



UBUNTU! The Spirit of Humanity

A training manual by Helen Sayers provides a description of Ubuntu.

So what exactly is UBUNTU?

“Ubuntu is an ancient way of living which embodies the generosity, warmth, inclusiveness and solidarity that is still typical of many African communities today. Though the word Ubuntu has its origin in the local languages of Southern Africa, the values it encompasses are found across the entire continent and are at the origin of every culture and religious and spiritual tradition in the world. Words in different languages that express one or another aspect of Ubuntu include ‘Harambee’

(Swahili, East Africa – Let’s pull together!), ‘Terranga’ (Wolof, West Africa – Hospitality), ‘Insanya’ (Arabic – Humanity), ‘Aloha’ (Hawaii – Compassion and mercy), ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ (Sanskrit – Belonging to one human family); and perhaps a European equivalent might be ‘One for all and all for one’.

The Ubuntu theology guided Archbishop Desmond Tutu when he chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – established in South Africa after the abolition of apartheid – helping to heal the wounds inflicted by this regime by implementing the values of compassion, forgiveness, personal accountability and dignity.

One key concept of Ubuntu derives from the Zulu/Xhosa (South African) saying: ‘*umuntu, ngumuntu, ngabantu*’ which means ‘a person is a person through other persons’ – otherwise expressed as: ‘I am because we are’ or ‘I exist because you exist’. It acknowledges the value of each individual or group, the acceptance and appreciation of our differences while recognising our common spirituality, our responsibility for the well-being of others, and a sense of belonging to one human family and being deeply connected with nature and with the universe. It promotes respect for all, especially elders, youth and women, and co-operation and trust between individuals, and among communities and nations. Above all, Ubuntu embodies the power of reconciliation, the potential for building bridges, creating unity between people and across cultures.”