

Can Awareness Help Solve Our Socio-Ecological Crisis?

How our sense of self can help solve our planetary crisis



People participating in a Black Friday event in São Paulo, Brazil, 2018 (Photo by: [Cris Faga/NurPhoto](#) via Getty Images)

My family will be in town for the holidays. So, like any good hostess, I had to shop for some 'stuff.'

I was in desperate need of new bath towels; the ones I still had from college looked rough, quite literally. But I know it wouldn't be a quick stop at Bed, Bath, and Beyond. Oh, no.

I spent days learning about the textile industry before getting my credit card out. This past year, I've been working hard to become aware of my impact as a consumer. So, I did a lot of research on how to identify products that use fair labor conditions and sustainably farmed raw materials and on understanding the environmental impact of towels once they reach the end of the line.

Did you ever think about how hard it is to buy 'stuff' nowadays? No wonder I had been procrastinating so much; being a conscious buyer takes up a lot of time - and money.

Nowadays, you can always be sure that whatever it is you're on the market for, you'll have thousands of options at your fingertips, varying in price points, branding, and quality. Price ends up being the deciding factor for many of us, and for good reason. But do you ever take into account the past, present, and future implications of the 'stuff' you buy?

Whenever we shop, we ultimately endorse a production cycle that was born way before we ever added any items to our shopping carts. And, given the world's preference for what's cheapest, you can be sure that these processes are extremely harmful to other people and the environment. Why? Because they're made of whatever raw material is cheapest to grow and manufacture, oftentimes employing forced labor and paying no mind to its environmental impact. All this plays into the steals you snag at fast-fashion retailers and Amazon, whose ethics and sustainability compromises are rather questionable.

Unfortunately, many of us are unaware of how our consumption patterns - what, why, and how much we consume - affect other people and the Earth.

But it's not our fault. The consumer world understands that if they get you to click "checkout" before you can think about your needs, they can get you to buy pretty much anything. It's hard to navigate a world that constantly bombards our senses, pushing us to buy 'stuff' into submission.

Was it always like this? Probably not. Back when industrialism began, the person became the basic unit of attention, replacing the community. We started conjuring our modern sense of self, consisting mainly of "me, myself, and I," and grew ever more distant from our communities and the beautiful planet we call home.

Perhaps uncoincidentally, that's also when our destruction of the natural world began. We started viewing ourselves as separate entities from our surroundings and felt superior to other life forms. Even with so much information at our disposal, we became oblivious to how our actions harm the planet and other living beings.

But we can't continue like this. Our well-being cannot take it, and our planet most certainly cannot handle it.

Yes, on a macro level, human activity is gradually improving – never before have we seen this many international negotiations on carbon emissions, private-owned attempts to improve energy efficiency, increases in renewable energy usage, and Earth-friendly consumer goods.

Still, change is happening much too slowly. If we are to truly mitigate our socio-ecological crisis, we must also regain the knowledge of connectedness that lies dormant in most of us. We must work on ourselves to ensure the future of humanity.

Self-awareness requires comprehending our true nature, identifying our place in the world, and realizing that every little action of ours affects the whole. This includes being in touch with our true needs and reevaluating our consumption patterns; it means prioritizing our connection with our inner self, one another, and nature. It's been on the rise lately as more and more people try to discover who they are and carve out a path to happiness, but we still have a long way to go.

The beauty of it is there's an inherent relationship between self-, social, and environmental awareness. Once you become more conscious of your needs and work to meet them, you get clarity on how your behavior affects society's social, economic, and environmental spheres. This consciousness serves as a tool to help you become the person the world needs you to be, inspiring others to follow that same path. Maybe if we do this internal work and pass it on to our children, we can begin to solve the planet's socio-ecological crisis.

Are you ready to take on this challenge?