

The Consumer in Us All

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 3 min read

Have we really noticed how insidious the now world-wide ‘religion’ of consumerism has become? We all know how advertisers create false ‘needs’. All adverts suggest what you are buying - a product, a service - is a bargain. Money well spent. They tell us it will make us especially happy. We will be so gratified – immediately! And we don’t have to do anything – or at least it will take such little effort. In fact if all you do is tick this box, go onto this loan plan. You won’t even notice the money leaving your bank account. And you can win a prize! Consequence of greed manifest: [http://themoneycharity.org.uk/money-statistics/Total personal debt \(2014\) in the UK](http://themoneycharity.org.uk/money-statistics/Total%20personal%20debt%20(2014)%20in%20the%20UK) currently stands at £1.46 trillion. The average household debt in the UK is £7,975 (excluding mortgages). Based on September (2014 trends, the UK’s total interest repayments on personal debt over a 12 month period would have been £59.8 billion. (Never mind the rest of the world!) This habit of greedily seeking a bargain insinuates itself into our lives so much so that the behaviour becomes automatic and is never questioned. It seems so natural. Well logical. Surely it’s been with us ever since bartering began. But as a generalised attitude to life this becomes truly cancerous to the good heart. For the consumer seeks to take as much as they can, while giving as little as possible. They are always on the lookout for that bargain. Of course, it’s just another manifestation of our good friend, greed, but in these new clothes it takes on the air of ethical correctness. It’s confused with self-care. ‘Greed is good.’ But how does it affect our spiritual lives? Some reflections: Are we looking for the pristine technique! The one that really was taught by the Buddha. The one that is going to deliver the goods and fast with least possible effort. Are we looking for that famous teacher everyone is talking about? What do we expect of the teacher? That they are actually going to get us to Nibbana? Do we expect them to be entertaining, exciting? Will they be able to give us the immediate gratification we are looking for? All those vipassana knowledges – theñāna, shouldn’t they come quickly. I have read about them. They all seem pretty straight forward to me! Why haven’t I attained them? It can only be the teacher, the method. And if I have to listen to that talk again, I’ll go mad. It’s become so boring! Same old jokes. And is my spiritual practice all about me. What about dana – generosity. It is said in giving we receive. Are we giving in order to receive? I don’t know where I got this quote (If you know, please email me): The One, or Oneness, as we might say in Zen, never tries to turn a profit from anything at all. It wouldn’t even make sense. We, on the other hand, are always trying to turn a profit from every human exchange. We are always trying to get something—admiration, love, recognition, praise, acknowledgment, even just staying connected. Think how we manipulate and bargain and negotiate to turn a profit from every interaction. Much of this is subtle, unconscious habit. Even when we give, or serve, or love, or pay attention, we’re trying to get something. Sometimes it’s just to get back some of what we give. Unfortunately the spiritual life asks almost exactly the opposite to our speedy, consuming society. It demands a long-term commitment – over

lifetimes if you are open that. It demands dogged perseverance. Although there are highlights and wonders on the way, they are merely short stops on the Path. The Path is a constant 'struggle' against Mara, our unwholesome habits - the Five Hindrances, the Defilements and the subtle, unconscious Latent Tendencies that we don't know are there or we don't know how powerful they are until a situation drags them out hiding. Why were these the last two words of the Buddha – *apamadana sampadetha* – with diligence strive/work hard. 'Strive diligently for your liberation!' If you see other ways in which the speedy, consumer affects our outlook, injurious to spiritual life, do email. Still a classic: *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche

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