

Get Unstuck, Don't Become Unglued - High Holiday Reflections (2009/5769)  
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We all have areas in our life in which we are stuck. I was stuck... in my basement. You might have even called it “The Dungeon” had you seen it. I started “The Basement Project” ten years ago. Marc and I had just gotten married and I moved into his house in a suburb of Chicago, which had an unfinished basement. Well, I had *no* problem filling it in with my crates of memories, teaching and counseling materials, and other items of value.

I have *always* been a “saver”. It was hard for me to give away *anything* because you never know what might come in handy down the road. And while I am very organized at work, home was another story. When guests came over to visit, I hid the basement from them by steering them away from that part of the tour because I couldn't stuff the basement contents into a closet like I could with the other rooms in my house. And to find anything in my basement, oy! I first had to navigate through a maze of boxes and then remember which crate... and then which file folder... contained the item I was seeking. Eventually, as I was having a harder and harder time finding things, I had to face the fact that all of my clutter was getting the better of me.

You're probably wondering how my story is relevant to the High Holidays and more importantly to you. Well, according to one of my best counseling professors, adults have between 6-7 personal growth goals at *any* one time in their lives, but don't always know how to go about the change process. So, I wrote this to offer encouragement and ideas to anyone who is *considering* or already working on making a change during this High Holiday season. And while this essay may seem to be only about my basement, that is just my story. As you listen to it, think about areas of your life in which you are interested in making a change.

Every summer for the first 9 years of my marriage, I *claimed* to be working on the “basement project”, but I made very little progress. In fact, I made so little progress, I was almost unable to move to Colorado because I didn't know how to complete this colossal project in the two months Marc and I had to pack up our house. So, *I ended up taking the basement with me to Colorado*, which reminds me of that expression, “Wherever you go, you take yourself with you”. The essence of behavioral self-help is that we are both the problem and the solution! It wasn't until *recently* that I saw myself capable of being the solution. How did I shift my thinking to believing that I could reach my goal? I think this transformation was due to a conversation I had with a CBE member last year at this time.

Last year on Rosh Hashanah, Marti Arnold, Rabbi Jamie's wife and I chatted while we were waiting for services to begin. I mentioned to her that I had been working on a project for a long time and finally realized that I needed to get some help with it. To my surprise, she was also working on a project- starting her own personal organizer business! Coincidence? Probably not. I believe that when you sincerely open yourself up to change and ask God or the universe for help, the help you need often comes your way. In the past, *despite* my strong determination to reach my goal, I was always trying to “go it alone”. Perhaps I didn't seek help because I figured organizing a basement isn't rocket science! After all, I have a master's degree and many initials after my name that show I am capable of achieving goals. However, if you have seen that reality TV show, “Clean House”, you just might understand why this was truly an *overwhelming* project for me.

So, how did I overcome feeling immobilized and develop the willingness to put my time and energy into making the basement project my first priority this summer? **I was ready to change and I finally asked for help.** Marti helped me move from the contemplation to preparation stage of change

by being both hopeful and validating of my struggle. Later, my personal organizer, Tracy, who is a good friend of mine, led me to the action and maintenance stages by working side by side with me until I was confident enough to complete the project on my own. I even saw a counselor and a life coach on alternate weeks. I was clearly ready, able, and willing to change.

What motivated me to finally change? And what were the results? The main factor that compelled me to complete the basement project was my upcoming 10-year anniversary. I was tired of having a chaotic basement and wanted to simplify my life, so was willing to put in the work to develop an organizational system. I also felt that in order for the quality of my marriage and life to keep getting better, it was essential to *let go of regrets* by disposing of reminders of incidents long since past. The results? I feel great about giving away items that I no longer needed, yet other people valued. Since my basement is organized, I can find things more easily now. I also feel empowered to have gained a new perspective on my past. In a sense, I was clearing away the clutter of my mind, heart, and soul.

So, where are you stuck in your life? And what are you hiding from others? If you're ready to address one of these areas of your life, then I encourage you to visualize yourself at these services next year having reached your goal - whether it's a new one or one you have been working on for 10 or more years. What steps are you willing to take to reach that goal? Are you willing to set aside your pride and ask others for help? Are you willing to allocate time and money to receive that assistance? I hope you'll start by taking the opportunity of turning to someone and talking with them about it. They might *well* be the *catalyst* to helping you attain your goal.