

Sustainability through Yoga Philosophy

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This activity for yoga philosophy addresses the following “Big Ideas” about sustainability: Interconnectedness, Interdependence, Systems Thinking, Consumption and Consumerism. Through personal reflection and group discussions, students will discover how to bring mind-body awareness into a sustainability context.

Designed for a Yoga or Yoga-Pilates class, the following activity will present sustainability as a “Bid Idea” in a discussion of yoga philosophy.

Yoga philosophy includes Yamas and Niyamas, which are guidelines for leading a healthier, happier life. Yamas are how we interact with the outer world and Niyamas are how we interact with ourselves. Deep contemplation of these ideas can bring mind-body awareness into a social context. These guidelines are about honesty and true self moving toward an understanding rather than separation.

Some Yamas that evoke discussion about sustainability are Brahmacharya and Aparigraha. Brahmacharya suggests moderation by avoiding overindulgence in all aspects of life, including the environment. Aparigraha involves greedlessness and simplicity: Consume less, live more and abstain from accumulating more than you need.

Some of the Niyamas that evoke discussion about sustainability are Shaucha, Santosha and Ishwara-Pranidhana. Shaucha concerns purity and clarity with a focus on good health habits and keeping the environment clean. Santosha is about contentment: practicing gratitude and joyfulness in a way that does not depend on any external status. Ishwara-Pranidhana is about realizing a universal connection with respect for limits, unexpected consequences and leverage points for change.

Presented mid-quarter this sixty minute activity involves the following “Big Ideas” about sustainability: Interconnectedness, Interdependence, Systems Thinking, Consumption and Consumerism.

After explaining some fundamental concepts in yoga philosophy including the Yamas and Niyamas, I will hand out a worksheet to each student to let them think about how the Yamas and Niyamas apply to their life and how they resonate with them. I want my students to question, challenge and contemplate the guidelines, then write down specific ways they bring this awareness into their life. Next, breaking up into small groups, students will share which Yama and Niyama resonates most with them and how they specifically apply that practice into their daily life. My goal is to have students discover new ways they can lead healthier, happier lives by understanding interconnectedness and by bringing mind-body awareness into a social sustainability context.