

**Recollections
Never Forget
By Daisaku Ikeda**

**Rabbi Marvin Hier —
Founder and Dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, Los Angeles**

In this essay about Rabbi Marvin Hier, SGI President Ikeda stresses the importance of remembering the atrocities of the Nazis. Because, as Rabbi Hier says, 'A world without a past...is a world without a future.'

This poem is in Anne Frank's own handwriting," said Rabbi Marvin Hier, pointing to a small notebook in the glass case. It was a poem that Anne had written for a friend when she was only 10 years old:

*Dearest Henny,
It is only a small thing
But I give it to you
The roses that bloom in the meadow
And a handful of forget-me-nots.*

Short as the poem is, it is filled with Anne's gentleness and her sensitivity to beauty. The open book shows pictures of flower baskets on each page. From the flower basket on the left, a dove of peace takes flight, with a letter in its bill.

Two months after this poem was written, the Netherlands, to which the Franks had fled from Germany to escape anti-Semitic persecution, was invaded by German forces. As Nazi persecution against the Jews intensified, Anne was forced to live in hiding with other members of her family in an attic in Amsterdam, where they remained for two years until discovered and arrested by the Gestapo. Anne was sent to a concentration camp where she died in 1945. She was 15.

The Nazis murdered 6 million people — simply because they were Jews. They ripped babies from mothers' arms and flung them to the ground to their deaths; they used children as guinea pigs in horrid medical experiments; with sneers on their faces, they unceremoniously herded people into the gas chambers; and shot prisoners just to "let off steam."

And what did the Nazis say about the Jews, who were the victims of their atrocities? They spread false rumors, denouncing the Jews as brutal and inhumane, morally corrupt, the dregs of humanity. Everything that was most true of the Nazis themselves, they ascribed to the Jews.

These repeated lies acted like poison that, drop by drop, penetrated the hearts and minds of the German people and paralyzed their senses. Eventually, the people were so transformed that they accepted the most evil of deeds without thinking anything of it.

"Forget-me-not." The name of the flower that Anne wished to send her friend was a plea not to be forgotten. But who could forget her? Who can forget all of those who died in the Holocaust?

Rabbi Marvin Hier founded the Simon Wiesenthal Center out of a determination, a vow that those who died in the Holocaust would never be forgotten. He would not allow them to be forgotten. But that is not an easy task. People tend to want to forget. Not only those who perpetrated the evil but its victims as well.

Title: My Recollections: Rabbi Marvin Hier
Subject: World Tribune 08/21/98 n.3205 p.6 WT980821p06
Author: Daisaku Ikeda
Keywords: Activists Forget Hier Marvin Never People Rabbi Recollections Tribune World

As Rabbi Hier points out: “Memory is fragile and pliable. And that is why, my friends, if we do not persist on our course, if we are not faithful to memory, then one day no one will believe that those eerie sounds of the trains once delivered millions of unsuspecting men, women and children to the death camps.”

Rabbi Hier is committed to perpetuating the struggle of Simon Wiesenthal, after whom the center is named. A survivor of the death camps, Wiesenthal has been dedicated to pursuing and bringing to justice Nazi war criminals who went into hiding after the war. Mr. Wiesenthal has been motivated solely by his duty as a survivor. Justice, not hate, is his motive. He is after his natural rights, not revenge. “Without Simon Wiesenthal,” writes Rabbi Hier, “the subject of the Holocaust would not really receive serious attention anywhere in the world.... There was still a big period of time between 1945 and the early '60s: a crucial period when there was the greatest pressure to forget.” Some had said that the reason for that pressure was that dead Jews don't vote, whereas living ex-Nazis do.

The denial was remarkable and so potent that youthful demonstrators who interrupted a stage production of *The Diary of Anne Frank* in Linz, Austria, in 1958, were able to write in the leaflets they distributed: “This play is a fraud. Anne Frank never existed. The Jews have invented the whole story because they want to extort more restitution money. Don't believe a word of it! It's fake!”

When Simon Wiesenthal, who was then residing in that Austrian city, heard of this, he dashed to the theater to investigate. Later, he wrote of this event: “These young rowdies were not guilty; but their parents and teachers were. The older people were trying to poison the minds of the young generation because they wanted to justify their own doubtful past. Many of them were trapped by their heritage of ignorance, hatred and bigotry. They hadn't learned anything from history.”

Some members of the older generation in Germany and Austria intentionally spread lies about their past, claiming that Anne Frank's diary was a fake and that the so-called gas chambers were only for the purpose of disinfecting the prisoners' clothing. This is not unlike the lies that are still told in Japan, claiming the Nanking Massacre never took place. When lies are allowed to go unchallenged, they spread like weeds. And from that neglect arises a second and a third Hitler. As Rabbi Hier said, “A world without a past...is a world without a future.”

Rabbi Hier has a personal connection to the Holocaust. Though he was born and raised in the United States, almost all of his parents' relatives in Poland were killed in the Holocaust. When he went to Vienna to meet Mr. Wiesenthal, he had a frightening experience. Sitting down in the hotel barber's chair, he noticed a signed photograph of Hitler hanging proudly on the wall. It was a terrible shock. This was the late 1970s, and yet Nazism survived in Vienna. Given this situation, it is not difficult to imagine the obstacles against which Mr. Wiesenthal struggled.

Mr. Wiesenthal's international visibility is very high. His existence has been a constant thorn in the side of ex-Nazis and all who would forget the past. On several occasions his life has been threatened. Attempts have been made to implicate him in scandals, and all sorts of plots were hatched to destroy his credibility. Yet he has kept up his struggle for justice for a half century.

Is it a crime to insist, for the sake of peace, that we must not forget such tragedies of war? When we deny the occurrence of Auschwitz and the Nanking Massacre, aren't we murdering the victims yet again? Surely seeking to keep our young people in the dark by failing to teach them the truth about history is far more shameful than having to come to terms with a shameful past.

There is no difference between the actions of the Nazis in Europe and those of the

Japanese military in the countries of Asia during World War II. Japan may try to play innocent, but the world is not fooled. The more Japan lies, the more the world scorns it and the more isolated it becomes. After the war, the following remark about Japan's invasion of Asian countries appeared in the *Nippon Times*: "The Japanese people must ponder why it is that there has been such a discrepancy between what they thought and what the rest of the world accepted almost as common knowledge. This is at the root of the tragedy that Japan brought upon herself."

The Nazis held up the Aryan race as a chosen people. The Japanese militarists called Japan the Land of the Gods. The belief that there is a divine people always entails the creation of the lie that there are inferior and profane peoples. For the Nazis, it was the Jews and the Gypsies, and for the Japanese military, it was the Koreans and the Chinese. Those lies resulted in the cruel slaughter that both the Nazis and the Japanese military perpetrated.

"He's dynamite," says Mr. Wiesenthal of Rabbi Hier. "The man is never quiet. He is always trying to do things no one else has ever tried." Beneath an intelligent and urbane mien, a fierce anger against evil and injustice burns in Rabbi Hier's heart. Whenever he hears anti-Semitic propaganda, he springs to the offensive. He rebuts it, demands an apology, widely publicizes the truth, and uses every method at his command to cut the poisonous weed of hate off at the root. He lectures, he writes, he appears on television discussion panels, and he meets with the leaders of nations across the globe.

He held public hearings in the U.S. Senate, sounding the alarm about the threat posed by neo-Nazi groups. He refuses to allow the smallest slur or slander to slip by, because he never forgets the history of a civilized society being transformed virtually overnight into an evil one. To teach the importance of human rights, he established the Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance, which uses the latest multimedia technology to teach, in graphically visual form, the truth about the Holocaust and all discrimination. He also founded a film company for this same purpose, working as a producer and writer of documentaries. He is actively involved in teaching the importance of human rights to young people who are drawn to Nazism. He works without rest.

Mr. Wiesenthal asserted, "Hope lives when people remember." Rabbi Hier's work proclaims, "Hope lives as long as we do not remain silent."

I visited the Museum of Tolerance on Jan. 31, 1993. Rabbi Hier graciously showed me around the facility, even though he was very busy preparing for its official opening in early February. There was a model of Auschwitz as well as a ghetto where countless Jews were massacred. The many photographs and audiovisual footage gave voice and identity to their now silent subjects. Who could ever forget these tragic events? Who could fail to be enraged by them?

Yet around the same time as I made my visit, books were still being published in Japan that talked of the "international conspiracy of the Jews" — the same ridiculous lies that were once spread by the Nazis. Those who were the greatest victims of the persecution were painted as its perpetrators and attacked. Such is the deplorable insensitivity to and utter abuse of human rights that exist in Japan to this day.

From my meeting with Rabbi Hier emerged the project of bringing the exhibition "The Courage to Remember: Anne Frank and the Holocaust" on a tour of major Japanese cities. It moved and touched the lives of more than a million people. In a speech at the exhibition's Hiroshima venue, Rabbi Hier declared that each individual must have the determination to stand up and speak out loudly, clearly and unmistakably for human rights in every area of the globe where those rights are being violated or threatened.

He also proposed a series of lectures to be held at the Simon Wiesenthal Center to make others aware of the unsung heroes of human rights around the world, to be titled the

Title: My Recollections: Rabbi Marvin Hier

Subject: World Tribune 08/21/98 n.3205 p.6 WT980821p06

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: Activists Forget Hier Marvin Never People Rabbi Recollections Tribune World

Makiguchi Memorial Human Rights Lecture Series.

This choice of title is a tribute to the fact that Mr. Makiguchi, our first president, fought to protect people's fundamental human rights from the oppressive forces of Japanese militarism and died in prison for those convictions.

When I was invited to give the first lecture in the series (June 1996), I closed my speech by saying:

*It is my belief —
that a person, a people,
who embrace a noble philosophy,
people upholding sublime faith —
that only a person, a people,
who, amidst raging storms,
live out the drama
of reality and grand ideals,
subjected to and enduring
limitless persecution —
that only such a person,
only such a people,
will be bathed in the sunlight
of perpetual joy, glory and victory.*

Survivors of the Holocaust were in attendance; many had lost relatives in the genocide. In my heart, I called out to the millions in Europe, in Asia, who had been trampled beneath lies and violence: I will not forget you. We of the SGI will never forget. We embrace you and stand strong. We will fight until the day when we can greet the sun together!

WT