computer software. Denial would be: (1) the situation where we refused to admit that these old programs affected our outcome; or (2) even worse, the situation where we denied that such old programs even existed in our computer! Devising a method to block out these old programs while using the computer is not a denial that the programs are present in the computer nor of their potential to affect the computer output, but it is only a denial of the ability of these old programs to affect the outcome of NOW programming by denying them access to the functioning of the computer.

Similarly, devising a way to access common-sense wisdom in the NOW, without contamination by these programs from the past, is not denial of the latter's existence in our "circuits". Nor is it a denial that our past programming has tremendous power to alter our view of the world and how we operate in it.

Keeping ourselves warm in the winter by building a shelter to protect ourselves from the cold is not a

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denial of the cold weather. Rather, it is explicit recognition of the existence of the cold and a step to insulate ourselves from its effects. The same principle applies to developing and utilizing methods to "protect" ourselves from the effects of our negative programs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DISPUTE RESOLUTION

As a collaborative lawyer, I work nonadversarially primarily with individuals and couples in the process of dissolving their marriages. I have experienced in this capacity the powerful impact that an understanding of the principles being examined here can have on our ability to resolve disputes effectively.

Most of us, when we are enmeshed in disputes of any kind--and particularly marital conflicts--experience ourselves deeply caught up in the Insecurity Space. As was explained earlier, from that frame of reference we see the world and the other party through our negative filter and our fears. Consequently, our ability to call on our natural wisdom is severely impaired. Since the other party is also coming from his or her own Insecurity Space, a closed system of reaction, counter-reaction, counter-counter reaction etc. is the normal interactive pattern. This is the context almost always present when two parties are entering the process of dissolving their marriage. This is the traditional frame of reference of each of the parties as they go to consult their respective attorneys and divorce proceedings are commenced. It is no wonder, then, that divorce proceedings are filled with bitterness, acrimony and expensive legal maneuvering. Lawyers, generally as unskilled in avoiding the Insecurity Space trap as most of us, tend to get caught up in their own insecurities in attempting to meet their clients' security needs and, in addition, commonly "catch" a portion of their clients' insecurities.

Once I began to become aware of the choice I

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had to stay centered in the Serenity Space no matter what was going on in my world, and once I was able to convey a little of this understanding and feeling to my clients, I discovered the difference it made to both me and my clients to begin utilizing our quiet wisdom rather than to react to the other party or his/her attorney. One result was the development of a sense of perspective on the issues involved—as well as a sense of humor about it all. Functioning from the Serenity Space allows parties involved in a dispute to stay centered in a space deeper and more solid than the issues involved in the dispute. When that happens options become available as a matter of just "knowing"—options that were not apparent or available before.

Another interesting phenomenon occurs, often present in the collaborative process, when one (or more) parties to a dispute begin to function from the Serenity Space: it becomes catching. Coming from centered serenity and acting rather than reacting, gives the other parties to the dispute room to do the same. The "loop" of reaction, counter-reaction etc. is broken. An invitation is implicitly present to quiet down and begin to discover the possibilities for creative resolution of the issues in dispute based on common-sense meeting of each parties' needs. The parties develop a context for discussion based on addressing a mutual problem and seeking satisfying solutions, rather than one based on attacking each other from entrenched issue-positions. The parties often discover that they are arguing over "stuff" and that neither their security nor themselves, personally, are "on the line." Wonderful, creative solutions become possible. More importantly, the parties get some practical practice in developing their Security Spaces and in discovering that Security Spaces overlap and connect (unlike Insecurity Spaces, which cut off and separate). This learning has implications far beyond the issues that were in dispute---implications that can alter the course of the rest of their lives!

FINAL WORD

That is it. You now know all the principles that can allow you to create your own world, knowingly and lovingly. The choice is yours and yours alone. You are the only one who creates the world you see. You can choose your level of consciousness and your world. It's not hard. When you're happy, is it hard work to feel good? The choice is yours. Would you like a punch in the nose (the Insecurity Space) or a nice meal (the Serenity Space)?

I choose the meal—life—from moment to moment. Won't you join me? If you do, please pass it on. It's catching.

P.S. I'd enjoy hearing from any of you on the path. The Serenity Space is made for networking. Or contact me for further information on Collaborative Family Law.

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