

THURSDAY OCTOBER 14,1999  
AFTERNOON SESSION A 14:00-15:30

## The Holocaust Education Center- Japan-Part A

by  
*Makoto Otsuka*

### 1. Introduction

The idea of establishing the first Holocaust Education Center in Japan dates back to the year 1971, when I coincidentally met Mr. Otto Frank, Anne Frank's father, during my visit to Israel. It was my first encounter with the Holocaust. My search for the truth of the Holocaust started then. Why were six million Jews killed only because they were born Jewish? Why were one and a half million children killed?

It was in the 20th century, in a Europe of prospering science and culture, that Hitler was chosen by referendum to be the leader of the then Germany. He carried out a national policy depriving Jews of the right to live, cleverly manipulating feelings of hatred and prejudice among the people against the Jews who had been in Europe for the past two thousand years; he insisted on the superiority of the *Aryan Race* and took advantage of the war and indifference of foreign countries to the persecution of the Jews. The planned extermination of the European Jews was carried out with the execution of the following six steps: ousting, deprivation, round-ups, deportation, selection, and liquidation.

"The Holocaust was a product of people's indifference and the wrong education", says Elie Wiesel, a survivor of the Auschwitz death camp. Ignorance and indifference of the ordinary people, the bystanders, after all, helped the Nazi Germany carry out the Holocaust, which spread to twenty-one countries in Europe.

Three years have passed since the opening of the Holocaust Education Center in Fukuyama City in Hiroshima. We have received more than thirty thousand visitors and also pupils from three hundred schools from all over Japan. For many Japanese the history of the Holocaust has been seen as unrelated to their own history. Although the *Diary of Anne Frank* has been read by many Japanese since its publication in Japan in 1952, they tend to sympathize with the girl as a war victim. They do not see the history of the Holocaust as very important background to the story of Anne Frank

Since about 1995, fifty years after World War, there have been publications on the Holocaust in Japan, and the movie *Schindler's List* was seen by many Japanese. It was at this time when the story of Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese diplomat who saved the lives of six thousand Jews by giving them transit visas, was taken up by the Japanese media. At the same time, however, an article denying the gas chambers during the Holocaust period, titled *There were no Gas Chambers*, was published in a certain magazine. It was at that time while we were witnessing increasing public attention on the history of the Holocaust, that we opened the first Holocaust Education Center in Japan.

### 2. Telling the Truth about the Holocaust

As the only country that was attacked with atomic bombs, peace education has been vigorously promoted in Japan. We have not, however, given much attention to the need for the kind of education that would lead children to think about why the war happened and how we can stop such a thing from happening again. This while still stressing the tragic aspect of the war and showing how much Japan suffered as the victim. In the German education system, it is now required to look back objectively at the facts of history.

The Holocaust Education Center is for the children who will lead the 21st century, with exhibitions placed at their eye level and with simple and clear explanations that are easy for them to understand. I considered it most important to tell the truth using photos and artifacts from the Holocaust period.

Since the opening, we have had thirty visitors from Germany who commented that the exhibition was very objective and told the truth of the Holocaust. Based on the advice of Holocaust experts, both in Japan and overseas, I have made some corrections to the exhibition. And I will continue, by trial and error, since it is extremely difficult to express the Holocaust with the limited space in my Center. A friend of mine reminded me of Japanese culture, which appreciates a small bud vase, holding a single blossom. I expressed my sympathy toward one and a half million children who died in the Holocaust symbolized by a tiny shoe that was once worn by a child who was sent to the gas chamber. This shoe, fifteen centimeters long, is placed in the Memorial Hall of the Center, which every visitor will see at the end of the exhibition.

### **3. The Cooperation of School Teachers**

In spite of the inconvenience of traveling to my Center, many school children and teachers from three hundred schools all over Japan have visited my Center so far. Learning at my Center begins even before their visit. We lend teachers a video cassette of the *Anne Frank Story*, which consists of animation and pictures, and ask them to let their students watch it and send me any questions they raised. Some teachers prepare an original text on the Holocaust and spend some time learning the history with their students before the visit to my Center.

Visitors spend an hour and a quarter at the Center. For the first 30 minutes we introduce the history of the Center, explain what the term *Holocaust* means, why it happened, and why it important for our future to understand the Holocaust. I also answer questions that they give me in advance. I consider it very important, first of all, to speak to every child myself about the Holocaust, as this, the biggest tragedy in the 20th century, was a creation of human beings.

Next, children see the Holocaust through the actual images in a film, which is carefully edited in order to tell them about the events that happened in the years from 1933 to 1945 in far-away countries in Europe

Finally, we guide them through the exhibitions. Is it necessary to explain to them as they see the exhibitions, or is it better to let them spend their own time through the exhibition? I believe it is more effective to talk to them and give them simple and clear explanations through the exhibition. After they see the exhibition, students ask questions and tell me what they think. Even after they go back to school, children send their comments to the Center. I myself learn most from the children's comments.

#### **4. The Importance of teaching the Holocaust**

Under the slogan of *Small Hands Create Peace*, I have asked every one of children how each one of us can build up peace in the world. The process of Holocaust education has the following three steps: First, learning the facts of the Holocaust, Second, thinking and acting on their own, and third, creating the future based on what they learn from the Holocaust.

Holocaust education should not end with teaching children the tragic aspects of war and hatred for Hitler. It must be clearly understood that the Holocaust was not a product of the war, but a creation of human discrimination and prejudice. Two thousand years of anti-Semitism in Europe culminated in the Holocaust influenced by the social, political and economic factors of the time. Seen as one of the worst tragedies in the entire human history, the Holocaust gives every one of us invaluable lessons on who we are and how we, as human beings, should live on to the future. In Europe, Holocaust education starts at the age of 12. In Germany some people even say that Holocaust education should start even before, at the age of 4. What I would most like to tell is the fact that one and a half million innocent Jewish children were intentionally murdered, which is the truth and the tragedy of the Holocaust. I would like children today not only to understand the history in their minds, but also to feel something in their hearts, giving thought to the fact that those millions of young children were facing death in their everyday life. Together with the tragic aspects of the Holocaust, however, we should not forget the people who risked their lives to help Jews or to resist the Nazism. They also give us important lessons on the nature of human beings.

People of different ages have visited the Holocaust Education Center, from nursery school children, college students, to the aged who experienced the War. Preparing and providing appropriate ways for the visitors according to their age to introduce the history of the Holocaust is important, I especially hope that young children study the Holocaust because I strongly believe that will get rid of discrimination, prejudice, and bullying from the schools in Japan.

#### **5. Toward the 21st Century**

"Both the Atomic Bomb and the Holocaust are the creation of human beings", said Hanna Pick, who was a friend of Anne Frank and a Holocaust survivor, at the opening ceremony of the Holocaust Education Center in 1995.

How do we pass down the facts of the Holocaust, one of the worst tragedies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from generation to generation? That is a significant theme toward the 21st century all over the world today. A new Holocaust Museum just opened in NY in September last year, and we see similar projects in London, Berlin, Moscow, and Cape Town, and other countries. The Shoah Foundation in Los Angeles launched a project of videotaping and archiving interviews of Holocaust survivors all over the world, which will be made available on-line for the education of the young about the Holocaust. So far they have interviewed fifty thousand survivors.

World attention to the Holocaust was also well recognized at the 3rd Conference on World Peace Museum, in which I was honored to participate, and I would like to express my gratitude to the people who organized this occasion. In Tokyo as well, the opening of the Holocaust Education Resource Center is in preparation now and it is expected to further promote the understanding of the Holocaust in Japan.

Toward the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Holocaust Education Center in Fukuyama is also planning to hold in 1999 Japanese Children's Conference on the Holocaust entitled *What I Can Do Now To Create Peace?*. I would like to continue offering children an opportunity of positive learning at my Center.

*Remember the past, live your present life, and open up a new vista for the future!*

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## The Holocaust Center- Japan

*Akio Yoshida*

The Holocaust Education Center, Japan, was established especially to commemorate the 1.5 million Jewish children and also to transmit the facts of the Holocaust to the children in Japan, the next generation of building the 21<sup>st</sup> century. So far we have welcomed over 33,000 visitors to our center and we are very happy to see that nearly half of them are children, under the age of 15.

We generally classify our visitors into three groups

- 1 School children who visit the center in school groups.
- 2 Educators
- 3 Others (Families, individuals)

The percentage of school children who visit the center in school groups is very high, and we can see that the studies of the Holocaust and peace is most effectively done through their school program.

I would like to introduce our methods of teaching the Holocaust in Japan, especially those that are related to children.

### **A. School Children**

#### 1. Kindergarten, Nursery schools (ages 3 to 6)

I. We ask the teachers to visit the center and understand the idea of studying the Holocaust in our center. After they have seen our introduction VTR program ( Introduction by Director General, short program of a survivor, Holocaust history program), and the exhibition, we lend them a video program called "Anne Frank's Story" (70 minutes animation program). It includes the nursery tales written by Anne Frank, and attracts the children's attention. It also gives them a brief image of western life more than fifty years ago, and living with the danger of people being caught because they were Jews.

II. We ask the teachers to elicit questions and comments from the children and to send them to the center in advance via fax. (We sometimes encounter interesting questions and comments)

III. Once the students come, we first welcome by saying *Good morning!* or *Good afternoon* to each of them to make them relax. We often give them a hand made paper pendant with a drawing of Anne Frank smiling at them (many of them like this very much and proudly take it back with them).

IV. We ask them to enter the library and sit to hear a short story. The story is presented using

large picture cards telling them about Anne Frank or Anne Frank's Rose or Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese Righteous Among the Nation. We, of course, refer their own questions.

V. Most of the time, questions such as "What is peace?" or "What can you do to create peace" will be asked to lead their thoughts towards peace.

VI. After the stories and questions, they are asked to walk through the exhibition with some easy guiding.

VII. If they still have time, there will be a period for questions and answers.

VIII. When they leave, we see them off by shaking each of their hands to show we really were happy to see them and care about them and encourage them to further their studies on the Holocaust.

XI. After their visit, most of the teachers use the time to think about what they saw and make them express their own feelings and ideas towards peace.

- According to our experience, even children from age around 3 to 6 can learn any lessons from the Holocaust, such as to think about the victims, think about what is wrong and what is right, and also think about peace.
- The total time for their visit will be between 45 minutes to 1 hour.

B. Primary School pupils, Junior High, Senior High school students (ages 7 to 18)

I. and II. Same as with A.

III. We welcome the students by saying *Hello!* or *Good morning!* to each of them and hand them our brochure.

IV. They will then be asked to enter the library, and are given introduction, usually by the Director General. He talks about the main facts of the Holocaust, details of the establishment of the center (his encounter with Otto Frank, Anne Frank's father, 29 years ago) and with ends a message of peace and comments on the importance of studying the Holocaust. The introduction ends with a positive message referring to the rescuers. The Director General then encourages them to build a century of peace, with no conflicts and discrimination.

V. A VTR program about a survivor visiting the center and then a brief introduction to the history of the Holocaust will be shown.

VI. The students will be taken to the exhibition and mainly asked to go through it by themselves. Several volunteer guides will be waiting for them to give explanations and to answer questions.

- The difference between the primary school pupils day and that of the Junior High students and the Senior High students is that there is a difference of themes emphasized during the introduction, and there is a difference in the amount of time they spend during a visit

- Total time of visit:
  - Primary schools- -1 hour to 1 hour and 15 minutes
  - Junior High and Senior High schools -1 hour and 15 minutes to 1 hour and a half
- The responses which we receive from the students, are extremely important for us, and we exhibit most descriptions of impressions from the children to have the other visitors, especially the adults, see how the children are responding.

### C. Educators

I. We don't ask the adults to study about the Holocaust before coming to the museum, so there is quite a range of understandings and knowledge about the Holocaust among the visitors. Some of them are very knowledgeable about the history of Jewish people and antisemitism in Europe, and some of them have never heard of the word *Holocaust*. This means that the introduction at the beginning of their stay is important for their study at the center. As most of the educators are schoolteachers, they have special interests in peace education and themes such as those concerning discrimination and prejudice. Our main message to them is relating subjects included in the Holocaust in a universal way. We try to broaden their view of the world, so they see the not only what is s happening in Japan. Furthermore, we tell them that it is education which changes the children the most and we refer to the mistakes of education in Germany which led people, even children, to support the Nazis.

II .They walk through the exhibition by themselves, encountering various pictures and items of the Holocaust.

III. Some groups of teachers hold meetings continuously, and exchange impressions and ideas they received from the introduction and exhibition.

IV. The center has held three series of public seminars for educators for those who want to know more about the Holocaust. Examples of the themes are: *General guidance to the Holocaust, Story of Anne Frank and her family, Rescuers etc.*

### C. Children's volunteer group, "Small Hands"

HEC has a group of children who are willing to act toward peace and support the center, which was established in March 1997. They join the group by themselves and find a place where they can talk about peace, and actually do something to realize their ideas.

*Small Hands* consists of 40 members and has four activity sections. The Editing section (editing newspapers), the Material section (introducing books on the Holocaust to other children), the Rose Section (presenting *Anne Frank's Rose* to other schools and groups) and the Video section (producing video programs that mainly introduce the Holocaust and the center).

This children's activity is very important to the center's entire activity. We are placing our emphasis on the children, and it is the children who are going to create the next century. Offering a place in which to act towards peace and where to think about peace together is a realization of our main idea since the establishment of the museum. Having a stable base of children enables us to create wonderful ideas and activities.

The conference, held last July, was a great example. *"The Children's Peace Conference on the Holocaust"* was planned and managed mainly by the members of *Small Hands* with the support of adult volunteer staffs. The main guest of the conference, Prof. Yaffa Eliach (CUNY, USA), praised the conference very highly, because of the children's well organized management. The stage, filled with children presenting and discussing their ideas towards peace, instead of adults talking over difficult issues, also impressed her

#### **D. Conclusion**

We are now continuing to introduce the facts of the Holocaust to Japanese children. Although we feel the necessity of producing more methods and materials appropriate for Japanese children of various ages, we are happily seeing the extension of understanding and support for our activity . We sincerely ask our friends attending this conference at Yad Vashem for ideas and suggestions for helping us with our task in Japan.