

The Bulging Knapsack

nce upon a time, a traveler was journeying to a far country. One day, he tripped over a green rock. "I must bring this rock with me, to remind me to never trip over another like it." So he put it in his knapsack.

The next day, he discovered a pair of beautiful sandals by the road. He tried them on, but they didn't fit. "I'll bring these with me — in case I fit them someday." So he put them in his knapsack.

The next day, he discovered a broken clock by the road. "I might be able to fix this someday, so I'll hang on to it." So he put it into his knapsack.

The next day, he came to a fork in the road. He hesitated, unsure which way to go. He chose the left path. Hours later, he came across an old signpost, half-buried in the dust. It read: "To the far country —" — pointing the other way. He sank to his knees. "I took the wrong path! If only I had chosen differently!" So he put the signpost in his backpack. "I will carry this with me, to remind myself to be wiser next time."

Before long, his knapsack was so heavy he could hardly stand. And he was so bent over by the weight of it that all he could see was the dusty path immediately in front of him — he could no longer see the beauty around him or the sky above.

Finally, he collapsed from the weight of it beside the road. Later, a young woman came down the road and stopped to see if the traveler needed help. He explained his plight.

"It seems to me," she said, "that you need to remove everything from your knapsack that you don't really need for your Journey. Most of this isn't serving you — or anyone else. Let it go!"

So together they went through the contents of his knapsack.

"What's this green rock?" she asked. "That's to remind me not to trip over another like it," he replied. "You have that lesson etched in your mind and heart — you don't need to carry the weight of this rock to remember." So they set the rock aside.

"What are these sandals?" she asked. "I might fit them someday." "If they don't fit you today, they probably won't fit you tomorrow. Don't expect to be something you're not someday." So they set the sandals aside.

"What is this broken clock?" she asked. "I might be able to fix it someday," he replied. "Are you a clock maker? Do you know anything about clocks?" she asked. "No," he replied. "Then let it go. This is a task for someone else. Stick to your own tasks." So they set the clock aside.

"What is this signpost?" she asked. "It's to remind me not to take a wrong turn again," he replied. "But every fork in the road is different," she said. "With practice, you'll get better at recognizing the best path. Meanwhile, it's inevitable that you'll take wrong turns from time to time. If you're not taking wrong turns, you're not on a journey." So they set the signpost aside.

What was left was only things useful to him, helpful to him. Without all the accumulated junk, his knapsack felt light as a feather. For the first time in ages, he was able to stand up straight, and look up and see the sky. And so, with a deep breath, he set out on his Journey once more — his unburdened steps swift and sure.

— *William Zeitler*
2025 March 4

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