

Bulletin for Living Simply

Business

Chalice Lighting

To live content with small means,
To seek elegance rather than luxury, and refinement rather than fashion;
To be worthy, not respectable, and wealthy, not rich...
To let the spiritual, unbidden and unconscious, grow up through the common.
This is to be my symphony.

William Henry Channing

Sharing of Joys and Concerns

Silence – holding ourselves and each other in silent support

Shared Readings

Manifest plainness,
Embrace simplicity,
Reduce selfishness,
Have few desires.

Lao-Tzu, Tao Te Ching

Live simply that others may simply live. *Attributed to Mother Teresa, Gandhi, and St. Elizabeth Seton*

The trouble with simple living is that, though it can be joyful, rich, and creative, it isn't simple.

Doris Janzen Longacre

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow. *Melody Beattie*

Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb nail. . . . Simplify, simplify! Instead of three meals a day, if it be necessary eat but one; instead of a hundred dishes, five; and reduce other things in proportion. . . . We do not ride upon the railroad; it rides upon us.

Henry David Thoreau

Too many people spend money they haven't earned, to buy things they don't want, to impress people they don't like. *Will Rogers*

The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. *Ludwig Wittgenstein*

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

Round 1 Describe a way in which your material possessions have kept you from devoting yourself to what truly matters to you. What is it that truly matters to you?

Round 2 Share more deeply your thoughts, feelings, and stories about Living Simply in response to the preparation materials.

Round 3 As time allows, share additional thoughts about the preparation questions or reflect upon what others have shared.

Closing Words

Go in peace. Live simply, gently, at home in yourselves.

Act justly.

Speak justly.

Remember the depth of your own compassion.

Crave peace for all people in the world,

Beginning with yourselves,

And go...with the dream of that peace

Alive in your heart.

Mark L. Belletini

Closing Song

"Simple Gifts" (1848) by Joseph Brackett

'Tis a gift to be simple,

'tis a gift to be free.

'Tis a gift to come down

where we ought to be.

And when we find ourselves

in the place just right,

'Twill be in the valley

of love and delight.

When true simplicity is gained,

To bow and to bend

we shan't be ashamed.

To turn, turn

will be our delight,

'Till by turning, turning

we come round right.

The Covenant I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to let the leader know if I will be absent or need to quit
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others
- to do the reading and thinking about the topic ahead of time
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and tell only my own story to others
- to honor the safety of the group by listening to what others share with an open heart
- to refrain from cross-talk, judging, or giving advice
- to share as deeply as I can when it is my turn.

Facilitator Notes for Living Simply

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Sharing of Joys and Concerns (each person about 2 minutes)

Silence – holding ourselves and each other in silent support (3 minutes)

Shared Readings

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Lao-Tzu, Tao Te Ching

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Ludwig Wittgenstein

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening I

In the rounds of deep sharing and deep listening, pay close attention to the time allotted each person to ensure that all get to share at least once.

Round 1 (each person about 2 minutes)

Describe a way in which your material possessions have kept you from devoting yourself to what truly matters to you. What is it that truly matters to you?

Round 2 (each person about 5 minutes)

Share more deeply your thoughts, feelings, and stories about Living Simply in response to the preparation materials.

Round 3 As time allows, share additional thoughts about the preparation questions or reflect upon what others have shared.

Closing Words

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Preparation for Living Simply

All of the world's religions have argued against materialism and for a more simple and spiritual way of living. However, advanced industrial civilization has promoted material "progress" and consumerism for hundreds of years. As a result, people of faith often find themselves confronted with the dilemma of how to live a more meaningful spiritual life in the context of a world dominated by materialism. Thoreau, one of our Unitarian forefathers, moved into a small cabin on Walden Pond in order to achieve a simple and authentic life. However, most people today are not able or willing to forsake the civilized world in order to achieve simplicity. Is it possible to live more simply within our complex, materialistic world? Is it possible to change this materialistic world?

The inclination to simplify our lives has recently gained increased importance for ecological reasons. Not only is industrial civilization running out of natural resources such as petroleum and natural gas, but climate change as a result of carbon emissions has become apparent. It seems clear that if life—human, animal, and plant—is going to survive in our world, we will need to fundamentally alter our current industrial civilization and make it more sustainable. Reducing our material consumption is beginning to be seen as not only appealing for spiritual reasons but also as necessary for survival.

Equity and justice are other arguments that are sometimes given for reducing material consumption in the advanced industrial world. Millions of people in developing nations suffer from hunger and malnutrition, and there is also hunger and poverty in the industrialized world. Sharing the world's resources more equitably implies that the more affluent people in the world need to consume less and reduce their material wants. It is sometimes said, "Live simply that others may simply live."

If we are to make such a substantial change in the industrialized world, a major shift in consciousness will be needed. It has been said that we need to focus on loving people and using things, not the consumerist orientation of loving things and using people. A poll in the mid 1990's found that 82% of those surveyed agreed with the statement "Most of us buy and consume far more than we need." (<http://www.iisd.ca/consume/harwood.html>) And yet we continue to buy and consume. Material things can be seductive, and advertising makes them more so.

Many people are beginning to focus on the positive effects of living a more simple life. For the past 30 years, a "voluntary simplicity" movement has been growing in the U.S. Inspired by the book *Voluntary Simplicity* by Duane Elgin, and many subsequent books on the same theme, proponents of voluntary simplicity promote the many advantages of living a more frugal, simple, and uncluttered life: less stress, deeper social and community involvement, greater authenticity, better balance between material and spiritual needs, ecological benefits and a stronger connection to nature, greater social justice and equity, and similar benefits.

Why should we live in such a hurry and waste of life? We are determined to be starved before we are hungry. I wish to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life. I wish to learn what life has to teach, and not, when I come to die, discover that I had not lived. I do not wish to live what is not life, living is so dear, nor do I wish to practice resignation, unless it is quite necessary. I wish to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, I want to cut a broad swath, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms. If it proves to be mean, then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it is sublime, to know it by experience, and to be able to give a true account of it. *Henry David Thoreau*

. . . in Western industrial nations in particular, millions of persons have searched for happiness through the single-minded pursuit of material wealth. Instead of happiness, many have found social alienation and spiritual impoverishment. Something is amiss—our lives are out of balance. We cannot attend to the depth and richness of life when we are largely preoccupied with the pursuit of material wealth and social status. Common sense suggests that if we simplify our lives—reduce the undue clutter and complexity—then it will be easier to find a more satisfying balance between the material and the spiritual aspects of existence. *Duane Elgin*

Simplicity is not so much about what we own, but about what owns us. If we need lots of possessions to maintain our self-esteem and create our self-image and to look good to our neighbors, then we have forgotten or neglected that which is real and inward. If our time, money, and energy are consumed in selecting, acquiring, maintaining, cleaning, moving, improving, replacing, dusting, storing, using, showing off, and talking about our possessions, then there is little time, money, and energy left for our other pursuits such as the work we do to further the Community of God. *Christine Hadley Snyder*

The ecological crises thus demand a deep solution. The will to change must come from within. Only a shift in values can work a lasting shift in laws and institutions and, most important, everyday practices. And those values must emerge from a shift in worldview that is in a fundamental sense religious. *Connie Barlow*

A self-reinforcing spiral of growth begins to unfold for those who choose to participate in the world in a life-sensing and life-serving manner. As we live more voluntarily—more consciously—we feel less identified with our material possessions and thereby are enabled to live more simply. As we live more simply, our lives become less filled with unnecessary distractions, we find it easier to bring our undivided attention into our passage through life, and thereby we are enabled to live more consciously. *Duane Elgin*

Questions to Ponder

1. How were you raised to think about material things? Do you see changes in how young people are being raised today?
2. Describe a way in which your material possessions have kept you from devoting yourself to what truly matters to you. What is it that truly matters to you? (to share at the group session)
3. What, if anything, would you like to simplify in your life?
4. Imagine the effect on your life of reducing your number of cars, or living in a smaller house. What things might you be willing to give up in the interest of achieving a more simple life?
5. What things would you *not* be willing to give up?
6. What obstacles do you encounter as you seek greater simplicity? Are these obstacles external (e.g. resistance from a loved one) or internal (e.g. emotional attachment to certain possessions)?
7. What are some of the positive benefits that you have experienced from simplifying your life?