



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Well, hello there my friend. Welcome back to the podcast. Have I ever got a treat for you today. Ah, it's so good. You know, I've been telling you about books, right? Books that I love. And this whole episode is about a book. It's called *Minimalista*. It's by my friend Shira Gill, who's been on the podcast before. She's an amazing, amazing home organizer, just declutterer expert. She's so, so, so great. I've worked with her myself, personally. She's also my friend. And also I have just been with her on this whole book extravaganza journey and she's ahead of me. And it's very exciting. She's kind of been a bit of a mentor, really, to me on writing a book. But that's not why she's here today. She's here today because today is the day that her first book, *Minimalista*, is being published. She's going to tell you all about it.

What's in it, how great it is. I can't wait for you to get it. You're going to want it. Because first of all, it's beautiful. The photos are so pretty. If you just want eye candy, you don't need to eat real candy. You can just have eye candy and go look through this book. It's so pretty. Also, if you have followed her at all, either on social media or on her email list, her writing is so accessible. I've always really enjoyed her writing. It's very to the point and very useful. Like, everything she writes is there for a reason, and it's there to help you and give you some great ideas. She's really changed my life for the better over the years that I've known her. And I know this book is going to make a big difference for you as well. So you're definitely going to want to listen to this.

Hear more about her book, *Minimalista*.

Okay. Now I'm going to just take you into my discussion with Shira. You're welcome, is all I have to say. I hope my excitement is contagious, because that's how I feel. It's so, so great. And I know you're going to want to check out this book, for sure, but first, listen to my conversation with Shira Gill.

Katrina Ubell: Shira, I'm so glad to have you on the podcast. Thanks for coming back.

Shira Gill: Oh, thank you for having me back. I've been so excited about this.

Katrina Ubell: Yes, me too. Mostly because I'm so excited about your... Well, first of all, actually, mostly because I love you. But besides that, I'm so excited about your book that is coming out the day this podcast releases. So if you're listening to this, that means you can go get this book right now. And everybody on the podcast knows that I've been talking about books that I have really thoroughly enjoyed, because making a book is a lot, as you know.

Shira Gill: It's a thing. Yes.

Katrina Ubell: It's a thing. And I think that books should be celebrated more, and especially ones that we really like. And so what we get to do today is celebrate your amazing, amazing book called Minimalista.

Shira Gill: Oh, thank you so much. I'm honored to be back on the podcast. This is one of my favorites.

Katrina Ubell: Yay. And you know, everybody loves hearing from you, so it's going to be so great. So the first thing I want to talk about is minimalism. You hear Minimalista, and some people immediately are going to be like, "Oh, this isn't for me. Shut down. Like it's not my thing." So let's just start with that. Common misconceptions, but also, what does it mean to live a minimalist life to you?

Shira Gill: So I do think there's so many misconceptions. I almost think minimalism is like a dirty word now. And people are like, "Wrong number. Nope. I don't fall into that box." And so I really try to make the distinction in my work and in this book that minimalism is about intentionality. It is not about having a specific number of items. It is not about living in a stark white box. It is not about deprivation or scarcity. It is literally just about being more intentional about what you consume, how you set up your life, and really the goal in all of my work is to help people get more clear on what do you care about? What is important to you? What are your core values? And what is the stuff that's in the way? And so for me, minimalism is a lifestyle that's all about clarifying what's important and stripping away the rest.

Katrina Ubell: I love that. Totally. And having your possessions, like your physical surroundings, reflect your values, what you want, the direction you're heading, all of that. Because I really do think, and I've heard this from a lot of people actually, where they're like, "Well, so and so author or minimalism specialist or whatever would be like, would say I shouldn't have that." And I'm like, "No, they wouldn't."

Shira Gill: Yeah.

Katrina Ubell: Like, you get to have whatever you want.

Shira Gill: You get to make your own rules, is the fun part about being an adult. And I'm a big rule breaker myself. So even when I kind of entered my minimalist journey, I was reading blogs that said a capsule wardrobe is 30 items. And I would always rebel and think to myself, "No, who says the 30 items is the formula for me? I'll decide what the perfect amount is." So the process in the book is really about leading you to your own answers of what's important to you and what your boundaries are around what you want to own and take care of and surround yourself with.

Katrina Ubell: Yes. So this is one thing that you talk about that was recently brought back up in my memory that you've taught me that I just wanted to touch on here again, because it's made a big difference for me. And some people who are listening live in a studio apartment in New York city and really, very limited surroundings. And they're like, "Yeah, I'm all in."

And then there are plenty of doctors who live in quite expansive space, whatever that might be, depending on their family and their lifestyle and all of that. So I think a lot of times what people think about is, "Well, I can afford this and I do have space to put it away. So what's the problem?" But what you talk about is the cost of owning something is not just the amount of money you pay for it. It's also you need to put it away, and you need to maintain it and fix it and dispose of it when it's done. I would love for you to just touch on that a little bit more. There's this other expense that we forget to think about.

Shira Gill: Totally. So I think of it as everything we own, everything we bring into our homes, has a cost and it's both the cost in terms of sustainability in our environment, like what is the lifespan of this thing? Where is it going to end up eventually? It's also the cost of our own personal resources. But more than that, I think the part people really don't think about is the energetic cost, is everything that we own provides stimulation. And so we're seeing it, we're cleaning it, we're managing it, we're organizing it. Eventually we're donating or recycling, we're passing it on. And so the more things that you own, to me, I think it's like the bigger burden you have of responsibility to deal with all of those things and manage all of those things. And I think we are all facing overstimulation and oversaturation of information coming at us all day long.

And so I think our homes are a place where we do have control. We get to decide what we look at, what we manage, how many things is enough things for us, even if we do have the privilege of living in a massive mansion. And many of my clients are in 10,000 square foot homes that take up full city blocks. And it's more challenging for those clients, because they do have the space. And so what I help them think about is just, is this item worth the cost of managing it for the rest of your life? Like, it sounds very intense, but I do think everything that we have is our responsibility, and we already have so much responsibility that I think, don't you want to lighten your load in this way? Even if you do have the space, maybe you're just enjoying the spaciousness of your space instead of just filling it with more and more stuff.

Katrina Ubell: One of my favorite things is having an empty drawer or an empty shelf, right? It's just, I have enough, and I don't need to fill that. I don't need get more things. And one thing that I had early on, and this is part of my overeating and all my emotional food related issues, but I had like all these kitchen gadgets and all the different appliances, and just lots of stuff. And it was fun to collect those and get those as gifts and things like that. And then it came to a place where I just literally didn't have any more room. So then part of it was being stored in the basement and I could go access it. But I remember coming to a place, this was many years ago, where I was like, you know what? I think I might have all the things that I need.

You know what I mean? Like, I could buy more things, but pretty much, there's not one thing that I have made where I thought, "No, you know what, I'm missing X, Y, Z utensil or something." And so I just stopped and I haven't bought anything else, unless I needed to replace it, like a rubber scraper that was kind of beat up and old or something like that. And it is kind of fun to know I have everything I need and I don't need more, and I understand that they came out with this cool new thing, but I didn't even have a problem. This is solving a problem I didn't have. So I don't think I need it.

Shira Gill: I know. I like to think of it as filling my home first with the essentials, what are the things I need? Like a bed to sleep on or a computer to do work on. And then what are the nice to haves? What are the things that elevate my life? So a beautiful candle or the plants that you surround yourself with or fresh flowers. And then to me, everything else is clutter. Like, if it's not an essential or a nice to have that you love, then it's just excess.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah.

Shira Gill: So I think the job is stripping away the excess so you're really left with your perfect amount, kind of curated just for your life and personal preferences.

Katrina Ubell: I love that. So you talk about the more of less, right? I think people, we live in such a scarcity mindset that we get so afraid of having less. So what are the great things that come from having less? I mean we've talked about some of them.

Shira Gill: Yeah. I can give you some examples from my own life because it's so funny. I think the less I have, the more abundant I feel, which is really counterintuitive. But what I found is for me, less really represents freedom. And so I think for many us, the happiest times in our lives, I don't know for doctors, but we're in the college dorms, when things were really simple and you just had your twin bed and your handful of clothes and a little bit of decor and you just had freedom. And so for me, having a home that's really pared down, I have this freedom now where I can pack up for a trip in two minutes because I have this really edited closet and I know everything fits me. I love it. It all kind of goes together.

I can rent my house out. We rent our house out for film shoots and creative projects, which I love that kind of community and collaboration. So having a home that's really pared down and minimal allows it to be a clean slate for other people to enjoy, both creatively, and we pre-COVID used to rent our house all the time on Airbnb and then go travel the world. And it really has bled out into every aspect of my life. So I feel like, whereas many moms I know don't host or entertain or have people over because it feels like so much work to get their house in order, I know for me, it's a big value of mine to host and welcome people into my home. I can do it any day on the drop of a hat because my house is ready.

I don't have to clean up all the piles and rearrange the things and shove things in the closet. And so I think doing that work has such an exponential payoff in your life in every level. Also, I don't spend time looking for things anymore. I used to lose things a lot, like hats and sunglasses and umbrellas, and having all of these things to manage. And now I have one pair of nice sunglasses and they're always in my purse. I have one umbrella and I used to have 10 umbrellas and I lost them all, all the time. So I think it's more efficiency, more freedom, more money, more time, all of the things.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah. I love that. And what I think is so important is when you think about actual behavioral change, if you're someone who has been accumulating a lot and things are disorganized or whatever, you can hire someone to come in and help you edit everything and get it to that place. But then there is this level of maintenance that needs to be done.

And I just want to point it out that there are people you can hire to help you maintain these things, too. If you're someone of those means and you really are busy and you value having your home look a certain way, you can train somebody to help you with that.

It doesn't have to be you all the time. But I think when you connect that to your values and to the life you want to live and who you want to be within that life, you're more likely to continue with it rather than, "Oh, I got this ready for this one party." Or,, "I had the holidays and I had people over." Or something like that. It's not going to be lasting behavioral change.

Shira Gill: A hundred percent. It has to be intrinsically motivated and really about who you are and how you want to live, instead of the extrinsically motivated where it's like, "Oh my God, someone's coming over quick, quick, quick."

Katrina Ubell: It's so stressful. Of course you don't have people over. Yeah.

Shira Gill: And I also just want to add that I'm all for hiring help and getting support to do this work, but I think what I've seen is you can't hire someone to prevent you from shopping.

Katrina Ubell: It's true.

Shira Gill: Which I have seen again and again, which is why a lot of my work does deal with habits maintenance, is you can work with an organizer or a designer to get your house looking super beautiful, but then if there's something in you that keeps shopping and buying things in, or not being intentional with your decisions, it's going to reset immediately to how it was. So I'm always thinking about, in this highly consumerist culture of more, more, more, buy, buy, buy, and I get the itch all the time, even last night. And I have just tried to start tuning into what's the real need here? Am I sad? Am I lonely? Am I bored? What's the thing, because I probably don't need this sweater.

Katrina Ubell: Well, I know it's so funny. That's exactly what we talk about here. The same thing goes for, "I probably don't need this cookie." It's literally the exact same thing.

Shira Gill: Totally. Like, what's going on here? Am I numbing, or am I nourishing?

Katrina Ubell: Right. Right, right, right. So good. Okay. So let's talk about your book. You, unlike me, always wanted to write a book.

Shira Gill: Yes.

Katrina Ubell: I cannot say that that's true about me. So you're very inspiring to me. So in terms of the whole book. So let's talk about the book it's available today. It's called Minimalista. And so tell us about this amazing, gorgeous book that you created.

Shira Gill: Well, thank you. So yeah. Both of my parents were writers and I was encouraged to write from a young age. So I always dreamed of one day having a book, but I of course had to wait to have something to say.

So I think 12 years into my career as an organizer and coach, I felt like I finally had crystallized my process and my toolkit, and started realizing things about my process that were different from other processes of other organizers that my clients kind of reported were really helpful. I've basically designed my book and my program to help people that are very high functioning, successful, but overwhelmed and feel like, "I don't have the two weeks to take off work to edit and organize my entire home. I maybe have 15 minutes, or maybe I have an app here or there."

So the way that I approach it is I have a foundational toolkit that's the first half of the book, that really breaks down the foundation of how to approach this big beast of editing and organizing and styling your home. And I use a five step process, which starts with clarity. So the first step in my process is just called clarify. And that's really those big meaty questions of who am I? What do I care about? What do I value? What do I want to create space for in my home and my life? And once you figure that out, that's really the thing that's going to guide you through all of the hands on work. So then my second step is edit, and that's kind of where all of the work happens in my work, which is just stripping away the clutter, layers and layers of do I need this?

Is it serving me? Is it adding value? All the things. Then step three is organize. And so I teach about super simple systems. I think every organizational system should be easy enough that a five year old can do it without any explanation and maintain it. And then my fourth step is elevate, because I love to make all the things pretty. So we talk about shopping your own home and really only bringing things that are going to add value to your home and take it to the next level. And then step five is maintain. And so I take people through that process, that's the first chunk of the book. And then the second half is just room by room tips, tricks, and hacks, really broken into these 15 minute wins, is what I call them. So if you have no time, you're totally overwhelmed, but you've got 15 minutes, you can clean out a junk drawer. You can edit your sock drawer. There are these little things that are going to compound to create massive transformation in your home and life.

Katrina Ubell: I love that.

Shira Gill: So that's kind of the big.

Katrina Ubell: Yes, that's overarching. Oh my gosh. It's so good. So in the 15 minute win thing, let's just touch on that a little bit more. You just set 15 minutes on the timer, on your phone or some other timer, and you just work on a small project. So here's what I can envision people, because I feel like I know how I would do it, but I can hear some objections or maybe confusion or questions that someone might have. Like, "Well, 15 minutes is up and now I have just a complete mess." Or, "I thought I could be done in 15 minutes, and now I'm not." Or, "Is it okay if I just want to keep going after 15 minutes?" How do you address those issues?

Shira Gill: Yeah. Yeah. So I think the reason I came up with the 15 minute win is to help combat overwhelm and paralysis, because I think most people, if you're looking at a whole home that requires editing and organizing, it just feels literally paralyzing for most people. And so with those clients that just felt overwhelmed, the way this kind of started in my work was let's just do one drawer. Let's just see. Set a timer for 15 minutes, one drawer. And then what would happen, is they would experience this thrill of success and kind of mastery. And then yes, most people do want to keep going.

But my advice is instead of unearthing an entire room or even a closet, one drawer at a time, one small shelf, little tiny micro steps. So then if you do have to run out to your work shift or to pick up your kids, you're not leaving this massive mess to come home to. So really, my whole process is kind of one baby step at a time so you can get that thrill of accomplishment, and then, "Well, maybe I'll do one more drawer, or maybe I'll leave and that's enough. And I can just celebrate that little win."

Katrina Ubell: Right? Oh. Yeah, that is so good. And I think you're totally right. It's just that little dopamine hit. It's that little reward, this is making a difference and if you just keep going, you'll get there. Versus when you look the whole big thing, like you said, with paralysis, you just do nothing.

Shira Gill: Yeah. And I think one of the biggest mistakes I see with people trying to organize their homes is just kind of little bits and bobs all over the house, but never finishing anything and feeling this exhaustion of, "I'm always organizing. I'm always tidying, but nothing's ever getting done." Which is why I realized if you have even one dreamy drawer that you kind of look forward to opening and it's sparkly and has the drawer organizers and everything's just so, you feel now, "Oh, I am a person who can organize. I nailed it. Now I can just rinse and repeat as many times as I need to, to get through the room or the whole house."

Katrina Ubell: It's like an identity shift. Rather than thinking of yourself as a total mess or being a disorganized person, it's like, "No, you're not. You totally can do it. You just haven't applied that all the way around. You're starting to shift that identity when you do that one thing." I love that. I've found myself sometimes getting into a drawer and just grabbing maybe workout pants or something. And I'm like, "You know what? I always go for these five, and these two or three are always the last pick, only if I have to." And then I'm like, "Then why do I have these?" But rather than feeling like, "Oh, I need to get them all the way donated." What I have is kind of like a staging area, where I know these are the things, like, I'm just going to put them over here until the next time I'm doing a shipment off to Thread Up or wherever we're donating or something like that. Just to kind of already have it away from the main space and it already feels better. It always feels better just to be like, "Oh yes. Now I can see so much better what I have."

Shira Gill: Yes. And that literally takes two minutes, right?

Katrina Ubell: Oh, it's so quick.

Shira Gill: If you have that staging area. Or like, I recommend just having a tote bag in your closet so if you notice, "You know, I don't really like this." Toss it in the tote bag and just kind of do that incrementally and then suddenly you have a full bag of donations to drop off.

Katrina Ubell: Exactly. Exactly. And I think sometimes too, at least for me, I don't know if everyone has this experience, but I actually just did a photo shoot for the business, and so I was having to really go through my clothes and pick and choose certain things. And why am I picking that? And why am I not picking that? And really thinking about everything. And it becomes so clear. I can like that and need to wear it on my body, and if that's the case, then maybe someone else could have the opportunity. It doesn't need to just hang here collecting dust.

Shira Gill: I also found I always was inclined to go for the mediocre things in my wardrobe, and kind of save, this is the nicer, I'm going to save it. And so what I did eventually is, just like you were saying with the workout pants, is I would rather have three pairs of really nice flattering workout pants than 15 mediocre ones that I'm always putting on. And so I just got rid of that layer of mediocrity. So now I'm kind of forced to wear the things that actually look good on me instead of, it's like, don't save the good China. Like, the same philosophy of embrace the good things now and enjoy them. Let yourself go there instead of being a little bit like, "I'm going to save this for one day."

Katrina Ubell: Right. I'm just sweating in it. I could just wear this other crummy thing that isn't my favorite. Yeah. I love that. I love that. So I also just want to touch on this, because I thought it was very, very impressive. So how many square feet is your house?

Shira Gill: Oh, our house is 1200 square feet.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah. 1200 square feet.

Shira Gill: Small closets.

Katrina Ubell: So two small closets, four people live there.

Shira Gill: Yep. And a dog.

Katrina Ubell: A dog that sheds.

Shira Gill: Yes.

Katrina Ubell: Which I couldn't believe when you got that dog. I'm like, wow. Okay. But you—

Shira Gill: That was not intentional living. I fell in love with the dog's face and everything went out the window.

Katrina Ubell: This is how it goes, though. Seriously. Anyway, you do not live in a very large home, you're in the Bay Area. Kids were home for over a year from school. A year and a half. And you managed to write a book during that time. And I think everyone else listening would like to know too, but I would like to know how you, because you don't have an office. For a while you did, because your girls shared a room, and then now they each have their own room.

Shira Gill: They rendered the office because they wrote a very convincing essay.

Katrina Ubell: About why they should get their own room?

Shira Gill: About why they needed their own room. So yeah. My office is now the living room table.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah. So how did you write a book in that scenario? Because a lot of people would've just been like, "Forget it." And I remember you said you had just signed the contract with the publisher right before COVID hit. Right? So you were in it, you couldn't back out, really, at that point.

Shira Gill: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So I signed my contract, I think January of 2020 and had these grand plans of going to the cafes and drinking my latte with my laptop and it all went out the window and basically I suddenly had two kids home from school who were distance learning on Zoom and needed help, and my husband who had always has been at an office was now also home. So we were all kind of on top of each other. Nobody had an office. So we were literally chasing each other from room to room with our laptops. It was a total zoo. So the process for me, I basically realized I have this massive project that requires a lot of focus, and I feel like I can't find any focus in my house. So I met with my husband because I was just exasperated and overwhelmed and he was working nine to five, so he couldn't help or support the kids.

And so we kind of put our heads together to figure out how is this going to work for our busy family, and I realized I am a morning person. I'm very sharp and alert and focused in the morning. And I used to not be able to do my work in the morning because I had to walk my kids to school and drive carpool and all the things. And so I realized the one small benefit of this challenge was that I could wake up at six and work from six to nine, three focused hours when I am the sharpest, before my kids started school, before my husband started work. And so the deal we kind of struck was from six to nine, nobody talked to me. I mean, typically my kids slept until at least seven, but no one was allowed to interrupt. That was like my writing time.

Katrina Ubell: And where did you go in the house? Were you in your bedroom?

Shira Gill: Bedroom.

Katrina Ubell: Okay.

Shira Gill: Which I did not recommend, but it was like I had limited options.

Katrina Ubell: What else were you supposed to do? Yeah.

Shira Gill: So the bedroom, I could close the door. The rest of our house is kind of open concept. And so it was too dangerous. And so I was like, I need a door that can close. And normally I don't have any technology in my bedroom, but for this kind of six month period, I would sleep with my laptop at the foot of the bed, I would wake up, drink a big glass of water and just sit with my laptop for three hours. And my goal was every week I would have a chapter done. And so I literally did it consistently every day from six or seven to nine. So it was two to three hours a day. And then what was amazing is by nine o'clock, my work was done and then I could focus on my kids, help them with school, make lunch, check my email, do the other things that didn't require so much focus.

But really, it was again, that kind of compound effect of two to three hours of focus time every day, in six months I had a full 320 page manuscript, and I actually think, had it not gone down that way, had I been able to go hang out at the cafes, it would've taken me so much longer to write the book. It would've stretched out, I think, probably a year.

Katrina Ubell: Which nobody would have scoffed at, right? Right? It takes a lot to write a book. Yeah.

Shira Gill: My new productivity technique is realizing instead of stretching out two hours of work to an eight hour day full of distractions, get it in when you are the sharpest and most alert, and then give yourself a break. So I didn't get burnt out that way. Also because it was done in the morning and then I could do all the other things in my life.

Katrina Ubell: Whatever else.

Shira Gill: Yeah.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah. Well, what I love about that too, and we're talking about book writing, this is obviously any big project, even doing some work in your home, right? Like decluttering and organizing and everything, you can do it in a similar way. This idea that you don't need, it's so easy to think, like, "I need to be spending six or seven or eight or more hours on this big project." And then you're procrastinating and like dinking around and taking a long lunch and whatever, because it feels so big. But when it's so narrow, you're like, "I've got a hard deadline here, or hard end points." You can get so much more done.

Shira Gill: Yeah. I mean, I find now that my kids are back at school and things have normalized a little bit, I am much less efficient because I wander for a snack or I'm going to do the laundry, there's so many distractions. And I think having that constraint of this is all I've got, I better use it, was so helpful for me in writing.

Katrina Ubell: I love that. That's so good. Yeah. And you just turned it out so good. Okay. I love it. You're just so inspiring to me.

Shira Gill: Aw.

Katrina Ubell: Okay. Shira did this. That means I could do it too. Okay.

Shira Gill: It's possible. It's possible. I had never written a book. I didn't know what I was doing.

Katrina Ubell: Exactly. So many of the things we do are like that. Right? Okay. So the book, Minimalista, obviously on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, we have international listeners as well. Where can everybody find the book?

Shira Gill: Yeah. So it's available across the US, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, across the UK, and it will be translated into German next year. So it will come out in Germany, which is very exciting, and hopefully other places. But yeah, for now it's UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, US.

Katrina Ubell: Okay. So basically major book sellers.

Shira Gill: Yeah. Yeah. Any major book seller and even your indie bookstores, your neighborhood bookshops should be able to have it. It's through Penguin Random House. So it's a big publisher.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, it's a big publisher. Okay. Amazing. This is so fun. I just, congratulations.

Shira Gill: Thank you.

Katrina Ubell: And happy book day. This is a really big deal.

Shira Gill: Thank you.

Katrina Ubell: No problem, I'm happy for you. Yay.

Shira Gill: Thanks for having me.

Katrina Ubell: Yes, absolutely. Thank you, Shira.