



DE-CLUTTERING: HOW AND WHY TO “SPRING-CLEAN” YOUR LIFE

By Yvonne Thomas, Ph.D.

As we enter into the month of April, several things are frequently associated with this time of year: warmer weather, flowers regenerating, and spring cleaning or what I call “DE-CLUTTERING.” In general, the concept of “clutter” is very interesting. I describe clutter as a collection of unnecessary, unused, and/or obsolete items, which may be kept in a haphazard, often excessive way beyond what would seem logical. Clutter often can be found in places such as one’s home, workspace, and car. To me, the really fascinating part about clutter is that it can EXTERNALLY reflect a person’s INTERNAL EMOTIONAL CLUTTER. (By “emotional clutter,” I am referring to such things as unresolved feelings, thoughts, and conflicts with oneself and/or with others.) Examples can include the following: A generally messy, chaotic home, workspace, or car can symbolize one’s INTERNAL chaos and confusion. Having EXTERNAL closets packed with stuff often can reflect how stuffed away and closeted one’s own FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS may also be. Having uncluttered and presentable FRONT rooms of one’s home, while the non-public BACK rooms are a mess, may indicate how a person shows a more polished image of oneself to the world, while covering up a less “together” part.

Since the concept of “clutter” may not be as simple as it seems, likewise, the notion of “de-cluttering” one’s external space has its own share of complexities. You see, people typically do NOT just arbitrarily “happen to have” clutter in their lives. Certainly, a person can keep things due to nostalgia, sentimentality, not wanting to let go of happier times represented by some items, etc. Frequently, however, clutter is actually a DISTRACTION that a person has SUBCONSCIOUSLY created to prevent one’s awareness of uncomfortable areas in his or her life. As a result, by being surrounded by some tangible, EXTERNAL chaos, a person can be insulated from dealing with his or her more internal, emotionally-based issues which actually NEED to be the focus of one’s attention, but, for whatever reason, are too uncomfortable to address.

Significant problems can arise if de-cluttering doesn’t occur, including overall feelings of depression, anxiety, insecurity, and being overwhelmed, as well as one neglecting major areas of his or her life (such as love, career, and self-esteem). As a consequence, a person may live in a very small “comfort zone,” which, over time, can start to feel more SUFFOCATING than comfortable. This can create a big dilemma for the person who may be ready to break out of his or her limiting “box” of life, but may be too scared and/or unsure how to go about this.

De-cluttering tends to work best if done in STAGES to help minimize resistance, fear, monotony, and stress. Make written posted schedules that are realistic and not overwhelming, have nurturing, motivational rewards periodically, and be AWARE of the feelings and thoughts being triggered during the de-cluttering process so that once the clutter is under control, one will recognize what OTHER parts of his or her life really are needing one’s attention and focus. And take note that one should de-clutter several times a year (NOT just during springtime!) to prevent both internal AND external “piles” of chaos and distraction.

If one is unable to get the courage, motivation, and/or game plan organized to de-clutter one’s life, or if one doesn’t understand how to open up and BROADEN his or her life AFTER the clutter is decreased or gone, seeking some assistance from a Psychologist specializing in this area could lead to some very empowering results.

Happy spring-cleaning!

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