The Benefits of Simplicity

The beginning of a new year is a great time to take stock, to look at one's life and see what matters and what has crept in that interferes with what matters.

Much of life follows Occam's Razor which says that the simplest, most elegant solution to any problem is the most likely to be correct. Most organizing needs follow Occam's Razor, and that's a good thing. Complexity and our difficulties in using our systems give us clear signposts for knowing when our systems, or lack of them, are not serving us.

Simplicity is often not easy to attain. Creating systems is sometimes like writing – ideas tumble out and there is a pell-mell scramble to write them down in any form before they disappear, then the writing must be refined down to avoid fatiguing the reader, ensure clarity, and maximize benefit. So it is with systems that facilitate everyday activities: the simpler they are, the easier and more energy saving they will be to use and maintain, and the greater the benefit that can be gotten from them. So the original system idea might be something like 'put all papers that need to be filed in a tray'. But on review, you might realize that using a file for papers that need to be filed would be simpler still. (Note: I am not recommending this approach – it only works if you have weekly filing session otherwise the 'Filing' file quickly becomes useless.) Far better still would be to create a file for each type of document you need to save and to directly and immediately put them there.

The benefits of simplicity apply to our belongings as well as our systems. The more belongings we have, the more time and effort are required to manage them. Since managing things isn't really fun, and most people would rather not spend a lot of time maintaining their things, the more things we own, the more we are either forced to invest time and energy in tending them or to live in the mess that untended belongings inevitably create. We acquire more things expecting that they will make our lives better when, in reality, they frequently make our lives largely worse. The more that we streamline our belongings, the more that we will be able to spend time doing things we enjoy more than managing our belongings and the more harmonious our surroundings will be.

Simplicity also applies to how we use our time. The more external demands placed upon us, the less we are able to experience the simple joys of being: breathing, feeling good in our bodies, moving, actually experiencing all our senses rather than taking them for granted, and being able to calm our emotions and thoughts.

The modern world is full of complexity and our lives operate at what seems to be an ever-increasing pace, keeping many people in a constant state of stress and anxiety. Indeed, it seems that many of the things we bring into out lives to relieve stress and tension often lead to increased stress instead.

By simplifying our lives, we reduce our stress and tension. New Years is a wonderful time to evaluate various aspects and make choices that will serve us better in the coming year:
- What do we own that we do not really use?
- How can we better organize things we use to make using them easier and to get our tasks done more easily?

- How can we best use our time to accomplish our goals in life? What unimportant activities can we let go of that will leave more time for more important activities?
- What expectations do we have of ourselves (or perhaps others) that we can let go of without sacrificing quality of life?
- How can we most wisely use our money to support achieving our goals and dreams and living comfortably? What expenditures do we currently make that are less important?