

MINIMALISM

A SPRING CLEANING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND YOUR HEADSPACE

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Minimalism. The idea that less is more. In a world so obsessed with consumerism, this idea can be a hard one to put into practice. However, it might be worth adopting alternatives to the materialistic mindset. Minimalism is an essential practice in developing a sustainable lifestyle. By practicing minimalism, the demand for materials that would likely end up in a landfill is reduced, the energy that would be used to dispose of or incinerate these materials is reduced, and the carbon emissions that would be used to continuously produce these materials is reduced. Reduction seems to be a theme here, doesn't it?

Environmental benefits aside, scientific studies also support that minimalism leads to a more positive headspace and a stronger feeling of well-being¹. More explicitly, studies have shown that greater psychological well-being is positively

correlated with consumption of experiences and negatively correlated with materialism¹. One study conducted using high school students as a sampling group even demonstrated that modeling gratitude while controlling for materialism predicted higher grade point average, absorption, social integration and life satisfaction and lower rates of depression and envy². Contrastingly, modeling materialism while controlling for gratitude predicted higher envy and lower grade point average².

Think about it. Have you ever dropped off a bag of no-longer-needed items at Goodwill or Salvation Army and felt an extreme sense of relief? This is not just a fleeting feeling, but a physical indication of our brain saying, "thank you". Mental clutter is a direct reflection of physical clutter. Think about how therapeutic it feels to clear out your workspace, organize

files, or even clean the bathroom. Now multiply this and consider it a reflection of your life. When our physical environment is clean and organized and our possessions have a place and a purpose, our mental environment feels clean as well. The opposite also holds true: if our physical environment is cluttered and suffocating, our mental environment begs for some room to breathe.

With all of this in consideration, practicing minimalism begins to sound quite appealing. However, it can be challenging to get started in this practice and it is easy to feel that you may not have the resources or the guidance to do so. Holly Thomas, a 24-year-old native of Corpus Christi, Texas and a follower of minimalism for three years, has some tidbits for those beginning their journey.

JOIN A LOCAL ORGANIZATION. “Changes in my lifestyle really started to happen when I got involved with the local Surfrider Foundation chapter after college”, Holly says. “My eyes were really opened to the growing global issue of pollu-

tion, especially plastic, and I started making simple changes like investing in a reusable water bottle and shopping bags.” In addition to Surfrider Foundation – Texas Coastal Bend Chapter (TXCBC), there are other local organizations that practice and invite environmental stewardship in the Coastal Bend area:

Grow Local South Texas, which advocates for affordable, sustainably farmed, and nutritious foods through their Grow Local Farmers’ Market;

Texas Adopt-A-Beach, which organizes yearly beach cleanups; And University of Texas – Marine Science Institute (UTMSI) and Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi (TAMU-CC) Green teams, which provide ways in which college students can get involved in green initiatives.

NO ACTION IS TOO SMALL. There seems to be a mentality in society today of “It’s just one piece of plastic” or “I’m only one person, how can I really make that big of an impact, good or bad?”. This all-

too-common mindset can be discouraging. However, small changes add up to big impacts. “Saying no to one plastic water bottle or plastic bag makes a change that lasts for hundreds of years, because it will take hundreds to thousands of years for that one single piece of plastic to breakdown, if it ever does” says Holly. “So, in response to the discouragement, trust me I know it’s hard but if you are making an effort then keep it up and keep your head up.”

BE A LEADER. Holly experiences firsthand how influential change can be. “When I first started my minimal waste journey, I was living in a house with several roommates. When I started making changes, the dynamic of our household shifted, and my roommates hopped on board and started making changes as well. We all started composting, sorting our recyclables, using wool dryer balls rather than dryer sheets, bringing green bags and straws everywhere we went, and even installed a bidet in our guest bathroom to reduce our toilet paper use.” Often, individu-

als are receptive to the idea of minimalism but are intimidated by the process. Being a leader in this area can help create a positive wave of change.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF BUT BE PATIENT WITH THE PROCESS. While it is easy to donate items that are no longer wanted or needed, the transition from single-use items to more long-lasting items can be a testament of patience and perseverance. Disposing of single-use items just to hasten the transition to more sustainable ones counteracts the idea of minimal waste. “I’m three years into this journey and I still haven’t completely phased out all single-use plastics” Holly states. “However, I’ve been able to steadily phase out several single-use items and will continue to do so until I have fully transitioned to sustainable items.”

AND LASTLY, SPREAD THE WORD. One of the most important things you can do when embarking on a minimum waste journey and a simplistic lifestyle is to educate others on the **WHY** of it all. “For me,

this is the most exciting aspect, spreading the word and encouraging others to do their part” says Holly. “Every little change counts.”

For those embarking on a journey towards minimalism and looking for inspiration and pointers, Holly can be found on Instagram at @hollythomas. Additionally, Holly lists the following accounts as sources of inspiration for her own journey:

1. Kate Nelson (@plasticfreemermaid)
2. Andrea Hannemann (@earthyandy)
3. @slow_yourself_down
4. Helen Milan (@helenmilan-home)

Reference:

1. Muñiz-Velázquez, J. A., Gomez-Baya, D., & Lopez-Casquete, M. (2017). Implicit and explicit assessment of materialism: Associations with happiness and depression. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 116, 123–132. doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2017.04.033
2. Muller, M. E., Froh, J. J., Bono, G., Youssef, A.-J. S., & Lomas, T. (2011). Gratitude and the Reduced Costs of Materialism in Adolescents. *PsycEXTRA Dataset*. doi: 10.1037/e711302011-001



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Tushy® bidet



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