

Travel Light

Spiritual Minimalism to
Live a More Fulfilled Life

LIGHT WATKINS

 **sounds true**
BOULDER, COLORADO

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Introduction

“No matter what you have in your bag, if you cannot adapt to change, then you will always be carrying that around with you.”

—The Spiritual Minimalist

TURNING ON THE LIGHT

I flipped the switch, but there was no light. It was January 2022, and I had just returned to my Mexico City Airbnb from a week-long meditation retreat that I'd been facilitating. I set my daypack down on the couch and began investigating. None of the other light switches were working. Evidently, the electricity was out, which meant that I would not have the ability to wash clothes, charge my phone or tablet, use Wi-Fi, turn on the floor heaters, or do much of anything other than sit in darkness until it was time to go to sleep.

I notified the apartment manager right away. She had no idea why the power wasn't working in my unit even though it was on throughout the rest of the building, and she verified that the electricity bill was current. Regardless, she promised to have the power restored right away. Later that night, I received a message informing me that she hadn't had any luck with the electric company and that she would try again tomorrow.

This was obviously not a life or death situation. In fact, some would refer to it as a "first-world problem," barely worth mentioning. However, if you're not prepared for a relatively small change of expectation like this, losing access to power for even a couple of hours can be detrimental to your entire day, especially if you've just returned from a trip with clothes to wash, or food to cook, or a meeting to prepare for, with devices that need recharging. But luckily, I had been preparing for this kind of situation ever since I began intentionally practicing minimalism on May 31, 2018, the day I started traveling *light*.

My leap of faith into minimalism officially began when I turned in my thirty-day notice to the landlord of my two-bedroom Venice Beach apartment after a whole year of thinking about doing just this. I then contacted my car dealer and made an appointment to return my leased car at the end of the month. Next, I posted a series of classified ads online, listing all of my

furniture, my Vespa scooter, and everything else of value that I no longer needed.

After doing some research, I found out that twenty-two inches was the largest carry-on bag allowed in the overhead compartment on most airlines. So I went to the luggage store to inspect the latest carry-on bags. I brought a bunch of clothes, accessories, and toiletries to see how much would comfortably fit into whichever carry-on bag I was considering. I left the store a couple of hours later with a brand new, high-end, twenty-two-inch carry-on bag.

This carry-on would effectively be my new apartment because, over the following month, I methodically cleared my apartment of everything that wouldn't fit into my bag. There would be no storage room, either, as I was allergic to paying a few thousand dollars a year to store items that I would likely forget about within a few months. On May 31, I rolled my new "carry-on" apartment out of my old, empty apartment and set out on my nomadic adventure.

A couple of years and dozens of destinations later, I scaled down to an even smaller backpack. And a year after that, I traded my backpack for a smaller daypack. In this process of elimination, I discovered one of the principles of what I began referring to as "Spiritual Minimalism": the fewer options you have, the more freedom you have to make decisions, and the more present you become.



I currently have around thirty items in my daypack, which include:

1 button-down shirt	1 pair of sandals
1 pair of pants	Toiletries
2 pairs of shorts	Refillable water bottle
3 pairs of underwear	Meditation shawl
3 T-shirts	Meditation teaching kit
1 jacket	Tripod
1 hoodie	Podcast microphone
1 sweatshirt	Rechargeable battery
1 belt	Tablet
1 pair of casual sneakers	Journal
1 pair of shoes	Mala beads

With these items, I've managed to travel the world two or three times over, giving talks; speaking on panels; leading workshops and retreats; working out each day; swimming, running, and hiking; going on dates; attending church, funerals, weddings, graduations, dinners, premieres, beach trips, celebratory gatherings, hot air balloon rides—you name it.

Back to Mexico City: it ended up taking my apartment manager two days to restore power. But it was only a mild inconvenience, because by that point—four years since becoming home-free—I had grown accustomed to operating with

maximum efficiency and had trained myself to perform my most important daily tasks *without* relying upon electricity or even light.

For instance, many people, after returning from a week-long trip, arrive back home with a couple of suitcases full of dirty clothes that they need to wash immediately in order to have something to wear the next day. They also need a haircut. Maybe a shower. And they need to do some work on their phone or laptop, which likely needs to be recharged.

When I arrived back at my Airbnb, my daypack was already full of fresh, clean clothes that I had hand-washed on each night of my retreat. I was thoroughly practiced in shaving my head, even in the dark, without the need for a mirror, just in case I encountered this type of situation. I had already practiced doing everything I needed to do work-wise from my phone, including editing my website, composing complex newsletters, and writing this book. And I carried a portable charger with me everywhere I went in the event that there was no available power outlet to recharge.

What would have been considered major inconveniences were fairly minor thanks to my years of intentional preparation and practice. In fact, I kind of enjoyed having nothing to do in the evenings while navigating my apartment by candlelight. Of course, I didn't admit that to the apartment manager because I wanted her to get the power restored as quickly as possible.


But I was okay with the situation, and because I had cultivated fulfillment inside, I was able to focus on the opportunities as opposed to the few minor inconveniences, making the score for that day Unexpected Change = 0, Spiritual Minimalism = 1.

THE INSIDE-OUT APPROACH

When considering a minimalist lifestyle, you may be excited to quickly get rid of half or three-quarters of your belongings, or to follow my example and purge *any* item that doesn't fit into your carry-on bag or daypack. After all, that's what minimalism is all about, right? Minimizing your life? Creating space?

If that's primarily how you're interested in approaching minimalism, I've got some good news for you: there are dozens of books that offer very methodical approaches to cleaning out your closets, hosting yard sales, and acquiring new items with more intention—but *Travel Light* is not one of them.

I will not be going room by room with expert tips for getting rid of your old books, or the shoes you no longer wear, or that blender you haven't used for three years. Instead, *Travel Light* will provide you with instructions for exploring a less obvious but more individualized approach to minimalism, which I call “Spiritual Minimalism.”



THE
GRASS
IS
GREENER
ON THE
OTHER
SIDE.

THE GRASS
WILL ALWAYS LOOK
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ON THE INSIDE.

Spiritual Minimalism is more of an inside-out approach than the conventional outside-in approach to making space. In other words, this is not the get-rid-of-my-stuff-to-be-happy approach to minimalism. Rather, this is the get-happy-inside-*first*-and-see-what-happens-after-that approach to minimalism.

To illustrate the difference between the two approaches, let's run a quick thought experiment: Suppose you only had two weeks to become a minimalist—how would you proceed? We can imagine that most people would start by frantically going through their closets and getting rid of the items that they no longer use or need. Nothing wrong with that, but the Spiritual Minimalist would take a different approach. The Spiritual Minimalist would spend those first few days getting quiet enough to hear or feel in which direction their inner guidance was pointing them as the best path forward. Maybe it would be to clean out the garage. Or it could be to pull the plug on a friendship that is no longer serving them. Or to finally commit to an exercise routine.

Whatever the Spiritual Minimalist hears internally as a first step, no matter how illogical it may sound to the conventional minimalist, they trust it enough to start moving in that direction. A Spiritual Minimalist makes the majority of their decisions from their own *inner* guidance. And the best way to make sure your inner guidance is providing you with the highest quality information is to turn up the