

Islam & Consumerism

As Muslims ever-increasingly find themselves surrounded by material goods, sales, gadgets and latest fashions, Dr. Hafiz Ather Hussain al-Azhari explores the Islamic perspective on consumerism.

It is now unfortunately a common occurrence. People of all ages are racking up huge credit card bills in their pursuit of the latest fashions and gadgets. Loan companies are making millions from consumers who prefer to buy first and suffer later. Christmas has become synonymous with shopping rather than religion. As one observer put it, people are now 'buying goods they don't want, for people they don't like, with money they don't have.'

Even the sales have an underlying message that helps to keep the 'haves' and 'have-nots' divided. For the entire year, ordinary people are bombarded with £2000 handbags and £300 shirts, as shown in the shop window and flaunted by celebrities. The sales is a small window of opportunity to attain this vain, false, celebrity lifestyle.

What does Islam say about consumerism? Is there any Islamic guidance on how to behave in the shop? Like with everything in life, only Islam has the answer. Allah and His Messenger ﷺ have tendered excellent advice on how to survive the consumer jungle.

i. Buy goods based on need, not greed

In the Holy Qur'an, Allah tells us not to spend wastefully (17:26), adding that such people are the '*brothers of the Shayṭān*' (17:27). For most part, the clothes we wear and the phones we have are more than sufficient for our ease. But it is the advertising industry that sometimes makes us think otherwise. They are constantly brainwashing us to think that the clothes we are wearing are last year's fashion and out-of-date. The mobile phone industry, with its constant updates

and newer models, are always convincing us that because we do not have the latest model, we are suffering. The whole idea of having the latest model is a myth. Retail experts themselves admit that if a person enters a computer shop and asks for the latest laptop to purchase, it is already old by the time he/she reaches home and opens the box. Another 'newer' model quickly replaces it.

Islam teaches us to base purchases on what we need, not necessarily what we desire. Like everything, money is a gift from Allah and should be used wisely. After all, Allah will ask us about how we spent it on the Day of Judgement.

ii. **Strike the right balance**

Allah says, '*And let not your hand be tied (like a miser) to your neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach...*' (17:29). In other words, Allah Almighty is asking us to strike right balance between over and under-spending. Indulgence in material goods whilst minimizing spending on health and education is damaging in the long run. A desire to 'look good' should not be preferred over the desire to 'feel good'. After all, Allah looks not at our outward appearances, but at the state of our hearts.

iii. **Never forget the currency of Allah**

We are sometimes lured into buying goods because of the attractive, reduced price. We persuade ourselves it is a worthwhile purchase because it is 'good value for money'. There is nothing wrong with this approach. But Islam asks us to find bargains in Allah's marketplace too. Compared to reading alone, congregational prayers are twenty-five times more rewarding, so why do we not see this as value? We do not think twice to pay up to £60 for a computer game, yet the same amount to purchase Islamic literature seems too dear.

iv. **Think like a *Faqīr***

Never show pride with the money you have. Even if you are billionaire, you are still only a destitute (*faqīr*) in the eyes of Allah. It is He that

has given us all. If we think in this manner, then we will never hesitate to spend in the path of Allah.

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