

An Initiative of The Peace Gong

Sowing the Seeds of Nonviolent Footprints

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A Psalm of Life' by 19th Century poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

*"Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time"*

Many students like us are appalled to hear stories of adolescents taking to crime across the world. It is sometimes difficult to reason out how a child can harm another and most of the times we are out of our wit's end trying to find explanation to such wild and violent acts. In the society, every time a story is flashed, adults start debating on the reasons of why adolescents are indulging in violence. Different theories then start floating on what might have happened and what needs to be done.

While we young people read and listen to talks and ideas on how different social, economic and cultural issues may influence a young person to indulge in violence, The Peace Gong team after talking to children, youth and seniors felt on the need to evolve the concept of '*nonviolent footprints*' to measure and gauge our acts of nonviolence in our daily lives.

Correta Scott King had said, "Nonviolence is a permanent attitude we bring to the breakfast table and bring to bed at night." The interviews suggested that the ideas of nonviolence should be sown in every person, right from infancy. Overall, the different views which came up can be summed up with what Mahatma Gandhi had said, "Nonviolence is a power which can be wielded equally by all-children, young men and women or grown-up people, provided they have a living faith in the God of Love and have therefore equal love for all mankind. When nonviolence is accepted as the law of life, it must pervade the whole being and not be applied to isolated acts."

Mahatma Gandhi had rightly said, "*The very first step in non-violence is that we cultivate in our daily life, as between ourselves, truthfulness, humility, tolerance, loving kindness.*" The foundation of the philosophy of nonviolent footprints which the Peace Gong team developed during the International Day of Nonviolence as a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi can be explained with this idea on the need to cultivate nonviolence in our daily lives.

The Peace Gong team developed the measures of our **nonviolent footprints** and how to expand these through the interviews. These included:

1. **Germination of the seed of nonviolence:** If we have to expand our nonviolent footprints, the seed of nonviolence should be sown right from infancy. It should be part our thought process and action from our childhood itself. All our studies and learning should be shaped from the perspectives of nonviolence.
2. **Attitude and Behaviour:** We can measure our nonviolent footprints through our attitude and behaviour towards others- not just human beings but all forms of life and nature. Our aim should be to promote mutual respect and not hurt others through our action. We should learn to live in harmony not with our fellow beings but nature and other living forms. The idea of mutual coexistence is directly proportional to our nonviolent footprints.
3. **Our expressions- both verbal and non-verbal- significance of nonviolent communication:** We can measure and expand our nonviolent footprints through the use of our expressions. This includes both verbal and nonverbal expressions. How we communicate with others and the words we use are important measures of nonviolent footprints. Also our body language in communicating with others is an important indicator to measure our nonviolent footprint. ***Nonviolent communication is an important measure of our nonviolent footprints.***
4. **Our thoughts and ideas:** Thoughts and ideas constitute important measures of nonviolent footprint. We can expand our nonviolent footprint by positive thoughts and ideas. When our thoughts and ideas are negative and aimed at hurting others, it is violence and it is when our nonviolent footprints shrink.
5. **Reaching out and the ability to engage in dialogues:** As young people find themselves in situations where they are not able to communicate and take part in dialogues, tendencies to get involved in conflicts and violence increases. So the interviews revealed that the ability to engage in dialogues and get involved in open communication can help in expanding our nonviolent footprints.

6. **Anger Management:** Young people are stressed more than ever before due to increasing competitions and expectations to achieve big. This leads to situations when they become angry easily. Learning the art of anger management in this age of stressful existence contributes to expansion of our nonviolent footprints. Just like Mahatma Gandhi maintained an '*anger journal*' to write down the reasons for getting angry during the course of the day, measuring our **Nonviolent Footprints** would involve maintaining an anger journal.
7. **Self acceptance:** An important measure of **Nonviolent Footprints** has to be the idea of self acceptance. Accepting one's flaws could be an important way to nurture compassion and empathy towards others.
8. **Acceptance of others** as worthwhile human beings not just by the class or caste they belong to. Treating people who are considered below us without civility has been the bane of our society. An early realization of this reality has to be inculcated, as this is an important measure of our nonviolent footprints.
9. **Getting rid of hatred:** Almost all social conflicts and violence have their origin in deep rooted hatred and prejudices. Homes and educational institutions need to help children to be free from such mindsets so that they can expand their nonviolent footprints.
10. **Ego:** Violence breeds in the minds of people who are obsessed with their hubris. If they are trained to understand their 'self' such people can be rid of unwarranted ego states.
11. **Developing Cognitive skills:** Being socialized by the traditional and new media, there is a growing tendency to be passive receivers of messages without being discerning. Training young minds to interact face to face with their mentors and peers and discuss issues threadbare need to be planned and executed. An active mind would develop positive thinking thereby expanding nonviolent footprints.

Children can take the lead for contributing towards a global nonviolent planet by coming together in solidarity and motivating their peers to expand their nonviolent footprints. Only when we, children, are able to expand our

nonviolent footprints, we can inspire adults to follow us and restrain from conflicts.

How the idea of Nonviolent Footprints emerged....

Members of The Peace Gong youth team Asiya Naqvi, Syeda Rumana Mehdi, Neelakshi Malik, Divyashree Dubey and Abhishek Bharanwal first shared their thoughts on nonviolent footprints in a conference on *Gandhian Educational Ideas* organized by the National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi. Their opening lines set the tone for the evolution of the idea.

*They said: "Humans cannot deny their role in the uprising of global violence. They also cannot blame it on only several people- the spread of violence shows that we all have played a role in contributing to the gruesome state of the world today. The idea of the **Nonviolent Footprint** is ingenious as it will enable us to see the impact we can make. Often we think that an action has minimal value and thus refrain from doing it but **Nonviolent Footprint** stresses on how even the smallest of actions can lead to a bigger action. It reminds us of our responsibility and accountability to Mother Earth and to other humans because we live in a shared space and each of us has equal ownership in resources. In our earnest journey in the search of nonviolence, no one is more powerful than the other. As we think of **Nonviolent Footprints**, we think of the Earth as a a gigantic sheet of white fabric laid out and children, adults and senior citizens walk all over it, leaving their colorful footprints. So colourful that the black spots can be seen no more".*

They used the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King as foundation for the concept of nonviolent footprints: For instance Martin Luther King had said, *"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..."*

To take forward the ideas of the youth team, The Peace Gong child reporters interviewed many young people and experts which further contributed to the

concept of Nonviolent Footprints. Excerpts of some of the views which emerged from the interviews:

- **Dr B S Panwar, Himachal Pradesh, (Mentor):** Compassion, empathy and tolerance should be the fulcrum of our thoughts and action. As teachers and parents, we should imbibe these ourselves so that children can learn from these and together we can expand our nonviolent footprints.
- **Devasheesh Sharma, (youth volunteer) of The Peace Gong, Agra:** We do not need to use violence to claim our superiority. Our belief in mutual respect and levels of compassion and tolerance should be the measure of our nonviolent footprints.
- **Sonika Singh, (student), Aligarh:** In our effort to measure our nonviolent footprints, we need to nurture 'deep self-realization' that we have an organic relationship with nature. We need to see ourselves as trustees of Mother Earth and exercise mindfulness practices which will help us to approach to our problems and conflicts in a balanced way.
- **Dr Anjuman Borah, Assam, (Mentor):** If we can believe in the greatness and power of our own life, we will no longer feel the need to compare, compete, envy and trample upon others rights and freedom. Similarly, if we can believe in the greatness and dignity of others we will be more humble and be open to learning from others. We will have to share with others and help others to believe in their own potential too. This can be our personal contribution towards expanding our nonviolent footprints.
- **Aman Johri, (student):** Nonviolence is that art of living which not only instils in us the very seed of discipline but also empowers us to keep evils like bigotry, discrimination, ill-treatment etc at bay. Inculcating nonviolent behaviour and attitude in our action and thoughts can help us in managing our anger.
- **Arunesh Pathak, (youth volunteer) of The Peace Gong, New Delhi:** Violence benumbs our sensitivities and this makes our life poorer. A healthy and harmonized society can exist, only when its members imbibe moral and ethical values. Only when people imbibe these moral and ethical values they can practice nonviolence in daily lives.
- **Vidhushi Vaidhya, (Class XI), Jhansi:** The Gandhian principles of nonviolence should be the central idea which all societies today should follow and practice so that we as members of the society together work to expand our nonviolent footprints.
- **Sheetal Prasad, (Volunteer), The Peace Gong Jhansi; Jatin Pratap Singh. Shailendra Kumar and Aryan Russia (Class X,**

Jhansi): When we hear of stories of young people committing crime, we get disturbed. The aim right from our childhood is how we imbibe the Gandhian principles of truth, nonviolence and mutual respect. The principles should be practices from our heart and soul so that we do not harm others.

These voices are steps towards building a society where peace and harmony amongst fellow beings become the order of the day. They are the silent footprints making their non-violent approaches in a society that longs for peace. These voices need to be heard.

The Peace Gong's Measure of Nonviolent Footprints:

- **Germination of the seed of nonviolence**
- **Attitude and Behaviour**
- **Our expressions- both verbal and non-verbal; significance of nonviolent communication**
- **Our thoughts and ideas**
- **Reaching out and the ability to engage in dialogues**
- **Anger Management**
- **Self acceptance**
- **Acceptance of others**
- **Getting rid of hatred**
- **Ego**
- **Developing Cognitive skills**