

Externalizing the Yamas & Niyamas: Precepts of Social and Individual Behaviour

ABSTRACT

In this project, students will take an integral concept in Yoga — the internal aspects of the Yamas and Niyamas — and demonstrate their understanding of the precepts by externalizing the concepts to apply to the idea of sustainability through an Environmental Stewardship lens.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

In the western world we think of Yoga as a type of exercise when in reality exercise is just one small part of the wider concept of Yoga. In PE117 students learn the 8 Limbs of Yoga, which details the 8-fold path to enlightenment.

The first limb is the Yamas, precepts of social discipline. They deal with how you treat others and the world around you and include the ideas of:

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| 1. Ahimsa | non-violence |
| 2. Satya | Truthfulness |
| 3. Asteya | non-stealing |
| 4. Brahmacharya | continence |
| 5. Aparigraha | non-greed |

The second limb is the Niyamas, precepts of individual or inner discipline. They are concerned with how we treat ourselves and include the ideas of:

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| 1. Saucha | purity / cleanliness of thoughts and deeds |
| 2. Santosha | contentment with self |
| 3. Tapas | accepting pain as purification |
| 4. Svadhyaya | self study / study of spiritual books |
| 5. Isvara Pranidhanani | humility / divine surrender |

Students learn these concepts through in-class lecture and discussion. Typically these big ideas are internalized as they are part of personal growth. However, the concepts can have a wider impact if one keeps an open mind. They can be externalized and rather than considered just personal growth opportunities, the external actions they generate can contribute to caring for the environment which supports all growth and life.

The timeframe for the sustainability assignment would likely be carried out mid-late term so that students will have a full grasp of the Yamas and Niyamas before asked to extrapolate on the concepts.

TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

With a firm grasp of the Yamas and Niyamas and how to incorporate the concepts into one's life, students will be asked to expand on the ideas. To think outside of the box and apply the internalized aspects to the external world of sustainability and the environment.

Students will be expected to submit a paper explaining each of the 10 concepts in their own words and how they can be used for personal growth. They will then be asked to take each of the 10 concepts and explain how that same internal concept can be used for external environmental sustainability.

For example, the intent behind Ahimsa (non-violence) is to cause no harm to any living creature in thought or deed. This does not mean that we all need to be vegetarians or cannot defend ourselves but rather that we should always behave with consideration to others. This same idea of non-violence, causing no harm and behaving with consideration, is also a key idea in sustainability. We can minimize our impact on the environment by recycling (behaving with consideration) and using recycled products (causing no harm). Furthermore, one could take this idea in the direction of managed forest, using local products, etc.

ASSESSMENT ELEMENTS

Students' papers will be evaluated on how well they demonstrate an understanding of the Yamas and Niyamas and secondarily on how well they apply the concepts to sustainability.

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