

30-MINUTE READ

# Simplify

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MAKE SPACE FOR CHANGE

A Muslim's guide to simplifying, decluttering, and making space for the things that are truly important.

Kate Hepburn (Umm Sakeenah)

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1st Publication – May 2023

2nd Publication - February 2024

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# FOREWORD

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

When I first shared the concept of ‘making space for change’ in a program, I had no idea the impact it would have, subhanAllah.

Over time, it became increasingly clear that clutter and overwhelm were affecting sisters on a global scale – a pandemic before the Pandemic - the effects seeping into their health, marriages, relationships with their children, and their connection with Allah.

The results of the Simplify program spoke for themselves, alhamdulillah, but I found there was a dilemma.

Those who needed to simplify and declutter the most were often the least likely to enroll in a simplification program due to their chronic state of clutter, overwhelm and already overloaded schedules.

I needed to find a new way to share the message that was accessible, impactful, and, most importantly, not time-consuming.

Condensing years of experience and a 6-week simplification program into a 30-minute read has not been easy. Still, I hope to have done justice to the subject and my aim is to provide you with inspiration, a sense of possibility, and some practical guidance to help you begin your own simplification journey.

Everything I share serves as a reminder to myself first and foremost and I would like, at the outset, to acknowledge my own imperfection. I do not write from a pedestal; I too am on the journey with you and fear being held to account for sharing what I do not always fully implement myself. Please know, much of what I share reflects not who I am, but who I aspire to be, bi'ithnillah.

I ask Allah to make this short book beneficial and to forgive my shortcomings.

“O Allah, make me better than what they think of me, and forgive me for what they do not know about me, and do not take me to account for what they say about me.”<sup>1</sup>



# CHAPTERS

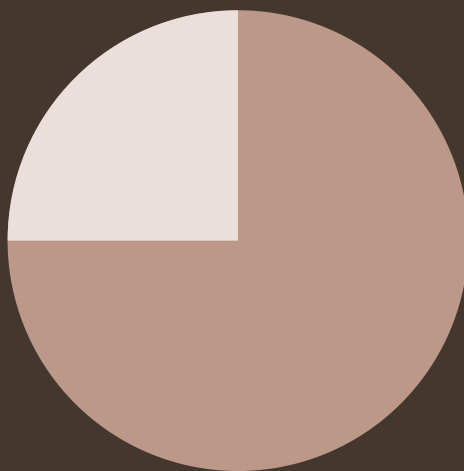
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WE ASKED SISTERS, 'DO YOU FEEL LIKE CLUTTER AND OVERWHELM IS AFFECTING YOUR ABILITY TO LIVE A LIFE ALIGNED WITH YOUR ULTIMATE PURPOSE - TO WORSHIP ALLAH?

75.3% SAID YES



SIMPLIFY. MAKE SPACE FOR CHANGE



CHAPTER 1

# Lightening Our Load

*"Be in this world as if you were a  
stranger or a traveler"*

Bukhari

In my early 20s while living in the UK, several years before I embraced Islam, one summer I decided I wanted to walk the Camino de Santiago, an 800km pilgrimage spanning northern Spain.

I'd done a fair amount of globe-trotting in my even-younger days, backpacking my way across the world so considered myself a fairly seasoned traveler. Aside from buying a few pairs of exorbitantly priced socks that promised to prevent blisters and packing a guidebook heavy enough to double as a weapon, I didn't do much in the way of preparing.



Though I'd traveled thousands of kilometers over the years, what I'd never done though was carry a backpack for 800km. Aware it was a long way to haul a heavy bag, I'd made a conscious effort to pack light, selecting only what I thought was absolutely essential — clothes, shoes, a hat, a sleeping bag, sunblock, a raincoat, and toiletries. I booked my flight and made my way to France.

Arriving in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, I registered as a pilgrim and received the coveted 'Pilgrim's passport' which was to be stamped at every town and village I passed through along the 800-kilometer route. I prepared to start walking the following day.

## **Day 1**

Surrounded by breathtaking mountain views, I trekked 23km up into the Pyrenees. The scorching heat of the day had pilgrims huddling in whatever little shade they could find on the mountain passes, trying to get just a few minutes of respite from the blazing sun before walking on – an unyielding heatwave had engulfed Spain.

Finally, the day's descent came into sight and with it the promise of rest just 4km away. Exhausted, in my eagerness to arrive, I made a fatal hiking error as I carelessly raced down the final leg, not thinking about the extra weight I was carrying, not thinking about the impact on my knees.

## **Day 2**

My knee throbbed with discomfort.

## **Day 4**

I was in agony and could barely walk. My heart sank every time I saw a downhill.

**800km suddenly seemed an impossibly long way.**

As it turned out, being overloaded was quite common among pilgrims, so common in fact that a service existed along the route that allowed pilgrims to send their excess luggage ahead to a post office in Santiago de Compostela, where they could collect it on arrival.

News of the service brightened my spirits! I urgently needed to lighten my load and eagerly started sifting through my belongings, deciding what would remain and what must be sacrificed.

***What had seemed so essential on day one did not seem essential anymore.***

My journal entry for the day reads, 'Begone evil extra weight'!

With a lighter load, walking became easier, and 6 weeks later, clad in double knee guards and leaning on my trusty hiking stick (which also saved my life along the way, alhamdulillah, a story for another day), I walked into Santiago. Alhamdulillah.

Although I'd not yet embraced Islam when I walked the Camino, the experiences and profound lessons I learned along the way bring to mind the words of the Prophet ﷺ, **"Be in this world as if you were a stranger or a traveler."** Bukhari <sup>2</sup>

BE IN THIS WORLD AS IF  
YOU WERE A STRANGER  
OR TRAVELER

BUKHARI



## **Lightening Our Load**

The reality is, we need a lot less than we think we need and often we don't realize the weight or impact of what we're carrying until we injure ourselves or experience the relief of actively lightening our load.

When we let go of excess, not only are we able to 'walk easier' but we feel better, lighter, and less burdened by carrying so much.

Grateful for what we have and grateful to not be weighed down by things we don't really need.

With a new spring in our step, we have more energy, more space, and more to give – physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually – we are able to worship better, to serve family and our communities better, to travel the road more easily and focus more clearly on the path ahead of us.

SIMPLIFY. MAKE SPACE FOR CHANGE



CHAPTER 2

## A Wake-Up

*"We are all going to die."*

My eyes ran over the words again and they hit me just as hard as they did almost a decade ago when I first read sister Rehab's story -a beloved friend's sister, diagnosed with terminal cancer in her early 20s.

**"It took me about three days to accept my death.**

On the first day, as you read, my mind was in chaos. On the second day, I was numb. And on the third day, my husband and mother began talking sense to me, and I finally came to some important realizations:

### **1. We are all going to die.**

The people who took the news of my disease calmly and those who panicked they are going to die one day too. Death is one of the few realities we can be certain of in this life, and yet we somehow slip into thinking that we are exempt.

### **2. We live this life for the next.**

I was living my life as a Muslim...praying and fasting, but I had somehow allowed my real goal in life to be swallowed by buying salad plates for my next dinner party and trying to get free shipping on my next J.Crew order, and finding pillows that popped against my cream sofa.

**In between being a consumer and entertaining myself to death, I let what really matters in my life slip away from me.**

**If I was truly living my life for the Hereafter, I should not be so fearful of the future I had created for myself.**

Life in Rehab<sup>3</sup>

Death is an uncomfortable thought, one most of us try to avoid rather than engage, and yet our beloved Prophet ﷺ encouraged us to remember 'the destroyer of pleasures'. At-Tirmidhi<sup>4</sup>

## Rewind

I was 'ticking the Islamic boxes' for the most part – I prayed, I fasted in Ramadan, I wore hijab, ate halal food, and said alhamdulillah – but if I'm honest, my daily life was far from focused on my true purpose or my Hereafter.

It had become a stream of never-ending to-do lists, overflowing inboxes, countless downloads I'd never even looked at crowded my devices, books I'd bought and had never read weighed on my mind (and I kept buying more). I signed up for courses I never finished, saved recipes I never made, and I had way too much stuff; clothes I never wore, arts and crafts materials I planned to use 'one day'.

My 'to buy' list never seemed to get any smaller, no matter how many things I acquired; there was always something else I wanted.

On a good day, I coasted by on autopilot; on a 'bad' day, I was overwhelmed to the point of paralysis. Most days, I felt like I was fire-fighting my way through life without a moment of introspection.

Time slipped by and the Quran gathered dust while thoughts of the Hereafter - Jannah, Jahannam, and my inevitable return to Allah - rarely crossed my mind. Most days, I don't even remember.

Exhausted, I sought solace in scrolling social media or binge-watching Netflix in my 'downtime' feeling too drained to do anything else.

**Caught in a downward spiral, neither present in my life nor in my worship, I knew I was in trouble.**

"How did I get here?"

“And how do I get out?”

## A Wake-Up

You know how every so often you have one of those moments when the world seems to pause, and something hits you like never before? It could be a familiar line in a book that suddenly carries newfound meaning or hearing a phrase that jolts you into awareness.

For me, it was a casual comment in a conversation with a friend that changed everything.

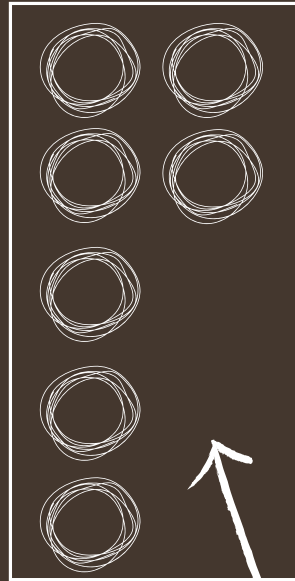
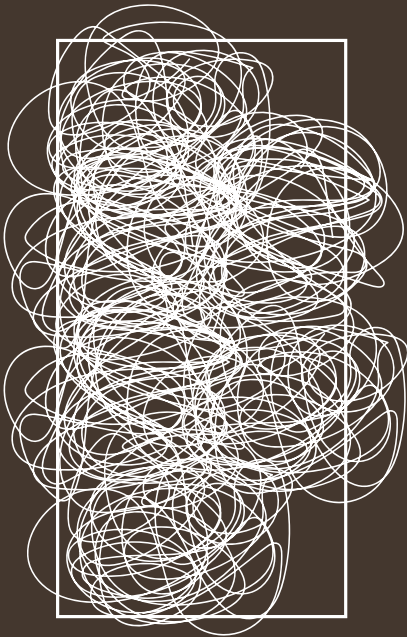
As we walked and talked, she shared her own struggles with a busy schedule and the challenge of trying to add healthy habits to her day, a goal she'd successfully managed to achieve in the past. This time though, she couldn't seem to make anything stick. I listened intently to her tales of stress-filled work hours, overwhelming to-do lists, and a packed schedule.

What followed wasn't a profound quote or insight but a simple thought that tumbled out of my mouth, alhamdulillah.

"Maybe the reason you're struggling isn't that you aren't able, maybe it's that you have so much going on in your life right now, there just isn't space for anything else. **What if you tried to make space for change first?"**



MAKE SPACE  
FOR CHANGE...



SPACE

## The Journey Begins

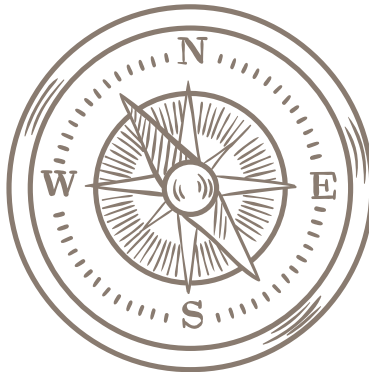
Make space for change. It was so simple.

I needed to take my own advice!

So started my journey into a world of 'less' and while I never set out to pursue 'minimalism', the definition shared by Joshua Becker, author of *The More of Less*, rang true,

***"The intentional promotion of the things we most value and the removal of anything that distracts us from them."<sup>5</sup>***

Viewed through the lens of our ultimate purpose - to worship Allah - simplification became a compass to help navigate this 'world of more' and my own cluttered life. It became a way to turn down the noise, reduce distraction, filter what is and isn't important, and create space for what truly matters.



## Results

The results of simplifying have been profound in my own life, alhamdulillah – and over the years, many sisters have joined me, realizing that 'too much' was affecting their health, their relationships, their kids, their marriages, their ibaadah, each embarking on their own personal journey of making space for change.

**In that space, amazing things have happened. Alhamdulillah.**

*"I picked up the Quran for the first time in a year."*

*"Now, I look forward to waking up every day to serve my Creator with ease. I can recognize if I am overthinking. I stopped feeling guilty about the past and I started living in the present moment which was a dream for me. I started showing up for myself. Alhamdulillah, my children are calmer around me, and I can have a meaningful conversation with my husband. Alhamdulillah."*

*"My life was so cluttered and chaotic. I had so much extra "stuff" in my home, and in my head. I was finding it hard to know where to start as far as decluttering or calming my life. I was constantly in a "freeze" response. I didn't know how to start, so I did nothing, and it made my life more chaotic and stressful. Through simplifying, I gained small, actionable steps that I can continue to use throughout my life, in all areas of my life. I am better able to take action when I need to, as I know what to do and when. My decision paralysis is so much less! I was able to clean out my closet and organize things in a way that made sense for me... and it's STILL organized, months later! I'm more at peace in my home."*

## A Caveat

Hearing the word minimalism or simple living can conjure up a wide range of ideas, images, and emotional responses so before we begin, I feel it's important to address some of these and emphasize that simplification is a personal journey that will look different to each one of us.

### 1. Less Doesn't Mean Nothing

Simplification doesn't mean whittling your home décor back to white walls and a single vase, getting rid of all worldly possessions, or giving away all your books in the drastic pursuit of 'having less'.

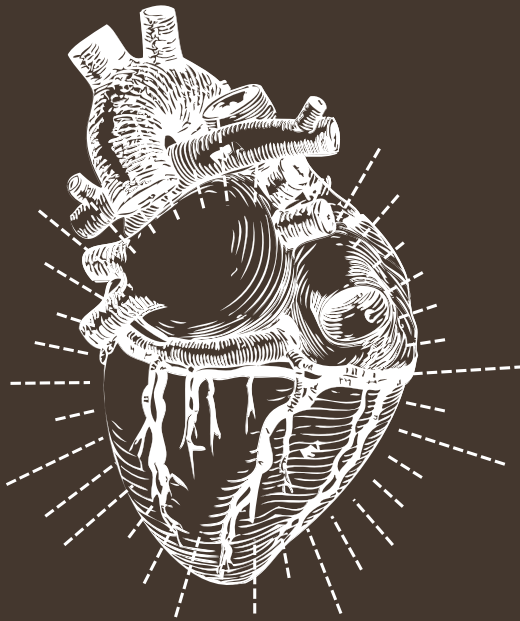
Nor do we have to turn our back on all worldly possessions or pleasures. Alhamdulillah, we can find balance in seeking the reward of the Hereafter while 'not forgetting our share of this world'.

**"Rather, seek the 'reward' of the Hereafter by means of what Allah has granted you, without forgetting your share of this world. And be good 'to others' as Allah has been good to you. Do not seek to spread corruption in the land, for Allah certainly does not like the corruptors." (Quran 28:77)<sup>6</sup>**

### 2. Money/Wealth Isn't the Root of All Evil

Simplification doesn't involve demonizing money or wealth but recognizing that both can be beneficial when used for noble purposes and held in our hands, and harmful even in their absence when they take up residency in our hearts

WHEN THERE IS MONEY IN YOUR HAND AND  
NOT IN YOUR HEART, IT WILL NOT HARM  
YOU EVEN IF IT IS A LOT;



AND WHEN IT IS IN YOUR HEART, IT  
WILL HARM YOU EVEN IF THERE IS NONE  
IN YOUR HANDS."

IBN AL QAYYIM

“Asceticism is not to give up worldly things with your hands while it still occupies your heart. Asceticism is to give up with your heart while it is still in your hands, and this is the state of the Rashidun caliphs and Umar bin ‘Abd al-Aziz, about whose asceticism stories are told, even though the treasuries of the kingdom were under his command, and the state of the best of mankind, the Prophet ﷺ, for whom God opened of the worldly life what He opened - but it only increased him in asceticism.” Ibn Al Qayyim<sup>7</sup>

### **3. Pursuing Perfection**

It also doesn't mean the pursuit of an immaculately tidy, aesthetically perfect living space. The goal of simplifying your home is to create a space that works for you and your family and aligns with your goals and values, not an Instagram-ready show home that nobody can live in and is impossibly stressful to maintain.

#### **This is Your Journey – Make it Your Own**

Simplification is a personal journey and for everyone it will be different but at its core is a desire to reclaim space – space in our minds, hearts, homes, and schedules for the things that are truly important.

SIMPLIFY. MAKE SPACE FOR CHANGE



### CHAPTER 3

## Retail Therapy

*And this worldly life is not but diversion and amusement. And indeed, the home of the Hereafter - that is the [eternal] life, if only they knew*

As I sipped my latte, browsing Amazon and Google for the best eco-friendly, EWG-approved, anti-aging serums, my focus was absolute. I'd spent hours reading reviews and looking at products that promised flawless, wrinkle-free, radiant skin.

Immersed in my caffeinated online shopping experience, the approaching time for prayer faded into the background, overshadowed by my insatiable desire for "just five more minutes" searching for the perfect product.

As the realization I was going to miss prayer time if I didn't get moving dawned upon me, I hurriedly closed the browser, mentally planning another round of product hunting for later.

Yet, a nagging unease tugged at my conscience.

How much time had I devoted to the Quran that day?

How much time had I spent in prayer and supplication?

Had I even spared a thought for the suffering of our brothers and sisters in Palestine, Sudan, and across the globe let alone raised my hands in du'a or donated to support them?

What about the 5 children who died in Africa every minute<sup>8</sup> or the 828 million people who would go to bed hungry that night?<sup>9</sup>

If I was honest with myself, where was my true focus?

What were my real priorities? The world and its distractions, mere fleeting diversions and amusements, or the true life that awaited me in the Hereafter?

***“And this worldly life is not but diversion and amusement. And indeed, the home of the Hereafter - that is the [eternal] life, if only they knew.” (Quran 29:64)<sup>10</sup>***

***“O believers, fear Allah and let every soul reflect upon what it has sent forth for tomorrow, and fear Allah. Surely, Allah is All-Aware of what you do.” (Quran 59:18)<sup>11</sup>***



I thought of the words of the Prophet ﷺ who once said, "**Verily Allah does not look at your faces or possessions, but rather He looks at your hearts and your deeds.**" Sahih Muslim<sup>12</sup>

I knew the hadith well, yet my Google and Amazon marathon had painfully highlighted that I was (quite literally) more concerned with my face than my Hereafter.

### **Rehab's words rang through me.**

"In between being a consumer and entertaining myself to death, I let what really matters in my life slip away from me. If I was truly living my life for the Hereafter, I should not be so fearful of the future I had created for myself." - Life in Rehab

### **Prepare for a Day of Questioning**

Competition for more 'gains' diverts you 'from Allah',  
until you end up in 'your' graves.

But no! You will soon come to know.

Again, no! You will soon come to know.

'But' you will surely see the Hellfire.

Again, you will surely see it with the eye of certainty.

Then, on that Day, you will definitely be questioned  
about 'your worldly' pleasures.

Quran: At-Takathur<sup>12b</sup>

SIMPLIFY. MAKE SPACE FOR CHANGE



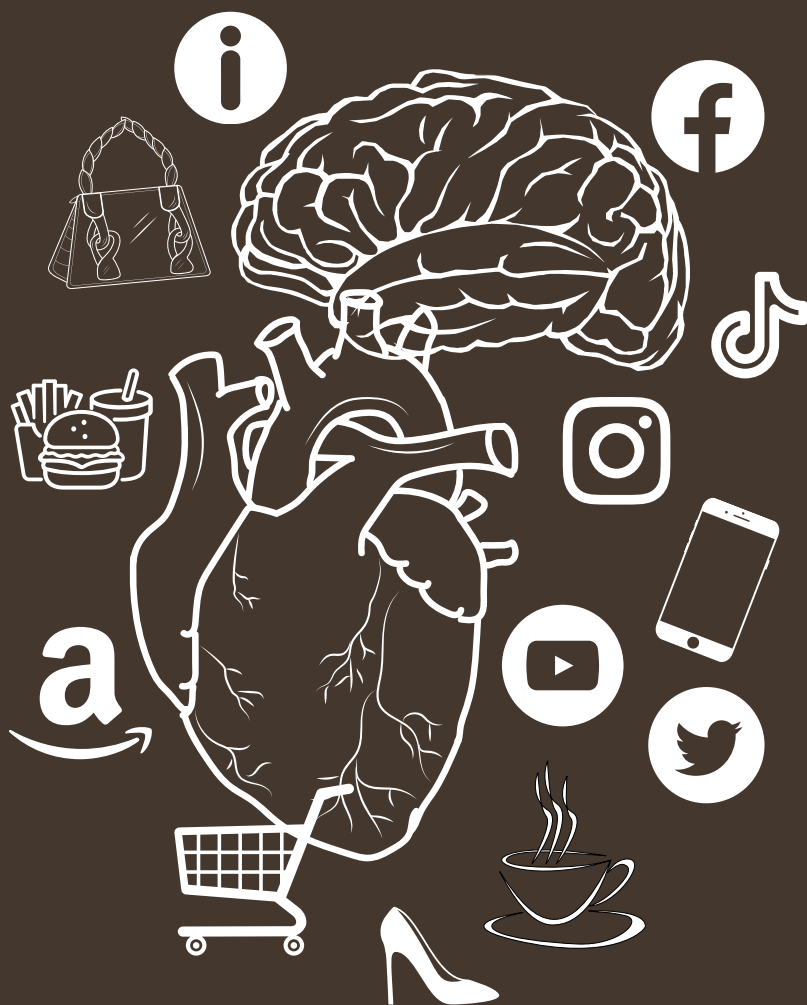
CHAPTER 4

## A World of More

*Were we to grasp the true extent of the price we're paying, it's highly likely our 'spending' habits would change.*

We are living in a world of abundance with more material possessions, choice, and convenience than ever before yet despite having more 'stuff', more options, and more ease, we see more depression, anxiety, loneliness, and stress enveloping our communities on a global scale.

# A WORLD OF MORE



## Spoilt for Choice

In our modern lives, even the simplest tasks, like buying groceries, have become monumental challenges as we attempt to navigate an overwhelming sea of tens of thousands of products. In the 1990s, a typical grocery store contained around 7,000 items; today, that number has surged to a staggering 40,000 to 50,000 items!<sup>13</sup>

Books are no exception to the trend, with an estimated 2.2 million new titles being published each year according to UNESCO.<sup>14</sup>

Covid brought *everything* online and now there is even more available at the touch of a button, beckoning us incessantly, inviting us to fill our minds, hearts, homes, and schedules with even more.

Every day, skilled marketers play on our insecurities, hopes, dreams, and fears and cleverly target us with algorithms that analyze our demographics and likelihood to buy their products which they then present to us everywhere we turn.

It's no coincidence that you see ads for something you Googled last week on your Facebook and Instagram pages.

**Google, Facebook, Instagram aren't free – YOU are the product.**

Apps and streaming channels beam almost unlimited entertainment into our homes, minds, and hearts – 'welcome' distractions from our hectic days.

Ideas, ideologies, and influence are woven into everything we watch – from the news to TV series, and even our favorite Disney cartoons.

## Hooked

***“One of the most harmful things to the servant are his idleness and leisure, for the ego is never idle, if you do not busy it with that which benefits you, you will inevitably busy it with that which harms you.” Ibn Al Qayyim <sup>15</sup>***

Gaming apps, PlayStation, and Xbox promise the exhilaration of dopamine rushes while they steadily nibble away at our precious time.

We find ourselves captivated by 'influencers' who beckon us towards their 'perfect lives' and entertaining reels often steering us away from the teachings of Allah and the example set by His Prophet ﷺ - digital Pied Pipers of our time. We follow them, mesmerized, captivated.

Or *we* post and share our own clips and content secretly hoping for a daily rush of “likes” and follows.

"The tycoons of social media have to stop pretending that they're friendly nerd gods building a better world and admit they're just tobacco farmers in T-shirts selling an addictive product to children. Because, let's face it, checking your "likes" is the new smoking." CAL NEWPORT, DIGITAL MINIMALISM <sup>16</sup>

Our addiction to social media keeps us hooked - watching, scrolling, liking, clicking, and sharing, on average a staggering 147 minutes per day, totaling 894 hours per year all while advertisements interrupt our experience at regular intervals with promises of algorithm-perfect products sure to appeal to us.<sup>17</sup>

If we continue at our current scrolling rate for the next say 60 odd years, each of us will spend over 6 solid years on social media – 24/7, without any sleep.

### Little Things Add Up

When we start adding things up, the impact of these seemingly insignificant moments becomes significant, and those who sell us goods and consume our time and attention depend on our tendency to overlook the long-term costs, both in terms of time and money – and even more so, the cost to our Hereafter.

Were we to grasp the true extent of the price we're paying, it's highly likely our 'spending' habits would change.

147 MINUTES/DAY



ADDS UP TO 6 SOLID YEARS IN A  
LIFETIME - 24/7, NO SLEEP

## Filling the Void

Within this world of plenty, our hearts long to be filled,

*"Truly in the heart there is a void that cannot be removed except with the company of Allah. And in it, there is a sadness that cannot be removed except with the happiness of knowing Allah and being true to Him. And in it there is an emptiness that cannot be filled except with love for Him and by turning to Him and always remembering Him. And if a person were given all of the world and what is in it, it would not fill this emptiness." Ibn Al Qayyim<sup>18</sup>*





CHAPTER 5

## We Are Here for a Reason

*What is the meaning of life?*

“Why are we here?” – the existential question that has kept many a philosopher and insomniac awake into the early hours of the morning, is one that we, as Muslims, already know the answer to, alhamdulillah.

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

*Allah tells us, “And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.” (Quran 51:56)<sup>19</sup>*

“Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding – Who remember Allāh while standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying], **"Our Lord, You did not create this aimlessly; exalted are You [above such a thing]; then protect us from the punishment of the Fire."** (Quran 3:191)<sup>20</sup>

## Clarity

If we start to look at our days, our lives, and our 'stuff' through the lens of our purpose, wiping away the dust and distractions that blur our view, **what is and isn't important becomes a lot clearer.**

When we stand in front of Allah, it's not our clothes or shoes, our matching curtains, and bags, our makeup or Ramadan decorations, our organic shampoo, or our likes and followers that will matter – but the state of our hearts and our deeds.

Wealth and children are [but] adornment of the worldly life. But the enduring good deeds are better to your Lord for reward and better for [one's] hope. (Quran 18:46)<sup>21</sup>

Allah's Messenger ﷺ said, "When carried to his grave, a dead person is followed by three, two of which return (after his burial) and one remains with him: his relative, his property, and his deeds follow him; relatives and his property go back while his deeds remain with him." Bukhari<sup>21b</sup>

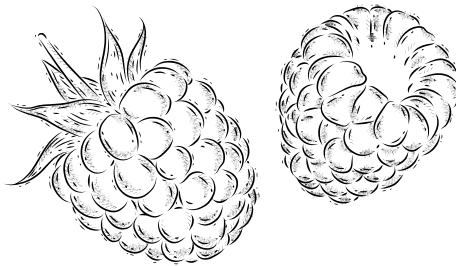
**If all we take is our deeds, doesn't it make more sense to spend our lives collecting hasanat, not things?**

COLLECT HASANAT,  
NOT THINGS

## Ajer Like Raspberries

I once heard a shaykh talking about how the companions would be constantly seeking opportunities to do good, snapping up any chance to please Allah; while in our times, opportunities for reward lie around like 'big fat raspberries on the ground with nobody picking them up.' (Paraphrased based on what I remember).

That's kind of a sad state for us to be in as an ummah but it's good news for anyone who does want to start collecting reward – there's an abundance of opportunity to please Allah when you start looking.



SIMPLIFY. MAKE SPACE FOR CHANGE



CHAPTER 6

# Eternity is a Very Long Time

*36,792,000 minutes.*

That's how much time each of us will have if we live to see seventy - 25,550 days. It sounds like a lot until you place it on its true scale.

"I heard the Messenger of Allah say: 'The likeness of this world in comparison to the Hereafter is that of anyone of you **dipping his finger into the sea: let him see what he brings forth.**'" Sunan Ibn Majah<sup>22</sup>

Eternity is a very, very long time.

*"And indeed, the home of the Hereafter - that is the [eternal] life, if only they knew. (Quran 29:64)<sup>23</sup>*

THE REALITY  
OF DUNYA



HOW DUNYA CAN FEEL



DUNYA CAN FEEL LIKE  
"OUR WHOLE WORLD". WE  
FORGET IT'S TEMPORARY  
AND THAT OUR 'REAL'  
HOME IS IN THE  
HEREAFTER.

THE REALITY OF  
THE AAKHIRA



## A Home in Jannah

We all want a home in Jannah, and "Jannah is very expensive' - Dr. Sh. Haifaa Younis, Jannah Institute.

The Prophet ﷺ said, **"Verily, the merchandise of Allah is valuable, surely the merchandise of Allah is Paradise."** Sunan al-Tirmidhī <sup>24</sup>

## An Enemy on the Path

If we want to live a life on purpose, seeking the pleasure of our Lord, we can't afford to fall into the traps of dunya's distractions and delusions.

Consider, for a moment, who has more desire to try and keep us mentally stretched, physically exhausted, drowning in distractions, trapped in overwhelming schedules, and weighed down by too much stuff than the one whose enmity to us knows no bounds?

Shaitan, in his animosity towards humanity, has declared his intention to lie in wait for us on the straight path endlessly trying to lead us astray, "...then I will come upon them from the front and from the rear, and from their right and from their left. And You will not find most of them thankful." (Quran, 7:16-17)<sup>25</sup>

He seeks to lure us into the depths of the eternal fire, inviting his followers to join him there for all eternity, "Indeed, Satan is an enemy to you; so take him as an enemy. He only invites his party to be among the companions of the Blaze." (Quran, 35:6)<sup>26</sup>

"O children of Adam! Do not let Satan deceive you as he tempted your parents out of Paradise..." (Quran, 7:27)<sup>27</sup>

# SUMMARY SO FAR

1. WE ARE ALL GOING TO DIE.
2. OUR PURPOSE IS TO WORSHIP ALLAH.
3. THIS DUNYA IS NOT OUR PERMANENT HOME.
4. OUR VALUE IS NOT DEFINED BY WHAT WE OWN.
5. WE TAKE NOTHING WITH US BUT OUR DEEDS.
6. ETERNITY IS A VERY LONG TIME.
7. WE WANT A HOME IN JANNAH AND TO BE SAVED FROM THE HELLFIRE.
8. JANNAH IS EXPENSIVE.
9. WE HAVE AN ENEMY ON THE PATH.
10. AND A REMINDER THAT NONE OF US IS PROMISED A TOMORROW BUT WE HAVE TODAY.



SIMPLIFY. MAKE SPACE FOR CHANGE



## CHAPTER 7

# Simplification is Subtraction

*In a world of limitless choices, options, and possibilities, we need a way to filter everything in our lives.*

Without this, it's all too easy for our minds, hearts, homes, and schedules to become overrun by too much.

If we revisit the definition of minimalism, "The intentional promotion of the things we most value and the removal of anything that distracts us from them" and add the lens of our ultimate purpose we have a clear and practical framework through which we can start to screen our world and everything in it.

CREATE CRITERIA - A LENS THROUGH WHICH TO FILTER THE DUNYA AND EVERYTHING IN IT.

GOOD VS. BETTER

TIME-WASTERS

NOISE

STUFF



WHAT IS ALIGNED WITH MY PURPOSE AND MOST PLEASING TO ALLAH?

'MORE'

EXCESS

DISTRACTIONS

HARAAM

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## Step by Step

“Asceticism has three ranks: The first is to abstain from whatever is forbidden. And this is the asceticism of the average believer. The second rank is to abstain from the excess of what is permitted, and this is the asceticism of the extraordinary believers. The third is to abstain from everything that distracts one from Allah and this is the asceticism of the enlightened believers.” Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal<sup>28</sup>

SIMPLIFY. MAKE SPACE FOR CHANGE

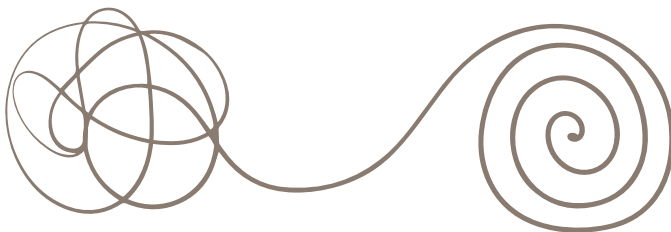


CHAPTER 8

## Three Ways to Simplify

*Have less. Do less. Be more.*

There are many ways to lighten our load but for the sake of this short book, we'll focus on just 3 that when done consistently, can yield amazing results, bi'ithnillah.



# 3 WAYS TO SIMPLIFY

HAVE LESS

DO LESS

'BE' MORE

## Have Less

How easy it is to forget the favors of our Lord when surrounded by creature comforts while the Prophet ﷺ reminded us that **'whoever among you wakes up physically healthy, feeling safe and secure within himself, with food for the day, it is as if he acquired the whole world.'**"  
Sunan Ibn Majah<sup>29</sup>

By choosing to live with less, we can start to be more intentional and reflective about how much we need, mindful of what we buy, and what we choose to keep in our space; letting go of any excess we've built up over the years.

As our priorities shift, we build immunity to forever wanting the 'next shiny thing' realizing we don't need to buy a new laptop when our old one is working perfectly well, upgrade our year-old phones to the latest model, or buy another pair of shoes on sale when we already have shoes at home. We become comfortable with living more simply.

As we slow the inflow of 'stuff' into our lives and let go of excess, we create space, reducing the stress of living in daily clutter, and opening new doors to gratitude, appreciation for what we do have, and the ability to give more.

## Do Less

"I want to do everything so end up doing nothing or almost kill myself trying to do it all!" – Me, a thousand times over in my life.

When we take on more than we can manage, even with the best of intentions, the result is almost always the same – we end up spread thin, stressed, stretched, exhausted, frustrated by our lack of consistency and progress, wondering if it's us.

Often this final thought compels us to sign up for yet another program or buy another book to try and fix the problem, which adds to our stress and our ever-growing list of 'unfinished business'.

## **Healthy and Unhealthy 'More'**

More that is sincere, intentional, healthy, balanced, and aligned with our purpose is a good thing, in sha Allah; more, even with good intentions, that leads to chronic stress, overwhelm, imbalance, mental paralysis, and harms us physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually, is not.

**The remedy for the latter type of more is LESS.**

Reining back so that we can regain our balance and focus.

Actions are judged by intentions<sup>30</sup> and the deeds most loved by Allah are "the most regular constant deeds even though they may be few, not taking upon ourselves, except the deeds which are within our ability." Sahih Bukhari<sup>31</sup>

How I wish I had actively applied this throughout my years of being a Muslimah!

**Less with intention, sincerity, and consistency, starting with first things first and only then adding more, bit by bit.**

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## HADITH QUDSI

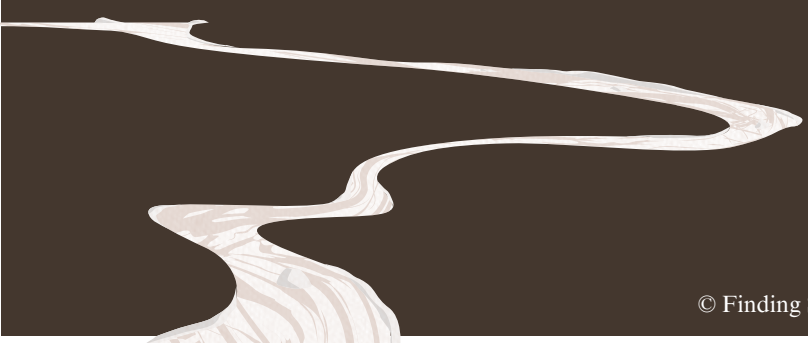
*My servant draws not near to Me with anything more loved by Me than the religious duties I have enjoined upon him, and My servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory works so that I shall love him. When I love him I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes and his foot with which he walks. Were he to ask [something] of Me, I would surely give it to him, and were he to ask Me for refuge, I would surely grant him it. I do not hesitate about anything as much as I hesitate about [seizing] the soul of My faithful servant: he hates death and I hate hurting him.*

Bukhari<sup>32</sup>



RUNNING  
RIVERS ARE  
NOT ABLE TO  
REFLECT.

KATE HEPBURN



© Finding Sakeenah

## 'Be" More

If I was told that I had 24 hours to live, I wonder how my life would change?

What would I do differently?

How focused would my prayers be?

How would I speak to my loved ones?

Who would I call and choose to spend my last hours on Earth with?

What would I do more of?

What would I stop doing entirely?

We live as though we have all the time in the world yet none of us is promised even a tomorrow. Remembering this can help us to become more present and focused in our lives, grateful for what we have, connected to our purpose, and mindful of Allah and our inevitable return to Him.

In theory.

But it's our nature to be forgetful.

The practice of being in the moment is not quite as easy as it sounds as our minds jump from one thing to the next and we battle the distractions of everyday life, and our own selves.

It may not be easy, but then again, neither is starting an exercise routine. Yet, if we wanted to successfully complete a marathon, we'd know that we needed to put in the work and start training, one day at a time.

Mindfulness and reflectiveness are muscles worth exercising and like our physical muscles, over time, with patience, perseverance, practice, and consistent du'a seeking Allah's help, they will get stronger, bi'ithnillah.



CHAPTER 9

## A Practical Guide

*Set your intention, raise your hands in du'a,  
and start chipping away.*

Some time back, an email arrived in my inbox from a sister struggling with clutter. She told me that earlier in the year, she'd decluttered a single drawer and every so often, she would go to that drawer, open it up and just look at it. She said it probably sounded silly.

It didn't. Not at all. I smile every time I think of her opening that drawer and I understand because that drawer is far more than a tidy space amid clutter and chaos. It's potential. It's hope. It's possibility.

Because if you can declutter a drawer, then you can declutter two, and if you can do that, you can manage a cupboard, then a room. And bit by tiny bit that potential, the hope, the possibility of a different life will not be an impossible dream; it will **BECOME** your present, bi'ithnillah.

## **Piece by Piece**

If the idea of decluttering your home, your phone, or your inbox is so overwhelming that just thinking about it is exhausting, you're not alone. One of the biggest hurdles we face when simplifying is taking the first step and knowing where to begin.

How do you tackle a lifetime of accumulated clutter?

**The same way you'd eat an elephant – piece by piece.**

Break the whole down into bite-sized chunks and focus on just what is in front of you.

You don't need to do everything at once to experience the benefits of simplifying; small and consistent daily action adds up over time and it's a far less stressful and more sustainable way to approach change.

**Set your intention, raise your hands in du'a, and start chipping away.**

**Don't overthink it, just start!**

## Use the Pomodoro Method

### The Pomodoro Method works very well if you:

- Struggle with procrastination
- Often spend too much time on tasks which then throws the rest of your day out.
- Have big goals that will take time to complete and would be best-approached piece by piece (decluttering is by nature, an elephant for most of us)
- Tend to overestimate how much you can get done in a time slot (this has been extensively studied in social psychology so if you do this, welcome to the club!)
- Are easily distracted.

### Here's how it works:

1. Pick a task (i.e., declutter my fridge)
2. Set a timer for 25 minutes.
3. Focus and work on decluttering the fridge until the timer goes off, then stop, guilt-free.
4. Take a 5-minute break.
5. Every 4 or so Pomodoros, take a longer break.

You can also change up the length of the Pomodoros and the breaks if you want to.

P.S.: There are great Pomodoro apps that do this for you – this is one app worth downloading!

# POMODORO WITH A DEEN TWIST

INTENTION

DU'A



BISMILLAH

IHSAN

GRATITUDE

## The Pomodoro Technique with a Deen Twist

1. Pick a task (i.e. declutter my fridge)
2. Set a timer for 25 minutes.
3. **Take a moment to think about your intention.**
4. **Make du'a asking Allah to help you.**
5. **Think about what ihsan would look like in the task you're about to begin.**
6. **Start with 'Bismillah'**
7. Focus and work on decluttering the fridge until the timer goes off, then stop, guilt-free.
8. **Pause, internalize the progress you've made and thank Allah.**
9. Take a 5-minute break.
10. Every 4 or so Pomodoros, take a longer break.

SIMPLIFY. MAKE SPACE FOR CHANGE



CHAPTER 10

## Space by Space

*"When our minds are cluttered, clear thinking is challenging making it much harder to focus on anything else..."*

My hope in writing this short book is to inspire you to start simplifying your life and also give you some practical guidance based on my own experience and many years of teaching simplification and decluttering to others.

Over the years, I've found the best place to start one's simplification journey is almost always mental decluttering simply because when our minds are cluttered, clear thinking is challenging making it much harder to focus on anything else, including decluttering other areas of your life.





## Begin with a Brain Dump

So we begin with clearing our minds, using a well-known technique called a 'brain dump' which is as simple as **transferring everything from your mind onto paper** – to-do lists, current and desired book lists, enrolled course lists, shopping lists, etc.

Once it's out of your head and on paper, the next step is to **divide the brain dump into two categories of lists: your macro and micro lists.**

The macro list is a space without rules, where you can include everything, be it your dream reading list of 500 books or the 50 online courses you want to sign up for. It can include your goals and aspirations, your to-do lists, your want-to-do lists – this is where you can go wild. This is the easy part.

Then comes the challenge.

**To pick just 1,2 or 3 items to pull onto your micro list in each category** - the current list of items you will actively focus on and complete before you head back to your macro list to select the next 1,2, or 3.

This simplified version of a 'brain dump' helps us clear our minds and as we select less to focus on, we set ourselves up to make progress and complete projects before we take on more.

In our advanced 'brain dump' at Finding Sakeenah, we dive more deeply into categorizing our brain dump using key growth areas and prioritizing our current list based on our purpose, key roles and values but as you're just starting out, using the macro and micro list is a nice simple way to begin.

# Clearing Physical Clutter

## **Recommended: Use the Pomodoro Technique**

### **Choose Your Focus Area.**

Start with a smaller area, like your living room's side cabinet rather than the entire living room. Focus on decluttering first; organization and tidying can come later.

### **Pick a decluttering Technique.**

There are plenty to choose from, this is just one of them – feel free to adapt the technique to suit your needs. There are no rules so go with what works for you.

### **Set a Pomodoro timer and get started!**

- Remove rubbish: dispose of it in a bag or bin.
- Set aside items to relocate.
- Collect items for donation in a bag/box.
- Gather items for sale in a bag/box.
- Place items to give away in a bag/box

At the end of your Pomodoro time slot, stop, guilt-free, and say alhamdulillah for the progress you've made, relocate items quickly without getting side-tracked, and set your intention to continue tomorrow.

## Top Tips

1. Avoid decluttering sentimental items in the beginning.
2. Keep projects small and focused.
3. Use the Pomodoro technique with time-based goals.
4. Use your purpose and your values to decide what is and isn't staying.
5. Research organizations for donations and schedule drop-off days so that your donation boxes don't end up sitting in your home for months.
6. Donate intentionally and with *ihsan* ensuring items are appropriate, clean, and in good condition.
7. Donate excess items first, then items you love, for the sake of Allah.
8. Stop the inflow. Prevent more clutter by monitoring the sources of any inflow.
9. Family not on board. Engage gently with them; focus on your own journey to inspire them through your growing calm and presence and *never* throw any of their belongings away without their permission.

## Digital Declutter

In our technological world, it's become critical that we manage our digital space and monitor our digital diets ensuring that technology is working for us and not against us.

Digital Minimalism - "A philosophy of technology use in which you focus your online time on a small number of carefully selected and optimized activities that strongly support things you value, and then happily miss out on everything else"<sup>33</sup>  
CAL NEWPORT, DIGITAL MINIMALISM

As you declutter, remember the key is to prioritize what adds value to your life and remove the rest.

### Social Media and Groups

- Keep only the most beneficial content: unsubscribe, unfollow, mute, or leave the rest.
- Set designated times to check social media and stick to them.
- Consider limiting social media apps to specific devices for better focus.
- Try a social media break. Start with one day and build up from there.

## **Apps**

- Keep only the most beneficial apps; delete the rest.
- Reinstall an app if you genuinely miss it, but most likely, you'll forget about it once it's gone.

## **Notifications**

- Mute everything/everyone except immediate family.

## **Emails and Subscriptions (newsletters)**

- Unsubscribe from unnecessary newsletters and subscriptions.
- Delete or archive old emails.
- Consider reducing the number of email addresses you have.

## **Digital Content: downloads, files, photos**

- Begin decluttering and organizing one area at a time.
- Delete unnecessary files.
- Create logical folders and be consistent with naming files and saving them in their designated folders \*note: this technique can also be adapted to manage paper clutter.

## **Online courses**

- Prioritize and focus on fewer courses at a time.
- Make consistent progress, apply what you learn, and complete what you start.

## **Set Boundaries with Devices**

- Avoid using devices during mealtimes.
- Establish a screen-free evening routine to improve sleep quality.
- Avoid checking social media first thing in the morning

SIMPLIFY. MAKE SPACE FOR CHANGE



CHAPTER 11

## Ripple Effects

*"I picked up the Quran for the first time in a year."*

The results of simplifying have far surpassed anything I could ever have imagined when I first started my journey and began supporting sisters on theirs. As each sister created space for change, remarkable things started to unfold, alhamdullilah.

Their stories speak for themselves. Alhamdullilah.

# RIPPLE EFFECTS



## From Sisters Who Have Simplified

‘I picked up the Quran for the first time in a year.’

“Simplifying felt so liberating. It felt like a weight off my shoulders. I became more organized with less clutter. I think twice before buying anything, or rather I have stopped buying unnecessarily.”

“I realized that simplification was working when I started focusing on everything I do. I was working on a more conscious level. My life now is more content, less stressful. I have more time to do things.”

“Now, I look forward to waking up every day to serve my Creator with ease. I can recognize if I am overthinking. I stopped feeling guilty about the past and I started living in the present moment which was a dream for me. I started showing up for myself. Alhamdulillah, my children are calmer around me and I can have meaningful conversations with my husband. Alhamdulillah.”

“Once I’d simplified my life, I was able to reach out for help and sign up for counseling. I knew I needed it before, but I was so overwhelmed, I didn’t have the capacity for anything else, even something that I knew I really needed. It’s changed my life. Alhamdulillah.”

“I was mostly overwhelmed, overthinking, and anxious 24/7. I wasn’t even trying anymore, I took anxietytics. Simplifying felt great. It felt like there is hope for change. I’m still working on it, but I’m making progress. I’m still on the path, and I’m not as anxious as before.”



“I was struggling with piles of clothes, shoes, scarves, etc. not used at all or worn for years, overwhelming amounts of groups of WhatsApp and Telegram which I was not using/accessing, messages I had not opened for a very long time, 3 email accounts which were overwhelming and hard to keep organized, household things which had not been used in ages. The thought of where to start and how to declutter was holding me back. I realized that simplification was working when I started to fill bags with my clothes, shoes etc. to give to the charity shop which I had previously found hard to do. Alhamdulillah”

"Simplifying for me was an entire lifestyle shift. More than anything, it has taught me that when you change your thoughts, you change your life. Of course, there have been moments when I've felt "overwhelmed" but alhamdulillah, I have grounded myself by remembering to just breathe, to take a minute to re-evaluate my purpose in life, and think clearly and yes, simply, about what I want to do.”



CHAPTER 12

## What's Next?

*As they say, "The best time to start was 20 years ago, the second best time is today."*

I know life is busy but please don't let what you've learned become something you carry around with you in an information backpack but never get around to implementing.

**Your life is too important to stay stuck in clutter and overwhelm so make the decision that today is the day things change! Start today!**

1. Declutter a drawer!
2. Share the book with friends and family.
3. Sign up for [one of my FREE classes at Finding Sakeenah](#)

# A Final Word

Thank you for reading this far and trusting me with your precious time. I pray that you've found the book beneficial. All good is from Allah, and any mistakes are my own. I ask Allah first and foremost, and then you my dearest reader, to forgive my many shortcomings. Please also remember that not all techniques or advice work for everyone so take whatever works for you and leave the rest.

**May Allah have mercy on our souls, and may He give us strength to be steadfast upon His deen, living our lives for Him.**

**May He make us among those who hear the words,**  
"O reassured soul,  
Return to your Lord, well-pleased  
and pleasing [to Him],  
And enter among My [righteous] servants.  
And enter My Paradise<sup>34</sup>."  
(Quran: 89:27-30)



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SIMPLIFY. MAKE SPACE FOR CHANGE



## Recommended Reading

*The best of all books is the Qur'an*

The Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ and then the wisdom of the scholars and the righteous.

Below I'll also share some contemporary books that may be useful to add to your reading list if you'd like to dive more deeply into the world of simplification and decluttering. Please remember to filter all content through the lens of our deen - take what is useful and leave whatever is not aligned.

**The More of Less.** Joshua Becker

**Essentialism.** Greg McKeown

**Digital Minimalism.** Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World. Cal Newport

**Affluenza.** How to Be Successful and Stay Sane. Oliver James.  
**Decluttering at the Speed of Life.** Dana K. White  
**The Myth of Multitasking.** How 'Doing it All' Gets Nothing Done. Dave Crenshaw  
**Addicted to the Monkey Mind.** JF Benoist  
**Declutter Your Mind.** S. J. Scott and Barrie Davenport  
**Zapped.** Ann Louise Gittleman.  
**Selfie.** How We Became So Self-Obsessed and What It's Doing to Us. Will Storr.  
**80/20 Your Life.** Richard Koch.  
**The One Thing.** Gary Keller.  
**The Productive Muslim.** Mohammed Faris.

## References

For the sake of reading-ease, I have written ‘Qur’an’ throughout the book when referencing ayat in English – this, of course, refers to interpretations/translations of the Qur’an. I have placed links to the original Arabic here in the references.

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<https://sunnah.com/riyadussalihin:578>

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Retail Therapy

[7] The Sayings of Ibn Al Qayyim Al Zawziyyah. Ikram Hawramani. Stewards Publishing. 2017.

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## **Three Ways to Simplify**

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[29] <https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:4141>

[30] Bukhari and Muslim. <https://sunnah.com/riyadussalihin:1>

[31] Bukhari. <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6465>

[32] Bukhari <https://sunnah.com/qudsi40:25>

## **Space by Space**

[33] Digital Minimalism. Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World. Cal Newport.

## **A Final Word**

[34] Interpretation of the Quran: 89:27-30, [https://quran.com/en/al-fajr/27-](https://quran.com/en/al-fajr/27-30)

30

# Jazzakum Allah khayran

*Share the message with friends and family and  
join us for more inspiration*



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SIMPLY MAKE SPACE

# Simplify

MAKE SPACE FOR CHANGE

30-MINUTE READ

## Lighten

*"Be in this world as if you are a stranger."*

In my early 20s while living in London, I embraced Islam, one summer I traveled the Camino de Santiago, and I lived in Spain.

I'd done a fair amount of backpacking my way across the world as a seasoned traveler. As I packed, I noticed priced socks that I had bought in London, a guidebook heavy enough to be a burden in the way of preparing for my next trip.

A Muslim's guide to simplifying, decluttering, and making space for the things that are truly important.

Kate Hepburn (Umm Sakeenah)