

**For Immediate Release**

**Kerala 8th Grader, Shreya Zoy, Takes Home the Grand Prize in Lions Clubs  
International Peace Essay Contest**

(Oak Brook, Ill.) – Shreya, a 13-year-old girl from Kerala, India, has an idea of what peace should mean to the world. She brought that idea to life through a powerful essay earning her the grand prize in the Lions Clubs International Peace Essay Contest.

"Sometimes it takes the perspective of an incredible young person to help the world realize that we are all connected, and that peace and international understanding can exist if we take the time to listen," says Lions Clubs International President Douglas X. Alexander. "The Peace Essay Contest lifts the voices of incredible young people, like Shreya, who have powerful ideas of how we can bring about a kinder and more peaceful world."

Created to give young people with visual impairments an opportunity to express their feelings about peace, the International Essay Contest is a staple of Lions clubs around the world. Lions work with local schools and area families to identify young people interested in participating and who could benefit from this program.

"Despite my vision impairment, I want to be a doctor when I grow up," said Shreya. "For others like me who may have vision impairments, I say don't focus on the pain, focus on the progress. It may be hard, but it doesn't mean that it is impossible."

The winning essay, titled "We Are All Connected," was selected for its originality, organization merit and portrayal of the contest theme, "We Are All Connected." The Mannuthy Agri City Lions Club sponsored the local contest that gave this 8th grader the opportunity to participate in this global event and share her words of peace with the world.

"The idea of a Peace Essay Contest is very relevant in the present context where we are all distraught over the disturbances in Europe and other parts of the world at a time when the bridge between the nations is getting narrower every day," said P V Surendranadh, club president for the Mannuthy Agri City Lions Club. "We are ecstatic to be part of Shreya's accomplishment, and all of us, including Shreya and her family, are happy about this historic achievement. Her thoughts are inspiring and resonate the world view the young hold for shaping the future."

Through her essay, Shreya shares the idea that the world is one family. Although we may be from different ethnic groups, follow different cultures, or believe in other religions, we are all people deserving of happiness and love. Shreya discusses the COVID-19 pandemic and that out of a significant global crisis, people were able to come

together to help one another in times of great need. In conclusion, Shreya explains that we need to remember the lessons we learned from the pandemic and recognize that we are genuinely connected and depend on one another.

"The Peace Essay is important because it may help others realize that humans can survive only collectively," said Shreya. "We are interconnected and dependent on another's kindness. The recent pandemic teaches us a lesson that nobody can survive alone."

As the contest winner, Shreya will receive a US\$5,000 cash prize, an award and an invitation to attend an award ceremony. Visit the Lions Clubs International website, [lionsclubs.org/peace-essay](https://lionsclubs.org/peace-essay), to read Zoy's essay and learn more about the contest.

Lions Clubs International, the world's largest service club organization, is made up of more than 1.4 million men and women in over 200 countries and geographical areas throughout the world. Lions created the Peace Essay Contest to foster a spirit of peace and international understanding in young people worldwide.

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### **We Are All Connected**

#### **Peace Essay Contest submission by Shreya Zoy**

We all know that comforting feeling when we are being physically embraced, feeling heard, emotionally understood, and supported by another human being. This warm human connection is very important in maintaining our overall emotional and physical health.

There is a saying in Sanskrit 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbikam' mainly "the world is one family." Certainly, we can see that the whole world is populated by people who are working to attain the same things - happiness, peace, security, resources like food and shelter and a hopeful future.

Our real identity is not whether we belong to a certain ethnic group or culture. Yes, we may follow different paths or religions, but these can be changed, and the soul is above all such temporary designations. And the nature of the soul is to love and be loved. Happiness is found in relations and no happiness is more than a deep loving relationship. But the highest relationship is that when we are spiritually devoted to the supreme being, the ultimate lovable object. That is the eternal spiritual path.

By having a solid knowledge of spiritual knowledge, we automatically are respecting all others regardless of their race, sex, or species. This brings moral and peaceful social behaviour in everyone towards everyone. By having respect for everyone's spiritual identity, parts, and parcels of the Lord, also gives us innate happiness. We can

understand that we are visiting this planet for a short time, and we are all in this together.

It is after thousands of destructive wars that humans realized the importance of peace. It applies to every angle like wars, pollution, natural disasters and more.

When peace and harmony are maintained, things will continue to run smoothly without any delay. Moreover, it is a saviour for many who do not like to engage in destructing activities and more.

I think there is another deeper lesson from Covid-19. A lesson about our interconnection and interdependence: it is now clear that if we follow the right measures of our own, if we wash our hands if we wear a mask, follow proper social distancing, then we may prevent ourselves from Covid.

Unless we are working to make those decisions and choices, then we aren't able to open the school, workplaces are not going to back up and running, our healthcare systems will be continued to be overtaxed and society won't essentially set up.

And one of the lessons of Covid is we can't respond alone. So, we have to mount a unified, thoughtful response. Unity is not just on a country basis, but between countries. We must be able to work together and put our common welfare ahead of our individual choices.

If we want to build a unified response to Covid and future pandemics, we recognise that we are truly connected and we depend on one another.

To conclude, we are birds of the same nest, wearing different skins, speaking different languages, believing in certain religions, and belonging to a different culture - yet we are in the same home - our earth. Born on the same planet, covered by the same skies, gazing at the same stars, and breathing the same air, we must learn to progress together happily. For humans can live individually but can survive only collectively. "YES, WE ARE ALL CONNECTED"