

We need more kindness, says Dr Linda Greenwall BDS, MGDS, MSc, MRD RCS, FFGDP, FICD, BEM

One in Eight: How has your life been touched as a result of Covid-19?

According to the Times newspaper (Thursday 24 January 2021), one in eight people in the UK is mourning and has lost a friend or family member. A YouGov¹poll found that 8 percent had lost a close family friend and 5 per cent have lost a family member.

- 25% knew someone who had become seriously ill²
- 57% know someone who has tested positive
- One in twenty Britons (5%) say they have tested positive for Covid-19 with a quarter (26%) saying this happened to a family member and 36% to a close friend.
- 52% feared catching the disease (Tuesday 19 January 2021) in the UK
- 81% are willing to be vaccinated in the UK (Tuesday 19 Jan 2021)

Calum Semple, a doctor who sits on the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (**SAGE**) advised that there would be possibly 50,000 more deaths in the UK. So far, there have been over 100,000 deaths out of a population of 60 million (as reported in The Times newspaper on 21 January 2021). This is a serious milestone of deaths in the UK from Covid-19. We need a way to deal with these deaths in the news and a way to process collective grief and mourning for those that have been lost. Whilst we have Remembrance Sunday for those who died during the two world wars, we will need a national day of mourning in the UK to process the deep sadness and pain that has endured.

One way to process so many deaths is to show more kindness and tolerance towards one another during this pandemic.

Where is the collective grief and national mourning process? We need to do something together as we are all in this together. Each and every one of us. Every day we read the numbers of those infected with the virus. We wait daily for the rates of infection data to come down so that we can creep back to our “normal life”. However, the way we have been living for the past year is the new normal life. But the truth is for mental health and wellness we cannot dwell on these numbers too heavily on a daily basis – that is until it becomes personal.

Last week on 18 January we lost our beloved Ian Cohen age 69 – my husband’s brother to complications from Covid 19 in Cape town. At this difficult time, our family had to begin the grieving and the mourning process. The number 18 means life. At this time, we consider how best to remember our beloved Uncle Ian who was a brother, father, grandfather, husband, cousin, friend, business owner, leader and purveyor of good deeds to so many – touching the lives of hundreds of people. The Jewish way in mourning has set guidance rules and protocols for bereavement and the process of mourning which continues over a year as the grief is processed each step of the way.

We watched the funeral on Zoom together as a family just as so many families across the world were unable to attend the funerals of their loved one. We watched our beloved three nieces and sister in law link arms as a human chain to walk together to the burial site and thereafter towards their new life without their father and husband. To watch our strong nieces and my sister in law link arms in a female chain of solidarity, support and strength and human continuity will be a special memory.

As the summer sun was setting over Table Mountain, a halo of light embraced the mountain as if to give a last collective hug to our beloved Ian. This light in the sky was awesome and had a special quietness as if to pay its last respect as the sun dipped behind the mountain towards night. “In thy

light do we see light” is from a well-known Psalm (36:9). This light helps us to pause and reflect on life.

During the week of Shiva, which is the seven day Jewish mourning process for the loved one, our friends and family showed so much compassion and kindness to us. Every day they brought food to our doorstep so we were nourished with love and comfort during this time. Whilst unable to be physically there for us, they knocked on our door and stood two meters away in masks expressing words of comfort and kindness. A friend organised a meal rota for the week, so we did not have to cook our own meals. Notes and cards were sent through the door from people sharing in our grief, showing their care, kindness, empathy and compassion even though we are in London Lockdown 3.

On Friday 29 January 2021, my 85 year old mother and brother participated in the Johnson & Johnson vaccine trial in Cape Town at the University of the Western Cape Tygerberg hospital. This was the only way of having a vaccine in South Africa at the moment. I hope that they will not give my mom the placebo and not experiment on the health of an 85-year-old.

My mom has been taking the shielding and isolating very seriously as she is well informed on the current news and updates herself regularly on every news channel. She has always loved to party and participate in every aspect of life. Normally, when I visit her in Cape Town we attend Zumba classes together daily. As the gyms are closed this is not possible and she has an evening stroll along the beachfront watching the sunset and smelling the sea air. It has now been a year since I have seen my mother and brother and we hope that we'll meet again sometime soon.

On 30th January 2021, the BBC news reported a record day of vaccinations. Nearly 600,000 people received their first vaccination in one day with 587 deaths, bringing the vaccination total to nearly nine million people out of a total of 60 million in the UK.⁴

Today we learnt about Captain Tom Moore who passed away at age 100 from Covid-19. He was an inspiration to the nation by walking laps in his garden to raise funds for the NHS. Initially, he was planning to raise £1,000 for the NHS and instead raised an incredible £33million for NHS charities. We were encouraged to see his positive attitude to life and life's challenges and how he made a difference to the lives of so many. A true hero dedicated to kindness, showing love and compassion.⁵

We hope that, in the future, there will be a global remembrance ceremony for all those that have died from Covid-19. It is important that their lives are remembered for who they were and the good deeds that they did during their lifetimes.

There are many ways to preserve the memory of a loved one and we looked at the ideas for planning to remember and keep the memories alive (Marie Curie³).

1. Interview them about their life: keep a video diary
2. Create a book about their lives and collect photos
3. Start a memory journal so that families can preserve memories in a format that feels most comfortable (Dawn Terry, Marie Curie)
4. Create a memory box
5. Collate letters from friends and family
6. Make a mix tape or a playlist of their favourite songs
7. Ask to leave messages for people- letter video, voice recording via WhatsApp
8. Write up their recipes
9. Make a photo book and download photos from their social media

10. Make a memory cloud which is a safe space where you can remember a loved one (Marie Curie Talk website)

The increased days and the journey to spring is commencing. This new light brings hope for the slowing of the pandemic. The UK's vaccination programme brings hope for the nation and hope for humanity. We long for return to our normal lives – but we will face a new normal when the pandemic is over. We are already different people, having to cope with so many challenges on a daily basis, resetting and reframing our lives and putting things into perspective.

This is what I have learnt over the past twelve months of the pandemic

“This too will pass” and it may take longer than we estimate but each day that there is a hope.

1. When you can hug your loved ones – give them an extra special hug
2. Never forget to tell your loved one how much you love them and how special they are daily
3. Say what needs to be said now don't wait for the right time
4. Do what needs to be done now
5. Don't procrastinate and do what you can
6. Kindness is key – add more kindness to your day- day by day
7. Think about what would make the most difference for that person, your family your loved one- may them feel special
8. As we have so little time in life- use each moment wisely
9. Make each moment count
10. Reflect on all your blessings, be thankful and grateful and share the love, write it down, create a memory book, journal, reach out to someone to tell them you care.

So, look at ways to show more kindness to each other. Let's demonstrate our compassion, our empathy and our caring capacity in small ways that we can. We will be remembered for our good deed, our kindness and the impact that we made on the world through kindness.

References

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