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Gentleness: A Helpful Antidote to a Demoralizing Pandemic

There is no question we are living in unprecedented times. Covid-19 has circled the world several times and evolved into a number of different strains. Now a fourth wave is sweeping across the western world causing renewed fears and anxiety. Life often brings us difficult challenges that we do not see the meaning of at the time, but then hindsight leaves us with 20:20 vision.

I remember skiing down a black diamond ski slope at Silver Star Mountain several years ago – totally out of control! As hard as I tried to regain control I just couldn't. It was a horrible feeling. Would I hit a tree, or collide with another skier? I was gaining more and more speed with less and less control before it dawned on me – the only way to stop this growing nightmare was to intentionally wipe-out, at least then I would not harm anyone else in my hopeless predicament. Seeing a high mound of freshly moved snow just ahead, I decided to lay over to one side initiating my wipe-out plan and in an instant I was on the ground cruising towards the snow heap. My skies popped off and after a somersault or two, I found myself sitting on top of the snow bank completely and amazingly unhurt! My choice of action to do something in face of my horrifying plight had paid off and I was better off for having done something.



Now, there are a number of parallels here between my skiing nightmare and the Covid-19 nightmare that we have all endured over the past twenty months:

1. Both events happened suddenly without any prior warning
2. I had no control over either event
3. Both events left me with feelings of helplessness and horror
4. Would I emerge from either event unscathed or would I suffer or even die?
5. The longer the events went on the worse things seemed to get
6. Both events were a nightmare that never seemed to end

7. I searched for ways in both events to minimize the impact
8. I realized that even the worst situation eventually comes to an end
9. I became aware that if I did something, I would at least feel as though my action gave me a perception of having some degree of influence over the eventual outcome
10. Both events left me with a tremendous sense of relief when it was over (or changed significantly in the case of Covid) leaving me with a sense of gratitude for having survived an event that could have destroyed me.

Let's focus for a moment on those last two - numbers 9 & 10. There is no worse feeling than that of powerlessness. That awful sense that nothing can be done. But in fact there is much that can be done in the midst of this pandemic.

- We can follow the guidelines and protocols such as washing our hands frequently, wearing a mask, keeping a safe two meter distance, spending more time at home and avoiding crowded places where others disregard health and safety rules.
- We can get vaccinated (if we choose), avoid unnecessary travel, especially on public systems of transportation (planes, ferries, etc.) and work from home.
- It is important to have our own perspective as to what Covid-19 is, where it came from, etc. and just as importantly to let others have their opinion. Do not waste time trying to convince them of your view and respect their view. In matters such as Covid-19 it is okay to agree to disagree.

That brings me to point number 10 relief and a sense of gratitude. What is gratitude? It is the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness.

Might I suggest we do not have to wait for Covid-19 to be over before we show gratitude and thankfulness? For far too many people this pandemic has robbed them of their compassion and empathy. Front line workers have coined the phrase “compassion fatigue”. Do you remember a few years ago when it was popular to practice random acts of kindness? Paying for a stranger’s coffee who was behind you at the drive thru’. Leaving a server a super generous tip, or giving a homeless person \$20.00 just for the heck it.

I remember reading a little book back in the 1980’s entitled, “All I really needed to know I learned in Kindergarten” by Robert L. Fulgham. Here is a summary of the author’s conclusions:

- **Share everything**
- **Play fair**
- **Don’t hit people**
- **Put things back where you found them**
- **Clean up your own mess**
- **Don’t take things that aren’t yours**
- **Say you are sorry when you hurt somebody**
- **Wash your hands before you eat**
- **Flush**
- **Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you**
- **Take a nap every afternoon**

I know Fulgham’s ideas are a little simplistic but hopefully you can read between the lines and understand what I am getting at, which is this:

Despite the uncertainty and fear associated with Covid-19 let us make a commitment to treat others with dignity and respect. If you have to choose between being right and being gentle... chose to be gentle. Be generous. Treat others as you would like them to treat you. Pull over on the road and let the insensitive, aggressive driver behind you pass so as to maintain your sense of serenity and safety.

Talk to your spouse, play with your kids, and stop watching CNN. Above all else practice being true to yourself and be kind to others.

Covid-19 is going nowhere in a hurry so we have to learn to live with it. That does not mean it has to rob us of our happiness and peace of mind. Most of us have done a great job managing this pandemic menace but it is going to be here for a while yet but don’t let it rob you of your kindness and gentleness to others and to yourself. Taking the moral high road is certainly a road less travelled but you will meet a lot of wonderful people along the way and feel infinitely better about yourself, and just like Covid-19 being gentle, kind and generous is highly contagious!

In writing this article I wish in no way to be insensitive to those who have experienced a massive impact due to this indiscriminant disease. It has cost some, loved ones, their job, hopes and dreams, their home and treasures. In fact as counsellors at Vancouver Island Counselling a considerable amount of our time is spent each day supporting and consoling those ravaged and traumatized by this pandemic. If you have experienced such in your life and have not yet reached out for help, please do so – this is not a walk you have to take alone. Call our office when you are ready to seek help and our caring, compassionate, highly skilled counsellors will be glad to walk beside you as you deal with your loss whatever that may be.



305 - 394 Duncan St
Duncan, BC V9L 3W4

Vancouver Island Counselling

Duncan: 250 746 6900

Nanaimo: 250 754 8222

Port Alberni: 250 723 7001

Victoria / Gulf Islands / Lower Mainland

1 877 746 6911