UBUNTU

There's this story from Ghana about this young girl looking at her father, who is peering into the past intensely. And the girl says: 'Papa, you are always looking into the past. Why? And the father looks at her and says: 'My daughter, it is because the answers to the future always reside in the past. And that's where knowledge that is banished in the past, like Ubuntu, becomes relevant.

What is Ubuntu?

Ubuntu is a traditional African concept. The word ubuntu comes from the Zulu and Xhola languages and can be roughly translated as **"humanity towards others."** Ubuntu embodies all those virtues that maintain harmony and the spirit of sharing and solidarity among the members of a society. It implies an appreciation of traditional beliefs and a constant awareness that an individual's actions today are a reflection of the past and will have far-reaching consequences for the future. A person with Ubuntu knows his or her place in the universe and is consequently able to interact gracefully with other individuals.

"Ubuntu", as a Zulu word, means "humanness". Its essence is captured in the principle: **"A person is a person through other persons."** A person's value as a human being depends on acting for the sake of the community and promoting community interests before individual interests. The concept of community is a core Ubuntu value in African thinking about humanity.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu famously described Ubuntu in these terms: ***"My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in what is yours."*** He states that having Ubuntu in one's life and "being human" means embracing the values of generosity, hospitality, friendliness, care, and compassion.

UBUNTU PHRASES

Ubuntu is a way of life that has held families and communities together for centuries. The following phrases give us more insight into the spirit of Ubuntu.

"As human beings, we are all linked. If we remain indifferent to the suffering of others, we are only depriving ourselves of our own humanity. We need to act together as humanity for humanity."
Dr. Kofi Annan, Former Secretary General of the United Nations

Anything that affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason, ***I can never be what I should be until you are what you should be. And you can never be what you're meant to be until I'm what I'm meant to be.*** This is the way God's universe is made; this is how it is structured.

"We are human beings, and we should feel for each other: I do to others what I want others to do to me... that I'm a human being because there are other human beings around me. ..."
Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa, writer, South Africa

"I am because we are" means that we stand up for our fellow humans and know that when we do so, we will never stand alone.

Values of Ubuntu

The Ubuntu Philosophy articulates such important values as **respect for others, human dignity, compassion, solidarity, helpfulness, community, sharing, cooperation, and consensus,** which in a way, demand conformity and loyalty to the group. Ubuntu underscores the importance of agreement or consensus and prioritizes the community's well-being as a whole.

Ubuntu lived out in different spheres of life.

1. The principle of co-agency and Ubuntu

Did you know that 30% of food crops in the world need cross-pollination from bees, these tiny insects? So if you're going to destroy the bees or the earth, you are ultimately destroying yourself.

So the principle of co-agency implies that we are interconnected and interdependent in a balanced biodiversity. So it is with the principle of Ubuntu. The awareness that our interdependence moves beyond the relationship between humans and humans, but the relationship between humans and non-humans, precisely because we are implicated in their lives, and they are implicated in our lives.

2. **Hospitality among villagers**
A traveller sojourning through a country would stop at a village, and he didn't have to ask for food or for water. Once he stops, the people give him food and entertain him. That is one aspect of Ubuntu shown as hospitality. To date, even in modern society, a visitor that arrives at the moment of meals is automatically welcomed to share whatever the family is eating, even if more food will have to be prepared. He cannot be told he was not counted among or included.

3. Solidarity in Agricultural Farming:

Among the Tiv people of Benue State, Nigeria, whose major occupation is farming, which is the source of their livelihood either by consuming what is produced or by selling the product as the source of income for other needs. The larger their agricultural activities, the better their income and lifestyle, but producing in large quantities is challenging due to a lack of mechanization or a shortage of manpower. The villagers, therefore, organize themselves in groups of 10s, 15s, and 20s or more. They all go with their farm implements to a member's farm to help do the work needed and could finish it in a day, depending on the largeness of the farm. This is what would have taken a month for the member to finish individually. The person welcoming them provides food for them, and they work the entire day until the work is completed. In this way, all members of the group realized that doing what he alone would never have achieved is possible with the group. His strength and fulfilment come from that of the entire group. This spirit is perfectly in line with Saint Claudine's saying: alone, one can go very fast, but together, we can go far.
And if there is a widow in the place without a son to be part of the group, the group will put outside a day to go and help her with her work on the farm.

4. Ubuntu Operating System

There is an operating system (OS)created in the spirit of "Ubuntu" called the **Linux computer operating system,** which claims that it "brings the spirit of Ubuntu to the software world. The OS concept was based on collectiveness and free-spiritedness in how it is given to all freely. Ubuntu OS offers users a free license to their operating system, and in return, people develop free patches, software, and add-ons that are offered free of charge to the community. The Ubuntu OS promotes interconnectivity and togetherness.

5. The story of Tam boon

One day a Western anthropologist went to Africa to study the social behaviour of an indigenous tribe, he proposed a game to the children, and they willingly agreed to be part of it. He put a basket filled with fruits underneath the tree and made the children stand 100 meters away, then announced that whoever could reach the basket first would win the whole basket and could eat all fruits by himself or herself. He lined them all up and raised his hand to get the start signal ready; he said; set! go! Astonishingly, the children took each other's hands and started running together. They all reached the basket at the same time, then they sat down in a big circle and enjoyed the fruits together, laughing and smiling the whole time. The anthropologist could not believe what he saw and he asked them, why they had waited for each other, as one could have taken the whole basket all for him or herself. The children shook their heads and replied; *how can one of us be happy if all the others are sad?*

6. In family settings and communities

Examples of Ubuntu are deeply ingrained in African culture, and there are many examples of its principles in action. For example, in many African communities, it is common for extended families to live together and share resources. The grandparents, parents, children, aunties and uncles could live together in one household. Sometimes there is no distinction made between immediate families and distant families. This is a way of ensuring that everyone has access to the resources they need, and it prioritizes the well-being of the community over individual needs. Thanks to this great Family Spirit of Ubuntu, a child is never completely orphaned.
Additionally, many African communities have a strong sense of collective responsibility. This means that if someone in the community is struggling or in need, it is the responsibility of the community to support them.

The impact of Ubuntu on the society has been significant. In African communities, Ubuntu has fostered strong relationships, built trust, and promoted social cohesion and harmony. It has also been used to promote social justice and equality.

7.   Ubuntu In Social Justice and Equality

During the apartheid in South Africa, the principles of Ubuntu were used to resist the oppressive regime and promote unity and solidarity among oppressed communities. Ubuntu has also been used as a basis for practicing restorative justice, which prioritizes healing and reconciliation over punishment.
Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first democratically elected president, encapsulated the many interpretations by referring to Ubuntu as an African concept which implies that "*if we are to accomplish anything in this world, it will in equal measure be due to the work and achievements of others."*

8. How Ubuntu is lived in our communities, schools, and Centres:

« A person is a person through other persons" A person's value as a human being depends on acting for the sake of the community and promoting community interest before individual interest»

a.   Community living is about sharing life in common. The spirit of Ubuntu helps in great measures to promote this sense of interdependence, kindness, compassion, and the need for connectedness. This was a conscious effort made through having many reflections and using Ubuntu as a theme for our community projects with the desire to remind ourselves to live by its values and to strengthen our sense of oneness which helped and improved our community living by bringing harmony as well as giving a better witnessing.
There are many tribes in the countries of the Delegation of Africa.

Diversity is lived and experienced on a daily basis ranging from languages, cultural differences in food types, ways of dressing, etc. each sister lives the attitude of openness to embracing the culture of another and tries to understand and appreciate it by learning to embrace the newness it brings to enrich others in the community, thereby enlarging our boundaries and enriching each other with new things. Cultural diversity is celebrated, and we notice its positive effects on us each time and that we are never the same; the integration of different cultures makes us more open to interacting with and welcoming others in their differences with gratitude and warmth. This interchange helps us realize daily that we are truly human and wonder how similar we are despite our cultural differences. Our goal in living interculturality is never to outweigh or uplift a culture over another, but it has been about how we can grow as one body and continue to enrich our communities and the mission with such richness of the plurality the interchange offers.

b. In most of our schools in the Delegation of Africa, in Nigeria and Cameroun especially, we have introduced a Cultural Day celebration which is a way of inculcating into the young ones that our cultural heritage and differences should be celebrated and appreciated. During the Cultural Day celebration preparation, the children are divided into groups, and they are given different tribes that are different from theirs beforehand, and they study about it, learn a few words in this culture, learn to cook their dishes and prepare traditional cultural attire. On the Day of the Cultural celebration, they all arrive in colourful styles to display and teach others about these cultures with pride and honour. Each culture is given a specific time for display where they take turns to explain the dishes, dresses, spoken language, and tradition, showcase their dance steps and what they are famous for, etc. By so doing, each child knows and feels that we are one and that the cultures are all rich and valued. We also grow in respect, openness, and appreciation of others' cultures.

c. The staff in our different schools, whether teaching or non-teaching, have organized themselves into ways of being in solidarity with one another and securing a support system for each member. Each member of staff has appreciated this way as they have, at different moments, benefitted from these organized help structures which come from the interdependence consciousness of Ubuntu: **For example:**
The Tontines: This is a contributory system designed by the people to bring people together to collectively meet each other's financial goals in a periodic and rotational pattern. The scheme usually operates on the principles of trust among members, with each person contributing a fixed amount of money on a regular basis, usually weekly or monthly.

At the end of a specified period, the pool is usually handed to member in a rotational way. The scheme can be seen as a form of informal banking or Microfinance, providing a source of savings and credit for people who may not have access to formal banking services.

The concept of pooling resources and sharing risks where people come together to support one another through difficult times has proven to be a life-giving venture for its members. Based on what is agreed upon, each member, at the end of the month, when salaries are paid, donates as agreed upon, it could be 50 000 frs, 100 000… etc. and if they are 20 participants, a total of 1 million, 2 million francs is collected and given to a person and next month another, until all the members have collected and they could start all over again. With this, they are able to accomplish things they normally wouldn't have been able to with their regular salaries. With this means, participants have bought plots and built houses, paid their children's school fees and house rental fees, bought cars, etc.

In Jesus and Mary College, Simbock, Yaoundé, when a staff loses someone close, being aware of the financial burden of burials, his or her colleagues give donations towards helping to relieve the financial burden on the person and assist in other aspects, as much as possible. This way of showing compassion and kindness has been a very important gesture motivated by the spirit of Ubuntu and has continued to strengthen our belief in the need to support one another.

d. Resolution of conflicts among the students:

The JM College Simbock, Yaoundé's management, and teachers come together to solve the problems of students in difficulty. We pull our efforts and our skills.

The parents of these children can be summoned and listened to in order to better target the problem and find a solution that can get them out of their difficulty.

In the same order, the parent's delegates act within the families through Whatsapp group platforms that are created and make themselves available in the accompaniment of their children and other learners. They can take part in the class councils and give their opinion in front of a case judged at fault. They show up at class time to advise students or to resolve any difficulties encountered in the classroom.

Conclusion

Pope Francis, in his Encyclical called Fraterlli Tutti, aligns in every
way, with the values and principles of Ubuntu.
"Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu." This saying exists in variant forms in Southern Africa's
Bantu language and translates as "A person is a person through other persons" or "I
am because we are."
Strikingly, Pope Francis' Encyclical Fratelli Tutti contains an equivalent: "Each of us is
fully a person when we are part of a people; at the same time, there are no peoples
without respect for the individuality of each person". In other words, we are "brothers
and sisters all".

Francis' twin ideas of fraternity and social friendship underscore the urgency of Ubuntu in our present-day context, where atavistic conflicts rive the fabric of humanity, ideological division, isolationist paranoia, and political polarization that take a catastrophic toll on the weak and vulnerable.

The commitment to live the values of Ubuntu is not without challenges. However, it is worth all the time and effort for truly; the society will be a better place if each one is determined and consistently living out its values.

Applying Ubuntu in your life can be a transformative experience. Some ways to do this include prioritizing relationships and community over individualism and self-sufficiency, practicing empathy and compassion, and considering the impact of our actions on the wider community. Additionally, we can seek out opportunities to connect with others and build strong relationships, whether it's through volunteering, joining a community organization, or simply reaching out to someone in need.

At the end of our lives, what matters is the quality of our relationships and how many lives were touched by our way of living in fraternity and in the spirit of Ubuntu.