

*“Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?”*

*So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*

*Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you?”*

**- Jesus Christ on the Mount.**

# Minimalism

Recently I've moved to a new apartment with my sister. I deliberately told myself that I will incorporate more "zen" into my life. This is a lifestyle I chose for myself as zen living is basically simple living. Being from the country, this simple living is ideal for me. But what does simple living mean in the first place?

What simple living means is that you live off that which you need. It means not having excess but at the same breath not having little. And a way to find the balance between having too much and too little is in the Buddhist definition of minimalism.

I refer to the Buddhist definition of minimalism because there's a modern, more extravagant definition that prides itself on having as few things as possible. You will find people pride themselves by saying that they use one soap to wash their clothes, their body, their face, their dishes and their house. We all know that the green bar can do all those things. I don't know about you but I'll feel very uncomfortable using the same soap I washed the toilet with

to wash my face. This modernised definition takes minimalism to the extreme, taking away its true essence.

The Buddhist definition of minimalism states that one should only have things that one need. And to identify things that you need, think about the functions of those things. An example could be your bedroom. How do you achieve a zenlike minimal state for your bedroom? The key question is to ask, what is the function of the bedroom? The primary function of the bedroom is to rest. So in your bedroom, you should have your bed and only your bed. The secondary function of the bedroom is to prepare yourself for work or the day in general. So, you should have a wardrobe or some storage unit for your clothes and lotions. Thus, to achieve a minimalist bedroom setting, you should have your bed and a storage unit for your clothes and lotions.

Anything else might be excess. The function of the bedroom is to rest your body, so it will not be wise to have your television set in there. Yes, not all of us are blessed with apartments that have different rooms, but the premise remains true. If you are a student living at a res, chances are that your room has a bed and a work table. If you are

fortunate enough, you might have your fridge in there as well. That's all you need in your room.

But let's remember the definition of minimalism according to Buddhists. Minimalism is living off the things that you need. So if you like me and you are a bit anti-social and have a low social IQ, chances are the room will be your escape from the world. So in the room (assuming I am still a student living at res or a commune), I will need a two-plate stove (to avoid conversations in the shared kitchen), a vaskom (because sometimes the showers get super busy and I'm conscious about my body), a fridge, a bed, a work desk with a chair and wardrobe to store my possessions. Those are the things that I'll need if I lived in a single-room apartment such as res.

What I will not need is an extravagant décor piece to sit on my desk. I have no need for such a thing. I will not need more than 6 shirts. I will not need more than 3 pairs of jeans. I will not need more than 2 cups, 2 plates, and 2 sets of cutlery. Anything beyond that will be excess.

But for someone who is social and has many friends, they might need more than 2 cups, 2 plates and 2 sets of cutlery because the chances are high that they usually have friends over. If someone is a fashionista, chances are high that they will have more than 6 shirts and 3 pairs of jeans because dressing well is their lifestyle.

The essence of minimalism is to reduce the excess that blocks one's mind. And the physical and material things are the manifestation of what occupies the mind. When someone has a lot on their mind, this reflects with the things that occupy their physical space. But one might argue and say that Steve Jobs probably had more on his mind than the average person but he was a true minimalist. We might look at his jeans and black turtle neck jersey and think he got it at Walmart (the equivalent of PicknPay Clothing). But that's not the case. That uniform was designed by Issey Miyake who was a world-famous designer.

Why would I mention Steve Jobs and his uniform in the context to having a lot on one's mind? Two reasons. The first one is that even though one would say that Steve Jobs had a lot on his mind, he meditated a lot. He was considered a

hippy by many who knew him. Through mediation, the mind has the opportunity to see the thoughts that occupy it. Mediation is like the sweeping of the mind.

I who practice zazen, when you sit and meditate, there are so many thoughts that cross your mind. But being in that moment, the mind has the opportunity to process each thought. It has the opportunity to retain useful thoughts and discard useless ones. Through mediation, you can clear the mind and this will reflect in the physical space that you occupy. As seen with Steve Jobs's clothing.

The second reason I mentioned Steve Jobs and his uniform is that the uniform was designed especially for him. It is said that Steve Jobs drove luxurious sports cars. He was once quoted as saying the reason that he drives these cars is that he loves the design of them. The key to minimalism is having only what you need. So if I going to wear two pairs of jeans a whole week, those jeans must be of great quality. If they are not of great quality, they will wear out quickly. I talk about jeans because I learnt this lesson last year.

For about 4 months, I had to walk an hour's walk to work and another hour's walk back from work. The jeans I had, I bought at Mr Price. They could not endure the daily walking. They didn't survive to see Winter. As opposed to when I was a waiter and I bought more hard "industrial" jeans that could endure a similar distance in walking and the further 8 (sometimes I'd push double shift) hours of walking around and serving people.

Because as a minimalist, you'll live with the essentials that you need, and you want those essentials to last you a lifetime. So let's say you work out and for you to hit those extra reps, you need to be listening to gangster rap through your headsets. If you buy quality headsets such as Skull Candy or Volcano, chances are those headsets will last a great deal of time. I have a pair of Philips headsets that I bought in 2015 that still work perfectly. That's the essence of quality and why as a minimalist it's best to buy quality as quantity isn't our goal.

Because the flip side is that if you buy cheap headsets from Pep, chances are they will not survive a month. Especially if you work out with them. At the gym, headsets fall. With most

cheap headsets on that first fall, that's game over. Now what happens is that you have to buy another set. That old broken set now is coiled up and placed in the corner of your gym bag. It will be worse if you didn't learn your lesson and you go back to the same cheap brand you bought.

Now you have to occupy your physical space with more things and worse, with things that are broken. If you are like me and were taught not to litter and try your best to respect your environment, you won't throw away those broken headsets because electrical products do not belong in the household trash can. As I write this, I can mentally see the boxes I have of broken electrical toys and gadgets I have had over the years back home. Something that now that I'm taking this zen living more seriously, I'll have to find a way to discard those broken toys and gadgets safely.

For those who seek a simpler life, minimalism is the way for you. And you don't have to be a Buddhist or a hippy to embrace this life. When Christ said to give to God what is God's and what is Ceasar to Ceasar, a minimalist interprets that as Christ speaking this philosophy of simple living.



To some of us, God is not a figure somewhere in a mystical place called Heaven. I believe that God is each one of us. So when Christ said that, to someone like myself, that's Christ saying feed yourself (you, your God entity) what you need and that which you don't need to give it to Ceasar. Ceasar being the opposite of you, your God entity. And it isn't that profound when you think of it.

If you take out physical work out seriously or you are a professional athlete, what your body needs is good sleep and good nutrition. What your body does not need is too much alcohol and lack of sleep. That is the opposite of your God entity. The explanation of this God entity I'll explain in another post as I don't want us to lose focus on this one. For this post is discussing living off that which you need and only that which you need.

What you need is what is keeping you alive. If you are a food content creator, a chef or someone who enjoys cooking, then what you need in the kitchen will be a bit more than the average person. Those different spices and different applications keep you alive because you can exercise your creativity which is a component of what God, the Creator,

has gifted in our God entities that embody our spirits. If you make the mistake and embody the corrupted form of minimalism that prides itself in living off the little as possible, you might see that air-fryer as an unnecessary appliance. When the reality could be that the air-fryer could have unlocked greater creativity in you.

I believe that minimalism is for everyone. Everyone can live off the bare basics that they need. But it begins by taking stock of what is in your mind. Through meditation, you conduct a mental stocktaking of your thoughts. And also through meditation, you can further conduct a spring cleaning of the mind to retain the thoughts that keep you alive and eradicate the thoughts that are draining your life force.

Once the mind is under your firm control, your physical space will reflect the state of your mind. At the end of the day, as the great Morpheus once said, reality is nothing but the interpretation of the mind. What your mind sees and believes, will be your reality. And it will manifest itself in the physical space you occupy. It took me a great deal of time to understand this concept. Because most of us got introduced to this concept by reading *Think and Grow Rich*

and listening to motivational speakers. We thought one needs to think of millions and they will manifest themselves. The older one got, the wiser one became to realise that's not how that principle works.

Someone who thinks of millions will not magically get millions. In fact, it is a fallacy to think in that light in my opinion. But one who thinks about money, their mind will see the book about wealth creation and not the latest love story at Exclusive Books. The one who thinks about nutrition will see the fruits and not the bottle of soda. Yes, they will see the Coke (it's near impossible to ignore Coca-Cola advertising) but their mind will associate that Coke with sugar that experts claim to be tantamount to alcohol.

Thus, this will force the mind to focus on those things that preoccupy it the most. One who does not have control over their thoughts, their mind is busy. And this busyness will manifest in their physical space. They will have one too many shirts, one too many shoes, one too many appliances, one too many everything. Their minds are focused on so many things at once, it has no place to settle. And if you have been in a room with a lot of things (whether tidy or not)

because there are so many things in that room, you cannot fully settle in that space. You could be sitting on the available seat but your knee could be hitting the tabletop. You could be sitting on the edge of the bed but your feet close to shoes or something on the floor. That room with its many occupants, invade your physical space and therefore your mental space as well.

Reality is the interpretation of your mind and your mind creates this reality through its interaction with the world through your five senses. Hence decluttering your mind will reflect itself in the physical space you occupy. You will not be able to declutter your mind if your physical space isn't decluttered or in the process of decluttering. You cannot go to the mountaintop to meditate and clear your mind only to come back to your apartment that is littered with things you do not need. It will counter the effects birthed through your meditative exercise.

It is important that as you declutter your mind to also take the initiative to declutter your physical space as well. An exercise by Fumio Sasaki that can assist one to declutter their physical space is to get rid of forgotten things. What this

means is that if you open your wardrobe and you see that one shirt or dress tucked at the corner, and this item of clothing has not been worn in years, it is best to discard that piece of clothing. Because clearly, it serves no function. Perhaps you bought in the heat of the moment when you saw that take two for three sale. The reason behind getting that item does not matter. What matters is what function the item currently serves in your life. And if it serves no function, discard it. So if there is something you have forgotten and haven't seen in a while and perhaps see it during your spring cleaning, don't think about it; just discard it.

Give to God what is God's and give to Ceasar what is Ceasar's. Feed your mind what it needs and reject anything else that your mind does not need. Assess the physical spaces that you occupy and begin looking at what you need and what you do not need. What you need serves a function. A bed serves the function to facilitate rest. A bed is not to serve as a coffee table or a work desk. It will be wise to differentiate between the two.

Yes, if you stay in a single-room apartment (or res) the bed might serve as an extra chair for guests when they visit. But

you will know it serves the function of rest. So if you are social and expect a friend or two to visit from time to time, invest in getting a chair or two to host your guests. Perhaps those foldable chairs that you can tuck away in the wardrobe so that they do not occupy your physical space when you not using them.

Minimalism is a lifestyle. So this reduction of things and assessing what you need and what you don't need is an everyday thing, not a single one-day event. Every time you clean your room, it gives you the opportunity to see whether there are things that serve the function they should or not.

Perhaps you have been working out for a couple of months. So obviously, some of the clothes that you bought before do not fit you anymore. They no longer serve the function of clothing you. At that time, it is best to discard them to allow yourself the opportunity to get new clothes.

And if you are a student or you are newly employed, perhaps you can't afford extremely expensive quality clothing. But

try not to be tempted by the sale at the discount store. Aim to buy the best quality clothing that your budget can allow.

Personally, my weight is seasonal. But generally, I am a big boy. Medium-sized clothing fits me perfectly. But sometimes I can easily get to 100kg (as I am now) and even though medium sized clothes fit me perfectly, they highlight my beautiful belly. When I'm at my leanest, those medium-sized clothing showcase me as the Zulu warrior that my surname suggests I am. But when not lean (like now) they still showcase me as a warrior, but one who hasn't seen war in a long time. And I'm conscious of my body. To avoid buying clothes all the time, I buy large-sized clothing. For my body, large-sized clothing is ideal. They accommodate me when I'm lean, and they also accommodate me when I'm not. This offers me the opportunity not to invest in clothing every time my body changes in weight.

A key thing to remember, minimalism is based on what you need. Therefore, our needs are different and our approach to minimalism will be as well. It is not a blanket approach. The examples used are to try to help you figure out how you can embody the minimalist approach in your life. However, this is a journey. One that I have committed myself to. And I hope

you will find gems that will be useful in your journey through these posts.



# Pride

Quite the interesting morning one experienced. One is on this journey of decluttering the mind and meaning to find peace in one's daily life experiences. After all, that's why people choose to live a minimalist lifestyle. The simpler the life you live, the less stress you'll have. And the less stress you'll have, the more peaceful your life will be.

I will retell the events of this morning and later explain how they connect with pride. The morning began as usual. However, this morning I woke up earlier than usual and therefore my mind was already operating sooner than usual. I get in the car and began driving out of the apartment where I stay. At the exit of this apartment, is a stop sign. Naturally, one stops and waits for other cars to pass by. I double-check for any cars that I might have missed and I see one from the opposite end. For him, entering the intersection is a yield sign. But I'm thinking that it's a yield sign and there are no cars. So, I enter the street and this man isn't stopping. Luckily nothing happened but that annoyed me.

I continued driving along and later on the highway, there were a lot of Primes. Primes are those big trucks that haul containers and stuff. I can see these Primes have occupied three of the four lanes. Mini-Primes (the smaller trucks like the ones from furniture stores) are behind these Primes trying to find a way to squeeze through between them. There was a bit of fog and other drivers around me are driving like mad men too to squeeze between the Primes and MiniPrimes. I see all this unfolding and I know my PacMan does not have the power to squeeze through that sort of traffic quickly and safely. I entered the slow lane and decided to wait it out. Moments later, I saw flashes in my rearview mirror from a Corolla. I am in the slow lane. If you want to move fast, go into the Shesha lane on your right. This Corolla violently overtakes me and gave me that look of “what are you doing”. I gave him the same look.

Already there have been two incidents in less than 30 minutes that have charged my energies. The third one comes at the intersection that leads to work. This intersection is busy and it's one of those where people decide to use lanes outside their intended purpose. But because I'm already emotionally charged, my mind is oblivious to what's

happening around me. I can see that the robots are red but then I hear someone's hooter barking at me. I look up and I didn't realise that the green arrow that I allowed our lane to move was blinking. But because of that hooter, I deliberately crawled into the intersection until the traffic opened for everyone to block those behind me in the lane I was in.

The last incident happened as I got to work. Before getting to campus, there is a roundabout. At this point, I was properly annoyed. So, I entered this roundabout faster than I should have. There were no cars in the roundabout. I had right of way because I was in the roundabout. Because I entered this roundabout like a formula driver turning at the apex of the turn, the driver on my left mistaken my turn signal so to indicate I was taking the second exit and not the third exit. This guy then decided to roll his window door and yell at me. At that point, I was so emotionally charged with kleshas (disruptive emotions), if I was not on campus with fellow colleagues arriving to work as well, I was going to tail that man to ask him to say what he was saying to my face. At that point, my knuckles were burning to knock someone's teeth in.

But anyway, he drove off and I entered campus. So, I'm a man who believes that you reap what you sow and that everything that happens to you is a reflection of your own actions. I mean you can find people in the greatest of poverty but still be the happiest people in the world. I got into my office and decided before I start the day, I must just sit and meditate. It's a bit awkward to do that in my office because the design is that it is fully transparent, which it should be given the industry I am in. But no way could I begin the day with such a potent charge of violent energy.

I sat down on the carpet, faced the wall and followed my breaths. In doing so, I broke down each incident. The first one, I was the one in the wrong. The man coming had the right of way and I had to wait for him before entering the street. However, my pride and impatience made me enter sooner.

In the second incident, I was also in the wrong. Even though I was in the slow lane, if memory recalls correctly, the minimum driving speed on the highway is 80km/h. The fact that I was driving at 60km/h, I should have turned my hazard lights on to indicate that there was an anomaly on the road

and drivers should be aware. My ignorance and selfishness made me feel insulted by the man's flash when he had the right to do so.

In the third incident, my mind was not aware of what was happening around me. And therefore, I deliberately choose to attack whoever hooted me by stealing their time. There was no reason for me to crawl into the intersection. There was no reason to stop still looking like an idiot in the middle of the intersection. The man or woman who blasted their hooter brought my attention that it was our turn to go. I could have chosen an emotion of appreciation and gratitude to have been made aware of the situation but, my ego and pride got the better of me and choose a further more disruptive emotion.

And lastly, the man who rolled down his window. The way I entered that roundabout, he too had the right to project his frustrations. I entered the roundabout relentlessly and carelessly. He decided, correctly, to wait until I got out of the roundabout to ensure everyone was safe in that situation.

The interesting thing is that with each incident, my pride would not allow me to see my fault. It would not allow me to acknowledge that perhaps I was in the wrong. It is only when I sat down and followed my breaths and followed my thoughts that I saw in each situation I was the one in the wrong.

Yes, not everything in life can be attributed to your own doing. Not being able to get a job when you are qualified could be an external circumstance outside your control. It is the Lutheran serenity prayer that teaches Christians to ask God for serenity for the things that they cannot change, the courage to change that they can and the wisdom to know the difference.

The key to that prayer is understanding the wisdom to know the difference. In all these incidents, if one did not sit and analyse them, I would still be charged with violent emotions. My pride would tell me that those drivers are idiots who probably bought their licenses in the first place. However, understanding that most of the things in life that we get are the direct consequences of the things we give, the emotions

that I got through those incidents reflected the emotions that I gave in each.

And in each incident, the main emotion that I gave was pride. Pride is an emotion that most of us believe we should possess. We should take pride in our profession and in our work. We should take pride in our friendships and relationships. We should take pride in our cars and other material objects that we own. This pride will make us cherish and respect these entities that define who we are.

But too much pride can be the death of you. This might not be a literal death but it could be an emotional and mental one. Taking root of these events, if I let my pride take over and feel that I was not in the wrong, my pride would have maintained that charged violent energy. I mean after that fourth incident; I was ready to throw down. It could happen that at work someone decides to rub me the wrong way.

Within my pridefully charged emotional state, that person would receive a violent attack which could have been verbal or even physical. And in that attack, it would have created an

enemy or an unfavourable situation that I would not have needed in the first place.

In the decluttering of the mind, it is wisdom that we need to eject those emotional and mental states that we don't need and keep those that we need. Like Teacher Pearl who chooses peace, love and hope, she actively pursues these emotions. In doing so, she's able to keep smiling even when faced with tough situations. Luckily, the state of our minds and hearts are things that we have control over. Even those getting professional assistance to fight their mental and emotional challenges, they have the power within them to make the change they desperately need.

This morning was a lesson on that. That your peace, ultimately is in your hands.



# Ego

It's 6 am in the morning. He woke up at 4 am to lose himself in his thoughts before he began his day. This he does every day. However, today he couldn't. The days have been so long that he has not had the luxury of spending time alone with himself.

He gets in his car and waits for it to warm up. Even though his car is new, practices from using an old Toyota still live him. He sits patiently, listening to the hum and rumbles of his chariot. Once the 67 horses that drive his chariot have all woken up, he begins his journey.

As he enters the highway in the city he is met with traffic.

Traffic.

This morning there was an accident that caused a bit of traffic. An accident at 6 am in the morning. There are two ways to interpret the accident. The first way which is the

most common is that someone will be annoyed by it. How can there be an accident at 6 am in the morning though? This delay will cause the individual to be late for work.

The second way, which is unlikely that most people will view the accident this way, is that there is an accident at 6 am in the morning. That person, like yourself, could have woken up, gotten in their car and begun their commute to work unfortunately to be met with an unfavourable event that ruined their day. It is an accident, an uncontrollable event that could happen to anyone.

But the accident isn't the main issue here, the traffic that it caused is. I don't think there's a sane person in the world that actively enjoys traffic. Traffic is a man-made annoyance. But why is it? Logic dictates that if you have a car and you work in the city, traffic is an unescapable reality that you will experience like getting wet from water or getting hot under the Summer sun. So why do people get annoyed by it?

Ego. The sense of self-importance that we all possess creates an illusion that elements such as traffic should not bother

you. You will see someone literally overtake you on the left, yellow lane just to get a car's advantage over you. You see people risking their lives and that of other drivers just to get that edge.

The issue is that as humans we have evolved to live extremely fast lives that we are not biologically equipped to live. And in this living of life, we have developed an ego that makes us feel more important than we should. And in traffic, this ego is where it is at full display.

Because you are in a car and have a destination to reach, other drivers in front of you are obstacles that should be removed. And even for someone like myself who drives cautiously not to damage my car, the act of driving not to damage my car is itself a representation of my ego. I will reduce the speed of PacMan to a crawl when I see a puddle, regardless of the driver (or drivers) behind me. At that moment, I am the one who is important and whether you are annoyed by it does not matter. What's important at that moment in time is me and PacMan.

So, stuck in this traffic my mind pondered the concept of the ego. Why is it important, and whether ego is a misunderstood concept like greed. Ego is the self-importance that we attach to ourselves. It's the human dimension that allows us to say we matter. It allows us to say we matter because we think we are important.

At its extreme level, this ego we see in celebrities. Their ego will make them go to Twitter and write outlandish opinions because they are celebrities. Their success inflates their ego to make them think they are more important than the average man.

And the average man's ego is seen in everyday events such as traffic. So much so that we see it in how we with cars pass the homeless man hauling his life possessions on the road. We are annoyed by his presence. We are annoyed that he is using the road that is designed for my car.

Ego, like our brain, is an entity that rests in the nucleus of what we are. A pastor needs ego so his congregation can believe that his an anointed man of God. A lecturer needs ego

so his students can believe that he knows his work. Selfimportance (ego) is based and amplified on an identity that we created for ourselves.

But if you pay careful attention to yourself, you will quickly come to realise that we have multiple identities and therefore our egos change along with them. My ego is less when I am with my family. I am the last in the line and so my identity is that of the baby of the family, no matter how old I get. In the same breath, my ego is a bit more inflated when I'm with my girl. She needs to understand that I am the man in the relationship, regardless of the modern conventions around gender roles that we are being bullied into believing.

Ego is a necessary entity of the human being. However, how do we keep our ego in check? Too much of anything in life is bad. And ego is one of them. Christ once said that you don't want to go to a party and sit on the highchair only to be told that the chair is for an honoured guest. In the same breath, Christ never lost sight of the fact that he was the Son of God. That is ego.

So, I sat in this traffic thinking about this concept. I asked myself, how do then control this ego? How can we keep the ego in check that events such as traffic caused by accidents at 6 am in the morning do not affect us?

The answer came from the notion that ego is linked to an identity that we embody at any given time. In most of us, going to work we have created an identity of being a professional. If you are a doctor then when you are in your car driving to work, your identity morphs into the medical professional. If you are a lecturer, the same process occurs.

So I thought to myself, how can we reduce these identities? Surprisingly, the answer came in an unexpected manner. There's a mediation method that I practice called zazen or sitting zen. One of the essentials of zazen is to have the ability to mediate or be mindful of your surroundings. So much so that zazen is encouraged to be done with your eyes open as they are sensory receptors that give the brain stimulation as well. This allows us to be more (and accurately) mindful and aware of who we are.

In that definition, the answer came to me. To control the ego, we need to reduce the many identities that we have created for ourselves. I am not a formal person. I'm fortunate that my profession does not require me to wear a suit and tie. In the same breath, I'm not an easy go person. In the sense that I am not a sandal, shorts-wearing type of guy. The list continues but this is important to consider. Because how we dress is how we choose to represent ourselves to the world. This is the representation of our ego.

By having multiple identities, we will dress differently according to the various identities. Someone who goes to church as a To-Do for The Week activity will put out on their Sunday best to fit the identity of being a churchgoer. The outfit is only for Sunday and is probably different from the outfit they were in when they are at Konka the previous night under the identity of enjoying the nightlife.

But someone who embodies and lives in the Word will dress in the same outfit they do during the week even on Sunday. Because for them, the church is part of their lives that they continue to live even after Sunday. Their identity does not change. This is one less identity that they possess.

Integrating our identities into one (or two) identities will greatly reduce the ego that develops in ourselves. However, one would argue and say that reducing our identities to one or few identities will merely concentrate the ego. Like too much Oros. The Oros that you poured in the many glasses, now you have poured into one.

And fundamentally this is true. Someone who is heavy into the church and has integrated their identities into being a churchgoer will begin to inflate their ego with knowing and living the Word. This is the stereotypical Christian who rides on high clouds and judges others forgetting that Christ died for all sins. This Christian will judge the 20-year-old earning double their income from her sugar daddy but find nothing wrong with their pastor buying a German sportscar with the Church's tithes.

A concentrated identity has the pitfall of creating an overinflated ego. However, a concentrated identity has the ability to create a real depth in the person that you are. The Oros (your ego) has more space to dilute and be palatable. Like the Christian who has developed a deep identity in the Word. These are Christians who will live the Word. These



are Christians that do not judge or condemn others. Instead, because they are deep in their understanding of the Word, they begin to understand why Christ spent time with the prostitutes and the tax collectors and not once judged them. That is the benefit of a concentrated identity.

And one way to begin consolidating your identities is in the way you dress. If you are dressed in trainers, track pants and a loose shirt, chances are you are active. And the feel of the clothes will make you ready for something active. When you dress in a suit and tie and formal shoes, you feel professional. You feel ready for the interview or to be productive at work. Assessing the clothes that you wear regularly will provide you with a great sense of who you truly are.

The act of beginning to assess what you wear and to begin reducing what you don't wear will begin the process of controlling your ego via re-identifying who you are and how you present yourself in society. A Buddhist monk has only two articles of clothing in the form of orange robes. A nun has a black cloak. This is their identity. They are deep in their identity that they are able to control their ego.

A Buddhist monk walking around a village blessing people and receiving gifts understands the importance of this act. If unchecked, their ego will get in the way and curse those undermining their presence in the village. It is the equivalent of questioning an egotistical pastor why he or she bought a jet instead of sowing in the communities where they got the money for the jet.

So back in this traffic, I positioned myself to the best of my ability in PacMan to practice a bit of zazen, sitting zen. I inhaled a deep breath saying that God is with me and I exhaled saying all the time, repeating the process every time PacMan came to a standstill. A calmness enveloped me and my ego. I did not have to switch identities because I've integrated them and this is evident in my dress code.

Only a calmness in self enables one to understand that traffic is part of life. Only a calmness in self enables one to control their ego. Only a calmness in self enables one to live a peaceful life. This life where we are insignificant as the speck of dust that lands on our table.

# Relentlessness

This morning I realised something. Lately, I've taken an active approach to taking note of what stimulates my mind. Not so much what it is the stimulation but more how it stimulates my mind. Meaning, with the things that I consume already and on a daily, how do they consume my mind? This morning, driving to work, I decided to give the house a break and listen to hip-hop.

I love hip-hop. I consider myself an old-school hip-hop head. But this morning I was listening to newer acts. Hip Hop is fun. The new songs are designed to entice and activate every cell in your brain. Also, new songs follow a short-play format so that they can be viral sounds on Reels and Tik Tok. Even old heads like Nas and Lloyd Banks release new songs with one or no chorus that are less than 2 mins, 2 and a half max.

So, what happens when you listen to these new songs is the equivalent of drinking high energy mentally stimulating shots. My drive to work is about 48 minutes and can get to an hour with traffic. 48 minutes equates to about 20 – 24 of

these high-energy songs. Fundamentally, there's nothing wrong with it. 20 to 24 songs to pump you for the day and get you going is okay. However, this is what I noticed when I got to work.

My ability to concentrate was affected. In most cases, I wouldn't notice this but lately, I'm on the active path to enhance my concentration and focus. I am paying careful attention to the things that are taking my concentration. This morning I found myself struggling to concentrate. I opened an ebook and got bored. I began writing in my notebook but my thoughts were everywhere. I looked up a video on YouTube but got bored too. In my mind, the high energy from the songs was still vibrating.

Over the weekend, I took the time to meditate and reduce the amount of stimulation I was receiving. It's interesting that in contrast to how I was feeling this morning, over the weekend my mind was calmer. And not only calmer, but more focused. I could hone in on one object. Everything seemed slower. And not in a boring kind of way but in a sense that I could embrace each moment as it occurred. Even something

mundane as a kettle boiling water could capture my attention.

Whilst meditating, an image of a calm lake filled my mind. The key to mindful meditation is to allow whatever thought that comes to mind to come and go as it pleases. The key is to not control it. So, when this lake rested in my mind, I felt it symbolised that moment. Shortly after, my mind thought of a drop that would land on this lake. This drop would cause a ripple that would dance on the lake's surface. That ripple would soon disappear into the lake.

I realised that the calmness of the mind can be represented as the calmness of that lake. When the mind is calm, any disruption that can alter its state can and will be absorbed by the calmness of the mind. However, when the mind is a raging cyclone caused by high-energy stimulation like highenergy music, mindless TV or any such stimulation, the mind can't absorb the disruption. Like a cyclone or tsunami, the disruption only makes the mind more violent and destructive.

Perhaps that's why people lose their patience in traffic because our minds are not calm. So many things occupy our minds. Of these things, we are so used to them occupying our minds we no longer question whether they should in the first place. It's like being in a home that has too many boxes. No matter how neatly you organise them and move them around, they still occupy your space. It is only when we take the time to open each box and discard what's useless and keep what's useful will the home be neat and clear.

The same applies to our minds. Maybe that's why the older we get, the less noise, movies or TV we want to engage in. There is already so much in the mind that we do not want to add more to it. But in any case, what we allow into our minds usually has the power to make a home for itself in it. It is our decision if we want something that occupies space for the sake of occupying space like a vase with no flowers, or we want something that occupies space for the sake of occupying space like flowers in a vase. That is our decision.

# Concentration

In this journey of decluttering, one thing that I am noticing is that I am finding it quite difficult to concentrate. Usually, when I work or study, I will play something in the background. Perhaps I'll switch on the TV, play some music or tune in to the radio. For the longest time, I saw nothing wrong with this. But being on this journey, the essence is to declutter that which occupies my physical and mental space.

In almost every book I read on Zen and Buddhism, the emphasis is on a mindful state of being. Meditation or just sitting zones an individual into the moment that they are in. Being mindful, one could say is being submerged in the activity that you are doing. Hence, monks do many chores because the practice of doing chores engages one with sweeping, mopping and the actual cleaning. But the truth is, not many of us actually perform our chores (or anything tedious) in this manner.

Like working or studying, most of us will listen to the radio, to some music or have the TV in the background while we

perform our chores. By doing this, we are not entirely mindful of what we are doing. We are not fully submerged in the activity at hand. The radio, TV, or music keeps our minds in automatic mode while we work, study or do our chores.

The mind consistently seeks stimulation. The mind consistently seeks some form of entertainment to keep it preoccupied. It is easier for the mind to be stimulated by music that changes every 3 mins (maybe 8 mins if you listen to deep house) than it is for the mind to be stimulated by 30 mins of sweeping. By keeping the mind distracted in this fashion, we believe that we are getting in some work done. But are we really? Would you feel comfortable if a doctor is performing a serious operation on you while listening to Drake and 21?

Think of the mind as Google Chrome or as Safari. Each tab that is open is the stimulation the mind receives through the five senses it uses to engage with the world. Let's say you work in an office. Let's try to count how many "tabs" will be open in such a scenario:



## Sound

1. The soft hum of the aircon.
2. The sporadic chitchat of passing colleagues.
3. The movement of colleagues walking up and down the corridor.
4. Sounds of construction or maintenance work.
5. The sound of the button clicks on your laptop or desktop.
6. Radio (or Youtube, Youtube music if you have them on)
7. The inconsistent ping and ring of your cellphone.
8. Random colleagues coming into your office.

## Visual

9. The glare of the laptop screen.
10. The colour scheme in your office. (this does have an effect. Hence prison walls are grey as opposed to creche walls that are colourful).
11. The colour scheme of your own outfit.
12. The various notebooks, and papers in your office.

13. The laptop or desktop itself.
14. Your table, chair and any other pieces of furniture.
15. The shape and colour scheme of accessories and novelty items that you might have in your office.
16. The colour scheme of your colleagues' outfits.
17. The colour scheme of the building at your work.

## Smell

18. Even though your mind is used to it, your scent.
19. The scent of your office.
20. The scent of your perfume.
21. The scent of the building.
22. The scent of your lunch.
23. The scent of your colleagues.
24. The scent from the aircon vents.
25. The scent of your furniture.
26. The scent of your coffee or tea.

## Taste

- 27. The taste of your own mouth.
- 28. The taste of your tea or coffee.
- 29. The taste of your toothpaste.
- 30. The taste of your lunch (or your colleague's lunch if they invite you)
- 31. The taste of your saliva.

## Touch

- 32. The feel of the laptop keyboard.
- 33. The feel of your office chair, desk and any other pieces of furniture.
- 34. The feel of lotion on your fingers.
- 35. The feel of accumulated dirt from the floating dust.
- 36. The feel of soap washing your hands.
- 37. The feel of reapplying fresh lotion.
- 38. The feel of cool (or hot) air in your office from the aircon.

39. The feel of your clothes (in most cases, your shoes cause your feet move a lot changing the sensations around them.)

Buddhist monks state that there's a sixth sense called the mind. From the way I understand this sixth sense, it involves that mental and emotional state that you might be in. This may vary on an hourly basis. You might have woken up in a great mood only to be put off by bad traffic. You could have woken up in a horrible mood but seeing your loved ones could turn that around. The mind sense changes consistently and it can be argued that Zen practice aims for its practitioners to have a firmer grip on this sense. But before we lose direction, let's go back to the open tabs.

On average, we have 39 (40 including the mental and emotional state that we are in) open tabs that are consistently using the brain's processing power. Mind you I omitted stimulation from platforms such as Twitter, TikTok or Instagram that has a lethal combination that stimulates all our senses except smell and taste. Which we can argue that sometimes food content creators create such amazing posts that we can smell and taste the food through the screen.

It is true, like a computer internet browser, some of these “open tabs” operate in the background. Like the colour scheme of your office, the feel of the air from the aircon, your perfume and such, your mind is used to these stimulating elements. However, it does not bypass the fact that the mind is processing the simulations.

But a key thing to remember about the mind is that it is consistently seeking stimulation. Therefore, with these “background processes” such as your own scent and so forth, the mind quickly gets bored with them and wants more. Hence most of us will feed the mind with more stimulation through playing the radio, playing Youtube or whatever the case.

The key aspect of radio, music and the like is that it is designed to be entertaining. A good radio DJ, with just his introduction, will have more than 10 different sounds played in seconds. The brain, in those seconds, will try its best to process those sounds. The same goes for modern music.

Through FL Studio and digital means of creating music, an artist can easily have various instruments playing in one song. Other artists will even include distorted animal sounds. With all these sound elements, the brain will do its best to process the various sounds. And music has the added effect that can alter the mental and emotional state that you are in, it can alter what the Buddhist call your sixth sense.

It is then no surprise that I am finding it hard to concentrate. Simply because of the stimulation that arises from reading a textbook or an article for research, setting a paper or any other administrative task of being a lecturer is boring and tedious. It is because, in this decluttering process that I am in, my brain is finding it difficult to readjust itself to less potent forms of stimulation. My brain is finding it difficult to engage in a single activity without the stimulation of more potent sensations such as radio or music.

There are two techniques that I've read that most experts suggest. One is that every 30 mins or so, because the mind will be using a majority of process power on one or a few elements, it will get exhausted and begin to seek distractions

(other more potent stimulations). They say that instead of seeking that stimulation through social media, it will be better to take walk outside the building of your employment. The feel of the sun (and even rain), the whisk of fresh air blowing, the green of nature and the pollen that it gives off, provides the mind with a healthier alternative that would allow you to regain focus. The danger however of this is that the sun might be so good on the skin that the stimulation you feel might be as strong as the one you receive from social media.

The other technique is slightly more difficult and I am yet to master it. It is a meditative technique that when the mind is less engaged in the work you are busy with, the technique implies that you breathe in and breathe out. As you breathe in, say what you to do and as you breathe out, say what you don't want to do that would be distracting to the core work that you are engaged with. So say for a lecturer stating an exam, it would go along these lines:

“Writing short questions (breathing in). No Kevin Momo (breathing out.)”

The key is to repeat these breaths until the mind finds its calmness and it enables you to regain focus on the work at hand. This, however, is a technique I still need to perfect without the assistance of caffeine.



# Are you alive?

Lately, I've embarked on a journey of decluttering my space. This includes my mental space and physical space. It started with social media where I found myself living in it. Chasing two or three likes with the numerous shares of memes. Sharing images of people and cultures I find intriguing. Why? The truth is, through sharing images of cultures I find intriguing and sharing memes, it's because I was seeking validation. However, it gets deeper than seeking validation.

The world is consumed by an overwhelming amount of stimulus that is everywhere. It is on your phone with social media, in your home with radio and TV, and on the streets with posters. Wherever we go, we are bombarded with some mental stimulus that distracts and robs us of our attention. Someone might say that it is not as bad as it sounds. Spending 10 mins every hour on Twitter, TikTok or Instagram is not that much time. However, when you do the math, that 10 mins builds up quickly.

Here's the math:

10 mins every hour. A day has 24 hours so that's 4 hours a day on social media. Let's put that into the perspective of an average person's day:

6 hours: sleep

1 hour: grooming and preparing for the day.

2 hours: relaxation (cooking, watching TV, eating)

8 hours: work (most of us do not work a total of 8 hours but we are at our place of work for the full 8 hours) 4 hours: social media.

You left with 3 hours out of 24 of free time.

That amounts to 3 hours a day that you have to yourself. 3 hours a day to pursue your passions. 3 hours a day to engage in your hobbies and interests. And this does not highlight the psychological and mental damage that social media has on individuals. Research has proven that social media is a toxic entity and is a poison to young women and men.

I am merely focusing on the time that social media robs the average individual. And 10 mins every hour for most people is the very bare minimum for being on social media. Some of us get lost in a social media “wormhole” where we end up scrolling endlessly.

And this boils back to the beginning of this particular post. The world is faced with an overwhelming presence of information that we humans were never ready for. I once read a fact that stated that people see fewer ghosts in the modern world than in medieval times and the middle ages because humans in the modern world are more engaged and stimulated with their surroundings. Therefore, our minds are so engaged with various stimulating elements that we no longer recognise or see ghosts which were products of idle minds of the ancient world.

Time is the measurement of life. Time is what tracks the moments we had, have, and will have in our life. So, social media robbing us of time, it is in fact robbing us of life. 4 hours a day, broken into 10 minutes every hour doesn't sound so bad. It is when it accumulates over the course of the day that we realise the true nature of what 10 minutes an

hour can do. Imagine replacing that 10 minutes on social media with a 10 min walk around your place of employment or residence.

I had originally begun writing this post to break down the journey that I am on of decluttering elements in my physical and mental space. I did not intend to focus on social media. But social media has become so entrenched in society that its effects have intervened in the fabric of society. It is an anomaly if someone does not have a Twitter, Instagram or TikTok account. But even for those who do not have these accounts, chances are their 10 mins are spent watching a video or YouTube. Their 10 mins are compounded by bingewatching a series every day after work.

The truth is, the world has created a system that has effectively enslaved many of us into thinking we are alive when in reality we are lifeless zombies. We are living corpses that have no clear grasp on what life is. Simply because the life we live is a fabrication of what we saw on TV while growing up and now, it is a fabrication of what we see on social media.

It is one thing to understand this concept and aspire to break free. It is another concept to begin implementing the means to break free. Hence my decluttering journey. And hence I am sharing it on the blog hoping that I won't embark on this journey alone.

# What do you want from me?

There's a quote that stays rent-free in my mind. There is a scene in *The Last Samurai* where Katsumoto is talking with Captain Nathan Algren. Captain Algren was just captured by the samurai and held as their captive. Katsumoto as the leader of the samurai called him to have a discussion after losing a fight to Ujio. Foreign to Japanese customs, Captain Algren lost his patience and yelled at Katsumoto about this captivity. This is shortened version of their conversation:

Captain Algren in anger: "What do you want from me?"

Katsumoto undeterred: "What do you want for yourself?"

Captain Algren still angry: "What the hell am I doing here?"

Katsumoto still calm: "In Spring the snow will melt, and the passes will open. Until that time, you are here. Good day, Captain."

From the whole movie, that's probably my favourite dialogue given the wisdom in it. Captain Algren was confused and frustrated to be trapped in the samurai's village. He was not treated like a prisoner of war like in the Western world he was from. Instead, he was cared for and made to feel comfortable even though he felt like a stray dog in the village. Even in his manner of communicating with Katsumoto, he was rude and disrespectful as he was annoyed to be captured aimlessly.

This is where we see the wisdom and intelligence of Katsumoto. He was also an advisor to the Emperor. Instead of him losing his cool and asserting his rank to Captain Algren, Katsumoto gently tells Captain Algren of the situation that he is in. By telling the Captain that the snow will melt (meaning that it has not melted, metaphorically referring to the Captain's frustration) he should understand that he is trapped in the village. And until that time when the snow melts, he was there. So even if he managed to escape the village, he would still be trapped by the snow. Metaphorically referring to his own frustrations towards the situation.

In the same breath, Captain Algren wondered why he was there by asking Katsumoto what he wants from him. Katsumoto, displaying his superior intelligence and wisdom, responds by asking him what he wants for himself. For what he wants has led him to be at the village where the snow has locked him in.

The identification of the snow represents the mental blockage that Captain Algren found himself. The snow will melt only in the Spring. The Spring is when things are rebirthed into existence. This tells the viewer that what Katsumoto is telling Captain Algren is that until he spends time melting the mental snows that block his mind, he will always be trapped by his own thoughts. These thoughts in the movie, Captain Algren is haunted by the massacre he was part of in America. Continuous flashbacks visit him in the night which he pacifies with alcohol. So much so that he was conflicted with his own perception of self.

Being in the village, for the Captain, was an opportunity for him to melt the heavy snow that clogged his mind. When he yelled at Katsumoto asking him what he wants from him, Katsumoto understood that the question was directed at the



Captain himself. Through the conversations he had with him, Katsumoto understood that the Captain was seeking something; something known by the Captain himself. He was searching for it externally failing to realise that it was in him to find.

Interestingly, when Spring came and the snow had melted, Captain Algren had taken a different look at his life. His time in captivity gave him the time to visit the nightmares that haunted him and seek ways to free himself from them. Which, when he returned to his old world, he was a new man with a new mindset. The snow had melted in the Spring, allowing the new passes of his mind to be birthed.

I always think of this section of the movie whenever I find myself asking myself whether I am where I am supposed to be in life. There is a great level of pain when people look at you as a failure. There is a great level of defeat when people whom you look up to look at you as a disappointment. There is a great level of anguish when you look at the mirror and wonder whether indeed this is the best you've become.

One wonders whether they would have been further in life if they took a different career path, dated different women, or had a different set of friends. I am one of those people who find it extremely difficult to celebrate achievements. Because at the back of my mind, I always know that there is more. I bought myself a brand new, straight-from-the-box 2022 Picanto but I know there's a BMW 330i waiting for me. I stay in a pretty safe and comfortable place for a man living alone but I know there is a house on an estate waiting for me. In this economy we live in, I am grateful to be receiving a steady income but I know that true financial freedom is when one no longer trades time for an income.

Like Captain Algren, I find myself blocked by my own mental snow and I yell at the world asking it what it wants from me. In doing so, I miss the fact that what I seek is not what the world wants from me but what I want for myself. A change in these perceptions leads one to ask himself a different set of questions that produce a different set of answers. This different set of answers leads to a different outlook on life which ultimately is what one truly seeks.

And until the snow melts, until I find those answers, I will be here. Here in this state of besetting search for purpose. This search, like snow, will take time to melt and clear for new passes to follow. When these passes are open, they will allow the mind to give birth to new realities and new perceptions.

But, “until that time, you are here.”

# Decluttering The Mind.

You know, it is common to hear people after they clean their room or house to say something like. “it’s so clear and fresh.” Ever asked why?

As an example, try this out. In your room, find an area that you spend a lot of time in. For me, it is sitting on the carpet under the window. For you, it could be on your bed or desk. Add something visibly large in that space. For instance, after doing your laundry, throw your clothes on your bed and resume sitting on your bed as you normally would. Or do the same on your desk. For someone like me who enjoys sitting down, place the laundry on the ground next to where you sit.

You will probably feel the presence of the laundry or whatever large object that you’ve placed next to you.

I suggest this exercise to introduce this conversation. The Good Book tells us that one cannot serve two masters as one. Confucious (or Lao Tzu, one of the two) said that if you chase the hare and rabbit at the same time, you’ll catch

neither. Even Nature, through the laws of physics tells us that no two substances can fill the same space. There are a lot of quotes that continually remind us that multitasking is a myth.

With the laundry example, this is a physical example of the said laws. Indeed, when you place a pile of laundry on your bed, that space is taken up by the laundry. What is also interesting is that you will feel the presence of the laundry. You will not be able to ignore it. It will be a consistent reminder that it is there. And so, you will consistently think about your laundry every time you see it.

And this is something that not only relates to physical aspects but mental ones as well. If your mind is occupied with something, that something will take whatever space you've allocated to it. Like feeling the presence of the laundry, like knowing that the laundry is there, the same can be said about that which will occupy your mind. But you see in your mind, it will take more than just a portion of space in it.

Remember, like Morpheus told Neo, reality is nothing but the interpretation of the brain through its five senses. Your mind will tell you if the stove is hot if you place your hand

over it. Your mind will tell you that a man with a gun, wearing a bucket hat, poses a threat to your life over a man with a gun but wearing a blue uniform written “POLICE”. And your mind will also tell you which man to run to in that situation.

Your mind paints the reality you live. Therefore, we must be extra cautious of what we allow in our minds. Extremely cliché I know. But I say this after I recently resigned from my job because this is what I discovered.

When you are employed, your job will fill your mind. It is nearly impossible for it not to. I mean, you spend close to a third of a day at work (some even longer and even during weekends). Close to a third of your life is consumed by employment. So, it is safe to say that most people are their jobs and though some might reject becoming their jobs, their jobs will form a significant part of their personality. Maybe that’s why people, even on dates, usually ask what do you for a living because your profession will say a lot about who you are as a person.

But in any case, the job will inevitably occupy your mind. When you wake up, as hard as you might try, the first thing that will come to mind will be your work. Maybe you have to send that email, maybe you have to attend that training or meeting or maybe you need to face that annoying dirtbag at work. Or perhaps you dread the traffic to get to work. But something, even for a moment, will occupy your mind about work.

You see, you might have to report at work maybe at 8 am but if you wake up at 6 am, you are probably at work already at 6:30 am. And look, the same applies even after you have knocked off. It is only now as a grown adult I understand why my parents would be so tired after work when I was growing up.

Because they were drained from work. And the cycle repeats itself, Monday to Friday. Work becomes your life and it will eat into your weekends as well. You see, unlike the pile of laundry on your bed, what occupies your mind acts more like a fungus. It starts small but best believe if you leave it unattended, it will grow. It will spread. It will reach areas

where you had thought are off-limits like your ambitions and dreams.

Your ambitions and dreams, from them being lighthouses and beacons of light that guide your future, they become flinting lights of dying memories. From them being the fiery flame that excites your inner child, they become the calm ambers that warm your old knees. Work, the requirements of work, the duties of work and the unwritten expectations of work rob you of your hope and aspiration of a brighter tomorrow.

I found myself in that state. Usually, when I wake up, the first thing would think about is how many classes I have in the day. Next thing would be to ask myself if I have prepared for those classes. This automatic task list will unfold itself, ticking the respective boxes along the way. I actually realised that for the past 3 years or so of being back in the world of work, I actually forgot what my goals and dreams were.

It was when I went home and read my old journals, some written a decade ago that I remembered what my dreams were. It was a cold evening hanging out with my closest



friends talking about years past I remembered who I am. The façade of being a lecturer was broken by the true me who was held hostage by the profession.

And the process of decluttering started. And look, unlike moving the laundry of the bed and placing it where it should be, when removing elements that occupy the mind, it takes time and deliberate effort. You have to remove the surface foilage, sub-surface foliage and then proceed to find the root cause of it. Only then will you be able to fully remove that element from your mind and open that space.

That is what happened with my work. I stopped arriving at 6 am. Work starts at 8 am but, I am that guy who always goes the extra mile and so, I stopped arriving at 6 am. When there was no soccer practice, I stopped leaving after 4 pm. I stopped going to work on Saturdays (and I wasn't paid for working on Saturdays). I simply stopped going the extra mile.

The sub-foliage was removed by quiet quitting. I merely and deliberately did the bare minimum. I did what my contract required of me. Nothing more, nothing less. This was

difficult I will not lie. Since I ever started working as a waiter back in the day, I never gave the bare minimum. I have always gone above and beyond. But I knew that I had to regain my time back and allow my mind to rebuild my dreams and aspirations again. Like plants in the winter, my dreams were not dead but they needed a lot of nutrients for them to find life again.

And this is the most difficult part. At this stage, comfort can seep in. Going back to the laundry on the bed example, it is like instead of removing the entire laundry off your bed, you decided to fold it neatly and leave it on your bed. Yes, it is neater. Yes, it has opened some space. But the fact remains, it is still there. Even though I was now doing the bare minimum, this work fungi still had some room to live.

I hated going to work, but I loved meeting my students. There was a time I would go to the library in town just to avoid being in that office. Only to come back later for soccer practice. It was extremely hard to be in class knowing that my journey with the students was coming to an end. You see, I couldn't care less about the workplace. They will replace me and forget about me very soon. But it is my students who

I will miss. It is my students whom I wish I could stay longer for, at least until they finish their academic journey to support them along the way. It is them whom I will miss the most.

And that's what makes mental clutter so difficult to clear. Cause sometimes the roots of the clutter are tied deep in your heart. There was a moment when I wanted to cancel my resignation because of my students. And as fate would have it, that one email reminded me why I should not. There was a moment when I wanted to cancel my resignation because of the soccer team. And as fate would have it, that one reminded me why I should not.

And I'll be honest, the institution I worked for is really a great place. There is a strong sense of teamwork and a strong bond among colleagues. And not that fake "we are a family" nonsense but one that you know you will get help and support from a fellow colleague, even if they work in a totally separate department. Like for those who are employee-minded to the core and content with a long life of employment, where I worked is really a great place to retire.

But I'm not employee-minded. There was a time last year, in the second semester, when the real me was fighting to free itself from the clutches of employment. It is a day that I will never forget. I will never forget and when I am ready, I will share the story. But for about two to three months, the real me was desperately fighting to be free. And as great as the institution is, I would never survive, no matter how hard I tried.

And so, I had to go to the root. I had to follow the veins of the root of the fungi that were seated in my heart. Like with the laundry, having it neatly piled up is not good enough. You have to remove it. And that's what I did. The root of this mental clutter was employment. I had to remove it. With no clear plan of what I would do, with no clear picture of how I would survive, my students never saw it but each time I saw them in class my heart melted and tears welled up in my eyes, I sent in my resignation letter.

And with that, the fungi were removed. The laundry is now totally removed from your bed. You have regained that space and can use it how you see fit. And the same applies to the mind. Now I no longer wake up worried about that email or about that training. I instead wake up thinking about how I will begin to dream again and take steps to live my dream. I

no longer drive down the highway and admire a Porsche. I instead start calculating how long it will take me to buy one and what I need to do to buy it.

You see, having cleared the fungi called employment from my mind, my mind is now free. I no longer see life through the lenses of employment. And remember the words of Morpheus, the mind is what tells you what life is. Employment has that dangerous effect that it will tell you what life is. Life is a good day if your boss is having a good day. Life is a misery if your boss is feeling miserable. Life is great for one day, usually at the end of the month. Life sucks, usually for days before that one day at the end of the month.

And that is why I likened mental clutter, like employment, to fungi or some bacteria. You might still remain true to who you are but who you are will be filtered by employment. For you to live your life, you need to filter it first through employment. Let me explain.

You maybe love to travel. But you'll plan your travels based on how many leave days you have and maybe around that

bonus or 13th cheque. You maybe love the groove and there's a week-long festival happening in May. Same thing applies, you'll probably have to check how many leave days you have and if they'll allow an advance on your salary. The unfortunate happens and you lose someone very close to you. Work will allow no more than 3 days, to plan, mourn, grieve, heal and be fully functional again. And so goes your life being filtered by employment.

For us who are not employee-minded, we can never live like that. No matter how hard we try, we can live being told what to do by a person or by a system like employment. With my mind cleared from the clutches of employment and my mind now seeing life through the filter of being an entrepreneur, life is more exciting. I am still very much sad for leaving my students and soccer team but there's a brewing joy from being free to be me. You know, I first experienced this freedom when I effectively stopped going to church. I do not fully understand then but I fully do now.

Your mind is your life. The life you live is created by the stimulations you give it. That which you feed your mind will direct how you live your life. With something so powerful as

employment, employment stimulates your mind through all your senses for a significant portion of the day. You smell the carpet of your office. You touch the door handles in and around your workplace. You see the building and walls in it. You hear the noises of chitchats among employees. Sometimes, you can taste the bland catering from work events.

If you sit in the sun for long, you will be burnt. That's a fact. If you sit in the cold for long, you will get sick. The conditions will affect you. So imagine what the conditions of employment do to your mind. These conditions one is exposed to for mostly a third of your life around strangers. It is maddening and I say that deliberately.

And so, for those who have dreams that employment can not offer, I would recommend stay away from it. It might be difficult especially in this economic climate we find ourselves in. It might difficult especially if everyone in your family thanks their cars, houses and clothes to the job they serve. It might be difficult. But it is totally worth it.