

# True wealth isn't something you will find in your wallet

by Ted Slavin

I am certainly no expert on addictions, but I know enough to recognize the monkey on my back. My vice came to me at a tender age and it will likely stay with me for many years to come, but the first time I really noticed it was the year Lindsay and I moved to Quebec.

I'd just landed a job in nearby Ottawa, but paying off our debts meant that we were on a strict budget.

One December morning, I arrived outside the office with my co-workers to find that the previous night's freezing rain had covered and seeped into the door locks, meaning we had some time to kill while they thawed. Instinctively, we walked to the Rideau Centre mall and that's where the wave overtook me.

The notion began soft and gentle as I passed through Sears, doing a little shuffle to Seals and Crofts' Summer Breeze, but making my way onto the mezzanine turned the soothing waters into the storm.

Signs everywhere trumpeted sales -- beautiful things, electronics, gadgets, clothes, books, all ready for the taking and welcoming me to put it on credit until sometime next summer when, surely, the joy of having the stuff had long outlived any pains in paying for it.

Our strict budget had meant that we had only been buying necessity items for the past several months. A vision of extravagance stood before me. I felt the urge to buy, accompanied by childhood mall memories when my parents were there to buy something special or, even better, buy something special for me.

Thoughts of how I could rationalize any purchase came easily in the form of, "Go ahead, you've worked hard; you deserve it."

Fortunately for my credit rating, the temptation subsided -- but not before succumbing to the call of a chai latte.

It was after that morning that I began to pay more attention to my feelings, realizing with time that the impulse to buy is considered a natural way of life for our society.

For example, my attraction toward the latest electronic gadgets is an irresistible urge for others. Acting on the compulsion of having the latest technology on the market can become a costly hobby, but many of us have relied on credit cards and loans to buy whatever we want, whenever we want.

So, with all this stuff-buying going on, who is to say when we've bought enough? And how is it that we've come to identify progress and prosperity with endlessly rising levels of purchases? Though we may feel entitled to fulfilling our wants as we can (or can't) afford them, we can remember that humanity is one family. In our family, many suffer a severe lack of basic needs while the wants of others are being met in over abundance.

Check out the following contrasts: basic education for all would cost \$10 billion, yet \$82 billion is spent annually on cigarettes in the United States alone.

The eradication of world hunger requires \$30 billion though the world military budget in 2008 reached

\$1.55 trillion.

Consumerism, as fundamental as it is to the current economic system, is simply not sustainable. I'm not a fan of those who choose to buy next to nothing and I'm certainly not going to stop gazing at gadgets, and even buying one once in a while.

Still, what I would like to offer is a suggestion to rethink what it really means to be prosperous. Where does the wealth of an individual or family lie? What makes one wealthy?

True wealth, when put in this light, may prove more enlightening to think about and will certainly be a nobler idea when compared with the version of wealth with a wallet attached to it.