



Alcoholism, shopaholism and holism

Greed has bred a peculiar, new, rapidly-growing species of humans. Often called shopaholics, these are people who are as addicted to shopping as alcoholics are to alcohol.

Why is shopping compared to alcoholism:

- Addictive "high": Purchasing and possessing new things, like drinking alcohol, makes us feel good – and makes us want more of that good feeling. But just as the high produced by alcohol passes away quickly, so does the charm of our new possessions.
- Hangover: The hangover in case of shopping is the burden of maintenance, which demands time, energy, care and money. Shopaholics have tea-set, sofa set, multimedia set – and are up-set. An exasperated shopaholic stated his predicament poignantly, "Everything I own owns me."
- Perpetual unhappiness: A US study looked at individuals whose idea of being successful meant having the biggest house on the block or the newest luxury car. Ohio State University psychologist Robert Arkin summarised the findings: "The cycle of materialistic pursuits is disappointing and exhausting in the long run and can make people perpetually unhappy." If people have little, they want a lot. If they have a lot, they want a lot more. They are never satisfied.

Thus shopping can be as addictive and destructive as alcohol. There's a disturbing difference between the two: most people know alcoholism is harmful, but most think shopping is the proof of their success. This wrong perception makes people uncontrollably greedy for wealth. Why do we want more and more? Because it is our right and nature to have unlimited possessions by possessing the possessor of all possessions – God, Krishna.

As spiritual beings, souls, the eternal children of God, we long for the security and satisfaction that accompany the devotional remembrance of our all-powerful, all-loving Father. Just as a fish suffers when out of water, we suffer when we turn away from God. Spiritual ignorance leads us to think that the suffering is due to a shortage of material things. We become greedy. The cure is not merely to subdue our desire for possessions, but to redirect it toward the supreme possession. By awakening our devotion for the supreme through chanting his holy names and serving him and his children, we can attract him to occupy the throne of our heart. When the lord chooses to reside in our hearts, he satisfies our hearts fully and takes care of our material needs.

The author is a spiritual mentor at ISKCON, Pune