

# Anjuli Sherin

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trauma, people, resilience, mother, community, pandemic, society, larger, suffering, world, vulnerable, activism, resilient, book, speak, privilege, individual, feel, transgenerational, mental health

## SPEAKERS

Omkari Williams, Anjuli Sherin



Omkari Williams 00:20

Hello, and welcome to Stepping Into Truth, the podcast where we take on the issues of race, gender and social justice. I'm your host Omkari Williams, and I'm really happy that you're here with me today. Hosting this podcast means that I am privileged to speak with people who are out in the world making a difference with their day jobs, their programs, their art, and their activism. And I truly love doing this work. If you would like to support me, you can do so for as little as \$3 a month by becoming a member of my Patreon community. You can go to [patreon.com/OmkariWilliams](https://patreon.com/OmkariWilliams) and sign up. There's also a link on my website [omkariwilliams.com](https://omkariwilliams.com)



Omkari Williams 01:03

My guest today. Anjuli Sherin is a Pakistani American Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist specializing in trauma recovery, resilience, building and cultivating joy. She has 15 years of practice working with immigrant South Asian, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and LGBTQI plus populations. In addition to awards for academic excellence and community service, Sherin has been featured in O Magazine as a finalist for the O Magazine White House leadership project. Her new book is *Joyous Resilience: A Path to Individual Healing and Collective Thriving in an Inequitable World*. And it is my great pleasure to welcome Anjuli to the podcast. Hi, Anjuli, I'm so pleased that you're here with me today. How are

you?

A

Anjuli Sherin 01:55

Thank you. Yeah, I'm excited to be here and have the conversation.



Omkari Williams 01:59

Great. So your book is very comprehensive. And it looks at various aspects of trauma recovery and resilience building. And I found it fascinating. But for this particular conversation, I really want to focus on the societal and community aspects that you reference. And right at the beginning of the book, you describe trauma as, "a grievous breakdown in safety and connection". And you talk about changing the systems that threaten and erode the resilience of our communities. So, let's start there. Let's start with your definitions of trauma and resilience.

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Anjuli Sherin 02:36

Well, when the the trauma definition you just shared, right, thinking about it as a breakdown in safety or connection, and I think that we can think of that either in our individual lives, I think that is mostly where people go when they think about trauma. Right, like whether it's a single episode trauma, which could be like a major accident or loss, and how in that moment, it is a breakdown in safety and connection, we have lost another human being usually or person, even an animal being who matters a lot to us usually is a provider of safety. And the loss of that physical form is incredibly destabilizing. I can actually feel like I've lost a piece of me, a part of my body, a sense of containment.

A

Anjuli Sherin 03:18

And that sense of containment is also a sense of connection, a way that I've oriented and felt a way of belonging in this world, felt a part of, felt understood. So on that individual level, any act with a single episode like that, or chronic in terms of like, say chronic physical abuse or chronic sexual abuse, ongoing trauma, which keeps breaking down this idea of the place I'm supposed to have safety is relationally. And the places which have connection is relationally. And then in that relationship, now safety is gone, connection is gone.

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Anjuli Sherin 03:50

And then when we go beyond the individual level, and we think about systems, like larger systems at play. For example, in some ways we all have we have been living inside of a larger trauma, which is a trauma of the pandemic, right and the breakdown of our number one connection. I mean, it is mind boggling right there we've gone through, possibly in some of our lifetimes the hardest thing or the hardest we'll ever go through unprecedented. And we've done it mostly isolated, or in these small pods and away from our networks of connection that usually give us resilience and help us actually move through difficult times.

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Anjuli Sherin 04:26

And then obviously a breakdown of safety. Whether it was a physical safety of this idea that I'm okay in my body or I have you know, that I can go about my business going grocery shopping or out in the world and I don't have to constantly be thinking about I could actually be in mortal danger in this sense of having this like virus. All the way to like safety of like financial safety, right? Well, I have my job, will I keep my job to sustain my family? So financial safety, health safety, safety of even a sense of is our world going to be the same? Can I count on my life and my routines and my dreams continuing on, or being in this prolonged sense of uncertainty, which is its own trauma.

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Anjuli Sherin 05:07

So I think that it really captures it right? Like breakdown in safety, breakdown connection, you know that you're in this suite, which is around trauma. And then resilience is our ability to withstand trauma, and actually get back up inside of it and thrive. And that's a huge ask, especially again, if I just even stick with this larger trauma we're talking about inside of, and I think we all are struggling and trying to find our ways of how do we stay resilient? How do we continue to not only even, in some ways, like even survive this without completely breaking down into depression, isolation, grief, you know, such profound loss? And then what is it like individually and societally to try to crawl, to get back up, to even re enter? And so build resilience and our capacity to actually do that.

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Anjuli Sherin 05:59

And in the book, we talk a lot about like, both individually and systemically, what are the aspects of ourselves and roles that we play inside of ourselves, and I think also the roles that we play in community in society that actually help us access that resilience? And the way that I read them down are the role of a nurturer. So the compassionate energy that we bring to ourselves into our world. The role of the protector, the boundaries, and limits, the ways that we actually protect each other communally. So it's kind of like the idea of

no one left behind as we go forward. Our resilient self, which is our creative and playful self, which I think we have seen actually a lot of in the past year and a half how the artists and the musicians, all the different, like storytellers, have helped us come through by providing a different narrative, and helping us process this time. And the soulful self, which is the voice of the interdependence between ourselves and the natural world, and with each other. And I think that in your podcast, and I think in your work Omkari I love the idea of like everyday activism, right? Like, the acts that we do to keep us tied to each other, and actually helping lift ourselves up, to help us go beyond ourselves. So these four voices nurture protector, the joyful resilience, self, and the soul self, at least in the book, in my kind of model, are the foundation for how we go forward in resilience, even inside of larger traumas.



Omkari Williams 07:23

I'm pretty sure that at this point, I am close to feral, it's been so long since I've engaged with people in anything that resembles normal human contact. And I who am quite happy on my own, I am truly an introvert, even I have experienced how challenging this last 14 months has been, and, and how much I all I wanted to do was be able to see people's faces. Even strangers on the street to just be able to see their whole face and get the information that we get from that. And so yeah, I can really, really sympathize with people for whom a larger community is even more important. And I think that there are so many lessons that we've taken from the pandemic and one of them is how do you sustain yourself? How do you sustain your community? And as you referenced, encouraging, and sustaining activism is a main focus of the work that I do. And you write about activists and you write about the need for activists to make inner changes in order to sustain their work. What kinds of inner changes do you feel activists in particular need to make?



Anjali Sherin 08:40

I think probably the first one that flashes to mind, and I think of any literature, right, and when we talk about like activism, and then and then like personal change, I feel like usually front and center is this idea of activist burnout. And so the opposite of that being like self care, and like this idea that like even as you give out, there is a way in which you yourself must be included in that heartfulness, in that recognition of like any sustainable work, any sustainable movement is a long movement. A long movement towards larger social justice and larger change. And in order for those who are working towards that to be able to not just survive, but again thrive in that, to stay resilient, there has to be this, this momentum between outward and inward. So that time and that permission, inward permission to go, it is a part of activism work. It is a part of any long term sustained work, that we do turn inward, and we do care for the rhythms of our body and the rhythms of

our own needs as a way to keep us sustained for the work that we have to do outside of ourselves.

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Anjuli Sherin 09:49

I say this actually also to the mothers and the parents and I say this to the healers and the therapists I mean, I think about this past year and something, all the frontline workers Right, that any of us who are engaged in work outside of ourselves, and I would say that is most of us for the long haul, we have to go in and out in and out. And to actually make that normal and permissionable and like, modeled by each of us that we turn to each other and we go, "Oh, have you? Have you turned in? Have you taken care of yourself as well"? Instead of, I think what happens is internalized judgment, a sense of like, not enoughness, scarcity, especially, of course, when we're working with large scale issues where they're relentless, or in the work of activism, the work of the world, or the work of parenting, it never stops, it's always there. So how do you still realize it inside of that, you still have to clock out for a bit to clock back in? I think that feels like probably the top of mind is just to make it a part of the work instead of something separate, or something to be judged.



Omkari Williams 10:53

I feel like there's enormous energy around self care in ways that are not necessarily as nurturing as they could be. And something I've been very concerned about in this whole experience of the pandemic, is the long term emotional, physical, mental health of the frontline workers, especially in hospitals. I'm from Manhattan, and watching what New York City went through was just heartbreaking. And all I could think was, Please, dear Lord, let someone give these people the ability to go and get some mental health help, when this is finally at a level that they can take that time, and they have the energy to do it. Because I don't see how you get through something like that without having really experienced deep and lasting trauma.

A

Anjuli Sherin 11:48

Absolutely. And I think that that is so that was happening throughout, right that like being in that ongoing, and without even the naming of it, just because you're on the frontline. And just because you are suffering the brunt of it does not mean that there is not a trauma happening to you, and that you too deserve that care. And actually, I would say like and not like care should happen after, whenever the after is, the pandemic would be over. But throughout. And yes, I mean, just like the like the extreme duress that those

workers have been under. And I think the idea also of not having the time to rest, to sleep, to eat, even these basic things just want to name them. Rather than like, one of the things I learned in like writing the book is like when communities are going through such profound stressors, the things that actually help mental health, you know, that they're actually some of the things that we just take for granted or seem so basic. Like sleep, rest, knowing that you can actually step away access to nature, knowing that you have enough funds, again, coming in, like these things actually provide people much more comfort than even sitting with somebody necessarily like a mental health therapist, that comes later. So that whole system of support being there, plus the mental health resources. Yes, I wish that that was like wrapped into what all frontline workers would receive.



Omkari Williams 13:04

That's a really good point, I hadn't thought about it in that way of people actually needing those other support systems in place at the outset, before they could even avail themselves of the mental health aspect of it, just having that piece set. It's something that reminds me of that you write about, that I'd never heard described in quite this way is what you call the cycle of suffering. And I wonder if you could explain what that is, and the implications that it has for all of us.



Anjuli Sherin 13:42

Yeah, so the cycle of suffering is basically these three roles inside of us. And once again, whether we are looking at them internally, like voices inside of ourselves, or the way that we interact with each other. And these roles are the neglecter, the critic, and the vulnerable self. And for whoever's listening right now, the easiest way to understand it is just think about in this moment, and I guess, since we're talking about the pandemic, or it could be anything in your life, which is making you feel vulnerable, or scared or angry, or sad. And those feelings and emotions, those are your vulnerable self. And we all have that vulnerable self. And it's often having a reaction to something that's occurring in its world, and it has some needs and some feelings.



Anjuli Sherin 14:27

And then what happens in the cycle of suffering is the way that we respond to that part, when we respond to it with either criticism, so putting ourselves down. Telling ourselves why are you feeling this way? Telling ourselves, other people don't feel this way, so what's wrong with you? Basically, you should not feel how you feel. And if you feel the way that you feel about this, then it is a lack on your part, which as I say that out loud obviously

many of us can think about examples again in our personal life, but also how we speak societally. When we expect a vulnerable, selfless society to just rise up, quote unquote, raise themselves up by their own bootstraps instead of understanding that if a portion of society is vulnerable, it is often for larger and very real reasons. So when we respond to vulnerable self with criticism, as you can imagine, that does not, kind of like a child who's crying or scared, the child might shrink and get quiet, or they might go further. But internally, that feeling has actually not improved, right? It's actually getting worse, internally.

A

Anjuli Sherin 15:30

We may also respond to ourselves then with neglect, and neglect can look like, there's so many other people to tend to. There's so much else to focus on, so why does this even matter? This feeling I'll get back to you later. And later is pretty much never. So ways in which we either people please or we martyr ourselves, or we even lose ourselves in different addictions, we lose ourselves even in like, you know, kind of benign addictions. Like I'm losing myself in my time alone, and reading books and watching shows, and I'm not hurting anybody. But the thing is, I'm actually not tending to and tuning to what is happening inside. So when we either neglect or we criticize our vulnerable self becomes weaker and weaker internally, and more and more in pain. And once again, societally that looks like either putting down portions of the population that are suffering, or turning our eye away from them, losing ourselves in what the world has to offer, and really forgetting that, like I said, a big segment of society is hurting. And that hurt, kind of like a part of your body, you cannot ignore your vulnerable self and continue to thrive over it, that self is going to keep on suffering. And that suffering is going to metastasize in a way into your mind and how you're thinking, into your emotional self, and even into your physical body. Right? So at some point, we start to get stomach aches and headaches and pains, chronic illness, and it's because of something chronic, that has been ignored. So this cycle of responding to ourselves in these ways, and chronically suffering is that cycle of suffering that I talked about in the book. And then you can look at probably most situations in your life or in the world through that lens and start to see how suffering continues to stay at play when it is engaged within these ways.



Omkari Williams 17:14

Yeah, that's really interesting, because one of the things that I find fascinating is, during the pandemic, we saw clearly how women have borne the brunt of the economic impact as literally hundreds of thousands of women have left the workforce. Largely because of the caretaking responsibilities that they had that they could not address if they were trying to navigate childcare and a job at the same time. And I feel like those 800,000 plus

women who left the workforce represent not just individual circumstances, but a real systemic problem that we need to address in how we navigate these situations and how we sort of approach as a society the challenges of something like a pandemic. And unfortunately, I believe this is not the last pandemic we're going to see, I think, you know, if anything, they will become more frequent. So I'm curious about how you would suggest we start to navigate this kind of thing.

A

Anjuli Sherin 18:21

Yeah, I love that example. I mean, yes, like when I think about the past year and a half, and who my heart goes out to parents, and especially yes, the the female head of households are top of mind, because the level of duress and the level of care that has been offered. Right, like talk about, again, who has been raising the families? Who has taken on the role of the mother and the teacher and the household head and the caretaker without support? So if I back up, so here, we had the cycle of suffering. And now we know how we could have and I think have responded to mothers, right are responding to mothers and their real distress in this is way too much for me to hold, way too much. And even though I'm doing it, I am falling apart under it, right.

A

Anjuli Sherin 19:03

And we could have responded with criticism of like, what's the big deal and mothers should and people should be able to kind of handle it on their own. And if they can't, that must be again, something up with them or neglect, like we aren't even thinking about that. It's just the way it is. And I mean, aren't mothers supposed to sacrifice anyway? And mothering is a hard job. So I think that happens a lot. Like it's almost like an unseen or invisible labor and distress. So that has happened and can happen and including an up to when we were passing, let's say, bills to go, Okay, we're going to give funds to different families. Where were the funds for childcare? Or where were the funds actually make up for the loss of income? Or where was the promise of jobs will be kept for the women as they left the workforce and re-enter?

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Anjuli Sherin 19:46

Those would have been examples of, so the opposite of the cycle of suffering is a circle of resilience, which we talked about earlier in this conversation. And that is that nurturing self that will not only look from the eyes of compassion and go, this is real, the suffering that you are going through is real. And it is incredibly hard not just for you, but it's also hard on your children and on the larger community. And our country is not better for the fact that women have left the workforce and the cost of it, actually, the cost to you is a cost to all



of us. So the nurturer looks in that way. And the protector, as I said, would have stepped in with larger systems of relief, including economic and the unemployment, right. And even now, now, as hopefully we re-enter would the jobs be given top priority to those who left the workforce because they were doing the labor at home, right? The bill that I hope will pass around affordable childcare, which is always necessary, but maybe now it will happen. So the protector looks at these needs and goes, I'm gonna step in and actually provide and send resources in this direction, and shift the structures that would make it so that you don't have to be in this vulnerable level of distress anymore, not just as a one time bandaid. But as a larger system of relief, for example, childcare being affordable.



Omkari Williams 21:07

I mean, that makes such perfect sense. And it really ties into something I wanted to talk with you about, which is the issue of intersectionality. And how, because our society has such an individualistic focus, which doesn't take into account systemic challenges we are always in this push pull, as we try to navigate these things. And you write about what you call the insanity of self help books and Western psychology. And I would love for you to speak about what you mean by that, because I think it plays right into the way we look at how do we support or how do we not support women in this circumstance, caretakers in this circumstance, etc.



Anjali Sherin 21:53

Yeah, I think that's, thank you for bringing that up. Because I can see how it's alive. Even this discussion we're having right now around childcare, right? Because it's like, well, we haven't named overtly maybe as an who has access to childcare, and then how that is based on class, and race, at the very least. And then being able bodied versus unablebodied, like, there's so many different intersections of what is impacting us at any given time. Which identities that we belong to, which basically limit our access to certain resources or not. And so if we are not speaking to that, and to make it just more granular, I think about the past year and a half, but as I spoke, right, a couple people top of mind were the moms. But then I think about like when I'm speaking to a mom in the therapy room, for example, and I'm saying oh my gosh, I can really see your your distress. And this is so real. It's not about you failing right now, the fact that you're having a hard time parenting the kids and providing for them, and also trying to keep the day job, but also trying to homeschool them, this is not a failing on your part.



Anjali Sherin 22:56

What I also have to take into account as a practitioner, and I think this is part of like whoever the healing practitioners are listening to this is, am I also naming the larger systems? And am I naming the fact that like, there is the racial element and the class element and the able bodied element, and beyond naming it in the room, which is important and validating for the person, and I think also again, helps to clear that idea of like, it's something wrong with me, is that our society is failing me. There's also the the very real question of like, as a clinician, or as anybody, kind of as like a member of society? How am I voting? What am I doing when I'm calling my member of Congress or the Senate? Like where am I mobilizing, even though like mutual aid funds? Am I thinking about and keeping top of mind that people who are most affected, especially the mothers, and especially the mothers of color? Or especially the Black mothers, or especially the Trans mothers? We can go on, like every intersection of privilege versus non, you want to keep centering those whose voices are not heard, and to whom resources and funding is not going. So this idea of at whatever issue we talk about, we have to think about individually validating and educating ourselves and then also communally, making sure that resources are going in that direction. I think on a larger level really thinking about how are we voting and joining movements that are shifting resources towards those.



Omkari Williams 24:21

I really like that because I think one of the things that I find particularly interesting at this moment in time, and that you talk about in your book, is transgenerational trauma, and you talk about transgenerational trauma trails. And I would really like for you to speak about what that is and why those transgenerational trauma trails matter so much.



Anjuli Sherin 24:49

It's a big question. All right. I think the way that I would think about it right is like, just going back in time, if you go back to, you kind of look, look back in your lineage and you go where you are today, right? And then like, Where were your parents? And then Where were your parents parents? I think that inside of again, many traumas, when someone walks into a room, and they look at what's hurting, it's very easy to look at what's hurting in this moment and go, what happened in your life, or what happened in the past year, or two or five years, that's making you hurt this way. But oftentimes, what gets missed is, think of an example. I guess one example since we have been talking about like women and women's labor, and all of this is to think think about, like, when you're at home, and you feel, in some ways, unworthy, or as if you're failing as a mother as a parent, because you're not able to do all of these things that society is asking you to do for your child. You

think about, oh that didn't just blossom in your mind in this moment, on your own, right? You have to look back at like, what were the expectations on your mother? And also depending upon what culture is surrounding your mother, right, and like what expectations around gender and society and culture and religion even shaped her ideas around mothering and motherhood, and then how she mothered you. And then if we go back a couple of generations, I mean, especially in this country, was there at immigration history? Was there a history of slavery, right? Like, what was your mother even allowed to mother you or was she mothering other people's children? And how that may have shaped the idea around what you are allowed to receive as support as a mother versus other people. So it's a tiny example. But you can think about like the like transgenerational trail around just this one thing, Mother, you think is so simple to go one worldview. Well of course, everybody has a mother and we mother in one way, but it's not, it's shifted down generation, depending upon your historic trauma, right, that has shaped your mother, as well as the culture, as well as the class, as well as the education, as well as the support or resources, all of that has gone to shape, the transgenerational cycle of mothering.



Omkari Williams 27:05

Yeah, I think we don't think about that very often. And yet, it is such a big part of it. And I mean, we see that playing out right now, if you look at this circumstance that's happening in the Middle East, and you look at what is happening with the Israelis and the Palestinians. And you can see, transgenerational trauma, literally in action in front of our faces. And you also see the continuation of that trauma. And it's heartbreaking. But I think it's important that we start to pay attention to that so that we can break those cycles. And something else that you talk about is what you call the matrix of domination. And I'm curious as to why you first off what that is, and also why it matters in a communal, or societal context.



Anjuli Sherin 27:59

Maybe I will pause just for a minute, because what I want to make sure is that I honor the person who, who that comes from my brain is like oh I can't remember. Yes, so the matrix of domination just for folks who are listening is a concept that Patricia Hill Collins talks about. And basically, what she was saying is that we simultaneously have access to power and privilege through certain identities. And most of us have certain identities that infer privilege upon us and certain identities that actually suffer oppression through others. And so it really just depends upon those intersecting identities, which we've mentioned, like race, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, and how they manifest for each of us in its own matrix.

A**Anjuli Sherin 28:47**

For example, I'll speak to being a woman of color, being raised as a Muslim, just these two things put me in categories where there's different oppression that I might suffer as a woman of color, or even just simply being a woman. And then being Muslim origin, like, especially here living here in the US for the past 20 years or so, at the same time, I'm an able bodied woman. And so that that puts me in a position of privilege. At the same time, I'm a US citizen, that puts me in an exponential position of privilege, versus someone who's a woman of color here was an immigrant who does not have that privilege. So at any point, you are looking at these different ideologies and looking at yourself and others, and recognizing that we each carry this within us. And it's a very important thing, I think, to wake up to, because it breaks down this idea, which is that this like, normalized idea through white white supremacy, actually, that there's only one way and we all have the same privileges. And that none of us have to struggle with certain things because we all have access to the same resources. And it basically completely collapses that idea and makes you realize this is not so in fact, that idea has been used to oppress people and to make them feel, what we just talked about in the cycle of suffering, bad about themselves. And to make it easy to neglect and turn our eyes away from suffering. Because aren't we all the same? And if we're all the same, then what's the big deal, if you're struggling, you can just make it as well as I can. Because I am unwilling to see actually how my identity has been at power and play to oppress you.

**Omkari Williams 30:19**

One of the ways that we here in the United States, in particular, hold up the culture of individuality is that, you know, in most things, we look at that and that is the highest thing, you know, to be the strong individual and to go out on your own and blaze a trail. And we really elevate that, except in the area of sports, where teamwork is the ultimate virtue. And I just find it such an interesting dichotomy to hold those two ideas. And I find it fascinating when you look at it in terms of how we are able to, or not able to, build communities in order to achieve racial and economic equity for example. It's like, we are told to be in community in this very narrow way that supports the underlying structure. But where community would actually enable us to start to dismantle that structure, we're told that individual effort is the highest possible goal. And I just find that fascinating.

A**Anjuli Sherin 31:31**

Yeah, fascinating. And also, as you see, right, it feels like very convenient, like what a, what a useful tool to make people basically not band together, come together into movements, which is the only way that change will happen. But for the powers that be that is very

useful, it's very useful to help us all overwhelmed, stressed out underpaid, so that we are constantly having to work and then constantly having to survive, which means that there's not enough, there's not that much time to actually galvanize and come together and push back for change. So...



Omkari Williams 32:04

yeah, it's a really clever way to train the members of a society to focus on their individual goals, so that the members of a society cannot actually achieve goals that are, in the larger sense, good for them. Because there really is no time. I mean, there's no time or even if you have the time, there's no energy, because you're so tired. From just struggling to do the basics in life. I mean, to me, even the notion that we have a two day weekend is ludicrous. By the time you finish grocery shopping and doing your laundry and cleaning your home, and whatever else you need to do on one of those days. That's kind of a whole day, and then you have maybe one day where you're supposed to recuperate from the stresses of the week. And that, to me is just absurd.



Anjuli Sherin 32:57

That's right. That's right. And this, of course, is like if you even have a weekend, right if you're not having to work multiple jobs in order to survive, because the minimum wage is really a non living wage, but actually hearing you speak and also realize that the other thing that it fosters, which is such a toxin, is isolation, like feeling so alone, or the only people that you see are than the members of your small nuclear family. And I think that's the other part of it, right? That not only are you tired, not only do you not have energy, but also you might start to really believe in buy into, it's just me, or I'm the one who feels this way, or who else, you know, like there isn't anybody else that I could bandwidth to gain momentum and energy. And that that disease, I think, especially a Western society, for sure, in America of profound loneliness, and the depression that it breeds, but I think also the helplessness that it breeds because the things that you and I are talking about, these are large systems, and the answers are usually for people or individual answers, right? Like, keep working and go get a better paying job. Or if you if you just keep working hard, then you'll be able to afford the things that you want. So the answers are usually economic, but like economic in the sense of consumption, like you'll be able to have more, you know, buy more, and they're also individual will be by your effort alone, instead of through unionizing. And just thinking about like Amazon right now and the fight, getting actually getting better wages, and then it will not happen alone. But that isolation and how it breeds helplessness, and I think huge mental health costs.



Omkari Williams 34:30

I agree. I think it's very interesting that we are in this time where the idea of unionizing is so abhorrent to someone like Jeff Bezos, who's richer than God and paying people a living wage and not working them to death seems so radical and how did that become a radical concept? I find that very disheartening and I do sometimes struggle with staying positive, in the face of that kind of event of people voting against their own economic self interest. And it shows how much work there is to do, but it also shows why community is so important. And that's the piece I choose to focus on most of the time is, okay, let's just keep building community because that will expand out and in that x expansion is our power to make a difference.



Anjuli Sherin 35:29

Absolutely.



Omkari Williams 35:30

Our time is getting short. And I have a couple more questions that I'd like to ask you. One of them is that you write that we have to make a commitment to become joyous, resilient, and loving agents of change. What does that look like for you?



Anjuli Sherin 35:49

I think what it looks like and that what that comes out of is, you know, and again, I'll tell my personal story, the first not something the first nine years, Omkari, of like me, even having the like privilege, right of going to therapy. I started therapy as a young 20 year old, coming from Pakistan to this country. And just a lot of like trauma, trauma around, like migration, trauma, like just like personal life history. But I think a lot of also profound loneliness here as a new immigrant in a society, which is, we just talked about, not so community oriented, especially not to, I think newcomers are coming on their own, and they're not tapping into a family system. But though it was a profound privilege, and very lucky, you know, just like life changing for me to have access to therapy and trying to work through those issues. It took nine years before I encountered any therapy that was actually politicized. Any therapy that actually began talking to me about these things that I'm feeling and undergoing are not just a solitary event. And they're not just about my personal history and coming here, but are actually part of these larger histories, right? Histories of migration, histories around being a person of color, histories around Islamophobia, because the time that I came, 9/11 happened, and a lot of the things that I felt and experienced happened, right, in the decade after that.

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Anjuli Sherin 37:05

And, I also at the same time as a clinician, because I became a clinician early on in my own therapy journey, and again, took those nine years before my clinical training became politicized, and had me start to really actively think about and speak to and work with clients on. We're not just talking about individual trauma at any moment, we're also talking about the systems in play, that have been influencing this trauma that are always at play, and that are affecting us. So I say that to say like, what it means to be in this kind of joyful activism or like a joyful resilience or a joyful therapeutic journey that is not just about ourselves alone, is to actually wake up to that. And I again, as a therapist, I often speak to it in the therapy room, but I would say the same thing, as if you're a teacher in the classroom, if you're a doctor, in the medical system, which has done a lot to harm, especially Black bodies, and Brown bodies. And so to begin to educate ourselves that there is systemic trauma at play at every level, and then to begin to introduce that to whoever we interact with in our lives, whether it's personally or in our work.

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Anjuli Sherin 38:15

And then finally, I would say like in the past decade, like since then, 10, 12 years, it made me realize that I cannot be, as we said, sitting across from one of my clients in the room, grieving with her about the fact that yes, lack of access to childcare, or grieving in this past year, the murders of Black men at the hands of police, and not at the same time, pick up the phone or get out on the streets, and I call my congressman sign the petitions be actively rallying in the streets, noticing where my money is going, and what it's supporting. So it's an integration of we are not just our individual lives, and our activism is not separate from our work ourselves, our human being. And to me, I would say, our spiritual path, that we really begin to integrate all this and say, like, what I wish for myself, I wish for my neighbor, for the person next door. And I begin to look at every facet of my life where I wake up to, how is the world at large, treating me and treating them and that there are differences. And then I begin to work towards eradicating those.

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Anjuli Sherin 39:20

And I love what you share, on your side, which is you know, pick two, because it is so overwhelming. It's so overwhelming, and it's so demoralizing. At the same time. I think for mental health it is such a form of resilience to actually take action. And to take action towards one or two that really called to your heart because it does help us feel like we have power, we are part of a community, and that we are the change. We are the change in this world. And most of us, I mean, all of us, I would say are standing here on the backs of many people who do that same change work myself included. I wouldn't even be sitting here talking to you. Wouldn't even be in this country if it wasn't for the work of so many

activists who came before.



Omkari Williams 39:59

I love that you say that because I think that something that is often very discouraging for people is the recognition that none of us are going to live long enough to see the end of this journey. We aren't, but that our, our responsibility is to do our part, the way that the people who came before us did their parts, and we get to stand on their shoulders, and we get to build on their legacy. And that can, you know, it can feel it can feel daunting. But I think that, the main thing is to just keep our eyes focused on where we're going. And just recognize that that is our responsibility. Everything else is out of our hands, but we have agency over what we choose to do in any given circumstance. So I really appreciate that you say that, before we go, I would love it if you would give the listeners three simple actions that they can take to build resilience, both in their personal lives, but also in their communities.



Anjuli Sherin 41:01

Okay. On an individual level, and the book talks about this, on an individual level, we'll start there, is really focus on cultivating a profoundly nurturing voice within. Because if the voice inside of you, is criticizing you and putting you down, or making you feel like there's nothing that you can do, or you have nothing to give, it is really hard to get up and to be resilient. So that knowing that inside of you, there is a home that is a loving home cultivated by a loving voice. You know, I think even the most difficult of times, that can give so much solace and the courage to do the work that needs to be done in the world. So that would be step one.



Anjuli Sherin 41:41

Number two, bust the myth that you have to do it alone. Nothing in this world, I think in the end are we gonna achieve alone. And so whether it is something that's hurting you in your personal life or something in the world that is hurting you look for and find that community. Even if it's a community of just one more, even if it is your healer, or a spiritual practitioner, or your best friend.



Anjuli Sherin 42:01

And if you can, this is this will be number three, tie the pain that you're feeling about something larger, to a movement, to an organization that is doing bigger work in the



world, because at that point, your resilience again, will be buoyed by the work of thousands or millions. And also you will begin to feel and see how your personal actions tie and buoy the resilience of millions outside of you. So loving inner voice, making sure that you expand your community and then tying tying your work to that of a larger movement.



Omkari Williams 42:35

I really love those. Those are just beautiful. And I have so enjoyed this conversation. I'm so grateful that we had an opportunity to speak and your book is remarkable. And I hope that people listening will go out and get it and do the exercises and take the time and just work through it at your own pace. You know, I think something we do a lot in this society is we like to rush. But I've taken my time with your book. And it's been very rewarding. So thank you so much. Anjuli, this was really, really great.



Anjuli Sherin 43:10

Thank you. Omkari, yes, thank you for this amazing podcast, like the resources on your site, I really will just sound like you're reading Joyce Resilience, especially and you want to know how to take everyday acts of activism, I would also just refer people back to your site. I also actually do want to let people know that if you have enjoyed the conversation, and especially around like cultivating these deep voices inside that helped us make change. On my website, you will find nine free guided meditations. And I would really encourage that, that again, you're not trying to cultivate those voices alone. Even simply having the guided meditations will help you drop in and just be able to access that part of you. So I hope they're a useful resource for people.



Omkari Williams 43:50

I'm sure we'll add that to the list of three, we will have four things that people can do. Thank you so very much. As much as it did anything else. The pandemic showed us where we are and are not resilient both as individuals and as a society. I encourage you to read Anjuli's book and find your way of building that resilience in both your personal and communal spheres. Yes, there is much work to do. But how much better if we can do that work with joyous resilience. Thank you so much for listening. I'll be back with another episode of Stepping Into Truth very soon.