[**Living simply**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1696447/living-simply)

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IF the Covid-19 pandemic was a global malaise that brought the world together over the past three years, high inflation and inability to make ends meet by the have-nots is another integrating factor in 2022 and possibly beyond.

The poor, the salaried class and anyone not among the rich elite are finding it more and more difficult to meet daily expenses, including those for education and health. Purchasing power is down, unemployment is on the rise and the prices of essential items continue to increase.

It is in times like this that we — the relatively less poor — must turn to lessons from Islamic teachings and ponder over our roles; first in bringing the world to this state of affairs and second, to what we can do to redress the same.

As ordinary citizens, we may not have done much in the first case, but we can certainly act effectively to address the second. We have been extravagant and wasteful — that is, practising israf and tabdhir, both of which have been strongly condemned in the Quran. Surely, we see the consequences of inequitable sharing of resources and wasting what we have been endowed with here.

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Even if we cannot do much to reduce inflation except raise our voices, we can surely reduce excessive use of resources and share more of what we possess with the less advantaged.

The Quran urges balance in all things, including in lifestyles and spending patterns. To those with resources, God warns them that He loves neither misers nor spendthrifts (7:31; 3:180).

Moderation in consumption is what He would require of a believing Muslim, whether this be in terms of housing, food, clothes or other items (25:67). Compare this with our luxurious and overly decorated homes, lavish and multi-function weddings and feasts and other celebrations and laden wardrobes. One dare not mention here the level of expenditure by the rulers of some of our brotherly states.

Can we not decline to attend these obscene manifestations of worldly wealth? Can we not cut down on expensive meals and shopping?

When commodity prices shoot up, hoarders and profiteers spring into action, as do smugglers. Prices are increased artificially by holding back products in stock, as has been seen in the case of sugar and wheat in Pakistan. Goaded on by this, sellers of other consumer items jack up their prices. This is where relatively rich consumers can act by refusing to buy the overly costly items, at least for some time. We can also refrain from buying imported goods and branded items even if it affects our social status. It will not hurt if we consume less meat or sugary foods for a few weeks or even months. Indeed, this could lead to healthier Muslim nations.

Islam has allowed Muslims to possess beautiful things, wear them and to own wealth. Simultaneously, we are warned of the short-lived attractions of this world and the fact that we should focus on what is required of us to prepare for the Day of Judgement. As the Holy Book states: “What is the life of this world but play and amusement? But best is the home in the hereafter, for those who are righteous. Will you not then understand?” (6:32).

We need not become poor deliberately, but we should differentiate between our needs — that is, what we must have for basic and decent living, and our wants — that are primarily our desires. The latter are manifest in excessive eating, drinking, buying sprees and spending in expensive hotels etc. The more we cater to our wants, the less satisfied we become. Note the tendency of the rich to undertake expensive visits and medical treatment abroad.

There is much to learn from the life of the Prophet (PBUH). He was a man of wealth and could have acces­sed more resou­r­c­­es when he beca­­me ruler of Madina. Yet, it was rare for him and his household to have eaten a full meal. They often went hungry and his clothes, that he would mend himself, were patched; so were his shoes that he repaired. When he passed away, his possessions were few. He apparently said that simple living is a part of faith (Abu Dawud, 4161). Moreover, the four caliphs were rulers of vast lands but lived simply and served their people with great commitment.

Simple living is the need of these times. This also means that one uses and reuses what is owned already and donates generously. Giving should be such that the dignity of the receiver is maintained, as the Prophet is said to have asserted: “The left hand should not know what the right hand gives” (Bukhari).

Muslim communities have collectively known many trying times in both war and peace. This is one of them. Can we not rise to the need and do what is required to live our short lives more simply, less chained to materialism and free to develop our spirituality?

As Hazrat Umar is believed to have said: “The less of the world, the freer you live.”

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