

How to Let Go of Any Possession

Over the years, I've come to be very good at letting go of just about anything.

In fact, I've come to relish the joy of letting go of possessions. It's liberating and delicious!

But most people I know struggle with letting go of the possessions they hold onto most tightly. There's nothing physical that keeps us from letting go of possessions — it's just our attachment that gets in the way.

I'm going to share how I let go of attachment to possessions (other kinds of attachment, I'm still figuring out!) in this short guide.

If you follow this guide, you will become a certified minimalist!

The Guiding Principle

In theory, we can let go of every single possession. Sure, for practical purposes, we'll need at least one outfit and shelter and a way to eat and use the bathroom. And even more practically, we'll need a house and things to wear for a job and so on. But letting go of a possession that you don't absolutely need for practical purposes is theoretically possible.

So what stops us?

Every possession gives us something beyond pure practicality. Or at least, we believe that they do. *This is the key to understanding how to let go — understanding what you believe the possession does for you.*

For example, here are some common things we think possessions give us:

- **Security:** Having items that keep you safe, or that you keep “just in case,” give us the illusion of some kind of security. When we're feeling uncertainty, we run out and buy things. The truth is that even with a house full of safety items and emergency preparation items and backup everything ... we still have insecurity. There is still tremendous uncertainty. We could get blown up by a nuclear missile, demolished by a hurricane or raging fire, or die of a heart attack or cancer, despite our best preparations. Security is an illusion.
- **Comfort:** We keep a lot of things because we think they give us comfort or pleasure. For example, snack foods, video games, anything else you find pleasurable or comfortable. They might seem to give you temporary pleasure or comfort from stress ... but it's like scratching an itch that just keeps being itchy, and that gives you sores from scratching it so much. Eating junk food (and all the other forms of pleasure and comfort we all indulge in) only gives you more pain and less comfort over the long term.

- **Self-image:** Most items fall under this category — we keep things because we feel they give us a certain self-image. For example, a leather jacket might make you feel cool (or maybe if it has metal studs, you feel tough), or having certain books on your shelf might make you feel educated or smart. If you have a lot of expensive stuff, you might feel they give you the image of success. Most of the things you have that aren't 100% practical give you a certain self-image. Except ... they don't. The self-image is completely generated in your head. It's not real, but to the extent that it's in your head, it wasn't created by possessions — it was created by you.
- **Love:** If you have something given to you by a grandparent, or other loved one ... you might think that item gives you certain memories, certain emotions. In essence, you think that cherished gift gives you their love. But their love isn't in the thing. It doesn't come from the thing. In fact, the love is in *you*. You generate the love and memories. The item is unnecessary for this process.

You get the idea. There might be other things you think that your possessions give you ... but they don't really give you those things. **They come from within you.**

You give yourself a sense of security, comfort, self-image, memories and love. Not any item.

Letting Go of the Most Difficult Possessions to Release

Of course, we don't have to get rid of everything ... but what would it feel like to let go of your most tightly held attachments? Could you discover a new sense of self, a sense of liberation, a world full of new possibilities?

What would it be like if you let go of everything you didn't absolutely use and need on a regular basis? Sure, keep your car, phone, computer, basic clothing and toiletries. Keep your most essential dishes and cookingware. Keep your couch and bed and dresser drawer. But see what it would be like to get rid of most of the other stuff — I bet you'll find it as enlightening as I do.

With the Guiding Principle from the previous section in mind, let's look at how to let go of the possessions that most people have difficulty releasing:

1. **Books.** If you love books, you probably have a hard time letting them go. You might not even question the need to have so many. It's part of who you are. But instead of solidifying who you are, consider who you'd be without all of them. What if you had zero books? Who would you be? It's an open question. You can reinvent yourself, and you don't need books to find out who you really are. Try this: pick the books you're actually going to read in the next 6 months. Base the number on how many you've actually read in the last 6 months. Now let go of everything else, because you don't need them. You

can usually get them at the library, if you ever really want it again. But you can find free or cheap books all over the place, and won't need the books on your shelf in a year.

2. **Photos, mementos.** I'm not saying you need to get rid of all photos and mementos. But they don't give you what you think they do — the love for your loved ones is in your heart, not in the photos, and the memories of your trip to Greece aren't in that trinket you got in that store in Santorini. Instead, why not just snap photos of everything using your phone, and put them in a folder you use for a rotating screensaver? You'll still have the reminders of your experiences and loved ones, but without the possessions you don't need.
3. **Gifts.** Often we keep these for the same reason as photos and mementos — they remind us of loved ones who gave us the gifts. Deal with those in the same way as photos and mementos above. But often we hold on to gifts because of a sense of obligation, as if we owed it to our loved ones to hold on to every gift they have given us. No! Gifts aren't an obligation, a burden to carry for the rest of your life. They are a gesture of love, one that is received as soon as the gift is given, but the love isn't in the gift itself. And the love certainly isn't in the sense of burden and obligation. Instead, snap a photo of the gift, and give it to someone who will actually use and treasure it.
4. **Clothes that make you feel a certain way.** Maybe your clothes make you feel cool, trendy, beautiful, badass. Maybe it's not clothes, but shoes, a bag, a pocket knife, or some gadget you carry around. We wear or carry these things to give people a certain image of ourselves, and to feel a certain way. In truth, we create this feeling and self-image, not the things. And we can't control how other people will see us. Even better, let's let go of that worry, and just be as true to our hearts as we can be, without posturing or pretending by dressing a certain way. Imagine if you just wore minimal, functional clothing, and let people form their impression of you by interacting with you, by experiencing your raw open heart. What a world that might be!
5. **Exercise or outdoor equipment.** Do you actually use the equipment? I can't tell you how many people I know who have bought a treadmill, elliptical machine, rowing machine or nautilus weight set and then used it only three times. The machine sits there for years, gathering dust. Let it go! You can still get fit without it — try going for a walk, adding in a few running or sprint intervals if the walk is too easy. Try doing some pushups, lunges, squats, chinups. Try some sun salutations for 20 minutes. Try pliometric exercises if those are too easy. We barely need anything (if anything) to get fit and healthy, to enjoy the outdoors.
6. **Items for hobbies you're not actually doing.** Over the years, I've gotten into a few hobbies that I was into for a month or so, and then fell out of interest with them. I kept thinking I was going to start them again sometime soon. And I kept not doing it. Finally I let go of all of those items, and it was a huge relief. I didn't have to keep feeling guilty that I wasn't doing those hobbies. I could just do the things I love doing right now, without some kind of placeholder for the future.
7. **Just-in-case items.** These are things you might need someday, but haven't used for

years. Let 'em go. Ask yourself, "What are the chances I'll really need this?" And also ask, "In the slim possibility that this need actually arises ... how hard would it be for me to make do without, borrow the item, or find a cheap replacement for it?" For most things I've let go like this, I've *never once needed it again*. For others, I could get at a thrift store, borrow from a friend, or buy a cheap version at a big box store if necessary. I have never regretted letting go of these items. The security they give you is an illusion anyway — why not try living without any of that false sense of security? Why not embrace the uncertainty of life, and trust that you'll be able to deal with whatever comes up? You always have so far.

8. **Things you spent a lot of money on.** There is the guilt of getting rid of that item because you spent hundreds (or thousands) of dollars on it. The feeling that you're wasting that money by giving it away. But you wasted the money *when you bought it* ... holding onto it for longer and not using it doesn't change that fact. Let go of the sunk-cost fallacy and just cut your losses. Forget about what you spent on it in the past (that's gone) and think about what benefits you'll get going forward ... and what the costs are going forward. Most likely the costs of holding onto these items is much more than the (non-existent) benefits of holding onto them.

You might have other aspirational items (see the sections above on books and hobbies) or items that make you feel a certain way (see the section on clothing above) ... but it all boils down to this:

You don't need possessions to give you a feeling about yourself or your life. It all comes from within yourself — you yourself are the creator of who you are.

With that in mind, try letting go of that which you don't absolutely use and need, and explore what happens. It's one of the things I savor the most.