



# The GOF Start Up Kit:

## How to Create a Garden of Forgiveness

### THE VISION

The Gardens of Forgiveness movement is inspired by the leadership of Alexandra Asseily, the visionary behind the world's first Garden of Forgiveness in Beirut, Lebanon. Gardens of Forgiveness can be elaborate and formal national gardens – such as the Garden of Forgiveness in Beirut – or local gardens created by local communities.

A Garden of Forgiveness is a place in which people can gather strength and inspiration, a place for calm and reflection. It is a garden for individual introspection and a sanctuary accessible to all. It is an edifying place, inspired by the flora of the local environment. If possible it will include a fountain of contemplation into which stones representing anger, fear, grief or bitterness may be cast. Comfortable seating is suitably prepared for both sun and shade. A place of inspiration, the Garden of Forgiveness nurtures sentiments of peace, joy, hope, and healing.

### THE CONCEPT

In life, we must find creative and constructive ways to negotiate conflict. The only conflict-free existence is death. One definition of forgiveness is “giving up all hope for a better past.” We cannot change the past, but we can change how we approach it, and how we carry our feelings about it into the future. Forgiveness provides the essential and necessary balance in all our relationships. Friends can live in the same humble shack and remain friends, but enemies, embittered by the feelings of enmity and revenge, cannot share even a palace in the hope of becoming friends. Forgiveness transcends painful memories and grievances and redirects this energy toward peaceful and creative coexistence. The Garden of Forgiveness will be a public place in which we raise awareness about the power of forgiveness for healing and conflict transformation.

### WHY FORGIVENESS?

Nelson Mandela once said that not to forgive is “like drinking a glass of poison and waiting for your enemies to die.” There is too much of this poison readily available and eagerly consumed in our society today. Forgiveness is vital to life: the person who is willing to forgive demonstrates less anxiety and stress, better cardiovascular health, lower blood pressure, and a renewed energy inspired by hope and optimism. The Garden of Forgiveness in the local community will be a place where this spiritual, mental, and physical health will be empowered. The path to forgiveness is an internal journey. It can be one of the hardest things to do and cannot be imposed. It must be undertaken by the individual. Each and every person has his or her unique relationship with their memories and ancestry. Hoarding bitter sentiments leads to the destruction of the individual and society.

## THE DESIGN OF THE GARDEN

The Garden of Forgiveness is a place of hospitality and inclusion; a place of comfort, beauty, and inspiration. A Garden of Forgiveness will:

- Offer a place of peace and beauty in which people can reflect on the bonds of our shared humanity. As John Donne put it so well, “no man is an island.”
- Include green space, and possibly a fountain with flowing water.
- Provide comfortable seating, both shaded and un-shaded.
- Include quotations on forgiveness from the major religions and the great philosophers, inspiring reflection on forgiveness and healing.
- Provide faith-based and community organizations public space for community rituals and programming related to forgiveness and reconciliation.
- Reflect a sense of connectedness and common purpose shared with other Gardens of Forgiveness around the world.
- Encourage the planting of flora indigenous to the area, as well as the possible use of specialty trees emphasizing peace and forgiveness, such as olive trees. The garden could include sunflowers, in tribute to Simon Weisenthal’s *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*; oleander, the first plant to grow in the devastated areas of Hiroshima and Nagasaki after World War Two; and New Zealand’s piripiri plant, also known as “the forgiveness plant,” which symbolizes the barbs of anger that need to be purged through the process of forgiveness.

Consultation with local gardeners and landscape architects is encouraged.

Other possibilities for a Garden of Forgiveness include the creation of a labyrinth or walking trail to symbolize the journey of forgiveness; or, if in an urban context where space is limited, a forgiveness mural on a building or in a park.

## POSSIBLE SIGNAGE: SOME QUOTATIONS ON FORGIVENESS

“Not to forgive is like drinking poison and waiting for your enemies to die.” - Nelson Mandela

“There is no future without forgiveness.” - Archbishop Desmond Tutu

“Forgiveness means giving up all hope of a better past.” – Lily Tomlin

“Every act of revenge is a time-bomb thrown into the future, one which reverberates through history, unless dealt with through modern psychological and effective methods of re-conciliation and peace building.” – Alexandra Asseily

“Whoever opts for revenge should dig two graves.” – Chinese proverb

“People ask me what advice I have for a married couple struggling in their relationship. I always answer: pray and forgive. And to young people from violent homes, I say: pray and forgive. And again, even to the single mother with no family support: pray and forgive.” – Mother Teresa

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“It is freeing to become aware that we do not have to be victims of our past and can learn new ways of responding. But there is a step beyond this recognition... It is the step of forgiveness. Forgiveness is love practiced among people who love poorly. It sets us free without wanting anything in return.” – Henri J.M. Nouwen

“The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.” – Mahatma Gandhi

“Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to a single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever, not unlike the sorcerer’s apprentice who lacked the magic formula to break the spell.” – Hannah Arendt

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you. – Lew Smedes

### **FORGIVENESS QUOTATIONS FROM WORLD SCRIPTURE**

“Be quick in the race for forgiveness from your Lord, and in the race for a garden wide as the heavens and the earth, prepared for the righteous – [the righteous are] those who spend whether in prosperity or adversity, who restrain anger and who pardon all people. For God loves those who do good.” (Islam. Qu’uran, 3:133 – 134)

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” (Christianity. The Lord’s Prayer)

“Subvert anger by forgiveness.” (Jainism. Samanasuttam 136)

“Where there is forgiveness, there is God Himself.” (Sikhism. Adi Granth, Shalok, Kabir, p. 1372)

“The superior man tends to forgive wrongs and deals leniently with crimes.” (Confucianism. I Ching 40: Release)

“If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” (Christianity. Matthew 5.23-24)

“The Day of Atonement atones for sins against God, not for sins against man, unless the injured person has been appeased.” (Judaism. Mishnah, Yoma 8.9)

“You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.” (Judaism and Christianity. Leviticus 19.18)

“Who takes vengeance or bears a grudge acts like one who, having cut one hand while handling a knife, avenges himself by stabbing the other hand.” (Judaism. Jerusalem Talmud, Nedarim 9.4)

“Then Peter came up and said to him, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.’” (Christianity. Matthew 18)

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