

LifeStyle Simplification

Lab



ICA at Greensboro
Workbook Series

Volume 2

October, 1993

**A Challenge
to
People in Affluent Countries**

How can the people of today's industrial center live up to their exemplary role for the developmental process of the industrial periphery, as well as of the poor countries that have not even started the transitional process to an industrial society? What changes in their political, social, economic, and moral thinking, in their life-style and in their technology, are required, so that the affluent and powerful will adequately perform their role-model function, and thus assume their responsibility for a sustainable development of the entire world?

Eduard Pestel
Beyond Limits to Growth
A Report to the Club of Rome
1989



This Booklet Provides ...

- ** Procedures and worksheets for the two workshops of the LifeStyle Simplification Lab developed by the ICA at Greensboro.**
- ** Selected readings on the topic which set the context for LifeStyle Simplification in the Twentieth Century.**
- ** A bibliography of relevant publications for further reading.**
- ** Space for taking notes, thinking and doodling.**
- ** An address to contact for further information about LifeStyle Simplification.**

This workbook is designed to be used by groups of people interested in LifeStyle Simplification. After each exercise, space is provided for making notes on the conversations in which individuals share their personal insights. People using this workbook by themselves can use these spaces to document their reflections on the previous sections.



A Simpler Life

"The simple life is not simple -- either to define or to live. There is no universal formula or convenient checklist that specifies what is simple and what is not. The meaning of simple living can never be precisely stated because it is not a single idea. Rather it is an imprecise label used to refer to one or several different attitudes, ideas, and beliefs.

What unifies these attitudes is the conscious desire to purge life of some of its complexities and superfluties in order to pursue 'higher' values -- faith, family, civic duty, artistic creativity, and social service.

The nature and extent of simplicity vary greatly from individual to individual and from era to era. As a way station between too little and too much, the ethic encompasses a wide spectrum of motives and behavior, a spectrum bounded on one end by religious asceticism and on the other by refined gentility. In between there is much room for individual expression. There is no simple life as such that can be universally prescribed or adopted, only an array of different patterns of living that in their own context are considered "simpler" than other ways of life."

David Shi

In Search of the Simple Life

"Simplicity is not an escape from responsibility, but a discovery of a new and deeper responsibility."

Arthur Gish

"Questions and Answers"
In Search of the Simple Life

Changing Consumption Patterns

The major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, particularly in the industrialized countries. Excessive demands and unsustainable lifestyles among the richer segments of humanity place immense stress on the environment. The poorer segments, meanwhile, are unable to meet food, health-care, shelter and educational needs. This pattern, which aggravates poverty in the world, is a matter of grave concern.

We must examine the demand for natural resources generated by unsustainable consumption and seek ways of using resources that minimize depletion and reduce pollution.

We must consider the need for new concepts of wealth and prosperity, which allow higher standards of living through changed lifestyles and are less dependent on the Earth's finite resources and more in harmony with the Earth's carrying capacity.

Excerpted from the Earth Summit's *Agenda For Change* (plain language version of Agenda 21). The Centre for Our Common Future, 52, rue des paquis, 1201 Geneva, Switzerland

A Global Ethic

We must strive for a just social and economic order, in which everyone has an equal chance to reach full potential as a human being. We must speak and act truthfully and with compassion, dealing fairly with all, and avoiding prejudice and hatred. We must move beyond the dominance of greed for power, prestige, money, and consumption to make a just and peaceful world.

Earth cannot be changed for the better unless the consciousness of individuals is changed first. We pledge to increase our awareness by disciplining our minds, by meditation, by prayer, or by positive thinking. Without risk and a readiness to sacrifice there can be no fundamental change in our situation. Therefore we commit ourselves to this global ethic, to understanding one another, and to socially-beneficial, peace-fostering, and nature-friendly ways of life.

We invite all people, whether religious or not, to do the same.

Excerpted from *A Global Ethic*, written at the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A. Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, P.O. Box 1630, Chicago, Ill., 60690, U.S.A.

Process for

Articulating The Context For LifeStyle Simplification

Take 5 half sheets of paper and number them 1-5.

Take a few minutes, and by yourself, quietly write words and phrases which, for you respond to each of the questions on the following page. Write neatly so someone else can read your writing.

Group Sharing

Sort the answer papers by number. (All 1's together, etc)
Divide into 5 small groups of 3-4. Give each group one of the piles of papers. Each group should:

Look for repetitions in the responses. Group similar responses into a few categories. Give concrete examples.

Discuss and (if time allows) write up the responses into a concise paragraph. Select a group reporter.

Plenary

How did you group the responses?

What were the dominant themes in your group's responses?

Give some concrete examples.

Overall Reflection

Where are you on this journey? Just starting? A long way?

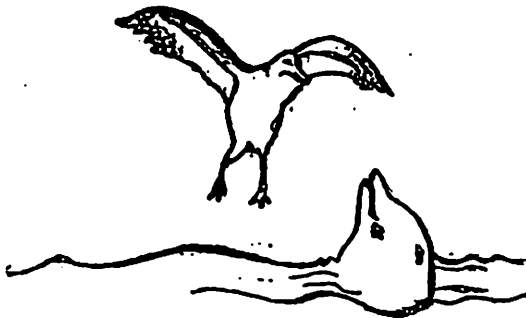
What is your story that keeps you on the journey?

Who are some of your fellow colleagues?

What is your next step?

Questions To Ask Yourself

1. What pressures/experiences raise the question of LifeStyle Simplification for you or people you know?
2. What data/facts/statements come to mind when you think about LifeStyle Simplification?
3. What are some positive images/examples of a simpler lifestyle?
4. What are the issues/blocks/difficulties that people face when they try to live a simpler lifestyle?
5. What clues/advice do you have about effective lifestyle simplification?



"There are two ways to get enough: one is to continue to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less."

G. K. Chesterton
from *Freedom of Simplicity*
by Richard J. Foster

"The wildfire advance of the consumer lifestyle around the globe marks the most rapid and fundamental change in day-to-day existence the human species has ever experienced. Over a few short generations, we in the affluent fifth of humanity have become car drivers, television watchers, mall shoppers and throwaway buyers.

The tragic irony is that while the consumer society has been stunningly effective in harming the environment, it has failed to provide us with a sense of fulfillment. Consumerism has hoodwinked us into gorging on material things because we suffer from social, psychological and spiritual hungers.

Yet the opposite -- extreme poverty -- may be even worse for the human spirit and devastates the environment too, as hungry peasants put forests to the torch and steep slopes to the plow.

If the Earth suffers when people have either too little or too much, the questions arise: How much is enough? What level of consumption can the planet support? When do more things cease to add appreciably to human life?"

Alan Durning
How Much is Enough

Notes on Group Discussion



Notes on the Plenary Conversation

The Boundaries of Enough

Only by determining, in advance, what is Enough, can one ever be satisfied. The worksheet on the next page provides spaces for listing what, for you, is Enough and what is Too Much in the three categories of Stuff, Relationships and Knowledge. This chart requires bold, imaginative thinking and visioning in tension with a realism which honors both the individual's perspective and the global ecosystem.

Like all of the exercises in this book, this one is best done in pencil to simplify the process of changing your mind as the work progresses. On the chart you can use pictures or words. It may be helpful to list sets of responses -- i.e. 1 TV is enough, 3 is too many but 0 is not enough.

After a few years, review the boundaries you used on this worksheet:

Have you reached what you said was Enough?

Are you satisfied with what is Enough?

Have you gone over into Too Much?

Is it time to simplify back into Enough?

Have new dimensions opened up where the boundary between Enough and Too Much must be established?



**Process for
Completing the
Boundaries of Enough Chart**
(Chart on the following page)

1. List 3-4 categories of "Stuff" that are a part of your LifeStyle -- such as: Furniture, Clothes, Electronics.
2. List 3-4 categories of "Relationships" that are a part of your LifeStyle -- such as: Organizational membership/participation, Telephone conversations and Letters written.
3. List 3-4 categories of "Knowledge/Experiences" that are a part of your LifeStyle -- such as: Conferences, Publications and Travel.
4. Spend a few minutes jotting down what is "Enough" for you in each category, what is "Too much", and what is "Not Enough".
5. Look at your work and write the "Criteria" you used in deciding the boundaries.
6. At the bottom of the chart, write the overall values you used in deciding "What is Enough".

The Boundary
For

Prepared on: _____

	Not Enough	Enough
Stuff		
Relationships		
Knowledge		
Overall Values		

ies of Enough
Me

	Too Much	Criteria

As you look back over the previous worksheet, where do you see your personal opinions shifting. In the spaces below make notes on these changes. Indicate ideas/values/behaviors that are moving **from** one perspective **to** another. On the following page note elements of your new self-story which is emerging.

Notes on the Group's Conversations

From

To

Elements of the
New Story
which is emerging .



Misconceptions about the Simple Life

Some people tend to equate ecological living with a life characterized by poverty, antagonism to progress, rural living, and the denial of beauty. It is important to acknowledge these misconceptions so we can move beyond them.

Impoverished Living

Although some spiritual traditions have advocated a life of extreme renunciation, it is inaccurate to equate simplicity with poverty...Poverty is very different from "simplicity." Poverty is involuntary and debilitating, whereas simplicity is voluntary and enabling. Poverty is mean and degrading to the human spirit, whereas a life of conscious simplicity can have both a beauty and a functional integrity that elevates the human spirit. Involuntary poverty generates a sense of helplessness, passivity, and despair, whereas purposeful simplicity fosters a sense of personal empowerment, creative engagement, and opportunity. Historically those choosing a simpler life have sought the golden mean - a creative and aesthetic balance between poverty and excess. Instead of placing primary emphasis on material riches, they have sought to develop, with balance, the invisible wealth of experiential riches.

If the human family sets a goal for itself of achieving a moderate standard of living for everyone, computer projections suggest that the world could reach a sustainable level of economic activity that is roughly "equivalent in material comforts to the average level in Europe in 1990." If we do not delay but act with decision and determination, then humanity need not face a future of poverty and sacrifice. The earth can sustain a moderate and satisfying material standard of living for the entire human family.

Turning Away from Progress

Ecological living does not imply turning away from economic progress; rather it seeks to discover which technologies are most appropriate and helpful in moving toward a sustainable future. Ecological living is not a path of "no growth" but a path of "new growth" that includes both material and spiritual dimensions of life. A simple way of life is not a retreat from progress; in fact it is essential to the advance of civilizations. After a lifetime of study of the rise and fall of the world's civilizations, historian Arnold Toynbee concluded that the measure of a civilization's growth was not to be found in the conquest of other people or in the possession of land. Rather he described the essence of growth in what he called the Law of Progressive Simplification. True growth, he said, is the ability of a society to transfer increasing amounts of energy and attention from the material side of life to the nonmaterial side and thereby to advance its culture, capacity for compassion, sense of community, and strength of democracy. We are now being pushed by necessity to discover freshly the meaning of "true growth" by progressively simplifying the material side of our lives and enriching the nonmaterial side.

Rural Living

In the popular imagination there is a tendency to equate the simple life with Thoreau's cabin in the woods by Walden Pond and to assume that people must live an isolated and rural existence. Interestingly, Thoreau was not a hermit during his stay at Walden Pond. His famous cabin was roughly a mile from the town of Concord, and every day or two he would walk into town. His cabin was so close to a nearby highway that he could smell the pipe smoke of passing travelers. Thoreau wrote that he had "more visitors while I lived in the woods than any other period of my life."

The romanticized image of rural living does not fit the modern reality, as a majority of persons choosing a life of conscious simplicity do not live in the backwoods or rural settings; they live in cities and suburbs. While ecological living brings with it a reverence for nature, this does not require moving to a rural setting. Instead of a "back to the land" movement, it is more accurate to describe this as a "make the most of wherever you are" movement.

Denial of Beauty

The simple life is sometimes viewed as a primitive approach to living that advocates a barren plainness and denies the value of beauty and aesthetics. While the Puritans, for example, were suspicious of the arts, many other advocates of simplicity have seen it as essential for revealing the natural beauty of things. Many who adopt a simpler life would surely agree with Pablo Picasso, who said that "art is the elimination of the unnecessary." The influential architect Frank Lloyd Wright was an advocate of an "organic simplicity" that integrates function with beauty and eliminates the superfluous. In his architecture a building's interior and exterior blend into an organic whole, and the building, in turn, blends harmoniously with the natural environment. Rather than involving a denial of beauty, simplicity liberates the aesthetic sense of freeing things from artificial encumbrances. From a transcendental perspective, simplicity removes the obscuring clutter and discloses the spirit that infuses all things.

It is important to acknowledge these misleading stereotypes because they suggest a life of regress instead of progress. These misconceptions make a simpler life seem impractical and unapproachable and thereby reinforce the feeling that nothing can be done to respond to our critical world situation. To move from denial to action, we need an accurate understanding of the nature of simpler living and its relevance for the modern era.

Excerpted from *Voluntary Simplicity (Revised Edition)*
Duane Elgin

Programs of the ICA at Greensboro

In an effort to bring awareness of the need for the industrialized world to reduce its consumption, and to give permission to every individual to make new decisions about their possessions and relationships in a global context, the ICA at Greensboro conducts a series of LifeStyle Simplification programs. These are not *how to* programs but are *facilitated* in such a manner that individuals can become aware of their global interdependency and the planet's ecological plight and thus discover reasons for desiring a more simple life. After the facilitated program, members of the group meet to explore further resources, share their own practices and build future action plans. Together they discover not only "how much is enough" for them but "how much is enough" for everyone to not only survive but thrive.

Assistance in planning and/or facilitating Lifestyle Simplification programs can be received by contacting:

**Elaine and Nelson Stover
ICA at Greensboro
5911 Western Trail
Greensboro, NC 27410
USA**

Phone: (910) 605-0143

Development and marketing of the LifeStyle Simplification Programs is conducted in cooperation with ICA:East, a network of skilled facilitators committed to --

- ▶ Empowering people to be a part of solving their own problems,
- ▶ Working toward making communities good places to live,
- ▶ Fulfillment and significant engagement for everyone,
- ▶ Participation as a way of working toward a better world, and
- ▶ Changing behavior through changing images.

LifeStyle Simplification Resources

1. ***What is Enough -- Fulfilling Lifestyles for a Small Planet***, Issue # 26 of *In Context* Quarterly

Includes the latest thinking by a broad spectrum of writers on the theory and practice of conscious, value-based consumption. Included are "Pogonomics" by Joe Dominquez and "50 Simple Things You Can Do Instead of Shopping" by Vicki Robin.

\$6.00 for single issue from Context Institute, Box 11470, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110 *In Context* is an outstanding source of the latest thinking on sustainability. Subscriptions are \$24 for one year (four issues).

2. ***Voluntary Simplicity (Revised Edition)*** by Duane Elgin. A bestseller. Order from Knowledge Systems, 7777 West Morris St., Indianapolis, IN 46321.

Tells about a new way of life of intentional simplicity as a first step toward personal and planetary revitalization. By embracing the tenets of voluntary simplicity (conscious choice) -- frugal consumption, ecological behavior and personal growth - - many have changed their lives, and may even be changing our world.

3. ***How Much is Enough? Consumer Society and the Future of the Earth*** by Alan Durning, 1992. Available from Worldwatch Institute, 1776 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20036.

The consumer lifestyle, as well as the opposite extreme -- poverty are detrimental to the human spirit as well as devastating the environment. If the Earth suffers when people have either too little or too much, the questions arise: How much is enough? What level of consumption can the planet support? When do more things cease to add appreciably to human life? We can curtail our use of ecologically destructive things and cultivate the deeper, non-material sources of fulfillment that bring happiness: family and social relationships, meaningful work, and leisure.

4. *Freedom of Simplicity* by Richard J. Foster, 1981, author of *Celebration of Discipline*. Harper and Row, publishers, San Francisco.

Articulates a creative, more human style of living and points the way for Christians to make their lives "models of simplicity." Foster provides a way to rethink our priorities. He shows us how to live in harmony with the rich complexity of life while stressing the relation of simplicity to prayer, solitude and all Christian disciplines.

5. *How Earth-Friendly Are You? A Lifestyle Self-Assessment Tool*.

The media is filled with assessments of the state of the planet, but perhaps what is needed most is a thorough assessment of ourselves. Created by the New Road Map Foundation, this questionnaire gives you the opportunity to examine your lifestyle choices in the context of personal values and planetary sustainability. Eye-opening and fun.

28 pages. Excellent for groups. Order from Quality Tape Services, PO Box 15352, Seattle, WA 98115.

6. *Beyond the Limits -- Confronting Global Collapse, Envisioning a Sustainable Future* by Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers. Sequel to the international bestseller *The Limits to Growth*, published in 1972. Chelsea Green Publishing, Post Mills, Vermont.

The authors help us to confront the *possibility* of global collapse in order to envision the *possibility* of a sustainable future. They use World3, their system dynamics computer model, as a unique tool to see far into the next century. By varying the basic global policy assumptions that go into the model, they are able to show a range of outcomes, from collapse to sustainability.

7. *In Search of the Simple Life -- American Voices, Past and Present*, Edited by David E. Shi, Gibbs Smith, publisher, 1986.

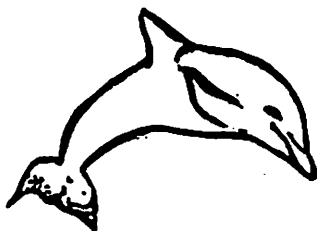
Selected writings from John Winthrop, Thomas Jefferson, Henry David Thoreau, Lewis Mumford, Scott and Helen Nearing, Wendell Berry and Gary Snyder. An inspiring, thought-provoking, enlightening collection. This book powerfully demonstrates that American materialism has always been paralleled by an idealism whose practical realism is becoming ever clearer in a time of ecological disorder.

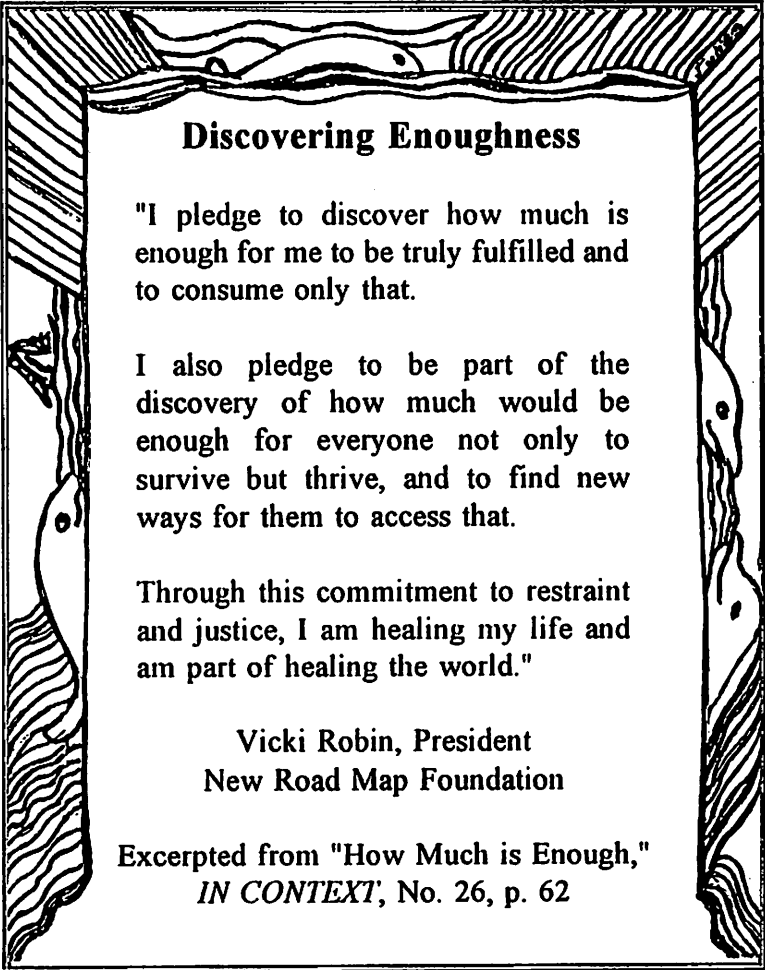
8. ***Your Money or Your Life -- Transforming Your Relationship with Money and Achieving Financial Independence*** by Joe Dominquez and Vicki Robin, Viking/Penguin, 1992.

Allows us to take a close look at our attitudes and habits about money. Learn what money really is and how to consciously track, evaluate and direct the flow of money in your life. Learn to integrate your values, purpose and goals with your patterns of earning and spending -- as you plot a practical path from where you are to where you want to be.

9. ***Simple Living -- One Couple's Search for a Better Life*** by Frank Levering and Wanda Urbanska, Penguin Books, 1993.

The story of one couple's decision to give up life in the fast lane in Los Angeles to run a family orchard in the Blue Ridge Mountains. An intelligent, inspiring guide for others who would also choose to make their lives contain less and matter more. It is a memoir chronicling a shift to a simpler, more satisfying life.





Discovering Enoughness

"I pledge to discover how much is enough for me to be truly fulfilled and to consume only that.

I also pledge to be part of the discovery of how much would be enough for everyone not only to survive but thrive, and to find new ways for them to access that.

Through this commitment to restraint and justice, I am healing my life and am part of healing the world."

Vicki Robin, President
New Road Map Foundation

Excerpted from "How Much is Enough,"
IN CONTEXT, No. 26, p. 62

Cover design by Ellen Howie
Interior art work by Julia Steingold
Workshops created by Elaine and Nelson Stover

To Run Joyfully Into The World

As a child, I thought simplicity meant
doing without,
starting from scratch,
bare floors,
hard benches,
plain speech,
dull colors.

As I grow older, simplicity becomes a question of:
how to live
on this planet
so that all
life can be
nurtured;

how to redesign what we
live in,
drive in,
dress in,
eat from,
throw away;

how to choose what we put into
our mouths,
the air,
the water,
our lawns to make them green;

how to quiet our minds, so we can
center,
listen,
lift those who are falling,
deal with greed and fear,
envision community,
run joyfully into the world.

SIMPLE GIFTS

'Tis a gift to be simple, 'tis a gift to be free,
'Tis a gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.

When true simplicity is gained,
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed.
To turn, turn will be our delight,
'Till by turning, turning we come 'round right.

American Shaker Tune

Additional copies of this workbook are available from:



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