

World Religions

Buddhism: Letting Go of Desire

Each student should be given 10 blank cards or slips of paper on which they are to write the ten things they value most in the world (one item per card). This should be done the night before, and they should put serious thought into that they list.

The following day, students should be led through a series of “stations,” ideally outdoors (the activity works especially well if you have a wooded area on your campus), that lead them further away from the world and that might even slightly disorient them. At each station, students have to relinquish one of their cards, symbolically giving up items that they consider to be valuable to them. At the last station, they will have one card remaining, which they then will relinquish, leaving them with nothing.

The discussion that follows the activity should focus on why they chose what they did, and how they felt as they gave up their possessions. You can focus on such questions as:

- Why did you desire what you did?
- What item(s) did you give up in the early?
- What item did you value most?
- Why do people feel the need to own and possess?
- How did the activity make you feel?

The activity lends itself to variations. For example, you can have students read a passage of Buddhist scripture regarding desire at each of the stations, etc. The activity can also be done indoors, though it is best if the various stations seem like part of a path or a journey. Note that the activity can shake up some students, who have difficulty accepting the concept of renunciation and who rarely question their own tendency to cling and accumulate. Of course, such discomfort is the reason for the activity.