



## Episode 37:

## Live Coaching With Roxy Manning: Bridging Divides and Holding Grief

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

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#### **Sarah Peyton** 00:16

Hi. I'm Sarah Peyton, one of the hosts of Fierce Compassion.

In this episode, we bring you something special: our second episode featuring live coaching. This one features a conversation between Roxy and Prabha. Prabha is an Indian-Australian psychologist who has spent much of her life adapting to different cultures. In recent years, she's been on a journey to stand more fully in her social identity, especially when it comes to challenging conversations across differences of identity and privilege.

She reached out for support in navigating a difficult challenge: how to have an honest, meaningful conversation with a long-time friend who sees the genocide in Gaza very differently than her, while still maintaining some sense of connection.

Through this coaching session, Roxy and Prabha explore the emotional weight of these discussions, the impact of cultural survival strategies and the struggle to balance authenticity with relationship care. They work through practical strategies for staying grounded, recognizing emotional triggers and making space for grief as a way to bridge divides.

If you've ever found yourself in a high stakes conversation, unsure how to hold on to both truth and connection, this episode is for you. Join us as we listen to the power of Fierce Compassion in action.

#### **Roxy Manning** 02:15

So hello, friends. Thank you for joining us for another episode of Fierce Compassion. Today, we're having a special opportunity where I am meeting with Prabha, who has agreed and requested to have a coaching call with me.

And so Prabha, would you like to say a little bit about who you are for our listeners?

**Prabha 02:34**

Hi, Roxy. I'm really happy to be here today, and at the same time feeling a little bit of trepidation. My background is an Indian-Australian. I've lived in Australia for over 40 years now, was born in Britain, grew up for my early years in North America. So I'm part of the Indian diaspora, and have had a lot of experience in adjusting to different cultures. And one of the things that I noticed - I'm a psychologist - is how that capacity to fit in has really defined me, and one of the things that's happened over the last 10 years or so is a desire to be stronger in my Indian-Australian identity as a woman of color.

**Roxy Manning 03:39**

Tell me a little bit about what it means to be stronger, like what part of you hasn't been as strong as you'd like?

**Prabha 03:46**

So what that means is, in terms of my adaptability, not trying to fit in as a white-adjacent person of color. So for a long time in my life, people didn't know what my background was, and often would think it was Mediterranean, European, and that allowed me to experience life free from aggression - racial aggression. It meant that I could pass, as I said, for white-adjacent, so I didn't - it just felt that I was more comfortable in my life, and becoming stronger means not shying away from my Indian identity, calling myself a woman of color, and being proud and and appreciative of all that identity has brought me in my life. You know that there was a loss for me earlier in my life and not holding my Indian identity so strongly.

So as part of the global majority, my immediate allegiance goes to people of color. So when there is a conflict, that's where my... that's where my heart goes. And you know, the Gaza-Israel conflict is a real example of that, where we're talking about over 75 years of oppression for Palestinians and people who are... I'm speaking a bit hesitantly because I'm not an expert, and I want to make that really clear, however, we are talking about people who have been displaced, people whose rights have been curtailed, and in this last 12 months where there has been indiscriminate, abhorrent violence upon the civilians of Palestine. So there is also the issue of the hostages and the rise of antisemitism. And it is all horrendous. However, there is a scale of violence that's occurring, and that's where I have the difficulty. So for me, in terms of compassion, you know, there is, it feels there is only so much in me to go around and to offer, and it's really difficult for me. While I am absolutely as outraged by acts of antisemitism, it's very hard for me when people justify the acts of Israel, because in my mind, they are two separate things. For me being anti the actions that the Israeli government is taking in response to the Hamas attacks is quite separate to being antisemitic. I would hold exactly the same view of any government who was responding in this way. And you know, the actions of Hamas were absolutely as abhorrent, but it's the scale of response that I have real difficulty with, and when people try and justify that to me, that's where I have difficulty in staying in a compassionate space.

**Roxy Manning 08:24**

Yes. I'm wondering if, in those moments, what you're longing for is some acknowledgement. At the simplest level, it's kind of the thing that you hear as a child. The ends don't justify the means, right? And so, yes, we need to stop antisemitism. We want to have Israelis have a safe place, a safe place to live, but not at the cost of a whole other group of people, not at this horrendous loss of life. And you would

love to have some acknowledgement of how many decades of devastation the Palestinian people have experienced, and that that's continuing to happen in an even more ramped up way. And so I'm imagining you're wanting to hear some acknowledgement that this is, this loss of life is not okay. This loss of rights are not okay,

**Prabha 09:14**

Yes, and sometimes people will acknowledge that - that it is not okay. So in conversations that I've had, people have said, "Yes, it's absolutely devastating what's happening in Palestine, and the Israeli government has no choice."

**Roxy Manning 09:37**

And so part of your dilemma is, how do you respond to that in a way that holds your truth? And I guess maybe my first question is, how much are you wanting to engage with people when they say this? Because that's always where I start when I'm coaching someone like, the first piece is, you don't have to be in this conversation.

**Prabha 09:57**

So the reason I put my hand up for this coaching call is that sometimes it's, it's friends who are Jewish, who I've known for decades, and people who I know are good people. You know this is, this is not people who are anti-Muslim or anti-Arab. This is people who are responding out of their own fears, and because, you know, the world is full of knowledge about the Jewish experience. And you know, I also understand how fear and trauma can, you know, can cause certain responses in us. So these are friendships where, you know, it feels like I'm actually avoiding those conversations because I don't know how to have it in a way that will continue the closeness in the relationship. So instead what emerges is a distance, because I'm also feeling hurt and upset that there isn't an understanding of the suffering. You know that there is some sort of justification being mounted for actions, military actions that I see as absolutely indefensible.

**Roxy Manning 11:37**

So I guess a question for me, then one, one goal that I hear you have is to re-establish an authentic closeness with these friends. And I'm curious what would you need from them in order to have this conversation, because my guess is that they are so lost in their fears that they're not able to kind of take a step back and say, "This is not part of my values." They're still in that, "I don't see any other option. I feel terrified it will be erased." So what would you actually need to see from them? What would your hope be if you were to have a conversation with them?

**Prabha 12:21**

It's not just of them. It's of me too, that we could have a conversation without emotion - emotional response.

**Roxy Manning 12:34**

Oh, that's interesting!

**Prabha 12:38**

Whether it's anger or hurt or taking over from listening to each other.

**Roxy Manning 12:46**

Ah, so here's, here's what's coming up for me as I hear this: I definitely understand why you wouldn't want the anger and the hurt to take over because it tends to disconnect us from our capacity to hear each other. But it almost sounds like what y'all might both need. I'm not sure that they will shift their position, and I am clear you won't shift yours. You know, what's happening is atrocious. I don't want you to shift your sense of this being atrocious, but it almost sounds like what might be a possible outcome for y'all is to be able to grieve together, so that you can grieve, and they can grieve with you this horrendous loss of life that's happening and not from, "But there's nothing else we can do," but just fully grieve it, and they can grieve the fear and the helplessness that they feel around how to keep everyone safe, including the Jewish people, rather than trying to get to a strategy to just create spaces where you can hear each other and fully grieve what is happening. What does that sound like? Instead of moving away from emotion, but actually stepping into the emotion?

**Prabha 13:57**

Yeah, I... that sounds possible. So, you know, like, as you said, coming to agreement around this is, I think, a far reach. And I would also say that it does require some containment of emotion, of anger, I would say, and volatility in order to get to the point of grieving, you know? So there has to be some ability to listen to each other in order to get to that place of grieving together. So if immediately someone is triggered, and you know... I got an example in mind when I say that, where I think I said I hadn't spoken to this friend about it, I'd been hesitant because I knew that there was support for Israel, and I think they also hadn't spoken to me, because it was clear from my social media posts that - where, where I stood on around this issue. So I did bring it up, and I said, you know, I'm just noticing how awful this is. And they immediately agreed. And then I said something like - it was a while ago now, so I can't remember the exact words - but the terrain was that the actions are not justifiable, or that there is so much, they're so out of proportion, I think in response.

**Roxy Manning 15:50**

So let me pause you here, because I think this is the place where coaching could happen. You, you mentioned you already knew what this person's stance was on this.

**Prabha 15:58**

I guessed, I guessed. Yeah.

**Roxy Manning 16:02**

And so when you said that, what were you imagining they would respond, or that would come back from them?

**Prabha 16:09**

So I imagine there would have been some agreement that it was out of proportion. So not that Israel didn't need to take action, but that there might have been some agreement around that this was now going on for too long, that it was, you know, the devastation being brought was unacceptable. You

know, not... However, the response I got was that Israel has no choice. You know, that Hamas is going, is not going to stop, until they kill, until they wipe out every Jewish person. And you know, so I - that I did not expect that.

**Roxy Manning** 16:52

Yeah, so there was a part of you that was actually saying this to the person, because you were longing for almost like the shared reality about - you know, of course, you and I both want Jewish folks to survive, and we don't want it to be at the cost of another group's existence. And you were hoping that there would be some shared reality there.

**Prabha** 17:17

Yes. Yes.

**Roxy Manning** 17:19

Yeah - and so when you got this response, what happened? What did you do?

**Prabha** 17:23

So the person became louder, and I asked for them not to yell. So, you know, I said, you know, I really don't want to be here and be yelled at in this conversation. And you know, it was a trigger. I recognized it was a trigger. I felt there was no purpose in continuing that conversation.

**Roxy Manning** 17:53

Would you like to do a role-play to see how that might have gone, where you would play that person, and I could play you?

**Prabha** 17:58

Sure - and bearing in mind, this is now a few months ago, so it will really be a role-play. It's not a true depiction, which is

**Roxy Manning** 18:09

Which is great, yeah. No, that makes sense. So before we do the role-play, I'll say that if I were you going into this conversation, I would be really first connected to, what are my needs? Why am I having this conversation with this person when I'm not sure of their stance in this matter? And I think for me, my needs would be very connected to longing for hope that there are people in my circle, people that I know people in the world who are committed to finding ways for every group to thrive, that you know, to holding nonviolence into looking for solutions, and so I'm kind of feeling this out to see if that might be possible, and wanting to establish the possibility for hope.

**Prabha** 18:59

And it is also for being authentic in the relationship,

**Roxy Manning** 19:05

Absolutely. Yes!

**Prabha** 19:06

So the fact that I was avoiding talking about this, and that was resulting in feeling disconnected from that person. And to express, as you said, that idea of solidarity with everyone suffering in this situation.

**Roxy Manning** 19:21

Yeah, yeah. So I could imagine starting out this conversation with even actually leading with this need that you have, and would be saying - let's make up her name for your friend so we can, I can call you by that name. So what name should I call you?

**Prabha** 19:40

Susan.

**Roxy Manning** 19:41

Okay. So Susan, I realized that ever since the war with Gaza has unfolded, I've been a little bit distant from you, partly because I worry that we have such very different stances on it, and I want to talk with you about it because I'm... you matter to me. And our friendship matters, and an authentic friendship matters. So I'm coming to you in this moment because I watched the news again, and I am so weary. My heart is sick because this has been going on for far too long, and I'm just devastated and heartbroken, and I'm curious what your experience of what's been happening has been.

**Prabha** 20:28

I'm really devastated by what's been going on, and I am horror struck at the hostage crisis, and also what's happening in Gaza, and I don't know what other choices the Israeli government had. This is another time where there is so much lack of safety for Jewish people in the world.

**Roxy Manning** 21:02

So Susan, I'm... thank you for sharing that. I actually want to slow us down a bit, because I have a sense that we could get into a big argument about the choices that are possible in this situation. So I want to slow down because I want to connect with the parts where I think that we are in alignment. And I hear you speaking with a lot of grief and devastation about the lack of safety that Jewish folks are having in the world. And I also heard you speak around just naming horror struck at what's happening in Gaza, and I have a sense of we both are so longing for everyone in the world - Jewish, Palestinian, every single person, every single mother, to know that their children are safe. Is that something that you're longing for, for every person to feel safe?

**Prabha** 21:59

It's a hard question to answer, because there are people that continue to be a threat. So you know, when you say,

**Roxy Manning 22:11**

I'm gonna pause though, I'm gonna pause you, I'm gonna interrupt you, because I get all that. But what I'm actually wondering is, do you want folks to feel safe? Do you want to be safe? Do you want everyone around you to be safe? Do you want Jewish people to be safe? Do you want Palestinian people to be safe?

**Prabha 22:32**

I do. Some of those Palestinian people, though, create a lack of safety for Jewish people. So when you say - This is my you know - when you say, do you want everyone else to be safe? Do I want the mothers who bring up Hamas terrorists? Do I want those people to be safe?

**Roxy Manning 23:01**

So right now, I'm getting that there's so much fear that you're not able to see people - like you're essentially assigning this role of terrorists to every single person, whether or not there are terrorists, that it's so hard for you to feel any hope that things can be different

**Prabha 23:24**

In the Middle East?

**Roxy Manning 23:31**

Yeah, yeah. Could you imagine that there's some people in the Middle East who are not terrorists?

**Prabha 23:36**

Yes, yes, of course. You know. I know that's not the majority of people.

**Roxy Manning 23:43**

Okay? It actually - I feel a tiny bit of relief hearing you acknowledge that it's not the majority of people, right? And so, yeah, part of what I'm getting, though, and I'm checking in with myself, is I noticed that I'm feeling a little bit contracted inside, because even as I hear that, I feel heartbroken, because I tell myself that this distance, our inability to see or to imagine the innocence of most of the people and to want everyone's safety is part of what keeps this conflict going, and I have a desire to connect with you about how to keep - how we can talk about this, but I noticed that I don't have a lot of spaciousness when I hear innocent people who have experienced decades of oppression still not being seen for their full humanity. My heart is hurting, and I'm curious if you could tell me what you're hearing when I say this.

**Prabha 24:54**

So I'm wondering whether you're also holding the Jewish experience in your heart when you say that. Are you actually recognizing...

**Roxy Manning 25:09**

Susan - I'm going to interrupt us again because one of the things I see that we're doing right now is we're each in our place of pain around you're wanting to trust that I can actually hold and feel compassion for the Jewish experience, and I'm wanting to trust that you can hold compassion for the



Palestinian experience. And so we're not hearing each other. We keep going back and forth. And I'm not sure that this will be productive if we stay in these siloed places, if we continue to see it as this group is suffering or that group is suffering. I am willing to hold because I strongly believe that I want every single person in the Middle East to feel safe, regardless of their identity, and I don't want anyone on either side to take actions that create death and danger for other folks. I'm willing to sit with you and grieve that that is not the experience for all peoples. I'm not sure that I can do a "What about?," you know? What about this group? What about this group? And I'm curious again, what are you hearing when I say that?

**Prabha 26:22**

So can you say a little more about what you mean when you say that you can sit and hold?

**Roxy Manning 26:30**

Yeah. So in this moment I'm a mom, and I can imagine what it is like to be a Palestinian mom and to not have a place to live with my children. I could imagine what it's like to be a Jewish mom and not know where my child is, who's being held a hostage. I could imagine what it's like to be a Palestinian or a Jewish mom who is not even in the Middle East right now, who is watching what's happening and feels terrified about relatives, about our community. And all of those mothers are suffering, all of those mothers are grieving, and that is not an experience I want for any of them. So that's part of what I mean. That's one part of what I mean, that I want to sit with that grief rather than make it about this mom or that identity, etcetera. That this is not what I want for anyone.

**Prabha 27:28**

Yeah, and I can join you in that space.

**Roxy Manning 27:37**

Okay - yeah, thank you. This is part of what I was longing for, that we can all agree that there has to be a way to have all of these. We as a people need to do better to find a way to keep everyone safe, regardless of identity. That is what I'm longing for, and I feel heartbroken that we are not coming up with creative solutions for this that are costing so much lives. I'm going to pause the role-play for a little bit. I'm curious, what's coming up for you as you hear this?

**Prabha 28:13**

So you know, I didn't role-play the anger and the... because I think the way you started the conversation would not have created that situation of anger, you know? I think it would have immediately diffused.

**Roxy Manning 28:36**

Did it feel authentic to you to start in this way?

**Prabha 28:39**

Yes. I mean, when you started I thought, I wish it had come from that place. Yes, it did feel authentic.



**Roxy Manning 28:51**

There are a couple of things that you mentioned that I also want to highlight in terms of, like, what are some of the skills people can take from what we just did? And I think you mentioned one of them, which is, like you said, tracking your body if you notice a contraction. It's so tempting to override it and stay in the conversation, but being able to slow down and say, "I'm noticing this is happening. So let's take a moment to figure that out" can actually help create that space for both of you to connect. Oh, why am I contracting? What am I needing in this moment, and to maybe be a position, a point when the conversation can change. And then the other thing I noticed I was doing a lot, which, you know, a lot of times we kind of think it's rude, is I interrupt a lot, right? Because if I kept letting you go, I would just keep getting more and more stirred up as I hear you talking, talking, talking, and you're also then spiraling. And so the interrupting is a way to kind of, "Let's slow it down again. Let's pause so that we don't get into this rhythm that's not going to be productive," right?

**Prabha 29:49**

And that's why I asked not to yell at me, because I just couldn't, like there was no way to have that conversation when someone is so triggered. This friend does talk over the top of me. And so that's the other thing that, you know I would say, is that that I've been wanting to have a conversation even before this arose, is that I noticed this happens, you know, that I'm talking, and what happens is that you get louder and louder and talk over the top. We're both talking at the same time, and I'm the one who usually stops because your voice is raised and...

**Roxy Manning 30:29**

What you just said is perfect. I mean, literally, it's perfect. I think if you had that conversation at a time when you're not upset and say, I'd love to talk about how we connect. Here's a pattern I've noticed, and then check, did you notice that also? And if they say yes, you could make agreements. If we're talking we can either, if it's something where we're going to be heated we'll either set a timer so we each get five minutes and we take turns, or I'm going to go like this. I'm going to make that T symbol for time out, and that's when we both pause and I'll say I'd like to finish what I'm saying before you continue. So just make some agreements when you notice these patterns, to see if you can interrupt them. And let's see, what do we want to summarize in terms of the work that we did together today? What are your takeaways?

**Prabha 31:19**

So the biggest takeaway is about acknowledging the emotion that's there in the conversation and bringing it to the fore, rather than pulling away from it.

**Roxy Manning 31:36**

So noticing the contractions and being able to work with them.

**Prabha 31:39**

Noticing the contractions in my body. And also, you know, being in a place that will allow me to have this conversation. If I'm - you know, there has to be time and space, and also a time when I'm not feeling particularly triggered by other things that might be going on in my life. And you know, those conditions are sometimes hard to find.

**Roxy Manning** 32:15

Yeah.

**Prabha** 32:16

So I think, you know, it's been wise action not to try and push myself - to have this conversation, and also keep it in my mind, because the opportunity might arise.

**Roxy Manning** 32:35

Yeah, and I think connected, connected to that opportunity, it's to have clarity about the reason we want to have the conversation, what you're hoping to get back from the other person?

**Prabha** 32:44

Yes, which is around wanting to connect authentically in the relationship with my friend and have a field of shared understanding. You know, not necessarily issue-based understanding, but understanding between us of, in this case, holding grief. In this particular situation, it's about holding grief for what's going on in the world, which is where I think it is possible to agree

**Roxy Manning** 33:20

Absolutely! Yes. So you can be authentic about the horror and your sense of the horror, and then also be in agreement around the, almost like devastation, that not having a strategy that works for both people like that situation is just horrendous. Yeah. And then some other things that we talked about were being willing to interrupt. And then another really important one, which we didn't model, but we could have, is being willing to stop the conversation, right? So you mentioned, I need to be in a place where I'm not super triggered myself. But you can also say, "You know what, I think we need to pause, because if we continue, we're not hearing each other any further and it will get worse for our connection. So let's pause and get support elsewhere.

**Prabha** 34:10

Yes - all of that is really helpful.

**Roxy Manning** 34:13

Well, thank you.

**Sarah Peyton** 34:20

Wow. What a powerful conversation. Listening to Prabha and Roxy navigate the complexities of identity, grief and connection in the midst of global conflict was just so touching. One of the biggest takeaways from this session is the importance of slowing down, of making space to check in with ourselves. Notice what's happening in our bodies, and get clear on why we're engaging in these conversations in the first place.

Roxy and Prabha also explored the power of grief. Not as a way to fix or convince, but as a way to connect across difference when agreement isn't possible.

If this conversation resonated with you, we invite you to take a moment to reflect, where do you feel contraction in your own conversations?

What would it be like to pause, interrupt old patterns or lead with your deepest values?

Thank you for joining us for this episode of Fierce Compassion. If you found it meaningful, please share it with someone who might need it. And as always, we appreciate your support, whether it's through rating and reviewing the podcast, joining our community, or simply carrying these conversations into your own life. Until next time, take care and keep showing up with Fierce Compassion.

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**Roxy Manning 36:30**

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You can find our books, *How to Have Anti-Racist Conversations* and *The Anti-Racist Heart*, and learn about our podcast guests and new classes on our website, [antiracistconversations.com](http://antiracistconversations.com).

**Sarah Peyton 36:57**

And Roxy and I love teaching, and we're always offering new classes, courses and other opportunities for learning in our own individual work. You can visit us at [roxannemanning.com](http://roxannemanning.com) and at [sarahpeyton.com](http://sarahpeyton.com) to learn more about our individual offerings.

**Roxy Manning 37:15**

We hope to see you.