

Our sages teach in Pirkei Avot: “Who is rich? He who rejoices in his portion.”

This year, among other things, I focused on simplicity. I learned about the minimalism movement and saw a lot of wisdom in its teachings. Though I didn't become an extremist, I did get rid of things I didn't truly need to free up space to focus on the things that really matter -- health, relationships, passion, and spirituality.

One of the main points I learned is that minimalism is not about consuming less, but consuming consciously. There are certain physical things that we need and add quality to our lives and those are okay. Minimalism comes into play when things are taken to excess.

It's clear that from a Jewish perspective, the ideal is to acquire no more than what we need. The teaching I mentioned above is just one example. An even bigger example can be seen in the Ten Commandments: “Do not covet.” It's clear that God is telling us that coveting leads to comparing ourselves to others, jealousy, and judging our own value based on how much we have. What we really need for a fulfilled life is spiritual satisfaction!

So how do we do this? It all starts with a conscious decision to work on internal goals and not external ones. Spiritual pursuits are some of these goals; acts of lovingkindness and tzedakah, learning Torah, respecting everyone, trying to repair the world, etc., are what really matter. These actions will help us far more than the newest iPhone or car!

The Torah's perspective on material consumption is that we should engage in the physical world and elevate it, by infusing our physical possessions and physical acts with spiritual meaning. For example, Jews say a blessing before and after we eat to elevate the act of eating by reminding us that God is the source of their food and we should remain aware of where the food came from and how fortunate we are to have it.

The Jewish perspective on consumption is in line with the minimalism. We should use and take care of our things. If something is not useful, we should donate it, sell it, recycle it, or throw it away, depending on the item. Yet the Jewish approach takes it one step further by suggesting that when we do consume, we should do it not just consciously, but for a spiritual purpose as well.

What do you think? Should we all be minimalists and live simpler lives? Do you ever stop and thank God for what you have? Will we be happier in life if we aren't attached to material? Please share your thoughts with me!

Let us all strive to live find meaning and spirituality in our daily lives this Shabbat and in the week to come.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Koas