



10 Workshops to Change the World



4. Respecting Life

"Forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds long to play with your hair." - Khalil Gibran

Aim

To give people who are interested in green issues, spiritual tools and insights to change their way of thinking and being with a view to improving the global environment and, in particular, our relationship with Nature (i.e. the land, sea and air and all living beings, including the plant and animal kingdoms).

Note: The word 'physical' is used on occasions in relation to the self - this refers both to the way we treat the body, for example what we eat and drink, but also to physical actions we might perform e.g. down-sizing our home or riding a bicycle more often.

Materials

- CD player with appropriate instrumental music or songs to create a relaxed atmosphere
- Paper and pens for the participants
- Flipchart and pens for the facilitator
- '10 ways to change the world' spiritual reflection cards
- 'Respecting Life' definition on a card or flip chart:
Recognising the uniqueness, wonder and beauty of our being, enables us to treat ourselves, others, animals and nature with consideration and care.

Resources for the facilitator

- '10 ways to Change the World' poster
- 'Living Our Values' book published by B K Publications - optional

Duration of Workshop

To be decided by the workshop organisers

The materials provide a framework/structure which can be condensed or extended according to the time available.

Workshop Structure

1. Introductory remarks, including

- Welcome and general introductions
- Domestic arrangements (fire exit, water and toilets, switch off mobile)
- Outline of the programme (facilitators, timings and refreshments break)
- Sharing in pairs 'Why you have come to the programme and what you hope to get from it?'
- Minute of silence

2. Background to the Initiative

a) *The current state of the world* – Top 10 facts on climate change (see Appendix 1)

b) *Information about the BK Environment Initiative*

- The Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative started in 2009 in order to meet the need for a higher environmental awareness within the international BK community, and also to add the inner dimension to discussions at the UN Climate Change conferences.
- It operates with BK Regional Green Co-ordinators in each part of the world. Many centres have a local "Green Angel" appointed to look after the environment issues locally.
- The UN conferences on the environment - climate change, biodiversity, sustainability - are looked after by a team under the Brahma Kumaris UN office. So far we have worked with around 40 different partners and organisations.
- The main communication tool is our webpage - www.eco.brahmakumaris.org, where you can find workshops, meditations, articles, news, information on our use of solar energy and yogic agriculture etc.

c) *Underlying BK spiritual perspective*

- Everything is interconnected
- We are all part of one highly complex, self-regulating natural system
- Every human being is a powerful soul
- We are innately good and have unlimited potential
- Each of us has the ability to think about and decide/choose our actions
- All our thoughts, words and deeds have an impact on the world, for better or for worse
- We create and are responsible for the state of our own inner and outer world
- The current state of the world is a reflection of the state of our collective consciousness and, in particular, what we value (e.g. competition, consumerism, economic growth or peace, love and co-operation)
- The world will only be restored to its former glory when we return to our original state of pure, positive consciousness, free from greed, lust, ego, anger and attachment.

We will achieve this state through recognising the importance of

- Non-violence (to humans and animals)
- The law of karma i.e. we reap what we sow
- Trusteeship
- Consciousness (it determines everything)
- Personal responsibility (not blaming others)
- Inner values
- Inner work on ourselves (becoming pure, positive beings)
- A daily spiritual practice
- An environmentally friendly lifestyle.

End with a minute of silence

3. Introductory Remarks on 'Respecting Life'

We are living in an age when many people know the price or cost of everything and the value of nothing. It is as if we have developed an accountancy mentality. Things are quantified, targets set, cost limits imposed and many sacrifices made in the name of efficiency and profitability. The balance sheet reigns supreme. In such a world there is little room for respect and the other priceless values which make us human i.e. care, compassion, love. Wild animals, forests, water and so forth are all disposable assets. Everything and everyone is used as a resource to be consumed regardless of the long-term consequences.

Respect for humanity is about:

- realising, acknowledging, accepting and appreciating the unique value of each human being - their abilities, qualities and achievements
- recognising that despite our external differences of race, gender, religion and economic status, we are all the same i.e. spiritual beings and part of one global family

Respect for Nature is about:

- recognising and appreciating its power, beauty, benevolence and wonder
- acknowledging our dependence on it. Without the co-operation of Nature the human race could not survive.

When we respect someone we value them and treat them with care and consideration. We recognise their rights and act accordingly. The same applies to the world of Nature.

Life is about 'we' not 'me'. We do our best to conserve rather than destroy.

The choice: Do we respect life and do our best to enable it to flourish in all its many ways or do we sacrifice it for the sake of profit?

End with a minute of silence

4. Definition of 'Respecting Life'

Handout the definition of the 'Respecting Life' or write on a flipchart:

Recognising the uniqueness, wonder and beauty of our being, enables us to treat ourselves, others, animals and nature with consideration and care.

Ask participants to reflect on it for two minutes then discuss the definition in pairs and feedback to the whole group any suggested amendments

Question

On a scale of 1(not at all) -10 (completely), to what extent do you respect yourself, others and Nature.

5. Cost benefit analysis of 'Respecting Life'

Discuss in small groups (after two minutes of silent reflection)

- The cost to the self, others and the world (including Nature) of thinking and acting in an uncaring, disrespectful way.
- The benefits to the self, others and the world (including Nature) of acting in a caring and respectful way.

Ask groups to feedback to the whole group. Make a list of the benefits.

6. A Role Model

Ask participants to think of someone (living or dead) who is an inspiring example of respect in their thinking and being

For two minutes silently reflect on:

- How do/did they behave?
- What impact does/did their behaviour have on others and the world (including Nature)?
- What particular values and qualities do/did they embody?
- How do/did they sustain themselves - physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually?

Ask participants to share the above with someone they do not know.

Ask 2-3 people to feedback their example to the whole group.

7. Visioning Exercises

a) General

Create small groups and ask participants to imagine and then draw a picture of a world where everyone and everything is treated with respect.

Discuss

- What is going on?
- What does it look like and feel like?
- How are people treating each other and Nature?
- What qualities and values are they expressing?
- How can we make this vision a reality?

Feedback main points to the whole group

Facilitator to make a list of the key points

b) Personal

Imagine yourself in one year's time being unlimited in your thinking and being

- What is your life like?
- What are you doing, thinking and feeling in relation to the self, others and the world (including Nature)?
- How has the environment benefited from the change?
- Draw an image of yourself as an embodiment of being unlimited
- Looking back over the past year, what did you do (physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually) to achieve this state?

The above to be done as a coaching exercise in pairs.

Ask 2-3 people to feedback to whole group.

c) An image from Nature

Ask participants to think of an image from Nature that embodies being respectful of life (e.g. the sun, the sea, the wind) and share it with someone they do not know.

Ask 2-3 people to feedback to whole group.

d) An Affirmation

An affirmation is a short, life-affirming, positive statement about the self which, if repeated regularly with feeling, will change our way of thinking and being.

Ask everyone to create their own affirmation based on respect.

Participants can use their chosen image from Nature in the affirmation if they wish.

For example:

My heart is like the sun constantly radiating love everywhere.

Ask participants to share their affirmation with three other people.

Ask 2-3 people to share with the whole group.

8. Meditation Experience

Explain that all the above experiences have brought us into connection with the innate good qualities and true desires of the soul.

Remind people of the importance of connecting with this inner self that has the ability to take us beyond the limitations of the physical world and connect us with the Supreme Source of Love.

Commentary

Go within

Remember who you really are i.e. an eternal, peaceful, powerful, loving soul in a physical body

Let go of all negative feelings from the past, allowing them to fall away like dark clouds

See yourself as a point of shining, loving light situated in the centre of your forehead

Connect with the Source of Love and bathe in this love

Visualise sending this unlimited love to your family, friends, all other human beings, animals and the rest of Nature

Holding on to these powerful, loving feelings, bring your attention back into the room and say to yourself 'I respect myself and all living beings and Nature.'

9. Summary

After two minutes of silent reflection:

- Ask participants to summarise and share in pairs what they have learned from working on living with respect
- .
- Ask 2-3 people to share with the whole group.
- Ask for general feedback on the changes we need to make on the 'inside' for things to improve on the 'outside'. Facilitator to make a list of the key points.
- Give some spiritual input about raja yoga meditation and how connecting with the Divine gives us the power to change
- Is the BK approach valid and useful? Will it make a difference to the environment? Yes or No? Ask for a show of hands.
- Ask everyone to complete a feedback form (see Appendix 2)

10. Action Plan

Following two minutes reflection ask participants to write down their answers to the following questions:

- What I am I going to do on a *regular* and *consistent* basis to make respect a reality in my life?
- What changes – behavioural, physical, emotional, mental and spiritual - do I need to make in my lifestyle in order to sustain and empower the change I want to make?

Ask everyone to share in pairs

Ask 2-3 people to share with the whole group.

11. Closing Moments

- Thank everyone for coming
- Mention future programmes
- Recommend the Raja Yoga course and other appropriate BK courses
- Recommend BK books and CDs and resources on the BK environmental initiative website
- Do meditation commentary based on what has been learned during the workshop
- Give out BK Green Action/Blessing Cards

Top 10 facts on climate change

1. Global ecological footprint

The global ecological footprint - How many earths do we use? If everyone on earth lived like the average American, we would need 4.6 planets to support us. Today, we need about 1.6 planets to provide the resources for our consumption and absorb our waste. Current overuse is due to our consumption of goods and services. The extraction, production, distribution, use and disposal of the stuff we buy. Source: <http://www.theworldcounts.com>

2. Temperature increases

Tipping point theories predict that temperature increases will create effects such as the melting of the arctic permafrost that could release greenhouse gasses equivalent to 17 times US yearly emissions. The increase of this and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere has warmed the earth. Due to Climate Change, the world's average temperature could rise up to 6.4 degrees Celsius (11.5 Fahrenheit) during the 21st century. Source: <http://www.theworldcounts.com/>

3. CO₂ in the atmosphere

PPM above 400 ppm: what does this mean? The concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere, is increasing at an accelerating rate from decade to decade. The safe level of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere is 350 parts per million (ppm). It serves to show how much carbon dioxide has been put into the atmosphere since preindustrial times. A level of 400ppm, indicates the high consumption of energy from fossil fuels. Atmospheric CO₂ is measured daily and monthly, at the Manua Loa Observatory in Hawaii and registered in March 2015 value of 401.5ppm. The only way to get there is the transition of the global economy away from fossil fuels into renewable energy, energy efficiency and sustainable farming practices in all sectors (agriculture, transport, manufacturing). Source: 400.350.org and www.CO2now.org.

4. Sea level rise

Scientific research indicates sea levels worldwide have been rising at a rate of 3.5 millimeters per year since the early 1990s. The trend, linked to global warming, puts thousands of coastal cities, like Venice (Italy), London (England), New York (USA), Barcelona (Spain), and even whole islands at risk of being claimed by the ocean. The rise in sea levels is linked to three primary factors: thermal expansion, melting of glaciers and polar ice caps, ice loss from Greenland and West Antarctica. Source: National Geographic.

5. Overfishing

Overfishing is a major problem. A study shows that if nothing changes we will run out of seafood in 2048. Oceans are draining of seafood at an alarming rate. Nearly 80% of the world's fisheries are already exploited, over-exploited, depleted, or in a state of collapse. Worldwide 90% of the stocks of large predatory fish such as sharks, tuna, marlin and swordfish, are already gone! Source: <http://www.theworldcounts.com/>

6. Water resources

Water resources are already being used to the limit and we are using more and more of it. Over 10 billion tons worldwide! Every year we use a massive 4 trillion cubic meters of freshwater. This amount is equivalent to 50 Olympic swimming pools every second, comparable to if everyone on the planet would drink over 4 glasses of water, every single minute. Source: <http://www.theworldcounts.com/>

7. Garbage in our ocean

We have a garbage island floating in our ocean, mostly comprised of plastics –the size of India, Europe and Mexico combined-. Environmental degradation is one of the most pressing current issues at present time (earth, water, air). Each year, we extract an estimated 55 billions tons of fossil energy, mineral, metals and biomass from the earth. The world has already lost 80% of its forest and we're continually losing them at a rate of 375 km² per day! Source: www.theworldcounts.com

8. Food waste

Almost half of all food in the world is lost or wasted. It's hard to believe! A lot of massive food loss is happening because of crop pests and ineffective harvesting and irrigation. Huge amounts of food is also lost simply because we throw it away! The amount of food lost and wasted every year is equal to more than half of the world's annual cereals crops (2.3 billion tons in 2009/10). The loss of food is also problematic considering the water that went into producing the food. Most of the water used on this planet is used for food production. Source: <http://www.theworldcounts.com/>

9. Health issues

Particulate matter is an air pollutant in the form of extremely small toxic particles. Inhaling them can cause asthma, lung cancer, cardiovascular diseases, strokes, acute respiratory infections and premature death. Annual estimations show that there are 7 million premature deaths linked to air pollution. Car exhaustion is a major source of particulate matter and the problem is therefore worse in cities. In some cities, the level of particulate matter is 8 times higher than the recommended maximum level. Source: www.theworldcounts.com and World health Organization.

10. Meat production

Meat requires great amounts of energy and water to produce. It has a higher "energy footprint" than any other food. It takes 75 times more energy to produce meat than corn and it takes an area of vegetation of 7 times the size of the EU to produce food for cattle and other livestock animals in Europe. Almost half of the world's harvest is fed to animals. Source: <http://www.theworldcounts.com/>

(1. maj 2015)

Brahma Kumaris Green Workshop on Respecting Life

We would be grateful if you could complete this questionnaire. Thank you

Q1. What was the MAIN thing that attracted you to attend this event?

- ☐ The theme/topic
- ☐ A speaker
- ☐ Spirituality
- ☐ General curiosity
- ☐ Opportunity to meet like-minded people / network
- ☐ Other, please specify below

Q2. What have you enjoyed MOST about this event?

Q3. What have you learned / experienced today?

Q4. Is there anything we could have done better?

Q5. Have you any suggestions for future topics/speakers?