

Overconsumption: An unnecessary evil

Turn, and it is possible that you are going to see an advertisement. In fact, an average human being is bombarded with an estimated 3,500 advertisements in a single day. We are educated from a young age to consume; we watch television, listen to the radio, surf the internet – all of these areas are teeming with advertisements.

In today's world it seems that to live means to consume, and consume we do. We are inclined to believe that buying will make us content. We believe that new lipstick, perhaps a bigger car or even a bigger house, will make us happier.

Advertising is a catalyst to our ravenous urges.

Advertising is very effective in convincing us that non-material happiness can be gained through material belongings (think of those deodorant commercials which assure swarms of ladies for users). It persuades us to turn the buying and use of goods almost into rituals and we start seeking our spiritual satisfaction and ego satisfaction in consumption. But looking to the material world for fulfillment can lead to people working in jobs they hate just to be able to afford an unnecessarily expensive life that advertisements urge us to achieve.

The story does not end there. Even the most materially rich do not feel like they have enough. As people get richer, they are surrounded by richer people and consume even more in order to compete with set social standards. It is a vicious cycle.

The assurance of happiness, connection and a position higher up on the social ladder convinces us to dole out money from our wallets again and again. This message is so frighteningly effective that we remain determined to consume even when research has shown that it leaves us drowning in debt and immense psychological stress.

There is even a term for it: affluenza, which is defined as "a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more."

It is the condition that urges us to reach for that \$90 lipstick because it will give us the "perfect" shade of red or throw out our iPhone 5s for the iPhone 6s.

The urge to emulate is a key factor used by advertisements. We all want to look like our favourite celebrities. We all want to smell like David Beckham or look like Aishwarya Rai.

We want their polished clothes, their shiny hair and their impossibly airbrushed skin and figures. Understandably, their endorsement of products causes us to run to stores to grab creams and shampoos.

However, we must realize that no amount of cosmetics can elevate us to that level of perfection; only a healthy dose of Photoshop can (according to WorldWatch Institute, the annual expenditure on makeup is a massive \$18 billion even though an additional annual investment of \$12 billion is needed to provide reproductive health care for all women.)

The condition is not reserved for the rich only. In villages, people spend money on

television sets instead of their children's education. The urban poor are even more exposed to affluent lifestyles and advertisements, which often endorse unnecessary and unsustainable lifestyles, slowly changing their consumption patterns.

THE PROBLEM

Apart from the sociological consequences, there is another price to pay for uncontrolled consumption. Everything we consume comes from nature and nature's resources are limited. As we continue to consume and feed our illusion of a 'comfortable' life, we are over-extracting resources - forests, water, minerals and animal life.

In the past 40 years, the planet's biodiversity has been reduced by 30 percent and humanity is "still using resources as if we had a planet and a half," according to the World Wildlife Fund. Our acts are resulting in the degradation of ecosystems and habitats. Increased consumption has also increased pollution and waste causing further ruin of the environment.

Though overpopulation has been known to be a major cause of environmen-



tal deterioration, it is now being seen that overconsumption is an equally, if not more, important issue. Australia ranks seventh in negative environmental impact. It is believed that if everyone lived like Australians, it would take three and three-quarter planet Earths to support humanity.

It is up to us to realise that we do only have one planet Earth and that we must stop our existing consumption patterns, which are edging us to the brink of an unsustainable future.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Our needs are limited, but advertisers take advantage of our unlimited emotional needs to keep us spending. The first step to a solution is acknowledging the problem.

The biggest dilemma of consumption is that it takes us away from nature. It can lead to people forgetting what is really important, such as family, helping others, connectedness with nature, eating

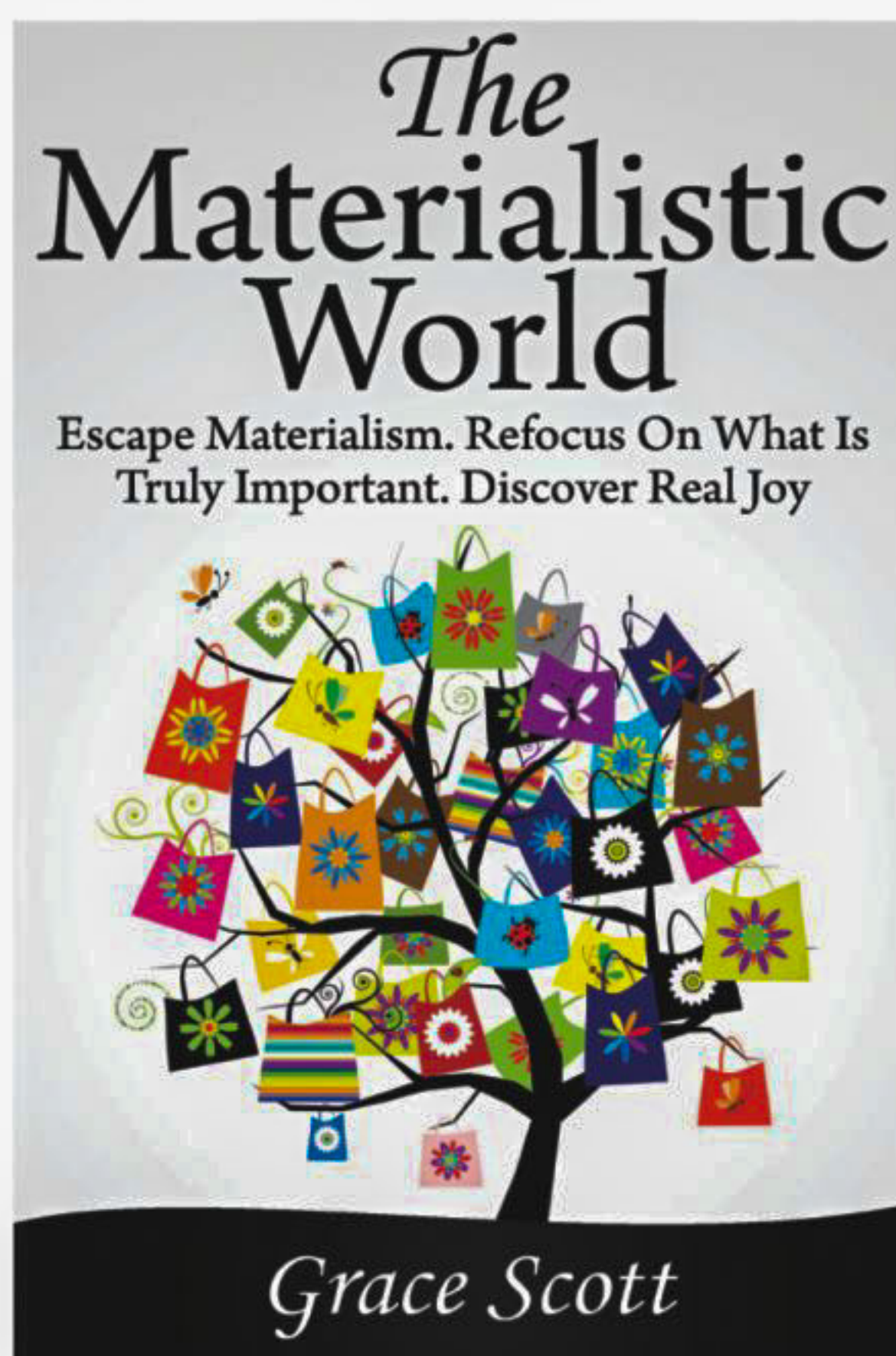
healthy and being the best you can possibly be.

Mass consumption has formed a world that constantly looks externally for happiness and fulfilment when, in reality, what we need to be happy is inside each of us. The solution is not to sell all your belongings and find refuge and happiness in the Himalayas as a monk; I know human beings have basic needs and justifiable wants to function. I am not even putting down all advertisements. It is an essential tool for producers to let people know about their products. However, most of us often get sucked in by advertisements into buying things we simply do not need. Here are a few ways to cut that down.

Be mindful when you are buying things. Do you want to buy something because it will be useful? Or are you buying it because it will make you look better, more popular or more successful? If it's the latter, it is likely that you have been duped by marketing.

TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR DEBT

Planning for the future so you can antici-



pate change

Buying things which are useful and reusable

Buying non-consuming things, such as a bicycle, instead of consuming things such as a car. Getting skilled. If you don't have something, try to make it! The internet has DIY tutorials for a range of things nowadays.

The antidote to wanting more is to take pleasure and be content with what you already have. Overconsumption leads to considerable debt, anxiety and even mental problems such as depression. Our home is the Earth is finite and cannot grow. We have to learn how to live with it. It is time for us to be the change and not the problem. As Gandhi said: "The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed."

By Maisha Rumelia Rahman

In conversation with Prito Reza

Awarded the 'Youth Icon' of 2012, photographer Prito Reza started his career as a freelance photographer. Wedding Diary, a company he later initiated, is now a renowned name countrywide. Under the banner of wedding Diary, Prito Reza had the privilege of being commissioned for wedding photography in Australia, America, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and India.

But as Prito Reza sees it, his transition into the photography industry was not an easy one.

"Initially I was not interested in wedding photography; I used to work as a photojournalist and that's when I thought of learning more about photography in general. But cameras and gears can be expensive. I got into wedding photography just to get some capital to support my passion. Whereas now I'm grateful that I picked up wedding photography because without it I don't think I would have become a photographer," said Prito Reza.

A graduate of Pathshala South Asian Media Institute of Photography, he was also behind the first ever wedding exhibition that took place in Bangladesh.

"I have taken this as a challenge to develop the photography industry of Bangladesh as during my initial days I was not very encouraged. In a way I was determined to take this profession to the next level" said Prito Reza.

The first and only photography show on Bangladeshi satellite television – Darkroom – was conceptualised and is now conducted by him. Anybody interested from any part of the country can participate in this live program and ask questions on photography.

Prito Reza is a faculty of Counter Foto and takes classes regularly at Potofee Photo Lounge, WD School of Photography and has conducted more than fifty photography workshops till date. His solo photography exhibition, Life Soldiers, was held at the 39th Paseo Art Festival 2014, in USA.

"For upcoming photographers I would say not to be too dependent on the device and be confident and passionate about photography," Prito said.

Wedding and Portrait Photographers of Bangladesh (WPPB) is pleased to honour Prito Reza on completion of ten years of his hard work and for his dedication towards photography.

By Mehnaj Kabir