



STUFFED IN THE DRAWER

Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

Come on now. Admit it. You have one too. We all have one.

Everyone has a place where they put all the stuff they don't want to deal with. It may be a closet, a box or a drawer, but whatever the receptacle, the stuff is there patiently waiting. You promise yourself you'll get to it as soon as you can, but you never seem to get to it.

The space gets fuller and fuller until you find yourself avoiding it, frightened and ashamed of what it represents. Obviously, it was never supposed to get that bad. You were only putting things aside because you didn't have enough time to take care of them at the time. You are, after all, an organised responsible adult who runs a pretty tight ship. It's just that you can't always face things when they spring forth, and so the drawer holds them for a more opportune time.

Higher and higher the pile grows, and with each added envelope you become more inclined not to look. You start to make mental deadlines: "I will clear it all out this Sunday!" The day arrives, and you find a hundred different things to do — anything but look in that dreaded drawer. It's obviously a fools' game, because the stuff won't go away of its own accord. The final cleanup is inevitable.

Well, my friends, Pesach is the deadline of all deadlines. All choice in the matter is taken out of your hands, and that drawer must be cleaned out. You have two options: (1) sift through all the papers, wondering how you survived this long without paying attention to their content; or, (2) throw the whole thing into the trash and pray for deliverance.

I suggest you try the former of the two. You will find lots of interesting information lurking between the old bills, such as where all the money went last winter or why you seem never to have enough in the bank. Yes, you will have to face some uncomfortable facets of who you really are, like admitting for the first time that you really don't give all that much to charity. But if Pesach is about anything, it's about rooting out misconceptions about one's true self and burning the chametz of self-serving delusions.

More vital to clear out than the closet of junk or the drawer of old bills is the corner of our mind cluttered with all that we prefer not to deal with. It's a place seething with all kinds of awkward feelings and misplaced ideas. It's a place of total, unspeakable anarchy. You keep the lid on tightly, hoping nothing will spring out uninvited.

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לזכר ולעילוי נשמת
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לזכר ולעילוי נשמת
הרבנית הצדקנית
חיה שרה בת הרב שלמה
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We say to ourselves that we will get around to it, that one day soon we will face these gremlins and work them out of our system. It will be erev Shabbos, no, perhaps erev Rosh Chodosh. Then when the time comes, well, we're too busy. Maybe next week.

The rubbish piles up ever higher, you become confused and even frightened every time the door to that hidden place is opened. You figure out all kinds of reasons not to visit that inner locale and allow yourself to go on as if it doesn't even exist.

The tragedy is that it does exist, and by trying so hard to avoid it, we become totally captive to its content. Our minds get muddled, and our hearts become hardened — all because we really don't want to visit that dark, dank corner of ourselves.

Sefer Shemos ends with the depiction of the setting up of the Mishkan and its celebratory beginnings amid the assembly of all Bnei Yisrael. The Tabernacle was created so that the Yidden would have a sanctuary, a safe place no matter where their wanderings took them. This was deemed necessary after the debacle of the Egel HaZahav. When the people mistakenly thought that Moshe was lost in the heavens, they were overcome with confusion and misgivings. They sought something, anything that would act as a safeguard amid such turbulence. Their mistake was seeking a symbol of their own making rather than one Divinely given.

Theirs was an all-too-human mistake. They chose to ignore the truth that the only true stability is found in Hashem. Rather they grasped at the threads of mortal understanding, hoping that in so doing they would gain a semblance of control. They should have known that creating a calf of gold was wrong. By ignoring what they should have known to be true, they set themselves up for their own downfall.

Which is what can happen to us when we deny our own faults and misadventures. We regress back to the slave mentality that is Egypt and lose our spirituality.

Chazal tell us that each family is a mini-Mishkan, a sanctuary where one can find safety and hope. But this holds true only when the home is built according to Hashem's Will and not our own. The Torah describes at great length the building of the first Sanctuary. After each act, we are reminded that it was all done "as Hashem had commanded Moshe." Again and again, we are reminded that a true sanctuary must be built according "as Hashem commanded Moshe."

Be this as it may be, we often lose sight of this lofty ideal in day-to-day life. We forget that we are created in Hashem's image and are meant to live spiritual lives. The bills come in, the kids act up, we lose our tempers and we become just plain exhausted. Stuff builds up in the dark drawer in our minds. We feel anger, disillusionment and the last thing we feel like doing is plowing through our mental junk pile. But cleanup time has arrived!

There's a choice, though. You can tackle the pile, work through item by item, accepting your mistakes and trying to rectify ill will. Or, you can dump the whole mess out into the landfill of foul smelling mental anguish. The problem with this option is that you've gone through all the turmoil without learning anything from it. Chances are, you'll just replay the same problems over and over again.

Retelling the Pesach experience every year reminds us that leaving Mitzrayim is an ongoing event. Our homes become sanctuaries from the winds of outside currents only when we build them according to Hashem's Will. Then we can look at each other as the Cherubim did, looking into each other's heart, willing to give through our dedication to Hashem's Will. In this way we can pass through the wilderness with "the cloud of Hashem" by day and the "illumination" of Hashem by night. Through good times and even through the night of difficult moments.

Directly following the Parshos of Shmos we are introduced to those of Vayikra. Here we begin to understand the necessity of purity, both in mind and in manner. The Sefer's first word sports a small Aleph, which brings to us many important lessons. Perhaps one can see this in terms of our cluttered up drawers. To face the real self you must first acquire a sense of humility. If you can't see beyond the overblown image of your leavened self, then you will never deal with the junk box that smoulders within. The small Aleph indicates this, Hashem calls us to purity, but does so to the humble human we should be.

So, happy cleaning and remember: Soon we will all venture forth from Egypt together. Hopefully, we'll be leaving all the rubbish behind.

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