



ANDREW ON WEDNESDAY

Wrapped in a dark veil

It is always a dilemma whether we should be writing, speaking or even mentioning the phenomenon of suicide.

It has been said that when high-profile suicides take place and they are reported in the media, it sets off copycat behavior that might trigger some to take the plunge. Then again, I still believe that if a fine balance is found and we share some thoughts on this delicate matter, it will tilt the balance to the affirmative.

In fact this week during my radio show, *Ghandi xi Nghid on Radju Malta*, we dealt with this reality because I believe it is a pressing issue that we tend to sweep under the rug. Well, really and truly, I was particularly interested in passing on the message during the show that we have a right to be happy. It appears that in a culture where sacrifice is often thought highly of for spiritual deliverance, and when we have been fed the idea that it will all be fine once we pass on to the next 'life', may lead us to believe that happiness needs to be justified.

While my mustard seed faith leads me to trust that after death there is a state of tranquility and serenity, I still think that we need to get to grips with the fact that our time on earth is there to be lived and in its entirety. To subsist to the fullest and to have fun and celebrate is perfectly legitimate.

For my part, this might not be easy for me to swallow as I cannot fathom the thought that I might be 'wasting' time on enjoyment or that doing nothing but simply chilling out and getting away from it all is no reason to feel blameworthy.

But I do admit to myself that we might work hard and yet the world will still not change as we would like it to. That doesn't mean that we do not contribute to making our community a better place.

Needless to say, a word and a gesture of comfort stand in good stead. For example, it is definitely okay to find time to have a coffee and chat with people during your working day.

I must admit that my visit to the Coffee Circus kiosk every afternoon at the University's quadrangle is bliss. A ten minute stop-over before the routine resumes to chat with students, colleagues and the nice people serving coffee and tea perks me up. It is these moments when we connect with people that make us feel part of a larger scheme. I'm not referring to any divine plan here but the simple gestures that make us civilised.

A word of comfort that I occasionally share with my students and colleagues is another special moment for me. The same fact that they allow me to steal a look into their lives

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when they feel confident enough to trust me with their story is so satisfying. It just doesn't get any more valued.

I don't have any pretensions that what I say will leave any sort of impact, but that moment when we link up, connect, communicate, is as prized as it gets. These off-diary moments, when discussion comes easy, are instances when I realise that I'm not alone and that even if pain or worry or feelings of wretchedness catch up, these conversations, this feeling of belonging, replenish that emptiness and help me to move on with determination to make my existence a beautiful moment to cherish and prize.

That is why speaking about suicide was so difficult last Saturday during *Ghandi xi Nghid*. The thought of people out there feeling and being on their own, isolated and that ominous feeling that a dark veil encapsulates them is horrendous. The emotion of solitude, abandonment

and remoteness washes away the colour from life and it all turns dull.

While probably most, if not all, have these moments during one's life course, it is unimaginable to think of the pain that some or many people out there feel in this sentiment of long-lasting lonesomeness.

Let it be ignored. It is roughly estimated that more than two people on average kill themselves every month in Malta and who knows how many others get these feelings of suicidal ideation. Probably at least double or triple of those who 'succeed' try 'it' but are unsuccessful. When you start totting up the numbers, it becomes mindboggling.

Studies seem to indicate that suicide is most widespread among adolescents, senior citizens, men and those struggling financially.

So while it is very exciting to learn that credit agencies, politicians and economists tell us that our economy is doing well, we all know that this is not seeping down to the people fast enough.

People who struggle to cope, who work crazy hours to garner ridiculous salaries, are the ones that will start feeling that life is not worth the struggle.

You also get young people who might sense that they are not being understood and think that they cannot cope with the transitions they are facing.

Even the elderly seem to struggle more and to find solace in death because they feel they are being put to the side.

But as Josef Bonello, the renowned broadcaster, said during the said programme, every person who is feeling isolated is flagging social failure. It is society that is absent for these individuals.

On the other hand, Joe Abela, who also sat on the panel spoke about the challenges that families face to support their relatives who are going through such a situation. He claimed that while it is vital to talk about this matter, it is also essential to let go of the stigma that shrouds these people and we need to speak about their life achievements. We need to resist the idea that once we know a person has committed suicide our understanding of this person changes and we end up perceiving him or her as a letdown. Joe Abela went on to say that it is necessary to respect the decisions that an individual would have made.

Life is no bed of roses, that's for sure. We miss out on targets, we get disillusioned by what people do and say to us, we lose hope and our targets seem blurred and impossible at times.

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That is all true and all of us get a bit of the veil every now and then, but there is surely always a lead we can fasten ourselves to and a good person who is ready to listen out there. As the slogan of my favourite football team, Southampton FC, goes, 'we march on', and this will only be possible if we keep strengthening our communities.

One day, when the chips are down, we will know the value of living together, of taking care of each other, of having an interest in our neighbours and colleagues. Maybe we could do something before a claim turns into an inevitability.

NB: If you need help because you feel that you cannot cope or if relatives and friends feel that they need advice on how to handle a mental health issue that someone close to them is struggling with, call Support Line 179 (24 hours) - Agenzija APPOGG 2295 9000 (office hours) or Emergency number 112 (24 hours).

"Ghandi xi Nghid"

is 24hr by RADJU MALTA and 9.00am-5.00pm

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