

Making Yoga Philosophy Straightforward & Accessible with Dan...

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

yoga, world, texts, book, gita, people, bhagavad gita, teachings, potentially, suppose, mind, practice, patanjali, teaching, message, philosophy, writing, meditation, sutras, bit

SPEAKERS

Daniel Simpson, Jivana Heyman, Amber Karnes

- A** Amber Karnes 00:01
Welcome to the Accessible Yoga podcast your weekly source for questions and answers around equity in yoga hosted by Jivana Heyman and Amber Karnes. Join us each week for powerful conversations with thought leaders at the intersection of justice, knowledge and practice. Welcome to Episode 36. I'm your host Amber Karnes. In Episode 36 Jivana sits down with Daniel Simpson to talk about yoga philosophy and his new book the truth of yoga. A comprehensive guide to yoga is history texts, philosophy and practices. Daniel is a former foreign correspondent who has gone on to study and teach yoga, meditation, yoga history and yoga philosophy everywhere from the Oxford Centre for Hindu studies to try yoga in London and beyond. Jivana and Daniel discuss many concepts and themes from yoga philosophy during this podcast, including the role of ethics in yoga, and how our individual interpretation of the teachings influences how we live our yoga. This conversation invites us to consider how we use self study and practice to either retreat from the world or become a more conscious citizen. of you enjoy this conversation. Here we go.
- J** Jivana Heyman 01:11
Hi, this is Jivana. And thanks for joining me for another episode of our podcast. I'm so excited today to be talking with Daniel Simpson. Who's the author, author of a new book

the truth of yoga. Hey, Daniel.

D Daniel Simpson 01:23
Hey, Jivana. Great to be with you.

J Jivana Heyman 01:25
Yeah, thanks for being here. You're in the UK somewhere. Is that right?

D Daniel Simpson 01:31
That's right. Yeah. Just northwest of Oxford, kind of the middle of nowhere and in the deep midwinter at the moment. So yeah.

J Jivana Heyman 01:40
Oh, gosh, yeah. Well, I'm in California, it's actually quite warm here today.

D Daniel Simpson 01:47
My hands on the glow coming out the screen.

J Jivana Heyman 01:52
Maybe that's good for something. Blue Light is warming. Alright, so I didn't really give you much of an intro. I wonder, can you tell us about yourself a little bit? Would you mind?

D Daniel Simpson 02:02
Sure, sure. Um, as you say, I've just published a book, the truth of yoga. And that really sums up what I've been teaching for the last five years or so. I am a long standing yoga practitioner who's always been curious about yoga philosophy. Ever since I guess, when I first tried to open a yoga text, to make sense of what we were doing a yoga class and I discovered that the yoga sutra in the Bhagavad Gita, in particular, didn't seem to say anything about what we were doing in our weekly classes. I was always wanting to understand, you know, what that disconnect might reveal and where, in some ways, you know, yoga history explains sort of the gap between the ancient past and the very sort of popular present. And so I eventually ended up back at college in my 40s, doing a master's degree and studying at so as in London, very fortunately, with some of the world experts

on the subject. So Mark Singleton, Jim Mallinson, Jason Birch, Daniela Bevilacqua, were sort of together under the umbrella of the HUD, the yoga project for five years. And I started out studying with them. And then I just kept following what they were doing. And I've been inspired by their work. And a lot of, you know, what I've written is, I guess, my attempt to distill some of their findings, combine them with what I've learned in the last 1520 years and make it as accessible as possible to him to use a popular phrase.

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Jivana Heyman 03:28

Yeah, thanks. I'm curious about your journalism background, though, because I read that you mentioned it in the interview you did with Seth Powell on his podcast, I was listening. And he talked about that a bit. I was really intrigued by that.

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Daniel Simpson 03:42

Well, that's Yeah, I suppose the backstory? Yeah, the story behind the story in every sense. I mean, firstly, in terms of writing the book, I mean, I've always been a writer. And I've always wanted to write a book about yoga, but I wasn't quite sure what form that would take. And once upon a time writing memoir, went badly off the rails after my experiences as a foreign correspondent. And I called that book a rough guide to the dark side. And I guess I wanted to make sure this was a brighter text. And at first, I thought it was going to be a story about how yoga had helped me I suppose to face my demons, change my life, stop smoking weed all day, that kind of stuff. In the end, it became much less about me. In fact, there's not really much meat in it. So I put a little bit in the introduction and the conclusion to try and explain why I've written the book and also, how I go about what I suggest in the book invites us to do which is to reappraise how we relate to yoga philosophy in light of yoga history and acknowledging that things have changed a lot. They've been mixed and match from lots of different sources. And so we in the present are inevitably doing some of that too. And we get we get a bit of freedom to go with what inspires us but at the same time, that comes would send responsibility to acknowledge what we're doing. I guess my journalistic training helped me to do that. Because, um, I guess, originally I was a Newswire journalist. And so my job was to distill things into the beefiest shortest possible form a bit like a sutra. And so I tried to distill all these aspects of yoga history and philosophy and into short, digestible blog length chapters, and therefore, hopefully have shown how, you know, really Yoga is made up of building blocks in terms of, you know, the theory behind the practice some blocks combines to build some structures, others, you know, rearranged slightly differently, create completely different structures. And I think, I think my, my training in that sense was helpful, but ultimately, I mean, it all comes back to you. I went slightly off the rails and yoga helped me find my way. So I think what I learned at that time was it's very important to me I was I was

radicalized, I suppose it's getting on for 20 years ago now and the, you know, the Wars of the Bush administration after the the attacks on New York and Washington in 2001. I was involved in writing about that stuff. And, you know, I was radicalized, I wanted to stop it. And that wasn't, that wasn't what my bosses saw their job as being instead, you know, we were basically at that time I worked for the New York Times, my job effectively was to take dictation from the American Embassy really, really came. If they phoned me up and summoned me in for a briefing. I certainly am not meant to pick picking up the pieces. Remember, basically being kicked out of the American ambassador's office in Belgrade after I argued with him a bit if you haven't been telling me it's, it's in your nature. And I suppose that was, I was quite argumentative. When I was younger. And I wanted to put things right, I wanted to find the truth and like to tell the truth. And I guess I was, you know, I was an angry young man. And yoga helped me to find some way of combining my interest in seeking the truth with trying to find a bit of peace inside myself. It's all very well, yeah, trying to make peace in the world. But if you're doing that, with anger, that that doesn't make any peace at all. It just spreads More, more, more venom.

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Jivana Heyman 07:19

So interesting. Thank you. Yeah, I was really curious about that. You know that, because I heard you mentioned that when you talked with Seth about radical, like becoming radicalized and having opinions and wanting to make change in the world. I think that I mean, I really connected to that, personally, because it's my background, you know, I was an AIDS activist. And that's what I mean, that's really what compelled me to become a yoga teacher was to, you know, share yoga with my community. And, and in a way, I definitely have an activist perspective. And so I'm curious about that, like, I just actually just finished reading your book. And I was, it's amazing. I just want to say like, if anyone's, you know, whoever's listening, I mean, it's really worth reading. It's an incredible, I don't know what the word is like survey of the whole of yoga, like, I've never really seen in one, relatively slim text, which is, I think I need to just, I think it shows that you have that journalism background, because you're able to cover so much ground very quickly. And I am jealous, just because, you know, I just, I just finished writing my second book. And I wish I actually had read this before I finished but I know how hard writing is. I mean, I don't have a background in writing. So it's just a, it's just so hard. But yeah, you're very clear and concise. And like I said, You cover so much, and I think in a very neutral way. In fact, I that's what kind of surprised me, because I I had the sense that you have this kind of activist heart or something that you have this kind of I don't know that perspective. And yet, I was surprised by I mean, if we can maybe start at the end of your book, like some of the things you say about contemporary practice surprised me a little bit because I feel like I think you're trying to be neutral, and I appreciate that. But it feels like a little I felt a little sad at the end. Do you know what I mean? Like a little, it seemed almost, I don't know

what to say. cynical. I mean, is that fair? What do you think, am I projecting

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Daniel Simpson 09:26

that you felt cynical or that you felt that I was cynical

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Jivana Heyman 09:29

that you were a little cynical about, about contemporary movements around like trauma informed teaching and social justice, integration and yoga?

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Daniel Simpson 09:39

cynical I think I've seen a lot in the last five years that's made me wary of, you know, my, my heartfelt instinct to be on board with that. Because I see, I see a lot of document to be honest and the intolerance that creeps in and I don't want to particularly name names or any individual, but I've seen that, you know, these, these, these these arguments about accessibility and it's less about accessibility and much more about you know, I mean, it started out with what is and isn't yoga I suppose and, and then it morphed into you know which which things are damaging to people, which which systems of yoga enable abuse. And I saw some of the people who were leading those debates being quite abusive, to be honest. And because they think they're on the side of the angels, that's all rationalized away. And I just found that sat very uncomfortably with me. And ultimately, I think the problem is that this is, I suppose, why I came to that conclusion. In the end, that was partly a product of its time writing at the moment when some of those debates were very vocal a couple of years ago, in the wake of Me, too. And also the history of yoga, there has never been such a thing as one true yoga, there is no way of coming up with the system that will make you know, everybody get on board with with the right way of doing things that there will always be diversity. And, you know, the whole sort of movement to make things more accessible, equitable, fair, rests upon preserving diversity and serving diversity. And that ultimately means that one size cannot fit all that no matter how well informed and well intentioned, the suggestions for improving things might be. Others might disagree for very good reasons. And that will be okay. It doesn't make them bad. And I think I found a lot of the discussion tending towards the finger pointing and get on board with my program, or you're the enemy. And I just found that depressing.

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Jivana Heyman 11:42

Yeah, no, I think actually, maybe what it has, when I, when I saw in the whole book was kind of a focus on

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Daniel Simpson 11:48

ego, like kind of the egotistical nature of humans and how we interpreted and taught Yoga is through that lens over centuries, maybe not maybe 1000s of years, even. That's the human condition. That's what the Buddha and various yogic sages in their wisdom have tried to warn us about the the more attached we are to the idea of being right, the further away We are from being liberated to this extent, although obviously at the same time that has to be balanced with, you know, the real world and the fact that injustice exists and people abuse one another. And that one has to draw a line somewhere I but getting that balance, right is a very tricky thing.

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Jivana Heyman 12:29

Yeah, I mean, I guess that's, I guess, why I felt maybe cynical wasn't the right word. But it just it felt a little. Yeah, just sad. Because I think that's what I saw in the history of yoga two that you described was just the way that people have used the teachings, or even created the teachings based on their own personal perspective and their own selfish desires, which does seem to be like that. The teachings are, I mean, you give some amazing examples. And yeah, I mean, the the diversity of the teachings is incredible. I mean, the way you describe, but I guess I'm curious what you think about the kind of the ethics. And just because, again, this is what I've been writing about. So my book is really about yoga philosophy, but from a very much a social justice perspective. And I really tried to hone in on the ethical teachings and try to look at, you know, are there ethical teachings that do transcend our individual desires? And you know what I mean? Like, are there ways that we should act in the world that are in line with yoga? Yeah, with the yoga teachings like Ahimsa. And actually, you have a beautiful line, maybe I could read it to you. around you talk about, I think you're talking in a section around first do no harm, you're talking about the sutras. And you said, the role of ethics is to calm the mind and to look within. And I was like, Yes, that's, that's it, because I feel like that's also the theme, you know, within the teachings, and sort of really interesting to me that you made that connection between ethics and the goal of yoga.

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Daniel Simpson 14:11

I mean, I think I think this is the thing that really struck me even and, you know, the book grew out of a time in my life, when I was considering doing a PhD, I was accepted onto a Ph. D. program at Syracuse University in upstate New York. And for lots of personal reasons, I didn't go ahead with that. But my proposal was to write about, you know, activist movements in yoga, and I didn't intend to do it from a position of skepticism. But at the same time, I wasn't really sure how to marry the modern disconnect between what these teachings say, which is largely world renouncing, and what people would like them

to say, which is much more about how we improve society. And that is not that's not been the concern of most texts in the yoga tradition. unfortunately and i think it's i suppose i ended up writing this book as the first step i've got another book up my sleeve which i needed when speaking with sas and and it's pretty much what you're talking about it by the sounds of it in your book it's you know how do we move beyond this and i felt like the first thing we have to acknowledge is that most most tech's on yoga don't say what we'd like them to and actually if we really drill down to the way that they're presenting the things that even sound appealing despite that say the ethical teachings that potentially offers despite his ultimate goal being basically to turn the lights out and disappear do we find that he's teaching those things as a prelude to withdrawal it's easier to leave the world behind it's easier to meditate if you haven't created more disturbance to yourself by making enemies behaving in a way that creates bad thought vibrations effectively is what he's saying so it's all about that and really the only mainstream yoga text that i know of that talks about action in the world is the bhagavad gita right and then at the same time if we really drill down to the politics of that uphold the caste system your place shut up so yeah it's awkward

J Jivana Heyman 16:15
yeah well i mean

D Daniel Simpson 16:18
when we drawn that baseline then we can say okay well we're gonna have to reinterpret things and there is socially engaged buddhism that draws on teachings of the buddha and at the same time reframes them somewhat and i think yoga needs that to happen but first we actually have to acknowledge that the teachings we've got don't say what we'd like them to

J Jivana Heyman 16:38
well i think that's what i was gonna say i think i'm lucky because i'm not an academic and i think that's also why i've avoided going back to school and doing what you did i mean part is i had kids and in that time but i i you know for me in my book i just say like i'm a practitioner yeah and that's my lens like i don't i don't pretend any expertise other than that you know what my experience has been practicing and teaching and what my teachers have taught me so i mean i see the the conundrum that you have you know now that you you really are an academic and you're in that world it's like it's harder to give your perspective

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Daniel Simpson 17:21

although i suppose that's why i didn't do the phd in the mean time i teach at the oxford centre for hindu studies but um you know that's that's that sort of step outside of the university it's it's got the university affiliation but it's really you know adult education platform effectively i mean it supports that there are there are courses there that they're offered to university students but my role is much more teaching online courses for practitioners in the general public so i'm actually in a lucky position that i can draw on the scholarly findings but at the same time tried to present them in ways that people really want answers to how do these teachings relate to how we live and as i say what i wanted to do first by writing this book was to try and summarize what's in the yoga texts and what did they tell us and really i think what i tried to say at the end of the book is that that that leaves us with with a choice we were inevitably going to have to do some brief framing perhaps even some reinterpreting perhaps some complete rewriting and maybe some of the things we'd like to do in the world don't need the yoga traditions sort of endorsement for us to do them and to feel that they're worth doing and i know a lot of the time it's tempting to reach for these texts to tend to give us back up but the right thing to do is the right thing to do whether or not potentially says

J

Jivana Heyman 18:44

yeah but i think what i what i found what i've tried to do in my book is to look at inspiration from the text you know and i know that it's definitely an interpretation but i think it has to do with thinking and well some of these some of these ideas have stayed around for 1000s of years and so maybe there's some meaning there and and i think i do i definitely take it with like a personal angle anyway but i want to talk about me i want to talk about you and your work so i want to know like i think look can i go let's go back to like ancient yoga for a minute i'm just curious what i would i would wonder is did you see themes you know in the ancient teachings because like i kind of mentioned i mean you cover so much time and so many texts it's really quite astounding were there themes for you that that came through

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Daniel Simpson 19:48

very strongly and i suppose that's why i've come to this conclusion really about about what what what really is the dominant message from from the yoga tradition to the extent we can generalize because there isn't really One, but that is that there are many, but they do have one thing in common at the beginning and it's renouncing, it's really that life, life causes problems, partly because of how we identify ourselves in relation to existence and the rest of our surroundings. And the simplest solution that early Yogi's came up with was to do nothing. And you know, the ultimate expression of that was to sit

down, stop eating, stop breathing, and leave the body behind. And it's really only about 1000 years ago that that mentality got knocked sideways by tantric philosophy, and we ended up with physical yoga practice, potentially is sort of the last gasp of summing all of that idea up, you know, had to leave the world behind. And I hadn't really realized until I studied in more depths with people who are far more learned than me how consistent messages, it's not the only message. And certainly in the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna is very critical of people who think that they can do such a thing is to stop acting. Our body does things whether we want it to not, Unless Unless we kill it, which doesn't sound very sensible. But at the same time, that that message resonates, and it seems to have been, everything comes from the idea of the problem of karma, caused by action in the world, we have disturbances in our minds, we're, I guess, conditioned to behave in certain ways as a result of things that have taken place in our lives or generations before us. I mean, there's a sort of intergenerational trauma understanding here, but the solution is not to make peace and and to try and put in place the conditions for less suffering for others, it's to try and unwind them in ourselves and to disappear again. And again, that's the message. So it was it was a radically self centered approach to something that was all about being too self centered is it's very strange paradox. In a way, you're right.

J Jivana Heyman 22:07

But isn't it disappear, but is it also enlightenment? Because it is say, like, the end, you say, well, there's no such thing as enlightenment. And like, things like that is what the focus is on a lot of those early days, but

D Daniel Simpson 22:20

then the texts don't end with stories about Well, now that you're enlightened, you know, like a bodhisattva in Mahayana, Buddhism, renounce your enlightenment and get on with leading other beings to enlightenment first, that is just none of that, you know, potentially ends with basically you've left the detached from the material world, and that's that you rest in your own nature lights out, it doesn't then sort of say, oh, MPs, you can get off your backside and go and be useful. So, yeah,

J Jivana Heyman 22:50

yeah, definitely. But he talks about

D Daniel Simpson 22:52

the same the hard to predict and saying, you know, you basically, only the yoga, he looks

like he's dead is truly liberated.



Jivana Heyman 22:59

Yeah. But I was gonna say Patanjali offers a lot of benefit, you know, in all those like cities and all the levels of Samadhi and all that. I mean, it does seem like there's a lot of attention



Daniel Simpson 23:11

through a lot more time on that than postures.



Jivana Heyman 23:14

Yeah. I guess I just, that's so interesting. Yeah. So I mean, it's like enlightenment isn't the goal so much. It's just complete. transcendence, just leaving altogether.



Daniel Simpson 23:31

As a way, it's described in roots of yoga by by Jim Melanson and Mark Singleton, which is, I mean, been very influential, I suppose on what I've written, it's, it's a great survey of all of these these texts in the yoga tradition. And they tried to sort of sum it up. Yeah, sort of general purposes that the early Yogi's, they all had very similar aim. And it was it was basically it was transcendence of being a person. This thing, they call it some ontological suicide, removing the conditions of personhood, so that you're not caught up in it. And, you know, that's it's extreme. really is.



Jivana Heyman 24:13

Yeah, that is extreme. But one of the favorite things I saw you say, it was early on, when I when I found you was something about yoga is not about union. It's about separation. And I was just so relieved to hear you say that because I get so frustrated, you know, by this kind of like this. I mean, I simplify things, for sure. But I feel like people confuse accessibility and simplification. You know, I don't think they're the same thing. And I sometimes try to make personally try to make complicated ideas accessible, which is not the same thing as actually changing them.



24:44

Right. That's, that's

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Jivana Heyman 24:44

pretty well put. Yeah, but I mean, I like this idea of union. I don't know if you could talk about that a bit.

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Daniel Simpson 24:52

Let me just clarify before I before we go into that, that. I mean, that transcendence of The personal being could be, you know, as you rightly suggesting the seed of bear selfless service, there's no reason for it not to be. And that's how it's been in the Bhagavad Gita. But that's not a message that strongly emphasized yet, particularly in the surviving relics of these ancient yoga traditions, there's there, there are renunciate Yogi's, and they have their sort of social order. And they do provide service in India, they some of these Saudis, they live in a little village, and they're the focal point for people to come and hang out and bring all their problems and sit around and chat for a bit. And, but but they just sit there. So that's their role is, I think the whole idea of activism and providing as a service for uplifting the poor. That's that's very more very much more recent, be they kind of are and Gandhi rather than the ancient yakattack. But anyway, back to back to Union and separation. The lens through which Yoga has been explained over the years, it's been through this idea of connection. And again, that makes it sound like you know, the whole aim of practice is to acknowledge our interconnection and our harmonious relationship with one another. But that's, that's that's, that's a message that comes from the early Punisher. That's really the philosophy that grows out. And it's known as Vedanta, and its various forms has originally quite a nondual quality that it consists of recognizing No, no distinction between you and the cosmos, if you if you don't see you, as you, as it were, you get beyond me. And this this identification with the body in the mind and satisfying oneself through desires and instead just see the timeless art man that is one with brotman. That's that's the Oneness that's probably really an articulation of pure consciousness. And so that's, that's the sort of message that a lot of the commentators on potentially have used. And it's the popular definition of Yoga means union, Angela himself says very clearly union is the problem. It's the it's the mechanism by which we get confused, we get we latch on to stuff that we observe. And we get confused with this sort of thinking capacity as to what it is to actually be liberated. And then we've got this deluded part of our brain that thinks it's enlightened when actually, it's just caught up in stuff satisfying itself. So his aim is to cause the total separation of spirit and matter. And, again, if you take that, too, I think the thing I'm really trying to emphasize is, if we take these things to the letter, they're all very extreme. And the way that it's useful to me, I think, to engage with ancient tradition is to see that first of all, and acknowledge and

perhaps not going to follow these things to the letter and then immediately, that requires me to reframe them a bit, and, and to start to say, Well, what would it be to do this in a less extreme way? And then it starts to be? Well, it's the possibility of relationship this separation, potentially, is really talking about. The other needs to always distinguish one thing from another. How can you have a relationship with another if everything's one, it's only through duality, that there is that possibility of there can be a connection between two things, but he's not really interested in that, but but he is interested in using our relationship with the material world, to ultimately learn to leave it behind getting getting more skilled at telling the difference between the subtlest states of mind and consciousness in the end. But if we go down from those elevated realms back to the day to day existence, we can just look at the ways in which we entangle ourselves and each other more deeply in suffering. And so the Bhagavad Gita spin on this is, you know, we should look to disconnect ourselves from the problem of suffering. And I think, you know, we can be skillful in the way that we look at relationship and the way that we look at how we're relating to ourselves as much as the world are we compounding or diminishing suffering? And it's really that's the Buddha's message, you know, basically, are you being more skillful or less skillful? There's one way that's clearly more beneficial, and you might not get enlightened, does it matter? It's what what are you doing in this moment? Is it Are you part of the problem or part of the solution to put it in straightforward language?



Jivana Heyman 29:23

Yeah, I mean, I think I like to I like that, you know, the theme of reducing suffering, I think is clear. In both texts, I mean, the Gita and the sutras and that's all that's as far as my training goes, You know, I don't go back. And even between those two texts, there's there's a lot of confusion, but I feel like that what you've just described around duality, non duality that if people can understand that, I think that's always helped me in terms of understanding Patanjali is perspective at least as dualistic. Instead of It's all we're all one all the time. You know, which is the source of confusion.



Daniel Simpson 30:06

It's also a wonderful recipe for spiritual bypassing, you know, if you can just keep out, we're all one. We're all interconnected. It's all lovely. And, you know, I did sort of say that in that last chapter on, you know, the activist thing is this, this whole problem in the way people sort of self satisfied Lee thinking they've got somewhere while the world goes to hell, the human race dies out. But at the same time, I'm not sure what we can do about those big picture problems. And on a certain level, I mean, I did devote quite a bit of energy to activism in the previous decade. And I think I suppose that was part of my own egomania at this megalomania. I'm sure we can only do very limited things as individuals, we can be

part of the movement that's working towards something else. But even then, some of the things forces and not within our control is all I'm really trying to get at. Yeah, but it's not worth doing something like that.

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Jivana Heyman 31:01

But around that spiritual bypassing, like, for example, right now, you know, in the US, we're having kind of a political crisis over here. And, and you know, I've seen a few posts from yoga, yoga related posts, people saying, well, yoga is not politics, yoga is not political, and it just makes me I don't know, upset and angry, actually. Because I think Where'd you come up with that? Like, that's as untrue as anything else? You know, I mean, I don't I don't think I feel like this idea, oh, of nonduality. Yoga is we're all one, we're all the same, we don't see a difference. That is spiritual bypass. And it also allows yoga practitioners who now number in the millions, or I don't even know 10s of millions, probably around the world, I'm imagining

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Daniel Simpson 31:42

10s of millions in the US, I think by the last year

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Jivana Heyman 31:44

10s of millions in the US then here in America, ignoring the political problem, saying it's well, that's not my practice. And I think well, it is your practice. I of course, then would say it's probably we would have different perspectives on what yoga tells us to do. Based on

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Daniel Simpson 32:02

I guess, what I'm trying to get at, you know, in some ways, there's textual backup for potentially his basic message seems to be and you can see this most clearly in sutra, 33, when he's saying, we should adopt equanimity towards the evildoers, because we don't need that don't let them harsh, your mellow. And, effectively, that's that that is sort of encoded into the idea of personal transcendence being the number one objective, it becomes quite a selfish pursuit. It

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Jivana Heyman 32:34

also says, He says, You should have compassion for the unhappy and I think that's, to me, that's the one you know, you can choose between any four of those locks and keys and what which one you want to pursue, but it seems like

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Daniel Simpson 32:48

an extent but if we go to the common tree, which is a thing where we have to deal with the legacy just because they're you know, there's they're so dense that you can't really understand them, except by adding information. And if we add anything other than the original traditional commentary, we've just reinvented that anyway. But what what said is the reason they're focused on the equanimity one is the asset or potentially depending on whether you think the commentary was written by a different dude or the same one. It basically says the aim is not positive thinking but restraining the mind. That's the basic gist of it that says, word for word, what Harry Horan under aranea says in his summary of the US has come to us this country says this sort of thought gives rise to clean a virtue in the mind becomes pure, a purified mind becoming one pointed, eventually attained serenity. So it really is about preserving the clarity of mind that will enable you to leave the world behind. It's always the objective. So cultivating those benevolent qualities, it creates a calm mind that's able to focus and then go inwards, rather than developing compassion for social activism just isn't it just isn't his message, unfortunately, however much we would like that to be. But I still think obviously, you know, compassion is a wonderful thing.

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Jivana Heyman 34:07

He doesn't. Often he doesn't I mean, it only comes up there I think an entire day.

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Daniel Simpson 34:13

Indeed. And I think that's one of those cases, borrowed and stuff that's popular around debt, particularly the Buddhist traditions.

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Jivana Heyman 34:20

Yeah. But then what about what about Ahimsa? Or, I mean, isn't that ethical practice of non harm? I mean, isn't that what we're trying to do? is

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Daniel Simpson 34:33

sure, but the but the aim, again, is to leave the world behind rather than rather than to get more involved in it. So again, it's to stabilize the mind if you're, if you're causing harm, you're ultimately bringing instability in your mind. Although he does say, you know, non violence is never causing harm to any creature and everything else is rooted in that. So, clearly, you know, there's a benefit. I mean, there was a slogan that people used to use

here In the environmental movement, riding bikes versus sticker, I think that people used to have the same one less car. So if you okay if you're if you're not being violent in your in your cat youth, then I guess that's, you know, one less violent person in the world, but it's also not somebody who's there at the same time, counteracting violence or just just not contributing to it or anything else. That's

J Jivana Heyman 35:23

that's that I agree me that I think the sutras don't demand social activism. But that's why I tend to move them to the Gita. I mean, I could definitely be more engaged spirituality there, but but also in a dangerous way, because I think it can go too far. Like I actually, I worry that, you know, this just war idea and a deep tech can be used by anyone in

D Daniel Simpson 35:48

my favorite example of this is, you know, both both Gandhi and his friend said, they were inspired by the Gita. So yeah, and obviously, that's, you know, this is problematic. There's a guy who was a scholar, actually at the, the college where I was going to do a PhD, his name was again underbara, at Austrian by birth, and he lived as a monk in India, and he was always didn't have a very positive view of the Bhagavad Gita, because he felt it was often exploited by the nationalists. And he had come from Austria, around the time of World War Two. And, you know, he was obviously painfully aware of where that can lead. And he said, there's a love of strong men in modern India, and this message of the Gita, you know, it appealed to some of the Nazis, some of what the Nazis have to say, appeals in modern India that you can find my on sale all over the place. But yeah,

J Jivana Heyman 36:47

I read that in the book, I was surprised. And also, I mean, the way the Nazis used the swastika, which is a Hindu symbol, right, or it's

D Daniel Simpson 36:55

also popular in Buddhist temples as well. But yeah, literally, the word I mean, Sue is good as the as the verb to be, and this diminutive suffix card means it's a little sign of auspiciousness vaccine. It's certainly not thought of that way anymore. It's seen as a sign of absolute chauvinist rage. But the Gita does have one, I'm just going to draw one line, verse 325, it says, it's the exact opposite potentially his message, the Why should act without attachment intending to maintain the welfare of the world. So there is this exhortation to do things for the sake of all beings. And I think what I really have

concluded, and that's why I couldn't get into it in this book, it was hard enough to keep it short, in the best of times already. I think, in an Indian context, is a word that sums up all of what we're talking about. And it's Dharma, which is basically the best translation of that that I can think of is right action. And there's this a lot of it in the Gita. And it's the message of the Mahabharata in which the Gita is embedded. But, you know, we don't really have that framework in the Western world. Because we haven't grown up around the rest of that textual tradition, we're looking at one small part of Indian religious thought in a way that the texts that are about Moksha are to leave the world behind. Rather than saying that's only one of four options. I mean, did this Dharma this comment is artists of this living in the world, making a living enjoying oneself, the Kama Sutra, older than potentially the yoga sutra. And then there's all these texts about Dharma, many of which are pretty hideous, as long as they say that, about the caste system and whatnot in the place. But still, there's a broader context. And I think, Gail for each time, towards the end of his life, echoing Carl Jung, was basically saying, the West needs its own yoga philosophy, we need to we need to embed this sort of teachings about transcending the the never ending get greedy person in the head. We know we need to marry that with with some sort of, you know, how to live in the world. Teaching and and that's what's missing. And that's, that's the thing. I guess, the reason I didn't ultimately do PhD was you can't, you can't write that stuff and have it called a PhD. You're writing your own Dharma tags, you're basically trying to be a guru rather than than scholars are meant to pick things to pieces, not started any religious movements.

J Jivana Heyman 39:25

I have a one of my favorite sections in the Gita is chapter 632. It says, I'm thinking, this is the yoga he perceives the essential oneness everywhere naturally feels the pleasure or pain of others as his or her own.

D Daniel Simpson 39:41

Yes.

J Jivana Heyman 39:43

This speaks to that issue of social justice, feeling. It actually that section he goes, he first kind of describes enlightenment and then says, well, you'll Eve it like the next level isn't feeling other people's pleasure and pain I've had that's really interesting to show that kind of level of compassion. Beyond beyond yourself, which isn't. Yeah, which is kind of pretty much opposed to what Patanjali says usually, which is just focus on yourself.

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Daniel Simpson 40:10

Really, I mean, it's interesting that that comes in the chapter that's basically teaching potentially is yoga, you know, meditate, a lot of crossover in the techniques, but the message is different. It is it is, it's never suggested in the Bhagavad Gita that that's an end unto itself. It's it's, it's a prelude to skillful action in the world, that the two definitions of yoga in the second chapter are all about maintaining even mindedness while getting on with doing stuff without attachment to personal gain. So it's sort of it's rewritten the script in a way it's saying you can, you can transcend your self centeredness best by serving other people rather than disappearing. And I think I think that's a really important message, and I guess, you know, be bbbb be good and and really look forward to reading your book for this reason to just put that into 21st century context.

J

Jivana Heyman 41:05

Yeah. And I would say thank you, I would say, the sutras in a way to me, they still speak to that same idea, because it's like, if you are able to, kind of, I don't want to say control, but calm your mind and release your own personal egotistic attachment to every situation and what you'll get out of it, I think you do end up having a more generous and compassionate worldview, you know, because then other people's concerns and pain becomes more apparent. They don't I mean, I feel like it that Patanjali is there is a certain amount of, I don't know, compassion, as a subtext to that practice. For me, maybe not in the end, if you do leave the world altogether. But in the teaching, especially like of non attachment, or

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Daniel Simpson 42:01

attachment, I think is perhaps the most powerful of all of those things to ensure lovely Tell, tell the truth, not steal from people and not, that's all great, but the niyama santosha just just to be okay with the world as it is another challenge, but it's it's so liberating. It says it's, you know, it makes you think it's 16 times more happy than the best sex basically

J

Jivana Heyman 42:25

616 times. So, one last thing, I just, I don't wanna keep it too long. But what do you think? I know, you mentioned towards the end, you talk about how yoga and meditation have been separated, which I think is really an important teaching. You know, because this modern postural yoga or Eric, the commercial yoga that we're looking at, I mean, it's so far from I don't know, the tradition. What What do you think we should be bringing back in? I mean, other than meditation, I think you said that very clearly. Like, what are their

teachings? Yeah,

D

Daniel Simpson 43:00

I think in the in the Mahabharata, which, which says very clearly, the best best kind of yoga is meditation. And it's got two varieties. One is to focus the mind. And the other is to control the breath. And both of those things, relatively speaking, don't get much of a look in compared to like a shapes with the body. And integrating those those those two things into it can be very powerful. I don't have much experience, I suppose teaching Accessible Yoga, experience teaching yoga this year. Actually, I'm not a big fan of the zoom teachings. I teach the old class now. But I taught my mum's from yoga, my mom uses a wheelchair, she's had a stroke, and doesn't have capacity to do very much at all. And it really, you know, got me thinking and basically, we wind up, she lifts her arm, and she puts it down again. But Can she focus and breathe and synchronize that with lifting the arm putting it down again? That already seems to have quite an impact. So it changed my perspective on how much can be done with how little I suppose really

J

Jivana Heyman 44:08

well, but also it goes back to me. I mean, the reason I mentioned meditation is just because it's pretty accessible. I mean, there's oftentimes or that it's too subtle for someone or if they're a beginner, it seems challenging. But yeah, meditation and pranayama are actually not dependent on physical ability. Unlike most of what we see in the commercial scene, the yoga scene of this very extreme callous thing, calisthenics and gymnastics.

D

Daniel Simpson 44:36

And there's always someone trying to push it further as the vim coughs.

J

Jivana Heyman 44:41

Yeah, but I was just thinking like for you. Yeah, yeah. No, but for your mom and what I try to teach an Accessible Yoga is like, like you said, I mean, small movements can be incredibly powerful, like you said, but also there's so many other practices like you know, guided meditation, breathing, many kinds of meditation, relaxation, you that I think can be incredibly powerful and are relatively accessible. Because these are the subtle practices of yoga, which I think connect back more to the tradition of yoga than a lot of what we're seeing as yoga these days.

D

Daniel Simpson 45:16

I think there's another message as well that say, we go back to the jaegers Union saying it every time the Upanishads talk about the location of the art men pretty much. And then Krishna echoes this in the Bhagavad Gita, he said, He's in everybody's hearts, because he is the Yeah, it's always located in the heart, even sort of articulation of the philosophy that potentially develops in the coteaux shed, which defines Yoga is the same as potentially restraint of the mind in the senses. It says, the very end, think that 17 of the sixth book of the cutter Punisher says, you have to extricate this purusha it lives in the heart and has to be sort of drawn out. So you know, this, this, this, this, this idea of the heart is, is sent very much recurring. And I think it's, I think it's easy in a modern context, I suppose to, to get a little bit perhaps even cynical about that. Because if you open your heart, how much will that achieve? But have we got Have we got a big enough heart to be able to hold our own pain? anybody else's and real loving kindness, I

J

Jivana Heyman 46:24

think, but also, I think, like you said, so you connect it back to the cut that you punish God. But I would say that they're just by doing that, in my mind, you've connected it to social justice, and like trauma informed teaching, Accessible Yoga, like to me these, these modern movements that I see, are trying to connect to that concept of opening your heart, but not in a way that's like, you know, feel good yoga.

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Daniel Simpson 46:54

Developing the capacity to withstand all the hell that life throws.

J

Jivana Heyman 46:58

Yeah. Yeah, even in the in the sutras, in Patanjali. I noticed in in chapter three, where he's going through all the different cities, you know, he's saying focus on, you know, what is it like focus on a feather and you can levitate, but there's one goes like focus in the heart to calm the mind. And it's like, wait, you just give me this whole lecture, like for the last two chapters on how to do that, and how to just say,

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Daniel Simpson 47:28

knowledge of the mind in CS? Yeah. word for heart is connected to mind anyway. So there is this understanding of a subtler way of knowing.



Jivana Heyman 47:38

Yeah, I love that. Thank you. That's beautiful. I mean, nobody should end there. I love that focus on the heart. Thank you so much. Thanks for this beautiful book and all your I mean, an amazing amount of work you must have done to create this book, I can't even quite imagine it



Daniel Simpson 47:57

standing on the shoulders of giants. And as Somebody once told me that, they had to sum up what this journalism gift gives you. It's basically he called me a synthesizer. condensing lots of information into into a short and pithy space. That's, that's what I've done. But that means other people's work, it's been, you know, very influential and important. So there's a lot of a lot of people's books and articles cited at the back if anybody wants to dig deeper.



Jivana Heyman 48:22

And we'll have two last things one at one is I like to leave listeners with a question. At the end of the episode. I don't know if there's a question that comes to your mind that connects to this book, especially if there's something that comes out that kind of rises up to the top for you, in terms of what should we be asking ourselves maybe as modern practitioners?



Daniel Simpson 48:50

Who it's hard to put it into one question because I think it's true, it's in Do we want the relationship with tradition in the first place, because there really isn't an obligation to have one. And if it's not speaking to us, I think it's more important to think about inheritor had to relate to one another, and then modern life, rather than dressing it all up in stuff that doesn't necessarily relate to do what we're trying to do. But then if the answer is yes, it's what are we actually trying to achieve? Because that's the that's the disconnect. Really, I think that the very few people are trying to escape rebirth, very few people are trying to leave their body behind quickly. And you know, very few people are even going the full distance of meditation to these these realms that made that possible. So if what what actually is our objective and is defining and it's quite a liberating thing to to acknowledge, I'm not looking for what those texts are actually presenting. And therefore I need to reframe everything in terms of what it is I'm trying to achieve here. And diminishing suffering is already you know, it's it's a pretty, pretty noble goal and can be interpreted In many ways, but in which way, you know, and I think that once priorities are

clear, then then other things follow.

J Jivana Heyman 50:06

Yeah. And that's a great question for all of us, you know, what are we trying to achieve in our practice? I think that's, it's always helpful, I think, to reflect. I try to do that every year that instead of doing a new year's resolution, I actually my my New Year's practice is to ask myself, what am I trying to achieve? In my practice? What was the goal here? So I appreciate that. My last question for you is how can people find you? So I mean, the book is available anywhere, I guess. Yes.

D Daniel Simpson 50:36

Indeed, anywhere books are sold. And truth of yoga.com will tell you more about it. And through that, you'll also find my other website, which has all the other things I get up to. And then you can ask me questions. There's a contact form. So if anyone has any questions I'd be happy to hear from.

J Jivana Heyman 50:56

Right. Thanks. Thank you so much for your time. And yeah, for speaking with me today. Yes. No, it's been it's been a pleasure.

D Daniel Simpson 51:04

All the best and yeah, I look forward to listening to more podcasts.

J Jivana Heyman 51:08

Thanks so much. All right. Take care.

 51:11

Bye. Bye.

A Amber Karnes 51:14

Thanks for joining us for another week of the Accessible Yoga podcast. I hope you'll go to Accessible Yoga training comm slash Podcast, where you can check out the show notes

for this episode, get links to everything we talked about, and also sign up to be on the interest list for the next Accessible Yoga online training with Jivana Heyman myself, and a whole host of other teachers. This is like a survey course in yoga, accessibility and equity. If you feel like your 200 hour teacher training just really didn't give you what you needed to be able to reach all your students equitably. You'll want to check out this training, there's 30 hours of continuing education that you can get, as well as a wealth of knowledge and connection and community with other teachers who are in the same struggle as you. class starts may 10. And enrollment opens in early May. So be sure to go to Accessible Yoga training comm and get on the interest list. You'll be the first to know when we open enrollment. You'll also get a bunch of teachings over the next few weeks from Jivana. about accessibility and yoga to get you ready for this amazing course. I hope you'll go check it out, get on the interest list. leave us a review of the podcast let us know how we're doing. We're gonna take a break and a few weeks to prepare for season two of the podcast and we'd love to hear from you if you have questions. If you'd like for us to interview a guest or discuss a topic, go to the podcast page Accessible Yoga training comm slash podcast and give us your feedback, ask us a question or suggest a topic. Thanks for tuning in. We'll see you next week.