

Module 2

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 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 and ourselves.

Friends, in this module, let us decode on what is NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION.

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 be able to plug the trust deficit.

For a building to stand erect the foundation has to be strong and it rests on pillars. If the pillars are weak, there is every possibility of the building crumbling. The stronger the pillars, the better it is for the constructed building. So, to construct the habit of using nonviolent communication, it is important to explore its pillars and imbibe them in our daily lives.

Friends, before we go any further, please remember as pointed in Module 1, nonviolent communication do not just entail communication with other human beings, but our entire communication ecosystem which includes the nature and all other living beings. We must remember the importance of human interdependence and interconnectedness. We are not alone in the universe, rather we are just a part of it and each one of us are dependent on others, whether human beings, nature and other living beings.

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.

The Gandhian approach to nonviolent communication has been put together by Robert Bode (1995). He notes: "For Gandhi, the goal of communication was to build

and maintain human relationships and thus enhance personhood. Gandhi's insistence on nonviolence recognized the importance of others, valued humanity, and appreciated the importance of human relationships and personhood... Gandhi's nonviolent communication theory included the valuing of personhood throughout the world, but he also stressed the importance of individual relationships and friendships. ...Openness was manifested in Gandhi's rhetoric and is a characteristic of his nonviolent communication theory. For Gandhi, openness included communication practices such as free speech and press, public discussion, and direct negotiation.” (Mahatma Gandhi's Theory of Nonviolent Communication. Paper presented at the Western States. Communication Association Conference, February 1995.)

Gandhi's nonviolent communication has also 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, Late Shri Natwar Thakkar, using the Gandhian approach, 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 including a dialogue with Shri Thakkar in Module 6.

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 regarding nonviolent communication:

- 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. This also includes our self-communication and our communication with nature and all other living beings.
- 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). So learning the art and science of nonviolent, is key to develop a nonviolent communication ecosystem.
- III. Sometimes we may not be violent 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 or spoil our relationships.
- 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. By using nonviolent communication we can strengthen relationships.
- VII. Conflicts are inevitable part of our lives and we may get into disputes and conflicts of different kinds in various times of our lives. Shri Thakkar points out that by using nonviolent communication helps us to resolve our disputes amicably. We will further discuss about this aspect in the next module.
- VIII. Shri Thakkar points out that we all need to develop the art of listening; it is an important part of nonviolent communication.

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.

With the basic understanding of nonviolent communication and its elements, you will realize how practicing nonviolent communication can help us reframe from the usual style of our communication. Most of us are attuned to use language and communicate in a way we think is natural without realizing that it does not help in developing connections or it may even hurt others. Using nonviolent communication, we can reframe the language and style of our communication efforts. It will help in strengthening of relationships and will not antagonize others. We start putting our views in a different way and this will be the main ingredient of our healthy communication ecosystem.

As we sign off from this module, let's find out why according to Shri Thakkar, there is need for *Nonviolent Communication Education*:

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 and expand 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 sufferings and 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.
