An Israeli Student in Rome: “My Studies Have Kept My Sanity”

Gili Goldhorn, who moved to Italy for her Italian partner, tells about life in a country with over 15,000 dead as a result of Covid-19 and about her education from a remote location at the Open University.

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Our world changed in a second. It is permitted to go to a supermarket only once every ten days and the worst part of it all is the collapse of the healthcare system. What keeps my sanity during this lockdown in Rome is my online studies at the Open University.
I am 28 years old, a Haifa native. I was born deaf to a hearing family. I work at the Israeli embassy in Rome and concurrently I am a student pursuing a double major degree in psychology and education at the Open University.
I moved to Italy on account of my Italian partner and by means of the Open University’s online systems I have continued studying, along with professors with whom I’ve had a routine relationship. Most were available to me at any time, for any question, and any topic.

At the moment the situation in Italy is dire. The healthcare system is collapsing and the medical staff are 24 hours a day in the hospitals. The hospital staff have been harmed by the protection measures and their bodies are collapsing along with the rising numbers of those who died and patients who remain attached to a ventilator, that either way seem to not be enough for all the patients.

Medical staff are being forced to make tough decisions regarding patients and deciding who amongst them will be granted the privilege to connect to a ventilator machine according to their age, their health status, and medical background. I have friends and colleagues who live in Northern Italy. They tell me that they have already exceeded 40 days in quarantine. Some were sick and have recovered, some lost loved ones without the ability to do a funeral for them, and some are praying for the welfare of their parents who have fallen ill. The matter does not seem as though it is near its end, despite the slight, however gladdening, decrease in the recent numbers.

As I said, what keeps me going in this time is my ability to study from a distance - while my professors are in Israel. In addition is the option to study from digital books and personalized programs for each student, and now even an additional assistance for those hard of hearing or deaf - a transcription of all the courses I am taking. The transcriptionist receives authorization to
enter the course website, connects to the live Zoom meeting together with the instructor and all the students, and by way of screen sharing with the transcriptor I can follow what is going on during class, including the conversations between students and instructor.

And maybe this is one of the benefits of this current plague - it has succeeded in providing a big technological push forward to everybody. I also think that the pandemic has brought out other positive aspects in humanity aside from technology: there is a lot of humor about the situation, there is a lot of mutual assistance, there is a real closeness between people across the world, suddenly political troubles seem meaningless and we are succeeding in working to overcome this together, despite disagreements in other times.

The last thing I would like to tell everyone is: stay home! This has completely proved itself to be true. The numbers decrease every day that the public stays at home more and more. Every day that you stay home - that is one less patient in the hospital. Every day that you stay at home is one more ventilator machine made available for someone who really needs it. Take care of yourselves, and your loved ones.

The virus will not ignore or pass over any of us if we do not respect the laws and stay home to watch Netflix and eat delicious food. We are being requested so little in order to save the world - let's honor that and stay at home.