

UBUNTU DURING LOCKDOWN

According to Wikipedia, UBUNTU is a Nguni Bantu term meaning “humanity.” It is often translated as “I am because we are,” or “humanity towards others,” or in Xhosa, “umntu ngumntu ngabantu “ but is often used in a more philosophical sense to mean “the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity.”

Ubuntu is a quality that includes the essential human virtues: compassion and humanity.

As is the same with the term Ahavas Yisrael which is the term used to describe the commandment to love a fellow Jew.

True unity is achieved when we see all our souls have their source in the same essence.

An analogy may be drawn from a Sefer Torah. In a Sefer Torah, each letter has its individual characteristics. Each letter must be completely surrounded by blank parchment and no two letters may be touching. However, even if just one letter is missing, the entire Sefer Torah is rendered invalid. The Jewish people are thus compared to a Sefer Torah. We are individuals yet united. As a United Jewish community we look out for each other and we look out for the rest of the world as well.

In Psalm 82:3-4 it says that we should ‘Defend the poor and the orphan; deal justly with the poor and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked’.

Charity, tzedakah, is not just a matter of feeling philanthropic, but an act of justice in our world.

For so many of us, the national lockdown has been a time of anxiety, but for thousands, this time represents total desperation and hunger. The inability to feed and look after their children. But despite this, South Africans including our Jewish community, have risen to the occasion and united. Despite our own unknowns of what’s to come, we have been able to look beyond our own fears, and see the hopelessness of so many others that have so much more uncertainty than us.

Here are some feel good UBUNTU stories to remind you of the hope and positivity that lies within us all:

1: UJ library makerspace print 3D masks

The University of Johannesburg (UJ) Library Makerspace team has joined the efforts to curb the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic by developing vital protective material.

Makerspace began using 3-D printing to produce surgical face shields in an effort to meet the rapidly growing need for personal protective equipment for healthcare workers during the coronavirus crisis. It's a timely intervention as suppliers are scrambling to secure essential equipment such as ventilators, masks, gloves, respirators and sanitisers.

2: Hospitality venues open their beds to medical workers.

A new initiative called Ubuntu Beds is linking hospitality businesses that now stand empty with healthcare workers who are fighting the virus on the front line. By connecting healthcare workers with accommodation, we can ensure they won't need to travel long distances home to their families that they'll be able to rest easy and, in turn, ensure the safety of more South Africans.

3: Some landlords have reduced tenants' rent for this month, other people have created food and care packages to distribute to the elderly or indigent.

A Cape Town shop owner put together hygiene packs with hand sanitiser, a mask, soap and liquid disinfectant. He gave them, free of charge, to anyone aged over 65. We have seen videos of people on balconies or porches applauding South Africa's essential service workers – such as the refuse collectors – often unseen service providers who keep our city going in a time of the coronavirus.

Companies and billionaires have donated hundreds of thousands of Rands to townships and organizations that provide meals to the destitute

Donors such as Telkom (R15 million), Outsurance (R102 million) and Momentum (R26 million) as well as the Oppenheimer families made R1 billion contributions to benefit small businesses.

People are finding ways to volunteer virtually:

From designing a home workout routine for kids, to helping a substance abuse prevention programme with financial management, now you can make an impact

without leaving your home.

This includes assisting people with social media support, marketing, writing, training, design, data capturing, providing legal advice and more.

The forgood platform acts as a central point, connecting the skills and talents of individuals and businesses with nonprofit, social impact organisations in need of those specific skills.

Amid the COVID-19 crisis, it has been so heart-warming to see our community tackle the challenges it has brought head-on.

In the words of the Chief Rabbi: *Together, as a community, we've confronted this huge challenge. And together, as a community, we've pooled our collective skills and talents and resources, and come up with a way forward.*

Yehuda Lazarus, our very own from Moishy's Butchery formed an organization called FINGERTIPS OF AFRICA which raises food and funds for the elderly, abused women, and orphan headed homes.

Kaddish and baby namings have occurred at the Sandringham Gardens Aged Home shul for hundreds of families throughout the world. This is the only Shul operating with a minyan due to their early lockdown for the residents' safety and it is a programme of the Home.

The Gesher Small Business Relief Fund is now being launched to assist majority-Jewish-owned small-to-medium-sized businesses in South Africa. It will endeavour to safeguard businesses, protect stakeholders, and preserve jobs while enhancing the stability of the Jewish community.

The Rambam Charitable Trust offers interest free loans to the South African Jewish community since 1995. At this time they are offering assistance to families and small businesses to help them get by.

The Chief Rabbis of the world have called on Jews in every corner of the globe to call or message each other with words of support before Shabbat and create forums of non-physical connection especially to those struggling at this time. As our Chief Rabbi says: This is a time for us to rally together in unity. This is a time for us to be

together - *as one people with one heart.*

As frightening as this time is for all of us, it's incredible and heart-warming to see how we are able to extend ourselves and truly care for those that are more in need than ourselves. Ubuntu and Achdus are both ways of life that the Jewish community lives by. It is something that we can be proud of and continue to change the lives of those around us.

The Midrash compares us to sticks. Each stick by itself is easily snapped; however, when they are bound together they are not so easily broken. As a Jewish community and a South African community, let's bond our sticks together and become unbreakable!



ChevrahKadisha