



Gentle drinking.
Knowing to taste.

Text by Paolo Basso
Photos by Lorenzo Rui

GentleBooklets

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GentleBooklets It is a series of long-form articles written by different authors. The booklets, designed for a quick read, feature texts and images. We have kindly asked to the authors to comment on the term “kindness.” Authors and photographers have donated their work.

The motivations behind the project are the same as those of Gentletude, the desire to spread awareness about the need for “kindness” in our society, a society too focused on personal success to remember the basics of everyday living and respect for the environment that hosts us.

Our decision to present these ideas in a series of publications is due to the awareness that, in order to stimulate people to think about these issues, it is necessary to present some concrete examples. In this case, the examples are provided in the texts written by the authors.

A Passion since childhood

I was born in Besnate, a little village at that time, in the Varese province; a while ago this was a territory where vine grew.

My first introduction into the world of wine was in my grandfather's beautiful winery. A silent, dark, fresh place; a place where kids were not admitted; from the eyes of a child as I was, all that was forbidden sounded more attractive.

Later on I was allowed to be in the "cantina sociale", the place where big quantities of wine are sold.

During the winemaking period, this place was in complete turmoil; it was the only time of the year the cantina was open to the public. It was a big event, especially for children. I hold beautiful memories of those times, also linked to a special cake that was prepared specifically for this occasion: bread with grapes, a pie I really loved.

I've always had big respect for the environment and everything around it. I consider the human body a perfect and very sophisticated machine, which requires a balanced and healthy diet. Since I was a





child I've believed in this theory, maybe because I was biking at competitive levels. After each training session or race my body could tell me if I was keeping to the right diet or if I was "messing up".

Very conscious of this, I took the decision to sign up to the hotel school that would allow me to explore deeper the nutrition topic as well as getting closer to the luxurious hotels world. The latter exercised on me a great attraction as I always had seen it from far away when going on holiday with my family in Venice.

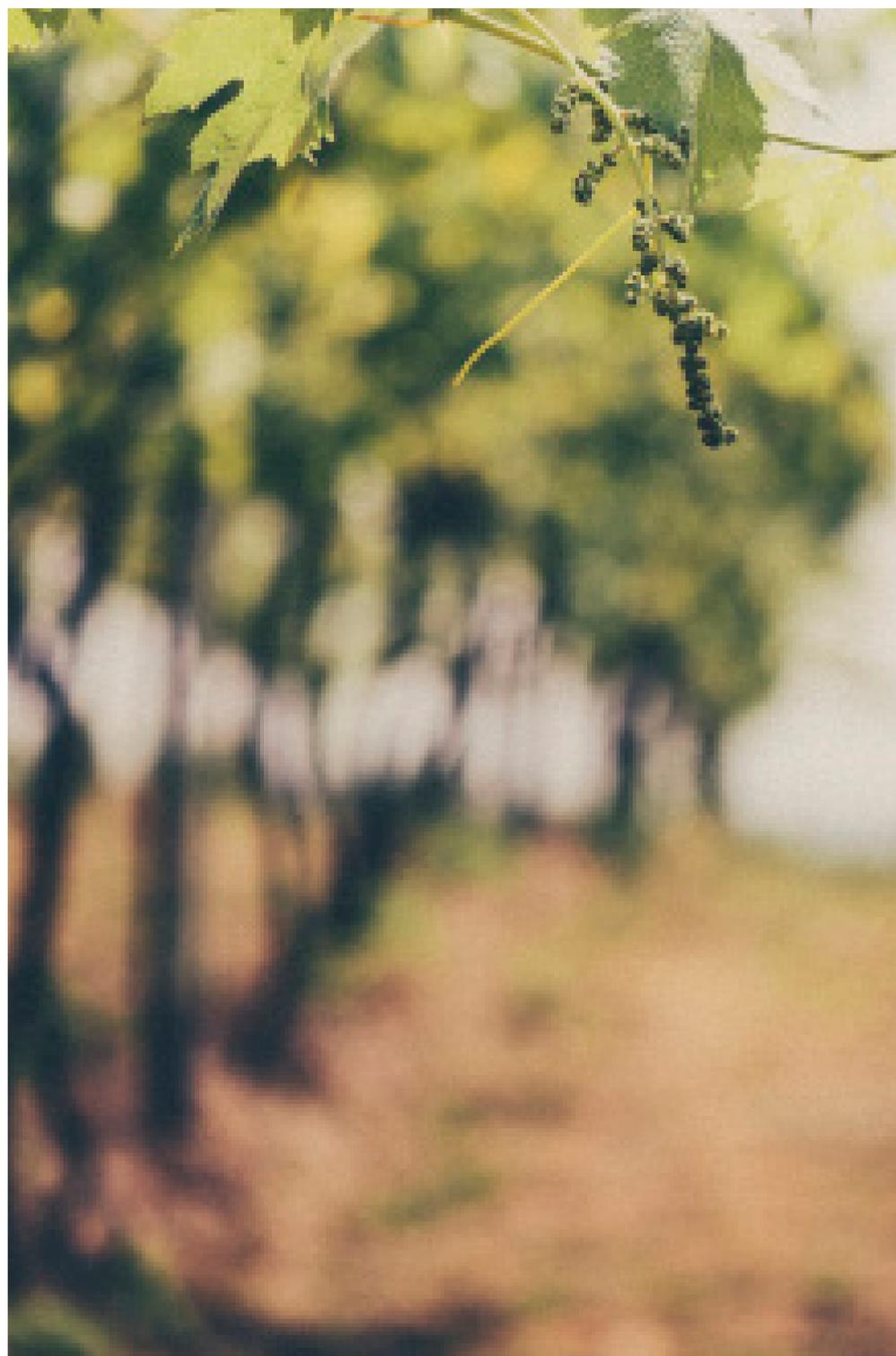
During my hospitality training years, my understanding and passion for wine grew even more to the point that I was fascinated by it.

Looking the clients handling the glasses of wine, praising and talking about the topic exert a great level of fascination on me; likewise I was always curious about the difference in prizes: some bottles were sold at 10€ and some others at 100€. I was asking myself: "Why has the same quantity of wine such as a huge difference in prize?"

After the Institute, I joined the army in the High Commands of Turin. One of the Cap-

tains was very fond of great food, and he was used to select within the soldiers the ones that he thought got some talent for cooking and wine. It has been a great experience and the search for quality there I couldn't find anywhere else for many years to come.

After I finished my military duties and as I thought that French was the language for gastronomy, I moved to Switzerland in Canton Vaud where I found what I was looking for. I was a passionate skier, a biker and a wine lover; in Switzerland I got all of those. It was at that time my teachers and mentors pushed me to foster my passion and grow my knowledge on the topic. Soon I found myself working in Geneva in one of the best Swiss restaurants of the time: surely it was the one offering the best wine menu! The Chef Sommelier (which was the best sommelier in Europe) thought I had good tasting potentials, therefore invited me to participate to some sommelier contests.





My first steps into the contest world

In 1997 I won the prize as best sommelier in Switzerland: it was a great first step, but I was still in doubt of what I wanted to do and where I wanted to be.

In 1999 Switzerland organized the selections to participate to 2000 Worldwide Competition, which was going to happen in Canada one year later.

The qualification was open to sommeliers with at least 5 years practise in the Swiss restaurant industry and that was admitted to the final in the previous editions. Only two weeks prior the first selection - that was going to be in Geneva - I was not feeling comfortable to find myself head to head with some of the most famous sommeliers in Switzerland. I asked my wife to cancel my flight. As it was not possible to get the reimbursement of the ticket, I decided to go anyway to Geneva and face the challenge. I got into the competition with a lot of goodwill, but conscious of the fact that some of the participants were very experts - and I have great respect for them.

Victory arrived unexpected, I think it was

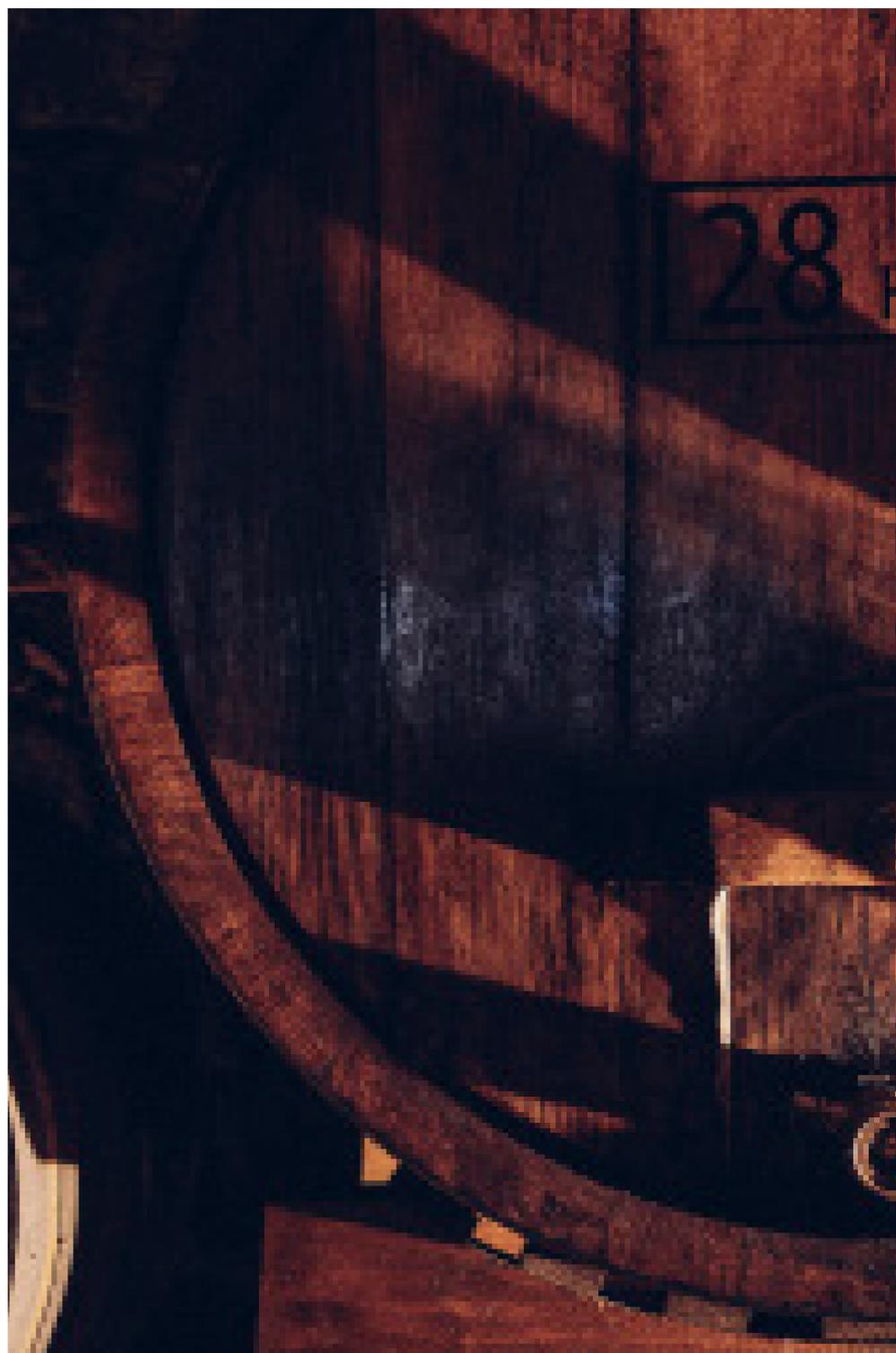
destiny. This victory brought big change in my life and was at that moment that I understood being a sommelier was going to be my future.

Since then my carrier changed, I started getting out of the Swiss cocoon, acquiring international exposure and experience.

To become a good sommelier you need lot sensitivity: when I was a child I didn't wolf down my ice cream like all other kids, I savoured it.

I do not think I have a good nose, more a palate, I do not make much of perfumes, also because nose is an organ not so trustworthy: it can be easily misled because of addiction.

I have more trust in my palate, so I take great care of it: I follow a healthy diet and I do not smoke. Even though many good sommelier are smokers; I do believe once your palate is set, it is possible to keep yourself off the influences and make a good testing sessions.



HL 10



The sommelier profession... 360 degrees expert

The sommelier is the person that serves wine, makes the selection and specially advice. He is an advisor, a confident and a bit of a psychologist. Very often the customers do not know the many varieties of wines; the sommelier, with discretion and competency, introduces, guides the client to increase his knowledge of wines.

Today a sommelier is much more than just the person bringing the wine from the cellar to the table: his role is more complex than that. First of all he needs to be a good manager, as he manages the cellar and the yearly budgets. His task is to make the selection of wines, keep an open relation with the cook; but mostly he needs to create a good relationship with his customers. In few seconds he has to understand what type of wine the customer would appreciate, without forcing the choice or imposing his own ideas and preferences. Often the client asks for something but he intends something different; it is like going to the doctor: you declare your leg hurts, but a good

doctor must understand that the problem is created from your back.

The customer chooses the food and the sommelier suggests the wine that is in tune with it; the wine that enhances the flavour of the dishes and makes the meal a unique experience. There are multiple combinations to consider.

The perfect wine does not exist: the one that goes with any dish. The only two wines that can cover this difficult task are the Champagnes and the sparkling wines, as they keep a high level of acidity, they have bubbles and some sugar residues; those characteristics allow a huge range of combinations, the most creative you can imagine. The only limit is with red meats: definitely they do not pair with Champagne and sparkling wines.

Probably you have heard of statements saying some wines can kill specific dishes: I totally disagree with it. In particular I'm referring to truffles. Actually I would not be able to taste the 5th essence of gastronomy pairing it only with water. I would feel as my experience was incomplete.

Pairing the local food with wines coming





from the same area works in 90% of the cases, but you have to consider it carefully. I'll give you an example: a goat cheese from the Loire Valley pairs very well with the Sauvignon from the same region, actually 80% of the cheeses require a white wine pairing; but if we choose a cheese from Alto Ticino we cannot pair it with a white wine as the structure of the cheese goes better with a red wine from Merlot grapes.

A good sommelier always has to enhance the flavour of a dish with the right wine, but also has to consider the budgeting aspects of the customer without expressing it verbally. To respect discreetly and without going over the psychological limit of his budget.

It is an intuition the sommelier should have; it is also the first act of kindness for the customer. To be able to completely satisfy all requests, considering all aspects as explained before, is the first step to create a full experience for the customer, that will seek to come back for the sommelier and for the restaurant.

When working in a restaurant in the French side of Switzerland, I experienced so-

something that really got me. On Sundays at lunch the restaurant's menu was more economical, therefore it was full with families. During those days I and the chef were really working hard to create a remarkable experience for all customers, as we understood their enthusiasm, their gastronomical curiosity, but also the economical sacrifice that they were facing to be able to have lunch at our place. The Sunday's customers were there not because they wanted to show off having lunch in a Michelin star restaurant, but because they enjoyed the art of sitting at a nice table. One time I heard a mother telling her son: "Pay attention of what you are eating here: this is pure art, I will not be able to replicate those flavours at home". Many people do not have the financial resources to seat at a Michelin star restaurant; and for this reason I always try to offer those people the best service, at the right price so everybody can afford it. This is the type of kindness a sommelier should have towards his customers; to drive him/her into gastronomy is one of the greatest pleasures mankind can have. If the sommelier will use the same kindness





for himself during his spare time, this experience will help him getting closer to the customer and creating empathy to build a much more tied relationship for both.

Wine is a noble food that satisfies the soul, but for tasting you need concentration and clarity of mind. It has something mysterious that comes from the land and that invites you to take care of it and appreciate its fruits.

The perseverance of the wine growers

Earth is giving us a present, a sort of kindness. Earth is giving us strength and through wine it nourishes us and gave wellness to our souls.

Wine growers must treat their vineyard with kindness and respect; they should infuse into it a lot of effort, attentions and cures for several years, before having back the best fruits and some big satisfactions.

When planting a vineyard he already knows that his sons will be able to benefit from it or even 2 generations after him.

He knows that only after 3 years he will be able to do the first harvesting and after 10

years he will understand if his production will become interesting in terms of quantities or not. The wine grower must be kind on his daily duties, be patient, and have a huge knowledge and understanding of what might happen in 10 years. Further a well maintained vineyard represents a sort of kindness to the environment. It is also a way to offer people emotions coming from nature.

Lately we have experienced big fervour and new trends rising in the market, some positive some negatives. The good will of the wine producers is shown also in opening to new orientations as long as those are in line with their way of thinking.

An example: the organic wines, considered a courtesy for the client and nature. Though it is important to point out that those wines are not 100% natural. The organic brands allow growing the vineyard in a different way: as an example in reducing the treatments from 7 to 5 - but it doesn't mean that there are no treatments at all! Instead of talking about organic wines, I believe we should speak about an organic approach to farming.





Few regions allow producing real organic wines. Chile is among one of those; a country where the vineyard is one of the healthiest in the world as it is not been polluted by the typical vineyard plagues.

For this reason Chile can use less aggressive treatments in farming to produce organic wines. Further, the climate conditions are very favourable as mould and fungus cannot proliferate due to the well ventilated climate.

In the past ten years Switzerland made a lot of efforts to introduce its wine production in foreign markets. It is right to say that this treasure has been safeguarded inside the country, with a lot of care, for many years. It was only revealed to people looking for it and wanted to know better. Switzerland is a country of quality and precision and, besides chocolate and watches, in the near future wine will also represent us.

Swiss wines start to be more and more appreciated; but it will take long time before reaching the same relevance as the Italian, French and Spanish wines.

Switzerland has only 15,000 hectares of vineyards (same size as Alsace). French

people have 400 years of experience; Italy started to produce good wines in 1968, and the best year was 1985 after the ethanol scandal.

In 1980s Austria experienced the glycerol wines scandal; after that it was able to come back on track.

The advantage of 400 years from France can be only partially regained, as wine is not only “a glass”, but represents history, culture, tradition, and care. France has definitely supremacy in this field and is not easy to match.

After 20 years of tasting I wanted to produce my own wine; I didn't want to create a wine just to amaze - like a Formula 1 car, but a wine that goes with the food we are about to enjoy. Actually I produce Rosso di Chiara to honour my daughter. I do not have my own vineyard yet, I buy the grapes for production; but I'm sure one day I will have my own vineyard. I'm embarking in this path with humbleness: this will be my future, this is my dream.





A difficult industry within marketing and tradition

Having to choose a wine from a shelf in the supermarket is extremely difficult, almost impossible. Wine is a very specialized segment, you need an expert. It implies you need somebody to take care of you, somebody able to give you the right advice.

It is like a medicine: we cannot always decide by ourselves which medicine to take, it is better to consult a doctor.

We also have to be very careful that the specialist is a real expert and he is an independent consultant. In some supermarkets, sellers have to make their money on a specific label, therefore they will tend to sell always that bottle, no matter which food is in your dish.

I've just come back from Canada where the Government hold the wines monopoly. The local government keeps a very generous margin on the wine resale, but takes care of the training of the sommeliers.

For sure the Canadian consumer will pay much more for his wine, but it is sure he will get the advice of a professional sommelier.

Very often the shape of the bottle is high and narrow; it is the shape typically known in our culture, especially in Europe where there is a great tradition, but also a lot of prejudice that does not allow alternatives. Tradition is a beautiful thing, but many times stops innovation.

In Australia, New Zealand, America, wine “bag in a box” is not considered a cheap wine as it comes in a bottle. There are producers that use those packaging for high quality wines; there is even one from Switzerland. Years ago milk was also coming in a glass bottle; the tetra pack packaging replaced it. In the end what is important is the quality of the product inside the bottle, not the packaging itself. However I never experienced tasting panels from tetra pack boxes. Recently it seems it was presented at Vinitaly: “The Tetra Pak® packaging are ideal to protect wine and to protect the quality of the distribution and are more environmental friendly. The combination of treatments and the sterile packaging assure the wastes are reduced and the distribution is more efficient.” While tasting only 20% of the wine flavours are coming from your





nose and your mouth, the remaining 80% is in your head, our database that maintains and classifies all the inputs we are exposed to. If our database contains wrong data, coming also from prejudice, our perception will be wrong. The European consumer, traditionally, wants a heavy glass bottle with a traditional label and a cork.

Some experts declared that they prefer to risk throwing away a bottle as it tastes of cork, rather than buying a bottle with screw cap. I think that throwing away a bottle because of the cork, now that there are valid alternatives in the market, is an offence to the wine producers and to their jobs. It is a limit that needs to be broken off.

I have been collecting wines from the year my daughter was born and when I could I bought the bottles with screw cap; this way I'm sure the wine will be perfect in 20/30 years' time. With the cork the risk that some bottles got distorted is very high.

A paradox with my production? Yes, I prefer to use corks to avoid the customer might think the wine I'm serving is lower category and prevent him from buying.

**Gentle drinking.
knowing to taste.**





AUTHOR

Paolo Basso

Born in Italy, he currently lives in Switzerland. Following the completion of his hotel management studies in Sondalo, Valtellina, and after various internships in Swiss hotels and restaurants, he became fascinated by the world of wine and he obtained the 'Professional Sommelier' diploma from the 'Association Suisse des Sommeliers Professionnels'.

Member of the jury of the most prestigious international tasting competition, he collaborates with various magazines and guides in the wine sector in Switzerland and abroad. Paolo also works as lecturer and wine teacher at the School of Wine of Changins, in Switzerland and at the Worldsom Sommelier Academy of Bordeaux. He currently runs his own wine consulting company Paolo Basso Wine in Lugano, Switzerland and produce his own swiss red wine 'Il Rosso di Chiara'. He won the title of best Sommelier of Switzerland in 1997, of best Sommelier of Europe in 2010, and of world champion in 2013. In 2014, the Grand Cru Committee of Italy, the most prestigious wine producers association in the country, crowned him 'Sommelier of the Year'.

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PHOTOGRAPHER

Lorenzo Rui

Lorenzo Rui was born in Vicenza in 1981. He became fond of photography since he was little. At 8 he insisted on having and obtained his first camera. At first Lorenzo took pictures of his friends at parties, on school trips and everything that he wanted to show others with his personal view. Lorenzo continued his science and technology studies, but preferred to enter the working world right after graduating high school, working as a sales rep for a number of big multinationals.

During this experience he learnt the logics of business and markets, and started building the foundation for his own business in the complex industry he operates in: commercial photography. In 2009 he left the safety of a steady job to devote himself to photography. Lorenzo has always been fascinated by human relationships and interactions. He often does portraits and successfully conducts personal projects documenting real-life situations, old trades and new generations. Many of the jobs he is assigned reflect this vision of society and clients pick him for this innate aptitude.

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GENTLETUDE

Gentletude is a neologism composed of the words “gentilezza” (gentleness/kindness) and “attitudine” (attitude). It pursues the aims for a better world without violence, arrogance and rudeness.

A world where caring and paying attention to others, common sense and balanced competitiveness are the most important things.

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Contact Gentletude on the website: www.gentletude.com

Earth is giving us
a present, a sort of kindness.

Earth is giving us strength

and through wine

it nourishes us and

gave wellness

to our souls.