

What the KonMari is Happening?

Rev. Carol Bodeau
Westside UU Church
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So how many of you know who Marie Kondo is?

She is the author of some very popular books, and also the host of the Netflix show “Tidying Up with Marie Kondo.” Her method of de-cluttering, called the KonMari Method, is literally *sweeping* the world. (HaHa) KonMari takes spring cleaning to a whole new level, elevating our typical desire to get rid of a bit of dust and old clothes, and turning it into a life transformation event.

She has published four books, which have collectively sold millions of copies and been translated in to numerous languages. She was named one of Time Magazines 100 most influential people in 2015, and after extensive popularity in her home country of Japan, and then the rest of Asia and Europe, the Kondo craze hit America in the last year with her popular Netflix show and millions of YouTube hits.

So how is KonMari different from just cleaning your house?

KonMari is based on core principles of Shinto, the indigenous religious of Japan. Marie Kondo spent 5 years as an attendant at a Shinto shrine, and this experience, combined with a love of tidying that she had since childhood, developed into her first tidying business, which she started in college at the age of 19. She understands de-cluttering as a spiritual practice, and as a transformative act.

In Shinto, spirits of place and object are extremely important. Right relationship with the *kami*, or divine presence, in any object or location is central to health, well-being, and peace. For Marie Kondo, each object we possess, has an essence or essential quality that affects us deeply. It is our relationship to the object’s *kami*—not its usefulness, or its monetary value, or its social worth—that determines whether or not it’s worth keeping around.

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So how does this work?

The process is very specific, and at first glance seems relatively easy to follow. I can tell you from personal experience, though, that the ease of this process is entirely determined by our own *spiritual or emotional relationship* to the items in question, so how “hard” it is depends on you and what you need to transform in your heart and mind.

There are 6 steps to the KonMari Method.

First, you begin by getting into the proper state of mind. This means truly, deeply committing yourself to the tidying up process. And this is bigger than just mindlessly cleaning and clearing the same way you have always done. This means becoming truly present, with your thoughts and emotions, in the act of tidying. Committing to tidying also means truly committing to letting go of that which no longer is aligned with who you are, or what your life requires right now.

Second, you imagine your ideal life. This is meant to get you in alignment not with the past, but with the future, with where you want to be. If we hold onto objects that carry the energy of the past, we are more likely to stay stuck there. If we want to move forward, we know that metaphorically, emotionally, psychologically, we must let go of old patterns, habits, resentments, attachments, and beliefs. So we imagine our ideal lifestyle, to get ourselves in the mindset of *becoming*.

Third, you commit yourself to doing *all* of the discarding—that means getting rid of every single thing, in each category, before you begin reorganizing. Again, that seems simpler than it is. And here’s why...

The fourth principle is that you do the actual tidying by category, rather than by room. And, in step five, you commit to addressing each category in a particular order. So you begin with clothes, then move on to books, papers, then what are called *komono*, or random objects, and finally sentimental things. And you don’t just wander through your

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house, browsing each of these categories. Instead, you gather together all the items in one category, to whatever extent possible, and examine them all at once.

So, for example, the first thing you do if you commit to the KonMari method, is you take all of your clothes—and I mean *all* of your clothes—every jacket, glove, boot, scarf, old pair of pants, the bins under the guest bed, the dresses hung in the back of the closet, the jeans that live on the rack for going out to the garden—all of it, from everywhere in your home and office and gym locker... and you put them all in one place (usually that's on a bed or the floor of a room near your closet).

When you do this, the first thing that happens is you get smacked upside the head with just how many clothes you own. Most Americans own waaaaay more clothes than we need. So you have this massive pile of clothes that you have to go through. And you can't get back into that room to live until you do it. So you're committed.

Now, you go through the piles. But you don't just sort them in your old mindless patterned way. Instead, you keep yourself fully present, mentally and emotionally—this is really the key, here—and you hold the item close to yourself, and you ask yourself, “Does this spark joy in me?” Asking this question is the most essential step of the KonMari method.

The way this feeling of joy is described in Japanese is with the word *tokimeku*, which means ‘flutter, or throb, or palpitate.’ So she means it—you only keep things that actually thrill you, that you can actually feel giving zing to your energy, uplifting your spirit. You don't keep something just because you've always had it, or someone said it's useful, or it was a gift from someone and you feel guilty letting it go. (And we'll come back to sentimental items in a minute.)

If you find that an item doesn't truly thrill you, truly give you that rush of joy that makes you want to smile when you just touch it or think about it, then it's time to let it go. Now remember, if you're following the KonMari method, you have, in step #1, committed to ‘tidying up.’ So you have to let it go. But how do you do that? Again, with mindfulness

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and intention. You thank the item for the joy, the help, the use, or the connection it has brought you. Then you set it aside to be given away or recycled, hopefully put to use in another form or with another person.

When it comes time to put things away—and you don't do *any* of that until you have sorted the entire pile—you also put things away in a more mindful manner. Instead of stacking clothes in the drawers, Marie Kondo uses a particular style of folding that actually allows you to see every single thing in one drawer, all at once. It's like origami for your tee shirts and underwear. My messy dresser drawers suddenly look like waves of beautiful color, flowing into one another, on textures and fabrics that are simply lovely. Instead of feeling like I'm just stuck with the same old three shirts that always seem to be on top, I feel like I have incredible options. And just opening the dresser is a treat, because of the artistic display that is my tee-shirt drawer. The idea is that beauty matters, and that if you can see all that you have, not only will it look more lovely, but you will appreciate the gifts in your life more fully.

You follow this method with all the categories, though of course not all things can be piled (like furniture) and some things have to be organized with pretty folders, or tidy bins. When you get to the sentimental items, which are saved 'til last, you reflect upon the nature of your relationship with the item, and the connections or memories that it carries. You allow yourself to truly reflect on the person, place, or experience that you associate with the item, and to feel all the feelings that come up. On the show, this often means a lot of crying, or anger, that was stored in the person holding the object, which is released as the object is released. This is truly meant to be a transformative experience.

In each category, you are focusing on what sparks joy, what is truly life-affirming for you, what brings you hope and excitement, or perhaps that bit of gentle peace that makes you smile, and feel a deep warmth.

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So why is this so popular, all of a sudden? I've been watching this trend, over the last few months, as friend after friend asked, "Have you seen Marie Kondo on Netflix?" or "Did you read Marie Kondo's newest book?" One friend dragged me into her bedroom to show me her neatly stacked sweaters, her newly tidy hangers, and the pared-down collection of items that filled her now much more empty closet. One friend got rid of all the furniture associated with her previous marriage. Others told me about acquaintances that were hoarders, finally cleaning up a house that had been packed with stuff for years.

I think there's a reason this is timely right now. I think that, in America, maybe in the world as a whole, we have become saturated with *stuff*. We have spent many years—maybe since the industrial revolution—collectively collecting copious stores of *stuff*. We have been marketed into the ground, we have been sold immense piles of "goods" that are bad for us, and we have become frankly tired of it. Maybe even spiritually bereft, in some cases. We have more than we need. What we need is more that gives us life, and less that gives us just one more thing to take care of.

In addition to the dawning realization that simplicity might be nicer, more joyful, more healthy, than more and more stuff, I believe we are also a world filled with grief. Our political system is showing us that we are getting more and more *stuffed up* with unresolved emotions, unacknowledged and unconscious agendas, and unconscious expectations that are tearing us apart. We are a people that *need* to clean our collective closet, to get things out into the open air, and to make some conscious decisions about what, going forward, will bring us joy, and what will bring us only more suffering.

I think Marie Kondo taps a deep well of need for transformation, and gives us a wonderful, metaphorical or energetic starting place. We all have things that we are holding onto, and some of those things bring us deep joy, while others simply keep us stuck in patterns that are no longer serving us. While we may not need the KonMari method in our homes, we may need something like it in our minds and hearts.

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Let us hold onto that which truly gives us hope, joy and peace. Let us keep close to ourselves all that inspires in us love, all that warms us with memories of true connection, with a sense of true healing, and with true promise. And let us release all those things that are complete. Let us give deep thanks, heartfelt gratitude for the people, places and experiences that have brought us to where we are today. Let us resolve old hurts once and for all, and commit to new ways. Let us honor with our lives the beauty we have shared, and then let us have the courage to let go. Life is a cycle of never-ending movement, and transformation is its perpetual vehicle. May we find in that truth both courage and peace, and the ability to embrace life in all its moments. May it be so.