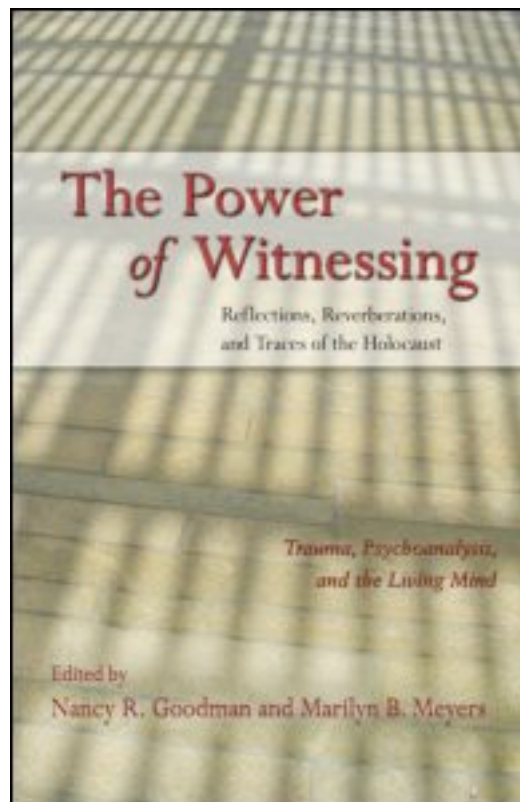


# Routledge Mental Health

## The Power of Witnessing

### Reflections, Reverberations, and Traces of the Holocaust: Trauma, Psychoanalysis, and the Living Mind



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- 2 Edited by Nancy R. Goodman, and Marilyn B. Meyers.

Witnessing comes in as many forms as the trauma that gives birth to it. The Holocaust, undeniably one of the greatest traumatic events in recent human history, still resonates into the twenty-first century. The echoes that haunt those who survived continue to reach their children and others who did not share the experience directly. In what ways is this massive trauma processed and understood, both for survivors and future generations?

The answer, as deftly illustrated by Nancy Goodman and Marilyn Meyers, lies in the power of witnessing: the act of acknowledging that trauma took place, coupled with the desire to share that knowledge with others to build a space in which to reveal, confront, and symbolize it. As the contributors to this book demonstrate, testimonial writing and memoir, artwork, poetry, documentary, theater, and even the simple recollection of a memory are ways that honor and serve as forms of witnessing. Each chapter is a fusion of narrative and metaphor that exists as evidence of the living mind that emerges amid the dead spaces produced by mass trauma, creating a revelatory, transformational space for the terror of knowing and the possibility for affirmation of hope, courage, and endurance in the face of almost unspeakable evil.

Additionally, the power of witnessing is extended from the Holocaust to contemporary instances of mass trauma and to psychoanalytic treatments, proving its efficacy in the dyadic relationship of everyday practice for both patient and analyst.

The Holocaust is not an easy subject to approach, but the intimate and personal stories included here add up to an act of witnessing in and of itself, combining the past and the present and placing the trauma in the realm of knowing, sharing, and understanding.

Contributors: Harriet Basseches, Elsa Blum, Bridget Conley–Zilkic, Paula Ellman, Susan Elmendorf, George Halasz, Geoffrey Hartman, Renee Hartman, Elaine Neumann Kulp–Shabad, Dori Laub, Clemens Loew, Gail Humphries Mardirosian, Margit Meissner, Henri Parens, Arlene Kramer Richards, Arnold Richards, Sophia Richman, Katalin Roth, Nina Shapiro–Perl, Myra Sklarew, Ervin Staub.

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## Reviews

"Thank you to Nancy Goodman and Marilyn Meyers for the gift of The Power of Witnessing. Once you start this remarkable book, you don't want to put it down. That may seem very surprising when you are reliving and witnessing one of the worst examples of narcissistic rage and human destruction the world has

ever seen. In some ways it is still beyond comprehension. However, you realize as soon as you start reading some of these descriptions that we owe it to every single person in the book (and elsewhere) who has suffered like this not only to read their story but to honor their ability to finally tell the world what they have suffered and lost. We must witness all of this and bear the pain. By being there with them and sharing it word for word, we can feel that we are doing our part in helping them not to feel alone and helping the world not to forget. When Dori Laub describes wanting to hug each person after they have given their testimony of their Holocaust experiences, I had the same experience as I finished each chapter. The sense of intimacy was profound. I thank Nancy and Marilyn for this incredible privilege and what they have given the world." – **Carolyn Ellman, Ph.D., editor, *The Modern Freudians* (Jason Aronson, 1999)**

"The Power of Witnessing is a rich, disturbing, provocative, startling but ultimately inspiring collection of essays related to the Holocaust by some of the leading thinkers of our time on some of its key issues. We encounter incredible stories of cruelty, elevating ones on how to rise above it, and the challenge of retelling those stories. Though the focus on one level is the Holocaust, on another level it is really about the human condition. The book holds up a mirror for us to see ourselves—whether we are students or faculty on campus, those involved in interfaith relations or simply wish to reflect on the follies of man. Anyone who believes in our common humanity must take a long, hard look into this mirror. I am grateful to the contributors for allowing us this

privilege. Read this book if you wish to confront the human condition and discover ways of transcending it." – **Professor Akbar Ahmed, Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies, American University, and author, Journey into America (Brookings Institution Press, 2010)**

"Nancy Goodman and Marilyn Meyers have contributed a gripping collection—told by survivors of the Holocaust and the witnesses to their testimonies—about the power of witnessing. These highly personal essays are an important addition to the growing 'literature of testimony.' There can never be too many. Goodman, Meyers, and the authors in their book affirm that the power of witnessing lies in the restoration of humanity born in the process of the telling and the receiving of the horrors that mark this period in our collective history. The spiral of witnessing—across generations and consulting rooms, in the narratives, poetry, and images—leaves so much more than 'a trace.'" – **Rachel Peltz, Ph.D., Psychoanalytic Institute of Northern California**

"As an artist and as the only daughter to Holocaust survivors, I celebrate the publication of *The Power of Witnessing*. Those of us raised in the presence of absence understand the necessity not only to 'remember' but to find a way of healing. There is no question that the writings in this book—whether coming from a psychoanalytic understanding or the beauty of a Myra Sklarew poem—emphasize finding a way to make peace with loss, to come full circle and allow the survival of beauty to live on." – **Mindy Weisel, artist, Washington, DC**

"The Power of Witnessing, edited by Nancy Goodman and Marilyn Meyers, invites us to revive the horror, the outrage, and the violence done to blameless people during the Holocaust—and to their descendents. As the contributors to this book vividly demonstrate, the acts of witnessing that cause us to remember are not on behalf of a just revenge for injustice done; they remind us to do the work necessary within ourselves and our societies to do everything possible to ensure that its like will never happen again. The book combines oral history and psychoanalytic insight with moral persuasion." – **Charles Hanly, Ph.D., President, International Psychoanalytical Association**

"Let me begin by saying I was reluctant to read this book. I anticipated it would be depressing and traumatizing. How wrong I was. In their edited book, The Power of Witnessing, Drs. Goodman and Meyers illustrate the importance of witnessing as an agent in healing. By using the experiences of authors who tell the story of their own trauma or witnessing the trauma of others during the Holocaust, the editors have broadened our understanding of witnessing to all important life events. At a time in our modern history when we are exposed to so many traumas in the world, it is especially important we not become immune but instead listen and try to understand the human effect these experiences have on individuals, groups, and society. All who want to help expand the human experience of others and themselves, whether they are psychotherapists, parents, teachers, or loving friends, should read this book." – **Joyce Lowenstein, Ph.D., psychologist**

"A deeply moving and important work. Goodman and Meyers' book brings together an exceptional group of papers which constitute a succession of Odysseys. Together they create a vivid testimony to human resilience in the face of essentially unimaginable terror and sadism. Through their nightmares and those confronted by each contributor, we learn just why the Holocaust is timeless and belongs to everyone and just why we must attend to all such new incidents with vigilance and inward questioning, balanced by the imperative we remain curious." – **David Tuckett, Professor of Psychoanalysis, University College, London, and Fellow of the Institute of Psychoanalysis, London**

### **Author/Editor Biography**

Nancy R. Goodman, Ph.D., is a Training and Supervising Analyst with the New York Freudian Society (Washington, DC Program) and the International Psychoanalytic Association. She writes on female development, analytic listening, Holocaust trauma and witnessing, film and psychoanalysis, enactments, and sadomasochism. Her most recent publications include "Enactment: Opportunity for Symbolizing Trauma" (Ellman & Goodman, 2011) and "Nancy Goodman Wonders What Is Normal in Myth and Psychic Reality" (2010); she is currently working on *Battling the Life and Death Forces in Sadomasochism: Theoretical and Clinical Perspectives* (Karnac, 2013; with Harriet Basseches and Paula Ellman). She maintains a full-time psychoanalytic practice in Bethesda, Maryland.



Marilyn B. Meyers, Ph.D., is on the faculty of the Washington School of Psychiatry, where she teaches and supervises in the postgraduate program. She is President of the Section on Couples and Families of the Division of Psychoanalysis (39) of the APA, and has a longstanding interest in working with Holocaust survivors and their children. Her publications include "When the Holocaust Haunts the Couple: Hope, Guilt and Survival" (2005) in *Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Couple Work*, and "Am I My Mother's Keeper? Certain Vicissitudes in the Mother–Daughter Relationship Concerning Envy" (1988) in *The Mother–Daughter Relationship*. In addition, she has presented papers on the use of film to illustrate the aftermath of massive trauma. She maintains a private practice where she sees individuals and couples.

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