

## **FELLOW FEELING - THE HIDDEN HUMAN TREASURE**

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Fellow feeling is an intrinsic quality cherished by the human race; that contributes to the well being of society. It is about being humane and is one of the qualities that distinguish human beings from the lower forms of life. It flows from the heart and calls for an individual's decision and reaction to situations ranging from sadness, achievements, grief, depression, loss, sorrow and the like, in a way that says, "I am with you."

When one mentions "fellow feeling" and sharing, what naturally comes to mind is the time of grief, loss of a loved one, sadness, sickness, pain etc. However it also encompasses times of happiness and fun.

Experiences with tragic loss show that fellow feeling takes numerous forms, there are people who are instantly there with you, immediately it happens and remain with you throughout. Others pray, some run practical errands; planners see to the big things and small detail, some feed the people and offer all manner of help. There are those who send written condolence messages, call on telephones, bring or send flowers, cards, messages; while others check on you or come and share with you afterwards. Therefore, fellow-feeling can be expressed in various ways. All these gestures go a long way in uplifting the spirit, bringing back rays of sunshine to the person in grief. and are greatly valued and treasured by the affected parties.

Considering the pressures of time and the numerous obligations of today a person who takes time off or spares a second or more to express fellow-feeling cannot be taken for granted but should be treasured.

A friend of mine, who lost a son who was at university, said that when all the people had left it was very lonely and she especially valued the people who visited or checked on her during the following months. They helped her in uplifting her spirit and mending her life. This "after fellowship" is something whose value, our ancestors knew but for which many people have no time for anymore. In these modern times even sending an SMS can be amazingly effective.

A common saying goes that life is there to be lived to the full with energy and purpose; that is, without sickness which has a tendency of sabotaging this mission and takes us out of circulation. At such times expression of fellow feeling is most needed.

When people fall sick they are visited, be it in the hospital or at home. We take them flowers, food, drink, money and other things. We may look after them or simply keep them company. However, most people visit for the first few days only and stop.

Those who have been sick for a long time will testify that after the first few days the flow of visitors and other expression of concern tend to dry up entirely or are far in between, yet they continue to wish for visitors and other expressions of fellow feeling. It is good to remember that a visit, message or other form of concern is treasured by somebody, who has been down for a long time.

Fellow feeling or the lack of it is not only when people are disadvantaged, but also during times of happiness, such as, weddings, “kwanjula”, parties and other forms of celebration. At times, attendance of such occasions might be a barometer or feedback of how the person is fairing in expressing fellow feeling to others. For example a few years back a very important national figure invited friends to a big celebration at his home in Kampala. Only a handful of people turned up and they were embarrassed that apart from the powerful host and his wife, they were the only ones present until they found an excuse to leave. It appears the gentleman had not taken time to invest in relationships at any level and the intended guests held back and denied him their fellow feeling as well. Christian believers would find analogy with the biblical story of the rich man whose invited guests never turned up, and he resorted to bringing in beggars from the streets.

In contrast to the above situation, I was once invited to a function at the home of a good friend of mine who was of humble status. His son had graduated from university.

It appeared all the people he had invite turned up right from the society notables down to his village mates. They all seemed genuinely happy and comfortable to be part of the occasion and to make his enjoyment of the day memorable. This was an indication of how he personally embodies fellow feeling for other people. If you have no time for others, they will have no time for you. Fellow feeling is some sort of unconscious investment of part of oneself into others and has nothing to do with riches, social status or power, number of relatives or contacts.

Fellow feeling has to be genuine and from the heart, otherwise if it is faked it falls apart when tested. For example not long ago a very prominent national political figure passed away. According to the press, all the powerful and not so powerful went to his ancestral home to send him "off" to his maker. The speeches and outpouring were unmatched. A few weeks later, it was announced in church that his widow, family and friends were to come to the front to give thanks to God for his life. As the hymn was sung the widow moved forward with her two young children and a couple of relatives. In the whole congregation no body else accompanied her to give thanks not even the prominent people, that normally occupied the front rows, who doubtlessly had claimed to be close friends of the departed only a few weeks before. What a display of paucity of genuine fellow feeling.

For illustration of an exemplary display of fellow feeling one does not have to look any farther than the accident that the Rotarians of the Rotary Club of the Source of the Nile were involved in on their return from the Mombasa District Conference in May this year. This misfortune took place hundreds of kilometers away from the conference venue.

It took a kind hearted passing motorist to phone the District Governor (Tusu) that an accident had taken place hundreds of kilometers away from Mombasa and the people involved seemed like Rotarians. The District Governor plus immediate Past District Governor (Aboo) and other Rotarians immediately mobilized themselves, contacted somebody else at the UNEP in Nairobi, who in turn mobilized an ambulance which arrived at the scene of the accident in less than forty minutes and transported the accident victims to Nairobi hospital. What a true spirit of fellow feeling by those involved.

Uganda as a nation fares badly in the area of fellow feeling, with a tendency to adopt apathy or outright callous behaviour where others are concerned. This lack of care for fellow human beings is exhibited in situations where accident victims are robbed instead of being helped by supposed rescuers as they bleed to death, individuals get pick-pocketed or robbed as others watch bemused, while others make alarm for help, but curious on lookers go about their business or simply observe at a distance. A madman attacks a lady and people standby without intervening. One can list numerous other examples. The country has to find a remedy to the lack of concern that people become more humane as it used to be in the past.

Sports, is a universal channel for building team spirit fellow feeling and patriotism in a nation. Sports ranks as the number one national endeavour in providing a public relations window to the world and is a front runner as bearer of the national flag at the global scene. Other nations all over the world treasure sports knowing its value in building national fellow feeling and as bedrock of patriotism. Uganda on her part continues to deny her sports heroes the fellow feeling that would propel them to aspire to even greater heights. While I cannot claim to be knowledgeable about sports, I know there was a sprinter called Kamoga who bore Uganda's flag for years in track and field events, and brought home medals, but he appeared alone without his fellow Ugandans reaching out to say "*I am with you*". And there are many more examples including, boxers Leo Rwabogo and John "The Beast" Mugabi whose stories featured in the press recently, (they brought home Olympic and Commonwealth medals and international championship titles, but are now leading hard lives!) but to a country without fellow feeling or patriotism to embrace them as national heroes. No doubt we have to identify with our sports heroes much more as a nation as an avenue of indicating patriotism and to show them fellow feeling so that they can rise to higher levels and stardom. It was refreshing to see the recognition and fellow feeling our lady Dorcus Inzikuru received when she brought the gold medal home last year.

What is your barometer reading regarding fellow feeling? Think about it and decide your part in enhancing fellow feeling wherever you are.