

4. Stick to a list

List items you really need before you reach the store. Stop and think before you buy something that's not on your list.

5. Wait!

If you plan to buy an item, like a new sofa or a second car, delay the purchase. If you delay, you may realize you can live without it.

6. Avoid debt

If you decide to buy something, big or small, avoid credit schemes and long-term payment plans that may leave you in debt. The Prophet, peace be upon him, made a point of not offering funeral prayers until a person's debt was resolved.

7. Become a producer

Become a producer of positive change in your community, rather than a consumer. Immerse yourself in projects that transform lives and require sacrifice. Prioritize working for God, as the Prophet, peace be upon him, said:

"Whoever makes the hereafter his sole concern, then Allah will be sufficient for him concerning his affairs and needs in the world, and whoever's concerns are divided amongst the affairs of the world, then Allah would have no care in which path he is destroyed" [Ibn Majah]

8. Give

Charity purifies your heart from the love of wealth and increases your rewards. When you give, you show gratitude for what God gave you.

9. Save up for the Next Life

Rush to hoard up on good actions, rather than items. Remember that your wealth and property will vanish one day while your deeds will remain in record to benefit you. God tells us in the Quran:

"What is with you must vanish; what is with Allah will endure." [16:96]

"Woe to every scandal-monger and backbiter who piles up wealth and (continuously) counts it, thinking that his wealth would make him last forever." [104:1-3]

Make the intention to confront consumerism so you can take back your body, de-commercialize your life, and reclaim your identity!

"Personal Development" Series

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Unclutter Your Life

Reclaim Your Mind, Body, and Wallet

"Our culture has evolved into a consumer culture and we have evolved from citizens to consumers. Gratitude for what we have has been replaced by a sharpening hunger for what we don't have. 'How much is enough?' has been replaced by 'How much is possible?' (Kalle Lasn)¹.

North America is the most consumer-obsessed society in the world. Mega-corporations exploit us through hollow promises:

BUY NOW, PAY LATER!

SUPERSALE!! BUY MORE TO SAVE MORE!

SUPERSIZE YOUR MEAL!

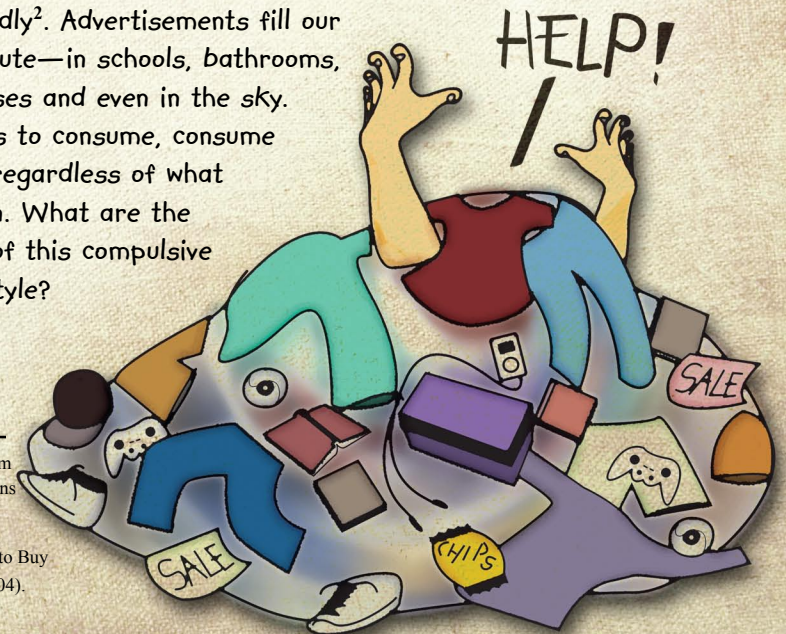
EVERYONE DESERVES A RELAXING VACATION!

GET A MANSION TODAY! LOW MORTGAGE RATES!

People in North America work longer hours than in any other industrialized country. Despite fewer people per household, the size of homes continues to expand rapidly². Advertisements fill our eyes every minute—in schools, bathrooms, on food, on buses and even in the sky. They compel us to consume, consume and consume, regardless of what we own or earn. What are the consequences of this compulsive consumer lifestyle?

¹ Lasn, Kalle, Culture Jam (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999).

² Schor, Juliet B., Born to Buy (New York: Scribner, 2004).





Seven Perils of Consumerism:

Consuming is far from harmless. A lifestyle focused on consumption does the following:

1. Wastes your time

When you flip flyers, search aisles and wait in checkout lines, you lose precious time. When you own a bigger house, an extra car and more appliances, you organize more, clean more, repair more—and lose more precious time. Consumerism steals your time to relax with family, engage in worship or help the community.

2. Distracts you from your goal

Our routines absorb us each day as we earn, buy, store, clean, organize and discard “stuff”. We have little time to contemplate why we perform these tasks and possess these items. Slogans of “Buy now! Enjoy now!” emphasize instant gratification and obscure the deeper

purpose and priorities of our lives.

We rarely remember to show gratitude for what God gave us. The more we ‘consume’, the more consumerism distracts us from our goal of pleasing God. God warns us that, “The mutual rivalry for piling up (the good things of this world) diverts you (from the more serious things) until you visit the graves.” [102:1-2]

3. Increases your needs

As you own more, your needs increase. A bigger house requires more furniture, more curtains, more decorations and more cleaning supplies (maybe even a maid!). Now you need to work longer hours to maintain your bigger house. When you work longer hours, you have less time so your needs increase again—you now need outside food, more childcare, a dishwasher, and a vacation to escape the stress! Consumerism traps us in a cycle of ‘own more, need more, work more’.

4. Enslaves you

The fashion industry, with the media’s help, creates, sells and alters styles to keep you spending. If you follow the latest trends, wear what’s ‘in’ and avoid what’s ‘out’, ask yourself why. As Lasn explains in “Culture Jam”:

“Brands, products, fashion, celebrities, entertainment—the spectacles that surround the production of culture—are our culture now. Our role is mostly to listen and watch—and then, based on what we have heard and seen, to buy.”

5. Creates more responsibilities

God tells us in the Quran, “Then (on the day of judgement) you will certainly be questioned about all the favours you enjoyed.” [102:8]

Are you ready to account for everything you consume—how you bought it, how you used it? As you own more, you increase your burden of responsibility.

6. Weakens your health

Juliet Schor, in “Born to Buy”, shows that children who lead a consumeristic lifestyle, spending more time watching television and shopping, face greater health problems such as obesity, depression, and low self esteem³. Even adults who are responsible for more financial and physical wealth suffer greater stress and stress-related diseases. A simple lifestyle, with meaningful physical and mental activities, can protect your health.

7. Destroys your environment

An individual in a developed nation consumes three times as much meat, nine times as much paper, and eleven times as much gasoline as an individual in a developing nation . This materialistic lifestyle sucks up natural resources and dumps tonnes of waste on the planet.

Imagine a single piece of paper—energy and resources are used to:

- cut, transport and process the tree
- produce the packaging
- package and transport the paper
- advertise and sell the paper
- produce the machinery required for all these processes

Don’t forget the air and water polluted by the factories and machines that produced this paper. Within seconds you use a portion of this paper and throw it out.

More energy is now used to transport this waste & dump it somewhere

Where does our garbage go? Many toys, electronics, and household items North Americans consume and discard ends in piles on landfill sites in developing countries where the toxic chemicals seep into water and soil. Each item we consume involves consequences we rarely consider.

Nine Ways to Confront Consumerism:

Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said, “The best livelihood is the bare minimum” [Ahmad]. So how can we live simply in a culture that loves luxury? Here are eight tips to start:

1. Avoid the mall

Purchase items you need from small businesses rather than huge department stores. If you shop for leisure, entertain yourself in other ways—take a walk, visit a friend, or volunteer for a community project.

2. Watch less TV

Most television programs promote materialistic values and goals. Consumer culture uses television to sell products, set fashion trends, and create values.

3. Choose friends carefully

Choose friends who have diverse interests, beyond making money and following fashion. God advises us in the Quran:

“And keep yourself content with those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His countenance, and let not your eyes pass beyond them to those who seek the pomp and glitter of this life” [18:28]

³ Gregory Mock, “How Much Do We Consume,” World Resources June 2000, 22 Feb. 2006 http://earthtrends.wri.org/features/view_feature.php?theme=6&fid=7.