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Healing the World Through Conscious Consumerism
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There is a current disconnect in our society between what we value and what we need to live on this planet - and it is evident locally, nationally, and globally. Our ideals have changed immensely in the past hundreds of years, beginning with small tribes that traded amongst themselves to global enterprises with little connection to or regard for their surrounding communities. This is consumerism. We are now a world that values profit, speed, and growth above all else. Many people are eating more and spending more, while others barely have enough to survive. Fast money, fast food, and fast fashion are all having a negative impact on our health and welfare, affecting us mentally and morally, while adding to climate change and threatening the future for our planet. In my ideal future, we slow down and learn to live more consciously.

Our greenhouse gas production has more than doubled in the past half a century, and one of the main reasons is livestock production. We are raising more animals and draining the world of more resources than it can sustain long term, which will have catastrophic consequences if not stopped immediately. We used to produce meat and dairy on sprawling green pastures, working in turn with the production of fruits, vegetables, and grains, creating a loop of sustainable agriculture. The demand for meat, and its profits, has shifted this natural cycle into one that is horrible for the environment, animals and workers involved. Livestock companies have done nothing but grown with time. Producers have not only found ways to increase meat yield per animal, but also milk per cow and egg per hen. These animals are confined, given antibiotics,

beaten, raped, tortured, and hooked up to machines all in the attempt to “feed the world”. People have never before consumed this much food, let alone meat. These cruel, archaic practices have led to an increase in obesity and higher greenhouse gas emissions. Many people overlook this sector of life and blame greenhouse gas production on transportation or packaging. In reality, “livestock production now contributes nearly 15% of global greenhouse gas emissions, even more than the transportation sector.” (Grain, 2017) This means that if people want to see our planet survive, and prevent the slaughter of billions of creatures per year, there needs to be a decrease in this sector of consumption.

Consumerism has also lead us to prefer fast fashion, when we buy clothing made to last weeks and then discard it without thought. These products are often made with plastics and chemicals, polluting our oceans and causing workers from countries with fewer worker protections to become severely ill. The rise of internet shopping has also led people to become disconnected from reality, affecting the health of the workers making our clothes as well as the livelihood of local retailers. An increase in major corporations - which value profit above all else, has created consumers who buy clothing because it's cheap, knowing next to nothing about the detrimental environmental effects of the clothing they purchase. This phenomenon is not about a few individuals; major data collectors have found significant impacts of fast fashion on our carbon emissions. One article wrote that “The fashion industry’s CO₂ emissions are projected to increase to nearly 2.8 billion tons per year by 2030 — equivalent to the emissions of 230 million passenger vehicles driven for a year.” (Global Fashion Agenda, 2017) Imagine that. It is shocking to know how much our consumerism contributes to global greenhouse gas production while consumers are not even aware of these consequences.

An ideal future could mean many things, but for me it means healing our planet through family and community, ending cruelty to all creatures, creating connections between all people and the earth, and living a more simplistic way of life. We need to act slower and more mindfully, thinking about the consequences of our lifestyle and purchases. We need to become conscious consumers. If we can do this, we will live with intention and gratitude for what we have.