

Let's understand Nonviolent Communication

Nonviolent



COMMUNICATION

Orientation Course

Course Developed by

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Preface

To mark the 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti initiated several landmark programmes to reach all sections of the society. An important intervention was regular workshops with judicial officers, lawyers and prosecutors on integrating Gandhian nonviolent communication for meaningful interaction between the Bar and the Bench.

In continuation to this programme, the Samiti has initiated programmes on nonviolent conflict resolution and nonviolent communication for police, home guards, teachers and students.

At the start of the lockdown phase, it was a challenge for the Samiti to continue its goal of promoting the values and ideals of Mahatma Gandhi. It is in this backdrop, that the Samiti developed a free online orientation course on nonviolent communication. The course was put together by Dr Vedabhyas Kundu, Programme Officer, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti.

Nonviolent Communication is a powerful tool of effective communication which helps individuals to connect and engage with not only themselves but their families, friends and the society at large. It is based on pillars of Gandhian nonviolence- mutual respect, understanding, acceptance, appreciation and compassion.

Nonviolent Communication not only helps in emotional bridge building but also is an important tool to resolve disputes and conflicts. If we nurture the habit of using nonviolent communication in our daily lives, we will be able to overcome many problems in our families and society.

Anyone can do this course on nonviolent communication. It is free and can be downloaded from our website, www.gandhismriti.gov.in. Participants need to reply to the Reflection Exercises and mail us at gsdspeacestudies@gmail.com. All those who reply to the Reflection Exercises will be given certificates.

Wishing all participants of the course a meaningful experience with the course.



Dipanker Shri Gyan,
Director, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti



GUIDELINES

Thanking all participants who are embarking this online course with us.

Please send the replies to Reflection Exercises to :
gsdspeacestudies@gmail.com

There is no registration process. All those who write the Reflection Exercises will be given certificates. Please ensure that you write at least 100 words answers to each question.

For certificates, please furnish the following details:

Name:

Mother's Name:

Father's Name:

Institution:



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Module 1

What is Nonviolent Communication?

Introduction

Dear friends,

Welcome abroad this exciting orientation course on Nonviolent Communication. Here in this course you will not be required to appear any exams or you have to compete for grades. It is a course through which you can hone your skills in nonviolent communication at leisure.

You have to share just your reflections and email these to us and we will send you your certificate. The Reflection Exercises will be featured in Module 3 of this course.

Well friends, for all of us we cannot not communicate in our daily lives. It is difficult to survive without communicating.

Have you ever thought of life without being able to communicate? Unthinkable isn't it!

It is as important as the food we eat and oxygen we breathe. In fact, we are communicating at almost every moment of our lives - whether with ourselves, our kith and kin, our friends, strangers and others. It can be both verbal and nonverbal communication. Whether we are involved in any activity or are inactive, whether we are silent or speaking- everything has a message and these can influence not only us but others. In most cases the others are expected to respond to these messages and hence they too are communicating. Our communication process is continuous, always changing, interactive and irreversible.

Now let us think of a situation when you end up eating rotten food. You are most likely to get sick and suffer from food poisoning.

Similarly, think of a situation when you are staying in a polluted environment. You will be complaining about it. The air that we breathe, if it is polluted will lead us to a variety of ailments.

In a similar way, if we get into the habit of communicating using foul language, we are likely to suffer from stress. If our communication, both verbal and nonverbal is unhealthy we will be unhappy. Think of an incident when you got into a verbal fight



with your friend and you end up using foul words. In all probability, while you are retiring to bed in the night and you reflect back, you will feel bad.

The Vietnamese Zen Master, Thich Nhat Hanh explains this beautifully, “We tend to think of nourishment only as what we take in through our mouths, but what we consume with our eyes, our ears, our noses, our tongues, and our bodies is also food. The conversations going on around us, and those we participate in, are also food. Are we consuming and creating the kind of food that is healthy for us and helps us grow? When we say something that nourishes us and uplifts the people around us, we are feeding love and compassion. When we speak and act in a way that causes tension and anger, we are nourishing violence and suffering.”

So, friends, we have realized the importance of healthy communication which do not hurt others and also that which do not make us unhealthy. Healthy communication is extremely crucial for strengthening of all our relationships. Let’s remind ourselves of this important direction of Mahatma Buddha on the power of the words that we use:

“Words have both the power to destroy and heal. When words are both true and kind, they can change our world.”

This course will precisely help you grasp the importance of the words and language that we wish in our communication process, it will help you understand its various elements and how you can make it a habit to inculcate nonviolent communication in your daily acts of communication.

Here we are not just limiting the use of nonviolent communication to human-to-human interaction but human-nature interaction and human-and all other living beings. As the world faces crisis of environmental degradation, it is imperative that our interaction with both nature and all other living beings are nonviolent in nature.

In this module, we will look at on what is NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION.

So, friends let us start this unique journey....



Why NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION?

“The golden rule of conduct...is mutual toleration, seeing that we will never all think alike and we shall always see truth in fragment and from different angles of vision....Even amongst the most conscientious persons, there will be room enough for honest differences of opinion. The only possible rule of conduct in any civilized society is therefore, mutual toleration.”

- Mahatma Gandhi

Myra Walden (https://www.sgi.org/content/files/resources/sgi-quarterly-magazine/1104_64.pdf; SokaGakai International), talks about the importance of nonviolent communication, “Many of us have been brought up in environments where competition, judgment, demands and criticism are the communicative norm; at best these habitual ways of thinking and speaking hinder communication and create misunderstanding and frustration in others and ourselves. Still worse, they cause anger and pain and may even lead to violence. Even with the best intentions, we can generate needless conflict. The system of nonviolent communication... begins by assuming we are all compassionate by nature and those violent strategies, whether verbal or physical, are learned behaviours, supported by the prevailing culture. Nonviolent communication helps people learn how to communicate effectively with each other so that their lives and relationships are transformed.”

Marshall Rosenberg in his book, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* talks of the benefits of using it in all aspects of our lives:

Nonviolent Communication helps us connect with each other and ourselves in a way that allows our natural compassion to flourish. It guides us to reframe the way we express ourselves and listen to others by focusing our consciousness on four areas: what we are observing, feeling, and needing, and what we are requesting to enrich our lives. Nonviolent communication fosters deep listening, respect, and empathy and engenders a mutual desire to give from the heart. Some people use nonviolent communication to respond compassionately to themselves, some to create greater depth in their personal relationships, and still others to build effective relationships at work or in the political arena.



Decoding on what is NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION

Learning new communication skills is exciting and energizes the learner like one finds oneself while trying to learn a new language. Though we are remarkably enthusiastic that we are able to acquire the skills of conversing in a new language, it needs lot of perseverance and repetition. The more we practice, the faster do we learn the new language. This is also true of acquiring skills of nonviolent communication; the more we practice and make it part of our lives, the greater will be the difference we will be making in our connections with others.

As the world is hungering for peace and we find conflicts and differences becoming a daily occurrence in our lives, practicing nonviolent communication offers the right nourishment needed to handle the conflicts and avoid stressful conditions. This will help in avoiding illusion of separation and ill-feelings. Use of nonviolent communication will act as a balm and help in healing wounds of hatred and mistrust.

For every building, the foundation has to be strong and rests on pillars. The stronger the pillars, the better it is for the constructed building. So, to construct the habit of using nonviolent communication in our lives, it is important to explore its pillars.

The grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, Arun Gandhi (2017), in his book, *The Gift of Anger*, elaborates on the five basic pillars of Gandhi's nonviolence. These are precisely the pillars of nonviolent communication.

These include:

- **Respect,**
- **Understanding,**
- **Acceptance,**
- **Appreciation and**
- **Compassion.**

Any one imbibing these five basic pillars can practice nonviolence in their daily lives without much difficulty.

Arun Gandhi beautifully explains the five pillars of nonviolence:

Respect and understanding of other people, whatever their religion, race, caste, or country, is the only way the world can go forward. Putting up walls and divisions always backfires in the end, leading to anger, rebellion, and violence. In contrast, when we respect and understand each other, we naturally evolve to that third pillar, acceptance. The ability to accept other views and positions allows us to grow stronger and wiser. The other two pillars of nonviolence-appreciation and compassion- help bring about personal happiness and fulfillment as well as greater harmony in the world.

So, friends, the formula is simple. Just try and make it into a habit of respecting others irrespective of their class and the communities they come. If you respect others, others will tend to respect you. This is true also for nature and all other living beings. We must



respect nature by all means otherwise we will end up creating imbalance in the relationship between nature and human. Similarly, we must try to respect all other living beings- all animals and birds around us.

We must remember that by imbibing the above five pillars, we will be able to inculcate positive attitudes. The negativity that often surrounds us will diminish and we will evolve as individuals and as a society at large. Negative and violent relationships cannot help in build a homogenous family or society; it is only positivity and nonviolent action that can promote social cohesion.

So, then what really is NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION?

Mahatma Gandhi's approach to nonviolent communication entails: (1) nonviolent speech and action; (2) maintenance of relationships and enrichment of personhood; (3) openness; and (4) flexibility.

Gandhi's nonviolent communication has been aptly encapsulated by India's first President, Dr Rajendra Prasad, who in his introduction to the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi wrote:

Here are the words of the Master covering some six decades of a superbly human and intensely active public life- words that shaped and nurtured a unique movement and led it to success; words that inspired countless individuals and showed them the light; words that explored and showed a new way of life; words that emphasized cultural values which are spiritual and eternal, transcending time and space and belonging to all humanity and all ages.

Senior Gandhian, Shri Natwar Thakkar gives us a comprehensive explanation on what is NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION (for those who want to understand in-depth this idea of nonviolent communication, we are attaching an interview of Shri Thakkar. He passed away in October 2018):

To me nonviolent communication would mean how our communication efforts should be nonviolent; how our ability and capacity to communicate not only with ourselves but with our family and society be nonviolent in all aspects and overall how the entire process of communication whether between individuals, groups, communities and the world at large should be nonviolent in nature. This would entail deep understanding of the art and science of nonviolence and its centrality in all our daily actions. It's not just verbal and nonverbal communication, nonviolent communication literacy would also include whether our thoughts and ideas are nonviolent or not. This would also mean how we can rid of our preconceived notions of individuals or groups with whom we want to communicate and stop evaluating them to suit our own ideas. More than often we are attuned to think in terms of moralistic judgments which may be our own constructions. By developing deep understanding of the art and science of nonviolence and integrating it in our communication practices we could get over with biased and moralistic judgments; this in turn could contribute to emotional bridge building.



By being nonviolent communication literate, an individual/group/community will be able to self-introspect whether the message they want to share has elements of violence and whether such a message will hurt others. Nonviolent communication literacy would automatically help in strengthening and deepening relationships. When we are able to emotionally build bridges with others, we will be able to empathize with their views.

Nonviolent communication literacy also includes mastering the art of listening. His Holiness The Dalai Lama has rightly said, “When you talk you are only repeating what you already know; but when you listen you may learn something new.” Essentially, we should learn to listen with a sincere intention to understand, open and focused on what the other person is trying to tell.

The way we use language and words while writing and conversations is an important aspect of nonviolent communication literacy.

So, I firmly believe that by practicing nonviolent communication, there can be amazing opportunities to promote goodness in our world which keeps on getting struck with conflicts. It is an essential part of efforts to evolve a culture of peace and nonviolence not just in our homes but in the entire world. This is also an antidote to all acts of revenge, aggression and retaliation as all these arises from breakdown in communication or our reliance in violence in communication.

Friends, let us further try to understand on what Shri Natwar Thakkar is trying to say:

- I. We should try to ensure that all our efforts to communicate with all – family members, friends, relatives and others should be nonviolent in nature.
- II. Shri Thakkar talks on understanding the significance of nonviolence in our daily lives. According to Mahatma Gandhi, “I am an irrepressible optimist. My optimism rests on my belief in the infinite possibilities of the individual to develop non-violence. The more you develop it in your own being, the more infectious it becomes till it over-whelms your surroundings and by and by might over sweep the world.” (Harijan, 28-1-1939, p 443)
- III. Sometimes we may not use violence in our communication. But our thoughts and ideas may be violent in nature. Nonviolent communication entails that we desist from violent thoughts and ideas.
- IV. When we start practicing nonviolent communication as a habit, then over a period of time we will be able to self-introspect whenever we communicate if what we have spoken or our action could hurt others.
- V. We need to be careful with the language we use and the words that are used during our conversation and all other forms of communication. We will discuss about this at length in the next module.



- VI. What the world needs is how individuals and groups constantly engage with each other and try and deepen positive relationships. But using nonviolent communication we can strengthen relationships.
- VII. As we may get into disputes and conflicts of different kinds in various times of our lives, conflicts are inevitable part of our lives, using nonviolent communication helps us to resolve our disputes amicably. We will further discuss about this aspect in the next module.
- VIII. Friends, so in this module we have tried to understand on what nonviolent communication is. In the next module using interesting case studies we will try to understand the different elements of nonviolent communication. You are the driver and when you grasp the different elements you will be able to guide your life into a positive and stress-free environment where you would have capacities to negotiate with people from diverse background and temperament.
- IX. As we sign off from this module, please remember that nonviolent communication is not for developing relationships with just fellow human beings, but also with nature and all other living beings.



Module 2

Elements of Nonviolent Communication

Words hold power that can be used to instigate or neutralize any given experience. They can be used as weapons- either offense or defense. We need to be aware of the energy that our language, our words, hold and use them for the greater good. - Thais Mazur and Wendy Wood (Do Not Harm: Mindful Engagement for a World in Crisis)

After understanding on what is nonviolent communication it would be useful to know about different elements which constitutes nonviolent communication. Here we will try to examine different elements using examples and scenarios so that we have greater clarity.

As we embark upon this journey, please try to reflect and think of your own situations and explore on how you can make these elements an integral part of your daily practice.

i. Nonviolent Communication means complete lack of violence in the way we communicate with others.

This includes both verbal and nonverbal communication. Several times, knowingly or unknowingly, we become violent and the words, without realizing, we use may hurt others. When we are violent in our communication, we tend to humiliate others and there is every possibility that the other person could also be violent with us. Violence in communication leads to communication breakdown and trust deficit; it sows the seeds of conflict. So, the next time, you are communicating with anyone consciously think of whether your message is hurting others or not.

ii. We should learn to communicate with ourselves and self-introspect.

In today's world, we are living amidst lot of negativities. Besides, with surfeit of digital technologies, most of us do not have time for ourselves. Just reflect on your daily habits. How many hours in a day do you end up browsing your smartphone? What is your daily intake of social media diet? If each one of start calculating we will find most of us spend substantial part of our time texting or spending time in the social media. The reality is that most of us end up sparing very little time for ourselves. Very rarely we get time to communicate with ourselves!!!

*This leads us to an important question: When was the last time you met yourself? **Pease reflect on this for a while.***



Here are some benefits of communicating with oneself:

When we start communicating with ourselves, we will develop patience and before arguing with others, we will start reflecting. We can practice nonviolent communication by observing our inner self and deeply listening to our self-talk. This will help us to look for creative solutions of our feelings and needs and also on how we connect with others. Practicing nonviolent communication with oneself is important.

Also, friends, learn to practice self-empathy as it is important to spot our shortcomings and reasons of our possible biases and judgements vis-a-vis others. For instance, in a situation where we have differences of opinion, if we start blaming the other person for the conflict solely, it means we do not have control over our own emotions. However, when we start looking at the situation from the other person's point of view, we are being self-aware.

To sum up, Swami Vivekananda reminds us: *There is, however, one great danger in human nature, viz, that man never examines himself. He thinks he is quite as fit to be on the throne as the king.*

Another important aspect to keep in mind is constant reflection of our self-talk and inner dialogues. We should always strive to ensure that our self-talk and inner dialogues are constructive in nature. Aggressive inner dialogues or self-talk will make us stressful and could affect our communication with others.

iii. Use of appropriate and positive language

Words and the manner they are used is significant. Words can be described as medicine- they can cure or heal but if used improperly we will become unhealthy. Constant use of violent words will disturb our mental balance and we will end up becoming stressful.

Use of appropriate language and words that are positive in nature are keys to nonviolent communication. It should also be noted words may have different meanings and interpretations in different cultures. We must remember that through language and communication we can see the heart of a people. It means that language makes it possible to express feelings, emotions, views, ideas, opinions, perceptions as well as judgement about people, objects, places, things, information and situations.

Inappropriate use of language and words can contribute to conflicts while use of nonviolent expressions can help in resolution of conflicts. An eminent scholar had aptly said, "Language is the key to the heart of a people". Language is hence a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires.

While you read this section, think of the last time when you had tiff with your friend and you ended up using inappropriate language. Could you have used some different words which wouldn't have hurt your friend?

If we reflect closely, we will realize that many a times we use words and language that suffocates others. But we can still express our feelings by using different phrases and



language. It all boils down on the words that we are using in our communication and the style of our delivery.

Here is an interesting example one is tempted to share.

Sometime back one was with a senior. He wanted his driver to take a courier packet. He called his driver and asked his driver if he was available. The driver came. He then politely asked him if by taking the courier packet he would not be burdened. Defenceless by this true approach of nonviolent communication, the driver promptly responded that he would not be burdened by taking the courier packet.

The senior could have ordered the driver as he was the boss. But instead he relied on using nonviolent communication. Such approaches strengthen relationships and mutual respect.

Again, think of a scenario where you want certain things from an acquaintance. If you are using aggressive language it may put off that person. However, if you use positive nonviolent communication, you could end up succeeding in getting your request fulfilled.

To sum up, it would be pertinent to quote Archbishop Desmond Tutu on the importance of language “Language is very powerful. Language does not just describe quality. Language creates the reality it describes. We should try to take responsibility of our action, words and feelings and not blame others for these.”

iv. Avoiding stereotypes in our communication efforts

Just think of a situation when you find that someone's pocket has been picked in your area. There are a few homeless people around. In all probability, many around would immediately blame these homeless people as pick pockets. More than often we are used to falling into the trap of stereotypes.

An important component of nonviolent communication is avoidance of stereotypes. More than often we fall into the trap of stereotyping individuals without understanding their points dispassionately. We stereotype individuals on the basis of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, caste, disabilities and many other criteria. We generally make our responses on the basis of the stereotypes which we construct. This is not nonviolent communication.

By categorizing people on the basis of different parameters and putting them into those brackets results in breakdown in communication. So, friends, try to make it a habit of avoiding stereotypes while communicating.



v. Avoid moralistic judgements

Another frequent drawback is how we end up in drawing comparisons between individuals. Avoiding being judgemental is another important component of nonviolent communication. Dale Carnegie has aptly said, “Even God doesn't propose to judge a man till his last days, why should you and I?”

Marshall Rosenberg terms such types of judgemental communication as ‘life-alienating’ communication. In his book, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, he says, “One kind of life-alienating communication is the use of moralistic judgments that imply wrongness or badness on the part of people who don’t act in harmony with our values. Such judgments are reflected in language: “The problem with you is that you’re too selfish.” “She’s lazy.” “They’re prejudiced.” “It’s inappropriate.” Blame, insults, put-downs, labels, criticism, comparisons, and diagnoses are all forms of judgment.”

According to Rosenberg, the life-alienating communication is ‘a language that is rich with words that classify and dichotomize people and their actions.’ Also making comparisons between individuals or groups is another shortcoming in our communication. Making comparisons are a form of judgement. Rosenberg goes on to term the demand we make of our desires as also life-alienating communication which should be avoided if we are to practice nonviolent communication.

Think of a classroom situation. We often find teachers making moralistic judgements of their students’ potential. They could for instance tell a student on why s/he is not performing in comparison to another student. We could, by using such moralistic judgements end up humiliating people or groups.

vi. Avoid evaluative language

Philosopher, Jiddu Krishnamurti says the highest form of human intelligence is when we observe without evaluating. For most of us it is extremely challenging on how we observe people and their behaviour without evaluating them. How is it possible to observe someone dispassionately without bringing into play our preconceived notions? Nonviolent communication necessitates that we learn to make observation without evaluations using preconceived notions.

For instance, think of yourself as a coach of the school football team. Say one of your players has not scored a goal in 15 matches. As a coach you will most probably scold the player by saying, ‘you are repeatedly putting the team down by not scoring any goal, you are not good enough’. This is your evaluative statement. But if you tell the player, ‘well you may not have scored in the last 15 matches but I am sure you will do in the next matches’. This may help the player to make renewed attempts to practice harder and feel you still have faith in his ability.

If we are practicing nonviolent communication, we should desist from evaluative statements and straight-jacketed generalizations.



vii. Role of mutual respect in communication

Mutual respect is critical element of nonviolent communication. It is the basic building block. If you do not respect others, you cannot expect a meaningful dialogue. Mutual respect requires that we should be aware of the impact of our behaviour and the way we talk on others. By practicing respect towards others during interactions and dialogues, we are being attentive, acknowledging their presence, trying to understand them and their point of views and accepting them.

Also, when we make mutual respect as part of our daily habits, it would be easier for us to use the most appropriate positive language even when we find ourselves in an emotionally charged situation.

viii. The Power of Empathy

“Three-fourths of the miseries and misunderstandings in the world will disappear, if we step into the shoes of our adversaries and understand their standpoint. We will then agree with our adversaries quickly or think of them charitably.” - Mahatma Gandhi

Nonviolent communication enables us to make empathetic connections. We should be conscious of the power of empathy. Here is an important quote of Swami Vivekananda which inspires us to empathetic: One-sidedness is the bane of the world. The more sides you can develop the more souls you have, and you can see the universe through all souls.

For instance, when we are in a conflict with a friend, instead of just blaming her/his for the situation, we should try to put ourselves in the shoes of that friend and then make our points. In fact, we should practice more deeply. We should go beyond just putting ourselves into the other's shoes at the surface level; instead we should practice to deeply understand the other's position from all dimensions before embarking on our arguments.

By empathising with others, we can touch the humanness of others. Connecting empathetically with others is an important objective of nonviolent communication. It entails not just connecting with one self or other individuals but with all including nature and other living beings. The need for empathetic connection is beautifully stressed in this quote of Chief Seattle, “Man did not weave the web of life, and he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself. All things are bound together. All things connect.” Lack of empathy is roadblock to proper communication and can result in conflicts.

In general, it can be said that empathy begets empathy. If you practice, you can expect others also to be empathetic to you and this can be a chain. We can say that positive and empathetic behaviour can spread if it is practiced with right earnest.



Studies have shown that empathetic individuals tend to experience greater subjective well-being. Another study shows that the need to feel good and be a moral person can be a great motivator to act empathetically.

In his book, *The Empathetic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis*, Jeremy Rifkin notes that human nature is fundamentally empathetic rather than selfish and competitive. Rifkin points out, “If we can harness empathetic sensibilities and establish a new global ethic to harmonize the many relationships that make up to life-sustaining forces of the planet, we will have moved beyond the detached, self-interested and utilitarian philosophical assumptions.”

Myrha Walden (SokaGakai International) talks on the significance of empathetic communication, “When someone receives our suffering quietly, openheartedly and without judgment, we are able to open ourselves to our pain. We experience it fully, release it, and in so doing, we heal. Clarity emerges, and we gain access to inner wisdom.”

ix. Strong belief in the power of compassion

“A human being is a part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feeling as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.”
— **Albert Einstein**

A basic premise of nonviolent communication is all human beings are capable of being compassionate. When we reach out to others with compassion, we can expect others to be compassionate with us.

We all know that developing social connections are an underlying drive of human behaviour. Also, majority of us desire meaningful interactions through these social connections. But to establish such connections, we should develop the capacities to express care and concern for others and also to identify with them. It is in this context, by being compassionate, we can promote kind and loving behaviour with others. Also, when we are compassionate towards others- fellow beings, nature and all other living beings, we will be less stressful and will feel better. It is an important dimension to our well-being. His Holiness, the Dalai Lama has rightly said, “If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”

Studies have suggested that when we practice compassion in groups, we can promote greater cooperation. So friends, as a nonviolent communicator, make it a habit to be compassionate as it has manifold benefits.



x. Connecting with needs of others

Human needs are universal. The manner we feel is mostly based whether our needs are met or unmet. Much of our action are guided on how are needs are met or they remain unmet.

Here it would be pertinent to mention that Mahatma Gandhi had said that there is enough in the Earth for everyone's needs but not for our greed. It is only when our aim to meet our excessive greed becomes the objective than most of the conflicts begins.

Often we associate 'needs' to something negative. But this should not be the case as we mentioned that human needs are universal. Conscious attempts need to be made to connect with the feelings, perspectives and needs of others. But when we start analysing the 'needs' without being judgemental and at a basic level, we would not be looking at it as a negative entity.

Many of the problems or conflicts arise because we are not ready to understand the needs of the others; what was the particular need of the person concern because of which s/he is behaving in such a manner. For instance, let us say there is a marital discord. If both the husband and wife start critically understand and pin-point that particular need of each other because of which they are acting in a different way, much of the dispute would get over.

So, in a nutshell, we should try to pin-point not only our own needs but when we are dealing with others, try to understand their needs. This will help us engage with others in a positive manner.

xi. Importance of flexibility in our communication

Flexibility is another important element of our communication process. Much of the problems happen when we refuse to be flexible and we start to believe that whatever we are communicating is correct.

George Bernard Shaw had rightly said, "Progress is impossible with change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything." Being flexible leads us to another important aspect, the capacity to show openness in our communicative abilities.

ChogyamTrungpa Rinpoche, "Openness is not a matter of giving something to someone else, but it means giving up your demand and the basic criteria of the demand ... It is learning to trust in the fact that you do not need to secure your ground, learning to trust in your fundamental richness, that you can afford to be open. This is the open way."

In short, let's try and practice flexibility and openness in our communication efforts.

xii. Practicing active listening skills

Practicing active listening skills is critical for nonviolent communication. Every time we enter into a conversation, we should carefully listen to the other; try to



understand the message they want to convey- both verbal and nonverbal communication; and try to learn from others. As active listeners, we should practice to summarize on what we have grasped from the other speakers; it will enhance our understanding. We also should try to pay serious attention to our responses and what we say during the conversation or dialogue.

Conscious attempts need to be made to sincerely listen to others. In our daily lives, we can easily feel when the other person is listening to us with sincerity and is engaging. We can easily understand that the other person is 'present'. It gives us the space for conversation and even if there are differences of views, it keeps the door open for further engagement.

According to Thais Mazur and Wendy Wood in their book, *Do Not Harm: Mindful Engagement for a World in Crisis*, "Deep listening includes both the mind and the body as instruments of listening-physical awareness, cognitive reflection, and emotional attunement. This is represented in varying degrees of emotional, psychological, and even spiritual components giving us the ability to listen closely to subtleties, and to the possibilities at hand."

They further point out, "If we sit with others and listen, not just with our ears but also with our bodies and whole being, we find that the words we thought we ought to say or planned on saying, may have changed. A new set of words begin to formulate a different way of communicating our knowledge is blended with our insights in the moment."

xiii. Expressing gratitude

We must practice to express gratitude to whatever we have and whatever anyone does for us. This is an important ingredient of nonviolent communication and it makes us more aware.

Gratitude means feeling thankful or returning the kindness or generosity received from others. As the world finds itself in turmoil and violence of different kinds, each and every individual strive to explore ways to remain happy and live peacefully. Different studies have shown that by expressing gratitude and making this as our habit makes us feel better. Gratitude breathes positivity into whatever we are trying to do and it helps us to improve the quality of our lives.

Underlining the significance of gratitude in nonviolent communication, Marshall Rosenberghad aptly said, "The more you become a connoisseur of gratitude, the less you are a victim of resentment, depression and despair. Gratitude will act as an elixir that will gradually dissolve the hard shell of your ego, your need to possess and control, and transform you into a generous being. . ."

Friends, we would suggest you maintain a daily gratitude journal where you, while retiring to bed, note down the situations and people who have helped you during the course of the day in some way or the other.



Module 3

Practicing Nonviolent Communication in our Daily Lives

Friends,

So far in Module 1 and Module 2, we discussed on what is nonviolent communication and its elements. We are sure by now you have been able to grasp on what exactly is nonviolent communication. Hope you enjoyed this course.

Here in this module we will discuss on how you can become a **NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATOR**.

Here we will also provide five reflection exercises which we would request you to put together and send us at gdspeacestudies@gmail.com. Also, we request you to mail us your full name, mother and father's name, institution if any and your full address with pin code. As mentioned in our announcement, we will be giving you certificates for finishing this course.

A) Adhering to Five Pillars of Gandhian Nonviolence:

As mentioned in our Module 1, if you adhere to the five pillars of Gandhian nonviolence- respect for all including nature and all living beings, understanding, acceptance, positive appreciation and compassion, you are likely to avoid many disputes that comes in your way and promote positivity in your lives.

B) Managing your negative and disruptive emotions:

As a nonviolent communicator, you would be able to handle and manage your negative and disruptive emotions under check which will help us to harness positive energy. Swami Vivekananda had rightly said: Each time we control hatred or feeling of anger, it is so much good energy stored up in our favour; that piece of energy will be converted into the higher powers.

C) Anger Management:

This leads us to an important aspect of our lives, anger management. Each one of us is likely to get angry at different points of our lives. For reasons or no reasons, we might end up being angry. The challenge is how to keep one's feelings under control. In Young India (October 1, 1931), Gandhi wrote, "It is not that I am incapable of anger, for instance; but I succeed almost on all occasions to keep my feelings under control."



While as Gandhi says channelizing our anger wisely could be used for the good of the humanity, more than often we tend to harm ourselves or others by getting angry. It could be both physically or emotional.

Practicing nonviolent communication will help us being patient and handle our anger constructively. Also, when we are able to channelize our anger constructively, we will not suffer from stressfulness.

Gandhi gave an innovative lesson in nonviolent communication to control our anger- daily writing an anger journal. An anger journal will help us write the reasons on why we got angry on a particular occasion. In the anger journal we can write on who made us angry, what were the main reasons for us to get angry, when we were angry, where we were angry and why we were angry? This will help us locate the reasons and the possible solutions to get over with our anger.

D) Conflict Resolution:

The way we communicate is crucial to how we resolve conflicts, it is central to both prevention of conflicts and resolution of conflicts. If we look at conflicts, we will realize that the reason of most conflicts is the result of perceptions, stereotypes, moralistic judgements, attitudes and assumptions. Now if we look at different nonviolent conflict resolution methods like collaboration, negotiation, mediation, promotion of dialogues and conciliation- all depend on effective communication strategies to succeed.

It is here that the role of nonviolent communication as a powerful tool for resolution of conflicts comes into play. In different parts of our lives we may get into disputes with different people including our family members, friends, colleagues and others. When we make nonviolent communication part of our daily practice, it gives important tool to handle these disputes without getting aggressive.

Think of the different elements of nonviolent communication- use of appropriate and positive language, compassion, empathy, understanding other person's issues at the needs level, flexibility, openness, and practicing active listening- all aid to resolution of conflicts. Further if we look at the other elements of nonviolent communication like avoidance of stereotypes, moralistic judgements, avoidance of evaluative language- all these are also important approaches to resolution of conflicts. In fact, several studies point out on how becoming a nonviolent communication practitioner, you can expand your levels of empathy and efficiency in resolving conflicts.

As use of nonviolent communication not only enables us to deeply understand issues from other person's point of view but also ingrain within you that the ultimate goal of any dispute should be to promote emotional bridge building and strengthen relationships, you will be handle emotionally charged situation with



greater maturity and dexterity. You will be able to handle not only your emotions but others too in a positive manner.

E) Overcoming Stress:

Using Nonviolent Communication helps us overcome stress and be happy. Just reflect on what is nonviolent communication and its elements. You will realize that using it will surely help you to minimize your stress. When you try to acquire positive energy by thinking and acting positively, express gratitude, is compassionate and empathetic, we will remain happy and it will aid to our well-being.

F) Importance of engaging in dialogues and the significance of Nonviolent Communication

Senior Gandhian, Prof N Radhakrishnan in his dialogue with peace scholar, Daisaku Ikeda, argues, “Insufficient communication, trust and dialogue are major causes of the tremendous violence, crime, hatred and exploitation rife in modern society.” This is definitely true as we find the level of tolerance in our society declining. We are getting less interested to engage in dialogues especially with those who may have differing views. For peaceful coexistence, dialogue is critical.

Captured in their book, *Walking with the Mahatma: Gandhi for Modern Times*, Radhakrishnan points out, “Dialogue is wanting today at all levels: among nations, groups and ethnic groups; among proponents of different religions groups; within families; between parents and children; and among friends. Lack of dialogue breeds a corresponding lack of mutual understanding at all levels. Gandhi believed there is no suffering that cannot be solved if people come together in one place for candid discussions.”

Responding to Radhakrishnan, Ikeda argues that ‘in order to change, we have to change people’s hearts and minds.’ “The only way to advance the movement for human revolution is sincere dialogue. The power of dialogue is the power of the spirit and the intellect,” he says.

Ikeda further notes, “Impartial dialogue is possible only when one is willing to look at things from the other person’s perspective. Dialogue is not possible if one disdains or discriminates against the other person. It is naturally engendered when one believes in, respects and reveres the worth inherent in the other person.”

Hence promoting meaningful dialogues is not only critically important but also the need of the hour for social harmony and cohesion. Having elaborated the key elements of nonviolent communication, it can be stressed that it is central to the success of dialogues.



G) Nonviolent Communication and Team Building

If you are working as a team, adhering to the elements of nonviolent communication will help in effective team building as there would be greater cohesion, trust, solidarity and empathetic relationship. This will in turn contribute to greater efficiency in your work.



Reflection Exercises

Friends,

Now it is time to attempt some reflection exercises. Please share your reflections to all these exercises below and mail these to gsdspeacestudies@gmail.com. There is no word limit. You are requested to share in-depth all that you have grasped.

- a) You have gone through the modules. Please share on what you understand by NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION in your own words. Please share on how you will attempt to make NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION as part of YOUR DAILY HABITS.
- b) Try to revisit a situation where you were indulged in a fight with your friend. It was a bitter experience. Now that you have tried to understand the nuances of nonviolent communication, reflect on how you could have handled the situation.
- c) Think of a person who might have hurt with her/his actions. Think of the ways they might have met their needs without doing the action which hurt you. Can you think of how you would convey these options to the person?
- d) Each one of us have our likes and dislikes. There might be number of persons whom may not like. Think of one such person whose image in your mind is like an enemy. However, now you wish to develop connection with that person. How will you turn the conflict with the person into a connection and build bridges?
- e) Mahatma Gandhi had said, “When we channel electricity intelligently, we can use it to improve our life, but if we abuse it, we could die. So as with electricity, we must learn to use anger wisely for the good of humanity.” Each one of us gets angry at some of point of time or the other. How do you think you can manage your anger effectively?
- f) How do you think the habit of expressing gratitude change your life?



- g) You are part of a team engaged in social change. Put together a framework of how will you introduce NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION amongst team members so that there is greater engagement and efficiency.



Nurturing Emotional Bridge-Building through Nonviolent Communication Literacy for Global Peace

Mr Natwar Thakkar was one of the pioneers of the Gandhian movement in the North-East India. He started working in Nagaland to promote Gandhian constructive work since 1955. This was at the height of Naga insurgency that he took the courage to travel to Nagaland to do the work of emotional bridge building with the rest of the country.

The Nagaland Gandhi Ashram which he set up has been a vibrant centre of Gandhian activities in the region. His efforts have been to promote emotional bridge-building between the people of the region and the rest of the country.

In this dialogue he shares his views on the essence of Gandhian nonviolent communication for emotional bridge building and enhancement of relationship. He says this is crucial for promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence.

Mr Thakkar passed away in October last year (2018).

This dialogue was conducted by Dr Vedabhyas Kundu, Programme Officer of Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, New Delhi. Dr Kundu specializes in nonviolent communication & media and information literacy for peace and nonviolence.

Vedabhyas Kundu: Every day as we turn our newspapers, television channel or browse the Internet, we find horrific stories of people killing each other, conflicts and different forms of violence debasing our society. Mostly conflicts start when we think ourselves to be superior and develop feelings of contempt towards our fellow human beings. The former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech in 2001 had said, “We have entered the third millennium through a gate of fire. New threats make no distinction between races, nations or regions. A new insecurity has entered every mind, regardless of wealth or status....In the early beginnings of the 21st century – a century already violently disabused of any hopes that progress towards global peace and prosperity is inevitable — this new reality can no longer be ignored. It must be confronted....The 20th century was perhaps the deadliest in human history, devastated by innumerable conflicts, untold suffering, and unimaginable crimes. Time after time, a group or a nation inflicted extreme violence on another, often driven by irrational hatred and suspicion, or unbounded arrogance and thirst for power and resources...”

Also Samuel Huntington (1997) in his book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* says, “People are always tempted to divide people into us and them, the in-group and the other, our civilization and those barbarians.” In the backdrop of deep fissures engineered by people themselves and the environment of intolerance, racism and xenophobia, the challenge today is to work assiduously to plug these fissures and make sincere attempts to stop the culture of intolerance and hatred. As Kofi Anan had stated further in his speech, “Peace must be made real and tangible in the daily existence of every individual in need. Peace must be sought, above all, because it is the condition for every member of the human family to live a life of dignity and security.” The 1980 Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Perez Esquivel in his acceptance speech had also stressed that to build a society in which peace is the foundation of life ‘we must reach out our hands, fraternally, without hatred and rancour, for



reconciliation and peace, with unfaltering determination in the defense of truth and justice. We know we cannot plant seeds with closed fists’.

Esquivel’s thrust on the need for people to reach out for a peaceful society underlines the importance of different strategies human society has to constantly use to nurture solidarity among communities and individuals. Communication is one of the most important elements for people to reach out for a peaceful society. It has the ability to play a dual role- while it can contribute to make peace real and tangible; if used in the wrong way it can aggravate conflicts and spread hatred. It is for people on how they use tools of communication.

Natwar Thakkar: You have rightly stressed on the dual nature of communication. Though the media tries to do a fairly good job, more than often it attempts to sensationalize violence which can accentuate cases of conflicts. The media is also accused of furthering what Huntington says, attempts to divide people into us and them. Throughout history we will find how different forms of communication have been used to accentuate divisiveness and intolerance. In this context, Mahatma Gandhi’s stress on the need to exercise self-restraint and critically ponder on what messages one is trying to take to the masses should be a guiding post for all communicators today. He had said, “To be true to my faith, therefore, I may not write in anger or malice. I may not write idly. I may not write merely to excite passion. The reader can have no idea of the restraint I have to exercise from week to week in the choice of topics and my vocabulary. It is training for me. It enables me to peep into myself and make discoveries of my weaknesses. Often my vanity dictates a smart expression or my anger a harsh adjective. It is a terrible ordeal but a fine exercise to remove these weeds.”

The need for communicators today is to challenge the attempts to divide people on the basis of class, religion and race. While communicating they need to imbibe what Mahatma Gandhi had so eloquently stressed, “I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible.” He had further noted, “Nothing can be farther from my thought than that we should become exclusive or erect barriers.” So right from a young age we need to teach children to use communication to promote human values which contributes to a spirit of solidarity. The communication education to my mind should integrate the values of pluralism, mutual respect and inclusivity. It should not be a vehicle to sensationalize or incite passion but a lesson to practice self-restraint and principles of nonviolence in all aspects.

My experience of working in Nagaland suggests that the role of communication should be for emotional bridge-building, connecting and facilitating dialogue amongst people from diverse cultural communities together. Emotions play a significant role in the process of communication. Majority of the time we are not aware of what emotional impact our speech has on others. So it is crucial that we try to develop our emotional vocabulary.

Our communicative abilities should be able to further compassion and empathy while developing deep understanding of each other’s concerns. If we are compassionate and empathetic, we will be able to understand other people’s views and we will be able to



connect with them. By being compassionate and empathetic, we can promote emotional bridge-building. This can help in narrowing differences and help in nurturing relationships.

Vedabhyas Kundu: The role of emotional bridge building which you have described as an important function of communication needs to be promoted among all sections of the population. Emotional bridge building can result in meaningful dialogues. Our efforts should be to draw people and groups who may have differences to be engaged in dialogues. John Dewey (1859-1952) had pertinently said that those who have not had the kinds of experience that deepen understanding of neighborhood and neighbours will be unable to maintain regard for people from distant lands. We need to develop a habit of continuously engaging with others and reaching out to them with mutual respect. On the importance of dialogue, peace scholar, Daisaku Ikeda (2007) notes, "Through dialogue, we can arrive at a deeper mutual understanding. Dialogue starts by clearly recognizing the positions and interests of the respective parties and then clearly identifying the obstacles to progress, patiently working to remove and resolve each of these." He further says, "I firmly believe that the true value of dialogue is not to be found solely in the results it produces but, more significantly, in the process of dialogue itself, as two human spirits engage with and elevate each other to a higher realm.... Dialogue is what opens the eye of the human spirit and liberates people from the curse of narrow-minded prejudices and hatreds." In his Peace Proposal 2005, Ikeda further writes, "The numerous problems we confront are caused by human beings, which means that they must have a human solution. However long the effort takes, so long as we do not abandon the work of unknotting the tangled threads of these interrelated issues, we can be certain of finding a way forward. The core of such efforts must be to bring forth the full potential of dialogue."

But in today's world we increasingly see that many of us abandon the spirit of dialogue and conversation, they are in a hurry and are intolerant. They are not ready to listen to others and this results in friction and conflicts. It is worrying. Instead of communication playing the role of emotional bridge building, there is communication of hatred and intolerance.

Natwar Thakkar: Definitely when communication is used to spread hatred and there is little space for dialogue, it is worrisome. Instead of playing the role of emotional bridge-builder, communication starts contributing to divisiveness. Breakdown in communication leads to the rise of differences and even conflicts. I sincerely believe that continuous dialogue is important to keep the channels of communication open. Mahatma Gandhi was an exponent of this art. Way back in 1939, he had told a correspondent that the object of a satyagrahi was '*not avoidance of all relationship with the opposing power*' but the '*transformation of the relationship*'. Gandhian Scholar B R Nanda (2002) in his book, *In Search of Gandhi* has beautifully encapsulated this, "In India, through a quarter of a century, Gandhi corresponded with all the Viceroys-Chelmsford, Reading, Irwin, Willingdon and Linlithgow- keeping his lines of communication open even while he engaged them in non-violent battle." This is the true essence of dialogue that even when there are serious differences of views we do not snap communication but make all efforts to keep the channels of communication open. The importance of dialogues for peace has been beautifully put by a great follower of



Gandhi, Nelson Mandela who said, “We inhibit the peace and negotiated resolutions of conflicts not only by the extent to which we demonize one another. We do so also by the degree to which we separate, on the one hand, the processes of politics and international affairs, and on the other hand, the moral relations between ourselves as human beings...talking to one another and discussion must be the prelude to the resolution of conflicts.” So let’s keep on talking to each other even in situations where there seems to be breakdown in communication; let’s solve our problems through discussions and not through violence and antagonism. Let’s use our power of communication to be emotional bridge-builder.

Vedabhyas Kundu: I think when you talk on the importance of keeping the channels of communication open, it is essential that we learn the importance of listening. In fact we need to exercise the habit of deep and insightful listening. Without developing critical listening abilities it may not be possible to ensure that the channels of communication remain open. More than often, in this post-modern world when most of us are running to outdo others and feel that our views are more important, we seem to forget the habit of listening. What is important is to learn to respect others views and pay attention to what they want to say. Rather than being judgmental, we need to develop empathy and be receptive when others are trying to put their views across. Overall, I think critical listening abilities, capacities to engage with dialogue even with one’s opponents and emotional bridge building in our communication efforts should be the fulcrum of our training to be effective communicator. Daisaku Ikeda in his speech on ‘Interaction of Civilizations Leads to a Flourishing Culture of Humanity’ in 1987 suggested three principles and guidelines for communication: (1) exchange among civilizations as a source of value creation; (2) a spirit of open dialogue; and (3) the creation of a culture of peace through education.... However, the challenge today to what Daisaku Ikeda reflected on principles of communication, has been aptly encapsulated by Victor Ordonez, former Director of UNESCO Basic Education Division, who had said, “We can create experts in information technologies, yet it seems we are unable to improve the capacity for listening, for tolerance, for respecting diversity, for making the most of people’s potential for the social good, or for the spreading of fundamental ethics, without which neither skills nor knowledge will be of any benefit to us. (UNICEF, 1995)

Natwar Thakkar : To possibly address the challenges which Mr Victor Ordonez reflected, I would suggest that we promote nonviolent communication literacy amongst all section of the population across the world. This should not just be in schools and colleges, but nonviolent communication literacy should start right from families and percolate to our societies. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization defines literacy as the “ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society”. Communication literacy, according to me entails deep and critical knowledge of communication. It also entails critical understanding of how we communicate, the way we communicate and the expressions we use to communicate. It includes both verbal and non verbal forms of communication. It is also the ability to discern between what is wrong and what is right. Being self-aware of what message we are using is part of communication literacy.



To me nonviolent communication literacy would mean how our communication efforts should be nonviolent; how our ability and capacity to communicate not only with ourselves but with our family and society be nonviolent in all aspects and overall how the entire process of communication whether between individuals, groups, communities and the world at large should be nonviolent in nature. This would entail deep understanding of the art and science of nonviolence and its centrality in all our daily actions. It's not just verbal and nonverbal communication, nonviolent communication literacy would also include whether our thoughts and ideas are nonviolent or not. This would also mean how we can rid of our preconceived notions of individuals or groups with whom we want to communicate and stop evaluating them to suit our own ideas. More than often we are attuned to think in terms of moralistic judgments which may be our own constructions. By developing deep understanding of the art and science of nonviolence and integrating it in our communication practices we could get over with biased and moralistic judgments; this in turn could contribute to emotional bridge building.

By being nonviolent communication literate, an individual/group/community will be able to self-introspect whether the message they want to share has elements of violence and whether such a message will hurt others. Nonviolent communication literacy would automatically help in strengthening and deepening relationships. When we are able to emotionally build bridges with others we will be able to empathize with their views.

Nonviolent communication literacy also includes mastering the art of listening. His Holiness The Dalai Lama has rightly said, "When you talk you are only repeating what you already know; but when you listen you may learn something new." Essentially we should learn to listen with a sincere intention to understand, open and focused on what the other person is trying to tell.

The way we use language and words while writing and conversations is an important aspect of nonviolent communication literacy. We had discussed above, the Gandhian approach to communication clearly emphasized on the importance of restraint and that which did not incite passion. His approach also stressed on the importance of brevity and the need to think before speaking. He had said, "My hesitancy in speech, which was once in annoyance, is now a pleasure. Its greatest benefit has been that it has taught me the economy of words. I have naturally formed the habit of restraining my thoughts. And I can now give myself the certificate that a thoughtless word hardly ever escapes my tongue or pen. I do not recollect ever having had to regret anything in my speech or writing. I have thus been spared many a mishap and waste of time." (The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi)

So by studying and practicing deeply the ideas of great leaders like Gandhi, King and Mandela one can start grasping on how to use nonviolent communication in our daily lives and aim to become nonviolent communication literate. Nonviolence according to Mahatma Gandhi is 'infinitely greater and superior to brute force'. He had said, "Nonviolence is like radium in its action. An infinitesimal quantity of it embedded in a malignant growth acts continuously, silently and ceaselessly till it has transformed the whole mass of the diseased tissue into a healthy one. Similarly, even a little of true nonviolence acts in a silent, subtle, unseen way and leavens the whole society." So if our



communication ecosystem is nonviolent in nature, it would act like radium contributing to resolution of many contentious issues.

I am also reminded of this powerful idea of Martin Luther King, “Nonviolence says that within human nature there are amazing potentialities of goodness.... I think we all must realize that there is within human nature a sort of dualism, something within all of us which justified Plato in saying that the human personality like a charioteer with two strong horses each wants to go in different directions.... There is this tension and this struggle within human nature between the high and the low.... we must recognize that just as there is a capacity for evil, there is a capacity for goodness. Just as a Hitler can lead man to the darkest and lowest depths a Gandhi can lead, men to the highest heights of nonviolence and goodness. We must always see these possibilities within human nature; the nonviolent discipline goes on with this belief that even the most difficult person, even the person who is committed to the old order with all his might, can be transformed.....”

King had also said, “Nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time; the need for man to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to oppression and violence. Mankind must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation.”

So I firmly believe that by practicing nonviolent communication, there can be amazing opportunities to promote goodness in our world which keeps on getting struck with conflicts. It is an essential part of efforts to evolve a culture of peace and nonviolence not just in our homes but in the entire world. This is also an antidote to all acts of revenge, aggression and retaliation as all these arises from breakdown in communication or our reliance in violence in communication.

Overall I firmly believe that nonviolent communication literacy opens new spaces for dialogues and engagement, mutual respect and tolerance. This will definitely contribute towards a humanistic society.

Vedabhyas: We definitely have a lot to learn from peace apostles like the Mahatma, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Daisaku Ikeda and others. King always used positive language in his writings and speeches. By using positive language and refraining from negatives, we can uplift the level of our dialogues. For instance if we analyze this powerful quote of King, *“If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward,”* it evokes great positivity. Similarly all other dialogues and speeches of King underline the use of positive language. Nonviolent communication literacy also entails how we can speak from our heart and our critical abilities to connect with all those with whom we are communicating. If we are truthful, honest, sincere and authentic it would not be difficult for us to communicate with others. These can also be a powerful strategy to prevent and resolve conflicts. The lives of Gandhi, King and Mandela and their communication approaches definitely need to be deeply understood to become a nonviolent communicator.



Natwar Thakkar: I believe when we are trying to promote nonviolent communication literacy, we are trying to facilitate relationships based on truthfulness, honesty, genuineness and empathy. Nonviolent communication also entails the elements of gratitude and forgiveness. All these ideas are important factors to promote love and peace amongst human beings. For Gandhi, truthfulness was of great importance, he had said, “There can be no room for untruth in my writings, because it is my unshakable belief that there is no religion other than truth and because I am capable of rejecting aught obtained at the cost of truth.”

On the essence of love in our communication, he had further said, “Little quarrels of millions of families in their daily lives disappear before the exercise of force...two brother quarrels; one of them repents and reawakens the love that was lying dormant in him; the two again begin to live in peace.” I totally agree that nonviolent communication is an important tool to resolve conflicts and help in reconciliation. Mahatma Gandhi had rightly said, “It is the acid test of nonviolence that in a nonviolent conflict there is rancor left behind, and in the end the enemies are converted into friends.” Nonviolent communication has the ability to convert those with opposing views and in conflicts to become friends.

Similarly His Holiness the Dalai Lama has rightly said, “Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them humanity cannot survive.”

Another important aspect of Gandhian nonviolent communication is the power of gratitude. This quote of Buddha sums up the importance of gratitude and why we should be thankful, *“Let us rise up and be thankful, for if we didn’t learn a lot today, at least we learned a little, and if we didn’t learn a little, at least we didn’t get sick, and if we got sick, at least we didn’t die; so, let us all be thankful.”* For Mahatma Gandhi, appreciation was an important element of his ahimsa or nonviolence. The Mahatma’s grandson, Arun Gandhi in his book, *The Gift of Anger* says, “Bapuji was masterful at appreciating the world around him. He looked for the good in everybody.” This is true essence of nonviolent communication to look for good in everybody and respond accordingly.

Hence to me nonviolent communication literacy is essentially to rekindle the dormant values of compassion, love, empathy and rediscovering our authentic self. It is an important tool to nurture gratitude and appreciation. By practicing it we can learn to forgive others. It is also a channel for conflict resolution, enhance tolerance and promote reconciliation.

To conclude I would like to share these beautiful thoughts of Buddha which is the central idea of our dialogue, ***“Words have both the power to destroy and heal. When words are both true and kind, they can change our world.”***



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