

How to Create a Garden of Forgiveness

THE VISION

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.

This document adapted from Alexandra Asseily’s *The Garden of Forgiveness – Competition Booklet.

THE DESIGN OF THE GARDEN

The Garden of Forgiveness is a place of hospitality and inclusion; a place of comfort, beauty, and inspiration. The 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. These quotations will inspire reflection on forgiveness and healing, the purpose of the garden. See attached for possible quotations.
- Provide faith-based and community organizations public space for community ritual and programming related to forgiveness.
- 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 the piripiri plant, otherwise 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 installation of Anne Mimi Sammis’ sculpture “Liberation,” (see attached) celebrating forgiveness as a liberating force for life; 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. All Gardens of Forgiveness will include a dedicatory plaque from the Global Gardens of Forgiveness Network© that designates the local garden as part of the wider global movement for forgiveness.

Liberation (also known as 9/11)



Anne Mimi Sammis is a renowned artist and sculptor whose works are represented in more than 300 public and private collections world wide. The sculptures range in size from 1-22 feet and incorporate fountains and moveable figures. Sammis currently lives and works in Narragansett, Rhode Island and San Miguel De Allende, Mexico.

Mimi started her artistic career in the medium of watercolors. From landscape painting, she expanded her artistic vision to bronze sculptures, embracing the idea of the spiritual made manifest.

Sammis supports the global work for peace with her artwork entitled *One Thousand Years of Peace*, an exhibition of 30 bronze sculptures. This body of work was exhibited at the United Nations this past September 2001. It was previously shown at the United Nations in 1999 and following that at The Hague, Netherlands, in conjunction with The Hague Appeal for Peace Conference. Most recently Ms. Sammis has received a commission from the Archbishop of Canterbury for Lambeth Palace, England to honor Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee, June 2002.

SOME QUOTATIONS ON FORGIVENESS

“There is a hard law... When an injury is done to us, we never recover until we forgive.”
- Alan Paton

“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

“Hope for a great sea-change
On the far side of revenge.
Believe that a further shore
Is reachable from here.
Believe in miracles
And cures and healing wells.”
- Seamus Heaney

“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

“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

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)

*Many of these quotations found on <http://www.unification.net/ws/theme142.htm>

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

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

“The best deed of a great man is to forgive and forget.” (Islam (Shiite). Nahjul Balagha, Saying 201)

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

“If you efface and overlook and forgive, then lo! God is forgiving, merciful.” (Islam. Qur'an 64.14)

“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)

“Show endurance in humiliation and bear no grudge.” (Taoism. Treatise on Response and Retribution)

“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)

“Moses son of Imran said, ‘My Lord, who is the greatest of Thy servants in Thy estimation?’ and received the reply, ‘The one who forgives when he is in a position of power.’” (Islam. Hadith of Baihaqi)

“Better and more rewarding is God's reward to those who believe and put their trust in Him: who avoid gross sins and indecencies and, when angered, are willing to forgive... Let evil be rewarded by like evil, but he who forgives and seeks reconciliation shall be rewarded by God. He does not love the wrongdoers.... True constancy lies in forgiveness and patient forbearance.” (Islam. Qur'an 42.36-43)

“In reconciling a great injury,
Some injury is sure to remain.
How can this be good?”

Therefore the sage holds the left-hand tally [obligation] of a contract;
He does not blame others.
The person of virtue attends to the obligation;
The person without virtue attends to the exactions.” (Taoism. Tao Te Ching 79)

“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.’

‘Therefore the kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; and as he could not pay, the lord ordered him to be sold, and his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, “Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.” And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, “Pay what you owe.” So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you.” He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.’” (Christianity. Matthew 18.21-35)

“When Jesus was crucified, Roman soldiers pierced him. And Jesus prayed for his enemies: ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.’ [Luke 23:34] Even at the moment of death on the cross, Jesus was so earnest in forgiving. His very last act was motivated by his love for his enemies. He was the supreme form of giving--a paragon of love. The example of Jesus Christ is the absolute standard for all mankind. Just imagine an entire nation composed of Jesus-like men. What would you call it? The Kingdom of Heaven on earth--it could be nothing less.” (Unification Church. Sun Myung Moon, 10-20-73)