

S I M P L E R I V E R

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Beyond Mere Simplicity

It is easy to argue that simplicity is really just about having “less” in life. Less furniture, less to-do lists, less debt, less of everything. The very essence of how Webster’s dictionary defines the word is focused on what is lacking. “The lack of guile, free from vanity, free from ostentation, free from secondary complications, free from elaboration,” etc. Even calling someone a “simple” person somehow indicates that they have a lesser way of understanding. The very concept of the word is defined more by what it is not, than what it actually is.

For centuries, major religious and philosophical belief systems have had simplicity idealists who further push this notion of “lesser living.” They claim that, to be truly enlightened, one must first disregard all earthly possessions, take vows of poverty and silence, disregard self and others, and wait with patient supplication until the lights go on. Not that any of these behaviors are inherently wrong, but the loss is in the one-sided view of simplicity. Again and again, it is presented as some forced sacrifice made for the sake of a greater good. Simplicity is unfortunately and wrongly portrayed as the process whereby all the excess is painfully let go of.

Simplicity, however, is not really about living with less, nor is it about lacking anything. It involves so much more than just getting rid of all the “secondary complications.” The tidying up of one’s space and time, living a life with less, putting aside worldly excess are all great in their proper place and time. These steps can help along the way, but they are not in themselves the entirety. In fact, simplicity is not something people just “do” so that they can feel freedom from the guilt of glut. Rather, it is about “how” people live.

Think of simplicity as an overall effort to find the base truth in our complicated lives and relationships. It is more about trying to look beyond the interferences and distractions in order to live life in its purest form.

The quest for simple living then becomes an act of freedom in order to focus on the best parts of life. Not the “best” as in what provides the most fun, but rather, what provides the most purpose. As this path is pursued, the richness and fullness becomes apparent in the quality of living. Relationships are more real and genuine, both in the good times and the bad. Emotions and logic are more regulated, without all the second guessing. Defining needs vs. wants becomes more obvious, both for self and for others. Loss and gain become less relevant to determining our worth.

And yes, all the pollutants that fill up houses, schedules, and relationships will get cleaned up. This life style choice will be the inevitable result of realizing all the extra “stuff” is not needed for living a full and satisfied life. **In this process, there is no loss or suffering in letting go because all the “stuff” does not offer any meaning or purpose to hold on to.**

Eco-Notes

Before buying that gas miser new hybrid car, do the math. Even if the improvement is an increase from 20mpg to 40mpg, the savings will only be about \$65 a month (assuming \$2 a gallon at 15K miles a year). It will take over 25 years just to break even if the new car cost \$20K to purchase. If a new car is truly needed get one with good gas mileage (or find another way to get around), but getting rid of old reliable that is owned clear and free just to get better mileage will only add to our nation’s wrecking yards and to your overall debt.