

## In despair? Open a window



**One of the things I appreciate most about living in the Western Cape is being able to avoid those seemingly endless dry, white winter seasons of the Highveld where I grew up.**

The drabness of dead lawns and the scorched veld accentuated by a colourless, cold sun has always left me morose and miserable. The gloom would only be lifted when in the distance you would hear the rumblings of the first thunderstorm of spring.

It feels like we have been waiting like for ever, for a sign that this dry, white season we are living through, which is the Covid-19 pandemic, will change into a new season with a promise of fresh beginnings.

But it is not happening and won't be happening soon, it seems. Our future looks as bleak as our experiences of the past year and a half. Any change seems to be a turn for the worse or at best a horizontal shift.

*Uitsigloos* is the word that best describes my current experience of life. It is difficult to translate this word into English. I am not feeling completely hopeless in the way the dictionary translates *uitsigloosheid*. Although there is a sense of despondency and being drained, I really don't feel as if nothing good will ever happen again and that my life is over.

Rather, being *uitsigloos* is more like looking out towards nothing but a lifeless landscape without a vista. On bad days I open the window and see a wall, on better days, just ashen veld. Like a psychological short sightedness, as if mentally and emotionally I have no long-term vision.

And I have no vision because I have no information with which to imagine my future and nothing I have done in the past has prepared me for this situation. I stumble from one day to the other in a quest for survival in an uncertain world with no end in sight.

# SELF-CARE SKILLS FOR TEACHERS

Living this way is difficult for anyone. We crave certainty like we crave sustenance and love. We need to fill in the blanks, it makes us feel safe.

Then just as my window seems to be so close to the wall that it cannot be opened at all, I remember that in fact I have never really been able to predict the future, that life has always been about facing uncertainty. Humans have always looked for the 'truth' and simple explanations to explain complex phenomena. Different people approach it in different ways, some people turn to religion and tradition while some rely on science or elaborate strategic plans and others rely on non-scientific tools like astrology and conspiracy theories.

But we are all searching for security, safety and certainty. Our brains are hardwired that way.

Yet, sometimes like now, it is probably best to live with ambiguity and insecurity however counterintuitive it seems. Instead resisting, rebelling and fixating on how things 'ought to be', accept that this is how life is in this moment.

So even if we are unable to open our window no more than a few centimetres and this makes it difficult to see our futures, we have to keep at it for two reasons:

## 1. What we don't use we lose.

If we stop working the hinges of the window frame, it will become rusty and eventually the window will remain shut and we will lose any opportunity to imagine a future for ourselves. Even if we can only see a slither of a future with or after Covid-19, let's take action. Keep opening your window and keep visualising a different future, grand and meaningful, a vision that goes beyond this daily battle to keep everything together.

## 2. Then use what you have.

The current vista looks grey and uninspiring, keep looking and learning. Even after a fire, the veld is teeming with life. In the midst of the blaze, all kinds of creatures and plant life protected themselves by hiding underground waiting to come out and continue living their purpose.

We are the same. We might have to discard or alter our current vision as a result of the changes brought on by the pandemic but there is no reason not to have a vision. This is a difficult time but it does not make our lives meaningless.

Visualise your future beyond this dry white season and then take steps to get you there.

**When a door closes, if you look long enough and hard enough, if you're strong enough, you'll find a window that opens. - John C. Bogle**

**Keep well**  
**Erika**

**WhatsApp 082 824 0642**  
**[www.somasense.co.za](http://www.somasense.co.za)**



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