

The Physics of Letting Go

By Nikki Moustaki

The Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), in his studies of physics, claimed that “nature abhors a vacuum.” He wasn’t talking about the latest Dyson canister vac, but rather that the physics of our world – the way matter moves – doesn’t like empty space. A vacuum – or a void – is unnatural and matter will always move to fill it.

If that sounds like your house, desk, or car, you’re not alone. According to the US Department of Energy, twenty-five percent of people with a two-car garage don’t have room for a vehicle in it because other stuff is where their car should be. The storage facility industry earns in the billions yearly, nearly as much as the Hollywood motion picture industry – but slogging through clutter isn’t nearly as much fun as a night at the movies. It’s no wonder that Americans spend 63,000,000 hours a week looking for things we’ve misplaced.

Empty spaces make us feel like something’s missing. An empty shelf is always in need of books. The space on the coffee table requires the perfect bowl, and that empty bowl should be filled with the perfect potpourri. Emptiness is uncomfortable, or at the very least we’re not used to it – so we fill it.

This phenomenon isn’t just physical. We also clutter our mental and social space, and all of this clutter leaves us with no room for growth of any kind. A house full of clutter has no space for redecoration; a desk full of clutter has no space for fruitful work; a mind full of clutter has no space for new thought; and a social space full of clutter has little space for new or better relationships.

Whether clutter causes depression or depression causes clutter is a chicken-and-egg argument, but it’s inarguable that clutter and depression are close cellmates. Clutter is defined as a “confused and disordered state,” so it’s no wonder that too much stuff – physical, emotional, and metaphysical – can weigh a person down. It seems that too much of a good thing is more like an anchor than wings. But if nature abhors a vacuum, then how are mere mortals like us supposed to accept the void, even if doing that is as simple as not filling up a shelf with knickknacks? We can do it with two words equaling one action that sounds so simple: letting go.

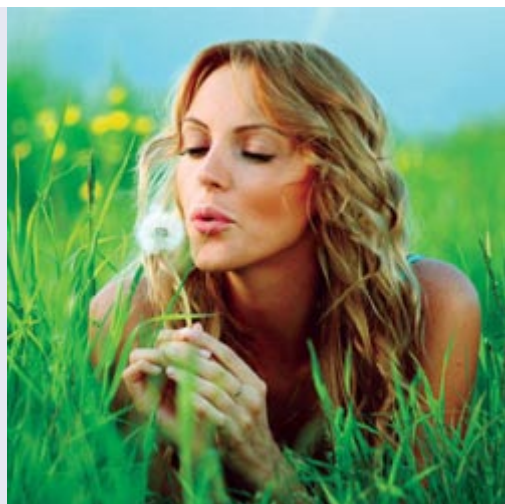
PHYSICAL CLUTTER

Clutter isn’t just an eyesore; it can be a “time vulture,” eating away valuable hours that you can spend having a spa day or writing the Great American Novel. A statistic from the American Cleaning Institute shows that getting rid of clutter would eliminate forty percent of housework in the average home.

The reasons for physical cluttering aren’t as simple as having too much stuff, and letting go of the stuff can be as complex as the reasons it’s there in the first place. Clutter can stem from the fear of lack (someday I’ll need this 100 yards of cable line), guilt (I can’t give away this ugly vase that Aunt Betty gave me), nostalgia (I should keep the Pez dispensers my boyfriend gave me in the ninth grade), depression (I’m feeling too down to clean), shopping addiction (this thing I didn’t need was on sale), keeping up with the Joneses (everyone needs to see my nice stuff so that they can like me more or envy me), unhappiness (I’ll feel better if I buy this fill-in-the-blank), and clutter as a shield (if I have 1000 dolls, people will pay attention to them and not to my issues). Unraveling some of these reasons may require professional help, but the average person can start to undo the knots of clutter and let go in small increments:

Recycle. In a time when it’s “good to be green,” recycle your stuff by giving it away – someone else may find a treasure in the things that are weighing you down, and you’ll feel good that your items are going to a good home.

Remember the “Rule of Two.” Every time you leave the house take two things out with you, even if they’re just two pieces of junk mail you need to toss.



recommended products:



Elemis Pro-Collagen Eye Renewal

NEW! Achieve the ultimate results for more youthful looking eyes with this revolutionary Anti-Aging eye cream. In just 28 days the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles around the delicate eye area was found to be visibly smoothed by up to 60%.

Use the Law of In and Out. If you are going to bring something into the house, you have to take something out at the same time.

Apply the 15 Minute Rule. Declutter for only 15 minutes a day and make yourself stop when the time is up.

Leave no paper trail. A piece of paper should go through your hands only once before you decide what to do with it – take an action, file, or toss. Don't let it pile up.

Adopt a decluttering mantra. A place for everything and everything in its place. All similar things should go together so that you'll always know where to find them.

Let go. Let go of the need to fill every physical space. Accept the space as it is.

MENTAL CLUTTER

Do you ever walk into a room with purpose, but then forget why you're there – and it's only five seconds later? This is the equivalent of tripping on a roller skate in the middle of the room – you probably have mental clutter. Procrastination is also a symptom of mental clutter, as is disorganization, indecision, and avoidance.

It's easy in this modern world to fill every second with a different thought, to fill every corner of consciousness with mental to-do lists and worries, to let the mental chatter overwhelm you. The Buddhists call this "monkey mind," when your thoughts jump from thing to thing, like a monkey jumps from branch to branch. The "monkey mind" engages each thought and gives them importance, allowing them to distract you from the present moment.

Some people successfully use meditation to calm the monkey mind, using the breath as a focal point. Every time the monkey mind acts up, come back to focusing on your breath and allow the thoughts to just slip by, kind of like a scrolling marquis announcing something interesting, but not important enough to make you pause.

But you don't have to retreat to a Buddhist temple and sit in silence to quiet the monkey mind. There are simple things you can do every day to subdue it:

Get a massage. Try Elemis Destress Massage Oil for an extra dose of calm. Anecdotal evidence shows that getting a onehour Swedish massage equals the calorie burn of a 20 minute walk, so that's a bonus!

Take a bath. Elemis has a variety of aromatherapy spa candles infused with essential oils that turn an everyday bath into a spa experience.

Take a spa day. Nothing's better for a mental clutter quick fix than an afternoon of pampering.

Drive. Driving is a "right brain" activity. The right side of your brain is in charge of automatic tasks and creativity, but is also responsible for random thoughts. The left side of your brain is more linear, logical, and rational. When you drive for a distance, you wear out the right brain just enough to let left brain thinking emerge, helping to slow the flow of cluttering thoughts. Exercise does the same thing – and helps lift your *derrière* too.

Delegate tasks. Trying to do everything yourself creates overblown mental to-do lists and lots of worry. Is there anyone in your environment that can do some of the tasks on your list?

Learn to say no. You don't have to do everything. Learning to say no can carve out a lot more time, creating more mental space.

Quit dwelling on the past. The past is like a carnival where you're never going to win that giant stuffed monkey, no matter how many darts you throw at those balloons. But it's all too easy to keep ponying up for more chances. You're never going to change the past, so you might as well quit worrying about it.

Let go of the future. Like the past, you'll never really get a handle on the future, because you're always in the present. Save worrying about the future for psychics and try to stay focused on what's right in front of you. It's great to have goals, but worrying will not affect the outcome of any action.