



Dear friends,

17th January 2012

May I wish you a good 2012. As growing number of e-mails, letters and phone calls are reaching us, requesting help and assistance; I thought to write this letter.

In a capitalist world, influence is exercised in consumption and investment habits as much as through the political system we live in today. Recently I've been struggling with accepting even ethical consumption habits as a marker of identity and a form of commodity. Though my preference is practical, plain, modest and unremarkable form of "ethical" (local, organic, fair-trade etc.) goods, the fact that I make a conscious effort to consume in this way allows me to be identified by these choices. Nonetheless, I remain suspicious of the ethical consumer being a target market. Supermarkets utilise economies of scale, display goods in an organised manner and provide an impersonal shopping environment, which many of us sometimes prefer due to our hectic way of life.

An example of this is my attitude towards advertising. Advertising often exists to make us feel dissatisfied, so encouraging us to buy goods, we really do not need. Another issue which I have been considering in my spare time is that of International Aid. Not, this time, the best methods of delivering it, but whether it should be delivered at all. The ideology at present seems to be that because "we" are rich and "they" are poor, we ought therefore to use some of our wealth to help "them". (This is only a kind-hearted motive, e.g. Christmas shoebox appeal)

To our credit, the figures are quite convincing. We have higher life expectancy, higher literacy rates, higher GDP, etc., but I find myself beginning to question even the analysis. In my personal life I have occasionally had the pleasure of genuinely cheering someone up, making their day and giving them hope. Sometimes I did it unknowingly, but having fun, playing, listening, sympathising, as a pleasure and not a duty. Rather than "us" giving to "them", I would like there to be a more mutual interchange of cultures, experiences, values; less "what can we teach" and more "what can we learn" on our part.

We seem to learn best when we teach, perhaps it is in 2012 the time the "emerging economies" got a chance to teach us.

With Best Wishes

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