

Ecological Lifestyle Assessment

This assessment closely relates to living the [Golden Rule 2.0](#): "Put back at least as much as you take from your life-support systems." The assessment grew out of trying to answer the question, "How much would everyone personally need to do to create a peaceful world that had all of its life-support systems in balance?" For most people, living a world-sustaining lifestyle requires making many major and minor lifestyle changes. A first step is to assess what you are currently doing and not doing. Assessing yourself will help you to develop goals for living a more ecological lifestyle.

As you do the assessment below, please remember three things: First, don't be overwhelmed. It took you years to form these habits, so give yourself years to change them. For many people it might be realistic to make a few minor changes and one major change every four months. Second, if you are very busy, you might have to focus on capacity-building for some weeks before you have enough time and money to start making lifestyle changes. Third, use the ongoing support of an individual or group to help keep you motivated for the long haul.

PART ONE: For each item, circle 'A' if it's something you *always* do, or almost always do, 'O' if it's something you *often* do, 'S' if it's something you *sometimes* do, 'R' if it's something you *rarely* do, or 'N' if it's something you *never* do.

In addition, if there's something you'd like to learn more about, or feel you need to think more about, put a "?" in the margin next to that item. For example, in the second statement below, if you feel you need to learn more about aerobic exercise, how much is needed, or how to do it, you would put a question mark in the margin next to that statement.

body

- A O S R N I get enough sleep each night.
- A O S R N I do aerobic exercise at least three times a week for at least twenty minutes each time. (Aerobic exercises are those that increase the heart rate, such as jogging, swimming, fast walking, etc.)
- A O S R N I make sure I get the nutrients I need in my diet. (Protein, carbohydrates, polyunsaturated fats, roughage, vitamins, minerals, water, etc.)
- A O S R N I maintain a healthy weight and avoid excess calories, salt and fatty foods.
- A O S R N I know and follow proper oral hygiene: brushing teeth and tongue, flossing, getting checkups.
- A O S R N I avoid smoking, excess alcohol and drugs.

- A O S R N I live and work in a low-pollution environment.
- A O S R N I know first aid for medical emergencies.
- A O S R N I avoid unnecessary stress by expressing my feelings, doing satisfying work, and not being too competitive or busy.
- A O S R N I know how to deal with excess stress when I experience it.
- A O S R N I receive and give enough physical affection (hugs, etc.).
- A O S R N I get a medical exam on a regular basis and don't put off serious medical problems.
- A O S R N I periodically check my home, car and workplace for safety problems and preparedness (against fire, electrical, chemical and mechanical hazards, crime, inclement weather, earthquake, etc.) to assure my physical well-being.

environment

- A O S R N I don't litter.
- A O S R N I avoid buying disposable items when possible.
- A O S R N I recycle aluminum, glass, newspapers, etc.
- A O S R N I give away, sell or share what I don't need so that the Earth's resources are efficiently used.
- A O S R N I buy organic produce and foods whenever possible. I garden when I can.
- A O S R N I conserve energy by not wasting heat, hot water or electricity.
- A O S R N My home is well-insulated and energy-efficient.
- A O S R N If I have a car, it is energy-efficient.
- A O S R N If I have a car, I avoid unnecessary trips with it by walking, riding a bike, using public transportation, car-pooling, or combining errands.
- A O S R N I write advocacy letters on environmental issues on a continuing basis. (These letters are usually sent to Congress or other elected officials.)
- A O S R N I eat a diet low in animal products. (Animal protein requires about sixteen times as much land as vegetable products on the basis of equal protein contents. It also requires much more water.)

- A O S R N I compost vegetable scraps and lawn clippings.
- A O S R N I avoid unnatural household, lawn and garden chemicals.
- A O S R N I don't put toxic chemicals in the sewer system or other bodies of water.
- A O S R N I conserve water.
- A O S R N I offset the pollutants put into the air by my vehicle(s); by the production of the energy I use; and by the manufacturing processes of the goods I purchase. I do this by contributing time or money to environmental replenishment projects, such as planting trees.
- A O S R N I consider carefully my decision to have children, taking into account the Earth's finite resources.

psyche

- A O S R N I plan time each week to do things I enjoy.
- A O S R N I have confidence in my ability to solve personal problems.
- A O S R N I have goals that give meaning to my life, ones which I believe I can attain.
- A O S R N I have enough variety and consistency in my life.
- A O S R N I have at least one personal relationship where someone will love me no matter what I do or don't do.
- A O S R N I feel I have unconditional worth and value.
- A O S R N I'm participating in a personal relationship or small group program where I can openly talk about any problem or growth issue in my life.
- A O S R N I don't overburden myself with too many responsibilities or activities.
- A O S R N I regularly take time to consider the unchanging realities of life (such as existence, growth, personal relationship, and death).
- A O S R N I have a sense of belonging to a family or community.

political

- A O S R N I vote in every election that I can.

- A O S R N I keep abreast of current events and regularly gather political information on issues that affect me in plenty of time to act.
- A O S R N I regularly receive enough news to make informed judgments on political issues that affect my community, country, the economy, the environment and the political process itself.(Note that the news must be timely, for instance, emails from political watchdog groups. Much newspaper and TV news on politics is after the fact, and is too late to be of use.)
- A O S R N I regularly do advocacy (e.g., writing a letter to Congress) on issues that are important to me.
- A O S R N I actively support political interest groups that share my viewpoint and that promote the long-range good of all.
- A O S R N I study candidates for both their decision-making ability and their past voting records.
- A O S R N I actively support candidates that promote the long-range good of all.
- A O S R N I'm aware of the effect of business, the media, special interest groups, and the government itself on the political process. I urge these groups not to over-represent themselves politically.

personal relationships (Please consider all of your significant personal relationships for this section. It may be helpful to list these first.)

- A O S R N I spend enough quality time on the important personal relationships of my life.
- A O S R N I make an effort to really listen to others, being alert to their experiences and feelings.
- A O S R N I share the work and rewards of the relationship with the other, not taking too much *or too little*.
- A O S R N Decisions involving myself and the other person are arrived at in a fair and peaceful way.
- A O S R N I'm able to share my feelings openly with the other person.
- A O S R N I'm able to talk about expectations and problems in the relationship with the other person.
- A O S R N I'm able to ask for what I need from the other. (I can assert myself without being demanding or needy.)

- A O S R N I regularly put extra effort into the relationship.
- A O S R N I'm able to resolve conflicts nonviolently and non-aggressively.
- A O S R N I am able to accept change and growth in the other person and in the relationship.
- A O S R N I frequently affirm the other person verbally and demonstrate my affection for the other.
- A O S R N I keep my promises and commitments in the relationship.

economy

- A O S R N I live within my means.
- A O S R N My job is necessary to the production of a good or service that enhances the quality of life.
- A O S R N My savings and investments are in socially responsible funds. (My money is not being loaned to groups that will use it to harm others.)
- A O S R N I contribute money to charities that promote self-sufficiency among the disadvantaged.
- A O S R N I buy goods produced by disadvantaged groups and by Third World cottage industries.
- A O S R N I write letters and do other advocacy on economic issues such as poverty, debt crises, and excess defense spending.
- A O S R N I boycott businesses that actively create social, economic, political or environmental injustices.
- A O S R N I return to the Third World poor the extra value I receive from the goods produced by multinational corporations that underpay them (for instance, by a self-tax donation sent to organizations that promote self-reliance in the Third World.)

nonpersonal relationships

(These relationships include any relationships to small groups or individuals besides close personal relationships.)

- A O S R N I treat service personnel and other strangers cordially.

- A O S R N I don't talk negatively about others (gossip).
- A O S R N I'm a courteous driver, deferring to others.
- A O S R N I carry out my responsibilities to groups I belong to.
- A O S R N I put a little extra energy into each group I belong to.
- A O S R N I confront unethical or dehumanizing behavior in the groups I belong to.
- A O S R N I do not try to make others uncomfortable with my tone of voice, body language or eye contact.
- A O S R N I make the effort to smile at or say something friendly to someone I don't know and may never see again.
- A O S R N If I meet someone who is very different from me, I avoid any prejudicial behavior, and instead try to be welcoming to them.
- A O S R N I treat animals and plants humanely.

society

- A O S R N I do about five hours a week of volunteer work.
- A O S R N The volunteer work I do is satisfying and not perpetually stressful. It involves personal contact rather than impersonal bureaucracy.
- A O S R N I don't engage in "victimless" crime (such as cheating at taxes, padding insurance claims, photocopying or recording copyrighted materials).
- A O S R N I make sure the groups I belong to (work, family, and social) put more into the environment than they get out. (Through recycling, conserving energy, etc.)
- A O S R N I ask my groups to put more into the economy than they get out (no unfair business practices, but some charitable or progressive investments).
- A O S R N I ask my groups to represent themselves politically whenever appropriate so as to promote the long-term good of all.
- A O S R N I make sure the groups I belong to don't create advertising, policies or products that harm people's emotional or physical health, or personal relationships.

spirituality

- A O S R N On a regular basis, I give thanks to my higher spiritual power (whatever I perceive God or the Creator to be) for the good in my life.
- A O S R N I do some regular study or reading each day to increase my knowledge of my chosen spiritual path.
- A O S R N I'm active in a spiritual group or worship community.
- A O S R N I do periodic long-term assessments of my spiritual walk. (For example, an annual retreat, or an in-depth reflection every six months.)
- A O S R N I do regular short-term assessment of my spiritual walk. (For example, an evening examination of conscience, or a weekly review.)
- A O S R N I'm open to being led by my Higher Power. In other words, I do not prefer to make major decisions alone, without prayer or asking for spiritual insight or clarity.
- A O S R N I've identified and am actively overcoming the greatest current obstacle to living my spirituality more wholeheartedly.
- A O S R N I have a guide, spiritual director or spiritual mentor with whom I'm in active contact.
- A O S R N My spirituality is at the center of my life. (Although *what* I do isn't always directly related to my spirituality, *the way I do things* is centered on my spiritual path.)

If you have children in your care, please continue, otherwise go to [PART TWO](#) below.

children

- A O S R N I affirm my children through positive comments several times a day.
- A O S R N I affirm my children by spending time with them individually.
- A O S R N I demonstrate my love for them often through physical affection.
- A O S R N I encourage cooperation by structuring activities that need at least two to be accomplished.
- A O S R N I don't punish my children physically.

A O S R N I stay out of sibling conflicts as much as possible. But when someone is being hurt physically or emotionally, I intervene and ask for suggestions for resolution that require the children's input.

A O S R N I provide natural or logical consequences for unacceptable behavior.

A O S R N I give my children the opportunity to make decisions by gradually increasing their responsibility as they mature.

A O S R N I discourage play and TV or movies that encourage fighting or weapons.

A O S R N I teach my children to "leave the trail better than you found it."

PART TWO: Developing Priorities

A. Return to the [start](#) of the assessment and in each section put a star next to the one item that you believe would have the greatest positive impact in that area. For example, in the "body" section, if you decide that the most important thing for you to do is to get a medical exam, then you would put a star in the margin next to this statement. You should end up with nine or ten items. You can list them here.

B. If you didn't do it already, go back to the beginning and put a "?" next to each statement that you need to learn more about. You can list them here.

C. Take a few moments to look back at your results in each life-support system. This assessment is a kind of "snapshot" of your current efforts. In which areas are you doing well? Which areas need attention?

PART THREE: Examining Your Feelings

Present Feelings: Once you have completed the first two parts of this assessment, it's worth noting your feelings, whether positive or negative. It's also worth noting what you consider to be the attitudes behind the feelings. For instance, you may feel overwhelmed because you realize there is a lot you can personally do, or guilty because you may think you're not doing your share, or you may feel excited because you already have ideas about what you can do. How do you feel now, and why do you think you feel that way?

PART FOUR: Attitude and Action!

There's a danger in underestimating your impact as one single individual. Many people believe their efforts are insignificant, but that's not true. Here are two quotes to help you realize the importance of your individual contribution, whether positive or negative, to the stability of our world:

"Each snowflake in an avalanche pleads not guilty."—Stanislaw Lec

"Look ahead. You are not required to complete the task; neither are you permitted to lay it down."—The Talmud

Now that you have an idea of some high-leverage actions you can take (from Part II of this assessment) and now that you've been reminded of the importance of individual actions, why not use a copy of the [Dream and Goal Sheet](#) or some other goal-setting materials to create a realistic plan for each of the lifestyle changes that you'd like to make in the near future? Don't be like the throng of people in the [cartoon](#) who were each bemoaning the world's condition and saying to themselves apologetically, "What can one person do?" —Small transformations add up!

AN APPRECIATION

Finally, thank you for taking the time to do this assessment! Please remember that every single act you perform, including completing this exercise, represents a small, but real change that brings both you and the world closer to a more peaceful, sustainable and secure future. Thank you for looking ahead!

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