



## Episode 3: The Creative Spirituality of Compassion with Dr. Shakti Butler

### Transcript *(lightly edited for readability)*

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**Roxy Manning** 00:13

Welcome to Fierce Compassion, the podcast that explores the power of compassion in creating an antiracist society. I'm Roxy Manning.

**Sarah Peyton** 00:22

And I'm Sarah Peyton. We are delighted to have Dr. Shakti Butler, the documentary filmmaker, as a guest on our podcast today.

**Roxy Manning** 00:30

We'll explore with Shakti the power of love, spirituality and dreams as inspirations and energizers for our creativity and antiracism work. In today's episode, you'll also get a glimpse into history. You'll get to see the importance of family as we develop our identity as activists for change.

**Sarah Peyton** 00:49

And you'll hear how historical leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr and Malcolm X, who have impacted so many people, helped to shape Shakti's antiracism journey. We get to travel with Shakti back to her early years in Harlem to hear how she was impacted by these movement leaders, people who also inspired us, and who've probably inspired you too.

**Roxy Manning** 01:23

Welcome to Fierce Compassion. I'm Roxy Manning.

**Sarah Peyton** 01:27

And I'm Sarah Peyton and we are delighted to have Dr. Shakti Butler as a guest on our podcast. Shakti Butler, PhD, visionary, filmmaker, transformative learning educator, wife, mother, grandmother and friend to many, is president and founder of World Trust Educational Services, Inc, a nonprofit transformative educational organization. Rooted in love and justice, World Trust produces films, curricula, workshops, and programs that are catalysts for institutional, structural and cultural change. Dr. Butler has produced five documentaries, and one clip alone of these documentaries has had over 30 million views, generating national dialogue and critical thinking

that is impacting institutions and communities. And in addition, Dr. Butler served as diversity consultant and advisor on a film I love - the Oscar winning Disney animated film Zootopia - which focuses on challenging bias and systemic inequity.

**Roxy Manning** 02:37

I personally use Shakti's work in retreats and workshops. And I'm always so delighted at the depth of reflection of engagement that people experience with your films. So Shakti, what more would you like to share about your work and how you entered this field?

**Shakti Butler** 02:55

Well, what I'd like to share, first of all, is my profound gratitude for such a beautiful introduction. And, and to be in your good company, because I have learned from both of you so much. And I feel like this is almost a little dream come true that I get a chance to hang out with you for an hour, you know. Just the three of us to talk about how we are and who we are and what we're doing. And I love the title Fierce Compassion. Compassion means a great deal to me. So thank you.

**Sarah Peyton** 03:28

It's wonderful that you mentioned that because that's one of our first questions. How do you define compassionate self compassion?

**Shakti Butler** 03:37

Well, you know, I was actually delighted when I was thinking about, well, how do I define compassion? And I have a very short little story I would like to share about this. So I have been a meditator for many, many years. And one of my practices is not only meditation but self inquiry. And I had been asking for quite some time, what is the meaning of compassion? Because I'd never been satisfied much with what I've read about the different definitions of compassion. At this particular point, I was writing my dissertation. And I had the profound luxury of being in a cabin, where I could go and write during the week and go home on the weekends. And during that time, I experienced an overcoming amount of sadness about race, my experience with race in my life, and the lack of compassion among people. And as this was reaching a crescendo, and I was kind of spiraling downward, I realized that more than ever, I needed to continue my practices, my practice of meditation and chanting. And one morning I woke up and I had been crying and crying and crying. And I'm like, let me, let me chant. And after the chant was over, I found myself moving into a meditative state. And in that meditative state, I became like a stone that you would cast into the river or into the water. And as the stone, I began to travel downward, towards the bottom, or the floor of the river. When I hit the bottom of the river, I kind of bounced, you know, where it's really soft, and squishy on the bottom. I bounced a little bit. And then I felt this sense of grief that I

had been having just leaving me. And in its place, I felt love penetrate every cell of my body, divine love. And I heard this voice say to me, this is compassion. This is a state. This is a state of being. And so when I think about compassion, I recognize that we all have it inside of us. We must uncover it, play with it, practice it, and recognize what it does because I can shift my state, if I choose to be aware, if I choose to be conscious, and then I experience compassion.

**Sarah Peyton** 06:27

When you're talking about this, it's so profound. And I wonder, does it transcend itself? Or is there also self compassion? Or does self become meaningless in this?

**Shakti Butler** 06:41

I think the answer is yes to all of them. Meaning, I can feel compassion for myself, when I'm in this state, of recognizing how profound the role of divine love plays in my life. It's not something I've created but it's something that's part of who I am. I can apply that compassion to others, which is really tricky if I'm not happy with another person or not liking what they're doing, or how they're behaving. But understanding that this ability to denigrate ourselves, the ability to succumb to, you know, grief, and trauma and pain and history, is something that we have to work with, because it's teaching us something. But whenever we can apply love to it, it becomes the balm, the B-A-L-M, the balm, that allows us to expand our hearts instead of contract. So I think it's true in all of those areas that you mentioned, Sarah.

**Roxy Manning** 07:45

And there's something in what you're saying that I really resonate with, which is that we can have compassion toward someone else, even when we don't like what they're doing, right? But those two things are not independent.

**Shakti Butler** 07:59

That is very much like my last film, Healing Justice, which is about interrupting the youth to prison pipeline and the ability to actually hold multiple things at one time. So I can allow my feelings to be whatever they are while at the same time talking to myself and to other people, sometimes silently, sometimes not. But also wanting to invite all of us to step into our own greatness, to step into who we can be in the midst of chaos. How do we find that center that allows us to be compassionate with ourselves and others?

**Roxy Manning** 08:40

And I'm actually glad that you mentioned the film, because your body of work is amazing. And I remember, that there's one video you have of the two women at the supermarket line, this little

clip online. I love that clip. And that was my very first introduction to your work. But I'm actually curious, I want to go way back. Where did your antiracism journey begin?

**Shakti Butler** 09:04

I can tell you quite explicitly actually. When I was eight years old - I grew up in Harlem, by the way just so people understand. I am a mixed race, African American, black woman, whatever term people like to use, and I'm very fair skinned. And so I have walked through the world as I call it as a light-skinned, colored girl, you know, for as long as I can remember. But I had a friend. Our parents were friends. And we used to get Ebony magazine at my house and she used to get Jet magazine at her house. And I've told the story many times because it's so so much alive inside of my being. Anyway, we got to her house and I opened up her Jet magazine with great anticipation. And I opened directly to the pictures of Emmett Till. And I was eight. I remember I collapsed onto the floor, hysterical, crying. I could not in my eight year old mind, and even today in my mind, understand, really fully understand, the hatred that can allow people to do what they did to that little boy. Of course, he was a big boy, to me, he was 13 and I was younger. But I never forgot that. And it's only I would say, in the last few years since I started doing some of your work, your neurobiological work, Sarah, that I don't cry when I tell that story. Not because - it's just as, it's still as impactful for me. But our ability to be inhumane to other human beings is something that I think was the catalyst for me to want to find peace, to find love, to find justice, although I didn't have the language for it at that time. I just knew it was wrong. And that was my launch into how do we, how do we make it better.

**Roxy Manning** 11:11

I got chills, you know. I have young, well, no longer young, but I have boys, and just imagining someone doing this to any of our children, any of our children, is heartbreaking. And what I'm really struck by is that, you know, your young self seeing this, had a call to love. Had a call to create more peace in the world. And I know that some people have the absolute opposite call, right? So it's kind of like, I'm gonna have anger and hatred that somebody can do this to somebody else. What do you think made you turn towards love as opposed to rejection, anger, hatred?

**Shakti Butler** 11:48

Well, realistically speaking, I did have great periods in my life where I hated. Where I turned away from Martin Luther King and embraced Brother Malcolm because I felt like he was telling the truth. And I feel like they were both telling the truth now, from very different perspectives, and how they both evolved over time towards each other in terms of their understanding of the world. And so, you know, I spent a lot of time really angry, really, really angry and involved in a lot of political work, a lot of movement building work. But at the same time, what I really longed for was

connection. And I was aware of the fact that I longed for that connection, both inside myself and with other people, and people who denigrated me or had impressions of who I was as a young black girl and my, my light skinned privilege, you know. And so, what I'm saying, I guess, to both of you is, we human beings are so capable of holding many, many things at the same time. But where do we direct our action? Where do we put our ability to change and step into that greatness that I talked about? And what made me do that, I think, is that my gift, as a person, in terms of one of the gifts that I feel that I've received, is love. That I do love, deeply and passionately. And that love is joy. It's joyous. It's amazing. It's healing. It's comforting. It's wisdom. It's all those things. So yes, that's what I want when I grow up.

**Sarah Peyton** 11:56

I feel the joy. I feel, I just feel the contagion of it, the being carried with it. And this is a complex journey that you're describing, from finding the photographs of Emmett Till, to the movement through Martin Luther King, Jr. and the incredible Brother Malcolm, and then finding the integration of all of this. Is there some way for you to speak to us about moments when self compassion has been particularly important in this journey?

**Shakti Butler** 14:24

Yes. I think one of the emotions that needs some deep introspection, although I know I'm speaking to the choir here, is dealing with shame. I experienced tremendous amounts of shame in my life. Starting with being a child. I mean, a little child. Like two. And these are stories, of course I would share at another time, but I do have ways that I felt like I really didn't belong in the world. No belonging. And that I was a problem. Starting with the fact that my mother's family basically disowned her when she, when she had a child, she had me. And I don't really know, I never got to know much about her family. And also understanding that my mother, who was a white woman born in Russia, really had racialized understandings of the world in which she lived even though she married my father and she loved me. And so I had to learn how to love my mom. It was one of my first. Although it took a long time healing pieces around shame. And it was compassion for her and compassion for me that allowed that to happen. I had a friend who came to visit me. My mother lived with me, you know. After my father died she lived with me until she died, which was for many years. And I remember I had a friend come to the house, and I was complaining about my mom. And he got very quiet. And he just looked at me and he said, "Just love her." And it was like this arrow pierced my heart. And I realized that I was not going to change my mom. She did the best that she could. She loved me with all of her heart. And my expectation of her understanding my journey was something that I could not manage. But I could feed her her favorite foods. I could read to her. I could, you know, do little things that I know that she appreciated that allowed her to be more comfortable in her space. And not too long after that, my

mother fell and hit her head, and she passed away. But I was able to say to her, "I'm sorry, Mom. I'm sorry for any grief that I've caused you." And she just looked at me and she said, "Oh, that's okay." That was a healing moment. And I was so fortunate that I had the ability to love her and accept her. And what that taught me is that everyone deserves that love. And it's not just for the person who you're directing it towards. It's also for my own healing, for your own healing. That we have to find a way to be at the center of the storm, whatever that storm might be, and to hold on to that place so that we can do the practices that we need to do in order to step into our fullness.

**Roxy Manning** 17:51

As I'm hearing this story, there's both this idea that you couldn't love her, you couldn't get to that place of truly embracing her, until you had some compassion for who she was right? This young Russian woman in this world that's completely foreign to her and who's internalized these beliefs that in some ways might be harming her child. And so holding compassion for her, and holding compassion for yourself - some self compassion - around the complexity of your feelings. Both of those would be necessary in order to be able to love.

**Shakti Butler** 18:24

Yes, that's very accurate. Very accurate.

**Roxy Manning** 18:28

I'm really struck by the complexity of, and you kind of referenced this earlier, that essentially, we tend to simplify things a lot. Like we want to have the simple explanations, but it's really our capacity to hold complexity, to have anger and love, right? To have anger and self compassion, shame and forgiveness, that makes this possible.

**Shakti Butler** 18:49

Yes, yes. Thank you for saying that. I know that you could probably speak a little bit to this, Sarah, yourself, holding all of the complexity that you have held and are holding in your life. I know that within all of that complexity, there is this soothing nature of being able to find one's way through the morass of what life can be. I had something I want to say but I completely forgot.

**Sarah Peyton** 19:30

As you're both talking about, you know, these lived experiences of shame and love and compassion, I am thinking about that. About the way that shame is the emotion that brings us the highest amount of stress of any emotion. That it is the hardest, the hardest thing to negotiate. I mean, if there is an emotion that is, you know, literally fire that we have to walk through, that is the one.

**Shakti Butler** 20:03

Right. Right. Right. I so feel what you're saying, because shame makes me want to close my eyes and not see when I really need to open my eyes and look. And I need to ask questions. I think, what I, what I remember, what I wanted to just talk about is this little bit of inquiry that I'm involved in right now, which is looking at what it means to actually hold the polarities of life. So when we, when I talk about what it means to live in a world of both ends, binary thinking some people refer to it, is that there's a tendency to want to look at one end of the binary thought, or the other end, when in fact, we need to explore them both. Because, you know, if you ask me to give you my hand, I can't give you the top part of my hand or the bottom part of my hand, I have to give you my whole hand. And, and so when I'm working with fear, for example, depending upon what I'm afraid of, or shame, or anger, or jealousy, or guilt, or any of those kinds of things, that I would refer to as the enmities of the heart, I realized that I need to be able to look at whatever it is generating that fear, or that shame, or whatever it might be. And look at what's the antithesis of it? And pay attention to that as well, because it's going to guide me, it's going to guide me to some kind of place of finding that center of the storm. I don't know if I'm being clear.

**Sarah Peyton** 21:44

You're being very clear.

**Shakti Butler** 21:49

Yeah, it's, it's, it's sort of being able to work the spectrum of, of the both and in order to help find a place of balance.

**Roxy Manning** 22:01

And that, like you said, being able to walk towards the full spectrum of our emotions and embrace them and harvest it and say, what is it that I can learn from not just one end, but both of them is the part, is essential for us to be able to work through some of the things that we face. One of the things and you've kind of touched on this a little bit, but I kind of want to go back a little bit to it, partly because it's such an important concept in the books that Sarah and I talk about is this idea of building community. And we especially talk about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s concept of Beloved Community. So I'm curious, like, how did that concept touch you or inspire you? And how do you engage with it nowadays?

**Shakti Butler** 22:41

I really love that question. So I often talk about my father. I was definitely a daddy's girl. My father was born in Barbados, and was a Bajan man, yes. And my father was born in 1890. He was 21 years older than my mother, which means that my grandfather was born into an enslaved place in Dallas, Texas. And he was about nine years old when the Emancipation took place. And in 18, he

took a boat to Barbados, where he met my grandmother, who taught him how to read and write and the story goes on. Anyway, my father was a great storyteller. And he, actually, is the person who helped me understand. Not only was he my first meditation teacher, so he meditated every day except Sunday. So there was a day he let himself sleep in, minutes into every day. But he also told me and talked to me and taught me through story, the importance of gathering wisdom. And that wisdom is something that we all have, but we may not recognize it or see it or know it or even accept it. But that wisdom is always going to seek a way to bring connection. We are not people living independent lives all alone. We are deeply entwined with one another. And that to me is the core concept of community. Is understanding that when we connect, we are actually breaking the code that says you have to do it all on your own. You have to pull yourself up by your bootstraps. You have to be successful. You have to know the answers. He taught me that it's the process of learning, and learning together with others, and working together that is the same as the, you know, the story of the African proverb of, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." And it's, it's those places where I've walked into a room and been exposed to, oh, this is a place where I belong. This is my community. Where I felt myself expand, where I was willing to be able to not only do the work on behalf of community in terms of what needed to be done, but there was a way that we can hold each other and support one another and love one another, and deal with the challenges that come up, just like in marriage. You know, we have challenges, and we learn to use those challenges to grow and to be mirrors for each other in terms of our healing. So, you know, community's everything to me.

**Shakti Butler** 22:57

Did your father have any kind of? Was he moved by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.?

**Shakti Butler** 25:51

Yeah, yeah. My father was who, when I would come home, after, you know, marching in the streets, and I would talk to him about, you know, the white man this and bla bla bla bla bla bla, he would say, "One day, you'll understand." That's how he would talk to me. He said, "One day, you'll understand." "Well, what do you mean by that?" I'm angry, I want him to be angry, too, right? "One day, you'll know that we're all one." "What do you mean by that?" And he would just force me to like, look at what I was talking about, and see how did that really sit with me inside myself? And I would always go, "Yeah, I'm gonna fight the good fight, but I got to do it with love."

**Roxy Manning** 26:40

Can you say again, that like that complexity of holding the both/and, that you're going to fight that fight, you're not going to stop fighting, and you're not going to discard it as you do this fight?

**Shakti Butler** 26:51

That's right. Right. It also keeps you from burning out in a certain kind of way. When the love is there, and you can step into that to remember why - remember, my one of my favorite words, to make things whole. You know, to put all the parts together is to re-member. And you know, that remembering allows me to see how I am a part of a world that's infinite, that I will never know. But then I can practice to remember what I can, when I can.

**Sarah Peyton** 27:26

Was the timing right for him also to have a response to brother Malcolm? Was that also something that was a part of your exploration with him?

**Shakti Butler** 27:37

No, we never really. Well, where I lived, where I grew up in Harlem, I used to go hear brother Malcolm speak quite often. And I never really talked about it too much with my father because he wasn't as interested in you know, what I was aspiring to in that moment in time. He wanted to be sure that I understood that unity is at the source of everything. And it took me many years to come back to that. So my answer is no, he didn't. I think he had seen enough in his life. That he he was not, he was not really thinking about what Brother Malcolm had to say. Not that he disagreed with the things that he said, but his exploration was much more on a spiritual level.

**Sarah Peyton** 28:32

It seems to me that one of the ways that you've made your love manifest in the world is by making your films. And I was wondering, like, how did you start making films, first of all?

**Shakti Butler** 28:48

I dreamed my films.

**Sarah Peyton** 28:50

Oh.

**Shakti Butler** 28:53

Let's see. How can I say this in a way that's clear? So my husband, who is the reason why I've been able to make films, he's a four time Emmy award winning cameraman. He shot a film called The Color of Fear, which I don't know if you've heard of, but it was the first film that I ever saw that was really about race, eight men of different ethnicities talking about race. And I was there. I was there when the film was being shot. Not inside the shooting but outside because our kids are going to camp nearby and it was our anniversary. And so I stayed. And the night that we were supposed to go out, my husband stood me up because he was involved in the shooting in their film. And you know, like he came into the room. And I know the audience can't see this, but I basically you know,

I'm like in the bed with my arms folded and like humph, harumph. Like how could you do this to me? Of course later on, I got to understand what was going on. But I started dreaming about the importance of hearing women's voices. And that women's voices were missing from the table. But I, in prayer and meditation, I asked, why? What am I interested in here? And why? And is this really something I'm supposed to be doing. And so I had a dream. And the dream was a very difficult dream. In the dream, this man was chasing me. And I knew he was gonna catch me. And I'm running, running, running, running, running. And I get to what seems like a hotel room and I get into the hotel room. And I close the door, and I hear the door opposite open and close. And as it was, as it was closing, I looked through the peephole of my door, and I could see this man who was chasing me, and I know he's coming for me. And so at dawn, he broke down my door, and he came into my room, and I had this experience of this fear in my body. And he, I won't go into the details, but he has me pinned down and my head begins to swivel, and I look at him directly in his eyes. And with this fear that I have, I start to feel his sense of power over me. And I recognized it, for some reason that we were in a dance. And that we couldn't play the roles that we were playing without each other. And I woke up. And I was stunned. I'm like, what does this have to do with this film, and so on and so forth. I realized that underneath is this, we are one. And there's so much that we don't understand about what that means. And that this is the reason that I was to make this film. And then of course, the films that followed. And I would meditate, and I would ask to be shown what I was to do, and I obeyed. I followed it. And that's how. I had to make lots of decisions also, but the underpinning of wanting to make a film and have it be something that had these, you know, eight separate ethnic councils of women, talking about what do Native American women think about when they're talking about race, and what do Middle Eastern women think about and say when they're talking about race. And, you know, we didn't use the term Latinx, then but you know, so Latinas, and African Americans and white women and Jewish women, and so on, and so forth. And it was remarkable, because these stories that women told were separate, different, and the same. Meaning, to be able to understand the racialization that's deeply embedded in our culture, takes so many forms. But at the bottom of it, there are so many things that we have to overcome and we have to learn. And we can only do them if we can hear each other.

**Sarah Peyton** 33:08

In this work that you've done over time and the foundation that you've created, what are the pathways that you see people taking? The films that you make, and moving toward action? Is there? Have you seen any such pathways?

**Sarah Peyton** 33:28

It's something that I saw when I was getting to enjoy your teaching this morning. I was watching you interact with the film. I was watching you show film and then speak to the audience and have

them speak with each other and, and it felt very much like an integrated whole. Was this something that also came in your dream, this integration? Or how did this come?

**Shakti Butler** 33:28

Definitely, definitely. So I think I mentioned that, you know, my field of study is transformative learning and change. And so the goal has always been to introduce. The reason I feel film is so powerful is that you're introducing ideas that everybody's looking at the same information at the same time, but are impacted by it in very different ways. So it's like the same thing as being able to hold complexity. You're holding complexity in a film and people respond to whatever it is that they're called to respond to. But then they talk to each other. And in that talking to each other, we are building community. It may be a very temporary community for the day or maybe with a group of people who work together and we'll be able to come back to it again, or any other combination that you could possibly think of. But after the exposure to some of these challenges, there are tools that people can use, you know, some of them you use. This is really important because dialogue and any kind of practices of contemplation or self inquiry or movement building procedures that people engage in how to build community, how to collaborate, what it means to actually engage across difference. These are all things that can come out from watching these films, and they just spark inquiry, you know. And I think inquiry is really important if you're trying to see beyond what you think you already know.

**Shakti Butler** 35:27

I think it comes from my my meditation practice and my other practices is having an experience, actually, many, many times, of this deep connection to what is infinite. Some of it nameless. One of the teachings I have received that I hold on to and work with a lot is not to attach myself to that which is permeable, but to attach myself to that which is infinite. Now how do I do that? The way that I do it is I practice remembering what it is to be one in the universe, which are some of the deeper experiences that I've had from meditation. So they're in my body, like what I described to you with compassion. It's that we already have what we need in order to grow, you know, just like the seed. You plant a seed in the ground. You know, it's going to become an apple on the apple tree, but you don't dig the seed up every day to see how it's doing. It's there, and you know what it's going to become, and it goes through a process to become that - not a peach, not a pear, but an apple, right. And so this ability to understand that I am connected to that same process infinitely. So we don't want to get into some of my beliefs, that list is like, Oh, she's really, you know, there was a blank, it's fine. But I have had experiences where I am more than just this body that I walk the world in. And that I am something that is a part of a mystical, magical, amazing capacity for what the universe is that I can't put into words. But it's those experiences that let me know that connection is the most powerful. Understanding the unity behind all things, in spite of

the fact that they appear to be completely different, is something. That unifying force is behind all good work. Understanding that unifying force, even if you're looking at it on a very small scale. It's very important.

**Shakti Butler** 37:57

That's right. And that fuels imagination. And that fuels possibility. And that fuels hope, you know. And we need each other to do that. You know, it's so easy to get lost in our own individual stories, but it's a great thing when we see, "Oh, other people have these stories, too."

**Roxy Manning** 37:57

I'm seeing such, like this through line, as you talk about this, with the work that you do. And everything that we've talked about today is coming together. So when you talk about, like the power of storytelling, right, I see that as inviting people. Especially when you said, we're all watching the same things, but experiencing it differently, it's this invitation to share and to connect. And to realize that even though we're experiencing it differently, we're still all human. We're still all impacted. We're still all, in some ways, part of this larger, unifying world. And when we can believe that, we find a way to create bridges across those differences. Like those bridges are, those differences are man made. But we can use this great inspiration to help us find both compassion, and the reason why we would want to work together to create change.

**Roxy Manning** 39:11

Yeah. And it might look a little bit different, but we're all still. Yeah. Yeah. So one of the questions that I wanted to ask you, especially when you said, you know, you might think, you know, this piece around like, Oh, I'm claiming these crazy beliefs, right. I know that sometimes, like when I do my work, I get a lot of pushback. You know, people are just like, either I'm being too soft or whatever. But I'm actually curious, what kind of pushback have you received, and how has, how have you dealt with that pushback?

**Shakti Butler** 39:42

Lots of pushback around race and what people perceive are my misunderstandings about race. A lot of pushback around this ability to work through and the importance of working through and with emotion. Lots of pushback around just people who believe that I don't understand. So let me let me give you an example. So I'm speaking in a room to 500 people, and a white man says to me. You know, he raises his hand, and I call on him. And he says, "You know, I grew up really poor. I grew up in a in a neighborhood where, you know, I was the only white person in my neighborhood and all the people of color, whatever term he used, they all hated me. And I've had a really hard time. And so I don't feel like I have any privilege." So, I teach something called strategic questioning, and I use it all the time. And so I use strategic questioning with him. And rather than

address or answer his question in that way, I asked him to tell me more about what his what his daily life was like and where is the place that he felt like he really had been hurt. Anyway, with that invitation of him telling me all of these things, I said, so let me ask you a question. Do you see the difference between your individual lived experience and the collective experiences of others? And can you hold them both? And I saw his eyes kind of glaze over. So when I respond, I respond after an invitation, usually with many questions if I'm doing it in depth. Many questions to help somebody get out what it is that they feel that they need to say. It's their harm, it's how they've been hurt. But also to invite them to look at the greater reality of how this harm has happened to, you know, millions of people that have been sustained through policy and law. And we just need to look at what's going on in the country right now. We can see so clearly the pushback. But you know, my way of dealing with that, I guess, what I'm saying is I'm not going to change anybody. I'm not going to change their minds. I'm not going to change their hearts. I'm not going to do anything. All I'm doing is presenting an opportunity for transformation to happen. And it's going to happen because some catalyst takes place that ignites a thought, or some set of understanding that they've not been exposed to before that makes them ask a new question. When somebody asks themselves a new questions there is a possibility, they might get a new answer. Or they might get a new understanding. And that's kind of how I work.

**Roxy Manning** 42:44

Even as I hear you say that it's like, you actually did, you brought compassion into this situation. So as you're listening to this man, and you're inviting him to be known about his experience, you're asking him to, to share and to be received with compassion, and still doing that plus still inviting him to look at that larger reality. So I'm really loving this modeling of, I can be compassionate, and I can still, you know, invite this greater awareness that's so important for this work. Right?

**Shakti Butler** 43:18

Right. And I have to say, in complete honesty, in the beginning, not just with this person, but in the beginning, I would get so angry. I would feel that anger, that heat arise inside of me, and I would have to take some deep breaths, and calm down and ask what's wanted here? What is needed here in this moment? And I know that he's coming from a place of pain, and a lack of understanding, and that he had a hard time. I just want him to know, he's not the only one. That, you know, this racialization that exists in our world has maimed so many people, killed so many people, you know, deprived so many people. Just the other day, you know, I read an article in Napa about black people who owned land in Napa here in California, and they want their land back. You know, what I see is an opportunity for, you know, black people and Native American people to build bridges and deal with harm that has come from the same, the ... has been colonialism. And so it requires asking questions. And I actually didn't create that myself. I have one

of the people who's taken over World Trust, which by the way, .... in World Trust. So one of the people who's taking over Whole Trust is working on a project with, you know, black folks and native folks in order to use this as a catalyst for healing as opposed to further division.

**Sarah Peyton** 45:01

One of the things that you spoke about that's just really kind of reverberating with me was this. It felt like an invitation to notice my own separate story, to notice other people's separate stories, but to, to really notice the collective story.

**Shakti Butler** 45:21

Yes.

**Sarah Peyton** 45:22

And that takes, you know, integration and I love. I love that it came back again, in your story about the man. You know, acknowledging your pain, can you also see the collective at the same time? This is such a, such an inspiring question.

**Shakti Butler** 45:43

The world is an inspiring place.

**Shakti Butler** 45:52

And I have to say, you know, to you, Sarah, and to you, Roxy, you know, having the privilege and the pleasure of reading your book, the that you worked on together, and Roxy, the one that you've just completed yourself. It's like, I felt like a mush ball after I read both books, because I could so connect with the things that you both said, and the stories that were told, and the love that was behind every word. And, you know, the desire for people to actually find, you know, joyfulness in this experience of being present moment to moment in life. And that's why it's such an honor to be here with the two of you, and you're asking me questions but boy do I want to switch the chair.

**Roxy Manning** 46:48

I'm both touched, it's like, having one of my heroines be the person to say such kind words. It's like wow. I'm completely fan-girling.

**Shakti Butler** 47:03

I never thought of myself as heroine. I mean, I really did love Joan of Arc.

**Roxy Manning** 47:10

You've embodied it. I mean, for me a heroine is somebody who's working to save the world. And that is what your work is doing.

**Shakti Butler** 47:18

Like the two of you.

**Roxy Manning** 47:20

Well, I know like, this has been a lovely conversation. And as we're coming to a close, what's an action that you would want any of our listeners to take?

**Shakti Butler** 47:29

I think learning is key, you know, engaging in self inquiry, in building one's behavior as they relate to the values that you hold most dear. This constant curiosity of how can we be our best? And how can we be our best with ourselves? And how can we be our best with each other? And what does it mean for us to, you know, be transparent, and, you know, practice things like dialogue and strategic questioning and self inquiry and imagination. Everybody has their path, I think, when we sit down, and we're quiet with ourselves, and we ask, How am I to be of service? The answers come. And that is my goal. How do I be of service in this world? Not because I think I'm going to change the world but because that's why I'm here, is to be of service.

**Roxy Manning** 48:30

Shakti, you mentioned learning. And I want to say that if any of our listeners want to learn more, go to [World-Trust.org](http://World-Trust.org). And you'll get to do a lot of the learning that Shakti talks about, see some of the videos and really engage with this material.

**Sarah Peyton** 48:47

Thank you very much, Dr. Shakti Butler.

**Shakti Butler** 48:56

Well, thank you Drs. Payton, Dr. Payton and Dr. Manning. We have those titles, right? But there's, I feel, I feel honored to be here in good company, and to continue doing the work. I've learned so much from both you.

**Sarah Peyton** 49:18

Thank you.

**Shakti Butler** 49:19

and I want to keep learning. So thank you.

**Sarah Peyton** 49:23

What a pleasure. And so I just, I'm also having a little fangirl moment here, so just breathing through it. But to say thank you to the audience for listening, and to invite you to support this work by going to our website, [antiracistconversations.com](http://antiracistconversations.com), where you will learn how to purchase our new books. And also, you'll see the upcoming podcast guests and the new classes that we're also going to be offering that are there on the website. So thank you, thank you. Thank you. Thank you to Roxy. Thank you to Shakti. What a pleasure.