



ZEN &
PEACEMAKING
Bonn



Auschwitz Is Like Coming Home

Testifying to the Absolute Cold - The Way of Warmheartedness

APPEAL FOR DONATIONS

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What is home? Why was I five times in Auschwitz, from 2010-2014 annually, and then five years no more? Why did I start writing a few times, a few pages at a time, and why do I always start all over again? Why write at all about experiences, about which a part of me can only remain silent or cry or both?

And even more disconcerting: Why do I go again now?

I have found a few answers, exactly one week before I will go for a walk in Krakow.

One answer is that there is so much to say that I can't say everything or only insufficiently, so I won't start at all.



Another one: You have so many people looking over your shoulder while writing, forget it, it's going to be bad.

Bernie is no longer there, why write. You neglected to visit him, you neglected to tell him everything you have to say, now you don't have to start anymore.

The fourth: The title is a cheek, you can't take it.

And fifth: In which language will you write?

My conclusion: Now I have some answers. I took the title and, to my own surprise, I write in German. Then so be it. Besides, I get pregnant with at least one book, so no wonder I have a hard time. But since yesterday something in me has started to vibrate and I was sure of my voice. Yes, I would write as I would like to: Intuitively, with a deadline, i.e. I can't and don't want to give the project more than a few hours, and then a few more to revise and translate. It feels good. I have cried a few times in the past few days, maybe I feel the loss - which one? which ones - the fear and the big cemetery come closer.

That was my conclusion from a week ago, and then I had no more time to finish writing. In the meantime, the attack on the synagogue in Halle that appalled me has taken place, and I have heard Jewish people, Rabbis, Germans, in speeches at solidarity events, and read, in newspapers. Anti-Semitism is no longer seen as exaggerated, as a puffed up problem of Zionists. Tragically this aggression is now perceived and finally taken seriously and evaluated differently than before.



Jews in my country are again receiving compassion, after years of a kind of love-withdrawal because of the blind spot of Israeli policy towards the Palestinians. Surely much too simplified, but I write it anyway. We all have blind spots, so much has been revealed to me, as individuals and as collectives. This attack and the tears in the eyes of two Rabbis of the synagogue in Cologne, the oldest in Germany, have strengthened me: Yes, I must, I will keep alive the memory of the ABSOLUTE COLD and its effects.

Why this title?

Because for me it is like that: On an emotional, spiritual, intellectual level. I suspected early on, as a small child, that there had to be something like a very dark place outside, which somehow had to correspond with inner dark places. Something that wanted to come up, yes, had to come up, was always laboriously kept down there. I can think of my two or three big dreams, which I had in the years of the retreats, the "Auschwitz years": Bernie and his large groups, including me, were always in them - in the dreams - underground. With masses of suitcases, clustered on each other, we did our work. Bernie made announcements, I can't think of any more. It was creepy and homey at the same time. Under the earth, where the dead may rest or hopefully find their last



rest, there was our sphere of action, the sphere of action of the Zen Peacemakers.

The domestic atmosphere was, as with about 60% of the Germans of my generation, the post-war generation - I was born in 1952 - poisoned by speechlessness, by verbal minefields, violence and addiction; and of course there was also love - always and everywhere people love or try to love, also in Auschwitz. I will return to this place in a moment. The collective situation was no less affected: Taboos, everybody tremendously busy, searching for pleasure and distraction, happy to be able to buy something for oneself and the family, longing, suppressed sadness, suppressed shame and guilt, suppressed depression, suppressed spiritual longing - the latter to this day, by the way.

The history lessons at school were still catastrophic in my generation, although I lived in a city, in Hannover, and later in Friedberg, even later in Franco-Spain, Madrid. Those who lived in the countryside and went to school had it much harder, there where still beaten regularly. In Madrid my school time ended with a very good report, in German, art and sport I had an A, they were my favorite subjects. I moved to Hamburg to study, with nothing but a backpack bought at the flea market. I wanted to become a teacher in English and German, like my beloved teacher and emotional rescuer in the German School, Madrid, Lore Lenberg. Our teachers, including the good and very ones, were war children, too, like our parents.



War children are so called because as children, the most formative time of our lives, they never experienced peace, they were born like my mother between 1929 and 1944, few were in resistance or lived in places where the war was hardly perceived. But I also met two German women, in my writing and dialogue workshops, who were born after 1945, but who nevertheless felt like war-children and had all the symptoms of war. They had absorbed the cumulative burden of their mothers, parents, their fear of death, hunger and their tension with their mother's milk.

So when, at the age of twelve or thirteen, I watched the first film on tv in which mountains of naked, white, malnourished bodies of women, men, children appeared, I don't know either the title of the film or the place where these scenes had been filmed, I fell into a shock that could only be remembered as such decades later. This had happened to many of my peers in the same or a similar way. I had gotten used to not ask questions, and history lessons, if they lasted until the twentieth century at all, always stopped with the Weimar Republic. Then the school year was always just over. I still see the maps of the "Polish Divisions" in front of me today, but without any emotional reference, let alone the fact that German Nazis, who by chance might have been the parents of our teachers, might have something to do with the division of our neighbor country.



ZEN & PEACEMAKING

Bonn

Now this is not a text about war children and their descendants, with whom I have been researching, writing, working, listening for about fifteen years. It is a text about one of the most wonderful, disturbing and at the same time deeply healing and transforming meditation-offerings I have come across: The so-called Auschwitz-Bearing-Witness-Retreats, and here specifically about the next one, in the beginnings of November.

I am going to participate in this one and kindly ask for your donation or support for it. I cannot finance it on my own, and so I do the exercise again, as so many times before, that I ask for materialized pearls for my prayer necklace ("Mala") which I will take with me on my pilgrimage to Poland and carry with me constantly. On the necklace I will attach the names of the noble donors, written on colored silk-ribbons. I can only say that they mean a lot to me, beyond the financial support. The "Mala" says that I am supported by you in one of my most important, heart-concerns, but perhaps also in one of the noblest concerns, but who can say that about oneself! Does that not sound presumptuous?



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During my first trip to Auschwitz, already in Krakow, during the meetings with participants inside cafés, on foot through the wonderful city, during visits to synagogues, cemeteries, with kosher food or Polish dishes, I cried, cried and cried again and again. You certainly know where there is allowed a lot of crying, there is also a lot of laughter, very much even. Well, it was always both, during the retreats, and by this much closeness arose. Anyone who goes through the underworld with a group, explores the cruel, brutally and sadistically inflicted death of people and allows getting touched: such a group grows together enormously. During all the retreats I took part in in Poland, tears flowed not only from me: In the barracks, near the wall of execution, at the large blackboards on which one could read what had happened here and, for example, saw a photo of women with their children who had to undress in winter - during meditation in the gas chamber, in the "sauna"... in the places where we all recited the Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead, in the many languages of the retreat participants present, together. And while sitting in a circle for several hours every day on the selection ramp: in silence and reciting the names of the murdered.



Today I know that I did not only cry out of grief, shame, despair, horror, compassion, extreme distress when, for example, I heard the same Jewish name sung nine times in a row from any place in Europe or recited it myself. No, I also always cried because I finally was. Again. At home.

Why at home?

Our spiritual home has to do with our wholeness as a human being and as *this* human being. Since I have also worked therapeutically, group-therapeutically, shamanically, I know, or believe to know, that we humans unconsciously or consciously strive for our wholeness. In my opinion, this is what can be understood realistically, and at the same time optimistically, as a healing path. It is not characterized by mere delight, always and everywhere, as suggested in the paradise of consumption and pleasure, but rather by the fact that everything can be as it is. And that our



dead belong to us and to this wholeness and home. The dead of our families and the dead of our collective. In a good therapy and in constellation work, which I enjoyed various times, this can be experienced. We may perhaps be the children and young people we were, but were not allowed to show. With good spiritual guidings, we may want to deepen our longing for the meaningfulness of our lives, we may want to be able to ask questions about entanglement with guilt and its solution, about the possibilities and limits of forgiveness and reconciliation, about true love and the recovery of betrayal, about an ethical life and a courageous way of dealing with our limits, the limits of others and the last Great Limit itself: Death. How do we reconcile subtle religious aspirations with the pressure to live our lives as adults?

Only during a therapy, during a deep conversation, during a time of pausing do we become aware of how much of these pressing questions we have held down, how much un-lived sadness and despair, **unquenched longing for self and world knowledge, for reconciliation is in us!**

Auschwitz is such a place: Of pausing. The silence and the sincere conversation with companions from all over the world. Prayer, meditation. A place that invites us to become whole, simply because it is there, on the edge of Europe, like a lament for the dead that rarely reaches our ears. We push every thought away in horror and prefer to distract ourselves. Who complains? Who accuses whom? What exactly was going on there?

Since my earliest childhood I have had a feeling for wounded places, in people and beings, in systems and relationships, in the world. They seem to me like wounds that want to be bandaged, seen, healed. For some years I have been slowly finding words for it. I miss my Jewish sisters and brothers, from all age groups and



from all over the world. I lack their culture, their normal, average and outstanding humanity, I lack their religiousness, if they were religious, their presence. I believe there are not only numb places on our body, our soul, which we feel (want to feel) for a good reason or after operations, hardly any more or not at all. On our planet there are small and large wounds everywhere, deaf places crying for loving attention. Bernie called these places "undernourished, underserved" - how ingenious it is! Energy always flows to underserved places, but it's not the best, not the healing energy that flows, it's an energy like quietly leaking blood.

Bernie often spoke and wrote about our two hands as Jack and Jim. When Jack suddenly bleeds because we cut our finger, Jim doesn't desperately reflect about what to do: He grabs the Jack, wants only one thing: Stop the bleeding! I experience it the same way with Birkenau and the land around it, the Polish guides and the many who have put their lives at the service of this horrifying place: **My soul wants to quench the bleeding! To dry the tears! To express my infinite sadness in silent dialogues. I just want to be where "they" are, where we belong, when tortured, murdered: At the side of the suffering and the dead.**



Yes, we belong there. We Germans, and because the horrible suffering affects and has affected so many, and unfortunately is still continuing, many go to this place in Poland to listen, to heal themselves and the world, or at least, as in the real old fairy tales, to contribute, with our hot tears, a heart to melt, a pair of eyes to close, a flower to blossom, a bird to sing.

As a collective we can only reach at our wholeness if we hear the call of these places and take it seriously. In Auschwitz we bow our heads and unite: Ourselves, who are still alive, with the dead. The membrane between HERE and THERE is very thin and can become even thinner during our practice, in silence or while celebrating the Holy Masses, singing the Kaddish, the ceremony "Gate of Sweet Nectar", and on Friday evening during Shabbat.

Next to the house where my mother Christiane Weißmann was born, born Strunk, stood a synagogue. I have to cry when I think about it again. They have become tears of love. A stone of the size of a landrover works as memorial. Both buildings were standing at a crossroads of the small town of Vitnica. Vietz. Vietz at the Ostbahn. My grandfather Hermann Strunk was a simple worker who had worked his way up to become a master potter, burning bricks, tiles and building tiled stoves in two of his own brick factories. His son Alfred entered the business, later he would also own an Angora rabbit farm in Vietz and a fittings factory in



Eisenberg/Thuringia. I saw with my own eyes the ruins and remains of the two brick factories and the Angora rabbit farm, where slave workers had to work, probably in total 600 of them. There were active business relations with a stove factory in Königsberg. My family on my mother's side had been wealthy and respected at that time. Alfred was one of the first who proudly drove an automobile, and I saw photos of Nazis celebrating in the garden of a manor house, whose former owner was Jewish, that also belonged to "us" in Groß-Cammin. I am shivering when I think of these photos, of the slave workers, of whom I met a few, on my first trip to Poland, in 2006 or 2007. They behaved very friendly, warm-heartedly towards me, the grandchild of their former patrons. It was overwhelming in various ways.

My grandfather joined the party early, I found in archive documents, and the synagogue served for Nazi-party-gatherings. I read that in the book about Vietz, one of those with many distortions, lies, denials. I have a deeply rooted distrust towards German wealth, I had heard and seen and read too much. Exploitation had taken place, slave laborers gave their sweat, their dreams and their lifetime and, who knows what else, to the two, later three factories of my grandparents. I tremble. My fantasies about tiles being transported to extermination camps did not stop, and at least once a year I went to my doctor because of unsupportable back pain, in connection with those fantasies, frights. I feared that nobody told me truth. I discovered that it was important to do deep research, but not as much as I had feared. It is my family karma that I face, but I also learned to take care of my own. I have or had enough to do with my karma, with the seeds and deeds, with sewing and patching, with asking forgiveness and forgiving, and with the possibilities and limits of unconditional love, forgiveness, in my family of origin and my spiritual family, with my practice, my doubts, my shortcomings and my beauty.



I find that I no longer have anger in me, no anger, only tenderness and sadness, perhaps.

I am so happy, Bernie, that I met your voice in your first book "Bearing Witness in Auschwitz" about twelve years ago. Bearing witness has become my path, my daily breathing exercise and my bread that I want to share! I am sad, Bernie, for you now "belong to the majority", as Roshi Soen Nakagawa called the dead, a writer and poet, he too.

Roshi Soen once said: "When an event is unrepeatable, it is beauty. (...) It's something so subtle that you can't talk about it."

I have tried to talk about the beauty of the "Bearing Witness Retreats" in Auschwitz, which were repeated even



though they are unrepeatabe. It is really and essentially about opening our hearts. Unconditional love. Also towards the perpetrators and all potentialities within ourselves. About our own emotions as witnesses who can bring blessings or harm. About the different hells within ourselves and our families, societies and **the always existing possibility of heaven, wonder**, and that we as humans, some of us Bodhisattvas "in spe", can really make a difference, here and now and everywhere.

Bernie's vision, which I so highly appreciate, is, according to my imperfect knowledge and perception, the essence of a group vision of the Bodhisattvas: Eve Myonen Marko, Joan Jiku Halifax, Sandra Jishu Holmes, Wendy Egyoku Nakao and certainly others I do not know. Peter Eihei Levitt and Rabbi Don Singer have brought the Kaddish into the form recited in Birkenau to this day. I got to know and appreciate Eve, Peter and Don in Auschwitz: Roshi Joan I met in 2018 in a wonderful Sesshin in the Netherlands, Roshi Wendy in a Bearing Witness Retreat with Lakota Natives in the Black Hills, South Dakota. I did not get to know Zen teacher Sandra, Bernie's second wife, before her death, but she too was inspired by and inspiring herself the Bearing Witness Retreats and a driving force for their manifestation.



I met my precept teacher Roshi Barbara Salaam Wegmüller at the end of my first retreat, in 2010. In 2011 I took the Zen Peacemaker vows in an enchanting ceremony in Bonn, together with her husband Roland Wegmüller. Both became Zen teachers shortly afterwards, together with some others, and now they are Roshis. I also met my first Zen teacher there, already in the plane from Frankfurt to Krakow: Roshi Genjo Marinello. I studied five intensive years with him (2013-2018), took the vows for the second time in 2014. I have been seven times in Seattle, always attending a 7-day sesshin and additional study times beyond - two of them were 8-day Rohatsu sesshins. Altogether I spent probably half a year in the USA, in the Rinzai temple Chobo-Ji. In addition, there were three bearing witness retreats, which I experienced with Genjo, two in Auschwitz and one in the Black Hills, as well as four sesshins near Bonn, which I organized for him, and worked hard to let grow a Sangha out of an initial Rinzai study group together with others. In March 2018 I put the leadership of this Sangha into the hands of Daniel Speicher.

Since 2017 I studied and practiced with Roshi Michel Dubois, with whom I was attending two street retreats in Paris (2017, 2019) and some sesshins. I also attended sesshins with Roshi Frank DeWaele and Roshi Joan Halifax. The "Little Temple" in Bonn-Kessenich experiences me as a kind of hermit alone and sometimes with a few others, on various occasions, sitting, practicing, in a circle there or in the city, on zen peacemaker days. I am sitting in Bonn with a Christian Contemplation teacher from Via Integralis: Winfried Semmler Koddenbrock.



His community supported me from my second Auschwitz-Retreat and invited us for a talk. My heart belongs to the writers any all my group attendants in thirty years, and everyone I have ever met, the children, the handicapped, the refugees and the homeless, the coming seven generations.

Why do I tell all this?

There is a need to bear witness to my journey over the last twelve years with Bernie Glassman Roshi. And I haven't yet told anything about the two self-organized Lampedusa pilgrimages, the Piraeus pilgrimage, the retreat in Bosnia/Herzegovina, or the numerous Zen Peacemaker Days in Belgium, Holland, and Bonn over the past seven years.

Perhaps I would like to make visible:

I have found my way and walk it, beside my vocation as a writer, poetry therapist and group leader, just as I like to serve the world, the small one, the big one. It is obvious that the times of volunteer work, joyful and necessary retreat into contemplation has become and will become longer and more extensive, also due to my age. I hope that you can see that our social commitment is only beneficial and can come from a space of love if we cultivate it within ourselves and keep it as pure as possible.



Please help me to fulfill my vows.

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I feel infinitely great gratitude for the fact that you have taken the time to read up here.

From my heart, all the best and love. For you, for them, for everyone. If you want to give me something other than money for my pilgrimage to Auschwitz/Birkenau, then please contact me, send it to me or call: +49-163/2695423. Memorial candles can also be bought via me, for 20 €. You give me a name or we write on the candle: "Unknown".

Bonn, 2029-10-26
Monika Jion Winkelmann



Dear friends, comrades, peacemakers!

Please, be assured that I am also going to Birkenau very consciously for the following friends and beloved:

- So-called handicapped people, on whom the most cruel experiments were carried out, who were tortured and intentionally alienated, with gross lies about what would happen to their children, from their families. For my nephew Florian Reichelt and his Mother, my sister Sabine, for my friends Isabell Rosenberg and Georgia von Schlieffen.
- Sinti and Roma who are dear to my heart. Unfortunately I didn't manage to go to the documentation center in Heidelberg this year..., so sorry, but I'll keep up this neglected topic.
- My very best friend Siegfried Dunde was gay and died of AIDS. For him and the many who were tortured, persecuted and killed for their sexual orientation. For all lesbian-loving women, girlfriends. For my former student and dear friend Monique Mathieu and the many women whom I got to know in the two decades of my workshops in the Frauenbildungs- und Ferienhaus Zülpich.
- For my friend Peter Levitt, who as an artist, poet, writer may stand for the many artists, writers whose books have been burned, who were humiliated and killed, particularly in Sobibor, and everywhere, and afterwards they themselves were killed.
- For my friend Rabbi Don Singer, who may stand for the Rabbis who were humiliated, tortured and killed, as well as clergy of other religions. I am thinking here especially of Father Manfred Deselaers, who is doing his love work for peace in Birkenau at the Center for Dialogue and Prayer.
- For the political prisoners who stood up for freedom, justice and truth and had to leave their lives in one of the camps.
- For the countless women and girls, certainly also boys, who had to be available for the sexual desires of their tormentors, always in danger of death.
- For all musicians and artists who were sadistically forced to play music and perform their art to people, at times and at places of unfathomable coldness and cruelty.
- For all those who participated in the "Dialogue- and Writing-Workshop for War-Children and War-Grand- and Greatgrand-Children" from 2012 until today, in Bonn, Münster and Berlin.
- For all who participated in the 5-year project: "Council for War-Children and their Descendants", every 3 weeks, in the Catholic Family Education Center Bonn, from 2012-2017.
- For all who have ever supported my retreats and sesshins in Seattle and elsewhere, through financial donations, emotional support and patience.
- For all children, always and everywhere. For my daughter Lisa Denise, forever.