

APPENDIX: CLEARING SPACE: A PRIMER

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We all have a tendency to internalize and carry with us various unresolved issues, plans, problems or concerns, from the mundane tasks of daily life, such as: “What should I cook for supper tonight?” to the kinds of concerns that are potentially life changing, such as: “Should I accept that job offer even though it will require a move?” Whether it is a wedding in the planning stages, an upcoming interview, a recent conflict or some disturbing or even some joyful news, we have all experienced feeling preoccupied or distracted by what we are carrying, at least from time to time. Many of us have also experienced occasions when what we are carrying around is too much, and we feel scattered or overwhelmed.

Clearing Space is the process of externalizing, or *putting down* all of this internal baggage. This has two major benefits. First, it allows you to experience the *authentic self*, and separate your own identity from those things that, while affecting you, are not really part of who you are. Who people who have been overwhelmed by all of the problems or tasks they are juggling, having even a few minutes of rest from all of that, and being able to check in with themselves, and ask: “How am I doing?” can be therapeutic in itself. Secondly, once you have Cleared Space, it is possible to focus *all* of your attention on just one thing, and you can choose what that thing is.

Clearing Space, like all of the steps of Focusing, is a natural process. Many people actively Clear Space in their daily lives. The ability to keep work and home life separate is one example. Sometimes Clearing Space happens naturally and without effort, as when we become so absorbed in something that it *pushes out* everything else.

The following is a process you can follow to Clear Space. Hopefully, it will be easy to follow, even if this is new to you.

Clearing Space can be done anywhere and in any position, but it is useful when starting out, to sit or recline comfortably, in a place relatively free from distractions.

Take a few moments to relax and pay attention to your breathing. You may want to close your eyes if you are comfortable with that and it helps you concentrate. Let your breathing become deep and regular. Bring all of your attention to the trunk of your body. While doing this, ask inward, directing the question into your body rather than your head: “What am I carrying that isn’t part of *me*?” Alternatively, you could ask: “What is in the way of feeling peaceful and clear?” Feel free to alter the words in whatever way works for you.

You then wait, with a Focusing attitude of friendly curiosity, openness, and willingness to accept whatever comes up, without judgement.

When something does come up, don’t engage with it, or try to analyze it. Rather, ask, again, into the trunk of your body: “Where do I want to put this for now?” and then put it

there. If something has trouble *staying put*, you can create a container for it, or ask into your body: “What does this need in order to stay put?” It may need to be placed closer, or a little further away. It may need a commitment that, at some point, you will pick it back up and pay attention to it. Again, wait for the answer to come up from your body, and then act on it.

Once you have successfully put this down somewhere outside of you, you then repeat the process. It is usually sufficient at this point to just ask into your body: “Is there more?”

You go through the same process with each thing that comes up, deciding where and how to place each, until there is nothing more that comes up.

If, at this stage, you do not feel clear, calm and peaceful, check to see if there is a background feeling or issue, something that you may have carried for so long that it seems like a part of you, though it is not. Clear that in the same way you cleared everything else, noticing, but not engaging with it, finding the right place and the right container, if a container is needed.

You have now successfully Cleared Space. Take a bit of time just to enjoy the peace of being free of all of that clutter, and say hello to the real *you* that may have been hidden under all of that.

Now that you have cleared space, you can choose to bring back into your attention one of the things that you cleared away, and focus *all* of your attention on it. Giving any issue or problem your undivided attention is the best way to arrive at meaningful answers. This is why Clearing Space is always the first step in Focusing, even though the other steps may follow in an order that is more flexible. Using Focusing as a way of paying attention to that issue or concern allows you to pay attention in the most meaningful way possible. Focusing assesses not just your thoughts, but *all* of your inner knowledge, even that which can not be put easily into words, and that which is connected or relevant in ways that may not occur to a person who is using their head rather than their body in attending to a problem. Our bodily felt sense of a problem will also go straight to the *most* relevant knowledge. It is like having a really great “sort and find” program for the archives of information in our immense memory systems. Focusing allows us also to use the whole of ourselves, heart, mind, body, and spirit, which is much more powerful than using the mind alone.