

#43 – Mindful Living: Finding Balance in a Chaotic World

Donna Ferris: [00:00:00] Welcome to Bounce Back Stronger, the podcast that explores ways to find peace and purpose after difficulty. Today, I have the honor of having Coach Aruni with us.

A little about Coach Aruni.

Aruni Futuronsky, also known as Coach Aruni, is a writer, co-author, teacher, facilitator, and mindfulness coach with a career spanning over five decades.

She brings a wealth of experience and wisdom to the table. Since 1990, Coach Aruni has been a senior faculty member at the renowned Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health, where she delves into the essence of living yoga and yoga off the mat. At the core of Coach Aruni's philosophy lies compassion, gratitude, and humor.

She believes that life's true richness is unlocked when approached with these principles. Drawing from her personal journey of recovery, she finds parallels between 12-step principles and living yoga, offering a unique perspective that resonates deeply with many. Thank you so [00:01:00] much for being on the podcast, Aruni.

Coach Aruni: It's an honor to speak with you. I'm really happy to be here. Thanks for asking.

Donna Ferris: I attended a class with you with Kripalu in 2015, and I know you won't remember that, but it was very impactful to me. My whole experience at Kripalu, I actually recently talked about that, with Stephen Cope too.

And, and I've been following you really ever since. Over the pandemic, I think you did maybe a workshop on grief or something related to grief loss and

Coach Aruni: “Grief, Loss & Renewal, Savoring Life’s Lessons.”

Donna Ferris: Yeah, really, really helpful for me. And then you also have done amazing workshops around eating. What was the name of that one.

Coach Aruni: “Beyond right and wrong, the Kripalu approach to healthy eating.”

Donna Ferris: Yeah. Well, that was very helpful for me too.

Coach Aruni: Oh good. You took that. Oh, good. Good.

Donna Ferris: I did. I've always followed you through 12 steps because I'm sober now too. So found all of your [00:02:00] wisdom there really helpful on my journey too. So I just wanted to say that out front.

Coach Aruni: Yeah. That's so good to hear. I appreciate it.

Donna Ferris: Yeah, and maybe I'm going to start off with a sentence I really resonated with from your website.

What obstacles are blocking me from fully savoring this moment? Befriending those obstacles and integrating them into awareness opens the portals to possibility. Right now, it resonates with me and maybe others. I'd be curious what you meant by those words.

Coach Aruni: I think that's such a huge and important reframe for so many of us, even in 12 step, there's an idea of getting rid of, our character, character defects, you know, and I always thought of that as this like surgical, like spiritual, surgical, take this from me. And, the more I tried to do that, the more I spun, I think further and further away from the solution which is to [00:03:00] soften into it and to learn from it and to see that these things, these old behaviors, these old thought patterns, these core beliefs that have limited us at some point served us, but of course then limit us and keep us from being fully alive to befriend them, like on the yoga mat, rather than fighting against it and trying to push away the sensations, relaxing into the sensations opens the door for transformation. I mean, the way things change is by embracing them. It's so almost counter Western in a way, we're like the to-do people, and we're going to get rid of this. And that's not the solution. The solution is to let it be and to attend to it and pay attention to it.

And Rumi says, meet them at the door laughing. I don't know about laughing. I don't know about laughing. Sometimes at two in the morning, my anxiety is not very funny to me, but I know that trying to rid myself of it [00:04:00] is just, it's literally the wrong direction. When I get ready to attend to say, anxiety, okay, God, okay, life, fill in the blank.

Okay. Great spirit. Okay. Energy. I'm ready to look at this. It doesn't banish it from me. It gives me more opportunities to be present with it, to practice.

Donna Ferris: Yeah, definitely. Why do you think we're so hard on ourselves rather than befriending ourselves? I mean, it's a natural instinct almost to do the opposite of what we really need.

Coach Aruni: Why? I think it's cellular. I think we learn, for me so much of what fills me up is just this wild people pleasing. Like, if I do it right, then you love me.

Donna Ferris: You know, it'll be different.

Coach Aruni: It'll be different. It. If I just landed this time, if you knew me, if you really knew me, you would be out of here.

So let me be really busy. And I come from [00:05:00] worker bees and so is my wife. We're just little workers. We work and we work and getting a little tired of working like that. It's not working. It's not working. The way I'm thinking about retiring isn't working. I'm like working at it. So I don't know why I know for me, it's something I learned deeply from my family.

Donna Ferris: Yeah.

Coach Aruni: Just to keep going.

Donna Ferris: Yeah, the retirement question is a really good one. What does that mean? And I have been talking about this with different people. I was talking to somebody actually last week, and she's like beforehand, I was always so scheduled, and I had so many things going all the time, and time was my enemy, and now Time is my enemy in a different way because it's so vast That's all the more reason to kind of be thinking about meditation and working with your mind because you have more time to let it spin if you're not working.

Coach Aruni: More and more reasons to think about meditation and how to calm down. [00:06:00] Absolutely. Absolutely. I know life is asking me to let go of the way that I work and how busy I keep myself. And it's not that I don't enjoy the time when I'm not working. For me, it wraps around, Donna. Something about how I will be of help?

And I think for a lot of us in the helping professions, It's a big one. My therapist got, got my attention. She's like, I was in this meeting, and I was supposed to be

talking about a program that I teach and love. I wasn't exactly defending it, but I had to represent it well.

I had nothing to say. If you knew me, you would know that that's very odd, especially talking about the programming that I adore. I had nothing, and I wasn't. I wasn't uncomfortable. I was just really surprised because I felt safe with the people I was with in the meeting.

Anyway, I talked to my therapist about it, and she said to me, Aruni, [00:07:00] listen to that silence. And boy, did I hear her. Like she got my attention. Then she went on to say something I know, and we know that so many of us in the helping professions don't know how to say goodbye to the work and keep doing the work after we know it's time to leave.

So I don't want that. I don't want that. I want to trust that I'll be able to transition and find ways to be of service. I just want to be of service. That's, that's a real driver for me.

Especially now. I mean, with everything on this planet, that seems so awry and so out of balance and out of kilter.

Donna Ferris: Yeah, but you don't want your body to tell you to stop, either. Like that's kind of where I have a pattern of that I go, and then I hit a wall and end up in the hospital. Or something else, you know, where my body goes. Okay, if you're not gonna stop, I'm gonna. [00:08:00]

Coach Aruni: No, I think I actually know what you mean, so I'm keeping an eye on it and trying in my own way to slow down. It doesn't come naturally, you know, but I'm tired.

I'm more tired. There's a lot going on around us, and we just absorb it. There's a lot of trauma, a lot of stress, a lot of unknowns, things that seemed unchangeable are changing,

Donna Ferris: Yeah.

Coach Aruni: So I think we need to be careful.

I think we need to be tender and careful with ourselves and with one another, especially.

Donna Ferris: Yeah. And keep remembering that when we see people that are acting in ways that are hurtful, they're acting out of their own pain, right? It is hard to do, but it's been helpful for me to kind of go I can't do a thing about that. I'm not going to be able to fix that at all. I think getting a little sick before my most recent interaction with that has helped me to kind of go, okay, my body's saying you really can't do anything about this. You need to stop it. And I think for me, it was helpful [00:09:00] to realize that.

Then, when I got the trigger again, I could go, oh, that's their problem. I'm not going to do any good by being agitated about that or doing around it.

Coach Aruni: It's very interesting and timely that you say that, Donna. I was home yesterday, and somebody came to help with the house.

And I know this guy, he's, he's a good guy. I paid him and he started to go on about the cost of things. Like, okay, I could join that company. Yes, life is expensive. Yes, it is. And he just went on a tear about everybody and everything. And I found myself kind of pulling back, and there was nothing to say.

And I'm grateful that I just said, yeah, it's a hard time. Thank you, Milt. It's a hard time, but I think I might've been afraid in the past. I didn't get afraid. I don't think I would have engaged in the past. Cause I often feel like I don't have words. I'm so used to being around people that think like me.

And feel like me. I live in this very blue bubble here, and, you know, I work in a [00:10:00] yoga center. I work in my office. I was happy and grateful to notice that I didn't get all constricted and concerned. And yeah, I have a friend. Joe has this mantra.

He says, bless you. Change me. Bless you. Change me. And it's just talking to a client about that. And, and we added bless you. Change me. And...because there are people that, you know, She was talking about her mother-in-law and and yeah, her mother-in-law could use some tweaks. I mean, can't we all?

Donna Ferris: And that's a relationship that's rife, right? I think it's always good to kind of step back and look at that one. Like that one just, it's always going to be a thing. Yeah. I mean, they make sitcoms about it. it's well-worn territory.

Coach Aruni: Absolutely.

Donna Ferris: Maybe a good one to go to next is Your philosophy, which emphasizes compassion and gratitude [00:11:00] and humor as pillars, and I love your humor. maybe talk a little bit about that and how you've used those tools in working with people

Coach Aruni: Well, compassion, I see as a verb form. We know that the word Kripalu means compassion.

I found out that it means to be compassionate in a verb form, and as a recovering English teacher, that made me very excited. So compassion as an action, a practice, not a thing that sits there. Sometimes, there's compassion. Sometimes there isn't.

I do feel I have a responsibility to practice compassion. It's too easy for me to leave my house, drive down this lovely dirt road, and get frustrated and annoyed at the person driving under the speed limit ahead of me. Where am I going? I'm going to the grocery store. It's open for the next seven and a half hours.

Like there really isn't a rush. I'm easily activated [00:12:00] by the slow driver, and there are a lot of people driving in the Berkshires, not quite yet, but soon. And it's so beautiful. I love driving here and I don't want to lose that behind my own frustration over something that isn't even real, something that doesn't even matter.

So compassion is a profound doorway. As a verb form, I try to practice it and share it with my clients and the people I teach, especially compassion for ourselves. And especially now with all this going on or all the sort of shifting and whirling around us, can we give ourselves permission to be human, permission to try, permission to practice, permission to do our best?

One of my friends said, I used to meditate for 35 minutes, and I'm not doing that now. I said, why? And he said I can't do 35 minutes. I said, dude, do, do two, you know, open the door to two and sit [00:13:00] there for two minutes like to throw the whole thing out. And I think we are all or nothing in so many ways.

So it seems to me that compassion is just a really essential part of the Kripalu path. And so much of what I've learned at Kripalu, like, let it be okay not to know how. It's terrifying; somehow, we're wired. I'm wired, and many of us are wired. I should know how to do this. I remember one of the first things I was doing at Kripalu working on household.

I was a volunteer and I was making bunk beds. I was up on the first bed trying to make the second bed. I started to weep like I don't know how to make bunk beds. And in those days in the ashram, there was time for that kind of exploration. And the supervisor, a lovely woman took me down and said to me, of course you don't know how.

We're here to learn how to make [00:14:00] bunk beds. And it's just like life lesson. I'm thinking. That I should know what was happening before it happens. And that's my 2 am thinking. Kind of scanning. the next day or the next challenge. And if that happens, then I'll do that. Or if this happens, I do that. And that whole trying to outthink reality, that isn't even reality yet.

So I think compassion for all of that, just meeting ourselves exactly where we are. And gratitude is a wonderful one. I know gratitude literally changed the chemistry of the brain. It's, it's so easy to focus on what isn't happening rather than what is happening. So easy to scan for what isn't going the way I think the world should be going at that moment.

And that is just exhausting and futile. It doesn't help. It doesn't change anything. All it does is take me further away from the [00:15:00] moment. And I really, I'm ready to be in the moment. You know, that's my practice. I just want to be here because everything else is just not working so well. And the moment is, but it's, it's always better than what I'm making up.

Donna Ferris: I'm in remote work, but I can get riled up over somebody that's thousands and thousands of miles away. That's crazy, right? I am perfectly safe in my little, house with my little dog.

But I can get completely fight or flight. over something. And I think that's a continual practice for me. I think it's just part of having anxiety that I will get triggered so fast, and I just have to keep doing yoga and meditation and just the exercise that I need to kind of be able to be in a better state to handle that trigger when it hits.

Coach Aruni: Right. Exactly. And I love the 12-step move a muscle, a change thought is so brilliant because I cannot think my way out of anything, but like digging a deeper hole, a [00:16:00] deeper hole, a deeper hole. But when I walk, my main thing now is walking because I have a little back injury. And I love, I like, and appreciate walking and praying.

I like a repetitive mantra.

Donna Ferris: What is your go-to mantra? If you don't mind me asking.

Coach Aruni: Oh, it changes all the time. I offer myself to thee, the first line of the third step prayer. That's a good one. I offer myself to thee. I offer myself. I I

Donna Ferris: I like that.

Coach Aruni: That's a good one. And I love it, it's like subversive praying.

I used to teach walking meditation in the forest room with, like, really slow, you put the heel down, and then you bring your weight forward. And lovely, but in the forest room, not in stop and shop, you know, not walking down the hall at work and left to my own devices, I could be going to that meeting at work thinking, Oh, do I have everything I need?

Wait, who does that? Who's going to be leading that? Like I could find a way to hop out of the moment and hop out of my center, but to walk down the [00:17:00] hall and say everything's okay, everything's okay, everything's okay, everything's okay. Or whatever happens to be there, whatever affirmation is available. That really saves me.

That's my main practice, just walking with prayer as best I can. I

Donna Ferris: Love that.

Coach Aruni: You can go to, like, like, Home Depot and be walking down the aisle praying, you know?

Donna Ferris: Yeah. Or standing in line, which I find helpful. That's the one thing I do remember in line, is to do, some breathing meditation.

Coach Aruni: Yeah, that's a good one. And then you asked about humor.

Donna Ferris: Humor, yeah.

Coach Aruni: I don't really know what to say about humor. I don't know how that's become me and I've become that. I do crack myself up. I just think it's a way that I've been given to soften, aerate, and lighten what's being held in the room.

And it doesn't, in my experience, it doesn't [00:18:00] deter or defer what's happening. It softens us around it. And I think that's yoga to relax around it rather than to try to control it or to push it away or constrict around it I don't know that I was always. a person who finds humor available.

I'll have to ask my monogamous childhood friend, Gladys, who is my friend today. You know, we were monogamous friends for many years. She thinks I'm funny. I don't know if my spouse thinks I'm funny.

Donna Ferris: Maybe that's not one to ask. I don't think it always goes well when we ask that one. (laughter)

So one of the things I think, and, and tell me if I'm wrong, I believe you used to lead the Kripalu sharing circles. So, I had one of my most profound experiences within one of those circles, on my first visit to Kripalu, and I'm wondering, what has some of the feedback been over the years on those circles?

Have you heard other people say the same thing? I think for me, [00:19:00] I went right after a yoga class, and I said something in that sharing circle about my childhood abuse that I had never said out loud, which was the beginning of a lot of opening for me.

Coach Aruni: Fabulous.

Donna Ferris: So I'm just wondering how often you hear something like that.

Coach Aruni: It's so funny you say that. I was just sitting in my office talking to a new client just a couple hours ago. She said the same thing. She said she's been going to Kripalu for decades and she said, quote, I miss the shared circles. I don't think we have them yet. I believe they're deeply a part of the curriculum.

I think any Kripalu program will have them. Mindful listening. I know that in the Innerquest Intensive that I lead, the dyad, listening, and talking are a huge part of the program. I hear that more than not. There's something so wonderful about the physiological reminder that we don't have to change people.

Just the freedom and the release to just listen. [00:20:00] Which is all we want from one another anyway. Truly all we really want is to be heard.

Donna Ferris: Yes.

Coach Aruni: So effortless in a way to just sit and receive what each person brings. And I remember the magic of watching a theme emerge as one person talks about something that sort of brings it forth in the room, and yeah, it's an incredibly bonding and relaxing and renewing practice

I think it's a wonderful thing to lead. It was remarkable.

Donna Ferris: Yeah.

Coach Aruni: I've learned a lot. Like, I had to let go of what I thought I had to do. I would always find ways to worry about time. Okay, there are 22 more minutes, and there are seven more people, and if everyone talks for three minutes. I learned so many ways to say, we have a few more minutes, you know, it was a great teacher for me, a really wonderful teacher.

And I think it's, it's touched a lot of people's lives.

Donna Ferris: It changed [00:21:00] mine, I

Coach Aruni: That's amazing, Donna, that you said that for the first time. That's wonderful. I

Donna Ferris: The only person that I'd said it to was my husband and my psychologist. And it was, it was profound because I needed to say it, but what's cool about it, it was still in that circle, right?

I walked around, and the people looked at me, and I felt like they were looking. They probably weren't, but I felt like they were looking at me, and it opened up the ability to talk about it. And, of course, eventually, I kept writing about it. I just released an interview with Mira Bartok, who also had challenging relationship with her mother.

And I asked her the question, I said, does your mother still kind of talk to you or in your mind? She ended up having to write her memoir about her mother because she couldn't stop thinking about her, and she had to do it. And she said, no, I don't dream about her anymore.

She's not there anymore. And I said I had the same kind of thing. I kept having her following me. So there's something about being able to do that in that circle and being able to start that process of kind of saying things that are [00:22:00] so deep and getting them out. And then you have no idea where that's going to take you.

I mean, that took me on a huge journey. It's a really special practice.

Coach Aruni: Absolutely. Breaking the silence is such a doorway back. Yeah. And the energy then, the energy of speaking, begets more energy; energy begets energy. And once the silence is broken, the healing could begin.

Donna Ferris: Yeah. And you're not alone.

I think there's a big part of that. Up until then, as you know, you feel like you're alone, and it kind of reinforces all the bad about you. And so when you're able to start to talk about it, it's very freeing and healing.

Coach Aruni: That's very inspiring. Thanks for telling me that. That's really, that's remarkable. Yeah.

Donna Ferris: Well, thank you for leading them. So maybe talk a little bit about your quest intensive that you're doing. And I think there's one in the summer, but I think this is going to probably air pass that one.

So there's going to be another one in the fall. What are those Inner Quest Intensives about?

Coach Aruni: The Inner Quest is coming together and building the world that we want to live in. [00:23:00] Creating relationship with one another within boundaries. Within a framework of how to create boundaries, safety, and opportunities to speak the truth.

It's deep, it's easy, it's fun, it's opening. We dance, we play, we sing, we breathe, we journal. It's been my greatest teacher in my life. What I learned in the Inner Quest is whoever is there really truly is meant to be there. That there's synchronicity in our coming together, and in that synchronicity, we build community.

And as each one of us attends to our own healing, because we're not responsible for one another, of course, we're only responsible for ourselves. As each of us does that, something happens in the community. There's some oneness and some unity that is quite remarkable and quite breathtaking. [00:24:00] It's fabulous, yeah, I love it dearly.

I love it dearly.

Donna Ferris: And they're all on the journey. That's what's kind of cool about it, right? They're all seeking at the same time.

Coach Aruni: Yes, whether they know it or not. I feel that about people who come to Kripalu, whether you know it or not.

Donna Ferris: You're on a journey.

Coach Aruni: Definitely in that program to sign up for a program named the Inner Quest Intensive. You're on a path. It's a powerful, gentle opportunity to practice. There's not that much teaching. Like, there's a little teaching, but mostly it's experiences. We get to practice coming into relationship with the edge, with the parts of us that are like, I don't want to do that.

Or like, just like on the yoga mat when you reach the edge rather than push through it or pull away from it. Again, relaxing around it and naming it like you just said so beautifully, and if we could speak it, we could heal it. If we could feel it, we could heal it. [00:25:00] And so there's lots of opportunities to do that.

It's something that I inherited from teachers older than me at Kripalu in around like '95, '96 after the ashram fell. I was a young teacher, but all the big kids left mostly. So I sort of inherited this program, and it's a huge part Blessing, like one of the biggest gifts I've been given in my life. It's like giant program.

Over the years, I've kept what I hope is the essence of it, made it mine, and offered it out. Actually, it'll be my 30th year teaching it three times a year.

Donna Ferris: Wow, that's great.

Coach Aruni: You must take it. Come and take it.

Donna Ferris: I know, I'm thinking, you're, luring me, yeah. You're luring me in. After having you on and then Stephen Cope,

Coach Aruni: I'm so happy you talk to him. He's my buddy.

Donna Ferris: Then Maria Sirois earlier in the year.

Coach Aruni: I was blessed to teach with Maria a lot for a while.

Donna Ferris: I took both of your grief workshops after [00:26:00] I had a big loss, and it was, both were really helpful. Really, really helpful.

Coach Aruni: I trust her deeply. I have a very high bar. For teachers. I've been exposed to the best and I adore Maria and I love Kavi and I trust both of them deeply.

Yeah. Yeah.

Donna Ferris: I'm just honored to have the chance to speak with you. I read your emails every week.

Coach Aruni: Oh, good, good, good.

Donna Ferris: Yeah, so I'll have to see what happens with, with your thoughts around slowing down.

I'll learn from you.

Coach Aruni: Yes, yes, yes. And when you come to Kripalu, please, please say hi.

Donna Ferris: I will. I will.

Coach Aruni: Take one of my programs, but the IQI for sure.

Donna Ferris: I think that would be a good one for me. I need to get there. I've just got to figure out when.

Coach Aruni: Of course, all of the details.

Donna Ferris: It's one of the things you said when people are there, they really want to be there. Most people have to travel some distance and, you know, really pare themselves away from their lives. So you're right. I think you have to figure that out, but once you do, it's worth it.

Coach Aruni: That open [00:27:00] space. That's very special. So please take care. Thank you so much.

Donna Ferris: Thank you so much.

That's all for today. If you want to learn more about Aruni's workshops and books, those links will be in the show notes.

Thank you so much for listening. I hope this episode was helpful. If it was, please subscribe, drop a review, or share it with your friends and family. That's the best way to get it in the hands of those who may benefit. And if my daughters Sienna and Sylvia are listening, I want you to know how proud I am of you.

And I love you so much. Bye now.