

[music, Peace Paradigm Radio theme, 0:00 – 0:54]

Stephanie [0:54]: Welcome everybody to “Peace Paradigm Radio”. I’m your host Stephanie van Hook, and I’m the director of the Metta Center for Nonviolence in Petaluma. Our work is to promote the study and practice of nonviolence worldwide. Sorry, but today I cannot be joined by my co-host Michael Nagler who has headed South to Los Angeles. But, he has left me some nonviolence news to report to our listeners. So let’s see if I can give it a try. We’re beginning to feel that things are really coming to a head; that the secret Fast-track Free Trade Agreement – the TPP – that we reported on last time, the militarization of the police, there are more reports everyday of SWAT teams killing American citizens for little reason, not to mention the drone attacks abroad, and the challenge the president holds to the onrush of oppressive measures on every front, is one side of things. But, on the other [side] which we report here in nonviolence in the news is that the world is really uprising in resistance movements; they are slowly increasing in sophistication and coordination. [02:03]

So here’s a sample. To start off on a happy note, we applaud this year’s James Lawson award for success in civil resistance. [It is] awarded by Reverend Lawson himself to a good friend of ours, Jenny Williams, founder of Women of Zimbabwe Arise – WOZA. Recently, [they were] joined by Men of Zimbabwe Arise – MOZA. WOZA has been subject to numerous arrests for their peaceful protests, themselves illegal under Zimbabwean law. But, it has not stopped the struggle for human rights under the presidency of Robert Mugabe. We wonder what Jenny has to say about his recently hotly contested re-election. Other awards went to activists in South Africa, Russia, and Bolivia; representing the diversity of determined struggles ongoing. At yet another attempt at US brokered peace talks to take shape maybe between Israel [and] Palestine, Palestinian non-violent resistance continues on the ground despite continued oppression. In the West Bank, a village, Babas-Shams, sprang up in what Israel considers the E1 area, and was promptly demolished. But even more villages sprang up! In other words, the Palestinians survived what we at Metta call the Sharpeville Crisis – after the Sharpeville Massacre in South Africa in 1960 which did cause the African National Congress Protestors to go back to violence. According to one observer of this [Palestinian non-violent resistance] scene, the young people in particular are carrying out their activities with awareness. They are proactive, rather than reactive. They plan and think of how to put their opponent in a dilemma. They are also trying to think of ways of how not to be destructive to the interests of their own people, [and] to rally as much popular support as possible. But, the big challenge is to remain organized so that the movement remains nonviolent. This will require unified leadership, and hard work of ongoing organization and training. [03:59]

Closer to home, we’ve been following the strength of the Moral Monday Protests happening in North Carolina where the entire state legislature – now in Republican hands – is ruling out one measure after another. [They] are seen to be repressive by many, including restrictions on voter rights, and of course, abortion. This movement has a charismatic leader, Rev. Barber, who I’m happy to announce will be on Peace Paradigm Radio on September 20<sup>th</sup> to talk about the protests.

Although it’s not just about protests, our friend John Lindsey Poland of Fellowship of Reconciliation, who we also hope to have on this show shortly, tells us that while peace communities of Columbia are not doing well, the best known among them, San Jose de Apartado has not been destroyed despite the death[s] of nearly 200 of its members of the last 15 or so years. They recently inspired two German ex-revolutionaries to found Utopian Community (or the more current term is Sustainable Community in South Portugal, TAMERA, which in turn cooperates with communities in India, Tibet, the US, Brazil, and elsewhere.) They are also planning a global campus to teach from a place of abundance and care for environmental resources. [05:15]

So we regard all of these movements, and many that we are not able to share with you today as filling in the idea of the new story, which I’m going to be talking about, certainly today, with our guest Leela Fernandes. Leela Fernandes is a professor of Women’s Studies and Political Science at the University of

Michigan Ann-Arbor. She specializes in Comparative Politics, International Feminism, and South Asian Studies. She's taught at Rutgers [University], New Brunswick, and Oberlin [College]. She's the author of several books [including] India's New Middle Class: [Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform], Producing Workers: The Politics of Gender, Class, and Culture in the Calcutta Jute Mills, as well as Transforming Feminist Practice which is the book I'd like to talk to her about today. She's the author of numerous articles and essays on woman and labor, class politics, cultural representation, nationalism, and globalization. Let me turn on her phone volume. [06:12]

S [06:12]: Leela, are you with us?

L [06:13]: Yes I am.

S: Welcome to the show today.

L: Thank you.

S: So, the full title of the book today that I want to talk to you about today is "Transforming Feminist Practice: Nonviolence, Social Justice, and the Possibilities of a Spiritualized Feminism". I am excited about the topic today because at the Metta Center we sometimes refer to nonviolence as the bridge between spiritual practice and social change. We want to try to go beyond the voices that say social transformation only happen because of violence. And we want to go beyond the voices that say nonviolence is only a strategy you pick up sometimes, and that sometimes it works. I felt that your book really helped to bring light to some of these issues. Before we get into the book entirely, I'd like to learn a little bit about you. What was your start? What brought you to this intersection between feminism, nonviolence, and spiritual practice? [07:14]

L [07:15]: I guess some of that is just life journey. My work has always been a question of inequality and justice. I have always been committed to those kinds of issues. But, I specifically wrote the book because of a sense that there was a loss in many secular movements – including the feminist movement – because there isn't really a systematic engagement with spirituality [and] the resources in the strong foundation that spiritual practice can provide... which is transformative. Some of it drew out of a sense of – not just my own sense – a sense for students who often see all the problems, and see all the criticism of "what is", but they are not often given the resources of a positive alternative, which can be transformative; not just a negative resistance.

S [08:16]: In your book you refer to the foreclosure of the imagination of your students. Talk a little bit about that. What do you think is contributing to the foreclosure of the imagination? I've been in a high school talking to 11<sup>th</sup> graders – already at that age – that imagining beyond what we already have seemed a little bit difficult. Is it a cultural issue? Is it just in the universities? Talk about that idea. [08:49]

L [08:54]: There probably isn't one right answer. It's probably all of the combination of things. Some of it is the historical conditions in which we are living in, specifically in this country; so some of it may be specific to the United States. You talk a lot about the drone strikes, which is a large part of our country. There is no way to do violence upon someone else – another country – without either experiencing that violence directly or indirectly. Some of it can lead to spiritual alienation. Some of it is that the problem seems so big – the systems that we are located [in] – are overwhelming, particularly to younger people, most of who are simply trying to survive. Sometimes they simply can't see outside of it. Part of it also is that the solutions they get from really good progressive spaces within places like universities, [which] don't often give examples that are transformative. I don't know if that makes sense.

S [10:07]: I agree that there is a lot of work to do in building the alternatives. Hannah Arendt once wrote in her essay, “On Violence” that the challenge of the military isn’t that people have a natural tendency towards warfare, it’s just that they have no alternative to go towards.

L: Yes. Right

S [10:45]: We really want to try to take out some of the ideas that you are talking about that we are taking as given. When you say “spirituality”, in your book, you seem to say spirituality as a doorway for awakening the imagination...for people to act in reality. Can you describe what you mean by “spirituality”? Why would we want to associate our movement for social justice with spirituality which has been co-opted in many ways? Can you speak to this?

L [11:14]: Yes sure. One of the things that people often ask you when you use the word [is that they] ask you for a definition. And sometimes I think the question itself is interesting because you can use many different terms, which people don’t ask you for a definition. Just the question itself is interesting to me. I don’t have a specific definition in terms of a specific – like a specific religion. It varies widely across cultures, across individuals, across historical periods, in terms of what fate and spirituality means. In some ways, it would be too difficult to get into the issue of definition. But I think I will say that why it’s important is to some extent...my own view, which has evolved since the book. In the book, I was simply trying to introduce even the language to a very secular spaces; in a way, to translate things to audiences that may be fearful or skeptical. But, I think my answer now would be [that] I don’t think you can really have a lasting form of transformation if you cut off a part of yourself, and only look at the material world. Whatever spirituality means – whether it means thinking about human connection – whether it means thinking about the connection between yourself and something transcendent...however you want to define it. I’ve come to the conclusion now, several years after having written the book, that I do and I don’t say it strongly in the book since I didn’t want to scare off the audience, particularly feminist audiences; [but] for me, I don’t think that you can be fully transformative. For me, spirituality means examining yourself as much as examining conditions out there; looking to yourself and looking at the connection between yourself what’s out there. It also includes breaking from ego based politics – ego-based conceptions of justice. In some ways, I don’t think you can disconnect it, no matter how you want to define spirituality.

S [13:31]: There is a lot in there that I’d like to go into in throughout this interview; but, I really want to draw out this idea that you’ve said: we’re talking about this whole view of who we are as human beings, that we are more than just material, that there’s something else which I think can be, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in the Unites States, a revolutionary idea. The idea that we are more than just our bodies or [even] the mindset that we are our minds, bodies, and spirits. Would you agree with that? Would you add anything to that?

L [14:06]: I agree with that. There are different ways you can put it. I think one of the ways which I tried to put in the book to reach out to more skeptical audiences is that most people in the world give meaning to their lives through languages or practices or belief systems which are not purely secular in the narrow sense. And so for any movement to really take off, you have to think about what makes sense to poor people’s lives. That’s just one set of basic things; that’s more of a strategic argument. What I’m saying to you now, I think, is that at a deeper level, to me, it’s a step further – it’s not just a strategic aspect of spirituality – it’s as you talk about nonviolence simply not being a method, [but also] as a way of life – to me spirituality is a full sense of who we are which is not reducible to the ego, to the mind, to the body, and even the identity at a certain point.

S [15:13]: A way that I’ve understood this is that we have experiences that are neither – as you put it – secular or sacred, it’s just “being human”, and yet we’ve not learned to name those experiences as something that could help us to transform ourselves and transform the way we see the world. So [while]

we are having these experiences all the time, we just haven't learned how to name them or really know what they are. Would you agree with that?

L [15:49]: Ya. And I think another layer to that is that we actually lose resources. There are lots of problems of institutionalized religion which is why so many progressive activists, and writers, and thinkers can be skeptical of institutionalized religion. But even within religion, as well as a whole range of spiritual practices, there is a lot of knowledge which we lose...knowledge which *is* transformative. I would add that as another layer.

S [16:26]: Can you give a sense of what is the difference between mysticism within the religions of the world and the way that they are practiced more traditionally?

L [16:38]: Well, I'm not an expert in theology, so I'm probably not the best person. So I'll probably just be speaking from my own opinion base, rather than from any systematic knowledge base. I think what I'm talking about is the difference between any form of transformative practice – whether it's secular, or whether it's sacred. When you're working with an institution or building an organization, it becomes a social base. Whether it's religion, a leftist organization, or a woman's organization, the principle and truth of your practice gets changed and shaped by the social nature of your organization. So own my personal understanding of mysticism is that [it is] the heart, the pure core, the practice, [and] the kernel of every major religion and spiritual tradition. As I said, this is not my expertise; this is more of my lived beliefs.

S [17:38]: You mention in your book [that] Jesus and his message of social justice, and the practices in Sufism, [that] they're come from the awareness of the interconnections of human beings, and the living systems. Can you speak more to the idea of this interconnection and whether it is religious, a mystical understanding – or not – or if this is a real basis of understanding our work in social justice?

L [18:13]: I missed the first part when you talked about the connection? What were the two things you were talking about?

S [18:18]: I was thinking in the book that you were describing social justice and mysticism mixed together when we are looking at the work of Jesus for understanding “do unto others as you would have them do unto you”, the more radical teachings of Jesus, or the more interconnected understandings that arise out of Islam, or regular understandings of our sense of interconnection, of our systems that we find in biology and other places. That this understanding of interconnection helps us better orient our work in social justice.

L [19:05]: I think you can look at it from two different sides. I'll talk about the side which I think I talked about in the book. Then, I'll add another layer to that. I think what I was talking about was how within history – and you gave a couple of examples – really great transformative figures always had a very deep either spiritual or religious mystical understanding of the sense of interconnection which is the foundation of what they were able to transform. That's what many practitioners of transformative nonviolence live their lives. They have a sense of nonviolence as a way of life, more than simply like a method, which you were talking about before. I think that's where that connection lines; that internal sense of interconnection which has a spiritual or mystical base is what gives you the strength to stand up to and transform these systems which would otherwise seem so large. In some ways, it gives you a sense of a power which is larger than what seemed to be daunting systems. In some ways, without that sense of empowerment, the systems which we are talking about do seem overwhelming do seem daunting. How do you change the military in the contemporary United States? How do you change a massive global capitalist system? They seem overwhelming, but I think the kinds of mystical figures which you are talking about, had a sense of religious and spiritual power that was bigger than any system. I'm not sure if that's what you're getting at. But what I'd add to it is, and I think this is the difference between usually spirituality as a method even – or nonviolence as a method – which ultimately itself has its limits, but I think the difference between

social and political figures who want to use nonviolence, spirituality, or faith as a method is qualitatively different from transformative mystical figures (or religious figures) who go through an internal process of transformation. Once you go through that internal process, as you keep transforming, as you keep unfolding yourself, the external structure crumbles and changes around you.

S [21:43]: This is very interesting and I need to do a station ID really quick. We are KWMR 90.5 Point Reyes and 89.9 Bolinas, streaming live on the web at KWMR.org. My guest today is Leela Fernandes, professor of Woman Studies and Political Science at the University of Michigan Ann-Arbor. We're talking about non-violence, social justice, and spiritualized feminism, especially related to her book by that title, "Transforming Feminist Practice".

So Leela, let's look. You're really calling for...in your book you [mention] it several times for a "Spiritual Revolution". That term really struck me in an important way. You said that movements for social justice "are sacred and diverse." It says that "movements for social and political transformation have faltered not because of the impossibility of realizing their vision of social justice, but because such transformations can not be complete unless they are explicitly and inextricably linked to a deeper form of spiritual transformation on a mass basis." This is what you were just giving us an overview of when somebody really takes nonviolence and spiritual practice within themselves that the structures around them seem to dissolve, and change, and transform. Is there anything else you would like to say on that topic in particular?

L [23:16] No, I think that's exactly what I was trying to talk about. You captured it well!

S [23:25]: The other day at the Metta office, we were having [a] conversation about the definition of peace. The peace movement, there are people working for peace, [for] social justice. But then, you see spiritual view has a very different idea of what "peace" means. I think that word really links it into these leaders like Gandhi or King. They're looking at peace from a deeper level. So what does "peace" mean to you?

L [23:51] That's a hard question. [laughs]

S: [laughs] No, it seems easy.

L [23:55]: I think it's a complicated question because peace doesn't always mean the absence of conflict. To me, I think. If you have...I think for me...I think what I'm struggling with putting into words is that peace sometimes can be mistaken for the status quo. Even if you think of marriages of law and order...keeping the peace...that's not the version of peace that I would feel comfortable with – or probably many people who are interested in activism – would be comfortable with. In essence, that is the maintenance of inequality, oppression, or injustice.

S [24:44]: Right, or like nonviolent crimes. We read about "nonviolence" in the papers, and we read that so-and-so is arrested for [a] nonviolent crime, which is not the kind of nonviolence we are talking about.

L: Exactly, exactly. So for me, peace has to, in some ways, be the product of transformation. It has to come *after* transformation. Even if we link this with spiritual practice, or [as] you said, your organization has a lot of interest in mysticism. That's often a very difficult process. Even people who are engaged in nonviolence often suffer a lot. It's not a very peaceful process, in that sense. Peace is what comes after the process of transformation...or through the process of transformation because you can also be suffering a lot, but still be at peace. Or [even] more at peace, if you are in a sense of self-alienation. I'm not sure if I have a clear answer for you; it's very complicated.

S: Mmm-hmm.

L: [It's] more of a process as opposed to an outcome.

S [25:53] Hmm.

L: It's more of a state of being.

S: And how has this influenced your discussions in feminism of a different understanding of peace?

L [26:04]: I'm not sure if I've taught or written directly about peace; I think I write more about social change and transformation. Maybe that's what I mean by "peace". I think, for me, I get nervous about this way which peace may be too easily taken as a static state – a state of rest, rather than movement or change.

S [26:43]: So peace as an *active* state?

L: Yes, so for you to define it as an active process –which could include a lot of unrest and in some ways, difficulty – I would probably be more comfortable with the idea of peace.

S: And moving forward in movements *for* social justice – how to carry with oneself an idea of peace as an active struggle while confronting some very difficult challenges, you mention that there is a lot of difficulty with spiritual practice or with cultivating an awareness of peace as an active movement, the flow towards something later, something down the road. How does this influence movements for social justice and social change because we have to deal with what's in front of us as well? You've discussed, perhaps, never holding onto a sense of retributive justice (as one example) that I've found in your book.

L [27:59]: Right. So in that example, that doesn't mean a lack of resistance. Right? So you can oppose something without either the intent or the practice of retribution. The big examples are Gandhian Nonviolence or the Civil Rights Movement where you're actively opposing. Or even in the case of South Africa. You're past laws, you're actively opposing in the colonial period, you're actively opposing unjust British Laws, or laws of segregation, but you're doing it, in the words of those leaders and those activists, you're doing it in order to overturn an unjust law and not to engage in retribution against whoever is enforcing the law, so it's not an active personal retribution.

S: And that seems to me, to be difficult.

L: Yes.

S: Thinking of the stories of injustice that we hear any time. What would we do with those other people that are doing these other things; it forces oneself to examine oneself. That in itself is hard. But to say that the structures that we have are not adequate for dealing with that sense of "I'm participating in this injustice too." Right? So how to really find that balance between the need for self transformation as well as an acting justice in the world or helping others achieve a sense of... a sense that justice has been served in cases of oppression, repression, and violence?

L [29:49]: Ya, I don't necessarily think that it means not bringing people who have committed acts of genocide – for example, an extreme example – I don't think it means not making people accountable, because that wouldn't work either. This is where you supply this connection to spirituality is important because from a spiritual method, if you use the same method as the oppressor, you end up reflecting what you're trying to change, right? That's not the same as saying you don't want to hold whatever structure or people – or even those individuals in the structure – accountable. For me there is a difference between holding someone accountable, and engaging in retribution.

L [30:40]: Thank you very much. I'm talking with Leela Fernandes on "This is Peace Paradigm Radio". We're going to take a brief break. We'll be back to talk more about nonviolence, social justice, and transforming feminist practice. [31:02]

## **PPR – Leela Fernandes Part 2**

[music introduction]

S [32:56]: Support for KWMR is provided by Bingham-Osborn & Scarborough, LLC with offices in San Francisco, Silicon Valley, and Healdsburg; providing clients with wealth management, and investment guidance services. More information available 415-781-8385 or online at [www.bosinvest.com](http://www.bosinvest.com). Gallery Route One is proud to nurture and promote emerging and established artists and to support KWMR. Artist run Gallery Route One believes that serves the cultural, political, and environmental concerns of the community. The gallery is open Wednesday through Monday. For more information: 415-663-1347 or online at [galleryrouteone.org](http://galleryrouteone.org). Stay tuned for the rest of Peace Paradigm Radio with Stephanie van Hook.

[more music]

S [34:56]: Welcome back to Peace Paradigm Radio. I'm Stephanie van Hook, your host; I'm on the phone with Leela Fernandes, a professor of Women Studies and Political Science at the University of Michigan Ann-Arbor. [W]e are talking about feminism, social justice, nonviolence, and transforming. [We are] really building a spiritual revolution...as she says in her book. [When] we left, we were talking about some pretty difficult topics, including how to enact justice without mirroring the oppression that existed when the act was committed. Leela, you were saying that it is still important to hold people accountable. How might that be done in the best of all possible world [and] in a world that we can also work toward?

L [35:55]: I think it's easier to think of a really specific example because otherwise it's harder to pin it down in abstraction; if you think of, for example, a basic social phenomena in the US, which is contemporary racism. When you think of spiritual practice...one of things I write about is that you don't want to get locked in the rigid identity category. In some sense, when you think of the spirit and the source of yourself, it is transcendent beyond that. At the same time, if you're living or existing – in the contemporary United States – there is no way to live in this world without confronting either racial marginalization (depending on your location) or racial privilege. [Therefore,] any kind of spiritual practice which is focused on the self has to talk about racial privilege as part of that self. So spirituality, in that sense, is not divorced from those material realities. One way of thinking about this difference between retribution and holding someone accountable is that you don't want to engage in personal retribution against people in order to get them to confront racism. At the same time, people are accountable for racial privilege, and racial inequality within the United States.

S [37:30]: Right, it also seems to be drawing beyond spiritual...just on what seems to be more effective on helping an oppressor to coming to terms with their participation and oppression; offering a way out, offering something else, or a different understanding for how they can atone or change, and still belong to the community.

L [38:00]: Possibly. The way that I would see it is that it is the responsibility of the oppressor; it can be problematic when the oppressed – in a sense – become responsible for doing the spiritual work for engaging in change. In some ways there are also way[s] that groups of privileged – or oppressors, to use your language – can also engage in spiritual extraction, which is similar to material extraction which has happened. You can even think of this historically – like the appropriation of music, or song, or poetry, or

many of the languages we use for spiritual expression – can also be extracted. When you think of that issue, like atonement, for me, I'd be careful about making sure there isn't a form of spiritual extraction where it becomes the role of the oppressed to fix the oppressed – to use crude language. You can even see this in secular terms; in some ways it [becomes] clear when you think of it in secular terms. It's not the job of a person of color to educate a person of racial privilege, in the United States. To assume that it's the job of the person of color to do the educating sets up another dynamical relationship of power. You know what I mean?

S [39:39]: And in a sense, that way out spiritual practice then provides is that it helps to redefine if somebody is seeking power over another, they're really putting themselves in an insecure position because they will constantly have to reinforce and dominate others. So spiritual practice – the way I understand it – is a way of finding a different kind of power... a power that doesn't depend on overpowering other people.

L [40:15]: Yes. Spirituality, like any other term – because after all, it is just another human term – as you said right in the beginning, it can be colonized. That's where everything is always risky. You know what I mean?

S [40:32]: Say more about that

L [40:33]: Well in some of my recent works (since then), I've talked about knowledge production in the United States. I've talked about the ethics of risk and risk acquisition. This is actually a term coined by Sharon Welsh. She talks about moving away from an ethics of control to an ethics of risk. Any kind of project of transformation – spiritual, political, social – is always risky because you never know the affects [and] consequences of your action. The reason spirituality is so important is because spirituality has, within it, sources like humility, self-examination; so if you have an authentic spiritual practice, you're building that into your political and social practice. But at the same time, even spirituality has th[e] risk of being colonist. So in the example you were just talking about, there is also this danger of having spiritual practices of traditions, rituals, or even knowledge of particular communities being appropriated by the more powerful. Any process, any project of transformation is always fraught with risk. So when you ask me the question about peace, there always has to be a process because we never know – right? –there is that partiality that we live with. We never know fully what the consequences of our actions are going to be.

S [42:16]: It reminds me of something that in a conversation I with Cynthia Enloe – a feminist political scientists – I asked her how she would define feminism, she said, “this definition always has to be changing because at the moment we begin to say ‘this is what it is’, that's also what creates the ability to reframe it, throw it away and say ‘I don't have to think about that anymore now that I've figured it out’.”

L [42:49]: I guess for me, one of the reasons why spirituality is an important connection – or necessary part of transformation – when you look at the greatest mystical transformations, mystical acquisitions, and sources of knowledge, there's a sense that there is something bigger than this. And we don't know. There's a sense that we don't know everything, and we do have to look outside our selves. Or if not that, at least to realize the limits of what we know. And that sense of humility and that sense of uncertainty can – in some ways – provide you with a stronger foundation than if you assume[d] that you kn[e]w the right manifest of the social change. Which doesn't mean that you don't take the risk of asking, doesn't mean that you just stay within your room and that you're completely internal...but it changes the intention and nature of how you act in the world.

S [43:51]: How do you think about action, as well? Do you see action as only going out into the street and making one's voice heard? Or is this the ability to change one's perspective about our relationships with others – is that also another area of action? There seems to be a dichotomy – a split – of this is what we



mean by action (getting out there and protesting) or sitting in offices or being a political activist versus other people who I've heard that say, "I'm working very hard to change myself and that's adequate for me". Where do you see this spectrum of action and how would you talk about that?

L [44:50]: For me personally, it's probably a combination. I don't think anyone can actually know and say what the right model is. It will vary for different people. It also depends on the part of life...the place you are in your life. For example, there are times where you may need to retreat from action because you may need to go through some introspection. There are times where you will need to take what you've learned in your introspection and share it with the world. To me, there has to be a combination; however the balance in that combination changes. For example, sometimes, there is too much judgment which we make of other people. You know what I'm trying to say? There's too much judgment about what someone *is* doing or *not* doing. We always want to talk about accountability; we want to spur people to act because there is so much injustice in the world, but none of us really know the right balance for each particular person. That's where that uncertainty – not presuming we know what's happening in a particular person's life which is making them be a certain way – for me, that's where the spiritual sense of uncertainty is important.

S [46:20]: Mmhm. It seems like an empowering concept of, 'I'm going to work on myself' on one hand, 'I'm going to try to be the best person that I could be in my relationships with others that I can know to a certain extent whether or not I'm trying my best at a certain time'; yet on the other hand, to be able then to say, 'Is this that I don't know what the consequences will be once I start interacting with people because of the intricate network of needing so many actors in a situation [that] it's hard to know where one's action will go' but still holding onto the principles of nonviolence, non-retribution, might give one a sense of – Gandhi wrote/said, "throw the right stone in the right pond and the results will take care of themselves" – that sense of detachment from the results of one's work?

L [47:33]: I think that makes sense. If I could just put it in a simple example: if you're committed to social justice, your emphasis is to want other people to mobilize. That's where the need for people – not to stay in a safe place meditating comes from, right? – because you want people to be out (speaking) in whatever they can. That impetus comes from many progressive spaces; whether they believe in nonviolence, or whether they come from a feminist space or wherever you can think of. On the other hand, if you are engaging in the internal process where you're saying: I'm just going to change my relationships with other people. If you think of yourself as really engaged in the process, your definition of a relationship cannot really remain static. The minute it remains static, it means you've drawn a wall around yourself. For example, if you are a pretty good person of privilege and you have a nice house, and you decide you want to engage in a certain level of introspection, there may be progressive activists who condemn them for being someone who is walled off in their privilege. There may be an aspect of it which is true. But if you're really engaging in introspection and you're not stopping with the walls who you think you're related to – your family, the people in your neighborhood (which in itself may be a safe area) – the concept of your relationship broadens. If spiritual process is a living thing, you can never have a bounded wall of who you are related to. So that internal introspection can never just be about sitting by yourself in your room because that's just not how things work because we are connected beyond that. That source of that connection, of moving outwards, does not have to come from someone outside schooling you saying you're privileged and not doing anything because if you're really living your faith, your walls will have to come down eventually. I don't know if that's making any sense.

S [49:57]: Yes, that's very interesting. Leela, you talk about...you say things in your book that I've thought about, but I've had some trouble working out. One of them is this – you draw a lot from King and Gandhi – you refer to King's thoughts on the power of redemptive suffering. The quote that you chose from Martin Luther King – I'm going to read that – "as Martin Luther King Jr. explained, 'suffering can be a most creative and powerful force. Now it is very interesting at this point that both violence and nonviolence agree that suffering can be a very powerful social force. But there is this difference: violence

says that suffering can be a powerful social force by inflicting suffering on somebody else. So this is what we do in war, this is what we do in the whole violent thrust of the violent movement. It believes you achieve some end by inflicting suffering on another. The nonviolent say that suffering becomes a powerful social force when you willingly accept that violence on yourself; so that self-suffering stands at the center of the nonviolent movement and the individuals involved are able to suffer in a creative manner, feeling that unearned suffering is redemptive, and that suffering may serve to transform the social situation.” Seems like a slippery slope and I was wondering if you might explain this idea a little bit, and maybe even challenge some thinking about it as well.

L [51:43]: I think that it’s a slippery slope because it can be used as a rationalization. Is that what you mean?

S: Yes, or to tell people who are suffering. There’s a lot of ways to think about it: but to tell people who are clearly suffering from oppression that their suffering can be redemptive when willingly accepted...that’s a difficult idea. What inspired you to bring this into your writing, and to share this in your book?

L [52:27]: I think it’s because...there’s probably different kinds of reasons. On one level, for people who are more privileged, who look at people who are suffering, it can shape that view of the poor, the oppressed as being passive and exploited...which can also be an objectified gaze on the poor and the suffering. In some ways, from the gaze of the powerful (or the oppressor)...we don’t really know what suffering means for different groups and different people. Sometimes the eye of the privileged can be objectified. For example, when you see ads for poor starving children that you see on the television, which depicts people as being lifeless, or without hope, or without dignity...that can reproduce the gaze of the oppressor, on one level. Shaking up that understanding that we know what suffering means in different contexts and different places is one way of looking at it. Another way of looking at it – it’s not a justification, and it’s possible my thinking has changed since I wrote that or since I used the quote some years ago – in terms of people who are experiencing great hardship and great suffering, it’s a means for transforming that suffering into a transformative and powerful force. My understanding of King’s quote is that that’s what he’s talking about; I don’t think he’s rationalizing and saying that suffering is good, [rather], that suffering can be the source of redemption and transformation.

S [54:35]: It also raises the more Buddhist idea that all of life is suffering...in a way. Turning to a more spiritualized view from a perspective that there are some people who are suffering, and then if I’m causing that suffering, then I’m not suffering myself? That it helps to also really bring that out, but perhaps a willing...King is talking about making that suffering conscious; bringing it forward and then helping to use that to help mirror the suffering that is inherent in the situation.

L [55:19]: You could think of it as a very mundane – not mundane – hypothetical example. I’m thinking off the top of my head. If you see someone beating a child (or beating someone else) really badly and harming them, you could get in front of that person to stop it, and you would probably be beaten and hurt and you would suffer. But if you’re doing that as an act of transformation, you’re going to be at peace with it, and the person who’s doing the beating...and that’s where the issue of peace comes in...we don’t know who is at peace; the person engaging in the violence may seem to be powerful, may seem to have control – but that’s from a very visible, very material sense of control. My understanding of suffering is more in that sense. In terms of Gandhi’s style, there were problems in terms of how Gandhi talked about suffering. He sometimes reproduced inequalities of gender and class in his particular practices of nonviolence. Nobody is without frailty when they are trying to live these concepts, so there is always that risk. Even when you talk about the suffering...you don’t want to rationalize because you don’t want to make that suffering seem good. There [are] some kinds of interpretations of spirituality that can make that a problematic interpretation, which says that you don’t really have to change anything because it’s somebody’s karma or because someone is *choosing* to live in that life of suffering. You want to be careful

that you don't do that. But at the same time, suffering itself can be – and has been – a very powerful impotence for transformation.

S [57:25]: Leela, this is very, very interesting. It's right at the time that I have to wrap up this show now. Thank you so much for coming on to be our guest today. We are talking about transforming feminist practice, nonviolence, social justice, and the possibilities of a spiritualized feminism. Thank you for all of the work that you are doing.

L: Thank you very much