



SPEECH TOPICS

- The Death Penalty
- Forgiveness

CAN DEATH JUSTIFY DEATH?

The capacity to forgive the unforgivable has long intrigued reporter and author Naseem Rakha. She has witnessed it in her work as a teacher and consultant for Native American tribes, as a mediator in the clean up of the nuclear site that created the Nagasaki bomb, and as a reporter covering state run executions. It was this later experience that led her to write her groundbreaking novel The Crying Tree. Set in southern Illinois and central Oregon, Rakha tells a story of a mother who must overcome the hate, grief, and secrets that surround the murder of her 15-year-old son, and defy church and family as she attempts to stop the execution of the man who killed her boy.

With the heart of a storyteller, Naseem explores the death penalty and forgiveness with her audience through the lens of our justice system, her experiences as a reporter for public radio, as well as subsequent interviews with crime victims, inmates, corrections officials and exonerated death row prisoners. Naseem finds that within these very human stories lie a multitude of lessons about duty, honor, grief, pain, hatred and the degree to which forgiveness can not only extend but also heal.

In composing her work, Naseem relies on the backdrop of the land and the landscape of human lives to build drama, emotion and depth. For writers searching for their own voice, Naseem has much to offer with her methods of reaching readers through character and place.

"For anyone who has ever wondered how forgiveness is possible, even when the pain is overwhelming, wonder no more. The Crying Tree takes you on a journey you won't soon forget."

- **Sister Helen Prejean, author of Dead Man Walking**

MEET NASEEM

Naseem Rakha is an award-winning journalist whose stories have been heard on National Public Radio, Marketplace, Christian Science Monitor Radio and the radio show Living On Earth. Prior to being a journalist, Naseem spent ten years working on environmental planning and conflict resolution with farmers, ranchers, native tribes, conservationists, and government officials around the U.S. and abroad. She lives in Silverton, Oregon with her husband, son, and a whole bunch of animals.

