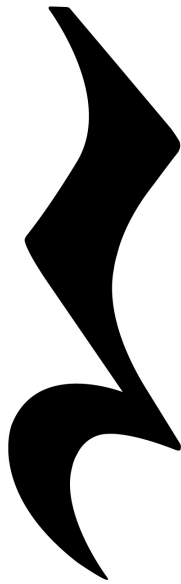


# THE SIMPLER WAY

A PRACTICAL ACTION PLAN FOR LIVING MORE ON LESS



[www.SimplerWay.org](http://www.SimplerWay.org)

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## INTRODUCTION

Samuel Alexander

Beyond our basic material needs for food, clothing, and shelter, how much is enough? In particular, how much money and how many possessions do we really need to live well and to be free? These are not questions that many people ask themselves in consumer societies today, but they are some of the most important questions of all.

Instead of confronting these questions, too many people today spend their entire lives desperately climbing the endless ladder of consumerism, seeking more and more income to spend on more and more stuff. But at the end of life these people inevitably discover that they had not really lived, that they had wasted their only chance at life inside a shopping mall. A free and meaningful life, it turns out, does not actually depend on having all the latest consumer products or having the nicest house on the street. On the contrary, working long hours just to ‘keep up with the Joneses’ leaves people with less time for the things that really matter in life, like friends, family, community, and engaging in peaceful, creative activity. This is the stuff that makes life worth living, and the interesting thing is we don’t need to be rich to enjoy it all. The best things in life really are free. Abundance is a state of mind.

Money is important, of course, but only up to a point, and the threshold point is much lower than most people think. Once our basic material needs are met, the limitless pursuit of money and stuff merely distracts us from more meaningful and inspiring things. As the ancient philosophers told us long ago, those who know they have enough are rich, and those who have enough but do not know it, are poor. Consumerism, it is clear, represents a mistaken idea of wealth, and it is based on a mistaken idea of freedom.

Not only are many people finding consumer lifestyles empty and unfulfilling, an even greater problem is that consumer lifestyles are destroying our beautiful planet Earth, jeopardising the future of life as we know it. Everything we consume ultimately comes from nature and all our consumer wastes must ultimately be returned to nature. But nature has limits! Today our fragile ecosystems are trembling under the weight of decades of overconsumption, and yet the pursuit of more economic growth and more consumption continues to define the collective imagination, even in the richest nations. Let us pause for a moment and ask ourselves: Is consumer culture really the best we can come up with? Is there no alternative?

The good news is that there *is* an alternative – the Simpler Way. Participants in this emerging social movement are voluntarily passing up high consumption, energy-intensive lifestyles and creating for themselves a lower consumption but higher quality of life alternative. By limiting their working hours and consumption, spending their money thoughtfully, growing their own food, riding bikes, rejecting high fashion, and generally celebrating life *outside* the shopping mall, these people are the ‘new pioneers’ transitioning to a simpler form of life beyond consumer culture. Furthermore, they are showing that this is the surest path to a sustainable life of freedom, happiness, and deep contentment. Please join us on this Great Transition and together we can ignite the most important

social movement of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is your personal invitation. Consume less, live more.

The aim of this document is simple: to provide a practical action plan for those people who wish to live a 'simpler life' of reduced consumption. The Simpler Way represents a life with less clutter, less waste, and less fossil fuel use, but also a life with more time for the things that truly inspire and bring happiness. It is hoped that what follows can provide creative individuals with a guidebook for how to reimagine their lives to achieve these important goals. If you start with the steps outlined below and enjoy the process of transition, soon enough a new way of life – the Simpler Way – will emerge. Only your imagination is needed.

It is important to note, however, that although there are hundreds of practical ideas in the first part of this document, each idea requires creative interpretation and personal application. This document, be sure, cannot replace thinking creatively for yourself. So conceive of this practical action plan as an outline of the first phase in the journey – the foundation. Use this information as the basis for action, but understand that everybody's life and circumstances are unique. We must each write our own story of simplicity.

The second part of this document is an essay by Ted Trainer that provides an inspiring vision of life beyond consumerism. With rigour and insight, Trainer attempts to work out how cheaply we could live, as individuals and communities, if we made a commitment to living more on less. While Trainer is the first to admit his calculations are not exact – he conceives of his essay as an ongoing work in progress – he nevertheless provides us with the most rigorous account of the Simpler Way presently available. And the news is good! By meticulously working his way through many practical aspects of the Simpler Way, Trainer shows that we could live flourishing lives on as little as 10% of current GDP per capita in developed nations. This will strike many people as a ridiculous proposition, but read on with an open mind! Trainer has been living the Simpler Way for decades and he is uniquely positioned to describe what the world would look like, and how it would function, if it came to be shaped by this philosophy of living. His analysis is radical, and you may not agree with it all. But he gets you thinking – *really* thinking – about the nature of an alternative way of life.

If you find our document useful, or think others might find it useful, please share it with others. By now we all understand the importance of reducing resource and energy consumption and stepping more lightly on the planet. But figuring out exactly how to do this in a consumer society can be very challenging. We hope this document can help as many people as possible transition toward a simpler, greener, and happier life beyond consumer culture. The time to reimagine 'the good life' is now.

Once you have read this document, please go to [www.simplerway.org](http://www.simplerway.org) and share your ideas, perspectives, and stories on simple living – both the difficulties and the delights. It is our hope that this website becomes the most comprehensive resource for the *practical* aspects of simple living, but we need your help for it flourish and grow. Nobody has all the answers, but everybody has a few, and your input is vital. Together we can build a sustainable, just, and flourishing human community, while enjoying the transition.

The seeds of change are in our hands.

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## **MINDFULNESS AND ATTITUDE**

It may seem strange to begin a document on the *practice* of simplicity by talking about 'mindfulness and attitude.' Isn't this document supposed to be about actually doing things differently, not just thinking differently? Yes it is, but it is very important to understand that the Simpler Way is first and foremost a frame of mind, a set of attitudes. If our minds are not in order, the Simpler Way will not make sense. Below are some important things to think about – to think seriously about – as you undertake your practical transition to a simpler life.

- **AFFIRM LIFE:** Everyday we are faced with a fundamental choice about how we approach life. Choose positivity. If we do not begin each day by saying 'yes' to life – even in the face of adversity – then all else is lost. Attitude matters.
- **TAKE A SECOND LOOK:** Dissatisfaction with our material or financial situations can sometimes be the result of failing to look properly at our lives, rather than the result of any genuine 'lack.' Take a second look. When we understand that genuine wealth does not depend on having the latest consumer products, we might discover that we are much richer than we sometimes think we are.
- **DO NOT CONFUSE 'STANDARD OF LIVING' WITH 'QUALITY OF LIFE':** There comes a point when pursuing a higher 'standard of living,' in terms of material wealth, adds absolutely nothing to 'quality of life,' in terms of overall wellbeing. Pursuing material wealth can even detract from quality of life if we aren't careful. If you focus on 'quality of life' you will discover it doesn't depend on being materially wealthy. So step out of the rat race. Seek true abundance – sustainable abundance – in the Simpler Way. 'There is no wealth but life.'
- **ASK YOURSELF: 'HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?'** Consumer society is defined by the ethos that 'more is always better.' The Simpler Way is defined by the ethos that 'Just enough is plenty.' As Henry Thoreau once wrote: 'Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only.' Don't waste life on superfluities. Know how much is enough.
- **OVERCOME STATUS ANXIETY:** Many people today work jobs they don't like, to buy things they don't need, so that they can impress people they don't like. But at the end of life these people will deeply regret spending their lives trying to impress other people. Be humble and seek to impress yourself only. Let other people worry about chasing status. This perspective is extremely liberating.
- **THE 'DEATHBED' THOUGHT-EXPERIMENT:** If you were lying on your deathbed, reflecting on your life, how would you want to have lived? How important will material possessions seem to you on your deathbed? You might agree that ultimately it's not the possessions that will matter. It's the people and the experiences. So live life for the people and the experiences, not the stuff. Privilege 'being' over 'having'.
- **BE GRATEFUL:** Be grateful for what we have. Do not always demand more. Let us embrace sufficiency, moderation, and frugality. Less really can be more.
- **LIVE DELIBERATELY:** Escaping the mindset of consumer culture takes effort. Re-read these points slowly everyday until they take root in personal experience.

## MONEY

**Practicing simplicity is much more than just being frugal with money and consuming less – as we have just seen, it is also a state of mind. Nevertheless, in a market economy, spending wisely plays a central role.**

- **VOTE WITH YOUR MONEY:** It is often said that how we spend our money is how we vote on what exists in the world. This is an extremely important insight. Purchasing something sends a message to the marketplace, affirming the product, its ecological impact, its process of manufacture, etc. Money is power, and with this power comes responsibility. If we spend our money differently, we can change the world. Be conscientious about how you vote with your money.
- **BUY LOCAL, ORGANIC, FAIR-TRADE, GREEN, ETC.** Voting with your money means supporting businesses that deserve support, and not supporting business that do not deserve support. Spending ethically is sometimes more expensive, which can be challenging. But it is important to do our very best. Beware, however, of ‘green washing,’ and remember that ‘Green consumerism’ is still consumerism.
- **KNOW YOUR FINANCES PRECISELY:** It is extremely important to have a very clear understanding of your income and expenses. It takes time to make money, so don’t waste it. Read *Your Money or Your Life*, by Joe Dominguez and Vicki Robin.
- **THE 30-DAY MONEY EXPERIMENT:** Spend one month taking note of *everything* you purchase. At the end of the month, categorise your expenses into rent/mortgage, food, electricity, wine, coffees, lunches, etc. then multiply those categories by twelve to get a rough idea of the yearly cost of each of the categories. Small things add up to significant sums over a year. This means that small changes in spending habits can produce significant savings.
- **BUDGET:** Set yourself financial goals. Start by trying to save a small amount each week. This is an important exercise in self-discipline. Enjoy the challenge.
- **LIVE BENEATH YOUR MEANS:** It provides a sense of security to live on less than you earn. It also proves that you are not an insatiable consumer. Free yourself.
- **SAVE YOUR RAISE:** When most people get a pay rise they immediately raise their material standard of living and start spending more. But there is an alternative. When you get a raise, consider immediately putting that extra income into a savings account. Again, this proves your wants are not infinite.
- **AVOID DEBT – BEWARE OF CREDIT CARDS:** Banks are generally very eager to offer us credit, because it is a good way to chain us to them. Beware of debt. A useful rule of thumb is: “If I don’t have the money, don’t buy it.”
- **RETHINK YOUR SPENDING:** Consider whether you are spending your money wisely. We all assume we are rational spenders, but we might be able to redirect our expenditure in ways that better fulfil our life goals. Perhaps by spending less or more carefully you will be able to work less?

## **WORK AND TIME**

**Rethinking attitudes toward work and working hours is central to the Simpler Way. Most of the things we consume have to be purchased, and this means that the more we consume, the more time we have to spend working to pay for our lifestyles.**

- **CONSIDER REDUCING WORKING HOURS:** Everybody's situation is different, so reducing working hours may not be feasible. But if you and your household find ways to significantly reduce your overall consumption expenditure, you may find that you don't have to work so many hours a week in paid employment. This will free up more time to pursue your private passions and engage with your community in meaningful and fulfilling ways. This may reduce your material wealth, but it is likely to increase your quality of life.
- **BUT HOW?** If you think it may be feasible to fund a simpler lifestyle by working less, the question is how to make this a reality. There are two main paths to reduced working hours: One option is to find a new job that offers part-time work. The second option is to approach your current employer and ask whether it would be possible to work fewer hours per week on pro rata reduced wages / salary. Your employer might be more open to it than you think. After all, it means reduced costs for them. It may also increase your own productivity.
- **WHAT TO DO WITH A PAY RISE?** There will probably come a time in your working life when you are offered a pay rise. One option, as noted above, is to save your raise. But there is another option, too. Rather than accepting the extra money and spending more, ask whether you can stay on the same wages / salary but work less. For example, you might ask for one afternoon off per week. Again, your employer might be quite happy to accept such an arrangement.
- **WORK FROM HOME ONE DAY PER WEEK:** Another way to rethink your work life is to consider whether it would be possible to work one or more days from home. This will not be possible for all jobs, but it will be for some. This may be a nice way to spend one of your working days. It will also reduce the amount of travelling you do to and from work, and that means less oil-dependency.
- **SEE IF YOU CAN TELECOMMUTE INSTEAD OF TRAVELING:** Many jobs today require travel in between suburbs, cities, or even countries. Using video-conferencing technology can greatly reduce the need to travel for work. Look into it. Your employer might be happy for you to do this too, as it will reduce their costs (and it will also significantly reduce carbon emissions).
- **IF YOU NEED LESS, YOU HAVE LESS PRESSURE TO WORK FOR DODGY BUSINESSES:** Sometimes people find themselves pressured or seduced for financial reasons to work for businesses that don't really contribute to the common good. If you don't need much money, however, you may find that you can choose work that pays less but which might be more fulfilling and socially worthwhile.
- **VOTE WITH YOUR TIME:** On the previous page it was noted that how we spend our money is how we vote on what exists in the world. The same goes for how we spend our time. Time is life - don't waste it. We have only this moment.



## **FOOD**

**Food is one of life's most basic material needs. Not so long ago people grew all or most of the food they ate. Today, we have outsourced most food production to global corporations that are more interested in making profits than providing us with nutritious food or producing food in a sustainable manner. Relocalising food production is extremely important.**

- **GROW AS MUCH OF YOUR OWN FOOD AS POSSIBLE:** Not everyone can grow all their own food, but everyone can grow some of it, even if it is a herb and lettuce garden on the windowsill. Gardening is an important revolutionary act.
- **WHO WANTS A LAWN WHEN YOU CAN HAVE A VEGETABLE GARDEN!** If we are going to transition to more localised and sustainable food production, many lawns (or parts of lawns) are going to have to turn into beautiful, thriving vegetable gardens. Expand your garden as much as possible. Perhaps there is there room for chickens? Perhaps a couple of carefully placed fruit trees?
- **THINK ABOUT PLANTING SOME VEGES / FRUIT TREES IN YOUR NATURE STRIP:** Look into your council regulations about planting up your nature strip. Or just do it. Not only does this provide you with more space to grow your own food, it also sends a message to your community that you care about food production.
- **IF YOU NEED MORE SPACE TO GROW FOOD, LOOK INTO WHETHER THERE IS A COMMUNITY GARDEN:** Community gardens are springing up all over the place, and the trend is likely to continue. Do some research and see if there is one in your neighbourhood.
- **NO COMMUNITY GARDEN?** If there is no community garden in your area then get a small group together and make it happen. There is no greater gift you can give your community. Survey your neighbourhood – then get planning.
- **SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL FARMERS' MARKETS:** Most people will not be able to grow all their own fruit and vegetables. Supplement your own food production by supporting local farmers' markets. Avoid supermarkets as much as possible.
- **THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE PUTTING IN YOUR BODY:** Eat healthy, organic food, and eat moderately. Avoid fatty, artificial, and processed foods.
- **REDUCE MEAT, DAIRY, AND FISH CONSUMPTION:** The fact is that the high levels of meat, dairy, and fish consumption is impacting very negatively on our planet. Try to reduce how much meat, dairy, and fish you consume. Start by going without for two days per week. This will save money and lighten your impact.
- **CONSIDER VEGETARIANISM:** This won't be for everyone, but it might be for some of you. When it is approached thoughtfully and creatively, a vegetarian diet is healthy and delicious. And the transition might be easier than you think.
- **LEARN HOW TO BAKE YOUR OWN BREAD AND PRESERVE FOOD:** Nothing smells better than freshly baked bread! And preserving food is an important way to reduce your 'food miles' (i.e. the distance your food travels to get to your table). You can grow or purchase your food 'in season,' then preserve it and eat it later.

## **TRANSPORT**

**Living simply involves rethinking how we transport ourselves. There is now more than one billion cars and light vehicles on the road – and counting! Our car culture is causing great environmental damage and it relies on a cheap and abundant supply of oil. We must find a way to escape car culture, fast.**

- **GET ON YOUR BIKE:** The majority of all car trips are short distances. Many of those journeys do not require a car. Get on your bike as often as possible.
- **BIKE LIGHTS:** Make sure you have lights on the front and back of your bike for cycling at night. A bright reflector jacket is also a good idea for extra safety. These are worthwhile purchases, and they will soon pay for themselves.
- **GET A GOOD BASKET AND/OR SOME PANNIERS FOR YOUR BIKE:** Many car journeys can be avoided if you have some carrying capacity on your bike. A good basket and/or some panniers are indispensable. A backpack can also be useful.
- **GET A CHILD-SEAT OR A TRAILER FOR TRANSPORTING CHILDREN:** A bike can carry more than one person. If you need to transport your children to school or day-care, a child-seat or a trailer can be easily attached to your bike. And your children will probably find it an adventure!
- **GET SOME WET WEATHER GEAR:** Don't presume that just because it is raining or cold you cannot get on your bike. Get you and your family some wet weather gear and some woollen gloves. Riding in the rain can be a beautiful experience.
- **CYCLING KEEPS YOU FIT AND HEALTHY:** As well as all the environmental benefits to driving less, getting on your bike also keeps you fit and healthy at no extra cost. Since it also means you don't have to sit in slow traffic, it is also very good for mental health! Let's face it, commuting isn't fun. Driving less also saves money.
- **PUBLIC TRANSPORT:** Whenever possible, use public transport when distances are too long to travel by bike, or when the weather is just too wet or cold.
- **CONSIDER SELLING ONE OF YOUR CARS:** Sometimes we drive just because we can, not because we need to. Perhaps if you sell one of your cars, you won't miss it. And it will give you some money to spend on other things – like a bike!
- **CONSIDER GOING CAR FREE:** Perhaps there is a 'car share' arrangement operating in your locality? Do some research. You might be able to do without owning.
- **DRIVE THOUGHTFULLY:** In those times when driving is unavoidable, think about whether your trip can serve various purposes: Can you do several errands at once? Can you give someone else a lift somewhere?
- **AIR TRAVEL:** Travelling by plane puts huge amounts of carbon into the atmosphere, and is a significant contributor to climate change. It can be a challenge to say no, but try to avoid air travel at all costs. If you do have to travel, pay a little extra to offset your carbon emissions. Is the train an option?

## **HOUSING**

**Housing (whether purchasing, building, or renting) is typically life's greatest single expense, so living simply involves thinking especially carefully about where you live and why. Exactly what kind of shelter do you need to live well and to be free? We must answer this question for ourselves, but the words of Henry Thoreau might give us a moment's pause: 'Most people appear never to have considered what a house is, and are actually though needlessly poor all their lives because they think that they must have such a one as their neighbors have.'**

- **LIVE IN A MODEST ABODE:** The ostentatious 'McMansions' which are so prevalent in many developed nations are extremely resource intensive, energy intensive, and expensive. They are also ugly. The Simpler Way involves embracing smaller, much more modest and energy efficient homes.
- **CHOOSE YOUR CITY, TOWN OR RURAL AREA CAREFULLY:** There are many complex factors that come into play when it comes to determining which city, town or rural area you live in. Your family, friends, your job, the weather, cost, etc. all play a role. Nevertheless, so far as you have a choice, think very carefully about where you and your family decide to set up camp. Housing can be very expensive in some cities and this can lock you into a large mortgage, which can lock you into a job you may not like. If possible, live in a place where housing is affordable. Low cost housing could save you years of labour.
- **TRY TO LIVE CLOSE WORK OR WORK CLOSE TO WHERE YOU LIVE:** This isn't always easy or affordable, but living close to work is an important goal. This will allow you to bike to work easily and it will also mean that you don't have to waste lots of time commuting. Research shows that commuting is one of the most unpleasant aspects of modern life. Do what you can to avoid it.
- **AVOID UNNECESSARY OR PURELY 'AESTHETIC' RENNOVATIONS:** Don't get sucked into the belief that everything about your house has to look 'brand new.' So what if your carpet is old or your wallpaper is a little tear in it? When renovations are necessary, consider D.I.Y. and buying second hand materials.
- **CO-HOUSING:** A growing number of people are exploring co-housing arrangements. This can involve groups of people (a group of friends perhaps, or two or three families, etc) living in the same house. For those with a spare room, it might involve taking on a boarder. Co-housing is a very effective way to greatly reduce the cost/impact of housing. It also promotes community.
- **ECO-DESIGN:** If you are in a position to design and build a house, take eco-design seriously. It can be more expensive, but often the initial costs of eco-design can pay for themselves over time (e.g. solar panels, quality insulation, double-glazed windows, efficient heaters, etc.). Small is beautiful.
- **EXPLORE ALTERNATIVE HOUSING:** More radical exponents of the Simpler Way might wish to explore various forms of alternative housing. This might include building a straw bail or mud brick house, or living in renovated shipping containers, or a 'house bus.' Take a look on the Internet for some ideas.

## **ENERGY**

**Energy, especially oil, is the lifeblood of industrial civilisation. It is what makes our current lifestyles and economic activity possible. But there are two main reasons why we must urgently reduce our use of energy: (1) Burning massive quantities of fossil fuels (coal, oil, gas) dumps millions of tons of carbon into the atmosphere and this is causing climate change; (2) Peak oil and other energy supply problems means that energy is going to get scarcer and much more expensive in coming years. We need to use energy much more efficiently and transition to renewable energies.**

- **READ WIDELY ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE AND PEAK OIL:** These subjects have political implications, and this means certain political parties and media institutions have an incentive to muddy the waters. But these matters are much, much, much too important to be determined by political power games. Let the science determine your perspective, not the politics. Read widely and critically. Ask questions. Do your own research, and think for yourself.
- **BUY 'GREEN' ENERGY:** Many energy companies today have an option for purchasing green energy (i.e. that is, energy produced from wind, solar, geothermal, hydro, etc, rather than from fossil fuels). Green energy will be somewhat more expensive, but if you take energy efficiency seriously you will probably be able to offset price increases by reducing consumption. Call your energy company today. If they do not offer Green Energy, change companies.
- **TAKE ENERGY EFFICIENCY SERIOUSLY:** This can take many forms, including insulating your house well; only heating or cooling the rooms you are in; using energy efficient light bulbs; turning lights off when you leave the room; turning appliances off at the wall; only boiling the water you need, etc. Many small steps make a big difference, both in terms of consumption and cost.
- **USE COMMONSENSE:** If you are cold, put on a sweater rather than always turning on the heater. We are all hardier than we think we are. If it's hot outside, keeping the doors, windows, and curtains closed keeps the house cool.
- **SOLAR:** If you can afford to buy solar panels and/or a solar hot water system, do so. Not only do most systems pay for themselves over a number of years, but also by investing in renewable energy you will be indirectly supporting further research and development of renewable energy systems.
- **QUESTION THE NEED:** Undoubtedly some modern appliances reduce labour. But some appliances are totally unnecessary and others are just gimmicks. Avoid electronic or petrol-fuelled appliances that you do not really need. Drive less.
- **WHEN PURCHASING AN APPLIANCE, CHOOSE THE MOST ENERGY EFFICIENT:** Energy efficient appliances are usually more expensive, but again, the extra initial cost is usually offset over time by the reduced energy costs.
- **SET UP A SOLAR-HEATED SHOWER BAG OUTSIDE:** In the summer, a solar-heated shower bag (the kind often used on camping trips) can provide you with solar hot water for free. This won't work in the winter, but it is likely to reduce energy bills noticeably in the summer. And it's invigorating.

## **CLOTHING**

**The historic purpose of clothing was to keep us warm and to cover nakedness. Today its primary purpose seems to be fashion and the conspicuous display of wealth and status. People can and do spend thousands and thousands of dollars on clothing every year. But this is totally unnecessary. Simplify.**

- **DRESS DOWN:** Wearing simple, humble, and functional clothing can be an outward statement of simplicity, an expression of one's opposition to consumer culture. Don't get sucked into high fashion.
- **RETHINK YOUR IMAGE:** If you are someone who has typically dressed in new and expensive clothing, consider reinventing your image. This can be an exciting journey on the transition to a simpler life.
- **BUY SECOND-HAND CLOTHING:** Vast quantities of clothing get dropped off at second-hand clothing stores everyday. Second-hand clothing is cheap, cheap, cheap. There is absolutely no need to spend lots of money on clothing. Furthermore, searching for treasures in second-hand stores is great fun.
- **DRESSING SIMPLY DOESN'T MEAN GIVING UP STYLE:** There is nothing wrong with expressing yourself through what you wear. But you don't have to spend lots of money on clothes if you dress creatively. Develop your own 'post-consumerist' style. Who wants to look 'brand new' anyway?
- **LEARN HOW TO MEND:** There is no need to throw out your favourite jeans or t-shirt just because it has developed a tear. Learn how to mend a tear or sew a patch on an elbow. This can give your favourite items character.
- **MAKE YOUR OWN:** If you are more ambitious, you might even spend some time learning how to sew your own clothes. This can be an exciting and creative experience, as well as one that saves money.
- **ARRANGE A CLOTHING SWAP WITH SOME FRIENDS:** Sometimes it's nice to have a change of clothes in your wardrobe. But this doesn't necessarily require going shopping. It can be fun to arrange a clothing swap with some friends. One person's old clothing is another person's treasure.
- **BEWARE OF CHEAP DEPARTMENT STORE CLOTHING:** It can be tempting to buy the cheapest clothing from department stores, but often it is cheap because of its exploitative manufacturing processes. When in doubt, avoid the purchase.
- **JUST IMAGINE:** Hundreds of billions of dollars are spent every year in the fashion industry. Just imagine if even half of that money was redirected toward green energy or humanitarian initiatives. We would lose so little and gain so much. Again, we must vote with our money.
- **DRESSING SIMPLY CAN BE LIBERATING:** Wearing expensive clothing tends to limit our actions, since we don't want to get them dirty. When you dress simply, however, you don't have to think twice about lying down on the grass or doing a spot of gardening. Dress simply and be free.

## **STUFF**

**We all want the food, clothing, and shelter needed to live safe and healthy lives. And we all want at least a basic education and access to medical care should we fall ill. But beyond these basic needs, how much more do we actually need to live well and to be free? The Simpler Way doesn't mean that we cannot have possessions that go beyond our basic needs, but it does involve questioning the amount of stuff that is in our lives.**

- **AVOID UNNECESSARY POSSESSIONS:** The Simpler Way involves embracing a form of minimalism. Again, this doesn't mean not having possessions, but it does involve only having the possessions that truly contribute to our quality of life. Often stuff is just stuff – a waste of space, money, and resources. Avoid unnecessary possessions. Live more with less.
- **DECLUTTER:** When people decide they want to take steps to simplify their lives, decluttering their homes of superfluous 'stuff' is the perfect way to begin. This can be extremely liberating. Go from room to room and think very seriously about whether you need all the stuff you have. Donate your superfluous stuff to charity.
- **BE AWARE OF THE STUFF NEEDED FOR STUFF:** It seems that stuff breeds more stuff. We often buy something and then discover that it needs extra stuff to make it functional. By reducing the stuff in our lives, we are also reducing the stuff needed for stuff. Stuff can also have hidden 'time' costs. Therefore, when in doubt, do without.
- **BE AWARE OF THE PSYCHOLOGY OF STUFF:** We've probably all had the experience of making some exciting consumer purchase, only to discover that the initial buzz quickly wears off. Despite what advertisements tell us, stuff just doesn't satisfy our desire for meaning, and it is a very poor substitute for an identity.
- **BE AWARE OF THE 'DIDEROT EFFECT':** Have you ever purchased something, something you really wanted, only to discover that it made the rest of your stuff seem a bit old and dated? Rather than accepting some disunity in the style of your possessions, have you then been tempted to upgrade your old and dated stuff? This is called the 'Diderot Effect'. You buy some new pants, but then realise you need a new shirt to match. You buy a new sofa, but then you have the urge to upgrade your chairs too. The Simpler Way involves resisting the initial upgrading. Get off the consumerist treadmill and stop the upward creep of material desire. Know how much is enough.
- **AVOID ALL GOODS YOU KNOW OR SUSPECT WERE UNJUSTLY MANUFACTURED:** How can some stuff be so cheap! At first this seems great, but a moment's thought should tell us that if some stuff is unbelievably cheap, it is probably because it has been produced by wage-slaves in the developing world. Don't support corporations that are based on unjust manufacturing.
- **QUALITY, NOT QUANTITY:** When you decide you really need some new possession, it is better to buy quality, so that it doesn't have to be replaced. This reduces waste. In this sense, the Simpler Way is about caring 'more' about our stuff.

## WATER

**Water is life. It is arguably our most precious resource. As our climate warms and population grows in coming decades, water will become even more precious. We must not waste it. Here are some conservation ideas.**

- **GET SOME WATER TANKS:** As your home food production grows, it is likely that you will need to expand your water resources. Getting some water tanks will greatly reduce or nullify the amount of water from the grid that you use on your garden.
- **HOME FOOD PRODUCTION USES LESS WATER THAN INDUSTRIAL FOOD PRODUCTION:** This should provide us all with further motivation for growing as much of our own food as possible.
- **LEAVE A BUCKET IN THE SHOWER:** Put a bucket in the shower. Collect the water as the shower heats up and keep the bucket in the shower as you wash. The water that is collected can be used to flush the toilet. This will save significant amounts of water every day. Just imagine if everyone did this! Millions and millions of litres of water would be saved *everyday*.
- **SET UP A GREYWATER SYSTEM:** A greywater system is a system that uses the water from the shower, bath, washing machine, or cooking, for other purposes. Some people use their greywater to flush their toilets. If it is sufficiently clean, some greywater can be used on the garden.
- **FLUSHING:** In the developed world today, we flush the toilet with drinking-quality water. Great amounts can be saved by not flushing if it's only urine. Keeping the lid down controls any odour.
- **TAKE SHORTER SHOWERS:** Keep showers to three or four minutes, or less.
- **BATHING:** There is no doubt that taking a hot bath is sometimes an exquisite luxury. But bathing uses much more water than showers, so try to have as few baths as possible. When you do bath, consider whether you can direct some of the water into your greywater system.
- **TURN THE TAP OFF:** It may sound like a minor act – and it is – but don't leave the tap running when you are brushing your teeth, shaving, washing your face, etc. Everything counts, and it is important to build conservation practices into our lives at every opportunity. Soon enough it will just become instinctive.
- **WATER INTENSIVE APPLIANCES:** Appliances like dishwashers and washing machines use a lot of water. By being thoughtful about how many dishes you use, and not washing clothes unnecessarily, water use can be greatly reduced.
- **UNFORESEEN IMPLICATIONS:** Since developed societies are so water intensive, governments sometimes spend billions of dollars creating desalination plants, just to keep water supply up with demand. But if we were all more water conscious, desalination plants would be unnecessary. This would be better for the planet and it would save tens of billions of dollars that could be spent on more important things. Our small acts can have huge, unforeseen implications.

## **REDUCING WASTE**

**One of the most worrying aspects of consumer lifestyles is the excessive waste that results. Every week more than one billion consumers in the developed world leave a bag of trash on the side of the road where it is picked up. It seems to magically disappear but actually most of it has to be dumped into the natural environment from where it came. More than one billion bags of consumer trash, every week! How much longer can this continue? Living simply involves taking steps to seriously reduce waste.**

- **REFUSE:** The first way to reduce waste is simply to refuse to consume in unnecessary ways. For example, instead of purchasing water from a plastic bottle, drink water from the tap; don't buy new shoes when your old ones are fine; avoid that unnecessary air flight; and so on. The list is endless.
- **REDUCE:** The second way to reduce waste is to reduce the *amount* of the things you consume. We all have things we like to buy (music, books, wine, etc.). Living simply doesn't mean giving up all these things, but it does imply embracing moderation. Try to reduce your consumption. Often free alternatives exist.
- **REUSE:** The third way to reduce waste is to reuse the so-called waste of our purchases. Use your imagination. The possibilities are endless.
- **RECYCLE:** The fourth way to reduce waste is to recycle vigilantly.
- **COMPOST:** Rather than using nasty chemicals to fertilise your garden, compost all the organic matter from your household. Overtime this will enrich your garden greatly and produce healthy soil for growing your food.
- **USE IT UP, WEAR IT OUT, MAKE IT DO, OR DO WITHOUT:** This is an old saying from the Great Depression years. It must become the commonsense of our Great Transition beyond consumer culture. Because that's what it is – commonsense.
- **JUNK MAIL:** Junk mail is surely one of the most perverse examples of the wastefulness of consumer society. Hundreds of glossy pages can arrive in our letterboxes everyday, only to be thrown straight into the recycling bin (or worse, the waste bin). Just think about how many trees would be saved if every household in the developed world put signs on their letterboxes rejecting junk mail. It's truly mind-boggling, and more than a little depressing.
- **PACKAGING:** Avoid as much packaging as possible.
- **ALWAYS CARRY A CLOTH BAG:** Plastic bags are an environmental hazard. Always carry a cloth bag (or several) so that you never have to accept a plastic bag. But remember, cloth bags are absolutely no use when they are left at home.
- **DON'T WASTE ENERGY:** This is extremely important. See the section above on energy.
- **READ ABOUT, AND PRACTICE, PERMACULTURE:** Permaculture is a complex term, but part of what it means is learning how to live on our planet without degrading it; to work with nature, not against it. Our future depends on permaculture.



## **APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY**

**What about technology? Does living simply mean that we have to give up technology? Absolutely Not! But it does involve thinking carefully about the role technology plays in our lives, because it is not always positive.**

- **SOCIAL MEDIA:** We live in the Age of Social Media. While there is certainly great potential to social media, it can also consume an alarming amount of our time, often in ways that seem rather wasteful and uninspired. For example, from April 2008 to April 2009, total time spent on Facebook in the US was 232 million hours, and total time spent on MySpace was 83 million hours. What activities are people substituting for these hundreds of millions of hours spent in cyberspace? What would life be like – what *could* life be like – if the vast amounts of time dedicated to social media were directed toward real life conversation with friends or family, or spent being engaged in practical, creative activity, or spent volunteering in some organisation of interest, etc.
- **NEVERTHELESS...** Social media, as noted, does have the potential to impact positively on our lives, if used with caution. Living simply in a consumer society can at times be socially isolating, so consider joining a Simple Living social network and connect with others who are also exploring the Simpler Way. See, e.g., [www.SimplerWay.org](http://www.SimplerWay.org) and [www.SimplicityCollective.com](http://www.SimplicityCollective.com).
- **IF AN APPLIANCE STOPS WORKING, TRY NOT TO REPLACE IT FOR ONE MONTH:** It is easy to think of appliances as ‘necessary’ when in fact they are, at best, ‘conveniences’ only. If an appliance you currently own stops working, try not to replace it for one month. See what life is like without it. Perhaps you will discover that you don’t actually need to go out and buy another one or pay to have it fixed. This will save money and energy.
- **THINK CAREFULLY ABOUT WHAT IS APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY:** If it turns out that an appliance really does contribute positively to your life, then embrace it. Living simply is not about being a Luddite. Appropriate technology will need to play a vital role in any transition to a just and sustainable world. Solar panels and wind turbines, for example, should not be rejected. But we must not think technology is going to solve all our problems. It is just as likely to exacerbate them.
- **BEWARE OF THE ‘REBOUND EFFECT’:** Technology can help us consume more efficiently, but if we are not careful such efficiency gains can be lost through the ‘rebound effect.’ For example, a more fuel-efficient car can mean that we just drive further or more often; insulating our houses can save money that is then spent on air travel, etc. Efficiency without sufficiency is easily lost.
- **KEEP TECHNOLOGY AS SIMPLE AS POSSIBLE:** Just perhaps our modern technocratic societies will one day come to see that there is a sophistication and an elegance to the clothes line, the bicycle, and the water tank, that the dryer, the automobile, and the desalination plant, decidedly lack. On a similar note, perhaps it will one day be widely accepted that there is a certain primitiveness to technological gimmicks or that a blind faith in science can itself be ‘anti-progress.’ In the words of the great Leonardo da Vinci, ‘Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.’

## **SOCIALISING AND ENTERTAINMENT**

**Socialising and entertainment has become big business in consumer societies. People often assume that when they have some free time they have to go out and spend money to socialise or to entertain themselves. This just isn't true. With a little imagination, socialising and entertainment doesn't have to cost much, or anything at all. This doesn't mean, of course, that we should never spend money socialising or entertaining ourselves. The point is that it doesn't have to cost money, or much money. And it isn't just about the money. It is also about how we direct our free time and the way we socialise. Consumer culture has taken us down the wrong path.**

- **PURCHASING FOOD, ALCOHOL, AND ENTERTAINMENT:** Most of us enjoy going out for the odd meal, relaxing with the occasional beer or glass of wine, or seeing a movie now and then, etc. And fair enough too. The Simpler Way certainly does not imply giving up these things. It does, however, imply recognising the importance of moderation in all we do. We should gratefully absorb the best our culture has to offer, but we should not rely exclusively, or even predominately, on purchased goods or services for our entertainment.
- **TELEVISION:** How a culture spends its leisure – its freedom – provides an extremely important insight into the nature of that culture. Aside from working and sleeping, most people in Western societies spend more time watching television than doing anything else. Studies have shown, for example, that the average U.S. and British citizen watch roughly 25 hours per week, and other nations aren't too far behind. Is this really the best way to be spending our freedom? It is likely that some of this time in front of the television can be replaced with more fulfilling activities. Put the TV in the closet for one month. See what happens. Reinvent how you practice freedom.
- **LEARN A NEW SKILL:** The division of labour that lies at the heart of consumer society has resulted in us losing many basic life skills. Re-skilling can be a very fulfilling way to spend some of our free time. For example, you might want to learn how to garden organically, cook, bake bread, lay bricks, preserve food, sew, build things, bind books, paint, or learn how to play a musical instrument, etc. Unlike the passivity of TV, learning a new skill is an active challenge and can provide endless hours of fulfilment.
- **DECLUTTER YOUR SOCIAL CALENDAR:** Spending time with friends and family can often be some of the most fulfilling time of all. But sometimes we are at risk of over-scheduling social engagements and find that there is no time for ourselves, no time to relax and just be. When you think you need some more time for yourself, learn to say 'no' to invitations.
- **VOLUNTEER:** What are you passionate about? Is there a way for you to share that passion with the world? It can be surprising how fulfilling this can be.
- **READING:** It is easy to think that we stop being students when we leave formal education. But the world is an infinitely interesting place, full of endlessly exciting things and inspiring people. Reading is a wonderful, enriching pastime, and it doesn't have to cost a cent. Your local library can provide books for free. Cultivate a love of reading and you will be rich forever.

## **COMMUNITY**

**Community engagement is often pushed to the side by the demands of a high consumption life. A society or individual might be booming economically, but dedicating too much attention to consumption and the acquisition of wealth, to the detriment of family and community life, can lead to an individualistic society of frantic, agitated, and alienated egos. Many affluent societies today would be better off choosing less stuff, and more community. Furthermore, community is the driving force of social change. By living simply, there is more time to cultivate community and enjoy our civic responsibilities.**

- **SHARING YOUR STUFF:** Which community is richer – the one in which everyone has their own? Or the one in which there is less but people share? By sharing our resources, our communities get richer, without increasing overall consumption. For example, not everyone in the street needs a lawn mower, since it sits idle almost everyday. Why not have one lawn mower for several houses? Lend when ask and borrow when necessary.
- **SHARING YOUR SKILLS:** Sharing our stuff promotes community, and so does sharing our skills. Chances are there is a wealth of expertise of various forms in your community. Sharing skills is a great way to help us escape reliance on the formal economy, and it's also a great way to meet new people and interact with different generations.
- **THE SHAREHOOD:** There is a great website that is designed to make sharing easy. The Sharehood ([www.thesharehood.org](http://www.thesharehood.org)) aims to build joyful, sustainable, and resilient communities by encouraging people to get to know their neighbours and share with them. This website is helping create vibrant communities where people share locally and meet their needs and help others do the same. Check it out and sign up! It may be worthwhile doing a mail drop around your neighbourhood too, letting people know about this amazing resource and encouraging them to sign up.
- **FILM NIGHTS:** One great way to cultivate community and promote good causes is to organise film nights / afternoons in your community. Who doesn't love a good film? Most communities have a venue that will allow free access to a room (e.g. a library, community organisation, etc.). Print out some posters and stick them up around your neighbourhood inviting people to attend. There are many great films freely available on you-tube or vimeo (e.g. "Home," "The Power of Community," "The End of Suburbia," "Life after Growth," etc.). After the film, have a cup of tea and a discussion.
- **TRANSITION TOWNS:** The Transition Town Movement is taking hold across the world, and it is a source of great hope. This movement is a community-based response to the dual crises of peak oil and climate change, and its participants are not waiting for governments to fix our problems. Instead, they are just getting work, building a new society from the grassroots up. Do some reading on Transition Towns. Then get a few like-minded people together, and start your own. From little things big things grow.

## **MISCELANEOUS**

**We are getting toward the end our Practical Action Plan. It may be helpful at this stage to address a few miscellaneous subjects just to introduce a few more ideas about how to continue simplifying your life.**

- **MEDITATION / YOGA:** Attaining peace of mind in a hectic world can be a great challenge. Consider taking a course on meditation or yoga. Alternatively, find fifteen uninterrupted minutes per day to just sit comfortably with your eyes closed and concentrate on your breathing. It's good for the soul.
- **KEEP A JOURNAL:** It is surprising how useful, enjoyable, and enlightening it can be to keep a journal. Find some time each day to sit down and write about your day, your thoughts, your state of mind. What situations would you deal with differently if you had your time again? This exercise in self-reflection can clarify our minds and help us all live more consciously and deliberately. Have no expectations – just write. See what happens.
- **READ ABOUT THE SIMPLER WAY:** Borrow a few books on voluntary simplicity or downshifting and read them. This can be very affirming.
- **GOOGLE IT:** If you have any questions about anything in this document, Google it. There is a wealth of detailed information on the Internet about the practice of living simply, but read broadly and critically (because there is lots of rubbish).
- **CHRISTMAS:** The materialistic orgy that is Christmas is but an exaggerated normality for Western societies. Show some enlightened material restraint at Christmas and celebrate without consuming excessively. Give thoughtfully.
- **EXERCISE FOR FREE:** Many of us can probably admit that we don't do enough exercise. But being physically healthy is an important part of being psychologically healthy. There is no need, however, to spend hundreds of dollars a year subscribing to an expensive gym. Go for a short run a few times a week, and do a few press-ups and star jumps. It's easy to exercise for free.
- **CLEANING PRODUCTS:** Television adverts selling cleaning products give the impression that our homes are crawling with bugs that are going to make us sick unless we buy their product. As a rule, this just isn't so. It's good to be clean, of course, but generally you don't need to buy any cleaning products. A mixture of baking soda and vinegar provides a substitute for most cleaning products.
- **RAISING CHILDREN:** Be aware that you are an example for the younger generation. Be an example of the Simpler Way and raise children according to post-consumerist values. There is much more to life than possessions and status.
- **GIVE SOME MONEY AWAY:** If you are reading this text, there is a good chance you are in the richest 10% of the world's population. Try to give to charity often.
- **OTHER THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:** Slow down; dream; be organised; trust thyself.

## **ACTIVISM**

**As well as transitioning to the Simpler Way ourselves, it is also important that at least some of us help bring more attention to the Simpler Way by becoming activists for the cause. In a world where we are constantly bombarded with advertisements telling us that 'more is always better,' more people need to see that there is a viable and desirable alternative to consumer lifestyles. Perhaps you can you help spread the word?**

- **EMAIL THIS DOCUMENT TO EVERYONE ON YOUR MAILING LIST:** This is a simple, quick, and costless act, but it may resonate far wider than you would have ever expected, like ripples in a cultural pond. It may well help free people from the chains of consumer culture. Living simply in a consumer culture can be very challenging, but this guidebook provides a free and accessible introduction to the practice of the Simpler Way. As you have seen, there are hundreds of ideas in this document about how to live more on less. Please share it with others.
- **EMAIL THIS DOCUMENT TO YOUR LOCAL SCHOOLS, CITY COUNCILORS, AND MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT:** Again, this is a simple and costless act with potentially huge implications. Imagine children learnt about living simply in schools? Imagine our political representatives started talking about simple living? Soon enough our world would change.
- **ABANDON A BOOK:** Invest in a book on voluntary simplicity, permaculture, or peak oil, and leave it in your common room at work. Perhaps leave another copy in the local café. This is a peaceful, non-confrontation way to educate people about the Simpler Way. Education is the first phase of activism.
- **JOIN OR ESTABLISH A COMMITTEE TO CREATE A COMMUNITY GARDEN:** Get a few interested individuals together and form a plan. Do some research on where the best place for a community garden would be; then contact your city council and try to get the ball rolling. Keep at it.
- **GUERRILLA GARDENING:** This term refers to the cultivation of land that you don't own but which you think you can enrich by cultivating productively – without permission, as such. Moderate Guerrilla Gardeners cultivate their nature strips without seeking council approval. More serious practitioners survey their neighbourhoods for other suitable spots. Seek and ye shall find. It is important to be sensible, of course. One shouldn't plant anything that might block vision of traffic, for example. But after taking such precautions – and after cultivating your own garden first – one can then proceed confidently, knowing that Guerrilla Gardening is a peaceful and honourable act of opposition. Such acts will be justified in the eyes of posterity.
- **ESTABLISH A 'SIMPLICITY CIRCLE':** Invite a group of interested individuals to your place (or some other venue) for the purpose of discussing all aspects of living simply. This is a wonderful opportunity to share information and ideas and the discussion process can be very affirming. You don't have to be an expert.
- **CULTURE JAMMING:** This term refers to the work of oppositional artists who use various forms of creative expression to challenge and subvert the entrenched norms of corporate consumerism. Think creatively. Act creatively. Resist.

## **THE POLITICS OF SIMPLICITY**

**Personal and community action is the driving force of change. But our decisions take place within legal, political, and economic ‘structures’ that make some lifestyle choices easy and other lifestyle choices difficult. We live in a society that is structured to promote consumer lifestyles, and this makes choosing simpler lifestyles much more difficult than it needs to be. In many ways, the structure of consumer society is locking us into high consumption lifestyles. We must free ourselves from those structures.**

- **RELOCALISE FOOD PRODUCTION:** Establish community gardens in every suburb and permit people to cultivate their nature strips. Subsidise relocalisation.
- **BIKE LANES AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT:** This issue is a perfect example of why a politics of simplicity is needed. Our governments must invest much more in bike lanes / public transport, otherwise many people are locked into driving.
- **PRODUCT LABELLING:** If we are going to ‘vote with our money’ we need to know about the products we buy – where and how they were made, and what is in them. Governments should require sufficiently detailed product labelling.
- **WORKING HOUR REDUCTIONS:** Many people are locked into 40-hour-per-week jobs even though they would prefer to work shorter hours and receive less money. This locks people into over-consuming lifestyles. In Holland there is a law that allows employees to reduce their working hours simply by asking their employer. The employer is required to accept this request unless there is a sufficiently good business reason to deny it (which happens in less than 5% of cases). By protecting part-time employment, Holland has produced the highest ratio of part-time workers in the world.
- **PRICE CARBON AND INVEST IN RENEWABLE ENERGY:** We need to break our addiction to fossil fuels. Our governments should begin by pricing carbon and investing heavily in the most suitable renewable energy. Abolish fossil fuel subsidies.
- **PROTECT NATURE:** Governments must help protect nature; markets are failing.
- **POST-GROWTH ECONOMICS:** Perhaps the most important overall goal in the politics of simplicity is to overcome the belief that a bigger economy is always better. This is especially important due to the ecological ‘limits to growth.’ We need our governments to focus on promoting ‘quality of life,’ even if this doesn’t produce the most economic growth. We should start measuring national progress using ‘alternative indicators’ such as the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) and pay less attention to Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
- **REDUCE POVERTY AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY:** Poverty and economic inequality are socially corrosive. If we are to eliminate poverty without relying on limitless growth then it is necessary to distribute wealth more equitably. Highly progressive tax rates and a Basic Income Guarantee would be a good start. The Simpler Way is about ensuring that everyone has ‘enough.’
- **VOTE PROGRESSIVELY:** All this depends on a citizenry that puts pressure on political parties from the grassroots up. We must vote and live progressively.
- **RESPONSIBILITY:** The less our governments do, the more we must do ourselves.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Simpler Way, as outlined in this booklet, presents itself as a remarkably coherent philosophy of life with which to live in response to many of the greatest problems of our age, including ecological degradation, global poverty, uneconomic growth, peak oil, and consumer malaise. The prospect of nine billion people on the planet by mid-century makes it all the clearer that the Simpler Way is a living strategy whose time has come. In a world such as our own, focused so intently on maximising material wealth, it is important that we take time to step back and ask ourselves: 'What is money *for*?' and 'What is our economy *for*?' For when we ask ourselves these questions, it quickly becomes apparent that the meaning of life does not and cannot consist in the consumption and accumulation of material things. There is more to life than desiring big houses, new carpet, fancy clothing, expensive cars, and luxurious holidays, etc. There is freedom from such desires.

Despite being burdened by a materialistic culture, we remain free to recompose our own fates, to make things new, to be self-defining and world-creating pioneers once more. That is the challenge – the joyful challenge – that lies before those of us who explore the Simpler Way. Nevertheless, when a whole society is geared toward producing and then consuming ever-more consumer products, it can be very difficult for people to live and think differently – even for those of us who want to. There is no easy, silver-bullet solution to this problem. But one step that can be taken is to dedicate more of our attention to exploring alternative ways of living and being, and that exploration has been the focus of this Practical Action Plan.

It is important to understand, however, that each element in this booklet raises a number of complex issues that you will need to approach from your own perspective. The Simpler Way is more about questions than answers, which implies that actually practicing the Simpler Way calls for creative interpretation and personalised application. We each live unique lives, and we each find ourselves in different situations, with different capabilities and different responsibilities. What this means is that the practical application of this booklet will very likely involve different things to different people. Accordingly, anyone who seriously wants to embrace the Simpler Way must be prepared to think over the idea for oneself, until it takes root in personal experience. Start with a few small steps, enjoy the adventure, and soon enough your life will have changed.

Theodore Roszak has captured in a few words our situation exactly:

There is one way forward: The creation of flesh and blood examples of low-consumption, high-quality alternatives to the mainstream pattern of life. This we can see happening already on the counter cultural fringes. And nothing – no amount of argument or research – will take the place of such living proof. What people must see is that ecologically sane, socially responsible living is *good* living; that simplicity, thrift, and reciprocity make for an existence that is free...

This Practical Action Plan will have served its purpose if the reader goes away with an increased curiosity about the life-affirming freedom of the Simpler Way, and an appreciation that with a little courage and some imaginative effort, the door to the Simpler Way will swing gracefully open.

'Old deeds for old people, and new deeds for new.' – **Henry Thoreau**

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# HOW CHEAPLY COULD WE LIVE AND STILL FLOURISH?

Ted Trainer

Given that the essential factor in our global predicament is overconsumption, the most obvious principle for a sustainable society is that those who are over-consuming must move to far more materially simple lifestyles. This does not mean deprivation or hardship. It means focusing on what is *sufficient* for comfort, hygiene, aesthetics, and efficiency. Most of our basic needs can be met in quite simple and resource-cheap ways, compared with those taken for granted and idolised in present consumer societies.

Living in ways that minimise resource use should not be seen as an irksome sacrifice that must be endured in order to save the planet. These ways must become regarded as important sources of life satisfaction. We have to see the joy that can be had in living frugally, recycling, growing food, 'husbanding' resources, making rather than buying, composting, repairing, bottling fruit, giving surpluses and old things to others, making things last, and running a relatively self-sufficient household economy.

This essay is an attempt to indicate the very low dollar, footprint and energy costs the Simpler Way might achieve. It is based on a combination of the way I live as a homesteader and the literature on eco-villages, permaculture and other alternative ways of life. It is a work in progress, and the intention is to improve the numbers over time. However, it seems from my analysis that the dollar, energy and footprint costs of current lifestyles could be cut dramatically. Very frugal ways are assumed, while improving the quality of life. As the analysis unfolds I describe some aspects of what a society might look like if it transitioned away from consumer capitalism and came to embrace the Simpler Way.

## **The context**

The 'limits to growth' analysis (Meadows et al, 1972) shows that we must develop ways of life whereby we can live well on *far* lower per capita resource consumption rates than we have now, in a zero-growth economy. The Simpler Way argument is that we can do this while improving the quality of life, but only if we made enormous change from the structures, systems and values of consumer-capitalist society.

The lifestyle and ways I would prefer would probably be much more frugal than those which most people would be willing to accept, and they might be more austere than we will need to accept in future. In other words, we might not have to go as far as the following notes indicate.

The conclusion the present analysis generally indicates is that we could live happily on something like 5 - 10% of present Australian per capita dollar, energy and footprint costs, and maybe 15% of the present energy cost, while greatly improving the quality of life and eliminating most global problems.

This claimed reduction will probably seem quite implausible at first sight. It is important not to think in terms of simply reducing consumption or making systems more efficient. The Simpler Way is about new means to new goals in new systems, and therefore about a quite different conception of the good society and of 'development.' For instance conventional thinking about Third World development is locked onto the conviction that development has to involve increasing investment of capital, to be able to sell more, to be able to buy more and to spend on developing more capacity to sell, buy and invest. Thus there is thought to be only one dimension

underlying development, essentially to do with increasing business turnover or GDP and 'living standards.' However the concept of Appropriate development scraps this whole way of thinking and simply focuses on enabling people to use the resources around them to produce for themselves the basic things most likely to solve their problems and raise their quality of life, mostly in cooperative ways, and as far as possible independently of the national monetary economy. Above all it rejects affluence as a development goal.

This different approach immediately liberates communities to achieve miracles, especially in avoiding the astronomical levels of waste, work, insecurity, debt, interest payments, worry, exploitation and overheads (advertising, packaging, consultants, bank fees, insurance, rent, etc.) that the consumer-capitalist way inflicts. Consider the example given by the US "health" system. In the conventional economy corporations constantly strive to increase the amount you must purchase from them, to add on services, to make you dependent, to then raise prices, to commercialise things that we once did for ourselves, to create needs you didn't realise you had.

At the end of each section there is an attempt to estimate the dollar and energy cost of a household of two adults and two children living in the style and circumstances I would choose. This yields the above estimate that a 90% reduction might be achievable. Several of these estimates are first estimates and quite uncertain. The intention is to improve them in later drafts of this document. I begin the analysis by discussing food production according to the Simpler Way approach, and proceed to discuss housing, tools, clothing, work, energy, etc.

## **FOOD**

Almost all food could come from home gardens, community gardens, neighbourhood commons, and small farms within and close to settlements, even in the dense suburbs of large cities, at a very low dollar cost and at almost no energy cost.

### **Home gardens**

Output from backyard gardens can be surprisingly high. Blazey (1999) discusses his trials indicating how a family could be fed from an intensively gardened 40 square metre patch, using high yielding heirloom varieties, composting etc., and multiple cropping. Figures on the achievements of urban agriculture in Havana are similarly inspiring. Koont (2009) reports vegetable yields of 21 tonnes per ha per year, without use of oil, machinery or artificial fertilisers or pesticides.

Such figures are partly due to intensive research into organic methods. We would always be trying out new varieties and ways, coordinated by our local formal (but voluntary) committees. The task would be to find those varieties that thrived best in our unique local conditions, yielding the tastiest, most pest-resistant, nutritious, drought-resistant fruit, with the best shelf life. My experience suggests that it should not take more than 10 person-hours a week to keep a thriving home garden in good shape (and this would be seen not as work but as top priority leisure activity.) Not everyone would need to be a keen gardener. The average per capita work time put into food production might be 3 hours a week when farms, commons, etc., are taken into account; i.e., under 10% of a normal work week.

All household "wastes", including from flush toilets and animal pens would be recycled, eliminating any need for importation of fertilizers (when use of nitrogen fixing, deep rooted and mulch producing plants are also assumed.) Some nutrients can serve as

animal and fish foods, on their way to the soils. Fish can be produced in small cement tanks and local ponds, linked to aquaculture, hydroponics and gardens taking the nutrient rich wastewater. Kitchen scraps go to poultry and rabbits. Chickens clear and fertilise ground that is then gardened.

### **The commons**

Our settlements would be crammed with community owned and run orchards, nut groves, olives, herb patches, bamboo clumps, woodlots and forests, ponds, dams and tanks. These commons would be on many areas that used to be roads before we dug them up. Committees would organise the maintenance of the commons, and working bees would do the 'work.' The produce from trees on private blocks would be included when these produce too much for the family (i.e., it would be "gleaned" by working bees). At least 15 useful trees per household should be possible, on the block and on the (old and dug up) road space in front of it. Many more would be planted on the commons. Every neighbourhood would have many mini-forests, providing mulch, fuel wood, timber, honey, nuts and fruits, and landscape.

The commons would also produce many kinds of craft materials and inputs to local firms, including timber, reeds, leaf oils (e.g., eucalyptus), vines and rushes for baskets, and clay and earth for pottery and building. They would also provide grazing areas. The community would build and operate fish tanks, ponds, and processing and storage sheds and greenhouses to enable some production of bananas, winter tomatoes etc. Greenhouses can include warm shelters for poultry and bigger animals in winter. The CO2 they breathe out helps plant growth. Settlements would be planted with many edible 'weeds' that would maintain themselves without attention.

### **Farms**

Many farms from small to tiny would produce within and close to (within 2 km) the centre of the town or suburb. Some would be little more than enthusiastic home gardeners selling or swapping surpluses, including vegetables, fruit, eggs, preserves, jams, pickles, dried fruits, garlic, honey, and herbs. This produce would go through kitchens with almost no packaging, preserving, marketing, or transport cost, or waste removal and treatment cost (and no advertising). Almost all transport would be via hand baskets, bicycles, and horse and cart. There would be little need for energy intensive storage such as refrigeration, because food would mostly go straight from the gardens to the kitchen when needed. Neighbourhood freezers might be used, eliminating the need for a fridge in every house. The biggest farms would still be very small in today's terms, mostly highly mixed (these have the highest yields and the most efficient performance). They might share machinery, such as a tractor. Some would be community-owned cooperatives, set up to provide us all with any important items the private firms have difficulty producing. These farms would include mini-dairies, aquaculture, and grain producers. Little food would be exported from the region or imported into it.

A significant amount of grain might have to be imported, but this is not certain. We would probably need 90+ square metres per person. (The uncertain assumption here is the equivalent of two loaves of bread per person per week, 1 kg of flour, produced at 6 tonnes/ha/y.) However flour can be made from corn and trees such as chestnuts and acorns, and indeed potatoes. Very small-scale grain production is feasible, including from home gardens. In general grain, dairy and forestlands would be on the edge of the settlement, within 1 km of its centre.

Permaculture principles, such as heavy use of permanent and tree crops, would almost eliminate the need for ploughing, enabling horses to do most of the cultivating and carting needed (given the very short distances), as well as performing leisure functions.

Locally made beverages would include fruit juices and wines, beer, cider, teas and coffee substitutes (carob). Honey would replace most sugar use, eliminating its transport and the ecological impact of sugar plantations, and improving pollination. Hobby beekeepers could easily meet all needs.

We would eat far less meat and this would greatly reduce the volume of produce necessary. (About two-thirds of the food produced in the US is not eaten by humans; it is fed to animals.) Meat would mostly come from small animals such as rabbits, fish and poultry, living within our settlements and recycling food scraps to the soil. Poultry would enjoy free-range conditions. One of their jobs would be to clear, cultivate and fertilise garden beds.

No food would be eaten out of season. Only those varieties yielding locally at a point in time would be harvested and used, eliminating much of the food-transport cost. This also means you look forward to and enjoy the new season varieties.

A committee would continually coordinate community research and trials of plant varieties from other parts of the world to find those that will thrive with a minimum of attention where we live, and they would develop recipes for the use of these, as well as for cheap and nutritious meals from local food sources (including the 'weeds' growing locally -- New Zealand spinach is almost a pest where I live.) The world contains huge numbers of vegetables, fruits, nuts and herbs that will grow well in your neighbourhood but that most of us have never heard about.

Wastes going to soils via garbage gas digesters would yield methane gas on the way. Some woodland would be given to production of the small quantities of ethanol needed for transport. Wood would be used wherever possible, not aluminum, steel or plastic, e.g., for tool handles, furniture, building, wagons, barrows, boats, etc. Mostly hand tools rather than machinery would be used in food production, mainly because the small scale enabled home gardening and tiny farm production.

Mulching, tree crops, drip irrigation and selection of the right varieties would minimise water use.

"Waste" water, kitchen scraps, crop wastes and animal manures would go to compost heaps, methane digesters and fish ponds. The ponds would sustain a fishing industry, along with ducks and geese and wetland plant production. Running bamboo would be confined on islands.

Plants would also provide many craft and industrial materials, including inputs to chemical processing of cellulose, replacing petroleum sources of plastics. Many oils and waxes for industry, paints and cooking could come from the locality, including peanuts, olives, flax, bees wax, and fish oil. Herb cultivation would also provide sources of various medicines, such as Alovera for ointments, Tea Tree oil for antiseptics. Cheese, olive oil, dyes and soap are among the other items easily made on a small scale from local ingredients. These products would mostly come from small locally owned firms and cooperatives which gave worthwhile work to many people. Where produce was to be sold, much of this could be done without salespeople; just weigh your beans at the roadside stall and leave the money in the tin. There will be familiarity and trust in these communities.

Many shops would need to open only one or two days a week. If you will want a new pair of shoes soon you can get them on Tuesdays when the shoe shop opens. That saves a lot of labour.

There would be no need for synthetic pesticides, although natural varieties can be made from plant inputs such as pyrethrum and tobacco, grown locally. There would be fewer pests in the complex Permaculture landscapes. (Monocultures encourage pest build up.)

Relatively little storage, packaging or freezing would be needed because fresh food could be taken from the gardens and fields just before use. Root crops can be left in the ground until needed. Traditional varieties which crop over an extended period enable picking of a few fruit when they are needed, while the rest ripen and store on the vine. Cellars and cool rooms can store fruit and vegetables, and there would be extensive preserving, bottling and drying.

There would be almost no need for energy inputs into the food-producing sector of the economy. In conventional agriculture these are enormous. Small farmers and home gardeners are far more energy-efficient than agribusiness. Almost all of the 17% of US energy consumption now going into food supply could be saved. There would be little ploughing, artificial fertilisers and pesticides, harvesting machinery, commercial processing and packaging, freezing, marketing, transport or waste collection and disposal. Households and shops would mostly buy from the local farm gate. The average item of food might travel only about 200 metres, whereas at present in the US the figure is around 2,000,000 metres. We would need almost no trucks, tractors, harvesters, silos, crop dusters, ships, supermarkets, advertising, cold stores, plastic bags, home freezers or garbage disposal. Because the food was produced close to where it was eaten all wastes could go back to the soils, serving as animal feed on the way. We could save vast amounts on food preservation, packaging, tins, bottles, labels, and refrigeration. Food could go straight from gardens and animal pens to the kitchen as it was needed, and from kitchens to animal pens and compost heaps without trucks and sewer pipes. Surpluses would be preserved in re-usable locally made glass and crockery containers (not tin cans). Damaged fruit and vegetables could be used, whereas at present they are dumped because supermarkets will not buy them.

Obviously those who did not enjoy gardening would not need to engage in it. They would buy what others produced and make their contribution in other spheres, as at present. Home garden surpluses would mostly be swapped, given away or left at the community centre. Committees would keep records and coordinate suburban planting so that all people would more or less know how much of what crops would be needed, what varieties did best last year, etc. Many gardeners would be trying out new varieties all the time.

In communities conscious of the need to make their local economies work well much effort would go into education, R and D, sharing expertise and mutual assistance regarding food production and all other activities. It would not be a matter of isolated householders struggling on their own to grow enough in their backyards to survive. It would be in everyone's interests to make sure that all were helped to run highly productive gardens, that discoveries and good ideas were shared, that the whole local agricultural system was highly organised and productive, and that people found the community garden working bees enjoyable.

As with most of the other domains discussed below there would be many desirable spin-off implications for health, community, leisure and education. Gardening keeps you fit and for many it would be a major leisure activity. In addition the field days, shows, talks

and research activities would provide sources of learning, entertainment and community bonding.

These ways indicate that we could provide ourselves with abundant high quality food and many materials, beautiful landscapes, any satisfying livelihoods and a great deal of rewarding leisure time at almost no energy, resource or environmental cost. And we could do it without suits! Most people in the food supply industry today sit at a computer screen in new clothes, and need degrees in accounting, company law, finance, trucking logistics...we would need almost none of that. Worst of all those people do not enjoy farming, and the agribusiness system they staff drive out of business the many people who do.

### **My probable household budget:**

Home gardening sharing/bartering among neighbours, plus “free” food from the commons, might provide all vegetables, fruit, nuts, poultry and fish at no dollar cost. Local small farms might provide 15% of food via cash sale, such as some/most dairy products, grains/flour, soymilk, cheeses, spreads, and juices.

Weekly dollar cost, approximately \$30 i.e., \$1,500/y, or \$375/person/y.

Weekly energy cost. For home gardens and commons almost no running cost, apart from 12-volt irrigation pump electricity. Embodied energy costs would include production of garden tools, wire netting, baskets, preserving containers and equipment, sheds from mud, saplings and tin, cement tanks, earthen dam and pond construction, poly pipe irrigation plus taps, 12 volt pumps, most assumed to last 20-50 years on average - GJ/year to be estimated.

Farm energy costs include shares in small community tractors, electric irrigation pumps, fencing, tank and dam construction, sheds, simple processing machinery, almost no transport cost (horse and cart) or fertiliser or pesticide cost, (carts and slurry pipes take nutrient wastes back to the farms). There would be a running cost for irrigation, tractor and processing machinery.

## **BUILDINGS**

### **Houses, sheds, small business premises, community centres**

All new buildings would be made of earth, local stone, wood, straw bale, at negligible dollar and resource cost, and built to last hundreds of years. Floors can be made from rammed earth surfaced, e.g., with turpentine and beeswax. . Some roofing would be earth (sod) over timber supports, or domes and vaults from mud bricks, surfaced by a thin layer of cement. Most roofing would eventually be ceramic tiles made from local clay and wood-fuelled kilns. Research would go into the production of durable sealers and paints from local plant and animal sources. For instance earth walls can be sealed with a whitewash made from lime and milk.

People would have much more time for home making, and therefore for cooking on wood stoves, with hot water jackets and tanks. A more vegetable based diet would reduce the amount of cooking needed. Rugs mostly made from wool would replace most carpets, eliminating the need for vacuum cleaning. (Take the rugs out and shake them, and sweep and mop the floors.) Matting, seating and screens, as well as baskets and hats, can be woven from local reeds, rushes and willows.

## My Dream House

*The following is an indication of the kind of house I would be delighted to live in. Most people would see it as quite unacceptable, but they should ask themselves what kind of housing could 10 billion people have. A couple or small family might need a house about 1.5 times as big in floor area.*

*I do not live IN the house all the time; I live in my patch, in and out of the house, garden, workshop, animal pens, forest, wetland, all day long. Thus I don't have much need for space inside the house.*

*It would be a tiny house. This minimises space heating and lighting, and housework, and big houses are morally ugly, wasteful, and take up resources others need. The floor area would be only 8x3 square metres for the single main room, plus a 20 square metre attic bedroom, plus a 5 square metre toilet+ shower room. Made from mud brick or rammed earth, including floor (surface hardened.) Low ceilings, 2.10-2.20 m. Wood burning stove for cooking and heating, with a hot water jacket. Corrugated iron roof, to be replaced by hand-made clay tile someday. No fridge; (cold water and evaporative cooling). No carpets; rugs. Most space for workshop, crafts, storage and clothes washing would be in simple sheds close by. A ladder or tiny stair way would lead to the sleeping area in the triangular attic, which would also provide storage space. There would be a small veranda to catch morning sun in winter. Water tanks. (I make tanks from cement plastered over chicken wire against a form, for about 1.5c/litre (excluding labour cost.) Plastic tanks cost about 70 c/litre. Not included in this accounting are a PV panel plus battery - \$1000?*

*Walls: 27 cm thick, 13 cubic metres of earth, = 240 barrow loads, i.e., 10 a day over 24 days. Forms borrowed. Earth pit becomes a fishpond.*

*Dollar cost estimated 2010: very approximately \$5,500 (not including "labour" or items below.) (The budget is detailed Ted Trainer, *The Transition to a Sustainable and Just World*, 2010). In the normal economy the cost of a smaller than average "normal" house (much bigger of course) might be \$150,000 to build, but \$400,000 when bank interest and tax on income are added. The 2009 cost to build a house in Sydney has been reported as c. \$150,000, about 27 times the cost of my ideal house. The average house being built in Australia now is the biggest in the world, with an area of 220 square metres, 4.5 times the size of my house.*

*Use of recycled materials would lower the cost of my ideal house considerably. Labour cost? Zero. The house would be homemade using hand tools as an enjoyable creative activity, partly assisted by local friends and experienced builders. These debts could be paid without money, by giving labour to their ventures. Some dollar costs, e.g., for materials, could be paid by labour given to builders who buy them in bulk. Build at a leisurely pace; move in when the roof is on and fit out slowly.*

Premises for most local firms, shops and community facilities such as libraries and community centres, could be much the same; mostly tiny, simple, built from mud or straw bale or rammed earth etc. plus locally grown and milled timber. Buildings would be one to three stories in height, eliminating the need for lifts. In general finishes would be rough/rustic, not be slick, e.g., barked saplings, mud walls, unpainted wood, with few metal or plastic surfaces.

These structures can be beautiful, decorated in a wild variety of styles, making the landscape unique and interesting. Our main community buildings could be inspiring, our home-made cathedrals, tributes to the power of our imagination and cooperative power, built by our own hands from our forests, clay pits and eager labour. These projects are much too precious to be given to a contractor.

Remember that we are talking about a stable situation, in which construction only takes the form of maintenance and replacement, not increasing the housing, office or factory stock. In other words most of the present construction industry would not exist and most of the building that was needed could be carried out by hand tools (because this is more enjoyable.) For many people, slowly designing and building their own home, helped by friends and with the advice of local experts, would be one of life's most satisfying adventures. No one would want a house and not be able to have one. At present maybe 100,000 Australians are waiting to get one, and large numbers never will because the only kind the market provides are absurdly big, expensive and ecologically unsatisfactory (no eaves, not solar passive, badly insulated, using aluminum and plastic and brick, and in my view often shoddily built.)

These have been construction costs; running costs are dealt with below under energy.

**My probable household budget:**

Items not included in the above accounting: Gutters, plumbing (steel plus poly pipes, taps), sink, toilet bowl and cistern, cabinet wood, table, chairs, electric lights wires and switches, insulation for roof only (earth walls), bolts etc., 12 pump, drum high tank for shower etc. pressure.

Dollar cost: Earth houses can last hundreds of years. If we assume 100 years the per capita dollar cost for a house twice the size above would be  $\$11,000 / (100 \text{ years} \times 50 \text{ weeks} \times 4 \text{ people}) = \$55 \text{c/week}$ , or  $\$28.60$  a year. Many home buyers are paying more than one-third of their income for housing repayments, or rent.

Compare a 'normal' house; if  $\$150,000$  to build but 4 times as big as mine above, i.e.,  $\$75,000$  for a house twice my ideal size, but double this after paying bank interest and tax, it would cost  $\$150,000$ ...i.e., 13 times as much as a house twice as big as my ideal.

Energy cost:

Wood: (Attic flooring,  $20 \text{m}^2 \times 2.5 \text{ cm thick} = .5 \text{m}^3$ ) +

(roof frames  $80 \text{ m} \times 50 \text{mm} \times 65 \text{mm}$  hardwood =  $.3 \text{ m}^3$ )

= .8 M3.

Assume  $1 \text{ m}^3$  wood = 1 tonne, and embodied energy cost of wood =  $18 \text{ GJ} / \text{tonne}$ .

So  $.8 \text{ m}^3 =$  14.4 GJ.

Roof tin:  $50 \text{ m}^2 = 160 \text{ KG}$ ,  $\times 44 \text{ MJ/kg} =$  7.1 GJ

Glass:  $18 \text{ m}^2 \times 200 \text{ MJ/m}^2 =$  3.6 GJ

Cement: Almost no cement in foundations; light structure set on broken concrete chunks set in trench.



Tank; 8000 litre, 6 m3 concrete + reinforcing rods	
and chicken wire =	2.1
GJ	_____
	27.2 GJ
<u>Items not included</u> , above; assume these bring the energy cost to:	50 GJ
That would be, for 4 people, an average of 125 MJ/y.	
At 2011 retail electricity price this would cost:	\$4.50 p.a.

**TOOLS, APPLIANCES, HARDWARE**

I would want to work mostly with hand tools, including for house building, furniture and clothes making and food production (often/mostly using machine produced materials), but some use of power tools makes sense. (My workshop runs on 12-volt solar electricity.) Local firms and farms would need some small engines, motors and machinery such as saw benches. Regional factories would make simple robust, repairable, durable, mostly small stoves, fridges, radios, heaters, tanks, furniture (although much of this would be home made) cutlery, crockery, pots, pans, brooms (I would vote for no vacuum cleaner production), garden tools, as well as bulk materials such as cloth, timber, roof tiles.

The national steel works would supply mostly small strip, rod, tube and angle, galvanised iron and wire netting, plus inputs to hardware stores (nails, bolts, etc.) and tool factories. In other words there would be very little production of heavy steel beams, pipes and plate, or castings, because there would be little heavy industry or construction.

Larger tools, such as lathes, drill presses would be available for anyone to use in regional factories, community workshops and small firms.

Thus the scale of manufacture and building would be enormously reduced, and therefore the need for heavy machinery would be much reduced. We would need to produce very few if any skyscrapers, big bridges, tunnels, silos, freeways, aircraft and airports, trucks, cars, ships, cranes, forklifts and bulldozers. Remember there would be very little need to transport things into highly self-sufficient towns and regions, and very little need to travel far to work or leisure; see below. We would have some buses, a good national and regional rail system, and many bikes (and use of horses for cartage), but very few cars. Because economies would be stable, construction would only be of replacement buildings, windmills, roads etc.

**My household budget**

Dollar costs: Assume timber from local hobby saw benches or small firms, much use of saplings and round wood, and stable settlements with no new construction, only replacement and maintenance building. Art and craft materials? Most tools can last a lifetime, especially hand tools. An uncertain guess at an annual household steel, glass, cement, consumption ... 30 - 50 kg, costing perhaps \$200 - 500. This would not include infrequent major remakes after storm or fire damage.

Energy costs: Appliances such as sinks, toilet bowls and cisterns, showers, (no bath

tubs), wash tubs, stoves, and fridges (if you have one) would be made to last 50+ years, and to be repaired. Art and craft materials?? Energy cost 40 kg x 30 MJ/kg = 1.2 GJ/y, i.e., .3 GJ/person/year?

## **CLOTHING**

Almost all the clothes we wear could be simple, tough, cheap and durable, old and much repaired. Few if any of us would need to work in a suit or tie, let alone new clothes. One of my hobbies is darning and repairing the old clothes I wear. (One of my best jumpers lasted 35 years, until a bushfire got it.) We might have a few 'nice' things for special occasions, but these need not be expensive. I have one pair of 'good' shoes, never wear a tie, and haven't worn a suit for about four decades. Those who were more interested in 'nice' clothes than I am could of course make or buy them as they wish but hopefully we would have the sense to scrap any notion of fashion. Some people could specialise in dress making and tailoring as a small business.

Old and worn out clothing items would be recycled, sold via second hand shops or given away. Clothes making and repairing would be much-enjoyed hobbies. A few small local firms might mass-produce some basic clothing items, mostly from locally grown fibres, and some basic footwear. Factories would supply local hardware shops and clothing makers with rolls of cloth of basic kinds. Some footwear can be made at home via hobby production, especially slippers, sandals and winter Ugh boots. There would be a great deal of that most miraculous art form – knitting, using wool spun from the local sheep.

It is possible that much of the bulk material needed could be produced locally. Wool might take .025 - .030 ha per person, 300 square metres, assuming consumption of 2 kg/person/y, 25 sheep/ha and 3.2 kg clean wool/sheep/year. Again this land would provide other products and services, e.g., play areas, honey, water catchment, timber, orchards... Other fibres including flax, sisal and cotton would add a little to this area, and some of this would be imported.

## **My household budget:**

At present I spend almost nothing on clothing, due to a stock of old items that can be remade, apart from (cheap, light) work shoes/sandals. An estimate for me (as distinct from growing children etc.), \$80/person/year.

## **'WORK'**

Most of us would go to work for money only one or two days a week, on foot or bicycle to local firms or cooperatives. We would enjoy working with friends, in control of our contribution to meeting local needs, or running our own little shop or farm, knowing we are helping to maintain a happy community. (This assumes considerable collective control over the economy to make sure there is no growth, no significant inequality, no unemployment, no poverty, that all have a worthwhile and respected livelihood, and above all that individual and social needs are met. These conditions are not possible in consumer-capitalist society.

On the other five days a week we'd be doing a lot of producing of important things, for ourselves in our gardens and hobbies (e.g., knitting, pottery) in craft groups, and for the community via the working bees, committees, organising concerts, leisure activities and festivals. In other words much of our work time would also be enjoyable leisure time; the work/leisure distinction would largely disappear.

The (negligible) dollar and energy costs of travelling to work are dealt with below under transport. There would be little or no cost in new clothes.

### **FURNITURE**

Furniture would be simple, cheap, robust and durable, made from local materials, mostly wood. It would be repairable, and most would be home-made by ordinary people. Some would come from local craft businesses in which people could enjoy making good solid furniture. These pieces might be relatively expensive, but they would last for generations, and cost would not matter since we could in general cover our monetary needs with two days work a week.

Various other items, notably toys, baskets, garden and storage sheds, wheelbarrows, animal houses, carts, and boats would also be mostly made from wood, either via backyard or small firm production. Minimal use of plastic. Matting, seating and screens, as well as baskets and hats, can be woven from local reeds, rushes and willows. There would be much use of hand tools because craft production is enjoyable, but light machinery would also be used.

### **My household budget**

Per capita lifetime dollar and energy costs would be negligible, e.g., bike parts, tyres.

### **MANUFACTURING, FACTORIES**

Most manufactured items would be produced in households, neighbourhood workshops and small local firms, and they would be produced in craft ways, not via industrial factories. Crockery provides a good example. It should all be produced by hand in your suburb or town, from local clay, fired by wood grown there, and made by people who love making pottery. How many new plates do you need each year to replace those broken? Again when we recognise that we are talking about a stable population and economy we realise that much of our present production is aimed at increasing stocks and consumption, so in a stable society relatively small volumes of replacement production would suffice. Because people will not need to go out to work for money more than two days a week there would be much time for interesting home and neighbourhood craft productive activity.

Small regional factories would produce bicycles, cutlery, pots and pans, roof tiles, containers (although baskets would be made at the neighbourhood level from rushes, willows and vines), nails, bolts, buckles, hacksaw blades, plate glass, preserving jars, ladders, barrows, needles, tools, brushes, paint (from vegetable and fish oils, milk, lime, earthen colours), beverages (fruit wines, beers and ciders), string and rope from yuccas and sisal, etc. and basic appliances such as stoves, radios and fridges. There would be intensive recycling, and items would be made to last and to be repaired. Only small quantities of items such as electronic devices would need to be imported.

Attention would go into developing excellent designs for all things, especially models that would last, be easily repaired and save resources. Research would go into studying the effectiveness of designs in use and improvements would be cumulative. (At present much design is shoddy, deliberately flimsy and unrepairable. There is too much innovation, for instance of gimmicky trashy products. Things are often designed to look attractive but not be functional. New products often fail to benefit from experience with older models.)

The energy cost of some manufactured items such as stoves, furniture has been included above. There would be many minor items to include in a thorough budget, e.g. paper, art materials, linen, cutlery, pottery, torches, batteries, buckets, pipes, taps, etc.

## **WATER**

Because the new agriculture would rely heavily on permanent crops, especially trees, and relatively little meat would be consumed, the water demand associated with annual crops would be greatly reduced.

Water would be scrupulously harvested locally, from rooftops, catchments and creeks. There would be maximum recycling and reuse, and therefore different grades (Flush toilets and water orchard with recycled water.) There would therefore be little need for big dams, mains, large pumping stations, and the bureaucracies to run them. Windmills and small electric pumps would do most of the pumping of fresh and wastewater.

All “sewage” would be dealt with at the neighbourhood level, thoroughly recycling all water and nutrients back to local soils, eliminating the need for large systems of mains and pumping stations. Wastewater would not contain industrial chemicals. Any of these would be recycled on factory sites. Composting toilets would cut water use and garbage gas units would produce methane for use while both returned nutrients to gardens. Settlements would be landscaped to retain rainfall via earthen bunds, swales and ponds, eliminating the need for concrete sewer and storm water drains and pipes. Storm runoff would be channeled above ground to soak-in areas, where trees were planted. Few if any underground pipes, mains or concrete works would be needed. Above ground systems are easily monitored and repaired, unlike underground systems. Where possible redesign of settlements would catch water on the higher ground, feed it by gravity to houses, then take nutrient-rich wastewater further down to orchards, pasture, ponds and farms, reducing the need for pumping energy.

## **My household budget:**

The tanks, ponds and dams to supply households, community gardens and commons, and small farms would be simple systems so easily maintained at low cost, e.g. by working bees. Stable settlements mean no additional construction, only maintenance and revision of systems. Replacement of metal and poly pipes, after decades of use. Once-off use of cement to construct tanks etc. Electric pumps and windmills would move water, mostly through poly pipe.

## **MATERIALS**

Most buildings would be made from earth, straw bales, stone, bamboo and wood. There would be little use of energy-intensive metals and plastics. The reduced quantities of glass, steel, cement and especially of aluminum might be produced regionally by solar and wind generated electricity in those periods when there is surplus supply. There would be intensive research into plant sources for chemicals, adhesives, medicines, paints, lubricants and fabrics. Most of the dangerous synthetic chemicals in use today would not be necessary. Design would focus on minimising problematic materials. For instance furniture can be made without metal fasteners, by use of dowelled and pegged joints.

Timber would be a major material, replacing most metals and plastics. It could all be produced within settlements, let alone close by. Timber needs would be low in a stable economy, called on only to maintain stocks of housing and furniture. Some combined

heating and cooking would be by woods fires, in well-insulated solar-passive houses.

Some materials would be produced in bulk in big regional or national factories, such as fabrics, metals and chemicals, and distributed to many small factories and workshops. Demand for paper would be greatly reduced and might be met from local forests and recycling. Eventually roofing iron would have been slowly replaced by ceramic tiles made from local clay and wood-fired kilns.

Cement would be a problem, given that it is such a valuable material enabling permanent structures, especially water tanks, yet it is energy-intensive. However the quantities needed would be small in view of the stable infrastructure stock that only needed maintaining, not expanding. When a stable settlement's infrastructure of tanks and methane digesters had been established there would be little further need to use cement. No cement would be used in the construction of high-rise buildings, big dams, bridges, roads or freeways. Water can be stored in many small earthen dams along watercourses, with grassed spillways. These dams would also enable pumped storage for electricity generation.

Leather might also set difficulties, in view of the quantity of this valuable material that might be required in relation to the much-reduced use of large animals for meat consumption.

**My household budget:** Dollar and embodied energy costs have been included in the other items discussed.

### **TRANSPORT AND TRAVEL**

There would be little need for transport to get people to work, because much less work in offices and factories would be done, and most work places would be localised and accessible by bicycle or on foot. The few large factories would be close to towns and railway stations.

Neighbourhoods would be very leisure-rich, containing many little farms, forests, ponds, factories, windmills, craft producers, drama clubs, libraries, neighbourhood workshops and centres, and leisure facilities. Therefore we would want to travel for leisure, holidays and vacations much less than we do now.

A few cars, trucks and bulldozers would be needed. The vehicles in most use would be bicycles, with some but relatively little use of buses and trains. Horses could be used for some transport, especially carting goods. They consume no oil, refuel themselves, reproduce themselves and do not need spare parts or expensive roads. Most roads and freeways would be dug up and the space used for gardens. The concrete chunks can be recycled as building stone and bitumen lumps can stack as animal pen fences. Railway and bus production would be one of the few activities to take place in large centralised heavier industrial centres.

Very few ships, large trucks or aircraft would be produced because there would be little need for the transport of goods or people over long distances. There would be little international travel, partly because the fuel for that will in future be extremely scarce, and secondly because there would be relatively little need for it. We might ration international travel primarily for educational and cultural exchange purposes, so that you might get one overseas trip in a lifetime. However we could bring back wind ships, so you might study for your degree while on a leisurely trip around the world.

Would the lack of travel be an intolerable deprivation? At present many would think so, given the taken for granted amount of that supremely luxurious self-indulgence that five billion people can't engage in -- tourism. But if and when petroleum becomes very scarce people will be jolted into understanding the unsustainability of the present levels of travel, transport, trade and tourism.

The main reason why we would not travel much for holidays is because there would be many interesting things to do around the town or neighbourhood, or not far away. Our living places will be enriched as places for spending entertainment, leisure and holiday time. (I never go away for holidays, have never flown anywhere for a holiday, and spend all weekends at home...because there are so many interesting things waiting to be done around the homestead.) The leisure committees would organise events, festivals, concerts, celebrations, picnics, adventures, dances and field days. They would surprise us with especially spectacular adventures and mystery tours. They would work out low-cost options, such as hiring a and a gypsy carriage and horse to go on a plodding tour of a scenic route, stopping at quaint old inns, craft centres, galleries, wildlife-rich camping spots...

### **My household budget**

Mostly walking, cycling and use of horse/donkey and cart. Assume three person-trips per week by rail or bus to larger town, c. 20 km per capita per trip. Assume rail twice the energy efficiency of cars (which use 9 litres of petrol per 100 km), so 60 person-km travel per household per week, i.e., 15 km per capita, would use .675 litres per person per week, = 29.7 MJ/week, = 1,544 MJ/y.

Transport of goods into town; assume 10 kg per household per week, and 20 km? Negligible energy cost...c. 2 MJ/person/week = 104 MJ/person/y.

### **HEALTH AND MEDICINE**

The far more healthy circumstances would dramatically reduce the incidence of mental and physical illness, and so the resources that would have to be put into health. The required personnel, time, training, equipment and buildings, would be far less than they are now, saving a lot of energy and environmental impact and freeing productive capacity for other purposes.

To begin with, most people would be much healthier than they are now due to the more labour-intensive lifestyles and the high quality food. Even more important would be the psychological factors, the elimination of insecurity, unemployment, poverty, loneliness and stress, long work and travel times and the worry about housing loan interest rates. Everyone would experience a supportive and cooperative community, a stressless and relaxed pace yet business on interesting projects, having a sense of purpose and being valued for making a worthwhile contribution. Caring communities would sense when someone is having difficulties and seek to assist and head off crises. (In Ladakh this happens, and some communities have "village elders" to whom one can discuss a problem). How high would be the incidence of drug and alcohol abuse, crime, depression, domestic violence, car accidents, eating disorders and random violence? There would be little or none of the mindless drunken pub violence by young people without worthwhile interests and purposes. There would be few of these problems on indigenous settlements if people there had purposes, productive and hobby activities, and self-respect deriving from being in control of a thriving, supportive and admirable community.

Health and medical services would be mostly localised, but there would be a few centralised and specialised teaching hospitals. Drugs and medical equipment might be among the items still mostly produced far away and transported into regions. Much of the increased R and D effort (below) would go into medical research. Satisfactory health provision by professionals must be organised primarily as a public service, paid for generously by taxation, and geared primarily to prevention, rather than cure.

However the focal level would be the town committees keeping an eye on practices, providing dietary and fitness advice, educating, and thinking about preventative measures and what maximises good physical and mental health. Central on the agenda would be *social* health; concern with indices of solidarity, morale, conscientiousness, readiness to help and turn up for working bees and concerts. (Can you leave your bike unlocked in the street?)

So, for a number of reasons overall health costs would surely be a tiny fraction of today's figure.

### **MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS**

These too should be largely localised, i.e., providing important local information and facilitating discussion of local issues, while also relaying national and international news and information from a few more centralised sources.

Media would seek to focus attention, thought and discussion on the locality and its processes, events, problems, merits and delights. This should be our cognitive centre of gravity, not the distant national or international arena, let alone the trivia provided by the global corporate media networks.

A local community cannot run well unless there is a great deal of discussion, sharing of ideas, sorting out of the best options and awareness of how arrangements are working out. All this contributes to the gradual movement towards consensus on what's best for the town. Much of this communication, clarification and learning will take place informally but good local media, especially locally made radio programs, will be important in facilitating the awareness that is crucial for collective decision making and in reinforcing social cohesion. It would also be a powerful educational instrument, constantly presenting informative material on ideas, technical ways and innovations.

Much program material would come from citizens, as distinct from being prepared by a few professionals. Many talks, interviews, and interviews would come from local gardeners, craftspeople, experts and scholars. We would elect the voluntary boards of directors, and be able to observe and feedback on their deliberations. There would be no advertisements, but there would be elaborate ways of conveying information on new ideas, products, events etc. much of the "work" would be voluntary.

The significance of TV would decline markedly. People would find much more worthwhile and interesting things to do with the precious time they now spend watching TV. (The US per capita average is said to be 4 hours a day.) Yet it could have important informing, communicating and educating functions. Elaborate programs on other countries and cultures would help to satisfy some of the present desire for travel.

Use of papers and magazines could be cut dramatically, replaced by electronic sources. Many people could work providing entertainment, arts, documentaries, reports, etc., whereas at present global corporations send a relatively few programs worldwide, employing a relatively few super-stars and creative people. Global media send the same

news and information material out to everyone, so can't deal with the issues that are only of interest to your suburb or town.

All important media would be publicly owned and run, via cooperatives, as distinct from being privately owned. Media provide crucial public services; everything depends on how well informed, thoughtful and caring publics are. It is therefore of the utmost importance that media be seen as our agencies for providing these extremely important public services, and be regulated carefully, be fully visible and accountable, and ultimately run by town meetings etc. It is totally unacceptable that they are allowed to be owned by some obscenely rich individual and run for his profit, let alone giving someone like Murdoch the power to push his opinions and preferences, spin issues, support the candidates and parties he wants to win elections, shape foreign policy and recommend invasions and wars.

What about the IT realm? Doesn't a sophisticated modern society have to be heavily dependent on computers, complex communications systems, satellites, highly trained scientists and wizard technologists? The Simpler Way would make whatever use of this realm was appropriate, and it would be of importance for many functions, but it would not have anything like the centrality it has today. It would have an important role in research, medicine, data storage, education, etc. but the need for it in business, accounting, media, leisure and everyday life and the management of complex systems would be greatly reduced. Most little firms and farms probably would not even need a computer. Relatively little leisure time would be spent in front of one. If the worst came to the worst and the satellites could not be kept up there or the computer factories could not be maintained, we could get by well without computers. Just reflect on how good life could have been with 1960s technologies, assuming a rational and caring economy. Most of the above listed productive activities such as food and furniture production could take place quite well without any IT. We were able to make beautiful dinners, houses, clothes, furniture, festivals, public buildings, communities and concerts in the 1960s without it (indeed in the 1760s!)

Computers and similar complicated devices would still be made in high tech factories, located in a few places in the world. These products would be among the relatively few things that would need to be traded internationally.

### **My household budget**

I do not watch TV or use a computer for entertainment. I listen to pocket radio most of the day. I'd like access to a TV set and a computer in the neighbourhood workshop.

### **RETIREMENT, OLD AGE, SPECIAL NEEDS**

Older, experienced people would be highly valued contributors to production and more importantly to social functioning, given their wisdom and their knowledge of local people, conditions and history. There would be no compulsory retirement age, and few would retire anyway. People could slowly phase down their level of activity as they wished. Most would want to remain active contributors, rather than cease "working". This would ensure that the community continued to benefit from that great deal of productive time, expertise and experience that is now wasted, especially the wisdom of the elders who know the town and its history and can provide good advice.

Much of the care of older and invalid people would be carried out by the community via the committees, working bees, rosters and the informal involvement of people. With five days a week to spare many people would drop in frequently to chat and help out. Old



people would be able to remain in their homes much longer, there would be little need for retirement “homes” and specialised staff. There would be small local hospitals and nursing facilities close to where people had lived, set within the busiest parts of settlements so people could drop in and so that residents could see and be involved in activities around them. Much of the ordinary work and care would be provided “free” via the community working bees. We might pay some of our town taxes by signing up for rosters.

The experience of old, infirm, mentally and physically disadvantaged, and mentally ill people would be infinitely better than it is now. They would be cared for by familiar people right in the middle of their communities, able to observe and be involved in the everyday activities going on around them. People would be wandering in from the town, especially at morning teatime. Compare the way present society isolates these people in expensive institutions with nothing to do or to be involved in or contribute to. ‘Inmates’ are often intensely bored, lonely and convinced they are worthless burdens. Then we have to pay for expensive professional staff to deal with the consequences. (As with ‘health’ the corporations have pounced on abundant opportunities for lucrative business. In a good community most functions are carried out automatically and without monetary cost, but in consumer-capitalist society these are no longer provided by ordinary people and are commercialised, generating sales and siphoning the savings of aged people into pockets of shareholders in health-provider corporations.)

Old people would have watertight guarantees of lifetime security, unlike today where one’s fate depends on the skill (and honesty) of one’s retirement fund manager in a predatory financial world that can collapse and eliminate your retirement funds overnight. Communities would have most of the responsibility of looking after all their members, including young, ill, handicapped, mentally unwell, old and infirm. (This was the arrangement in Medieval Europe, before the advent of individualism and market society.) State resources for such functions will be very limited. More importantly, as has been explained, in a zero-growth economy provision for old age cannot come from interest on superannuation investments. (A problem to be worked out would be provision for people who have not lived in the town for long. However settlements would be more stable than at present, with less mobility in and out, reducing the problem somewhat. National accounting and transfers of resources between settlements might be needed. ‘Superannuation’ arrangements making savings transferrable would be needed.)

## **LAW**

There would be very little need for legal work compared with present society which is riddled with struggles and disputes generated by competition for markets, development approvals, property, rights, and wealth. The climate would be cooperative, not adversarial. Wealth and property would not be so important to people. The stability of the economy would mean that many legal problems that presently derive from competition for development opportunities would not arise.

Most important is the fact that because all would be provided for, i.e. all would have a livelihood and a productive role, and because there would be no unemployment, exclusion, poverty or disadvantage, then most of the forces generating crime in the present callous winner-take-all society would have been eliminated. For large numbers of people today it is extremely difficult or stealing cars or mugging people, or selling shonky products, or that many give up hope and take to alcohol or drugs. Large numbers are “excluded”.

The savings The Simpler Way would produce here would be astronomical. How many police, courts, prisons, judges, barristers or parole officers would we need if all people had a role, worthwhile and respected contribution to make in caring communities? How much collateral damage and self-destruction would be avoided?

Each town would establish systems of mediation and 'village elders,' so that if conflicts began to emerge experienced people could informally help to sort them out (without any fees!) If you have a problem you might go to some of them to chat it over. These are the practices in many Eco-villages and tribal societies.

Would we need as much as 5% of the legal industry we have today?

## **EDUCATION**

In The Simpler Way education has very different goals and procedures compared with consumer society. Education would not be about competing for the credentials that might guarantee jobs and privileges in consumer society. It would be about enabling an enjoyable, meaningful life as a citizen contributing to a good community. The main implication for the present discussion is that there would be a greatly reduced dollar cost, deriving from the fact that most education would take place in the community as children worked with adults performing the important every-day tasks needed to keep the community functioning well. Although much attention would be given to the educational progress of each individual child, involving (a small number of) professional "teachers", there might not need to be any schools. The whole community would continually be teachers, (and learners) and it would be the "classroom". There would probably be important roles for professional educators, but ordinary citizens would do most of the educating.

Education has little to do with training, which is what mostly takes place in schools and universities today. The training of trades and professional people is important and might take place much the same as it does today, but far fewer such people would be needed. With much simpler systems many trade level tasks would be carried out by ordinary handymen (I do all my own plumbing, 12 volt electrical, metal work, carpentry and building etc.), and in an economy with mostly simple technologies and nowhere near as much production, heavy industry, nor as many sophisticated global systems, there would be far less need for highly sophisticated technocrats (let alone lawyers, financial consultants, accountants, security analysts, marketing experts, CEOs, etc.).

Our educational institutions could then focus on Education (as distinct from mere training; see), but this can be organised effectively without expensive plant or systems (think Wikipedia plus discussion groups, visits, field days, and access to local gurus and craft and art wizards, etc.).

## **WELFARE**

Because there would be little or no crime, stress, depression, unemployment or poverty, the incidence of social breakdown and therefore need for 'welfare' services would be greatly reduced. In healthy communities most of the needs of those people who do run into difficulties are met spontaneously by ordinary citizens, as distinct from by expensive professionals and institutions.

## **LEISURE**

This is a major cost item in consumer society, and source of savings in the alternative. It

has been partly dealt with above, in terms of having leisure-rich communities and a lot of time to pursue leisure interests within them. At present leisure time is mostly spent in the passive consumption of experience produced by corporations or professionals, especially via TV and IT, in travel or consuming goods and services. The quality of most of this material is “spiritually” negligible if not negative, evident in the mindless TV soap operas, game shows and crime dramas, and especially the violence and destruction of computer “games”. Much leisure time and expenditure at present goes into purchasing; shopping is a form of entertainment, including the purchase of expensive luxuries, rock concert tickets, clothes, gladiatorial sporting event tickets.

Simpler way settlements and lifestyles are very leisure-rich. Any town or suburb includes many very talented musicians, singers, storytellers, actors, comedians and playwrights, presently unable to do their thing because the globalised entertainment industry only needs a few super-stars. These people will thrive, having several days a week to practise their art and being appreciated for their (largely unpaid) contributions to the many local gatherings, concerts and festivals. The corporate entertainment industry has taken all the entertaining business (just as the supermarkets have killed off all the little shops), and can provide access to the world’s best performers at the flick of a switch. (This debauches; it reduces appreciation of the very best. Once you would go on a difficult pilgrimage to experience great art, and then really appreciate it.)

Much more leisure time will be spent in creative and social activities, as distinct from the increasingly private involvement in computerised leisure pursuits today. In addition much leisure time will be spent in productive activities, such as gardening, making things and arts and crafts. And much will be spent reading, thinking and learning, and doing formal courses. We will have the time to work on the issues that are important in our personal development.

The community would be a spontaneous leisure resource. A walk around the town would involve one in conversation, observations of activities in familiar firms, farms and mini-factories, and the enjoyment of a beautifully gardened landscape. Contributing to working bees would be interesting. Then there would be the festivals, celebrations, concerts, visits, field days, and the mystery tours organised by the leisure committee. Obviously media could further enhance leisure etc. resources.

In these new enriched physical and cultural landscapes there would be far less interest in the purchase of leisure or entertainment services. People would be busy with interesting tasks and projects, especially gardening and crafts, and would be involved in many community activities.

We would have leisure and cultural committees working on organising a rich variety of interesting activities, including the festivals, talks, visits, field days, celebrations, hay rides, hikes, adventure and mystery tours, and the holiday ideas, such as the gypsy cart tour mentioned above. Thus it is likely that there would be far less desire than there is now to purchase leisure and entertainment, or to travel for leisure, let alone to travel overseas.

### **My household budget**

I do not go away for holidays, I don’t go out on weekends, and rarely go to a restaurant or movie. This is because I have (too) many interesting jobs and projects to do around the homestead. My circumstances would be greatly enriched if I had a thriving community full of expert craftspeople, artists, scholars, etc. and community activities, concerts, festivals etc. I have a long list of philosophical etc. questions I have been

mulling over for a lifetime waiting to find an expert willing to help me sort out. I don't think I would need to spend any dollars or energy on leisure or entertainment or cultural activities, apart from local library services (and web access if it is still there.)

## **ENERGY**

Clear and confident conclusions on this crucial topic cannot be offered at this stage. Firstly to summarise some of the above reasons why energy demand could be greatly reduced.

Far less energy would be required compared with the present. This would firstly be because we would be consuming far less, living in solar passive mud brick houses, recycling, getting to work on a bike, with close access to local sport, cultural and leisure facilities and therefore not traveling much for leisure, and we would be buying little that was imported. The total volume of production and consumption would be a small fraction of the present amount. Most of our economy would be localised, eliminating most travel to work and most transportation of goods. The reasons why the agricultural sector would use almost no non-renewable energy have been explained above.

Almost all energy would be produced locally, from windmills, watermills, garbage gas digesters, solar panels, and biomass sources of fuel and ethanol for vehicles. These sources would be augmented by some larger scale regional wind farms, PV and solar thermal fields, etc., and much reduced grids. Horses, mainly used for the small amount of ploughing and hauling, would also provide some recreational and routine transport functions, in a society where the pace was much more relaxed. Cooking would mostly use wood and biogas fuel from methane digesters taking wastes on their way to the gardens.

Solar passive earth-made buildings would eliminate most of the energy presently needed for heating, cooling and therefore air-conditioning. Stirling heat engines driven by solar reflectors or wood fuel would be power sources for some machinery (e.g., saw mills) and electricity generation. Most of the woodcutting, pumping, electric welding and freezer boosting would be carried out when the sun or wind was high. The many small local dams might enable most of the (much reduced) electricity storage required.

Extensive forests would permeate and surround our settlements, providing some energy including wood-fired electricity and small quantities of ethanol or methanol for transport. Candles and lanterns using bees' wax and vegetable oils would meet some lighting needs. (Candles are good light sources, e.g., can be reading lights, when backed by parabolic reflectors made from pieces of broken mirror.)

### **Electricity:**

I am not clear about the amount of electricity that it would make sense to import to the town from the national grid. Space heating and cooking are the problems. I use about .1 kWh of electricity a day, for lights, computer, workshop machinery, water pumps (and could also run a TV for another .05 kWh/d.). I estimate that for a family of four it might be .3 kWh/day, = 1.08 MJ/d = 394 MJ/y = 98 MJ/person/year. This assumes no ironing, electric floor polisher, or washing machine, and it does not include cooking. It does not include a fridge (presently I have a gas fridge but soon will have only an evaporative cooler that does not use artificial energy, for most of the year at least).

Pumped storage might be able to replace batteries for electricity storage, given the very low quantities required. The efficiency of the cycle is about the same, and settlements

would have many small dams and ponds.

In the town sawmilling, water pumping and boosting of community freezers would be carried out when the sun or wind was high. It could be that local solar panels and windmills could provide all electricity needed, although cooking and heat pumps might need more. Local pumped storage and maybe hydrogen storage (which is very inefficient) might be viable. However some dependence on national renewable energy sources coming in to the town via the old grid might be assumed.

### Cooking and heating:

These seem to set the main difficulties and uncertainties which later drafts of this document will seek to clarify. Firstly frugality and good design will make a big difference. We would have efficient wood stoves fitted with water jackets, (and contributing to space heating.) A small quantity of methane for quick convenient kettle boiling could come from community digesters taking biomass and wastes. (Possible quantity is uncertain yet.) Use of wood-fuelled private and communal earth ovens for the bi-weekly bake-up, especially making bread. Reduced meat consumption and increased use of fresh fruit, vegetables and salads would reduce cooking energy demand. Open-fire and slow combustion stove heating can also be used for cooking. Earth buildings are well insulated so will cut space heating demand dramatically.

On the global scale the supply of sufficient wood fuel is a problem, if the goal is provide all heating and cooking energy from it. A very uncertain estimate from my (inefficient) open fire indicates the need for 10 kg of wood per household per winter day, for space heating and all cooking and water heating (i.e., wash up, shower, via water jacket). This would be 45 MJ/person/day, or 16.4 GJ/year, or .9 tonne of wood. (This corresponds to 18 kWh per household per day. For a world of 10 billion this would correspond to 160 EJ/y, or the equivalent of 34% of present total world energy. Given very fast growing trees (wattles where I live), that is assuming 13 tonnes/ha/y growth/harvest, the 8 billion tonnes of wood would require 680 million ha of land, which is a problem. However much/most of the trees could be grown on areas also used for other purposes, such as grazing underneath, water catchment, protecting shade-needy crops, non-plantation trees dotted into gardens and landscapes. (I can run my fire on self-planted random wattles that come up here and there.) So that 680 million ha might be feasible given that it largely replaces coal, oil and gas energy and their heavy demands on the environment, and much of it is also serving other purposes.

Note however that we would also want to use biomass for (small quantities of) liquid fuel, and this is a land-hungry fuel. If the world could find 500 million ha for biomass energy production (and it shouldn't), that might produce  $500m \times 7 \text{ tonnes/ha/y} \times 7 \text{ GJ/t} = 25 \text{ EJ/y}$  of ethanol = 2.6 GJ/y per capita in a world of 10 billion. Australian total energy use p.a. is nearing 300 GJ/person/y, and transport energy is 60 GJ/person/p.a. 23 times as much as 500 million ha would permit.

However the use of electricity from local and distant wind and solar farms via remnant national grids would seem capable of significantly reducing the wood problem. It would seem plausible that if cooking and heat pump heating was largely performed by national and local electricity sources, (private house roof PV + community/public wind farms etc) the need for fuel wood might be cut to maybe one-third of the 16 GJ/person/year figure? (To be clarified.) Australia would need enough turbines to produce 5 GJ/person/year, i.e., 100 PJ/y, or 16% of present electricity consumption. This might require 8,500 1.5 MW turbines (averaging 12 TJ/y each.) The capital cost would not be

a problem; 8,500 x \$3 million over a 25 year turbine life = c. \$1 billion pa. (The actual cost would be considerably higher if the formidable storage, intermittency and redundancy issues were dealt with.)

Hydrogen produced from surplus wind and solar energy seems not to be a viable option for very large scale energy supply, but for the settlements we are considering it might be, again keeping in mind the very low need for liquid or gaseous fuel for transport, and the scarcity of wood fuel.

The uncertain interim conclusions arrived at from the above estimates of the few (but major) quantifiable items, for per capita energy use, are:

<u>Embodied energy costs</u> (of quantifiable items)	<u>Per Capita</u>
House	125 MJ/y
Tools	400 MJ/y
<u>Running energy costs</u>	
Travel	1,648 MJ/y
Electricity	
Lighting etc.,	96 MJ/y
	From the national/regional grid (cooking and heating);
Assume 3kWh/household/day (??)	3,450 MJ/y
Wood 5 GJ/y per household/year	1,250 MJ/y
<hr/>	
TOTAL:	6,969 MJ/y

Many items would need to be added to this total, especially for production of imports to the town and their transport, production of buses, bicycles, railways used, regional and national government...and the within-town items not quantified above, incl. health, law, welfare, pets, education...) So it is not possible to be confident about a final figure. However 2011 Australian per capita average energy consumption is approaching 300,000 MJ/y. So if my all-inclusive per capita total was 15,000 MJ/y, i.e., twice the above total, it would be about 5% of the national average.

**Footprint estimation: A note**

Chapter 4 of my book, *The Transition to a Sustainable and Just World* (2010), details derivation of a footprint figure, for a town of 1000 people, given various assumptions re grain, wool, timber, dairy etc. production and consumption per capita p.a. The figure arrived at is .25 ha per capita. In view of items not included this might be doubled; it would then be about 6% of the present Australian figure of 8 ha.

**Dollar cost conclusion**

At this stage an annual per capita dollar cost can't be estimated at all satisfactorily. However, for the above items it would seem to be well under \$100/person/week, or \$5,000/person/y. This is under 10% of the average Australian wage. Several significant items would have to be added in a thorough accounting, including health and accidents, insurance, children, rates and taxes, although these could be paid by additional contributions to working bees, avoiding the need to earn money. Thus some people might be able to live well without earning any money at all. For most people one or two days a week working for money might be the norm.

### **Too austere?**

Of course the level of 'austerity' described here would not be acceptable to most people today. But if we raised children in communities of the kind described they would grow up finding these new ways and activities to be sources of interest and enjoyable activity. A major task for us in the transition period is to show that these ways are more rewarding than those of the consumer-capitalist rat race promises.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The Simpler Way makes possible enormous reductions in resource consumption. Consider the following:

- The industries we can phase out. Sports cars, speed boats, florists (we will live in gardens), advertising, bottled water, fashion industry, car racing, gladiatorial sport, precious metals and gems – and no military expenditure, because we will be living in ways that do not require taking more than our fair share of world resources.
- The industries we could greatly reduce. We would need little, shipping, aircraft, lawn mowers, pesticides, fertilisers, finance industry, tourism, packaging, agribusiness, trucks, insurance, IT, heavy machinery, roads and freeways, courts, prisons, police, counseling and psychiatric services, drug and alcohol and eating disorder treatment, road accident emergency hospital wards etc.
- The savings from reorganising, e.g., when food is produced locally we do not need trucks and ships to bring it to us, or downsizing, e.g., smaller houses. When people are active citizens rather than sitting in front of the TV, many services are performed without expensive corporate or professional suppliers.
- The reduced need for effort to fix the damage caused by ecological and social breakdown, including the reduced need for law, health care, courts and prisons, care for mental illness and depression etc. being caused, and weapons given that there would be no need for war to secure your empire!
- The overhead costs presently loaded on everything purchased, for example in the form of advertising, insurance, interest on borrowed capital, outrageous CEO salaries, consultancies, bank fees, products not made to last, lawyers fees, etc.
- The bureaucracy, systems, professionals, offices, consultancies, computers, suits...we would not need if local networks informally and voluntarily organised provision of many local goods and services, including much food, aged care, nursing, maintenance of energy and water etc. infrastructure, entertainment, R and D, etc.

Also, consider the greatly increased "spiritual" productive capacity that The Simpler Way harnesses, the enthusiasm, time, energy, conscientiousness, thinking and innovation that comes from happy, secure, cooperative citizens in control of their situation, eager to join working bees proud of their communities. Again compare with the apathy and TV watching stupification that goes with stressed, competitive individuals isolated in their private houses and having little or nothing to do with their community. Much development, administration, fixing, giving, innovation and cohesion-

building would take place with no dollar or resource cost, as committees, working bees and spontaneous discussion and action attended to local tasks, getting a lot of “work” done by human energy.

**So there is a preliminary case for thinking that we could enjoy idyllic living conditions on around 10% of present per capita dollar costs, footprint area, and energy costs – but only if we accepted a transition to very different ways of living.**

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