

The background of the image is a dark blue and purple night sky filled with numerous white stars of varying sizes. In the foreground, there is a silhouette of a forest of evergreen trees. The overall aesthetic is serene and celestial.

# TOPIC OF THE WEEK

MAY'19 (16 to 22 May)

## **Materialism: More than meets the eye**

On the deepest dive ever made by a human inside a submarine, a Texas investor and explorer found something he could have found in the gutter of nearly any street in the world: trash. Victor Vescovo, a retired naval officer, said he made the unsettling discovery as he descended nearly 6.8 miles (35,853 feet/10,928 meters) to a point in the Pacific Ocean's Mariana Trench that is the deepest place on Earth. His dive went 52 feet (16 meters) lower than the previous deepest descent in the trench in 1960. Vescovo found undiscovered species as he visited places no human had gone before. On one occasion he spent four hours on the floor of the trench, viewing sea life ranging from shrimp-like arthropods with long legs and antennae to translucent "sea pigs" similar to a sea cucumber. It was the third time humans have dived to the deepest point in the ocean, known as Challenger Deep. Canadian moviemaker James Cameron was the last to visit in 2012 in his submarine, reaching a depth of 35,787 feet (10,908 meters).

Today, we all are surrounded by advertisements on television, radio and the Internet encouraging us to want things. Advertisers would have us believe our lives are deficient and impoverished without their products – even though by comparison to much of the rest of the world, we in the United States already live like kings and queens. We live in a materialistic society, but seriously, an excess of material goods does not bring the sort of long-term contentment, that genuine feeling of satisfaction and peace, that is the foundation for a happy life. For rich and poor alike, the desire to have more, newer, better, fancier stuff seems to be a fact of human nature. So it is important to know and understand that the unceasing pursuit of material goods can destroy one's sense of contentment.

**One of the saints once said:**

*“Wealth is not in having vast riches, it is in contentment.”*

Today, messages about contentment surround us. Storefronts, billboards, and commercials tell us we need things to be happy. The first step in seeking contentment is understanding our desires and purpose. The Christian

believes we were made for God. Some religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, suggest that desire is the explanation for all human suffering. But Christians believe the problem is found not in desire itself but in the human heart. Our hearts seek the fulfillment of our desires in all the wrong places. According to the Bible, in the beginning, humanity was perfectly content because humanity was in perfect communion with God. In reality, Adam's problem had nothing to do with what he actually lacked; it was about what Adam perceived he lacked. Indeed, the nature of our problem as sinners is that we do not properly perceive our problem.

We live in a world surrounded by and composed of matter. It is natural; therefore, that we may become distracted from spiritual or intellectual pursuits by material possessions, but this is frequently where problems occur. We can become obsessed by a desire to obtain them, or simply frustrated by the need to maintain them. Here comes the term Materialism, which can also refer to a doctrine that material success and progress are the highest values in life. This doctrine appears to be prevalent in western society today. Materialism as a philosophy is held by those who maintain that existence

is explainable solely in material terms, with no accounting of spirit or consciousness. Individuals who hold to this belief see the universe as a huge device held together by pieces of matter functioning in subjection to naturalistic laws. Since materialism denies all concepts of Special Creation, it relies on the Theory of Evolution to explain itself, making beliefs in materialism and evolution interdependent.

The effects of materialism are similar to brainwashing. They have undermined any personal responsibility by claiming that thought is dictated biologically and by environment. A materialistic society can be especially effective if it is a governmental tenet as well. For instance, some of the oppressed countries under the strictest rule of Communism mandated its citizens to disband all formal and public forms of Spiritual worship. Day after day Materialism is getting deep rooted in our society. The pursuit of everyone's dream has become rather costly in that it is fraught with a large quantity of material possessions. The increase in high tech, computerized, and digitized devices in the areas of electronics and household appliances has altered the landscape of almost every home and family.

Personal satisfaction and greed are the most important aspects of life of the society driven by materialism. Many people echo the sentiment that the real cause of the economic problems that has hit the world is the greed caused by materialism. The real problem may not be so simple but it could be one of the reasons. Here the greed is not only confined to acquisition of money but also power. Where there is power, corruption is bound to happen. Materialism promotes many other negative feelings as well like lust, selfishness, jealousy, sense of hopelessness, etc. People are forgetting their moral values and often fail to understand the distinction between right choices and the wrong ones. The only thing that matters is good quality life and false comforts. They think that everything around them is dictated by need of humans and is being provided by the environment. All their beliefs are based on scientific inference only. The worst of all they have lost faith in God as they refuse to believe in anything that we cannot see or hear or touch. As a result, they remain unrepentant after committing sin. Thus materialism has adversely affected the entire framework of our society.

The constant desire for stuff is what drives our global economy - and many suffer because of it. The environment suffers as well. The cost of goods for many of us is not the issue, but the true cost to the environment is one that cannot be labeled with a price tag. As cute, awesome or impressive the item is, it costs human labor, water, fossil fuels to manufacture and transport it. The outcome, aside from owning this cute, awesome or impressive item is increased pollution, destruction of precious land, harmful working conditions. No matter who you are, or how much money you have - the things you buy have an effect on you, your environment, and the unseen people in far off lands who are connected to those things through manufacturing, production, packaging and transportation. The bright light at the end of this often dim tunnel is that there are ways to live in abundance of everything you need. How good it feels to live free of destroying your own home? Be excited, with a small mental shift, and few small actions, you can help to avoid over-consumption, help the environment, and return to a slightly more blissful existence free of clutter, both mental and physical.

As we all know everything has two aspects of its- same is in this case. Studies show how materialism is perceived across cultures and it revealed that there is more to materialism than just self-gratification. In Asia, materialism is an important part of the “collectivistic” culture. Buying inspirational brands of goods and services is a common approach in the gift-giving traditions in East Asia. Across collectivistic communities, purchasing things that mirror the identity and style of people you regard as important can also help you to conform to social expectations that in turn blanket you with a sense of belonging. These behaviors are not unique to Asian societies. It’s just that the idea of materialism in the West is more often seen in sharp contrast to community values, rather than a part of it. We also found that materialists in general are “meaning-seekers” rather than status seekers. Materialists who also believe in community values use these cues to shed positive light onto themselves and others they care about, to meet social expectations, demonstrate belonging and even to fulfill their perceived social responsibilities. For example, people often flaunt their green and eco-friendly purchases of Tom’s shoes and



Tesla cars in public to signal desirable qualities of altruism and social concern.

Keeping all these views in our mind we can conclude that we can still mend our ways and move towards a beautiful world. For this, we have to look for a purpose in our life. Each individual has to make some changes in his outlook. We have to separate ourselves from material world. This will make us happy both with and without the material things that we desire. It will make us feel that "if I get that thing it's good but if I do not get that it's fine with me". It's not very easy for us to get this kind of mental set up but it is not an impossible task too.

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