

LET THERE BE...STUFF? A SPIRIT-FILLED RESPONSE TO A CONSUMER-CRAZED WORLD

A Baha'i - inspired Program for Youth created by

www.storyofstuff.org

www.greenfaith.org

Story of Stuff Baha'i Team

2017, last update 2023

SESSION 4: Think ... Before You Buy!

These materials contain three main sections:

- * TO THE FACILITATORS: Explanations about how to facilitate Session 4.
- * SESSION 4 LESSON PLAN: A step by step guide through the session. Each activity is explained here.
- * SESSION 4 HANDOUTS: These are all the readings and materials that need to be copied for each participant. They will be used throughout the session as indicated in the Session 4 - Lesson Plan.

TO THE FACILITATORS

Overview

In Session 4, we explore the ways in which ads manipulate us into wanting things. We also learn that many things are designed to break, so we have to keep buying more new things. It will help the youth see through these manipulations and think for themselves so they can put their focus on the source of true happiness: their spiritual nature, their relationships with others and the Creator.

This session is an opportunity for teens to explore how consumerism affects their own attitudes and behaviors. It helps them understand that there is a whole industry that only sees them as consumers, and studies how to make advertising most appealing to young people. That industry is working hard to convince us to buy things we may not even need. You are inviting participants to look at the consumer society from a whole new perspective and that can be difficult. They might resist the idea that ads really influence them or that wanting and getting stuff isn't the source of true happiness.

You can help your group to see this by providing examples of times when you bought something because the ad looked so good and it turned into a big disappointment. It might have been poorly made, or sat in a box in the corner, or just didn't fill the longing for something to make you feel good. Be transparent about your own challenges, how you are also vulnerable to ads.

Goals

- Develop the *virtues contentment and detachment*.
- Reveal the ways in which we are manipulated by the media.
- Help us choose wisely and make responsible decisions.
- Help us understand our spiritual nature and what brings true happiness.
- Give less time to consuming things that use up natural resources, and more to things that really matter, such as learning, friendships, creative pursuits, and service.

Themes

Secular:

Our consumption habits are fueled by two sneaky concepts; perceived obsolescence and planned obsolescence.

- Perceived obsolescence is when we think our stuff is un-cool even when it works just fine.
- Planned obsolescence means it's so poorly made that it's "designed for the dump."

Spiritual:

Material things cannot provide us with true happiness, but we can find it in loving relationships, meaningful and creative activities, and service.

Materials for Session 4

Handouts copied *for each participant* which contain the Opening Prayer, Introduction, Spiritual Reading, Closing Prayer, and Action Plan. (Pages 7 - 10)

Your Session 1 Facilitator's notes about the Promises

Right Stuff Action Board poster to document actions taken after Session 3.

Session 4 The Story of Stuff video clip <http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/>

See To Do List right below for instructions.

Prayer "Blessed Is the Spot": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGe1w62zKzY>

Logos and Leaves papers (one print out only)

Popular magazines

Large piece of flip chart paper or whiteboard

Thick colored pens

Session 4 To Do List

Set up [The Story of Stuff](http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/) video clip cued:

- START at 10:10 ("And that brings us to ...")
- STOP at 16:46 ("And we could just stop.")

On your computer, open the video with the prayer "Blessed Is the Spot":
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGe1w62zKzY>

Copy the handouts for each participant which contain the Opening Prayer, Introduction, Spiritual Reading, Closing Prayer, and Action Plan. (Pages 7 - 10)

Prepare Right Stuff Action board to document actions following Session 3.

Have Logos and Leaves sheet printed. (one print out only)

Find 5-10 good popular magazines relevant to teens.

SESSION 4: OVERVIEW

ENTER AND CONNECT (10 MIN)

- Opening prayer(s)
- Sharing and Getting Organized

INTRODUCE (5 MIN)

THINK (10 MIN)

- Story of Stuff video clip

REFLECT (22 MIN)

- Part 1 - What Makes You Happiest? (10 min)
- Part 2 - Spiritual Reading for Session 4 - Happiness with a Simple Life (12 min)

ENGAGE (35 MIN)

- Part 1 - Leaves and Logos (5 min)
- Part 2 - Ad-busting (6 min.) (optional)
- Part 3 - Skits (25 min)

ENACT (5 MIN)

- Action Plan

EXIT (5 MIN)

- Closing Prayer

Total estimated time 1 hour 32 minutes



SESSION 4 - PLAN

The Story of Stuff - Think ... before You Buy!

ENTER AND CONNECT (10 min)

Opening Prayer(s)

Warmly welcome the youth and distribute the handouts.

Then listen and watch another beautiful rendition of the prayer *Blessed Is the Spot*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGe1w62zKzY> The length of the video is 4:12.

As an opening prayer for this session, we suggest the prayer by the Bab “*God sufficeth all things...*”, which is included in the handouts below. You could have each of the participants say (or chant) this prayer going around in a circle.

Sharing and Getting Organized

Promises - If necessary, briefly review the Promises and discuss them.

Review and Reflection:

- What did we do last week? What did we learn from the last session?
- How were you able to practice the *virtues of independent thinking* and *investigating truth*?

Right Stuff Action board:

- Last week, you each chose one or more activities. How did they work out for you?
- Have them post any pictures (or a sentence) documenting their actions on the Right Stuff Action board.

INTRODUCE (5 Min.)

- Have students take turns reading the **Introduction** in the Handouts, one reader per paragraph.

THINK (10 Min.)

Preparation:

Set up Story of stuff clip on extraction and production: <http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/> (10:10 - 16:46)

- START at 10:10 (“And that brings us to ...”)
- STOP at 16:46 (“And we could just stop.”)

Instructions:

- Tell the group that they are going to watch a section of the video with the themes you will be focusing on in this session.
- Watch the clip.
- Debrief (1 min) – Let the participants briefly share their thoughts about the video clip.

REFLECT: (22 Min.)

Part 1 - What Makes You Happiest? (10 min)

Preparation: Notepaper and pens, a big piece of paper and colored pens.

Instructions:

1. Pass out notepaper and pens.
2. Ask the participants to privately list all the things that have made them happy in the last week, which didn't cost money. (2 min)
3. Invite two participants to serve as scribes, writing on two separate large pieces of paper in front of the room.
4. One scribe will title his sheet "**Favorite Possessions.**" The other scribe writes "**Sources of Happiness**" at the top of their list.
5. The scribes then invite the other participants to take turns adding one item to each list as they write them down, alternating between lists.
6. Once the pages are full, ask the youth the following questions:
 - What are the most important things on these lists?
 - What would be the hardest to live without?
 - What kinds of happiness do you get from having possessions? What doesn't this list of possessions give you?
 - What kinds of happiness do you get from the items on the "Sources of Happiness" list? How long does that usually last? What don't those things give you?

Part 2 – Spiritual Reading for Session 4 - Happiness with a Simple Life (12 min)

Read the Spiritual Reading for Session 4 taking turns after each paragraph. You will find the Spiritual Reading in the Handouts for Session 4, just scroll down.

ENGAGE (35 Min.)**Part 1 - Logos and Leaves** (4 min)

Preparation: Have Logos and Leaves images ready.

Instructions:

- Show the group the Logos and Leaves sheet *without labels*.
- Ask the group to identify what each one is. What kind of plant does the leaf belong to? What company is the logo representing? (Most groups have a hard time identifying the plants, but no problem identifying the logos).
- Ask:
 - Were the leaves or logos easier to identify?
 - Why do you think that is?
 - How do you think logos manage to get so much of our attention?

Part 2 - Ad-busting (6 min.) (optional)

Preparation: Have magazines ready to hand out.

Instructions:

- Pass out magazines.
- Invite participants to select ads that they think are particularly manipulative.
- Have one of them hold up an ad while the whole group explores how the ad is manipulative. There is time for about 3 ads.

Ask the following questions:

- What does the ad imply the person will get, feel, or have by buying the product?
- Who does this ad imply a person will BE if they have the product?

- How does the ad do that?
- What does the ad imply you don't have enough of without the product?
- Is the product really necessary? What will it really give you?
- How do you think do the Baha'i teachings relate to the message the advertisement is sending?

Part 3 – Skits (25 min)

Preparation: It's nice, but not required, to bring any costume elements such as hats, scarves, bags, etc. for this.

Instructions: Divide the group into three smaller groups. (Depending on the number of youth, you can also have two or four groups.)

Instruct the participants to make up a fake commercial selling anything they want. They won't have time to memorize lines, so have them decide on an outline instead of a script and make it up as they go along. The skit should include the commercial and the response of someone watching it, who sees right through the manipulation and doesn't buy it. Tell the youth to show the advertisers that they don't control you, that you have a mind of your own and can buck the trends. Give the groups a warning a minute before their time is up so they can wrap up. (15 min)

Have them perform the skit for the whole group. (3 min/group).

Alternative: You can have each group just play a commercial. Then when they perform it, ask one of the other groups to spontaneously play out their resistance to the manipulation.

ENACT: 6 Min.)

Action Plan (4 Min.)

Ask the participants to pull out their Action Plan in the handouts of Session 4.

1. If necessary, review the Action Plan instructions together.
2. Have them decide on their actions for the week.

EXIT

Closing Conversation

Encourage the participants to practice the virtues *contentment and detachment* when carrying out their actions.

Tell them that you would like to briefly **talk about the last session of this course** (Session 6).

- Explain to the youth that in that final session you will decide on a group service project. Ask them to begin thinking about ideas for such an action that would be meaningful for their group to take.
- Tell them that another aspect of that last session will be to celebrate their achievements having taken this course. Ask them whether they would like to have their parents present for that last session. Make sure you are clear about the wishes of the youth.

Closing Prayer

The handout contains a suggestion for a closing prayer.

After the Session: If the group decided to have their parents present in the last session, you can print nice invitations for them and bring them to Session 5 for the youth to take home. Perhaps you could leave open a space on the invitation for the youth to decorate and personalize.

SESSION 4 HANDOUTS

The Story of Stuff - Think ... Before You Buy!

OPENING PRAYER

God sufficeth all things above all things, and nothing in the heavens or in the earth but God sufficeth. Verily, He is in Himself the Knower, the Sustainer, the Omnipotent.

The Bab

INTRODUCTION

Where did our obsession with Stuff come from? What made us want designer labels and cell phone apps? What made us think we were lame if we didn't have the fastest computer or the hottest jeans? And what made us spend more time consuming the world than caring for it and each other? In this session we are going to talk about how we are being bombarded by messages that try to manipulate (trick or deceive) us into feeling bad about ourselves and wanting things we don't really need, which don't give us true happiness, and which are trashing the planet. And we are going to show that we are capable of making our own choices to find real happiness focusing on the things that really matter and at the same time taking better care of Creation.

A study by California State University in Northridge reported that the average US child watches television for 28 hours each week and sees 20,000 30-second commercials every year. According to the same study, the average US child spends almost twice as much time watching television than being in school. While ads promote the benefits of different products, their basic message is identical: Getting Stuff brings fulfillment, the more Stuff the better. We live in a culture that is constantly making us want material things and is engendering envy.

So is there any truth to the message we are being bombarded with night and day? Does consuming Stuff have anything to do with happiness? Derek Bok, the former president of Harvard tells us "no." Consumption has risen over 50% since the 1950's. Yet, his research shows that "since the early seventies, the percentage of Americans who describe themselves as either "very happy" or "pretty happy" has remained virtually unchanged." The truth is, we aren't any happier than we were with half the stuff we have today.

It's not our intention to deny the blessing that material comforts offer. May we all have the pleasure of listening to music and enjoying other beautiful things! At the same time, we don't want to forget what our faith teaches about the basis of true happiness:

We humans are souls and also have a body during our earthly life. It is important that we meet the basic needs of our body such as food and shelter. Once the basic needs of our body are met, our happiness comes from nourishing our souls.

'Abdu'l-Baha says that we are spiritual beings and only when we live in the spirit are we truly happy. This doesn't mean that we have to say prayers all day long. It means that we are aware of our spiritual purpose and our interconnectedness with all other people and with nature. Instead of seeking happiness by buying more stuff, we can choose activities that are up-lifting or helpful.

SESSION 4 SPIRITUAL READING – HAPPINESS WITH A SIMPLE LIFE

The Baha'i Faith does not teach asceticism, the avoidance of material or physical pleasures. We should appreciate the beautiful things provided by nature or crafted by people as long as they don't become a barrier between us and God. Baha'u'llah said:

God hath ordained every good thing, whether created in the heavens or in the earth, for such of His servants as truly believe in Him.

However, we need to put material things into the proper perspective. They are only tools for us during this earthly life which is short compared to the life of the soul that will continue forever in the spiritual worlds.

O Son of Man! Thou dost wish for gold and I desire thy freedom from it. Thou thinkest thyself rich in its possession, and I recognize thy wealth in thy sanctity therefrom. ...

Baha'u'llah, *Hidden Words*, Arabic 56

(Sanctity means holiness of life and character.)

In many places, the Baha'i Writings admonish us to lead a simple life and to observe moderation in all things:

Content thyself with but little of this world's goods! Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 97

Now, Abdu'l-Baha did not simply say these words. He lived them throughout his life! There are numerous stories of how few possessions he had and how he would give away his belongings. Here is one of many stories:

For 'Abdu'l-Baha inexpensive clothes were sufficient. One day He was to entertain the Governor of 'Akka. His wife felt that His coat was hardly worthy of the occasion. Well ahead of time she went to the tailor where she ordered a fine coat, thinking that, with His lack of self-consciousness, He would surely not notice that His old coat was missing. He desired, after all, only to be scrupulously clean. The new garment was laid out at the proper time, but the Master went searching for His own coat. He asked for it, insisting that the one laid out was not His. His wife attempted to explain the new coat, but He would have none of it, and He told her why: "But think of this!...For the price of this coat you can buy five such as I ordinarily use, and do you think I would spend so much money upon a coat which only I shall wear? If you think I need a new one, very well, but send this back and have the tailor make Me for this price five such as I usually have. Then you see, I shall not only have a new one, but I shall have four to give to others!"

Honnold, Annamarie, *Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Baha*, p. 74

So what should we really strive for during our life on earth? Material things only provide temporary satisfaction. Lasting happiness does not come from material stuff! True happiness comes from spiritual things we cannot touch, such as love, friendship, creativity, learning, generosity, and service:

Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth.

Baha'u'llah

CLOSING PRAYER

Create in me a pure heart, O my God, and renew a tranquil conscience within me, O my Hope! ...

Let Thine everlasting melodies breathe tranquillity on me, O my Companion, and let the riches of Thine ancient countenance deliver me from all except Thee, O my Master, and let the tidings of the revelation of Thine incorruptible Essence bring me joy, O Thou Who art the most manifest of the manifest and the most hidden of the hidden!

Bahá'u'lláh

SESSION 4 ACTION PLAN

Instructions: Choose which of the many suggested action(s) you are planning to take. When carrying out your actions, remember to apply the *virtues of contentment and detachment*.

(If you can't remember the detailed instructions you may look them up in the handouts of Session 1, 2, or 3. Take pictures or document what you do so you can share it!)

My Action Plan after Session 4

Make a Difference

- Spending Freeze - The challenge is to reduce your consumption for the week by not spending any money on non-essentials – everything except what you need for school, food -, and safety. Bring a list of all the things you normally buy, but didn't this week.

Create

- Promote real happiness - Make your own ad to get people to spend more time taking care of Creation and spending time doing things that make them really happy.

Communicate

- Wake up a friend - Tell your friends what you have learned the next time you pass an ad or when they say they absolutely have to have something new.
- Catch the lies - Go to the mall with your buddy and take pictures of some of the worst ads you can find, take pictures and /or tell us why.

Reflect

- True happiness - next time you feel like shopping or think someone else has something you absolutely have to have, ask yourself why you want it and if it really fills the need you think it does. What do you really need in order to be happy?

Try Something New

- Instead of buying something new, make it from something you already have, but aren't using anymore (i.e. turn an old pair of jeans into a bag).
- Catch yourself every time you think you need to *buy* something in order to feel better about yourself. Think what else you can do to feel good about yourself.

Have Insights

- Don't buy it! - Next time you think you want something, see if you can identify the ways in which you have been manipulated into wanting it.
- Take an Inventory - Go through everything you normally buy during a month and take an honest look at how many of those things you buy in order to feel like you are cool. Cross off everything you don't need.
- Write On! - Choose an object that you bought a while ago. Reflect on and write your responses to the following questions:
 - What difference did I think this would make in my life?
 - How did I think it would make me feel?
 - How did I think other people would see me because of it?
 - Did it work?
 - How long has it lasted?
 - Has the feeling changed since I first got it?
 - What does it do for me now?

Share any insights with the full group at the next session.

Be a Leader

With peers

- Take a new direction - when you are with friends and they want to go shopping, convince them to do something outside or play a game together – something that engages and connects you (not just zoning out in front of the TV).

In your family

- TV fast - Turn the TV in the living room off for the week.

In your school

- Anti-ad campaign - Brainstorm ideas for an anti-ad campaign in your school and create a poster.

Tips and Tools...

- Don't fall for the latest trends. Buy clothes that will last and stay in style.
- Next time you go clothes shopping, instead of hitting the mall, try going to Goodwill or another place that sells previously worn clothes. You'll be amazed what you find.
- Use old clothes to make one-of-a-kind items like handbags and quilts.
- Before you buy a new electronics gadget, check to see how much your desire for it comes from the "Golden Arrow" of consumption the Story of Stuff talks about. Set a new trend by using technological dinosaurs until they really bite the dust!

SESSION FOUR: DON'T BUY IT!



LOGOS AND LEAVES

LOGOS AND LEAVES



APPLE

SESSION FOUR: DON'T BUY IT!