

## What Is Voluntary Simplicity?

Voluntary simplicity, or simple living, is a lifestyle people decide to follow for many reasons, including improving their health, because they believe in social justice, or because they want to help save the planet and be more ecological. People who practise simple living consciously choose not to make money or the things that it can buy the most important priority in their life. People who decide to own and buy fewer things and to get rid of stuff they own are doing what is called “downshifting,” moving from a lifestyle of consuming toward a lifestyle based on voluntary simplicity.

People who practise voluntary simplicity try different ways to live without buying things or services. They believe that if they spend less money, they can spend less time earning money. This means that they will have more free time for voluntary activities such as helping their family and friends, or improving their own quality of life by, for example, creating art or exercising.

Advocates of voluntary simplicity criticize media advertising for encouraging people to constantly want to buy things. They often argue that reducing or eliminating television viewing is an important first step toward simple living. Some see the Internet, podcasting, community radio and pirate radio as alternatives to television, but others maintain that you can hear commercials there, too, and cutting back on all media is the best idea.

Voluntary simplicity is not a new concept. Two thousand years ago various Hindu groups in the Eastern world practised a voluntarily simplified spiritual lifestyle. Archaeologists and sociologists have found proof that many religious movements in the Middle East, Europe and Asia also adopted simple living. Abraham, Moses, Buddha, John the Baptist, Jesus and Muhammad all practised simple living, and many of their teachings recommend a lifestyle of voluntary simplicity to their followers.

Today there are many eco-anarchist groups in the United States and Canada who promote a lifestyle of simplicity. In North America, religious groups such as the Shakers, the Mennonites, the Amish and some Quakers have codes of conduct that exclude many forms of wealth and technology. The Quakers, in particular, believe that a person should live life simply in order to focus on what is most important and ignore or play down what is least important. Quakers believe that a person’s spiritual life and character are more important than the quantity of goods or amount of money possessed. They also believe that one should use resources, including money and time, in ways that are most likely to make life better for everyone, not just for yourself.