

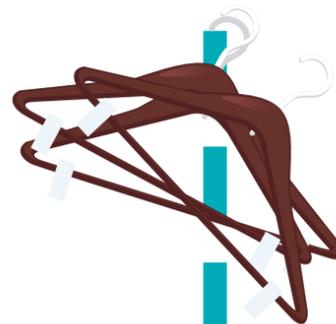
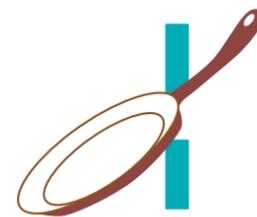


DARE TO




DOWNSIZE

Yael Wiesner



THE KIDS HAVE ALL MOVED OUT, LEAVING YEARS OF MEMORIES IN YOUR CLOSETS, AND NOW YOU'RE DOWNSIZING TO A SMALLER HOME AND NEED TO GET RID OF THE CLUTTER. OR MAYBE YOUR FAMILY IS MAKING THE MOVE OF A LIFETIME TO ERETZ YISRAEL, WITH THE REQUISITE ADJUSTMENT TO SMALL ISRAELI APARTMENT LIFE THAT ENTAILS. MOST OF US HAVE WAY TOO MUCH STUFF TO MAKE THIS MAJOR LIFE CHANGE SEAMLESSLY. HERE, WE UNLOAD YOUR HOME, STEP BY STEP, AND ZONE IN ON YOUR GOALS, SO YOU'LL DISCOVER HOW YOU CAN SMOOTHLY DOWNSIZE

STEP ONE

Establish your mindset.

• **Downsizing** – or better put, decluttering – a lifetime of belongings is one of the most overwhelming things a person can do. The first step in overcoming the downsizing challenge is to keep a clear picture of your ultimate goal in the forefront of your mind. Whether you're selling your home to pay back debts and live near your kids, or moving to Eretz Yisrael to live your dream – this is what you want! If along with that you have to get rid of some belongings, it's a small price to pay for your worthy goal.

• **When** you feel like procrastinating because the task looms so large – just start! Don't wait to feel motivation; it may never come. ("Yes, now I'm really in the mood to sort through the rusty tools in the garage and the boxes buried way up in the attic.")

• **Don't** just throw everything into a

box and wait until you get to the new place to sort through it all. Decluttering, packing, and labeling correctly from the get-go will ease the entire downsizing experience.

• **Get help** when you can – a friend or family member at your side can help you think clearly (or think for you!) while you're sorting through a lifetime of memories, both to hold you in the correct mindset and to keep you working.

• **Get organized.** Susie Schwartz of Chicago, who downsized from a five-bedroom-plus-large-basement home to a three-bedroom condo in the same neighborhood, claims that since she was so organized, the entire process from the decision until the move took only three months. "I had many lists to keep me focused," says Susie. "Every day I checked another few items off my list."

STEP TWO

Declutter in stages.

In general, I'm a big believer that decluttering is the remedy to every household problem. When downsizing, you have to become even more aggressive to make the new space work. Break the big purge into stages so it's more manageable, both physically and emotionally. Before you begin, stock up on packing supplies, tape, and garbage bags to keep the process organized.

Here are the stages you'll need to go through:

1. Get rid of no-brainers. You know, the broken microwave, outdated clothes, old shoes, chipped dishes, books no one has read in years, and puzzles with missing pieces. The moment downsizing becomes a potential option, start tracking how often you use certain items, so you can easily add them to the "no-brainer" pile.

2. Reduce "just in case" items. You won't have room to store these items in the new place. In a smaller home, your top priority is space for the items you need for today and not "one day." If you need something, you can buy it! (That's what you're going to do anyway!) In Israel today, you can get anything. Don't schlep it with you. "Israel has advanced so much over the years — we no longer need to bring Ziploc bags, Raisin Bran, and toilet paper," says Liz Bernstein, Manager of the Pre-Aliyah Department at Nefesh B'Nefesh.

3. Assess bulky kitchen items. Small appliances have to *earn* a place in your new home by being used often. These clunky items can be big space wasters. Keep your favorites and learn to manage without the rest. The same goes for bulky pots and serving pieces. Let's get real — when the family visits, we're using paper goods... so why hold onto an entire collection of oversized serving pieces?

WHEN YOU HAVE THE
RECIPIENT IN MIND, IT'S
MUCH EASIER TO PURGE
YOUR BELONGINGS,
KNOWING THEY'LL BE
PUT TO GOOD USE



4. Sort seforim and books. Weed out the ones no one has picked up in years and donate to a local library or yeshivah. Say goodbye to all old copies of magazines. Don't worry, you'll start a new collection soon enough.

5. Terminate free storage services for your kids. Set a deadline for your adult children to pick up their lost treasures buried in your home and the other useful items they may want. You can invite the grandchildren as well and make an activity out of it, or just create oversized packages for each adult child and send them over to them, to show them that you mean business.

6. Purge paperwork. Now is the time to speak to your accountant and find out which records you really need to hold onto. It would be a shame to schlep pure garbage with you.

7. Figure out furniture. Measure the width and depth of all the furniture you want to keep and determine if it fits into your new home. It often doesn't make sense to bring much of the furniture with you: either because you could buy a piece which doubles as storage, or because furniture is usually oversized, or just not needed in a smaller home. Don't bring furniture just because you own it.

Here's how Susie decided what to move into her new place: "I made a list of each of the rooms in the new apartment and how big they were, with a diagram. I then went through my old house and made a list of every piece of furniture. I tried to envision which pieces would work or which I knew would definitely be coming (my husband's chair, for example) and then wrote down on my diagram where each piece would go in exactly which room. Whatever was left on the original list was what I had to dispose of before moving."

If you're heading overseas, don't assume your American furniture will fit into the new space in Israel. "If you can't come on a pilot trip and you're unsure of the space in which you'll be living, think twice about bringing oversized American furniture," says Liz. Many *olim* who take this advice choose not to send lifts, preferring to ship just a few boxes via postal mail and buy new furniture.

8. Sell stuff. Make some money on the extra furniture and belongings that won't fit in the new home. For some this can be emotionally difficult — haggling on prices and watching strangers carry off your three-sectional sofa for a fraction of the price you paid for it. If it will be draining for you, look into services that pick up your stuff and do this for you.

9. Give away. Contact your local chesed organization to pick up your extra belongings. Find a family in the vicinity who can use your stuff. Maybe your neighbor's son who just got married could use your dinette set? When you have the recipient in mind, it's much easier to purge your belongings, knowing they'll be put to good use. Make sure that whatever you're donating is in good condition. The poor and needy don't want junk, either.

10. Go through the hard items (items that are especially sentimental or expensive). Bubby wouldn't want you to have a dysfunctional kitchen just because you're holding onto her china set! Of course, it's hard to part with these items. Regard your feelings while still respecting your space. If no one in the family can get use out of all of your inherited belongings, consider keeping one or two pieces for display and purging the rest. For some items, it will suffice to take pictures and store your memories digitally.

Liz Bernstein has found that while most *olim* express some anxiety, fear, and/or loss saying goodbye to belongings, they also



CONSUMERISM OUT OF CONTROL

These stats relate to the typical, non-Jewish American family. Multiply this by our growing Jewish families and the numbers become scary!



The average American home holds 300,000 items. *(L.A. Times)*



One out of ten Americans rent off-site storage. *(New York Times magazine)*



The average size of the American home has nearly tripled in size over the last 50 years. *(NPR)*



Twenty-five percent of people with two-car garages can't fit their cars inside them. *(US Dept. of Energy)*



The average ten-year-old owns 238 toys but plays with only 12 on a day-to-day basis. *(The Telegraph)*



Three percent of the world's children live in America – but those kids own 40 percent of the world's toys. *(UCLA)*



The average American owns 30 outfits, one for each day of the month. *(Forbes)*



Women spend an average of eight years shopping over the course of their lives. *(OnePoll)*

Compiled by Joshua Becker of becomingminimalist.com

report it as exhilarating, rewarding, and refreshing, helping them focus on what's really important.

11. Cut down on photos. If you devote time to going through old photos, you'll save yourself an entire shelf (or closet!) in the new place. To save time, sort by event (bar mitzvahs, birthdays, summer vacations, weddings, etc.); sorting chronologically takes too long. Remove at least 30 percent of photos from each category and toss. (Five to ten pictures from one trip to the zoo is enough; you don't need 30!) Once your collection has been weeded, categorize into albums, picture boxes with dividers, or have someone from the current generation create digital albums for you. It's worth moving just to create a story out of those beautiful pictures.

12. Expect to declutter even more after you move in. Even organized Susie claims, "I could have gotten rid of even more household items and mementos. Sometimes I open a cabinet and see a bowl I haven't used in the five years we have lived here and wonder why I bothered to bring it. And there are others like it in the buffet as well!"

Liz Bernstein of Nefesh B' Nefesh says that although families make a large effort to reduce their belongings before aliyah, most people are simply amazed by the amount of belongings they have even after they've sifted through their stuff. Even after sending a lift, they can still pack 20-plus pieces of luggage for their family's aliyah flight!

After unpacking the essentials, there will be boxes whose contents simply don't fit anywhere. After a few months of not utilizing the contents of those boxes, it's safe to rid yourself of those items, too. At worst, you can always rent storage space, but try to stay away from this option – it's a big money waster. If you're putting it into storage, you probably don't need it.



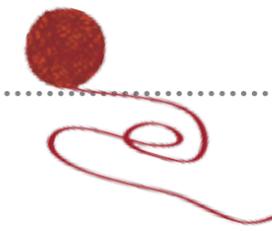
STEP THREE

Maximize space in the new home.

1. If there's an empty spot, you can keep something there. If you have a small gap between the fridge and the wall, you can use it to house a narrow mobile shelving unit for food. You can hang additional storage organizers on the inside of cabinet doors for products and in closets for accessories. You can go vertical and build custom storage cabinetry around doors and cabinets up to the ceiling. Wall space can make for great storage from shelves to hooks to pegboards. Make use of vacuum storage bags to cut down on shelf space for off-season items. Of course, don't go too far with creating storage solutions. You don't want your new home to look like a storage facility.

2. Invest in dual-purpose furniture. Shop for furniture that doubles in function: a kitchen bench with drawer storage, a bed which closes to a couch with extra storage, a coffee table with magazine storage, an Ottoman with storage for use as a coffee table (and that can double as extra seating when there is lots of company).

3. Aim for accommodating furniture. A large sectional L-shaped couch may be the perfect solution to seat lots of people in a small space. Cut down on the depth of the couch to save space without sacrificing the number of seats. (Pull over the dining room chairs when you need more sitting room.) If your space is really small, look for rounded tables and furniture to avoid bumping into corners. Consider hanging lamps on the wall and exchanging night tables and end tables for shelves to create more floor space. An office that doubles as a guest room can benefit from cabinetry on wheels, so that you can adjust the



DON'T GO TOO FAR WITH CREATING STORAGE SOLUTIONS. YOU DON'T WANT YOUR NEW HOME TO LOOK LIKE A STORAGE FACILITY

furniture when the beds are open. Another trick for small spaces is to decorate with see-through pieces. A clear acrylic desk or glass shelving create more functional space without visual clutter. Fold-down shelves can be used as extra counter and work space and folded when in the way.

4. Make the most of your closets. At least 75 percent of hanging clothing is short, so don't waste precious closet space on full-length hanging. Design a custom closet with double rods and extra shelves from one of the inexpensive modular-closet companies. Look for organizing ideas such as hanging door storage, stackable bins, and shelf dividers to accommodate all of your belongings in your closet. Consider storing each family member's linens and towels in their personal closet if you don't have room for a linen closet.

5. Unpack theoretically in advance. Before you make the big move, plan where every item in the smaller home will go, even if it's going to be stored. Consider everything from your furniture to your soup ladle.

6. Change your shopping habits. Stop buying in bulk. It's no longer a smart habit. If you stock up on too many oversized sale products – such as toilet paper, paper towels, and laundry detergent – your new

home will begin to look like the warehouse where you purchased them. Change your habits to suit the new space.

7. Think creatively about hosting. The hard part is where to put guests when they sleep over, especially the grandchildren. "I bought a lot of sleeping bags," says Susie. "It's amazing how much fun a group of children can have 'camping out' on the living room floor at Bubby and Zeidy's house. We also have been fortunate that sometimes neighbors go away for Yom Tov, giving us their apartments to use for the larger families. It's not as comfortable as the old house, but everyone manages and adapts."

Downsizing is not synonymous with downgrading. It can actually be rejuvenating and enjoyable to start over. You're older, wiser, and more established than the last time you set up a home, and you'll make smarter decisions. Susie Schwartz let us in on her secret to survival during this major life transition: "I focused on the excitement of starting something new, with a blank canvas, and making it feel like home." ☺

Yael Wiesner, Professional Organizing and Interior Design Consultant, is the author of "How Does SHE Manage?" (Feldheim 2012, 2016) and helps women worldwide to plan and manage their homes through her private appointments, teleconference courses, and training program.