

Ubuntu: The Human Spirit

#WellbeingWarriors

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The emergence of COVID-19 and the subsequent implementation of the lockdown has had an enormous impact on all aspects of our lives: family, relationships, the economy, educational institutions, health system, to name a few. The demands of our changing world can get quite overwhelming, and it is easy to find yourself burdened by all the changes you need to make. For many students, you may be experiencing challenges in your academics, physical and mental health, finances, and interpersonal relationships.

As you navigate your way through this 'new normal', it is of utmost importance to remember that you are human, ungumntu. None of us has ever experienced COVID-19 or the lockdown before. Therefore, it is natural that you may be feeling anxious or overwhelmed. Now, the good news is that it is not a hopeless situation.

You are not alone as everything you are experiencing, the Kopsie community, South Africans and the world at large is also going through it. Therefore, please be kind to yourself by acknowledging your humanness. What that essentially means is be open to asking for help. As you realise what your needs are during this time, know that other people have the same or similar needs. Furthermore, as much as you need others, they also need you.

WHAT IS UBUNTU?

Nelson Mandela defined Ubuntu as "the profound sense that we are human only through the humanity of others; that if we are to accomplish anything in this world, it will in equal measure be due to the work and achievement of others."

Ubuntu can be defined, interpreted and expressed in various ways:

The essence of humanity (humanness): I am human because of other human beings around me. We need each other. As people, we are interdependent.

'Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu': A person is a person because of other people. 'I am because you are, and you are because we are.' I am okay if you are okay.

Shared experience: The human experience is shared - whether it is grief, pain, danger, change, joy, laughter, achievement, food, houses, etc. Culture of empathy; Being empathetic. I see you.

Ubuntu is reciprocal: It is about extending a helping hand to others as well as being vulnerable enough to ask for help when you need it.

Spirit of sharing: It is about giving what you may need to foster and nurture relationships. Kindness towards others.

Quote by Desmond Tutu: "You cannot be human on your own. You are human through relationship."

BENEFITS OF UBUNTU

Now, living out your humanity should not be done to get something in return. However, being kind to others is like planting a seed and watering it daily. It is guaranteed to yield some fruits. What you give to others does not necessarily leave your life; it comes back to you in some way or another, to the benefit of your health and wellbeing.

The Healthiness of Kindness:

- Decreases pain, stress, anxiety, depression, blood pressure and anything that is a threat to your physical or mental health.
- Increases the love hormone, energy, happiness, lifespan, pleasure, serotonin, connection to others, your sense of purpose and fulfilment.

Quote by President Barack Obama: "Mandela understood the ties that bind the human spirit. There is a word in South Africa – Ubuntu – that describes his greatest gift: his recognition that we are all bound together in ways that can be invisible to the eye; that there is a oneness to humanity; that we achieve ourselves by sharing ourselves with others, and caring for those around us."

UBUNTU IN ACTION

Nelson Mandela once [said](#): "A traveller through a country would stop at a village and he did not have to ask for food or water. Once he stops, the people gave him food, entertain him. That is one aspect of Ubuntu, but it will have various aspects."

What Nelson Mandela meant was that we could show our humanity in many ways: actions, words, gestures, and thoughts. Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, we, as human beings, must sustain each other. Here are some ways you can live out your humanity. It would be best if you found a way that resonates with you.

1. **Live out your values:** showing love; caring for and respecting others; choosing to forgive; having sympathy and empathy; being kind and compassionate.
2. **Gestures:** greeting, nodding, smiling, waving, etc...simply, acknowledging others.
3. **Acts of service:** spending time with others; sharing your knowledge; running an errand for the elderly; making a cup of tea for your parents or organising a movie or games night for your family.
4. **Giving:** food, clothes, time, or money.
5. **Being Intentional:** be genuine and present in your everyday experiences or encounters. Call a classmate or friend and check on them.

Quote by Boyd Varty: "In a more collective society, we realise from the inside that our wellbeing is deeply tied to the wellbeing of others. Ubuntu asks us to open our hearts and share..."

REFLECTION EXERCISE

For a moment, reflect on the past few months. What are the specific challenges you have personally gone through, and what or who helped you through those challenges? Was it your family, friends, neighbours, classmates, or even strangers? Did you rely on your character, your beliefs, your will power, or your hope for the future? Once you have identified your source of support, know that someone also needs your help during this time. Someone needs your Ubuntu, your humanity. Challenge yourself to embrace your humanity and intentionally live it out in your everyday life. Just remember that you cannot give to others what you have not first given to yourself. A little kindness goes a long way in improving your mental health and overall wellbeing.

The U in Ubuntu means it starts with you.