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2023 High School Scholarship Essay Contest
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Transcendence of Ripples

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"I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples" - Mother Teresa

While Dr. Goodall's words ring true, I uncovered a nuance to her assertion. We must determine the difference we strive to make, but realize the chasm between vision and reality can only be bridged by our choices. Predicting our true impact is nebulous as we only choose our actions and aspire to influence others' choices -- without any guarantee of results.

Each action is a stone cast into the sea of humanity; the ripples we effect are the difference we make. The most impactful differences are not abrupt paradigm shifts; they are persistent ripples made by everyday actions. That our impact multiplies beyond the capacity of our foresight is both its enigma and its beauty.

Henry David Thoreau, in *Civil Disobedience* (1849), espoused the civil rejection of an unjust authority in response to American slavery. He cast a stone of thought into American minds to live their lives in protection of intellectual autonomy and nonconformity to the government's perpetuated injustices. A century of ripples would bring his philosophy to Indian shores.

Mahatma Gandhi manifested his philosophy of Satyagraha, or "truth-force" in the hearts of his followers. Though the Father of the Nation, he did not, by himself, gain independence for his motherland. Really, Gandhi reverberated his message of nonviolent opposition that had been promulgated by Thoreau, a message that sent ripples through the conscience of imperial India to reject the British salt tax, disenroll their children from British schools, and trade British-manufactured cotton for that of their homespun. This formed the bedrock for the first nonviolent revolution in the annals of history -- the Quit India Movement. Gandhi preached his philosophy in daily action, the fruit of his labor cultivated within his fellow Indians. Little, then, would Gandhi know that his ripples of revolution would resonate in the mind of an imprisoned preacher in Birmingham, Alabama...

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," against the tide of prevalent thought to wait for justice, proclaimed that the fight for equal civil rights needed to incite discomfort in the status quo, an upheaval - - sustained ripples. One year later, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 affirmed equal rights of all races, sexes, and origins.

Seemingly quotidian, our choices become habits that create ripples, surging into our impact, translating into our legacy. We can only make conscious decisions about how to choose the stones we cast to create our ripples -- concentric ripples that grow and change our world.

Prophesying our impact is not in our hands. Instead, our true impact is not just in our careers, our titles, or our achievements. It is the daily manifestations of the philosophies we wish to embody. In holding the door open, we invite. In lifting someone after a fall, we support. In excluding someone, we isolate. In talking over another, we belittle. The choice is ours to make.