



International Solidarity Reflection

School Sisters of Notre Dame

Shalom

Living Simply, Responsibly, Sustainably

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Introduction

Tuning in to the various meetings, conferences, and workshops, local, national, and international, one hears or reads these words: Simple living, simple lifestyle, simplicity, sustainability, and responsibility. The imbalance and inequity between the haves and the have-nots, the first-world nations and the developing ones are a glaring reality in our global society. There is urgent need to create a sustainable lifestyle, to commit oneself to creating a lifestyle whose impact on the whole of creation stands the single and direct test of “The Golden Rule: “Do to others what you would have them do to you.”

Call to Prayer

Loving and gracious Lord, we praise You, adore and glorify You in all of creation. We give You thanks for your gratuitous and unconditional love of all your creatures—with no exception.

Open our hearts and minds to embrace all creation with that same love with which you love us all.
Amen

Experience

The idea of simple living is often associated with Henry David Thoreau’s life at Walden Pond described in his 1854 book. It is there that many people have found inspiration in quotes such as: *Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind. With respect to luxuries and comforts, the wisest have ever lived a more simple and meagre life than the poor. (Thoreau, 1961)*

In ancient China, the philosopher Lao Tzu said, “*To know when you have enough is to be rich.*” Similarly in Japan, the idea of “shoyoku chisoku” (less greed leads to contentment) or “taru wo shiru” (to know what is enough), both derived from Buddhist concepts, have traditionally been ingrained in people.

In developed countries, interest keeps increasing in activities such as yoga or meditation courses, organic and vegetarian food and the slow food movement. Although these used to be an alternative, in opposition to mainstream consumption habits, they are becoming popular themselves, with articles and books on them published by fashionable and fashion-creating publishers.

Meanwhile, to be able to live in a sustainable way, humankind needs alternatives that would go beyond choosing more environmentally friendly (or simpler) goods only. To change current unsustainable consumption patterns, there is a need to change mentality — towards thinking about the earth as a whole, and about one’s surroundings and one’s influence on those surroundings.

Education for the purpose of bringing about a radical shift in consumption and production patterns can change the most important drivers of the current problems. Information is necessary for consumers to make more informed purchasing decisions, but also, to some extent, to change their perception of values, needs and the means of their satisfaction.

We cannot impose simple living on anybody as it would contradict the basic idea, that it is a voluntary and deliberate act of renunciation of some material needs and opting for spiritual experience rather than material wealth.

The most important of these is reflection, or “thinking more and buying less”, as it could be rephrased in the language of activists, or just “thinking more” which would result in consuming less anyway. Reflection is necessary to appreciate the difference between means and ends. Simple living in developed countries does not necessarily lead to reflection — simple living is often adopted as yet another attractive consumption option. Life without reflection contradicts the idea of simple living and it often involves unsustainable patterns of consumption. Devoid of reflection, simple living will not lead to sustainability.

Reflection

Creating a sustainable lifestyle takes a lifelong commitment to learning, experimenting, exploring, reflecting, committing to increasingly sustainable practices, and above all loving. Reflection is the most important element of simple living that might enrich the current debate on sustainable consumption and suggest how to further strengthen simple living.

Because beyond all of the frightening news, beyond the frustrating politics, beyond the failed international agreements, there is one question — how do you want to live your life? With fear or with love? The fear route feels defeated and helpless and frustrating. The love route, on the other hand, feels grounded, purposeful and hopeful.

Action

How shall I and we respond?

Choosing a life of love requires changing, shifting our lifestyle away from consumption and toward more sustainable activities such as:

- Taking public transportation
- Becoming more self-reliant like growing food, repairing belongings
- Volunteering on local sustainability projects
- Spending more time in nature and reading downloaded or library books for entertainment
- Learning how to cook with local, sustainable produce
- Uncluttering one's inner life
- Altering energy consumption, and diet

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, one day you came to the Temple and were horrified at what you saw: money-changers, vendors of all kinds, and animals. You drove them all out of the temple. They have made the house of the Father a den of thieves. Like these people, we clutter our lives with things we believe we need, gotten at the expense of the life of your creation. Grant us the grace to create a sustainable lifestyle of loving all of creation. Amen.