

Photo by Kate Rinder

# IT'S ALL CONNECTED

*The path toward human survival and all forms of equitable justice begins with our willingness to collaboratively and compassionately create a new way of being in relationship with one another and with the rest of creation.*

— SHERRI MITCHELL WEH'NA HAMU KWASSET

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Recognize the interrelatedness of peace, justice, and sustainability.
- Identify, understand, and articulate values, visions, and frameworks that lead toward a more peaceful, just and sustainable world.
- Identify, understand, and articulate some of the culturally-entrenched values and assumptions that reinforce destructive practices and systems of oppression.
- Practice systems thinking skills for peace, justice and sustainability action.



## SUGGESTED GROUP ACTIVITY: SYSTEMS THINKING ICEBERG

Use the Iceberg Activity at [ecochallenge.org/iceberg-model](https://ecochallenge.org/iceberg-model) to practice systems thinking with your group. Select a recent event that strikes you as urgent, important or interesting. Some examples: a recent hurricane, drought, or winter storm; a controversial Supreme Court decision or a high profile court case; a local policy change; recent military action between nations.

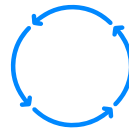
## Circle Question

**In the opening article for this session, Rachel Alexander speaks of the difficulty and pain in loving something you may soon lose. How do you put love into action when so much we care about is at risk?**

*Reminder to the facilitator: The circle question should move quickly. Elicit an answer from each participant without questions or comments from others. The facilitator's guidelines are on page 5.*

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do Thich Nhat Hanh's ideas of 'interbeing' relate to peace, justice and sustainability? How does the concept of interbeing apply to other things (jet planes, your cell phone, the burrito you ate for lunch)?
2. Jeannette Armstrong discusses how the members of her community explicitly identify the roles they are assuming in group dialogue and decision making. Which of these roles would you be likely to take in your own community? Who in your community takes on some of the other roles?
3. Imagine speaking with a child about the topics studied in this week's session. How would a child describe a peaceful, just, and sustainable world?
4. In "Dancing with Systems," Donella Meadows says, "We can't control systems or figure them out. But we can dance with them." Describe a way you could implement one of her "systems wisdom" practices in your own home, work, or community.
5. What are some culturally-entrenched values and assumptions that reinforce destructive practices and systems of oppression?
6. What are some values, visions, and/or frameworks that lead us toward a more peaceful, just, and sustainable world?
7. Nikki Silvestri, Amy Hartzler, and Hosan Lee discuss how to "Resist. Insist. Love." in response to our current times. Which of the three feels the most uncomfortable to you to enact right now? Why?
8. Other than the approaches highlighted in this session, is there an approach you use and trust to stay grounded and hopeful while working for change in our world?



### PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Choose an action to commit to this week from the list of possibilities at [systems.ecochallenge.org](https://systems.ecochallenge.org). Reflect on your experience, the difficulties and benefits of your action, and what you learned from taking action by posting to your Feed. You can register for Systems Ecochallenge using the password **connectionsPJS2019**.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Interested in finding out more about the topics presented in this session? Please visit [ecochallenge.org/discussion-course-resources](https://ecochallenge.org/discussion-course-resources) for suggested resources.



## ABOUT THIS SESSION

This is a course about the interrelationships of peace, justice, and environmental sustainability. The readings in this session open the path toward recognizing multiple layers of interconnectedness among peace, justice, and sustainability topics — the obvious and the not-so-obvious ones.

This is also a course about systems thinking.

Each of us is surrounded by and a part of innumerable complex systems — our solar system, our planet, the watershed from which we get drinking water, the food system that grows and transports and processes our food, representative democracy, the economy, our families and other social networks. Even our bodies are ecosystems, with millions of microbes affecting processes like immunity and digestion in both positive and negative ways.

Simply put, a system is multiple elements and processes that interact to form a whole. Systems thinking is a way of seeing and making sense of complex systems and complex problems. We usually attempt to solve problems through analysis — taking apart the pieces of something and attempting to understand the whole through analysis of the parts.

Systems thinking requires also paying attention to relationships, patterns and dynamics, as well as individual parts. Systems thinking helps us to integrate various perspectives to better understand complex patterns and structures. It allows us to more effectively interpret and solve complex problems, as well as be more effective in learning and designing.

In order to make positive change, it is vital that we see the relationships between people and between systems that contribute to or prevent peace, justice, and environmental sustainability. While we need to be cautious to avoid a meaningless catch-all perspective of connectedness, developing thinking and action outside of mental silos is important when we constructively seek to address peace, justice, and the environment. These readings do not deny the immense challenges we are facing, but they all offer authentic forms of hope which we can embrace and act upon.

Through systems thinking, not only can we more accurately identify the massive and interconnected problems we face, we can also learn from our mistakes to design more peaceful, just, and sustainable systems that are better for us all.

## DEFINITIONS

**Global Civil Society** refers to the aggregate of groups and individuals in society that operate across borders and independently of governments to further the will and interests of citizens.

The **Global Peace System** consists of numerous evident trends in the areas of global collaboration, constructive conflict transformation and social change. While significant in themselves, all are connected and part of the whole.

**Globalization** is the development of an increasingly integrated and interdependent global economy. Economic globalization has occurred through increasing free trade, free flow of capital, and the utilization of cheaper foreign labor markets.

**Nonviolence** is the practice of using peaceful means instead of force to resist oppression and bring about political or social change.

**Peace** can be used to describe a personal state of tranquility or a group's (e.g. national, societal, cultural) state of freedom from war, violence, and/or destruction.

**Systems thinking** is a way of conceptualizing and understanding the world that focuses on how various elements within a system — which could be an ecosystem, an organization, or something more dispersed such as a supply chain — are related to and influence one another. In systems thinking, seeing the relationships between the parts of a whole is as important as seeing the parts themselves.

**War** is the sustained and coordinated militarized combat between groups leading to large numbers of casualties.

**World Peace** is a process where we continuously take steps to promote the existence of all human and environmental components in a web a life that sustains us within its workings.