

## WENDY EGYOKU NAKAO

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### The Case

It was the first night of the second Bearing Witness retreat at Auschwitz/Birkenau. Speaking to the group in the Auschwitz auditorium, Rabbi Ani Shalom was overcome with the spirits there and began to sing and dance. The entire group was swept up in this energy and began to sing and dance with him, weaving through the rows of chairs and the aisles of the entire auditorium. People began to feel uneasy and, as the unease rippled throughout the group, the singing and dancing stopped. People were upset that they were dancing and singing at Auschwitz.

Bernie called a meeting of the key people involved with the retreat. We went to an adjacent room and sat in a circle. People expressed their upset with him, saying,

“Why are we singing and dancing at Auschwitz?”

“This is only the first day of the retreat. This is something—maybe—for the last day.”

“This is so wrong.”

People vented. Bernie listened. Then a man to my left leaned toward Bernie, who was on my right, and demanded, “You need to fix this!”

Bernie responded, “I am not here to fix anything. I am here to bear witness.”

## Commentary

In that moment, bearing witness opened up for me—*just actively listening*. Bearing witness is not passive at all. It is listening in such a way that one is alive to whatever is emerging, not trying to hold on to an idea of how things should be or intending to make the situation other than it is. The *just* part is Not-Knowing, being still and open in the midst of a situation. The *actively listening* part is Bearing Witness, touching and being touched by how people and situations are in the moment. These arise together along with the third tenet of Taking Action, the spontaneous response to the moment. Bernie's action in that moment was him saying, "I am not here to fix anything. I am here to bear witness." The Three Tenets are always in motion, arising together in an unending, life-giving spiral.