

Gariwo The Method

Gabriele Nissim
and Francesco M. Cataluccio

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Introduction

Gariwo is an educational agency for civic responsibility vis-à-vis the present and the future. It does not have any political function, it has an ethical function: a call and practice to save humans, through lifelong learning of individuals' conscience. Its purpose is to teach that every person, even the seemingly simplest, most fragile one, or one who feels to be inadequate, in every context and in every time, can make a difference in improving the world.

It is the power of the powerless, as proposed by Czech writer and dissident Vaclav Havel. Gariwo Foundation (founded in Milan as a committee in 1999) offers a new bottom-up experience that seeks to transform youngsters and citizens into the protagonists of major human and international events. An idea inspired by and carrying forward European values: from the more than two hundred Gardens of the Righteous in Italy, in Europe, to those scattered all around the world from Latin America to Africa, to the Middle East.

Today's big challenges are: selfish and nationalist drifts; ethnic conflicts and wars; hatred and anti-Semitism; weakened democracies and culture; increasing violence and abuse in language and social relations; the climate crisis; migration of men, women and children fleeing conflicts and poverty. In all these contexts, indifference, apathy and powerlessness seem to prevail and individuals increasingly act as spectators. Today, after all, it is easier to be passive in a world dominated by social media, where people believe that a "like" for a trampled right, or indignation for a failed rescue operation at sea can change things.

Virtual protests are indeed a mode deluding our conscience and we never get our hands dirty directly. One stands on the side of the victims without having to deal with them directly, as it sometimes happens on *Remembrance Days*, when it is easier to take a stand against Nazism and the extermination of Jews than question our responsibility in today's world.

Education for Prevention and Personal Responsibility

Evil done to people should not be told from the end, it should be told from its **beginning**. It is important to study and understand the **stations of Evil** that in any age, under certain conditions, can lead to oppression and inhumanity.

As Primo Levi understood, it is not a matter of two planets: that of Auschwitz and that of our daily lives. The seeds of Evil are born and manifest themselves through sick words, the emptying of democracy and attacks on pluralism, bullying, contempt and manipulation of the other. It can then easily lead to political and social discrimination, to liberticidal laws, to the triumph of prisons, prison camps, wars.

This is why Gariwo urges parliaments to make periodic **reports on** ongoing **genocides** and the mechanisms of contemporary hatred, to educate society on prevention. Public orientation of institutions on a prevention policy at the international level is necessary, but this is not sufficient and this task, due to realpolitik or opportunism, is very often disregarded.

That is why it is important to educate individuals to become watchful guardians of what is happening in the world throughout their existence. Each person in his or her own small way can make a gesture to lift from oblivion those who are persecuted in another country and express solidarity with them. Everyone can be the protagonist of **a network of solidarity** that unites individuals from different countries. Proximity, which dissolves borders, can be of great help: social media, and even increased tourist flows, facilitate and make it possible. It is always possible to be close to a distant person.

In today's world, **human rights diplomacy** is not only the responsibility of states, it is also the responsibility of individuals. And individuals can not only urge states, they can make up for political shortcomings from below. Citizens, in particular those living in democratic countries, have the opportunity to exercise **transna-**

tional control over the state of rights and work for justice and conciliation in world's conflicts.

However, it is equally important to remain vigilant with our daily behaviour, when somebody is humiliated and scorned on social media or in the workplace, when ethnic and religious barriers are erected between us and others, or gender and sexual identities are disrespected and blamed. Or when democracy and public debate, instead of affirming the taste and resource of dialogue as a moment of collective growth, become a battleground of opposing factions where each one would like to impose the supremacy of what they consider to be their own indisputable truth. This is the real crisis of democracy, which becomes an arena of enemies, supporters and gladiators and which can gradually pave the way to an undemocratic regime.

“Illiberal democracies” are spreading all over the world, in Europe, as well as Latin America, Asia, and with attempts even in the United States (as in the case of Donald Trump). As it has appeared evident in recent decades in Central Europe, democratic systems (which arose from the collapse of communist systems) have been transformed, without the overt use of violence, into populist, anti-democratic regimes having strong totalitarian overtones. This has happened through similar paths the gravity of which was not understood in time by citizens and European institutions. First, due to demagoguery and populist promises, elections were won, then the parliament was emptied of its powers; the electoral system was changed; the judiciary was deprived of its autonomy; friends were placed in key economic posts, who then became masters of the media, making them subservient to power; nationalism and religion were exalted, especially in the education system; the “enemies” of the nation (Europe and international financial institutions; migrants; the “different ones”; intellectuals and opponents) were created and continuously attacked, through hate campaigns.

To regenerate political democracy, we must therefore enhance the ethics of **democratic citizens** who are ready to listen to others, to

change their mind, to acknowledge their mistakes. Each individual can become the **guardian and custodian of the plurality of democratic life.**

Unjust laws and policies very often arise from incorrect behaviour within society and establish themselves as the result of our negative way of acting. It is us who anticipate them, even if we do not realise it.

On the other hand, as the history of totalitarian and dictatorial regimes shows, bottom-up behaviours of moral resistance are the necessary precondition for change, as it happened in Prague with “Charter 77”, in Argentina with the women of the Plaza de Mayo, and today in Iran with women’s resistance to fundamentalism or in Russia with courageous journalists and free people. It is always individuals who can make a difference and sow the seeds of possibilities of political transformation, even when one is in the abyss.

The Righteous

The Righteous of Humanity are all those who have sacrificed themselves (often, but not necessarily, losing their lives) to save other persecuted individuals or who have fought for Life, Freedom, Dignity and Equality. They are neither heroes nor saints. They are sometimes individuals who are certainly not morally irreproachable, like German industrialist Oskar Schindler who saved many Jews through his famous List (to whom Steven Spielberg dedicated a famous film in 1993). Schindler was a Nazi entrepreneur who exploited free labour of Jewish prisoners in Krakow. However, when the time came for them to be deported, he had an issue of conscience, a glimmer of humanity, and thanks to his List he managed, at great risk, to save almost all of them. Schindler was not a morally exemplary individual, he was an “imperfect and contradictory” man as all real people are, to varying degrees (cf. G. Nissim, *The Tribunal of Good. The story of Moshe Bejski, the man who created the Garden of the Righteous*, Mondadori, Milan 2003). Israeli magistrate Moshe Be-

jski (1921-2007), who survived the Holocaust thanks to Oskar Schindler's generosity, fought for him to be considered as a Righteous in Yad Vashem Garden in Jerusalem in 1963.

The concept of the Righteous goes back to the Bible and Yad Vashem Institute has taken it up to honour "those non-Jews who saved Jews during the Holocaust" with a tree.

Thus was born, in some ways, a word having a new meaning associated with the vocabulary entry invented by Polish Jewish lawyer and jurist Raphael Lemkin (1900-1959). If the word **genocide**, a hybrid from Greek *genos* (gender) and Latin *cidio* (murder) indicated the destruction of a national, social or political group, the word **Righteous** was first used to define those who opposed the genocide of the Jews.

The Day of the Righteous expanded this concept, both temporally and spatially: the Righteous are all those who opposed genocides and crimes against humanity. They are also, for example, those who, between 1915 and 1919, tried to prevent the genocide of Armenians by Turks, but also those Serbs who hid Bosnians, or the members of the Hutu ethnic group who opposed the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda, or the caretaker of Bardo Museum, in Tunis, who rescued a group of Italian tourists from the wrath of Islamic terrorists on 18th March 2015, or Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya, murdered in 2006 for denouncing the massacres in Chechnya and Vladimir Putin's liberticidal policies, and the women of the Plaza de Mayo who defied dictator Videla in front of the Casa Rosada to demand the truth about desaparecidos.

The Day of the Righteous of Humanity is celebrated on 6th March: a festivity proclaimed in 2012 by the European Parliament, at the proposal of Gariwo Foundation, and unanimously approved by the Italian Parliament in 2017 and by San Marino in 2023, and currently under discussion in other countries.

The Stories of the Righteous

The stories of these people are examples of how one must and can always oppose violence against minorities, dissidents, political opponents. They teach, especially to youngsters, that Good is possible, that everyone can be a Righteous person, even in small everyday events (such as, for example, defending and rescuing a schoolmate from being bullied by a small group of violent people). Absolute Good and the perfect Righteous will never exist, not only because individuals cannot be the guardians of the entire world, but above all because each human being, even those having the best of intentions, will always be limited and respond to their survival instinct. This is why we must accept the ambiguity and contradictory nature of Good as a human fact. An individual can be righteous for some things and indifferent to others, or take wrong stances. Rescuers of Jews have existed, for example, who had anti-Semitic views (including Polish writer Zofia Nalkowska) or showed profound ambiguity vis-à-vis women and homosexuals. In the classical world, several great philosophers considered enslavement and subjugation of women as normal. It is wrong to imagine a perfect and absolute Good that applies to all times and to censor contradictory conduct in the past, erase the works and pull down the statues of artists, intellectuals and politicians that were important to human history and culture.

One cannot fail to take into account that every individual can always make choices in their life, resist the temptation of Evil and, in their own small way, within their possibilities, leave a trace of Good in their existence, when circumstances call them to act responsibly. These are the stories of all the Righteous who responded to the call for help from others and acted virtuously in the situations in which they found themselves living and acting. It is necessary to tell their stories as vividly as possible with all their ambiguities and contradictions, without sweetening or concealing the complexity of their personalities and the difficulties of their choices and actions. Only in this way can storytelling not be an end in itself or a cold compilation of a hagiographic item: in this way the Righteous help us

reflect, imagine, compare.

Storytelling designed in this way has the merit of showing how the Righteous are not aliens or unattainable saints, but rather individuals who are quite similar to us with all our weaknesses and bias. This non-heroic and truthful storytelling thus conveys a very powerful message: Good is within the reach of every human being, it is not an unreachable goal. It is **the humanisation of stories** that leads to empathy and emulation. Thus, the story of a Righteous will always depend on the storyteller who, like the pearl fisherman recounted by Walter Benjamin, will take him/her out of oblivion and let us look at the world from a new point of view.

The *Encyclopaedia of the Righteous*

It was in this spirit that entries in the *Encyclopaedia of the Righteous* (en.gariwo.net/righteous/) were researched and compiled. Gariwo has prepared and will continue to prepare them, as authentic storytelling, supported by in-depth investigations and meticulous checking of sources. The entries in the *Encyclopaedia of the Righteous* are not literary works (meaning that they also include a part of invention), they are stories that are as rich in detail as possible and are constructed in such a way that each entry on an individual is not a cold record, it actually can leave room for doubts, questions, critical considerations. Indeed, when their life (and sometimes their violent death) is recounted in retrospect, Righteous can never be presented as consistent individuals. As we said, in most cases, choices made by the Righteous are unexpected, sudden, the result of a sort of “enlightenment”.

A light that lights up in their conscience, which it would be too easy to explain with Faith alone, and which instead manifests itself in a relationship of proximity with those who suffer. Therein lies the difficulty in the story: reconstruct as much as possible the steps that led to a virtuous act or to the choice of an existence of struggle and witnessing.

The *Encyclopaedia of the Righteous* is a never-ending journey *in progress*, not only because new individuals can always be added, but also because a text can be reformulated on the basis of new information and considerations. The criterion applied is that of scientificity and of the use of reliable sources and accurate testimonies. Approximation is always detrimental to remembrance. However, it is equally important to emphasise that research is carried out from the grounds and involves researchers, associations working on Remembrance, and students from schools and universities. This is why we ask our network (from the Gardens of the Righteous to associations and teachers) to contribute to compiling the *Encyclopaedia*. Indeed, we consider it as a tool for dissemination of collective Remembrance of Good and moral examples within society.

Remembrance

Telling the stories of the Righteous requires preliminary reflection on Remembrance. Reflect on the fact that it has worn down certain places, making them rhetorical, causing them to lose their most profound truth. On the *Days of Remembrance*, tainted places and Remembrance, such as Auschwitz, become something of a ritual that makes people lose sight of the drama: “tainted places” should be surrounded by a “cordon sanitaire of books” (cf. A. Cavaglion, *Decontaminare le memorie*, add, Turin 2021). This is the great task of teachers. Extensive reading before direct experience. Acting on studying, understanding and reflection rather than on emotions. Places of public Remembrance of genocides must not make people forget life. The millenary Jewish culture, for instance, cannot be identified with extermination. The abyss of violence and hatred must be well understood to help regain hope. Remembrance must make us capable of recovering the will to live from tragedy.

When visiting or studying a place of Remembrance (a concentration and/or extermination camp; a detention centre for migrants; a place of internment of opponents and dissidents; a memorial to a

genocide), two fundamental elements exist to reconstruct a living memory and hope for the future:

a. rational understanding, as recommended by Israeli historian and Holocaust scholar Yehuda Bauer. One must wonder why that abyss was possible and question the responsibility of individuals. A crime against humanity is not a natural catastrophic event, like a tsunami. Understanding the mechanisms will never be exhaustive, but it is the basis on which one can work in the contemporary world for prevention;

b. the relationship between Remembrance and Ethics. As Primo Levi understood, the abyss of extreme Evil makes us think about the human condition and ethical choices in our daily lives. Unfortunately, in many memorials, Remembrance has been conceived as having an identity purpose and the moral element and the theme of choice have been lost.

The lack of a relationship between Remembrance and ethics led to our reflection on the Righteous. Life is rebuilt when individuals take responsibility for the future.

Gardens of the Righteous and Prevention of Evil

The term Righteous evokes the conduct of those who take responsibility for the world, who preserve beauty in human relationships, who make their resistance felt when society takes a wrong turn and hatred gets the upper hand, even to the point of extreme Evil. This is why the concept of the Righteous is **the antithesis** to the concept of genocide and the actions of righteous individuals are the **possible therapy** against the constellation of Evil that repeats itself in ever different forms while constantly crossing human history.

This assumption leads to the international function of the Gardens of the Righteous, which are a tool of education in civil society for the

prevention of hatred and any mechanism of offence against human dignity that could lead to new genocides.

After the Holocaust, a legal concept was formulated for the first time with the Nuremberg Trials, which identified crimes against humanity as personal responsibility that could not be evaded on the grounds of having obeyed orders (“wrong orders, against humanity, must not be executed”). Then, in 1948, two political resolutions were voted at the United Nations that were to become a moral benchmark for relations between States. “Never again” was the intent of the **Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide**, proposed by the aforementioned Raphael Lemkin, and of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, promoted by Eleanor Roosevelt, which called on international institutions to take on this ethical and political commitment. These are two resolutions that, unfortunately, due to the vetoes of States and the lack of supranational bodies capable of enforcing them, very often remain mere good intentions. However, what determines their persuasive force and possible political amplification is the understanding that **new moral commandments** have arisen in societies since the Second World War.

A bottom-up movement will always be necessary for these commandments to be transformed into political practices in a constant exchange between the conscience of individuals and institutions. This is a crucial role played by the Gardens of the Righteous set up in every city and country in the world, which can become democratic squares, permanent agoras that encourage societies to take charge of the enforcement of the two UN resolutions whenever the life and dignity of a nation or groups of individuals is threatened.

Gardens are recognisable physical places, which raise people’s awareness, from generation to generation, of all possible violence towards human beings and break the wall of indifference from time to time. We have called them **Gardens of the Righteous of the World** because they invite people to take responsibility for the whole of humanity. If the Righteous are individuals who take a

stand against Evil, the Gardens of the Righteous are the tool that stimulates consciences not only on what is happening in one's own country, but rather throughout the world. It is a feeling of global conscience.

The role of Italy and the Diplomacy of Good

Italy can play a significant international role in promoting Gardens all around the world and in engaging international institutions around the project for the prevention of genocide and the defence of human dignity proposed by Raphael Lemkin. Italy is the country of beauty, creativity, humanist culture and arts. The idea of the beauty of good individuals can be exported in the world, as Hungarian philosopher Ágnes Heller wrote, who valued the aesthetics of the conduct of those who work for justice. Beauty and Good are intertwined in that a deep connection can exist between artwork and the art of a virtuous man. It is no coincidence that Italy was the first country to grasp the value of the Righteous for all humanity and not only voted an act in Parliament, it also disseminated the Gardens of the Righteous throughout the country.

An extremely important step was the decision taken by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to set up the world's first Garden of the Righteous at Farnesina (headquarters of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and the commitment of numerous embassies to set up Gardens in their premises and plant trees in remembrance of the Righteous, as it has already happened in Sweden, Tunisia and Jordan. In several countries of the world our diplomatic offices are directly involved in promoting the Gardens of the Righteous. This political-cultural activity is an innovative form of diplomacy: **the diplomacy of Good**. Indeed, diplomacy is not only political and economic in relations between states, it can also be geared towards the prevention of genocides, wars and conflicts. The best known example is that of the *peacekeepers* in crisis zones. However, prevention

is equally important, which is achieved through ongoing ethical education work.

By striving for reconciliation and conflict resolution, diplomacy fosters the crucial and decisive role of individuals who are the actual foundations of hope for the future of humanity everywhere. It is always women and men of flesh and blood who break or prevent the wheels of evil by their example in every emergency. The prerequisites and starting points of a policy of prevention are always the actions of individuals.

Gardens of the Righteous and Remembrance of the Stories of Good

Gardens are first and foremost places of stories. They guard the stories of the Righteous from all over the world. Annual ceremonies honouring new Righteous are an opportunity to remember them. This is how, in a way, they are brought back to life. People meet and participate in educational activities around the trees of the Righteous. Teachers often explain the Righteous and also the type and characteristic of the tree (thus doing History and Biology lessons) to the youngest. For older students, the Garden becomes a sort of agora, a space where civic education is experienced and history is better learnt. For citizens, it is a place of living, non-rhetorical remembrance (as opposed to monuments and memorial plaques). In most cases Gardens are made by school children and their teachers. Students are also very important in taking care of the Gardens, in that they can adopt the trees and the individuals they represent. Gardens educate people to action and personal involvement.

The close relationship between the Gardens and the Righteous is thematised at the very beginning of *The Just* (1952), one of Jorge Luis Borges' most beautiful poems: "A man who cultivates his garden, as Voltaire wished/ He who is grateful of the existence of music / He who takes pleasure in tracing an etymology/ Two workmen play-

ing, in a café in the South, a silent game of chess/ (...) He who prefers others to be right/ These people, unaware, are saving the world”.

A tree is planted for each Righteous. Because trees are Life. The Righteous have bravely saved the lives of others. Trees are the beauty of life that is reborn every year: in spring, after the apparent death of autumn and winter. No other living being has the ability to resurrect. Among many peoples, trees are celebrated, embraced, decorated. Not only Christmas trees. In early February, Jews celebrate “Tu Bishvat”, the New Year of Trees, by planting young trees everywhere.

Trees are also Remembrance. One of the most heinous sites of the Holocaust was in a place the name of which means “Birch forest” in German and Polish. Those beautiful trees were cut down to make way for a vast clearing where Hell was built. Even today, beyond Birkenau barbed wire, stubborn clumps of white-barked trees still stand. And they are the only thing in that place that does not distress, as noted by French art historian Georges Didi-Huberman, who took fragments of that bark as a “piece of remembrance”.

Furthermore, trees can be living reminders of resistance to evil. In Japan, *hibakujumoku* are the trees exposed to radiation from the atomic bomb that are revered as symbols of obstinacy and peace. Hiroshima is still home to a ginkgo biloba (1,130 metres from the impact), a camphor tree (1,120 metres), a kurogane holly (910 metres), a peony (890 metres) and a heroic weeping willow (only 370 metres away), which has been reborn from the roots that survived underground.

The Gardens of the Righteous are precisely places of rebirth. The one in Milan, on Monte Stella hill, sits on the little earth covering a hill that was artificially made from the rubble of houses destroyed in the war. The Warsaw Garden sits in a park above the ruins of the Ghetto. In general, the Gardens give a new value to otherwise anonymous places.

Due to climate change, due to the unwise work of Human Beings, Nature is endangered. First and foremost, the very trees that are being senselessly cut down and deprived of water that is necessary

for their survival. Those who oppose this often lose their lives. Like Brazilian trade unionist Chico Mendes (1944-1988), who was murdered for fighting against the deforestation of the Amazon rainforest. Chico Mendes is honoured as a Righteous.

Unlike a memorial that evokes the pain and suffering of the victims, the Garden of the Righteous must convey the beauty of virtuous human individuals. A good deed and selfless conduct, when remembered and recounted, can leave posterity with the same gift as a piece of art. Although the Righteous have suffered and often paid a price for their good deeds, their behaviour conveys confidence and hope. The ethos of good individuals stems from behaviour that can compare to that of artists who have built beauty into their work. This is why the architecture of the Gardens must restore and present its visitors with the profound spirit of human beauty. Trees, small squares, sculptures, benches and meeting places in a Garden thus make it possible to encounter this type of beauty that is suffered, but crucial to our existence, like any art, literary, musical or figurative work.

The Methodology

The methodology developed by Gariwo over twenty years in the Gardens of the Righteous is based on these elements:

1. Bottom-up Education to Gratitude

We encourage society and institutions to recognise and value the best individuals who at all times and in all places on the planet have cared for humanity by going against the tide in the face of the worst crimes or who have done their utmost to prevent evil.

It is a mechanism taking the actions of deserving people out of oblivion, making them public and turning them into a moral benchmark. It educates the public to develop aesthetic taste, to recognize the beauty of good individuals.

This is not an imposition, it is a journey of bottom-up self-education. Its originality lies in creating democratic involvement in the selection and identification of the Righteous. What counts is not just a name selected, but rather the collective exchange that is stimulated in society. This journey not only educates people to overcome prejudices that often prevent them from recognising Good, it also encourages society to understand how ethical choices are never defined a priori, they change in different contexts and at each historical moment. A prototype of the Righteous or a photocopy of them will never exist, but new behaviours will constantly emerge to be valued. Bottom-up research and public debate are an important tool to recognise the existence of a plurality of stories and experiences of the Righteous.

It has often happened that, beyond the best of intentions, the prevalence of a single reference model, as with the Righteous of the Shoah, has not broadened the concept, it has in fact obscured equally important experiences in different contexts, which has led to counterproductive hierarchy of Good.

As noted by Moshe Bejski, the creator of the Garden of the Righteous at Yad Vashem, Good received requires gratitude from society and is as important as that of justice vis-à-vis the victims. This journey of recognition of good individuals applies to every situation where human dignity has been offended and is an indication of the moral maturity of a country.

Forgetting the Righteous is the **other side of indifference** and it is the reason why the Gardens of the Righteous propose to create a bottom-up collective movement of gratitude in society that educates citizens at all times to discover the plurality of moral excellence.

2. The Transmission of Knowledge and Fostering of Empathy

Being aware of what is happening around the world, inside and outside one's borders, is crucial for visitors to the Gardens to act as citizens of the world. Ignorance, political denialism and censorship

of information are the mechanisms that, from the Holocaust to new persecutions, have allowed autocracies and dictatorships to conceal their crimes. The Gardens therefore inform society about the state of the world to break indifference that is based on non-knowledge. If one does not know, one cannot act.

Therefore, the Gardens constantly call for knowledge of rights that are denied and violated, from Iran to Afghanistan, to political repression in Russia, to new wars and discrimination throughout the world, to the effects of climate change on the survival of the planet. This is why it is necessary for the best intellectuals and educators who can pass on their knowledge to society to participate in the Gardens as a cognitive and moral reference point. The understanding of the state of the world could be conveyed by the activity of the Gardens, which should direct the search for the Righteous of our time in crisis situations. This is why it is important for each Garden, which always starts with its own specific features, to build on a universal vision. Through their activities, Gardens offer the opportunity to have an open view of the world starting locally. They are a sort of observatory through which people can feel close to the Righteous of the world. They stimulate people to experience dual belonging. We are at the same time citizens of a country and of the whole world, as American philosopher Martha Nussbaum wrote. They therefore enable us to develop our dual responsibility.

Empathy, for example, towards an Iranian or Afghan woman fighting for her emancipation from religious power activates our mind's desire for knowledge of a situation that is far removed from our own. The same happens when we remember, in a Garden of the Righteous, the story of a Chinese or Russian individual defending human dignity and fighting for democracy in a dictatorial system. This is how Gardens develop imagination in that they make us see through an effort of identification what we could not feel and touch closely that is taking place in another part of the world.

3. The Method of Indirect Communication as Education to Personal Responsibility

The Gardens of the Righteous address to society through a mechanism of **indirect communication**, as French scholar of classical philosophy Pierre Hadot observed, who reflected on the modalities of **persuasive** education. They do not impose a moral or behavioural directive on anyone, conversely, through the stories they tell, they stimulate people to think for themselves and empathically identify with those who have acted as worthy people in difficult circumstances.

The call of Good is not obeyed like a military order, it is achieved through a solitary journey of **moral purification**. We always act when we feel convinced for a just cause, not because someone imposes it on us. Indirect persuasion that activates the freedom of individual choice is the prerequisite for non-totalitarian communication. And it is precisely this original mode that proves to be a possible antidote to political practices in use in autocratic systems, where citizens are accustomed to submission and act unaware. When citizens learn to think for themselves, based on their own conscience and judgement, they no longer become obedient beings who can be easily manipulated.

Thus the Day of the Righteous of Humanity, unlike other anniversaries, is never a celebration imposed by an official calendar, it is always a choice of those who wish to remember it. The Gardens of the Righteous only have strength if they live of authenticity and participation. If they turned into a repetitive ritual imposed only by law, they would immediately lose their educational function.

The Gardens, through their practices, convey the idea that doing Good towards others is not deprivation or renunciation, it is the realisation of human wholeness. The stories of the Righteous are often perceived as elitist stories of those who decided to sacrifice themselves for others. This is a distorted vision that confuses the victims with the Righteous and makes one believe that suffering is the mandatory path of the Righteous. This is far from true. People

who do their best to help human beings do so first of all because they have understood that doing Good is the key to feeling better about themselves and to finding a form of happiness. Becoming “builders of justice” in one’s own sphere means feeling fulfilled. The secret of the Righteous is exactly this.

This methodology of discovering the Good within oneself, exercising it towards others, is not only important for one’s own moral growth, it can become a tool for convincing those who take a wrong path. Good has two faces, as philosopher Baruch Spinoza understood: the exercise of one’s own virtue and being an educator towards those who make mistakes and are taking a dangerous path towards other human beings. Thus one makes the world better in two ways: by acting directly and by correcting others.

If we become aware that evil done to others is also directed at ourselves, we have the opportunity of showing those who do wrong that they are contradicting themselves by acting in a certain way and therefore that it is not convenient for them to become a persecutor who exercises violence towards other human beings.

Socrates brought the problem into sharp focus when he stated that it is better to be wronged than to do wrong. Even more radically, the *Talmud (Bava Kamma Treatise)* reads: “Man must be part of the persecuted and not of the persecutors”. In the end, he who humiliates the others, hurts them, uses violence, becomes a persecutor, a cog in an oppressive system, a traitor, to the point of being an executioner, cannot be happy. Domination over others and the exercise of violence damage one’s personality and make one live a distorted existence. When Dutch Jewess killed in Auschwitz Etty Hillesum was in Westerbork transit camp, she wrote with extraordinary sensitivity in her *Diary* (only published in its entirety in 1986) that she felt pity for the unhappiness of her captor.

Through the practices of the Gardens, young people can be taught to correct the behaviour of their peers who have bullying attitudes towards the weaker, who show contempt towards those they identify as different, who indulge in racism and who even use violence

towards others. These are the first signs of evil in everyday life, which can lead to more serious events. With persuasion and conviction one has the opportunity of stopping, when it starts, a mechanism that may, under certain circumstances, lead to extreme evil.

The Gardens of the Righteous thus have the function of stimulating conscience through personal relationships created with the stories of the Righteous. By visiting the Gardens and studying the story of a Righteous, one can wonder about his or her own existence. One can have a spiritual encounter with those who, to all intents and purposes, by their behaviour, were masters of life and teach us to continue to do so in our time. And since the Gardens tell a number of stories of responsibility taking place in different ways, immersing oneself in a Garden means discovering different ways and possibilities of exercising Good and reacting to injustice in society. It is the same mechanism as that of mature readers who do not converse with one single book, they do so with a number of books that make them discover a multiplicity of different and possible journeys.

4. Garden Practices

The sense of Good and responsibility is always learnt through the development of practices and behaviours. This is why the Gardens are a place for bottom-up experiences of civil society through a number of initiatives that are organized autonomously in different contexts.

To encourage the promotion of such good practices, over the years, Gariwo Foundation has drawn up **Charters of Values** on various issues of our time, taking as its reference the experience of Vaclav Havel with “Charter 77”, which set out to organise a new way of civil coexistence that would regenerate society from the bottom. This has led to drawing up various charters, starting with the one on Responsibility (2017), to the one on Remembrance, the one on the Environment and Climate Change, the one on the Use of Social Media to foster a practice of dialogue against the perverse mechanisms of contempt and hatred on the Internet, and the one on Sport to propose competitive spirit and a form of cheering that is always responsible towards the dignity of human beings.

5. Adopt a Righteous

Among the various experiences that Gariwo aims at disseminating, it is worth mentioning the contest for students named “Adopt a Righteous”, stemming from the stories of Milan Garden and encouraging young people to make (literary, art or multimedia) works to identify with the events recalled by the trees dedicated to the Righteous. This educational experience has two goals:

- a.** encourage young people to analyse the historical context in which a responsible action took place by investigating the unjust laws of the time and the prejudices embedded in society. This is how young people can discover the cultural and political dynamics that led to the genesis of dictatorships, totalitarianism and genocide;
- b.** turn young people into detectives: a sort of Sherlock Holmes of Remembrance. In this case, it is not a matter of discovering the evidence and motive for a crime, but rather the personal motivations leading somebody to react courageously in the face of injustice. In this way, youngsters investigate the secret of human Good and the mechanism of conscience behind the action of a Righteous. This not only prompts youngsters to make comparisons with the present, it also stimulates them to make an indirect self-examination of their sense of responsibility. Empathy created with the depth of a story leads young people to wonder about themselves.

Telling the stories of the Righteous has exemplary moral value, which is educationally relevant from many points of view. Through these individuals, storytelling journeys can be started using the various materials available.

Students can be invited to:

- a.** study the story of a Righteous in his/her actual historical context, taking into account the distorted political and moral ideas and prejudices prevailing at the time (so as to also understand the inner distress preceding awareness and rebellion against prevailing indifference and violence);

- b.** critically analyse the story of a *Righteous* told in the *Encyclopaedia of the Righteous*;
- c.** search for further information (also using literary sources);
- d.** try and retell the story based on facts told;
- e.** invent a similar story;
- f.** compare stories having similar or even opposing characteristics.

Human beings have survived because they have told stories. Stories are the breath of the world: telling is living and remembering.

Tours at the Garden

Tours organised at the Garden by schools, associations and citizens, with an expert guide telling the stories of the Righteous, are crucial to disseminate their significance. This is why the architecture of the Gardens includes amphitheatres and meeting places where visitors can talk and exchange ideas. Indeed, the Garden is not like a memorial where one pays tribute to the victims in silence, it is a place of permanent reflection and education where words spoken aloud count the most.

The trees of the Righteous live and grow not only thanks to gardeners taking care of them, but also when exchange arises around them that is renewed over time. It is visitors with their ideas that strengthen the plants, make them alive and flourishing and prevent them from withering away. Thus, a tree of a Righteous always conveys life, not only when it is planted during the ceremony with its friends and admirers around it, but also in the years that follow.

The dramatic invasion of Ukraine, for instance, and the outlawing of opponents in Russia today, immediately makes one think back to the significance of the trees that have been planted over the years to honour Vasily Grossman, Varlam Shalamov, Andrei Sakharov

and Yelena Bonner, Anna Politkovskaya. With our imagination, we revive the teachings of these Righteous men and women who, as in a moral relay race, handed over the baton to us.

Journeys of Remembrance

Students' trips to Auschwitz, the Gardens being their first stop, organised by Gariwo and the Association "Spontiamo mari e monti" have offered a new idea of visiting the concentration camp and then the extermination camp, which has become a symbol of the destruction of the Jews. Indeed, the trip is not designed to raise an emotion instead of horror, but rather as a community experience to teach young people to wonder about their lives and the possibilities of preventing evil when its premonitory signs appear in society.

These Journeys of Remembrance to the place of extreme extermination, have often conveyed the idea of unique and unrepeatable Evil, almost separate from contemporaneity, and from the other genocides that have bloodied the planet. Gariwo, on the other hand, considers these trips as a magnifying glass that opens youngsters' eyes to each new crime against humanity. This is why educators who accompany them encourage young people to make comparisons, without neglecting specific traits, with situations that can be repeated in other contexts, albeit in different ways. To raise overall awareness in young people, this universal approach can therefore be an opening for trips to the sites of other often forgotten horrors, such as Foibe, the Gulag, Sarajevo and Srebrenica, Armenia, and the detention camps for migrants.

The Voice of Minorities and Overcoming Prejudices

The Garden is a place for different minorities to meet and integrate into the Polis, making their voices heard by citizens and thus finding public recognition. In Milan, Armenians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Eritreans, Uyghurs, Iranians, Afghans and Somalis, Russian opponents and journalists launched their cry for freedom in Monte Stella amphitheatre.

Thus, for the different minorities living in our cities, the Garden of the Righteous can be a great **amplifier** conveying their claims and letting them learn about events that would otherwise be unknown. In this way, the Gardens becomes living tools of information. The physical presence of the witnesses opens up to the world, to solidarity for the other and breaks the mechanisms of indifference with its practices.

A very significant experience was promoted by “Associazione Rondine Cittadella della Pace” in Arezzo. It has helped opposing minorities remove the culture of the enemy and prejudices that block mutual dialogue. Hatred for minorities (fomented by dictatorships and racist or xenophobic regimes) can be overcome through the educational role of relational facilitators who build trust and make the other’s culture and humanity known. Thus they have brought Israelis and Palestinians, Russians and Chechens, Armenians and Azerbaijanis together under one roof to teach them to break out of the cage of hatred and thus find a common destiny. By recognising that the other is not an abstract enemy, but rather a person, foundations are laid to break down walls in people’s hearts. This happened for example in Milan after the start of the war in Ukraine. The Garden facilitated the first encounter between Russian and Ukrainian activists to find the possible path of dialogue, justice and peace together.

Ethics in Sport and Social media

Sport and social media are important training areas for the personality of individuals and of young people in particular.

The use of social media, like cheering and agonistic activity, leaves profound traces in people's lives. These activities can generate inclination to bullying, contempt for others, prevarication, or openness to dialogue, social integration and community life.

This is why Gariwo has undertaken to support, in the Gardens, the work carried out in Italy by the *Parliamentary Commission against Hatred* chaired by Senator Liliana Segre and has drafted Value Charters on sport and the use of social media, in that the mechanisms of hatred, unless countered by appropriate culture, can spread beyond these areas. With the book *I Giusti e lo sport* (edited by Gino Cervi, Cafoscarina/Gariwo, Venice 2023) and the recognition in the Gardens of sports individuals who saved lives, like Gino Bartali or Syrian swimmer Yusra Mardini, Gariwo set out to raise awareness of the best moral examples in sport to start a mechanism of emulation not only among athletes, but also in society.

By recognising and educating on certain values, even spectators' sporting passion can mature and become **positive cheering** that does not degenerate into contempt and insult of opponents. One cheers **for** and not **against**, to destroy opponents. It is the same mechanism we find on social media when tribes are created to pillory those who think differently. Education to respect human dignity also passes through the use of words.

Gariwo's website

Gariwo's website (gariwo.net in Italian and English) hosts a plural forum for activities organized at the Gardens of the Righteous, for ethical education and the prevention of hatred and genocide. It is not only a website for information and cultural analysis, it is a place that gathers and guides practices that are built around the Gardens of the Righteous and in all areas where prevention and education to responsibility are carried out.

The website has two functions:

- a. offer working tools for communities, schools and gardens through fact sheets on genocides and totalitarianism and through the *Encyclopaedia of the Righteous*;
- b. provide up-to-date information on international dynamics, climate change, human rights violations all around the world.

Its ethical mission is protection of individuals and the environment as challenges for the future. Since an exhaustive solution to these complex issues will never exist, Gariwo has designed a website to host analyses and in-depth studies carried out by intellectuals, journalists and educators and to organise a debate on the issues of ethical responsibility and prevention. An open editorial team involving several authors has formed around the website.

For the Gardens of the Righteous to live in the future, two conditions are needed:

- a. setting up bottom-up positive practices embedded in civil society;
- b. the commitment, as it happens in all spheres of public life, of a **moral and intellectual elite** that can always offer new tools of knowledge and insight. Culture and knowledge are the bases of personal responsibility. The future of Gariwo and of the Gardens is linked to the ability to draw on a network of intellectuals who can shoulder this responsibility.

Let us stay in touch

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**To organize events, suggest a Righteous
or tell us about a project**

segreteria@gariwo.net

**To create a Garden of the Righteous
network@gariwo.net**

**For initiatives in schools
and our educational projects
educazione@gariwo.net**

**Press Office
comunicazione@gariwo.net**

**Fondazione foresta dei Giusti - Gariwo Onlus
via A. Manzoni 12, 20121 Milano
www.gariwo.net
+ 39 02 3670 7648
Tax Code 97287220152**



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