

Meaning of Ubuntu

Ubuntu, pronounced /ùbúntú/ (oo-BOON-too), is a sub-Saharan African **ethic** or **ideology** focusing on people's allegiances and relations with each other. The word has its origin in the **Bantu languages** of Southern Africa. Ubuntu is seen as a traditional African concept.

There are many possible translations in English for **ubuntu**, including:

- "Humanity towards others"
- "I am because we are"
- "A person 'becomes human' through other persons"
- "A person is a person because of other persons"

A popular definition of ubuntu is, "the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity.

An attempt at a longer definition has been made by Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999):

*" A person with **ubuntu** is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed. "*

Low (1998) suggests that the concept of **ubuntu** defines the individual in terms of their several relationships with others, and stresses the importance of **ubuntu** as a religious concept. He states that while the Zulu maxim *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* ("a person is a person through other persons") may have no apparent religious connotations in the context of Western society, in an African context it suggests that the person one is to become by behaving with humanity is an ancestor worthy of respect or veneration. Those who uphold the principle of **ubuntu** throughout their lives will, in death, achieve a unity with those still living.