**I Am Because We Are**

I recently learned a new word.

It is “Ubuntu.”

You won’t find it in an English language dictionary, that’s because it’s not English, but a word from what is known as African Humanism. 'UBUNTU' in the Xhosa culture means: "I am because we are."

Bishop Desmond Tutu explained it as follows:“One of the sayings in our country is Ubuntu – the essence of being human. Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. You can't be human all by yourself, and when you have this quality – Ubuntu – you are known for your generosity. We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole World. When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity.”

Nelson Mandela explained: “A traveler 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 attend him. That is one aspect of Ubuntu.”

An anthropologist proposed a game to the kids in an African tribe. He put a basket full of fruit near a tree and told the kids that whoever got there first won the sweet fruits. When he told them to run they all took each other’s hands and ran together, then sat together enjoying their treats. When he asked them why they had run like that as one could have had all the fruits for himself they said: ''UBUNTU, how can one of us be happy if all the other ones are sad?''

I could use many words in an attempt to express the Buddhist notion of gratitude and happiness, but this simple story expresses it as much as I could. The Chinese characters for "gratitude" mean "to know the cause". I am here only because of the kindness of many people, my parents, teachers, friends, relatives and so on. The know the cause is to feel gratitude, and vice versa. Unbuntu; no man is an island.

What Nelson Mandela says about giving also reminds me of the Six Good Deeds taught in Buddhism. The first good deed is Kindness. This is also expressed as Giving. There are two kinds of giving: 1. The teachings of Buddha 2. Materials. There are seven kinds of giving materials that don’t require money. One of those is to give food and shelter to someone. I am moved to hear that such a mentality exists in cultures. Africa is a place I hear more about poverty and hardship than anything else. For this reason I am surprised to hear that people can be so giving, and to a stranger at that, who is simply passing through.

If giving were simply a matter of wealth then the wealthy people of the world would be taking in and feeding people all the time. But we know this isn’t so. In fact the more money we have the more tightly we hang onto it. Often times people with the nicest homes and possessions are unwilling to let anyone, even themselves, enjoy it. The more we have the more we want teaches Buddhism. But from the spirit of Ubuntu, it tells me that the spirit of giving comes from a mind of kindness, a mind of giving, regardless of one’s wealth or lack of. As Buddha taught, one doesn’t need to have things in order to give.

But in order to give, one does need to have a mind of giving. Without having such a mind, no matter how much we have, we will never be able to show kindness. And likewise, no matter how little we have, if we have a mind of giving we will always be able to give, because for sure we will always be able to find something to give.

The children in the story are an example of how the spirit of Ubuntu has been passed down from generation to generation. Kindness, generosity, selfishness and miserliness, are habits learned and passed on. Children, who grow up to be unkind and uncaring, have learned such lessons from their upbringing. Although it’s important to give a child a good school education, neglecting to give a child a moral education is setting them up to be failures as human beings. As it’s says in Unshakable Spirit, we must not forget what constitutes true parental kindness. For a parent, nothing must be more heartbreaking than that of seeing their child become a person who cares about no one but themselves. Passing on the spirit of Ubuntu through the teachings of Buddha and the six good deeds will give people the foundation for a true education.