



“IT’S MY RIGHT!” BUT ARE YOU HURTING SOMEONE?

On 21 March, we will be celebrating Human Rights Day in South Africa. It is a time for us to reflect on our individual human rights, and – more importantly – to consider how we can support others to bring these ideas into reality. In other words, a reminder to embrace the spirit of “Ubuntu”, I am because you are. Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu believes this is what defines us as a society: “We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole world,” he said. “When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity.”

WHAT ARE HUMAN RIGHTS?

According to the UN: “Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination.”



As South Africans, we have first-hand experience of how tricky this can be. A conversation with your parents about the “old days” brings up some stark reminders of how things used to be. Indeed, we have a painful history of racial oppression, discrimination and suffering, but the South Africa our children are living in is quite a different place compared to where it was 30 years ago. Yes, we still have challenges, and yes, some mindsets still need to change, but schools are open, neighbourhoods are open and everyone has the right to vote.

On 21 March, we remember **what it took for our country to become a democracy**, but we also reflect on how we still need to move forward, together. It is awful to live in a world where your religion is not respected and where you are discriminated against because of your gender, race or beliefs. There is no doubt about it, an equal world is a better world and we can all play a part in achieving it. One of the key ways to do this is relatively simple: listen and reflect. Be aware of your own attitudes and assumptions and continually challenge them.

WHAT IF MY HUMAN RIGHT CLASHES WITH YOUR HUMAN RIGHT?

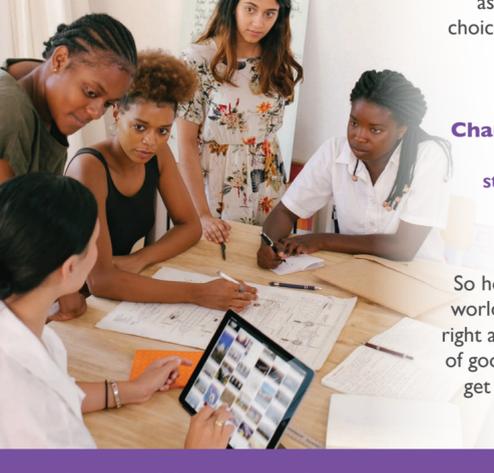
“It’s my right to exercise my freedom, and not wear a face mask”

Sadly, in the last year, we have seen many examples of people claiming their human right to freedom, but not considering how THEIR right might be putting others at risk of COVID-19 infection. Those who believe wearing a face mask is infringing on their human rights fail to consider the needs of others. Yet on the other end of the spectrum, are the health workers and volunteers who have voluntarily put themselves at risk to help fight for the rights of those in need.



As we rise to the challenge of moving our world forward, we need to constantly remind ourselves that just as Desmond Tutu said, we are not separate, but all connected. Cultivating a sense of peace, harmony and happiness for yourself, generates a culture of freedom and equality to those around you.

THINKING COLLECTIVELY



The last year has shown us just how connected each of us are. A mother who lives in China is just as impacted by COVID-19, as a son who lives in Kenya. Unless we all consider how our choices affect the broader community, we will simply stay stuck in a discriminatory, oppressive society. And, as Martin Luther King Jr. said:

Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle. And so we must straighten our backs and work for our freedom. A man can't ride you unless your back is bent.
— Martin Luther King Jr

So how do we contribute to the change we want to see in the world? How do we become forerunners to make every human right available to every human being? We can all do this. A touch of goodwill plus a handful of positive intent is what you need to get going. Then, with a bit of practise and a change in mindset, you can easily master these skills:

1. Cultivate empathy
It's hard to feel compassion for someone who is very different from you. You may not understand their pain, suffering and challenges. But, unless I can train myself to feel your suffering with you, it will be harder for me to take a step to helping you.



Even if you don't understand where someone is coming from, it's important to remain curious, open and objective.

If you, for instance, are an Indian, Muslim woman, you might have a conversation with a white, Atheist man. Instead of focusing on your differences and assuming they won't understand you, be curious. Ask them about who they are, why they believe what they do and how they approach certain situations. The more curious we become of those who are different from us, the more we can see how similar we are underneath and find common ground to work from.

2. Always ask ‘who am I missing’ and ‘what am I missing?’

It's hard to see beyond our own community. Our friends, family and colleagues make up most of our life experience. Even technology filters our content, so we only get exposed to opinions that we agree with.

But simple decisions always have a ripple effect, which is why we often have to ask ourselves: “Who am I missing?”

Let's say you decide to hire a new employee and someone who is very different from you to proofread it and ask them: “Who am I missing? or What am I missing?” by simply changing the language, you could have different genders, races and cultures of people applying for the position, allowing a more diverse workforce.

Or, if you want to buy one brand over another brand, ask yourself: “Who am I missing?” or “What am I missing?” Some brands have more humane conditions for their workforce and other brands may be giving a percentage of their profits to a good cause.

If we don't do a bit of research and educate ourselves, we will miss amazing opportunities to make a difference in the world and to support organisations that are already making a difference.

3. Aim for the win-win situation
If your neighbour is driving you crazy because he always has noisy parties on a Friday, it can be easy to go into a win-lose mindset. “One of us are going to have to sacrifice something here.”



This mindset will mean that you and your neighbour could start a fight and none of you walk away feeling any better.

If you go into the debate with a “win-win” mindset, your neighbour will be more open to negotiate and you might find a solution that you are both happy with.

BETTER TOGETHER

It can be hard to get along with people who are different from you, but by looking inward a bit more, we realise that it's important to make some sacrifices and think beyond our own needs. In truth though, relationships are what makes us the most unique species on the planet. If we cultivate, nurture and grow these relationships, we can be assured that we will never be alone and we can move our world to a better place for everyone.



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Let us stay mindful of caring for one another and ourselves

