

NONVIOLENCE IN YOUR DAILY LIFE – LOVE IN ACTION

Written by Nina Koevoets, with the help of Pancho Ramos Stierle

Nonviolence is not only the absence of violence, it is not simply the negation to cause harm, but it is something infinitely more: it is actions that are rooted in a heart full of **love, courage, forgiveness, generosity, kindness and compassion**. Nonviolence is also a call to **disobey inhumane laws, treaties and institutions**. It is a call to not control anger (if it arises) but to express it under discipline for maximum effects. It is a call to obey the 'laws of love'; it is a **positive force**; expressed in the thoughts we have, the words we use, the things we do, the clothes we wear, the food we eat... It is a way of life! We call this **integral nonviolence** or **love in action**.

We hope that the action points in these four areas will help you to integrate nonviolence in your daily life be a part of the global community you and I like to live in.

HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

1. How well do you know your neighbors? Do you feel safe in your neighborhood? Would it help if you knew the people in your block? Can you imagine/ would you consider to knock on the door of a neighbor or two you have not met yet and introduce yourself and ask if they would be interested to get together some time? (Having a meal together can also be a good way to think more about food: what do you eat and what does sharing food mean to you? Do you neighbors share your eating habits? Perhaps they have some stories behind the food they like to eat.)
2. Can you think of someone who has done something to upset you, who you are not on good terms with now as a result? Can you put yourself in the shoes of that other person to understand why they acted the way they did? What needs were they trying to meet with their behavior? If you are able to see the situation from the other person's perspective, would it be possible to write to or call this person to express your understanding of his/her actions, coming fully from a place of love, empathy, and humility?
3. Divisions often start in the mind, for example discrimination because of someone's sex or gender and/or sexual orientation. In which ways does language perpetuates sexism or heteronormativity? (Some examples to get you started: "you're running like a girl!", or "hey guys" when referring to a group that includes women or "that is so gay!"). What about jokes? What kind of behaviour do they justify? Do you find sexism in the news? For example something on rape that follows a 'blaming the victim rhetoric' or a piece arguing against gay marriage? Can you start small by formulating some new ways of expressing yourself in a way that supports equality?
4. Divisions often start in the mind, for example discrimination because of someone's religion. What role does religion play in your life? Or, if you are an atheist, what beliefs do you hold? How can you be less self-righteous or move away from claiming truth? What major disagreements and what commonalities can you think of between the main religions in your community? How do people interact? Can you come up with translations that help to understand each other? (E.g. translating 'God' as 'Universal Love'.)
5. Divisions often start in the mind, for example discrimination because of socio-economic class &

skin color. You can do some research to find out how skin color and income are related to each other and how the accessibility to public facilities is for people with different skin colors. To what extent is there inequality? Where do you stand in this picture? Do you notice things are shifting globally? (Think of wealth being concentrated in the cities, rather than certain countries.) How does that affect you?

*(*These three points are inspired by three elements of Mohandas Gandhi's ten point program for what he called 'Constructive Nonviolence', in which he included equality for women, unity between Hindus and Muslims and removal of 'untouchability' from the caste system).*

CONSUMPTION

1. Where do your fruits and vegetables come from? Are they organic? Are they local, or shipped over a long distance? How does this impact the environment and your body? How often do you eat meat? Did you know that some vegetables have more protein than meat? Do a google search about it. If you eat meat every day, can you try not to eat meat for at least two days a week? If you already frequently eat vegetarian, and/or already eat organic and local: can you inspire others by sharing a picture or the recipe of your meal on social media or attach it to an email?
2. How is your waste management? Are you separating your compost? Glass, paper, metals, chemical waste? What do you do when you want to change your furniture or buy new tableware? Have you thought of bringing it to second hand stores? If you do not compost, you can find out where there are drop-off points in your city for organic waste. Or perhaps you can build a compost in your backyard? In this way you can see how it turns into fertile soil and use that to feed the plants in your garden :-).
3. What kind of cleaning and personal hygiene products do you use? Did you know vinegar makes an excellent all-purpose cleaner? Or that there are many nontoxic alternatives to shampoo, body wash, detergent, etc. You can ask yourself if you want to commit to switching one or more of the products you use in your household to a natural, non-toxic alternative in the future. Besides being more friendly to your own body, fewer toxins in our products also mean less toxins in our drinking water, rivers, and oceans...
4. How often do you buy new clothes and do you know where they come from? Did you have a look at Annie Leonard's youtube movie "the story of t-shirts"? (one of the spin-offs of "A story of Stuff"). Do you bring your used clothes to a collection point or a second hand store? Or can you organize a clothes exchange with your friends or neighbors? Or even experiment making your own clothes...?
5. So-called 'Western' societies have been trying to globalize capitalism, or spread 'free' market principles. It is suggested that an 'invisible hand' guides the economy, yet there are very powerful multinational corporations, centralized in the rich countries, that actually stir the global market by inventing complicated financial tricks... Local economies are therefore an important tool to somewhat counter this process of economic globalization. How much are you a part of local economy? How much do you practise the principle "think local, act global?" Gandhi called this "Swadeshi". You can find out if there are any local cooperatives in your neighborhood, or any other local producers that you could buy your groceries from.
6. How much time do you spend watching TV, listening to the radio, reading the newspaper or browsing the internet for news or movies? What kind of messages the media give you? Who actually produces the things you read or hear? How 'independent' are they? How do they affect

your thoughts? And social relations? Can you try out what a day without any media (internet, TV, films, radio, newspaper) would feel like to reflect on these questions and your feelings? A “media fast” can give some relaxation too... :-)

EDUCATION

1. Education is also a vital aspect of Nonviolence. Not only of *what* our children learn, but also *how* they learn is important. Do the children that you feel close to in your life enjoy learning? Did you enjoy learning? Why (not)? What alternatives do you know of that already exist? Can you talk to a child today about school and learning and explore how you can support her or him?
2. Weapon trade and nuclear energy are topics that have been associated with peace movements for decades. Do you know how much your government is spending on these? When you answer this question, you can try to compare this number with what the government spends on policies that promote peace. How you are feeling when you learn about this? Is it important to be informed? Besides the government and weapon manufacturers, do you also have some responsibility? What can you do with the information you found? Do you want to share it with your friends? Write to the Ministry of Defense? Make a drawing or cartoon? Something else?
3. Do you want to get inspired and give examples of nonviolent movements or actions? You can check out a book from your local library written by an inspirational figure in a nonviolent movement, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Cesar Chavez, the Dalai Lama, Vinoba Bhave, Satish Kumar, Vimala Thakar, Dolores Huerta, and Aung San Suu Kyi. In addition, some great contemporary theorists related to nonviolence are Marshal Rosenberg, Joanna Macy, David Korten, Charles Eisenstein and (a bit older) Gene Sharp.

CONTEMPLATION

1. By practicing silence and mindfulness regularly, we are able to be more aligned with our deeper truths and act from a place of peace and love. Do you devote some time to contemplate, meditate, or sit in ‘receptive silence’? Would it be possible to integrate it into your daily routine? Can you start with sitting in silence for ten minutes? When you are ready, ask yourself how was it? Did you notice changes in your body? Was it difficult or easy to quiet the mind? Do your insights require a change of behaviour? (Note: If the term ‘mediation’ does not sit well with you, you can also think of it as a brain exercise or prayer.)
2. Violence is often woven into our belief system: The disconnection between nature and humans is at the core of many global problems. Nature is not treated with respect as profit is prioritized before people and planet. Did we forget what is really important in life, i.e. all the things you cannot buy, like love, happiness, peace, etc.? How can we recover connection to nature and to important things in life? What does it mean 'to be alive', to be 'human'? You could write it down and share it. Do your insights require a change of behaviour?
3. Another way to describe the power of Nonviolence is ‘to stand up for dignity’. What does dignity mean for you? How important is it? Do you think that violence damages your dignity? When that happens how do you react? What are your thoughts about retaliation? How can you be peaceful in the face of humiliation? You could write it down and share it. Do your insights require a change of behaviour?