

AN INTRODUCTION TO BEING CHARITABLE

Being charitable towards others is a spiritual asset—one that can contribute to community building. Some might even maintain that it is impossible to build a sense of belonging and community without some form of charitable practice.

An illustration is the South African view of community referred to as “Ubuntu,” which is usually translated as, *“I am because of who we are.”* Retired Archbishop and social rights activist Desmond Tutu believes that Ubuntu is the very essence of what it is to be human:

“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.”

[<https://www.tutufoundationuk.org/ubuntu-youth-project>]

This value, or way of life—Ubuntu—suggests a way of thinking, seeing, and acting in the world that we will explore in this section.

Tutu refers to being charitable as being someone with “generosity.” Whether you call it charity or generosity, each word translates to giving of one’s self for another, for the greater good of the community. This can be the giving of one’s time or finances, or something as simple as offering nonjudgmental and kind words.

Through charity or generosity of self, we create a deeper sense of community with each other. We begin to see ourselves as one—one community—connected with each other through Ubuntu. We begin to understand, and to acknowledge, that we are interdependent in a respectful and supportive way.

As human beings, as a social clan, we have a need to live within supportive environments where we are nurtured and can thrive together, where there is a strong commitment to the well-being of the community as a whole. We are fundamentally designed to live this way. Being charitable towards one another is not just “a nice thing to do”; it is an imperative for our survival as humans, and for our well-being as a local and global community.

Source: Tool Box chapter on Spirituality and Community Building (Chapter 28) written with the support and contributions of experts connected with the Charter for Compassion. For more information about the Charter and its work, visit www.charterforcompassion.org.

