

## DIALOGUES ON EDUCATION THE ANSWER IS EDUCATION

**‘All hope for the new century rests on the wisdom of the people. An awakened citizenry must keep a careful watch over politics. What, then, can be done to ensure a wise, well-informed citizenry? The answer lies in education.’**

On March 13, SGI President Ikeda met with Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, a prominent Jewish human rights organization in the United States. Also present at the meeting, which was held at the Seikyo Shimbun Building in Tokyo, were Dr. Alfred Balitzer, newly appointed dean of faculty at Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo, SGI General Director Eiichi Wada, SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima and SUA President Daniel Habuki.

President Ikeda and Rabbi Cooper first met in January 1993, when the SGI leader visited the SWC’s Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles. That visit led to the Soka Gakkai collaborating with the SWC in mounting the “The Courage to Remember: Anne Frank and the Holocaust” exhibition in Japan.

The traveling exhibition documents the tragedy of the Holocaust, which claimed more than 6 million Jewish lives, through photographs and the personal effects of those who perished, with a special focus on the young diarist Anne Frank. Since its opening at the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building in 1994, the exhibition has been viewed by more than 1.7 million people. It is the first full-scale exhibition on the Holocaust to be shown in Japan.

President Ikeda thanked Rabbi Cooper for the SWC’s assistance in making the exhibition possible and explained that its tour has brought hope and courage to people throughout Japan. As one example, he cited a letter from a teenager in Fukui Prefecture who had written saying that she had once attempted suicide, but after viewing the exhibition she was filled with fresh appreciation for the preciousness of life and determined to live from that point on with hope.

During the course of the discussion, it was announced that the SWC’s traveling exhibition “Friedl Dicker-Brandeis,” which features the life and works of the famous Bauhaus artist who perished in the Holocaust, will open at the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum in spring 2002. Dicker-Brandeis, an Austrian of Jewish descent, was deported to the Nazi concentration camp in Terezin during World War II. There, she taught art to the children in the camp, who were traumatized by the death and violence they witnessed around them.

Located near Prague in the Czech Republic, the Terezin concentration camp held some 140,000 Jews of German, Austrian and Czech descent before they were sent to the Nazi death camps during World War II. The detainees included some 15,000 children, only around 100 of whom survived the Holocaust. Dicker-Brandeis was later sent to Auschwitz, where she died at the age of 46, together with the children whom she would not abandon.

Rabbi Cooper explained that Dicker-Brandeis’ courage in lighting a flame of hope in the children’s hearts through art was comparable to Makiguchi’s courage in fighting Japanese fascism to the death. Lauding President Ikeda’s efforts to carry on his predecessor’s spirit through his activities for peace, Rabbi Cooper presented the SGI leader with several pieces of fabric hand-woven by Dicker-Brandeis.

“I am honored to receive these treasures,” Mr. Ikeda said, describing them as works of art woven with blood and tears. He promised to ensure their careful preservation and to put them on display for people around the world.

Speaking of the exhibition on the Austrian artist’s life and works, the SGI leader said: “The 20th century was, sadly, a century of war. Therefore, it is imperative that we make the 21st century a humanistic, peaceful century for women and for children. In that sense, I believe the Dicker-Brandeis exhibition has great importance.”

The SGI leader added that although the artist could have escaped before being sent to Terezin, she boldly chose to remain with the children in her community. “This is nobility of the highest order,” he said. “Her example prompts all of us to ask ourselves whether we could be capable of the same selfless courage in such circumstances.”

He also cited second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda: “No people have been as oppressed as the Jews. None can compare to them in terms of their intellect and talent. We should emulate them and learn from their indomitable spirit!” Acknowledging the many influential scholars and intellectuals of Jewish heritage, President Ikeda said he had the deepest respect for the Jews and said he looked forward to seeing what kind of outstanding world leaders would emerge from the ranks of the Jewish youth in the future.

“Persecutions of the Jews have often been incited by the hate propaganda of political demagogues,” he stated. “This is a historical fact that we absolutely must not forget.”

During a 1999 showing of “The Courage to Remember” exhibition in Tokyo, Rabbi Cooper said that ordinary people understand the true nature of problems in the world far better than politicians. Reminding him of this comment, Mr. Ikeda expressed his complete agreement: “Ultimately, all hope for the new century rests on the wisdom of the people. An awakened citizenry must keep a careful watch over politics. What, then, can be done to ensure a wise, well-informed citizenry? The answer lies in education. The Jews have a great tradition of education and a profound respect for books.”

President Ikeda identified the French philosopher Henri Bergson as one of the authors whose works he loved reading as a youth. He mentioned that Bergson was very proud of his Jewish heritage. “Raising the question of what can be done to combat a person of extreme evil such as Hitler,” the SGI leader says, “Bergson states that there is only one way: for the Jews themselves to appeal to the conscience of humanity and to cause their voices to resound throughout the world.” President Ikeda commended the SWC for carrying out activities in precisely this manner.

Responding to a number of questions from the SGI president on Judaism, Rabbi Cooper briefly explained the Jewish understanding of God, love, prayer and funerals; the status of the rabbi or teacher; the differences between Judaism and Christianity; and the Jewish view of life and death.

Asked by President Ikeda if he had any message he wished to convey to youth, Dr. Balitzer said that he hoped young people would live true to themselves. Next, he continued, he hoped they would have big dreams and be bold and courageous. He also hoped that they would help others before they helped themselves—this is a path to personal growth.

At the end of their meeting, Rabbi Cooper said he hoped that in the near future Mr. and Mrs. Ikeda would visit Jerusalem. The SGI leader said that he very much hoped to visit Israel, which he described as the microcosm of humankind and the world.