

**Week #1 of the 2-Week Series, "TIDYING UP"**

## **GET YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER**

**March 1, 2020**

**Rev. Richard Maraj**

**Rev. Richard Maraj:** So, today, we're talking about decluttering and getting rid of things that don't serve us any longer. So, how many people here have a cupboard, a closet, or a drawer that is so crammed and full that you're kind of afraid to open it? Anybody have one of those? How many people? And the thought of cleaning and organizing that cupboard or drawer or closet – just the thought of it – mentally exhausts you and kind of gets you depressed? How many people have so much stuff that you often wish you just had more space for your stuff?

**[Congregation laughs]**

We have a lot of stuff! And it often creates a lot of clutter in our lives, whether we realize it or not. Here is a clutter quiz I want you to see if you identify with any of these:

How many people in here have a drawer full of Tupperware, yogurt or butter container lids that do not match the containers? Anybody have any of those?

**[Congregation laughs]**

How many people have some clothes that are no longer in fashion, or don't fit, but you're still hanging on, hoping one day you'll wear them again?

How many people have bookshelves that are a combination of other books you've read and books you will never read? Anybody?

How many people have a bicycle in the garage, or exercise equipment somewhere that you have not used in at least a year?

And then the final clutter question is: how many people have bags – plastic bags, full of plastic bags – somewhere in your house?

**[Congregation laughs]**

If you do, you might be a pack rat or a clutter-holic!

**[Congregation laughs]**

We laugh at that, because we know it's true that we all do that. That we have that in common. The interesting thing is, it's actually getting worse! Studies show that – even though families over the years have gotten smaller and smaller – our houses have increased. We have more square footage, because we have more and more stuff. We always want more stuff, to the point that we're filling our basements, attics, garages. We're filling storage units that are not even on the same grounds as our home. I mean, it is absolutely amazing! And we always like getting more stuff, thinking it's going to make our lives better... When, actually, having so much stuff actually makes our lives a little bit worse. It makes it a little more crowded. It puts more focus and attention on our stuff, and actually reduces our ability to enjoy it. It pulls us from the actual kind of life that we really want to live.

So today, we're going to start a two-week series on a book entitled, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*. And part one is going to be called, "Get Your House in Order."

How many people have read this book, or heard of this book? Okay, cool. I love this book! Now this woman, Marie Kondo, from the time she was five, she was fascinated with organizing and cleaning up. She would come home from school and, when most kids would go play, she would go organize something. And at 15, she started studying religiously different techniques of organizing. And what she did was develop her own technique and her own method that she says is so powerful, it will transform your life. That it is magical! If you have two things: the right mindset and use the right technique – hers – that it will literally... What a coincidence!

***[Congregation laughs]***

It will literally change and transform your life. It will not only reduce clutter and help you get organized, but it will create more ease and flow, and you will have a more fulfilling life. She absolutely believes it will change and transform your life.

And she is talking Tidying with a capital “T” ... not, you know, picking something up and then putting it back in its place. She’s talking, capital “T,” which stands for Transformation. It will transform your life.

And so, she says that we have some poor ideas and, and misbeliefs... that we’re messy and not organized and never do this. And she says that, with the right mindset and right technique, it’ll work. She said we believe things like you should just do a little bit a day; you know, one room at a time, a little bit ongoing. And she says that’ll keep you on a cycle forever! And every six months or a year keep cleaning up, and getting more junk, and keep doing it. She says that is not the way to do it.

**Her technique is this: do it all at once.** Do it all at once; make it an event! But if you really want to transform your life, she says, dramatic change all at once – of picking and choosing everything in our house – will actually change your mind. Because the other one, you’re keeping in your pattern. You just keep doing small things and you keep repeating it. But she says if you transform it once, and if you’re that committed to making it an event – if you’re serious and ready to be changed and have your life flow in a different way – if you’re really that ready to do it all, it will transform your life.

**The second thing she says is: do things by category, not location.** Don’t go room to room; start with a particular thing and complete it all, and then move to the next thing. Because sometimes we have things in different places. Like how many people have so many clothes that you have clothes in other closets of other bedrooms, other than your own bedroom? Anybody? So, she says what you should do is get all of our stuff together in one room.

**And then the third thing she says is: it isn’t about storage, it’s about discarding.** She said when we think of getting organized, the first thing we do is buy those Rubbermaid tubs. We get all these organizing things. And she said what we’re really doing is relocating and reorganizing junk that we don’t need. It is just organized hoarding, is basically what it is. And it actually doesn’t help because all that clutter is actually still there.

So, here’s what she says: take all your clothes – we’ll start with clothes. That’s the first thing, she says. Take all your clothes and put them on your bed. Get them from every location, and put all your clothes on your bed all at once. **And here’s reason number one: because you will finally know exactly what you actually have.** That sometimes, because they’re in different locations or duplications, there’s all kinds of things we don’t know. And it’s actually sucks up a lot more energy than we realize. That it’s important to know what you have. For you to manage what you have – to organize and to choose what you want and don’t want – you have to first know what you have.

Like for me... The other day, like, I'm always running out of peanut butter. And I put peanut butter either in my fridge, or in this particular cupboard. Now, I was thinking to myself, "*Gosh, I need more peanut butter.*" And then about two days later, I was looking for something else, and went in a cupboard I usually go in... and what did I find? Two peanut butters and an almond butter!

**[Congregation laughs]**

I have way more peanut butter and butters of all nut kinds than I realized! And this is how it is with our lives. We end up finding things, because we don't know what we have.

**And the second thing about all things all at once is, to not just know what we have, but to know how much we have.** Can you imagine if you took all your clothes, from all of their locations, and threw them on your bed, how high that pile would be? I mean, it is absolutely amazing; we have a ton of stuff! We often think that we don't have enough, that we need more, more, more. If you piled up all your clothes, you would realize you live in a world of abundance... in fact, even excess. It is absolutely amazing! We keep wanting more and more, even though we have so much.

And it's important to realize how much we have. I mean, she was telling the story about somebody who had 160 pairs of shoes. You know, 10 sets of jeans. I mean, some of them have thrown away bags of clothes: like 10 or 12 garbage bags full of clothes. I mean, it is amazing how much stuff we have! And the question is: when is enough, enough?

We have this idea that if some is good, more is better, and too much is just perfect.

**[Congregation laughs]**

We love stuff! We keep cramming it in, thinking it's going to bring us more and more happiness, you know. And yet, that's abundance. We have an abundance – and even an over-abundance – of stuff in our lives, and yet our mind keeps thinking, "*Lack; not enough; gotta get more.*"

And so, the thing I like about this method is that it brings you face-to-face with your stuff. But I'm not talking clothes; it brings us face-to-face with realizing what our choices have been. How we've chosen to spend our money. Of the things that we like and don't like. It tells us about our styles. It tells us about who we were and who we want to be. It tells us a lot!

See, our closets and our lives reflect our kind of mindset and our values. And so, **when we start this process, four things seem to happen: we need to be aware of what we have; be responsible for it; reassess; and, then, reset.**

Socrates once said, "*The unexamined life is not worth living*"... which really means, life is so worthy of living, we need to examine and look at how we're living it. That we need to really ask ourselves, "*Do I want to keep living this way, cramming all my clothes in places? Do I just want to keep getting more and more, and not purging or releasing? Is this lifestyle – as it relates to my clothes, and how I have my home – really working for me? Is it supporting the kind of joy and the life that I really want to have?*"

And (Kondo) says before we get onto (the process, we need) to ask those questions. We want to get clear. What is it you want? We all want to tidy. We tend to do it every six months. So, there's results; what would be the benefit you're looking for? What would be the change that would make a difference? What is it that would improve your life? What is it that would be better? And so, she said that's a very important thing for us to think about. What is it that we want our lives – particularly, our home life – to look like?

And so, she was talking to one of her clients, and her client said, *“Well, what I would like is for it to be more feminine.”* She says, *“What do you mean by that?”* And this is what her client said: *“I would like to come home to a clutter-free home that looks as beautiful as a hotel suite, with a pink bedspread, white antique lamp. I would like classical music playing while I’m doing my yoga. And then be able to sit in a nice, beautiful place while I drink some herbal tea. Then take a bath with my favorite aromatherapy oils, and relax before I go to bed.”*

And I thought, *“Wow!”*

***[Congregation laughs]***

But Marie Kondo loved the answer. Because we always talk about creating our vision and our goals... and, yet, we don’t always think about: *“What would I like my home to look like? And feel like? What would the flow of my home be, ideally, to support the kind of life I really want to live?”* And she said even go a little further: not just your vision, what you want – but why? And the “why” could be: *“Because I want to feel comforted, and nurtured in my own home. I want to feel safe and pampered and taken care of.”*

And, ultimately, what we want is we want to treat ourselves well. You know, there are other areas of our lives we can’t control... but in our home, what it’s calling us to do is: how do you want to care for you? How do you want to love you? So you can be your best in all the things you do and to support all the people in your life>

As I got more into this, something I realized is: this was more than just clothes. This was a deeper look at how we’re living our lives. How we’re showing up. And, particularly, how are we treating ourselves. Our level of self-care. Our level of support. Our level of love. And how much we’re able to give of ourselves and give to ourselves.

So after we get that, the next one is to discard. We are really not good at letting go. We believe in holding on as much as possible, and it’s hard for us. Sometimes it’s like a vise grip for us to let go of stuff of all kinds, including clothes. You ever, going through that process, are like, *“Oh, no; but I love that!”? “I know it’s old, but I love it. I know it’s got holes, but I love that!”*

***[Congregation laughs]***

Or, you know, *“My mon – or my uncle – gave me that. I gotta keep that!”* Or it’s like, *“You know how much money that cost?!? I am keeping that!”*

***[Congregation laughs]***

I mean, we have all kinds of excuses; we all have lists of them! And we just won’t let it go. Regardless of how much pile high that bed thing is, we don’t want to let it go.

Emmett Fox once said, *“If you can’t let go, you can’t make spiritual progress.”*

And here’s my thing. If we have a hard time letting go of a blouse or an outfit, how harder would it be to let go of the past? To let go resentment? To let go of some old dream? To let go of some limiting idea about your self-worth? Letting go is a powerful thing. And if we can’t do it in our own home, with our own stuff, when will we do it? Sometimes we’re very attached to “stuff,” and to certain things. But we shouldn’t get attached to all of the things to the point that we aren’t willing to let any go.

Remember that story of the rich man who asked, “How do I inherit eternal life? How do I get into eternal life?” And Jesus said, “Sell all your possessions and come and follow me.” And he walked away very sad, because he wasn’t giving up his stuff. He had stuff, but he didn’t really have stuff. His stuff had him.

Let me ask you the question: Do you think Jesus really wanted him to be poor? Do you think Jesus wanted to have nothing? What he really wanted was him to be free. He wanted him to find peace: that place where you could let go of some things, but still know there is a deeper truth. And real joy and happiness doesn’t come from that stuff. Yes, enjoy it! But it is not the source of happiness. Holding on to things and being attached to them should never prevent us from experiencing peace and love and joy.

So, what things do you need to let go of? And are you willing to even just start with the practice of letting go of certain things in terms of our clothing?

The other thing about letting go that I think is important is: often when we think of letting go, we think we’re losing it. You know, “I don’t have it anymore. I’ve got less. It’s depleting me.” Actually, letting go gives us more peace, more energy, more joy. It doesn’t actually deplete us; it makes us feel lighter and brighter and more joyful.

On Friday, I did half of my closet. And just even that half of my closet... Well, I walk into my closet now with my right eye closed and just my left eye open to only see that side.

***[Congregation laughs]***

So that’s helping a lot! But I have to tell you, even half of a closet – with only 30 or 40 pieces left – makes me feel lighter. In fact, sometimes it’s relief. You, people reach a certain age, and then they downsize. And most of them feel relief. I don’t have to keep putting all that energy into managing all that stuff, and taking care of all that stuff. And the thing is: it robs us of energy now. Letting go and discarding is one of the most powerful practices: spiritually, physically, and emotionally. And if we can’t do it in our own home with our clothes, how are we going to evolve to that level to let go of bigger things? To lighten our lives, to feel more peace, more ease and more joy?

(Kondo) says an interesting thing: imagine what your clothes would feel like because of the way you treat them. I thought that was brilliant! Because some of my clothes are suffocating, being trapped so tight!

***[Congregation laughs]***

You ever have your closets so tight that, on hangers, you have to reach in there and pry it out? I mean, I’ve got stuff folded, just wrapped up, stuffed in places. Could you imagine treating our stuff like that? Treating ourselves like that?

One of the things about not letting go is to realize things come into our lives for a reason, a season, or a lifetime. And sometimes things that were good and important to us – in terms of clothing and other things – were there, and they did what their job was. Now we just need to thank them, honor them, and release them. And, for the things that are there, to treat them a little better. A little more space. Maybe fold them. Take care of them a little better. Because it’s about honoring our stuff... which is really also about honoring ourselves and the kind of life that we really want to live. So that the letting go and discarding part is really powerful and is really important.

And then, the final one... And this one is the money shot. Because this one is: how do you decide what to let go? Is it expensive? Is it in style? I mean, what is the measure? And her measure is, just love it. Her measure is this. She says, take it in your hand – every single piece separately – and ask this question:

*“Does this bring me joy? Does this support me in the kind of life I want to live?”* To tune in and ask yourself that question. Because that’s really what the goal is: to bring you more joy. To do better self-care. To bring the best of you out. To live. To make a difference in other people’s lives.

So, suddenly, the measurement is joy. That’s the standard of, *“Should I keep this or not keep it?”* So, even when I’m doing my half a closet on Friday, what I noticed was the same, *“Yes, I like it, don’t like it, it’s stained, blah, blah, blah, out, in.”* But in asking the question, *“Does this bring me joy?”* was a totally, totally different mindset! A totally different experience! And I could connect— regardless of how it looked – with, *“Is for my highest good?”* And I realized I was making choices to support me and to build a better life. To build a more joyful life. Not picking what looks good, or blah, blah, blah... Although that’s important, too!

**[Congregation laughs]**

But, anyway! And that tuning in at a deeper level I found profound. You know, we do things... Like, people do muscle testing. They’ll touch a banana and do this special testing, or touch a donut and then, you know, go in it for guidance about, *“Should I make this investment? Is this the right relationship I should get into?”* We do that. But I never heard anybody do it with clothes! And yet I thought it was brilliant. Because, you know where a successful life begins? In here. **[Points to heart]** And if we can’t do it in our own home, for those things, how are we going to let it filter out to other places?

And so, I found that profoundly important and moving. My mom always used to say this phrase: *“Guard your mental house. Don’t let anything into your mental house that’s negative or less than you are and want to be.”* Well, guarding your “house house” is to guard it from things that take your energy down, or you don’t like. We have the authority to say “Yes” or “No” to what comes into our sphere and our surroundings. And why not only pick things – whether it’s clothes, or whatever it is – that make us feel good? That support us, and help us express the spirit in us even greater?

Marie Kondo asked this question: *“Can you continue living with clothes that don’t give you pleasure? Or seeing a pile of unread books that really don’t inspire you at all? Or wearing accessories that don’t make you happy?”* And she said the correct answer is, “No.” Because we have the choice and the power to choose and select and hold on to only things that serve us in the greatest and best way.

You know, this isn’t just about cleaning up. To me, it’s a microcosm of life. If we want our lives to get better, we need to be aware of what we have. We need to be responsible for the choices that we’ve made. We need to reassess, and then reset. You know, clutter is a sign that an area of our lives has gotten a little cramped, a little crowded. We’ve gotten a little disconnected. And it’s an opportunity for us to choose again, and to create a better system that will support us in greater ways.

Tidying is more than spring cleaning. (Kondo) actually says it’s an inner dialogue with ourselves about who we are, how we’re showing up, what we’re doing, and how we really want to live and support ourselves in a greater way.

This week, here’s your assignment. Take all of your clothes – from all of their locations – and throw them on your bed. See how high that pile is, and make some choices. Take each piece in your hand and ask, *“Does this spark my joy?”* And if it doesn’t, thank it for the role it played and the way it helped you, and let it go. And then, for the things that do, support them and care for them in a greater and more wonderful way.

Tidying up our closet and our stuff is really tidying up our past, cleaning up our space, and creating greater ease and flow in our lives to bring us more joy. Tidying up will change and transform. Tidying up

is magic. It really will transform our lives, but it starts at home; it starts with us; and it starts by getting your house in order.

God bless you all!

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*Thank you to volunteer Dot Sagnis for transcribing this message*