

# Imagine's Test

Since arriving, I've been fascinated by the quantity of goods and services available to me. I find everything that retailers and advertisers offer attractive. It all seems so magical. As I was wandering through a shopping mall, I said to myself: "Oh! If only I were rich! I would fill my suitcases with souvenirs, gadgets, clothing, shoes, and toys." How can anyone resist so many beautiful things? I see people walking around with baskets full of food or bags in both hands. I started thinking. After a moment, I asked myself: "How on earth do they choose one product over another?"

To find out, I started asking the people around me.

"Excuse me, sir, ma'am, why are you buying all this? How do you choose one product over another? Do you know who made this item? Do you know what country it comes from? Do you think the people who made it receive fair wages for their work? What do you intend to do with the item's packaging? And if the device you have there, on top of your basket, should break, what do you intend to do with it?"

Honestly, I was a bit discouraged. People just kept going without paying any attention to my questions. No one seemed interested in what I was asking about. A large man, with eyeglasses on the tip of his nose, shouted at me from behind his counter, shaking a menacing finger at me: "Hey, you! Yes, you, you little mischievous man. Are you done bothering everyone with your million questions? Everyone has the right to buy whatever they want in MY store! Who are you to tell us what's right and what's wrong?"

Disappointed and frustrated, I left the shopping mall feeling dispirited. A few steps away, I saw a park. I decided to go sit down to digest what just happened. An old lady sat down next to me.

"Young man," she said to me affably, "you seem to have a lot of questions floating around in your head. I can see them, you know. They come in and out."

"Really?! You can see the questions in my head?"

"Yes, and much more besides. So don't be shy. Tell me what you've got on your mind."

Behind her kind face furrowed with wrinkles, I could see calm and serenity. I immediately noticed her jet black eyes, as bright as a spark. This encouraged me to open up and tell her about my disappointment.

"I just came from the shopping mall. I asked people to tell me if they knew any ways to make responsible consumer choices."

"And what did they reply?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? That's strange. By the way, what's your name?"

"My name is Imagine."

"Well, Imagine, I'm going to ask you to imagine a bit more. Before you buy anything, you should always do Imagine's test."

"Imagine's test?"

"Exactly. You'll see, there's nothing easier. Before every purchase, there are few questions to ask yourself. It's that easy. In other words, you need to 'filter' your consumer choices."

"Filter my consumer choices?"

"How do I do that?"

"It's easy, you just have to remember that there are three critical filters, then use them effectively."

The first filter is usefulness. Does the good or service you are thinking of buying meet an actual need? Do you really need it? Is it a want or need? Are there any other products that would be better suited to your needs? Instead of buying it, would you be able to make it yourself?

The second filter is the environment. Is the product you intend to buy environmentally friendly? Can it be reused or recycled? Is it heavily packaged? Will it end up in the garbage? Was it manufactured without harming the environment?

The third filter is justice. Is the product you want manufactured in conditions that respect the workers' human rights? Were the workers who made it paid fair wages for doing so? Is their work environment safe? Does the company that makes this product care about the growth of the community where it is based?"

"Thank you very much, ma'am. Your advice has been really helpful."

After this conversation, I returned to the shopping mall. The large man who had shouted me down was still there. He didn't recognize me, which would no doubt have tempered his enthusiasm. He called out to me and said:

"Hey, young man! Do you want to buy a great dinosaur-shaped pencil sharpener that roars and lights up when you use it?"

"Sir, do you think the product you're trying to sell me really meets my needs?"

"Maybe!"

"With all that packaging, and all that mixture of plastic, metal, glass, and cardboard, do you think your product is environmentally friendly?"

"Not really."

"Do you know if the people who made that gadget received fair wages for their work?"

"I have no idea."

I then said to the large man: "If what you're trying to sell me is not useful, environmentally friendly or fair, why should I buy wrong?"