

Making Room for the New  
*B'chukotai, Leviticus 26:3-27:34*

**D'VAR TORAH BY: RABBI ESTHER L. LEDERMAN**

Early in this week's *parashah*, we encounter the following phrase: *V'yashan mipnei chadash totziu* - You shall have to clear out the old to make room for the new. To what is this in reference? To grain. As the medieval Torah commentator Rashi explained, "The threshing floors will be full of the new grain, but the storehouses will still be so full of the old grain that you will have to move it somewhere else to clear out enough room to put the new grain into them." The Torah is dealing with quite a practical question - that of storage. Often when you get something new - food, clothing, or toys - something needs to be cleared away in order to make space for new things. I live in the mid-Atlantic and I spent most of April moving out winter coats, hats, and gloves to make way for sandals and sundresses - clearing out the old to make way for the new.

Let me push this a little further. A student once asked me, "Does one need to destroy in order to create?" and it was this phrase that came to mind when I ruminated on my response. As any writer knows, and this was certainly my experience as a regular author of sermons, the finished product is the result of numerous drafts, rewrites, and material left on the cutting room floor. By the time I compare the first draft to the final version, so much has changed. It's not simply the choice of language, quotes, and texts. Sometimes, the ideas change as well. In order to create, I often need to get rid of what had come before. We who engage in creative work know that we can't become too enamored of every word or scene we initially develop, as something better might appear as the creative work deepens and continues.

But I'd like to take this teaching a little deeper. I'd like to apply it to our attitudes and mindsets. Sometimes, to embrace new possibilities, or new futures, we need to clear out the old. If I want to change and become a better spouse, daughter, and parent, I need to get rid of old habits and behaviors. If I want to forgive someone, I must clear out my previous experience with them. I believe this applies not just to individuals but also to institutions. If we in the organized and institutional Jewish world want to transform and imagine new ways of Jewish living, we have to let go of things that may no longer be working. If we're going to embrace a multi-access world, in which Jewish experiences and teachings can be found the minute you log onto a device, what do we stop doing and what do we start doing? And in a world in which we are working towards greater racial equity, diversity, and inclusion, what old habits, mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors need clearing out, so we can adopt new ways of being and behaving?

Gloria Steinem once described nostalgia as disempowering. Those who are comforted by the embrace of nostalgia, defined as a sentimental longing or affection for the past, might ponder in what ways our sentimental longing for the past impedes our ability to move forward.

Clearing out the old to make room for the new is also the blessing of Shabbat. Once a week, we are given a gift - the opportunity to clear out the baggage and detritus from the week and make room for freshness and renewal. As the sun sets and the stars begin to appear on Friday night, that is our opportunity to say "good riddance" to anything we no longer need. Think of the Sabbath as a chance to say: "Hello. What am I open to? What new things can I see or sense? What new possibilities await?"

The next time you find yourself saying, "but I've always done it this way," ask yourself: Is it still working for you? It might just be time to make some space for the new grain and anything else that may come in.