

An Essay by SGI President Ikeda Simon Wiesenthal: Champion of Human Rights

‘Simon Wiesenthal calls on us to transcend personal enmity and restore justice to our societies,’ SGI President Ikeda writes. ‘This heartrending cry emanating from the very depths of this great champion of human rights reverberates with a solemn message for us all.’

For a period of four months, starting from Sept. 12, the exhibition “I Am My Brother’s Keeper: The Life and Times of Simon Wiesenthal” will be held at the Soka Gakkai Toda Peace Memorial Hall in Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture. The hall, which adjoins our Kanagawa Culture Center and is across from the famous Yamashita Park, has served as a Soka Gakkai facility for more than two decades. Renowned as one of the city’s historic buildings, it has hosted many peace, cultural and educational activities over the years.

Yokohama is also the starting point of the Soka Gakkai’s peace movement, for it was here that our second president, Josei Toda, on Sept. 8, 1957 — only six months before his death — delivered his epochal Declaration for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons.

The Simon Wiesenthal exhibition, being presented in Japan for the first time, commemorates the 44th anniversary of that event.



Mr. Wiesenthal is 92 years old. He miraculously survived the inhumane Nazi Holocaust and has devoted his life since to pursuing those who perpetrated that heinous crime. People of conscience around the world have praised him as a true fighter for human rights; former Nazis and their collaborators speak fearfully of him as the “Nazi hunter.”

To date, he has investigated more than 6,000 Nazi war criminals and secured more than 1,100 convictions. His relentless crusade has also been a fight against people’s forgetfulness, against the Holocaust being consigned to historical oblivion.

His unchanging spirit is “I will not forget!” He is determined to keep alive the memory of that brutal slaughter — the bitter tears and anguished cries of his murdered comrades, the countless lives abruptly cut short.

As the Jewish poet Yitzhak Katzenelson, who perished in the Holocaust, declared, “We must not seek to heal eternal scars in forgetfulness.”



Mr. Wiesenthal’s noble convictions are illustrated by his deeds. For several years after the war, young Jewish commandos and former underground resistance fighters sometimes came to Wiesenthal asking for information about Nazi fugitives. But Wiesenthal resolutely refused to give it to them — it was clear that they were seeking to take personal revenge by killing those individuals.

Wiesenthal believed that the Nazi war criminals had to be judged in a fair, public court of law. Retaliating in the spirit of “an eye for an eye” would only add to the cycle of evil and could never restore justice.

I have not yet met Mr. Wiesenthal, but I have spoken several times with Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center. In an interview, Rabbi Cooper said that Mr. Wiesenthal believed that, after the Holocaust, the task before humanity was

not to exact revenge but to restore trust between people.

Mr. Wiesenthal calls on us to transcend personal enmity and restore justice to our societies. This heartrending cry emanating from the very depths of this great champion of human rights reverberates with a solemn message for us all.



Justice only shines when we challenge and triumph over evil. The same is true of Buddhism.

I cannot emphasize enough, however, that bloody, hate-filled revenge is utterly foreign to Buddhism. As a famous passage from an early Buddhist text says, “Hatreds do not ever cease in this world by hating, but by not hating; this is an eternal truth” (*The Dhammapada*, p. 8).

Nichiren Daishonin, though the target of the harshest persecution, also demonstrated a spirit of tolerance and compassion as vast as the great ocean. He says, “I pray that before anything else I can guide and lead the ruler and those others who persecuted me” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 402).

This does not mean, however, that it is acceptable to blur the distinction between good and evil or to condone evil. As first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who stood firm against oppression by the Japanese militarist authorities and died in prison for his beliefs, said, “Unless you have the courage to be an enemy of those who are evil, you cannot be a friend to the good.”

Indeed, good cannot be achieved without a struggle against evil. Overlooking and ignoring evil show cowardice and a lack of compassion—in the end, it is the same as doing evil oneself.

The great struggle to triumph over the pervasive forces of the devil king of the sixth heaven as well as the destructive tendencies within our own lives is what we call kosen-rufu, what we call human revolution.



Mr. Wiesenthal has offered the following warning to young people: “In reality, culture and civilization are only a wafer-thin layer, beneath which the beast continues to lurk within us.”

Forty-four years ago, on a day following a typhoon, with clear blue skies and a refreshing breeze, President Toda stood before 50,000 Soka Gakkai members and announced the first of his final injunctions, his Declaration for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons. He entrusted the youth with the mission of spreading its message throughout the world.

The crux of his declaration lies in clearly exposing, and stressing the need to eradicate, the “claws hidden in the very depths” of the idea of using nuclear weapons—in other words, the insidious devilish tendencies inherent in life. This is none other than “the beast within us” of which Mr. Wiesenthal speaks.

In his declaration, Mr. Toda states: “We, the citizens of the world, have an inviolable right to live. Anyone who tries to jeopardize this right is a devil incarnate, a fiend, a monster. I propose that humankind apply, in every case, the death penalty to anyone responsible for using nuclear weapons, even if that person is on the winning side.”

Mr. Toda was a Buddhist whose first and foremost conviction was the sanctity of life. He was absolutely opposed to capital punishment, yet here he called for the death penalty for anyone responsible for using nuclear weapons.

This was based on his wish to eternally immobilize the devilish functions inherent in human life that seek to possess or use nuclear weapons. He wanted to deeply establish in the minds of all humanity a way of thinking that denounced nuclear weapons as an absolute evil—a way of thinking that would serve as an inner restraint for the sake of “preventing wrong and stopping evil” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 744).

In order to defend life, Mr. Toda used the word *death*, its polar opposite, in an effort to crush the demonic workings of evil. It was an act of conviction directed toward the absolute good of rigorously protecting life.



At the time, the general public paid no attention to Mr. Toda’s pioneering declaration. However, its undying brilliance, which has only increased with the passage of time, has grown into a great light that is now beginning to brightly illuminate the world in the new century. Says Dr. David Krieger, president of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, “I think Josei Toda’s declaration against nuclear weapons retains its importance today.”

This summer, Dr. Krieger and I published the dialogue *Choose Hope* [not yet available in English]. In that dialogue, the American antinuclear weapons campaigner says: “Young people are the future. They must have a say in the world they are inheriting and must play a major part in resolving the nuclear threat.”

Youth! Cry out ever more strongly and widely for justice! Youth of the SGI, of the new century! Resolutely extend our alliance for lasting peace—to the world, to the future!