

Episode 1: If yoga is so peaceful, why are y'all so angry all the time?

Welcome to the first episode of the brand new [Accessible Yoga Podcast](#), hosted by Jivana Heyman and Amber Karnes. In episode 1:

- Amber talks about her work: community-building around yoga, social justice, and body image
- Jivana shares his background with yoga and social justice including how he got started with yoga, how Accessible Yoga came to be, and how his participation in AIDS activism laid the groundwork for his work today
- How a community of practice (like the global Accessible Yoga community) supports marginalized practitioners and teachers to be of service and stay connected to one another
- Yoga is not just about a personal practice to make us feel better, our opportunity is to use our practice to create more well-being for all
- “Yoga is supposed to be peaceful, why are y’all so angry and negative all the time?” We discuss spiritual bypass and why the yoga teachings are not just about “love and light.”
- The harm that is done when spiritual teachings are used to ignore or downplay the harm that happens in our own lives, our yoga communities, or the world
- Yoga gives us the tools to sit with discomfort, but only using yoga to end our own suffering means we miss an opportunity to use our practice to be of service and lessen suffering for others
- Jivana shares about his experience working in AIDS hospice and how that shifted his understanding around healing, death, and yoga
- Service is the expression of an expanded mind and an ability to stay open to others’ humanity
- Figuring out “your lane” in social justice by honoring your body, knowing yourself, getting beyond shame, fear, and confusion, and managing your mind
- We’ll also share with you our plans for this podcast going forward

Today’s inquiry

Each week we’ll leave you with a powerful question. We encourage you to sit in inquiry with this question, write about it, discuss it with another community member on this path.

This week’s question comes from Rachele Knowles (she offered this during her workshop on the Bhagavad Gita during the St. Louis Accessible Yoga Conference last year).

“If the battle is inevitable, what kind of warrior do you want to be?”

Amber Karnes 0:00

Welcome to the accessible yoga podcast, your weekly source for questions and answers around equity in yoga, hosted by Jivana, Heyman and Amber cards. Join us each week for powerful conversations with thought leaders at the intersection of justice, knowledge and practice. In this first episode, we'll each introduce ourselves, talk a little bit about the work that we do in the world and try to answer the question if Yoga is supposed to be so peaceful, why are y'all so angry all the time, we want to talk about spiritual bypass and why the yoga teachings are not just about love and light. We also discuss a little bit about finding your lane when it comes to yoga and social justice. by honoring your body knowing yourself and getting beyond shame and confusion. We'll also share plans with you for this podcast going forward. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

Jivana Heyman 0:51

Hi everyone, and welcome to the first episode of the accessible yoga podcast. I'm Jivana Heyman and I'm here with my co host, Amber Karnes.

Amber Karnes 1:00

Hey,

Jivana Heyman 1:04

how you doing

Amber Karnes 1:05

great. Glad to be here.

Jivana Heyman 1:07

Yeah, I'm excited to be doing this with you and to be launching today. I thought we could start by introducing ourselves maybe talking a little bit about our work. And, yeah, so people can get to know us a little bit more. Do you want to start doing a talk about yourself a little bit. Sure. Should I share embarrassing facts that I know about you.

Amber Karnes 1:29

Oh my God, it's that kind of podcast, everything for the juicy details that never emerge. I'm sure I could go first. So hey y'all. My name is Amber Karnes, my pronouns are she and her. For those of you that don't know me, I let me see I'll give you a couple of facts, I'm 38 years old. I live in Baltimore, Maryland, with my husband Jimmy and our dog Garnet, who is a Boston Terrier. I'm a yoga teacher and founder of body positive yoga, I train yoga teachers to make their teaching more equitable and accessible, and I do that through continuing education and trainings, from, you know, 10 hours to 200 hours, and I also run retreats and workshops for people who wants to make peace with their bodies, a lot of my work is around body image,

especially through the lens of the yoga teachings and how we can use our practice to not only like feel better about our own bodies but really get perspective on how our own body image work like plays into social justice, and the larger systems of oppression that set us up to be messed up about bodies in the first place so my work is a lot about combining the yoga teachings intersectional feminism, a little bit of cognitive behavioral therapy like pulling tools from all these different modalities and and topics to be able to get to a place where we we feel more comfortable in our own skin we feel more confident, to be able to move into the world and make the world a more adjust place. So, I have been teaching since 2010 and practicing. Since my early 20s, and it's very exciting to be able to, to bring this work to the world and to be part of this accessible yoga movement, so I started working with Jivana a few years back, I'm one of the accessible yoga trainers and also a board member for the accessible yoga organization. And so I just really felt aligned with this work and the impact that it makes to make the world, the yoga world, and the wider world a more equitable place where folks feel like they can belong. And really I think lately you know I'm I'm making this connection. More than ever. I've been building community since I was a kid, and lots of different arenas from punk and hardcore scene to independent arts and crafts to yoga to entrepreneurship, all those phases that I've been in a different place in my career has taken me but I've really been focusing lately on this concept that in order to like set up the conditions that we need to really practice yoga, like to start that journey of turning inward so that we can remember the truth of who we are, and and show up in the world in a way that honors our own humanity and the humanity of others like we really have to feel safe. Before we start that. And I think one of the ways that we can most find that personal power that personal safety. A place that we can start to like take those hard looks at ourselves so that we can relate better to ourselves and to one another and really practice this this yoga, all the yoga, not just the stretching part of the yoga. And we can build that safety and community. And so that's, I think one of the reasons I was so drawn to accessible yoga and to the work that Jivana does because it is really individual work that's also based and community. And I think that, you know, we are seeing right now like with the state of the world and this sort of like political and social justice awakening for so many people, it seems like that folks are looking more and more for tools to do this sort of like personal growth and transformation so maybe I'll just pause there that seems to be like the direction that my work is going more and more even though the way that community looks has changed a lot in the past couple of months and so I'm excited to be moving forward with your with your help and sort of guiding each other along this path Do you. We've connected in a lot of ways,

Jivana Heyman 6:09

yeah we're really helping each other and that's what this project is about I think is about combining forces to create a platform for these conversations and also for the new accessible yoga training school that we're launching, which we're going to maybe talk about a little bit later. And also I just want to say our theme for the, for our talk today is around that connection between yoga and social justice. But maybe I could. I can share a little bit about my background, too. So yeah, I appreciate you saying your pronouns and it's so important that we do that so minor he and him. And we could talk about that. Maybe another time to the

importance of pronouns. I live in Santa Barbara, California with my husband Matt and I have two teenagers, Charlie and violet. They're, 18, and 14, and I'll probably get to talk about my kids later too I have a lot to say about that is really really huge and challenging part of my life.

Unknown Speaker 7:10

And,

Jivana Heyman 7:12

yeah, and we have two dogs to man blue. You may hear them barking in the background. And let's see, I've been teaching a long time actually I finished a formal teacher training in 1995 but I actually had started training. I started a yoga teacher training in 1991 with my first teacher Kazuko Kundera who really took me under her wing and was an amazing influence in my life. You know, really taught me early about integrating yoga into life and how that's not a separate thing. She taught me how to cook how to garden like we spent a lot of time just hanging out together is really incredible in fact even my grandmother practiced and taught me yoga when I was a very young child. She was like an older hippie, and was practicing and in the 60s, you know, I was born in 1967. So, to be honest on my earliest memories are actually practicing and with her just watching her practice like because I think it was so unusual and my life, like, wait, she's standing on her head, you know, like every morning, he was doing his thing. But the other, you know, a big part of my life as AIDS activism because I came out, came out of the closet, like, I don't know what year that was but like in the 80s. And right in the middle of the AIDS epidemic and, you know, the gay community we were just totally dealing with AIDS. Illness and death and you know I was out on the streets marching getting arrested. You know that was a huge part of my life, and what I was focused on for, you know, it still am. It's just that I was kind of using yoga personally from my from my own self care during that time and then I kind of realized when I finished that teacher training in 1995 that I could share yoga with my community and so I started right away with teaching classes for people with HIV and AIDS, and then those classes really just expanded and I started including people with different disabilities and teaching all over the San Francisco Bay Area. And then accessible yoga really that name came in around 20. I don't know what year that was, I'm so bad with dates. A while years

Unknown Speaker 9:32

ago,

Jivana Heyman 9:34

and it was like herbal It was like early on I just realized that oh because I was leading 200 hour trainings that was like my job. Actually I was my job was actually a gardener. I was a professional gardener and then I was leading 200 hour trainings, as well, to try to make a living. And I love teacher training, by the way, which is another theme I just love that world of teacher training. And, anyway. Can you hear my husband. I am. But I realized that my students with disabilities really couldn't participate in that 200 hour trainings I was leading so I created an accessible yoga training that would allow them to become yoga teachers and I think that

motivation came really from two things one is to empower people to use the yoga teachings and really dive deep into them. And I feel like a lot of that's not available for people, people just in regular classes and teacher training as a special opportunity. And also just wanting to change the day, what is it called like change the, the system itself I felt wrong, I could already felt broken to me that the 200 hour yoga training program was not accessible, like that was already a big concern for me. And I was also leading trainings, helping teachers work with people with disabilities and expand their skills. And then about eight years ago, I moved down here to Santa Barbara and I felt really lost and overwhelmed by like starting over like removed for family reasons and I was just like, not wanting to do the whole marketing thing again. You probably heard this story so many times. I'll make it fast but basically it just the conference came out of that I was just like, I realized that other teachers must feel the way I do, which is they feel isolated. They're on their own we as yoga teachers generally we have to be like experts at marketing and accounting and contract law and all these things and I'm just like, with no support, you know no support really and I felt like the organizations that existed at that point, didn't really support me, the way I wanted or needed. And so I had this idea, which is a longer story but basically it was to have a conference, and so we had a conference I think in 2015, was the first one, and that's where that's where the organization really like came together, the community came together and lots of people volunteered I mean really, we had, it was all volunteer run. It's kind of incredible actually and that's how the nonprofit really got moving. Yeah. It's been amazing. It's been an amazing journey and I feel like you have been thinking a lot about how life, because I'm older than you. And I say life is like almost, I mean it's just my mind but it's almost like feels like different lives you know it's it's almost like there was like my use and then it was kind of like young adulthood and like middle age and it just feels like different, like I don't know like I think it's a luxury of getting older, in a way of having that like, like my age activist time and it's just coming up for me so much these days with Black Lives Matter and getting out and protesting again I was just like, wow, I was having like deja vu and. Mm hm. And also a little bit being traumatized again like being remembered by me remembering all the loss. Yeah. You know, it was really, I lost so many people. Yeah. Unbelievable. So many it's almost like there was a whole generation of gay men mostly that were like my friends and my mentors, because I'm, I was slightly younger than the average age of the gay men that died I mean it was really a, it was. I'm like on the low end of that generation age wise, there are mostly guys that were just like, five years older than me. And they were you know like when you're. Now when you're 18 and 20 years old like those are the guys they're like teaching you how to be an adult like these are the people that were my friends and boyfriends who kind of just taught me like, How to Be a man how to be a person in the world you know and I don't know how to explain it other than that I was just like, and then they're gone. It's just so weird. It's like, I can't even imagine somebody that tried to imagine what the world would be like if they were here like the kind of the contributions these people were made, just incredible. Yeah, like just hundreds of thousands of gay men, if not more, I mean millions have died of it but I mean that that community in particular just completely devastated. Yeah. Yeah. Well that's, that's my that's my sad story.

Amber Karnes 14:28

Now it's a powerful story and I don't know I think that many of us probably have that experience that become involved in activism work that oftentimes the thing that you know generates like the most light or the most work or the most change is often like starts with a wound or like something painful or a tragedy that we go through, you know, and it's I don't know it's really encouraging to hear that, like, I think what came like your start and activism has grown and shifted and that like, like you said, you know, these different lives that we've sort of let you know I had my, my teenage years and that, you know, and then the like my marketing career and my, so I know what you mean it almost seems like oh I was a different person then but all that experience like goes together to like, end up in the work that we're doing now. So, anyway,

Unknown Speaker 15:25
yeah and I appreciate what

Jivana Heyman 15:28
you said about community building like I feel like that's what I love about you and I think why you and I are so connected in our work is like that. I think we both see that. And I saw in the AIDS activism, I was part of act up San Francisco actually act up New York originally the act of San Francisco and I learned early on, like the power of community like we. I don't know how successful we were but we did make an impact and I felt like it was this complete grassroots movement of people who just want to change and facing you know governments that were just not paying attention that we're at, they're actively fighting against us, and I felt like, I'm so moved by the community of people that I was involved with, and I, and I saw in yoga that you know Yoga is also communal practice, it's a real paradox there, you know that Yoga is so personal. Like I turn within when I sit in practice or when I do my when I do my poses I'm alone on my mat, but it's like so much more powerful to do it in a group, or to even do it. Even now like not physically in a group, but at least connecting with others who are practicing, and then bigger than that like knowing there's a community of practice out there. It just supports me and my work like both spiritually and, like politically like in terms of the work we do, we like to know that the accessible yoga community is out there like that there's so many other people that support this connection between yoga and social justice keeps inspiring me, because it's sometimes it's a little disappointing like I feel like in a capitalist system we're in sometimes it seems like success is only measured by celebrity or

Amber Karnes 17:12
money or followers, or whatever.

Jivana Heyman 17:16
Yeah. Hey, well you got a lot of followers. But no, I just, yeah, like, I'm just like, I can't use those measurements like that Well first of all, I could try but it's just, it's depressing too. And it's like I'm not like a thin young white woman so like for me. I mean sure I have privilege just being a white man but in terms of like the yoga celebrity world. this was never gonna work for

me anyway. And that's okay. Like, it's not, it's actually not an effective measurement of success, it's actually a lie. It's a real dangerous.

Amber Karnes 17:55

And I think that we definitely have seen that illustrated especially like at the beginning of the pandemic when it was very quickly obvious that everyone had to cancel everything and we weren't going to be teaching in person again and it was really amazing to see, you know, the accessible yoga community, globally, like step up to help each other, like I saw so much like peer mentorship and sort of like crowdsourcing of information, and people that are just willing to like to jump in and get worked on and support one another, because we didn't really have, you know, some organization that was stepping up or some leader that you know like all these people that we maybe as a wider yoga industry or community or however we want to refer to it like yoga in America, I think elevates these sort of celebrity people that line up with like the dominant culture beauty standards or the measurements of success like you talked about and so those people aren't standing up, or stepping in to say like this is where we're going. Here's how we can help each other. And it was amazing to see like this community of, well, I don't know, sometimes I think of us as like the underdogs or the yoga misfits like everybody that doesn't feel like they belong in these sort of mainstream wellness faces or doesn't see themselves reflected on the cover of yoga journal or whatever it is that we came together to really support one another I think it's one of the like the beautiful things about this community, so yes

Jivana Heyman 19:27

yeah and I actually think that's, that's a great example of how Yoga is social justice actually I think, going back to our theme like that effort to build community to me as a yoga practice, because I think, I think the piece of yoga or the yoga teachings that gets lost so quickly is around ego, and to me like some of the most important. You know, teachings from the Yoga Sutras, or the Bhagavad Gita really are about working with your mind and. And it's not that ego is bad, but it's about just trying to get the ego in balance, you know what I mean. And it's, it's a very tricky complicated thing to do. But I think, you know, Western culture tends to push us towards ego and egotistical place where we're getting that attention for the self, right, like, like you said, the money or the followers or whatever. And I think that's really like antithetical to yoga that's like the opposite of what yoga actually is teaching which is to not focus on the self but to serve others. And, and again to serve in a way it's still selfish right but that service is helping us in the end it's actually allowing us to be more connected with others, and more open and more loving and experience love more in our lives. So I think there is benefit to it but I think it also like dovetails beautifully with social justice, which is about, which is social justice to me means making sure that everyone shares, those same rights that like nobody is left behind that like basic human rights are universal and they're applied universally, and that justice, of all, you know, out of all the rights, we have justice especially is fair and equal and that's not, it's not the case. And so if people aren't experiencing that if they're, you know, as long as some people are being marginalized and harmed. Then I can't be just all peaceful alone in my little bubble like it just doesn't work like to me, yoga, in the service focus of Yoga

means that I have to be focused on the. No, I don't know what the word is like the well being of everyone. In order for myself to be well, like I can't I can't be well, if others are not. And that's been a struggle for me all along like through my life, like I said through my AIDS activism like really trying to understand how do I balance my own self care and my sense of peace in my life with the work that I see that needs to happen out there, and the change that I feel like I could be involved with making. But I really think we need to highlight that in yoga, as a huge piece of our practice. It's not about to me Yoga is not about going into that cave, and meditating for 10 years by yourself or getting on your mat alone and spending your whole life there without then taking what you learn and what you find and using it to support other people or serve the community there has to be this like outer connection of some kind. For it to be service, or to be yoga.

Unknown Speaker 22:39

You know what I mean, right.

Amber Karnes 22:40

Yeah, I do. I think that, um, you know, a lot of times, will you and I both dealt with this is when we talk about the connection between yoga and social justice, or how we can use our practice as a form of activism that oftentimes we get pushback from other people in yoga circles. Why are you so angry Why are you so negative like Can't we just love each other. Can't we just focus on peace. And what about Ahimsa and like all of those, like I noticed sort of yoga folks using like this yoga terminology to like, Hey quiet down over there talking about all those uncomfortable problems and conversations. And so I wondered if we could just talk about that for a minute and about spiritual bypass like let's define what that is and talk about this notion of like yoga supposed to be peaceful, why are y'all so angry. Okay.

Jivana Heyman 23:36

I totally agree I mean that's exactly spiritual bypassing. I mean, spiritual bypassing is basically, you know, using the spiritual teachings to bypass painful emotions or painful situations that you don't want. Yeah,

Amber Karnes 23:53

that sounds like what any that's listening. That sounds like the, you know, let's let's focus on the positive loving light, just vibrate higher and, you know, if we all vibrate at higher racism wouldn't be a problem because we just love each other. That's what spiritual bypass sounds like,

Jivana Heyman 24:13

yeah, in a way, it's like the spiritual equivalent of saying all lives matter.

Amber Karnes 24:17

Right.

Jivana Heyman 24:18

It's actually, I mean yeah of course all lives matter but the point of Black Lives Matter is like, not all lives don't matter until Black Lives Matter right it's like about trying to see that we are all one, but actually there's also difference in our experiences and I think that's where people get confused in yoga. There's a paradox, and people have a really hard time holding a paradox in their mind, but the paradox is that, yeah, spiritual truth is where you have, we all share the same spirit that's true, like according to the yoga teachings right we all have that moment, inside of us. But actually, yoga is a dualistic philosophy that says that there's two things nature is different and in nature we have completely different experiences our bodies are different our minds are different. And our life experiences are extraordinarily different based on a lot of situations and that's what we're privileged comes in as you have to look at, you know, where, How close are you in proximity to the power structure where you are and where you live, right, like, there is this, there's a story that came out in the news yesterday I can't stop thinking about about this teenage girl who was acting out and she was on parole or something up for all but like she was getting, she was in the system already, but then she didn't go to school, she didn't finish online schooling and so that a judge put her in juvenile detention. Because for not doing her online schooling. And it was so upsetting to me because, you know, my daughter is the same age and she's really struggled a lot and she's actually in a residential treatment center, but like my daughter did a lot of stuff that could have easily gotten her into juvenile detention but I think because I'm white and I know how to work the system, and this other This girl is black, by the way, the one that got into juvenile detention. Her name is Grace and there's a petition online for her but, um, I just feel like that because of my privilege I knew how to work the system and get my daughter into a treatment center, rather than into juvenile detention and like that experience that I have shows my privilege and, and that's not something that a lot of people have, you know half who are black in America, or, you know, for other reasons too, like there's, you know there's a lot of ways that we don't have privilege, because of gender identity or because of sexuality body size, like there's a lot of things that contribute to lack or loss of privilege. Anyway so spiritual bypassing which was your comment I think it's just focusing on that kind of deeper spiritual spiritual teaching about oneness without really facing the reality of life, and and that to me an integrated spirituality embraces both things, and embraces that duality of, you know that you know that on one level yes we're one but actually the experience is completely different. And to deny that is to deny that actually is harmful, it actually creates more harm and more injustice. So it's actually, it's a very dangerous approach in spiritual teachings. There's many ways actually that spiritual teachings can be used in a dangerous way and I think that's something we need to cover in this in this podcast as well i mean i don't mean to be negative but I think we have to be a little more alert to that, you know, cold dynamics and abuse in yoga. It's been horrific racism and the way that yoga community is not responding to racism right now is kind of horrific conspiracy theories around COVID, you know that I think are kind of rampant and spiritual communities is another way that it's dangerous there's actually real harm done I think when people use spiritual teachings to avoid the reality that we're actually living and this is real like this natural world is real and our experiences are real. And just because you have a spiritual awakening doesn't

deny that. It doesn't deny the realness of that. In fact, I think a real spiritual awakening. Is it means you're able to integrate both.

Unknown Speaker 28:19

Yep.

Jivana Heyman 28:21

I mean,

Amber Karnes 28:22

yeah, definitely. And I think it's really, I love talking about this this way with you because I see parallels to what you're saying, with, you know that concept of intersectionality and social justice work right where yes we all are you know working toward feminism or we're working toward anti racism or we're working toward eliminating fat phobia or whatever those social justice issue that we're looking at. But as you know, we might all be white people working toward that goal or women working toward that goal but we don't all have the same experiences. And so, I think, like, really acknowledging. You know, I think the powerful part of what yoga can offer to us when it comes to social justice is that, you know, we can have these individual awakenings and awareness and like so many people are coming into awareness right now that a shift needs to happen, but it also gives us the tools to do that. And like you've talked about this, you know duality that like we don't sit well with duality dominant culture like literally conditioned us to think in black and white terms. It teaches us that there's always a simple problem and a simple solution when in reality, that's not the case and we all have different lived experience and so yoga I think really gives us those tools for sitting, both with the discomfort of how making a shift to your worldview to your perspectives to the ways that you understand like, oh, I've been parts of these systems of oppression and I benefit from them in ways I uphold them in certain ways like getting to the place where you can look at that and sit without uncomfortable truth and determine how you want to take action, like yoga gives us the technology to both like deal with those uncomfortable feelings in the body, which are definitely going to come up and also to understand ourselves so that we can like relate to other people in a clearer and more. I think humane in a way that honors our humanity, like both our own and acknowledges that we're interdependent and that we're connected and, um, but I feel like and maybe this is something you've noticed too, that a lot of people who have practiced or even taught yoga for a long time don't actually like use those tools for that purpose that oftentimes yoga could be like it's changed so many of our lives in so many ways, and, you know, for me personally like I didn't talk about this a lot at the beginning but one of the ways that Yoga has always shown up in my life has been, you know, in making peace with my body. And this is a podcast so I'll just say like, I'm an I'm a fat woman I'm in a larger body and I have been since I was a teenager. And so yoga spaces wellness spaces anything that's like adjacent to fitness had always been very fraught where yoga was a different experience for me when I was able to really like, get in touch with my body, learn to trust it like as an adult for the first time, like learn about what this meat suit is like all about and how it's related to my mind and all of that, but like, if I just let the practice stop there. If the practice is just about

like making myself personally feel better. or like making myself personally okay with my self esteem or like whatever it is. I think that a doesn't really honor the roots of like what this practice is about, but B is a huge missed opportunity to like, if I can get in a place where I feel more confident, more, you know, comfortable to be able to have difficult conversations or face difficult things. I can take that stuff off the mat off my personal practice and really use that to make, make a difference and make change in the world and starting with my Varian yoga community. Because the fact is that the problems that we see in society, all the things that we've been talking about from racism ableism homophobia all that stuff. It shows up in society. It shows up in our institutions, our yoga studios, our classes, our businesses, and in our individual relationships, and so I think being able to widen our perspective and really start to see the way that these systems of oppression operate not just as like individual mean people having mean thoughts right like that's sometimes what I think like, how we think racism shows up is like, Oh, it's you know someone wearing magga hat or it's somebody who's saying all lives matter. It's not always just that that we have to see these systems and the ways that we participate and how we can start to build that awareness so that we can take individual action that leads to this like bigger collective shift. And I think yoga gives us so many tools to be able to do that.

If we just pay attention and apply it.

Jivana Heyman 33:29

I love that I think that's essential, I mean that point is incredibly powerful to me the idea that the teachings actually give us tools to be able to sit with the discomfort that comes from not only seeing our own pain and really embracing that the pain that we've experienced but the pain of others are experiencing as well, which I think, actually, embracing the pain of ourselves and others, actually opens our heart and that that's the goal of yoga, like I feel like there's this kind of misunderstanding that spiritual enlightenment is a personal thing. And I don't think that's true. I just I don't see it that way anymore. I think enlightenment is a communal experience and. And so I think there's a misunderstanding like people come to yoga they find they find like a refuge there, like, I think a lot of people in their practice like find this relief, you know to whatever their to their own personal suffering. It ends there and then they actually get defensive about that and they protect it. But I think that's kind of limited thinking, it doesn't really go to, I think, a little to the next level of practice, which to me is actually how does that experience that you're having of removing your suffering or seeing your pain, allow you to then connect with others that are experiencing pain or just acknowledge the suffering that is happening around you, and it can be hard to do it can be hard to open yourself to that to the reality of suffering that's happening and instead we kind of hide and turn in on ourselves and protect ourselves again because that's what we've had to do, like, and I don't mean to blame anyone I think it's kind of a reaction and also maybe it's a trauma reaction right like we turn in, like, fight, flight, freeze. And another thought about that. Oh, I think, you know, it's. Well, I don't know, I had another thought that's left to my mind. Oh come back. Okay, this is something I'm excited about I was going to say like, I'm working on a new book and this is exactly what the topic is like I'm really, I could talk about this for hours. I don't

know how long we're happy today but like, I'm so interested in reframing the yoga teachings, as social justice rather than as personal spiritual awakening like that's really my current goal in life is to like try and share that concept with people like. And it's not new. It's not a new idea I think we can see that in like the teachings of Gandhi and there is a history within yoga of social justice. By connecting to mean like on data connecting with a himsa in such a way, the idea is of non violence and truthfulness, and that to really embrace those concepts means that we are seeing the harm that's being done in the world. And we are speaking truth to power like that we can't avoid that, if we are practicing yoga, that it's an ethical requirement for us to speak out and speak up, and not just be complacent and want to be happy ourselves. Oh I know what I was going to say my thought that I left me it came back. They went back to my work. The people with HIV and AIDS so when I was younger I was not only an activist I also worked in an AIDS hospice, as a volunteer for a long time, and. And then, you know, I lost many friends too so I spent quite a bit of time with people who are dying. And I was really young, I was like I'm early 20s and so I think it's I think it's. That's where I kind of learned about spirituality, like I feel like I was learning yoga and practicing yoga, but like real spirituality comes when you're facing death. And I think, like it's a very different kind of spirituality, it's very real. And it's like, facing the, what you call, like the the mortality of the meatsuit you know like the reality that we actually have this like mortal body, this mortal coil, that's going to go. And I think it shifts our understanding and I actually, I think that's where I feel like there's some confusion in yoga as well and that is around healing. And maybe that's another topic for a whole podcast, but I just feel like there's this misunderstanding about what healing means in yoga, and I get kind of caught up in that because I think that leads us down this road

it that that ends up in spiritual bypassing. Because, you know what, you can heal all you want, but your body is going to die. And like I always say like in my trainings are asked people like is death a failure is death a failure appealing and i think i think it's an important question because it has to do with our personal journey here in this body, and what the goal is for that journey. And sometimes I think healing is put out as the goal of yoga. And, and I would say this, especially the yoga therapy like I want to call yoga therapists to like out on this a little bit, which is that I'm a yoga therapist, but I think we really have to be careful that we're not focusing on physical healing only because that's actually not yoga. Right, it's more complicated than that it's much more subtle and it's, it has again it goes back to that paradox that yeah you can heal your physical body, to a point, but it's gonna go, it's gonna die. So like really what is happening from the deeper level like what is your journey. You know what are you learning about yourself about the world, and and then actually. How are you, how are you not only living the teachings, but actually living your kind of your own enlightenment, like whatever that looks like for you like that kind of realization that you're having to your practice, how does that get embodied in the way you live your life. And to me that has that has to be through social justice like there's no other form, it's service like that's, to me, services, the only form for that. That yoga offers that's that's services like the expression of a personal like an expanded mind, like your mind can like open enough to embrace others and to embrace the suffering of other people, and care for them. Yeah. What do you think,

Amber Karnes 40:03

I love that this was reminding me of at the accessible yoga conference in St. Louis last year. Rachel Knowles did a talk on the Bhagavad Gita. And I remember she asked us a question which was basically like, you know, if the battle is inevitable, what kind of warrior do you want to be. And that really stuck with me, you know, because I think that one of the things that um, that maybe gets a lot of us stuck when it comes to our place in social justice or radicalizing our yoga practice so that we can create more equity or figuring out like okay there's a shift that needs to happen but I don't know my place in it that you know it's easy to watch like you know the footage of all of these uprisings and these protests and like, I've had so many people reach out to me like, Oh, I can't work through these protests because I'm high risk of getting COVID or I'm disabled in this setup for me or whatever and then they feel like they don't have a place and things, but I feel like there are many different types of warriors like it doesn't always mean that you are on the frontlines marching or fighting or actively like putting your body out there that we need warriors at many different levels we need people who know how to manage their minds so that like you said they can like recognize that humanity in this suffering and others and figure out like, Where can you serve, like what are your gifts and maybe that's like a question that we can leave folks with is, you know, I guess there's a this saying of like, know your lane and stay in your lane but like figuring out your lane is like worth his work worth doing. Figuring out like what are the what are the gifts and the talents and those like superpowers that you have, whether that's, you know, maybe you're a great writer, maybe you're somebody who can really sit with people while they are crying or grieving something maybe you're maybe you make food that really nourishes people like there are many ways to get involved in social justice work that don't always look like marching or standing on a stage with Banga phone. And so I think like that question that Rachel asked about like, if you're going, if you, if the fight is inevitable what type of warrior going to be, I think, is really helpful, especially for those of us who are trying to connect this activism to our yoga practice, I think is such a huge opportunity there and I'm really grateful to be able to explore that with you on this podcast where maybe we can just talk a little bit about what our plans are for this going forward.

Jivana Heyman 42:42

Yeah, and I just, I just want to echo what you said again because I just wanna go back to that idea of service and to say that anyone can offer service, no matter where you are in your life and how little access, you have to prevalence you can still offer service to yourself first like service starts with self care so taking care of the body in a way that is appropriate to what it needs that service and that if you have a disability or chronic illness that might be all of it, that's your service is like taking care of yourself. You're taking yourself like feeding your body what it needs doing the right kind of exercise or asanas or whatever it is. And you can be serving your body, and then once your body feels like it's okay then you can turn that service outward so I don't yeah I love that I think it's essential to say that there's no like hierarchy of service, or social justice. You know I see it I see examples of service, all the time from people who don't even know they're doing it people that just like go out of their way to be kind, or to

take care of other people. It could be loving. To me that's a beautiful example of service and social justice actually anyway yeah so let's talk about the podcast.

Amber Karnes 43:55

Yeah, so, um, so Jivana and I basically will be doing this sometimes where we have a conversation about a topic and yoga, that has to do with accessibility equity social justice and, and sometimes we'll be talking to other people so do you want to talk a little bit about that, like, that type of thing i mean

Jivana Heyman 44:13

i i thought it would be fun to kind of do a combination of both you know like that some, some episodes are just you and me because we like to talk to each other. And. And then other episodes, maybe one of us will interview a guest, and we're hoping to do that about half the time and I'm excited because there's so many incredible people out there doing amazing work, and, you know, a lot of my work is trying to platform marginalized voices and support teachers that are doing that work, and like finding new and exciting ways of making that connection that we keep talking about. And that's also that what we'll be doing on our training platform is offering trainings that you know really give yoga teachers and practitioners tools to, to make that connection again between yoga equity accessibility and social justice. So that would be the theme that we'll be talking about and exploring here and in the trainings.

Amber Karnes 45:14

Yeah, so we hope that this podcast and the accessible yoga training school will be some resources that will help you feel a little less isolated if you're a teacher who's trying to do this work, especially in the age of COVID which has separated us more than we usually are already. We really want this to be a resource where you feel like you're part of a community of learners who are really stepping up to do this work that's often uncomfortable and that requires us to be able to manage our minds and really be able to stay open to the experience of other people, even when we even when that experience or like witnessing that makes us feel really uncomfortable or ashamed or guilty or whatever. I'm hoping that through these conversations we can start to shift out of that space of like guilt or shame or confusion and into a more clear space where we can really see and hold opposing truths at the same time, or hold you know our understanding of the world, and listening to other people's experience of that world and then being able to reconcile those things and use the tools of this practice to be able to make change so we hope that we hope this will be helpful to you.

Jivana Heyman 46:29

Well, you just said my favorite thing so so in a way again it goes back to the book I'm writing right now really the theme I've come to is this idea of clear vision, which in Sanskrit, the vague nuts. Maybe we can talk about it another episode in detail but basically like what you just said it so beautifully like, rather than being lost in the confusion that can come by working with your mind like when you're really trying to work with your ego and stuff it can be really hard and confusing and painful and you don't know where to turn. That that's actually the theme of

the yoga teachings that's the theme of the Bhagavad Gita like Arjuna is confused. He doesn't know what to do. And really the teachings of the Gita are offered to help him see more clearly how to be like what kind of warrior to be and how to step forward in the world, and the sutras the same thing like how do you work with your mind not just like, get rid of your mind, but like how do you use this incredible tool that you have of your mind is this incredibly powerful tool but how do you use it, you know, for good for yourself and for the world, you know, how do you become like more effective at what you're doing. And I love that goal like for us here, like I love that goal is like trying to see more clearly. And and and like, avoid the shame and fear I think that actually are really covering, and like blocking our vision, you know, I think that's beautiful and. And I would just say yeah like the people that we're gonna bring on like the guests that we've talked about so far and that people are gonna leave these trainings are people I've already, I'm learning from like I'm still learning like there's so much to learn. There's always more, you know, always. And I'm like, so excited. I learn all the time, and same like when I'm teaching like I always learned from my students every single class. And it's not I'm not just saying that like it's true, like there's actually. Everyone's having different experiences and it's so it's an exciting opportunity to be open to that rather than feeling like. Again this kind of a capitalist idea that like I have to be the expert, and I have to be, I have to know the answer. And I think really what I want to what I'd like to do through this podcast is like destroy that idea, just like you don't have to be the expert, like I'm not, I'm not an expert. You know I'm Yeah. No, no yeah like exactly I'm, I'm learning. And that's, I'm an expert at learning stuff like that's what I want to do. I want to be an expert learner Explorer.

Amber Karnes 48:56

Yes, I think like 100%, the yoga practice has taught me that asking better questions and figuring out a way to stay in the inquiry and well Michelle Cassandra Johnson, who's one of my favorite teachers says, one of the agreements whenever we come into her workshop is expect an accepted non closure. And that's been a big one for me and for so many of my students like since we've started working with it. Because the world is not neat and tidy. Things are not always as simple as we would like them to be and so having tools to really be with that non closure i think is is so huge. And so, Jivana and I don't have all the answers but we like to learn to ask better questions. And so that's how I always know that an experience, a learning experience has been really transformational for me as if I leave with more questions than I came with but maybe they're just a little bit better questions. And so I hope this podcast will be a place where we can ask some questions, maybe get some answers but definitely get some better questions along the way. So thanks for joining us for the first episode, we're really looking forward to connecting with you more. And definitely go check out accessible yoga training. COMM where you can find all of the online training and courses and other study opportunities that we're working on for you, with regards to social justice and equity and how your yoga practice can really be used to make change.

Jivana Heyman 50:34

Okay, thank you. Thanks Amber. See you later.

Amber Karnes 50:36

See ya.

Thanks for joining us for the accessible yoga podcasts maiden voyage. We're so excited to have you along for the ride. Be sure you check out everything we're up to on our website, which you can find at [online dot accessible Yoga training.com](https://online.accessibleyogatraining.com). Our website is where you can find our upcoming courses, including the flagship accessible yoga training online, as well as our debut course on the new accessible yoga training school platform. Kelly Palmer's course race and equity in yoga disruption as a practice. This is a course that helps you to get clear on what your roles responsibilities and what your work is when it comes to using your yoga practice to help create more justice, more liberation, more freedom in the world. It really will help you to get out of a place of shame and confusion and identify clearly what your role is in systems of oppression and how you may be upholding them, helping to perpetuate them. Not so you can stay in a place of shame or fear, but so that you can take clear, direct and decisive action to really make the change that you want to see in the world and to use your yoga practice to help create more justice, more freedom, more liberation for all. That's the goal, isn't it? We hope you'll check out the website and everything we're up to at the accessible yoga training school over at [online dot accessible Yoga training.com](https://online.accessibleyogatraining.com) See you there.

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