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Space Settlement: The Journey Inward

By Steven Wolfe

As we mark the first anniversary of the shuttle Columbia tragedy, there is renewed urgency to reflect on why we ever got into the space business in the first place and why permanent human settlement of space is worth the risk of life itself.

For many of us, it was the space settlement vision that stimulated our original passion for space. Not to be confused with a clunky, overpriced NASA program, the space settlements vision, in its purist sense, embodies all our hopes and dreams of what space means to the future of civilization. In order to move forward, we need to reassure ourselves that this vision is still very much a living possibility.

For far too many of us the space settlement dream was long ago put on the back burner of our hearts. If you are fortunate enough to work in space industry, you may feel satisfied that you have a job that at least remotely relates to your passion. To be sure, we celebrate the occasional successes in space technology, science and politics. But, however much we may think we are contributing to the space cause, the predominant feeling is one of frustration and regret that our dream for space settlement is not any closer today than it was on the day Aldrin and Armstrong walked on the Moon.

With Columbia, we are coping with a major setback. This is surely a time of renewal. Not just in making necessary fixes to the space shuttle and planning its successor technology, but it is also a time to renew our own original passion for space. Not in a superficial way that will quickly fade when the demands of everyday life creep back in. Real renewal will require that you be willing to go much further in honoring your core passion than you may ever have before. It requires you to find a way back to the moment your passion for space was first realized. Once there, you will discover all the strength and wisdom you need to get through this difficult period, and more importantly, actually take part in laying the groundwork for human evolution into space.

This kind of self-reflection will require effort on your part. If you are interested enough, the following steps will take you on an internal journey back to your original passion.

Reflect on your original motivation

At some point in your life there was a moment when you were overcome by the full magnitude of the unlimited possibilities awaiting humanity in space. You may have directly experienced the awesomeness of the Universe within which humanity itself is completely insignificant. This moment may have been euphoric or simply a feeling of 'Yeah, that's for me.' This was the moment the passion for space was born in you.

Take some quiet time to reflect on that original moment of inspiration as if for the first time. No matter when or how it occurred, try to separate yourself a little from the experience and ask yourself questions about what you see. If your peak experience came at the time of the Apollo launch, for example, ask yourself what was it about that

mission that stirred your emotions. In this way you will gradually achieve greater depth of understanding about your desire for space.

In examining this moment it is not so much that we are seeking an explanation that can be articulated, as much as we are attempting to connect with our emotional state at that moment. To be sure, this exercise, if fully embraced, requires delicate consideration and a high degree of openness. If you are willing to give in to this inquiry fully, you are likely to reach a depth of your own self you never experienced before. This inquiry may also spark new peak experiences, which is only natural as you examine anew the nature of your passion.

Realize the profound 'rightness' of your original inspiration

As a result of your reflection, you should arrive at a place where the 'rightness' of the space vision is unquestionable. There is nothing hokey or fringy about the space settlement passion. It is the direct recognition of humanity's destiny, and should be a source of great motivation, not hesitation. It is not something to shy away from, or to take casually. Seeing the 'rightness' in this effort will provide the clarity of mind that you need to carry you forward. In order for us to make real progress in settlement matters, we cannot doubt its imperative.

Become fixed in this perspective

Once you have accepted the rightness of the settlement mission, you must cultivate an unwavering stance in relationship to it. There must be a fundamental orientation about human expansion into space that is expressed through you within whatever professional and personal context you may be living. In other words, your worldview is altered such that the settlement imperative becomes a core value.

This kind of fixed perspective is arrived at by repeatedly reflecting upon the source of your motivation at its deepest level. Let this become a regular practice, which can be in the form of deep contemplation and/or meditation. If you get to that fixed perspective, then it doesn't matter what others thinks. You can't be moved by criticism, ridicule or self-doubt.

Take action consistent with this stance

Correct or right action will naturally arise from the fixed point of view you have established. Depending on who you are, and where you are, these actions could be big and far-reaching or subtle and discrete. There should be ease in your actions that come from your connectedness to your original passion. But do not confuse ease with laxness, however. Once you are clear on the direction to take, you must act upon it with all determination and confidence.

Your course of action may be obvious. Perhaps you will recall a long put off activity; something that you heard fleetingly will suddenly seem much more relevant; or you may feel the need to reestablish contact with people you know share your passion. Resist the temptation to take impulsive actions that may not help the cause of space, and could even hurt its progress. Before acting, ask yourself how much selfish motivation is contained in the act.

If you are unsure of what action to take, turn inward again, and trust that the right course will present itself. If no appropriate action seems obvious, there is no need to remain idle. Apply yourself to whatever feels closest to the mark. It is important, however, to remain open to any new insights that may arise that will provide clearer direction.

Spiritual Space

If we dare to consider this journey to original passion in a spiritual context, the search as described here is synonymous with the transcendent journey to higher consciousness that men and woman have aspired to for millennia. Seeking to understand your urge to move into space is to directly experience the primordial force of evolution moving within you.

To help clarify this statement, let's look at what we mean by 'evolution' in the way it is used here. Science is beginning to recognize that evolution is a phenomenon that permeates the entire universe. Darwin's theory of biological evolution is just one expression of evolution's perpetual process of matter organizing itself into increasingly higher forms of complexity. This process has been on-going since the big bang, and occurs in every moment and every square centimeter of time and space. The spiritual dimension is added when we accept that a higher intelligence is guiding evolution's march.

The creative force of evolution abounds all around us. Every time we stand in awe of a natural or man-made wonder we are directly connecting with that force. If we can stay with that experience long enough, it can have a transcendent affect on us. Indeed, if you are sensitive enough, the movement of evolution is obvious everywhere. But most of us are so dense we need dramatic example of evolution to experience even an inkling of the universal dimension. Man landing on the Moon is such an example. The birth of child is another.

While evolution is occurring in all places at all times, some of its manifestations, at least from our limited perspective, are more apparent than others. It's easier to see evolution unfolding in the bloom of a flower than it is in a rockslide, for example.

This is why there is so much spiritual potential in the space settlement dream. What could be more dramatic than witnessing life evolving from a single-planet to a multi-planetary existence? Those who feel the pull of the space cause have a unique opportunity for Awakening because evolution is so much more obvious here than it is in other aspects of life.

The Edge of Evolution

The glaring fact of our current situation, of course, is that our space dream is not yet manifest. We feel only the evolutionary tension impelling us to take action and make it a reality. The transcendent 'whoosh' experience won't occur for most people until we have done our part in creating that new reality. We are at the stage of the flower bud, not the bloom; the pregnant woman, not the newborn.

In this stage we represent only the potential for the extension of life into the cosmos, with no guarantee that we will succeed. Humanity is the means by which evolution has determined to achieve its end. Yet, while we are commanded to take this action, we still have free will to act or not. But to not act in building civilizations beyond this planet is quite literally to go against the very demand of the universe. If we are resolved to participate in this effort, we must be willing to get very close to the evolutionary tension throbbing within us, and boldly act in accordance with it. If these ideas seem a bit heavy to consider, look into your own desire for space and you may begin to see the truth contained in them.

I am not suggesting here that everyone interested in space needs to embrace the spiritual dimension. Opportunists are as likely as the pure of heart to participate in the actual construction of space settlements. But, it will be the deliberate actions of those

who are most aligned with the evolutionary imperative who will provide the leadership and set the whole space settlement enterprise in motion.

The settlement of space is an unbelievably difficult project for our species. Its success will require sustained determination of legions of individuals around the globe. To get this project moving forward in a meaningful way will first require that those already enthusiastic get behind the effort with far greater integrity than they have yet exhibited. It just won't happen any other way.

Remember, the space settlement dream was born in you so that you would strive for its fulfillment in this generation, not defer it to the next. It was, and is, a call to you to take some action in this lifetime; and if you are not meant to see it through to completion, then you must at least lay a foundation on which those who will follow can build.

This process of renewing your passion for space will bring you, if you are fortunate, to a very lonely place. It is a place where you realize that success or failure of this entire enterprise rests solely in your hands. Will you ignore this responsibility, or will you give yourself over to it regardless of how you may feel about your own capabilities? Taking right action, despite how you may feel inside, is not only necessary to complete the evolution of humanity into space, but it is the very means to your own spiritual Awakening, and quite possibly that of the entire planet as well.

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