

# Out of Africa - A Lesson in Uncluttering from my Parents

When I was a little girl my parents had a rule that before Christmas we had to sort through all our toys and choose one or two that we really loved and wanted to keep. All the rest were boxed up and taken to the orphanage for children that didn't have any toys. We were told that unless we did this Santa would not be bringing any new toys to us.

There was a tinge of clinging to some things but mostly there was the "feel good," idea of some other little kid enjoying something that I had given them that predominated. This ritual of tidying and organizing was celebratory and exciting (especially for my Mom - and it was catching!) If anything I felt a twinge of guilt for not giving my most favorite toy - because if it was my favorite then surely it would give some little girl more pleasure than the things I was giving away.

I wondered if my memory was serving me right and asked my Dad. His response was:

"Year end-stocktaking : Throw out the clutter.

Discard all the things you have out-grown even if they are OK.

Review the treasures remaining.

Choose some that you really like and give them to someone  
deserving so that they can share the pleasure you have had.

Retain some treasured favorites without being greedy about it.

Tidy everything up and wait for your cup to overflow again.

Those, more or less, are the ideas I had in mind - if I remember correctly!"

All rituals are external symbolic events that point to and teach an internal and eternal truth. This simple ritual has continued to inform my life and teach me at different levels and because of this it becomes sacramental - I trust it will continue to reveal its secrets to me as I ponder it every Christmas.

The internal clutter of the mind are all the cherished beliefs, judgments, fears and supposed needs to which we cling so tenaciously. They constitute habitual ways in which we respond to the world - and are therefore what we consider our personalities. We actually outgrew these ideas and attitudes a long time ago but they sit hidden in nooks and crannies in the cupboards of our minds and we continue to live our lives according to them without even realizing this is what we are doing.

These beliefs and feelings, were okay and helped us form a rudimentary identity that helped us survive successfully in the world. Just like toys they were teaching aids. We need to go through our cupboards and reassess them and decide what can be discarded without danger or deprivation to ourselves. We need to clean out and tidy up.

Examination will reveal that they can really be discarded without there being any loss to true identity. Our true identity, that is free of fear, shame, resentments and needs, is a treasure - a pearl resting in the outer crusty shell of a protective fear-body not really needed anymore - a body that never was who we essentially are, after all - at least not in any permanent sense.

Releasing and giving up old ways of thinking, feeling and acting in the world, leaves a silent, empty space that is able to be filled with love, joy and peace in such abundance that it overflows and spills into the world. We no longer have to choose to give. We no longer "feel good," about giving - the giving is a spilling out that we have no control of anyway. If we

remove barriers, grace, love and peace flow freely through us, because it is within us and without us - it is the ocean within which we swim. Salvation comes by doing the work of uncluttering and the gift to us is that we become the cup overflowing. Nothing is ever lost by giving away. The opposite is true - the more you give away, the more you will receive.

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