

Simplicity means making time for yourself in a hectic world. You clear out what is superfluous and make room for a life of passion, depth, and joy. As people become more and more stressed out from the pace of modern life and as we become increasingly concerned about the price of our over-consumption of the planet's resources, the movement to living in a state of 'mindfulness' has increasing interest as a chosen life-style.

By: Gwen Stewart

There is a relatively new phenomenon in North America called 'voluntary simplicity.' The term 'voluntary simplicity' is used to describe a process whereby people opt out of the harried life of modern day living, and chose to live a life of frugality. Frugality in this sense doesn't mean poverty rather, it means, enjoying the virtue of getting good value for every minute of your life energy and from everything you have the use of. Frugal is characterised by or reflective of economy in the expenditure of resources.

To be mindful means to dwell deeply in the present moment knowing there is only one opportunity and it will never come again.

Voluntary simplicity comes from within. It is a social movement of a more sustainable, gratifying, and spiritually connected existence. Voluntary simplicity is a matter of personal responsibility and conscious awareness of how we live on the planet. It means identifying the difference between our needs and our wants. Needs are those things that are necessary for our survival - food, clothing, and shelter. Wants are all the other things we desire and to a large extent are driven by media advertising. Simplicity as a life-style is the identifiable difference between needs and wants, and the awareness of the cost in terms of our life force energy and our willingness to pay the price.

### **Pursuing a life of Simplicity**

The Chinese pictograph for 'busy' is composed of two characters: heart and killing. When I first read this, I thought of the many people who are 'too busy' to make that phone call to someone

they love and then one day it is too late; the many children who get gifts and/or money instead of their parents' time and then one day they leave home and it is too late; the many times we have an opportunity to touch someone's life with kindness but we are 'too busy' and the moment never comes again and it is too late.

As we search for meaning in our lives, we start to become aware of the emptiness and shallowness of a life based on materialism and consumerism. We become aware of the tremendous expenditure of our 'life force energy' to just keep up with the daily 'rat race.' We start the search for a life of deeper meaning and ask ourselves 'what gives us joy?' We realise we don't know and can't answer the question but we feel a yearning in our hearts for a sense of connection, a sense of purpose, and the sense that our life matters. The question demands an answer. We discover that all the myths such as: get a job, get married, have children, buy a mortgage with a two-car garage, and you will be happy, makes us wonder what is the matter with us when we feel the increasing futility of it all. The emphasis on externally meeting our needs leaves a 'hole in our soul' as we consume more and more and feel less and less satisfied. Consume by definition means to do away with completely; destroy – to spend wastefully; and squander – use up. Is consumed by our meaningless and frenzied consumerism a description that all too closely resembles most our lives?

What we don't realise is that we are spiritual beings, in a physical body, having a human experience, and when we don't connect the internal (spiritual) and the external (physical), our lives increasingly lose a sense of balance or harmony. There is literally no distinction between the outer and the inner when our lives are in balance, and as we seek this stability, where do we start? We start by examining our expectations and assumptions including the belief systems that drive us to live our lives 'zombie-like' without determining whether or not we want to play this game. We move towards consciously asking the questions about how much of our 'life force energy' we are prepared to exchange for the material goods we consume. This expenditure of 'life force energy' includes the storing, cleaning, insurance costs, maintaining, etc. all the stuff that clutters our lives.

### **Practical Steps to Simplifying Your life**

1. Reuse paper bags, envelopes, newspapers, etc. Newspapers and shredded paper make excellent mulch in the garden. The mulch will break down over a period of time and add humus to the soil. (Don't use coloured flyers.)

2. Have a Buy Nothing Day.
  
3. Carve some space for 'mindful living' so that you have time for 'beingness' rather than 'doingness.'
  
4. Find friends who know the glass is half-full or in other words, find friends who share the same value system as you do.
  
5. Grow your own food or buy as much as possible from local growers.
  
6. Use non-toxic products such as borax, vinegar, baking soda, lemon, and salt in your home, yard, and garden.
  
7. Before you buy something, write the item down on a note and if you still want it after a month, purchase it then.
  
8. Decide what is really working in your life and let go of that which no longer serves you.
  
9. Surround yourself with what you really need and love.
  
10. Go Organic. Organic gardening is not only about the avoidance of chemicals, but in the larger picture, it is organic living using Nature's laws.

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