

Episode 20: How Chair Yoga Democratizes Asana Practice

In Episode 20 Amber Karnes and Jivana Heyman sit to talk about chair yoga and how it can be used as a tool to democratize asana practice. We begin with a conversation about how lineage and “guru culture” are shifting as abuse is being revealed. Jivana and Amber also talk about the way dominant culture conflates health and wellness as a basis for a human being’s worth and value. They each share about the ways that this belief keeps folks from understanding the potential of chair yoga and creates more ableism in our yoga spaces. The conversation also talks in depth about how chair yoga can be used to serve folks in diverse bodies who have different needs from the physical practice.

This week we explore:

- How the end of “Guru culture” through the revealing of ongoing abuse is shifting yoga culture
 - How we continue to have a collective focus on extreme physical asana
 - How Amber thinks about her learning lineage in yoga
 - How Jivana thinks about his Guru and lineage
 - How toxic diet culture and dominant culture have influenced who we see as an expert or “yoga celebrity”
 - How props like chairs are still seen as less than in mainstream yoga spaces
 - How we uphold health as the basis for value in others, on and off of the mat.
 - How ableism
 - How the sutras talk about our care, feelings and thought about our bodies
 - The importance of creating right relationship with our body and spirit through acceptance
 - How to easily use a chair to make the other limbs of the practice accessible to anyone
 - How the chair can be used as a prop to support postures, making them more accessible
 - How to create an inviting virtual space for your students
 - How Francesca serves as a mentor for other yoga teachers
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AK

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 Carnes. Join us each week for powerful conversations with thought leaders at the intersection of justice, knowledge and practice. Welcome to Episode 20. I'm your host Amber Carnes. In this episode Jivana and I sit to talk about chair yoga and how it can be used as a tool. to democratize asana practice, we begin with a conversation about how lineage and guru culture are shifting as abuse is being revealed. We also talk about the way that dominant culture conflates health and wellness as a basis for human beings worth and value. We each share about the ways that this belief keeps folks from understanding the potential of chair yoga and creates more ableism in our yoga spaces. This conversation also talks in depth about how chair yoga can be used to serve folks in diverse bodies who have different needs from the physical practice. Hope you find this conversation helpful. Here we go. Hey, Jivana How's it going?

JH

Jivana Heyman

1:04

Hi, Amber, how are you?

AK

Amber Karnes

1:06

I'm good. It's good to hear voice.

JH

Jivana Heyman

1:08

You too. I know. It feels like it's been a long time. Probably a couple of days.

AK

Amber Karnes

1:14

I know. We talk all the time. Sometimes we just record so all of you get to listen to it. Yeah.

JH

Jivana Heyman

1:23

Are you though?

AK

Amber Karnes

1:25

Now? How are you?

JH

Jivana Heyman

1:28

Know, I'm doing good. You know, it's great to be back for another podcast. I've been really enjoying them. I love listening to the episodes that you do without me. Because it's the one this morning. Yeah, I mean, I love this podcast stuff. I love talking. Yeah. And teaching.

AK

Amber Karnes

1:50

I know today we wanted to talk about chair yoga. But we're not going to start talking about talk start out talking about chair yoga. But we were chatting before we got on to record about sort of where I don't know yoga culture is right now. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

JH

Jivana Heyman

2:08

Yeah. You know what, I think here on the podcast, we've spoken about how we need to move away from this fixation on Asana, especially physically advanced poses as the goal of yoga. I mean, that's still that's still happening, you know, you kind of see a lot of, I still see, I should say, a lot of posts on Instagram with these kind of extreme poses as it that's what Yoga is all about. Right. And the other theme, you know, I think, the last few years, we've seen really a takedown of so many gurus and kind of it feels like really the end of that traditional group culture, at least in the West. And I, I feel like we're it's kind of like, Where is yoga? It's like, where do we go between those two? What I think of two kind of extremes? Don't I mean,

AK

Amber Karnes

3:03

I do. Yeah, it's like, on the one hand, there's this intense, you know, the focus of yoga on Asana, or extreme physical practice. And the other side is this, like that guru culture you talked about. And because of all the the abuse scandals within lineages that have come out, like, I think that's what you mean by like, the gurus getting taken down that, you know, I think there's been this tendency, I've actually been thinking about this a lot, too. And the notion of lineage, I don't know if we've even talked about this yet. But I was going to write something about it, that, you know, I've often felt that there's this sort of special, magical, something that's conferred onto people who can, like, be part of a lineage or trace back to their guru or whatever, and I never, you know, that wasn't my yoga education, I really felt like, every time I would go try to study with a senior teacher, or someone who was, you know, really respected in a lineage or something like that, I would notice that oftentimes, these teachers who were so like, lauded by, you know, yoga land, actually didn't know that much about teaching to diverse bodies, and definitely weren't even creating an environment or workshop or whatever, where I could even participate in some of the things and, you know, I'm, like, non disabled and pretty strong and stuff like that. And so, I, I sort of felt like separate from, you know, being able to, like, be part of lineage or whatever. And I was thinking about it the other day, because, you know, I feel like, I still have a lineage, right, like, you're in that lineage, all the all of my students are the people in the accessible yoga community, like the people in I don't know, the tradition of fat liberation, like are part of my you know, and so, um, I don't know I've been interested in this idea of Like if guru culture, you know, basically just mimics the systems of oppression that are in dominant culture. And that has been echoed like the oppressive dynamics that create those abuse situations and in cycles, then, you know, what actually is a more yogic way of looking at things like lineage and honoring our teachers and all that kind of stuff. I don't know, this isn't. Maybe this is a bit of a ramble. But it's definitely been something I've been thinking about.

JH

Jivana Heyman

5:31

I love that I love those questions. I mean, I really think about those things a lot. And I've been writing about it too, actually, for my book. You know, I do I do come from a traditional lineage and I have bigger Swami satchidananda. But, you know, I feel I have, I have mixed feelings about it. I feel grateful. I mean, incredibly grateful to him for what I've learned. But also, I feel a little bit jaded. Or I don't know, what the what's the word? Like? My eyes have been open a bit to like what you, you said just now about how that system also reflects? Kind of a white supremacist, I would say patriarchal culture or teaching. Yeah, it seems like, but it but it's hard. It's a hard one. And I think this is a topic, maybe this is a whole podcast in itself. But I would just say, you know, there is a there was a lot of value in the guru lineages. And and being a disciple, I think that's just such an essential part of this tradition of yoga. But what I'm always looking at is what how could we keep the good part of it and get rid of the bad part? And is that possible? And something I think there's there's some thinking these days about how the community can become the guru. I think Theo wildcraft has a new book, I haven't read her book, but talks about that, you know, post lineage yoga idea. And I feel like that's, that's kind of where I go with it, too. Like what you just said about how you have, you have a tradition. Actually, Theo also makes me think of Matthew rimsky, who also mentioned something to me about that once about how he was interviewing me. And he said something about how my experience and act up, which was my age activism background, probably taught me as much as my yoga tradition did and in a way, it's true, like, I yeah, I think that the group is more than just that one person. And so maybe we could hold that week, we can keep the group tradition, the essence of it without having it be focused on one man, or even sometimes a woman, but usually, it's a man. You know, and I think that's really the challenge for contemporary practitioners is to figure out that the nuanced approach to really valuing a tradition and also being respectful to the tradition and and way that Yoga has been passed down, you know, through these incredible teachers, I mean, some of them have been incredible. But also, I've just been incredibly abusive. Yeah.

AK

Amber Karnes

8:06

And, you know, like many of the teachers who, who are the gurus who have fallen, like, had amazing contributions to this practice, but the, you know, the power dynamics, I think, are the things that we tend to notice maybe in a different way. And I know that we both address through the way that we teach and train other teachers that, you know, I think the, the danger of that sort of, like putting one person up on a pedestal is like, if we're, if we're talking about yoga philosophy, you know, we are not, we don't, we don't lack anything that that person is, you know, holding some secret knowledge that they have to bestowed on us, you know, at

least the way I understand yoga philosophy. And so I think that, you know, there is this really radical, but also essential to the teaching, like way of being in relationship with our students that can be, you know, the ways that that we talk about teaching in a collaborative and co creative way that honors like the fullness of everybody's humanity and not sort of this, well, I'm appear, you know, the sage on the pillow, and I have this secret knowledge that you have to come to me for, I think the best teachers, you know, ask questions and guide and like, hold space for us to do our own practice. I don't know. I think we're No, yeah.

JH

Jivana Heyman

9:32

Well, I think that's important, just what you just said that the best teachers are the ones who ask questions and, and also encourage people to find themselves rather than to follow and I think that that's really the main issue, I guess is to, you know, for all of us to look at our to look at our teachers and really ask that question is like, what are they? What are they asking of us? And is it Are they leading me, you know, as my teacher leading me towards freedom and independence? Or are they leading me to just continue to follow them and be somehow dependent on them? I think that's really the the problem with a lot of the abuse has happened is this dependency that's been cultivated. And that could even be a dependency on, like, come back to class next week, come back to class rather than, you know, be free. I think as teachers, our goal should be to the student becomes free of us. They don't need us any longer at some point, you know, that they even surpass us. Yeah, that's, that's my goal for my students is that they are free. And they, you know, I basically go on and enjoy their life without me, you know what I mean, that they need to come back to me, which is I think a lot of what happens in yoga is like, we get stuck with people.

AK

Amber Karnes

10:51

Yeah, for sure. Yeah. Well, do you want to talk about chair yoga?

JH

Jivana Heyman

10:58

How do you make that segue?

AK

Amber Karnes

11:00

Well, here's the segue. We want to talk about chair yoga.

JH

Jivana Heyman

11:04

Okay, well, I have one way I have. That is that I just want maybe talk for a minute about, you know, maybe the parallels between that kind of celebrity yoga culture and the group culture. Like I think what I mentioned, I started by saying there's these two extremes, you know, that we see right now we see the kind of focus on extreme Asana. And also, then you have the guru culture, and that neither one is really, I think, the whole story. But in a way, those two extremes are actually maybe similar. And that some some yoga celebrity teachers have become the guru.

AK

Amber Karnes

11:41

Yeah. And

JH

Jivana Heyman

11:42

are the guide and we want to be like them. We want their attention. We want to Yeah, follow them. And, and that maybe that's also been misleading, because that's made us that's trained us to think that the fancy asanas that they're doing, but that's the goal. And so I think we need to move away from that. I think one way, personally, for me it one way is chair yoga. I mean, it sounds kind of some simple, like a simple answer. But thank cheer yoga to me is such a great example of where yoga celebrities Don't go.

12:17

That's so true. Yeah.

JH

Jivana Heyman

12:19

Except for you, you're my yoga celebrity.

AK

Amber Karnes

12:25

dealer list. But, uh, yeah, I think I think you're right, like this emphasis on. Basically, I think the way that diet culture and sort of like beauty standards have laid themselves on top of the commerce driven side of yoga, or like, how, you know, capitalism and Lululemon, all the things have had an effect on yoga in the West is that these the influencers, or whoever tend to be, you know, someone who also looks like a celebrity in non yoga space, you know, they're folks that look like fashion models, or maybe stars or whatever. And that emphasis on physical prowess, and also having like a thin young body with expensive clothes shot in a, you know, it's always someone doing a scorpion handstand or mountaintop in Bali, not like, I'm in sweatpants, doing Warrior Two, at the YMCA, you know, like, I think these are good things to notice, like, where, you know, this is the same hierarchy, I think that gets that we see in every, in every phase of our lives, where, you know, what this this, like, image is held up for people to say like, this is what you should be striving for, or attaining, when a very small percentage of us, you know, can probably look like that, or maybe do those things. And so, I think it implies a lot of things about what the practice is supposed to be about what we're able to do, and what Yes, I think the chair is seen as less than, you know, props are seen as less than

JH

Jivana Heyman

14:04

I was just gonna say, it's funny, you mentioned Luna lemon, because I just did a chair yoga class for Luna lemon.

AK

Amber Karnes

14:10

See things are changing.

JH

Jivana Heyman

14:14

I mean, I really appreciated them hosting me and yeah, it was on their Instagram page. I think it's still there. People want to watch it as a short class, but it was just so funny to see the reaction to their community because like they obviously they have a lot of people who just are interested in clothes and so like half the comments were like, what was I wearing? And like, why Oh, and Kai buy such and such a thing still, why did you stop selling this thing and that thing, and it was just like cracking me up. I was like, wow, this is really just about clothes. Not so much about yoga. So that's kind of that kind of made me laugh but like I said, I do think Yeah, you're right. Things are changing. So yeah, but but I feel like cheer yoga to me. Just kind of Yeah, like makes It accessible. And more than that, I feel like it kind of what's the word like democratizes? The practice, like makes it a practice for real people.

15:12

You know? Yeah. levels the playing field a little bit. Yeah,

JH

Jivana Heyman

15:14

I think that's what I love about karaoke the most is just that, that fact that it's like, you don't have to get on the mat, you don't have to get down on the floor. You know, most people are comfortable sitting in a chair. Not everyone, but most people. And I feel like that we can reach a huge audience and show that yoga can be that Yoga is not about the body actually. And then it can be done by almost anyone. Actually, any yoga can be done on anyone. But cheer yoga can be done by almost anyone, I don't want to say I know, there's some people that aren't comfortable sitting in chairs. Right. But I would say, going back to what you said that the practice is about something else, and not about those fancy poses. So what is it about? Amber? What is yoga about?

AK

Amber Karnes

15:58

Well, I think Yoga is about, you know, remembering who we really are. And learning that we're not our body, like you said, or bank account, or our relationships or our degree or whatever. And, you know, remembering that we have everything we need, I don't know, some of that. Non attachment, maybe that's the biggest part of the practice for me is like realizing where those attachments are and, and working on that most of my yoga practice is off the mat. I mean, Asana is amazing. And it brought me home to my body. It's a wonderful tool for inquiry. I think it's, it's so cool. To have and to use, but it's it's just one part of it. At least for me.

JH

Jivana Heyman

16:45

Yeah. Yeah, I agree. I think, to me, it's a spiritual practice. You know, and what does that mean to me? Like, I'm always wondering, like, what what is spirit? And? And I'm, I'm mostly interested, I think in that question about the relationship between spirit and the body, mind. And like, what you know, it's not that the body mind aren't an aspect of spirit. But in the yoga tradition, it's really like, you have this really a dichotomy. You have the body, mind as nature, it's part of nature. And then you have spirit as it's like, essential self that's, like, never changing. It's always there, that kind of constant. And I, I'm really interested in that kind of like, what, what stays the same? And what changes that's like, really what I focus on a lot in my practice, and how do we see? How do we see clearly between those two things like that? I love the concept of vaikka. You know, I probably talked about it before here, but that clear, clear vision, or discernment, and be able to see that difference what is changing and what's not changing in myself and the world? tech? Yeah. That makes sense.

AK

Amber Karnes

17:59

Yeah, it's beautifully said,

JH

Jivana Heyman

18:01

yeah. And I feel like going back to chair yoga, I feel like you can you can reach that you can connect to that part of yourself that's unchanging, just as well and chair as you can on a mat, you know, like, there's actually no difference at all between the potential that exists for you to have that connection with yourself, if you're practicing a chair versus practicing on a mat. And I feel like that based that's like, the basic message that I want to share with people, and I feel like, it seems so obvious, but I really don't. I don't know if we believe it. You know what I mean? Like, I really feel like there's a lot of value judgment in the way people practice. It's not just that we emphasize extreme Asana. But I think we really have mistaken the body as the goal or something like, you know what I mean, like, we feel like there's some kind of even health as a goal. Yeah. I think is actually, I mean, health is great, but it's not the goal of yoga. Right? I mean, not traditionally speaking, I think it's a side effect. Yeah. I think the goal of yoga is this kind of deeper realization, connecting with your truth. And that's available for anyone, regardless of their health or lack of health, and regardless of their ability to get on the floor or not. You know, and like I always say, we're all gonna go there eventually. I mean, we're all gonna die. So it's like, why I don't know what I don't know why we're in this. It's like we were, what's the word? Like, we're, we're our own worst enemy. Is that the word? Like, is that the expression that you know? I mean, like, we're creating a situation that we can't succeed at Can I mean, I

AK

Amber Karnes

19:49

do. Yeah. say more about like, What do you mean, we can't succeed, like if you fail, like,

JH

Jivana Heyman

19:55

yes, set up a system of yoga that you're gonna fail out eventually because your body He's going to, at some point either get sick, or just get old and then die. So like, you cannot succeed at being, like, perfectly healthy, forever. Like, that's just not possible. So,

AK

Amber Karnes

20:15

yeah, or the perfect body, you know, like, that's another I think concept that's held up that's like, literally impossible to get because the body always is changing, you know?

JH

Jivana Heyman

20:27

That's the nature of the body. So I feel like it's basically we're like in denial about the reality of our human existence here, which is that it's limited. And I don't think our potential is limited, but I do think that the body itself is limited. And you might, right you'll never reach perfect health, whatever that is, like, what is that? So annoying. And, and, and then but we judge illness or disability, aging and as bad and because they're they're like somehow against this kind of healthism? Is the word you use that word,

AK

Amber Karnes

21:04

I think? I think so. Yeah, I mean, I think health is definitely held up. In our culture as a barometer of worth, just like productivity is a barometer of worth, just like beauty, just like youth. And I think that, I mean, that's ableism, right? We don't, in our health, you know, it like our body is something that is guaranteed to change. And also that is not guaranteed to us, like our health is not guaranteed to us, even if we do all the quote unquote, right things, you know, you might still get sick, we still are definitely gonna get older. So, you know,

JH

Jivana Heyman

21:41

Yeah, go ahead. Well, I would say so. So how do you approach it? Like, I think it's not about it's not like, it's not black and white. Like, it's not that the body doesn't matter, and that the body should be ignored, because it'll never be perfect. But we have to find the right relationship, like there is a right relationship there. And within the yoga teachings, and I feel like that's never really expressed. You know what I mean?

AK

Amber Karnes

22:08

Yeah, I do. I think so. I mean, I think that, to me, you know, when I think about the yoga teachings, and what yoga philosophy says about, you know, our natures as human beings are

our humanity, our interconnectedness, all of that, like, That, to me says, Yeah, it's not that we deserve dignity and respect and cares, humans, because we're, you know, perfectly healthy, or because we're in a young body, or because we can do dhanurasana, or whatever, you know, it's because we should honor one another's aasmaan, you know, that inner radiance, or whatever, whatever you like to however you like to think of it, that spark of divinity. And I think it's very dangerous, sort of slippery slope to say, I mean, I hear this argument come up a lot. When I talk about body acceptance, right? It's like, you can, okay, love yourself, you know, but like, Don't let yourself go, like, as long as you're still working on your health, and it's like, nobody, you don't owe health to anyone, like, you know, ideally, we should be able to prioritize our health, and have the access to get the care that we need, and all of that, but like, the reality is, not everybody even has the same access to health care. Or if they do have access to health care, they may be facing bias because of the way their body looks, or an illness or a disability they may have and so I don't know, it's, it's I don't really want to hear these arguments about, you know, well, what about the health and when we're not like even looking at so many of the social determinants of health and kind of how power structures and inequities within, you know, power and wealth and safety and all that stuff has an absolute outcome on health. So yeah, I know, we can have a whole episode about that.

JH

Jivana Heyman

24:05

But I would just say it's, it's, it's not based in yoga teachings, either, like I would, you know, the yoga teachings, if you look back, I was just thinking about the yoga sutras of Patanjali. There's a section that I think is really shocking to people about having disgust for the body. Do you know that it's like, I'm just like, yes. I know what you're talking about to sutra. 40? Yes, the sutra on sound, which is purification or cleanliness. And it says, By purification arises disgust for one's own body and for contact with other bodies. I mean, it's like, what does that mean? You know, like, I think that's like the other extreme of like, basically, I think that was really representing this idea that we shouldn't identify with the body and we should be identifying with spirit. And so like, disgust is a way to kind of realize Wait, we're not the body Yeah, but it feels like we've gone completely other side, and like glorified certain bodies. You know, but I feel like yoga practice is about that right relationship, maybe that neutral relationship where you accept your body, you're grateful for it, and that you take care of it. And, you know, wouldn't give it whatever it needs, and then focus on something else. You know what I mean? Like that your your life isn't just about the But well, for some people, maybe it is about their body, but that you have this potential for spiritual awakening. And spiritual awakening is simply connecting with a part of yourself. That's always there. You know, the part that's essentially you? Yeah. And not changing.

AK

Amber Karnes

25:46

Yeah, well, sir.

JH

Jivana Heyman

25:49

So, cheerio,

AK

Amber Karnes

25:52

25 minutes in, should we? Should we talk about chair yoga? Yeah, and I like what you said about how it democratizes the practice, I think that's a really, I like the I like that word for it. That, you know, for me, the chair definitely opens up possibilities for folks to like, participate in these postures and practices in a way that works with the body, that they're in the experience level that they have, you know, whatever their range of motion, or, you know, their particular, like, limitations or injuries or whatever may be going on I that we can still, like you said, get just as much out of the chair practices as we can, if we're, you know, on the mat or whatever. Right?

JH

Jivana Heyman

26:43

Because the practice isn't really about the body in the end, and we're using the body. And the body is really, really important. So that's the thing we can talk about, maybe it's like, how to access the experience of Asana in, in a chair, you know, and that, that there is a huge benefit or a lot of there's a lot of growth and learning that can happen in Asana. I mean, I think Austin is incredible, and such an important part of our practice, but it's just one piece. And it's funny, like I hear so many people talk about that, like, Oh, well, we need to teach about the other eight limbs, or the other seven lens, not just Asana, but then I don't really hear that happening. You know, to me, it's like, I feel like that's kind of it just, it's just being said, but it's not actually happening, we're not really paying attention to the other limbs. But what I love about chair yoga, not only can you make the practice fun, and the asana practice fun, but also you can do a lot of the other practices easily in a chair that like pranayama, and meditation,

you know, guided relaxation, things like that are really accessible in a chair. In fact, I always like to mention that. One of the things that's so beautiful about yoga is that those subtle practices are accessible, really, regardless of your physical ability that you can do. You can do breathing, you can do relaxation, and meditation, which are really like the next limbs of Ashtanga Yoga. We're, regardless of how your body moves, and where you where you're practicing. So you can do those just as well in a chair, as on the mat.

AK

Amber Karnes

28:27

Yeah, let's talk about some of the other ways that you teach folks to use the chair like I know you. Like I think there's this conception or misconception that chair Yoga is like gentle yoga, like, we're just gonna sit there and like, breathe and rotate our wrists a little bit. And I think chair yoga, it's wonderful to bring extra gentle yoga for folks that might need it. And there are so many ways that you can use it. So what are what are some of the ways that you teach folks to use the chair?

JH

Jivana Heyman

28:57

Yeah, I mean, I, that's a good point. Because sometimes I think, like in the anchor tradition, chairs are often used as a prop to to, you know, support the body in some very extreme Asana as well. And I don't usually do that. I mean, I still, when I do, Terry, I'm almost always teaching people people are sitting in the chair, or standing using it as a prop, because it's, it's a very accessible Prop, because chairs are everywhere, pretty much in our lives. So like, if you go teach at a community center or something, they're way more likely to have chairs there, then blocks and straps and yoga and stuff. So I like to, you know, think about that, that chairs are there I like, but generally, I'm teaching people who are sitting in a chair, I'll just say that. I really mean.

AK

Amber Karnes

29:45

Well, I know you. You've talked about like, you can do strength in the chair or like increasing range of motion or you know, you just brought up meditation, relaxation, stuff like that. So well.

JH

Jivana Heyman

29:58

Thank you. So I think that's Through the I just I just finished a course of chair yoga one on one per yoga journal, which was really fun. And, you know, it was fun to spend five weeks just exploring chair yoga for me rather than with accessible yoga like to kind of look at all different ways of adapting practice, but just focusing on the chair was really enjoyable. And I that's what we did, we looked at how you could focus your practice on different benefits of yoga, like you could focus on strengthening, you could focus on increasing range of motion, you could focus on relaxation, or meditation. So like all of that's available in chair yoga, and I think, actually, in chair yoga, the physical is important too. And the way we practice and move the body is important. I'm not, you know, I don't I hope people don't go away from this thinking that I'm not emphasizing that. I mean, the body is great and asanas are fun and incredibly beneficial. And I feel like the asanas are a great way in to yoga for people to like. And I do Asana every day, actually some form or another as a huge part of my practice. But I I just would say that Asana is a tool, and I think we can use that tool to achieve different results. So rather than just create a practice, based on what someone told you, or told me, I can find a practice that works for me based on what I need in my body. Like maybe I'm there's part of my body that's a little bit weaker than the other part. And I want to strengthen it, like I want to strengthen my arms, or my leg or my lower back or whatever. I could focus on that in chair yoga, or I could focus on increasing range of motion, say, if I'm getting older, and I want to, you know, some older people have trouble with daily activities, even some younger people, actually. But daily activities like tying your shoes or driving, you know, in the kind of range of motion, you need to be able to do those tasks in a way that is comfortable for the body. So I think Asana can really help with that too. Also in the Asana, we can explore that the relationship between the body and mind, and really, maybe most importantly, work on kind of regulating the nervous system. I think a lot of a lot of the practice of Asana is really about, I think you said inhabiting the body and getting comfortable there. And I think of that as regulating the nervous system really balancing Yeah, yeah, parts of our nervous system that tend to be kind of out of whack. Like, either we feel stressed and anxious, or we feel maybe depressed and kind of lethargic. So it feels like there's, you know, movement can really help in that way, like balancing that.

AK

Amber Karnes

32:53

Yeah, and one of the ways that I really like to use the chair is as like a replacement for blocks, sometimes I think it's like, a little bit less fussy than blocks can be, and like you mentioned is so much, so much more like ubiquitous, like chairs are just everywhere. And one of my

favorite things to teach, you know, you were talking about using it for like, folks, learning functional activities, like you know, practicing tying their shoes or getting out of the car, that kind of stuff. I really like to use it to teach things in a lower stakes way. That then like we'll have a skill transfer to other things. And asana practice. So for instance, sun salutations, are difficult for lots of people for lots of different reasons. But the up and down up and down off the floor, is really troublesome for a lot of folks. And it's not that they can't move through the postures, it's those transitions that really trip people up. And I feel like and when you're building strength, or you're building range of motion, you know, maybe some of us that have done so many sons mutations, we forget, like how difficult those movements were, and how you know, coordinated you have to be to practice that sequence in like the, you know, the flowing way with the breath and all that. And so I love the chair, because, you know, I'll have people put like all four feet of the chair on the mat, so it doesn't go anywhere. That's very important. We can talk about more safety stuff here in a second but I also and then you know, put the chair at the front of your mat, so the seat is facing you. And now the seat is your new floor. Right. So this changes the relationship to gravity in these postures. Most people have more strength in their legs than their upper body just because, you know, we tend to develop more strength there unless we on purpose bear weight in our arms. You know what I mean? So the those poses like down dog and plank and all that stuff, especially stepping forward and back. I think if you're building strength or you're building flexibility in your wrist, any of the reasons that People have trouble with sun salutations. A lot of that gets mitigated when you you raise up the hands on to the seat of a chair. And so I really love teaching people like stepping forward and back. And you know, I like getting people into say, like down dog on the chair. So their feet are on the floor, their hands are on the seat of the chair and actually have folks grab the sides of the seat, because then that takes the angle of the wrist like all the way straight. And so if you have any pain, when you flex your wrist, it can really help with that, too. So imagine, you know, holding the sides of the chair, your feet are on the ground, you shift your hips back in a downward facing dog, you're still getting the the whole, you know, benefit of the pose, is just a little bit more easeful in the upper body. And I really love teaching poses this way, because rather than, you know, being in down dog, like oh, my gosh, oh, my gosh, oh, my gosh, I'm holding myself up, you know, then, then you can actually find the shape of the pose, let it settle into your nervous system, you know, breathe, like feel the muscular engagement that the teacher is cueing you to feel or whatever is going on. And then I love teaching the like stepping forward and back with the seat of the chair, because it's funny, like, I'll run folks through a few sun salutations with stepping forward and all that. And then I'll say like, step, hop, jump, or float to the front of your mat, you know, that cue that teachers love to give, but that I always roll my eyes, because I've never floated anywhere in my life, but you can actually do it. With the seat of the chair, it's so much more accessible for many folks that they're like, Oh, I get it, like, that's what that's supposed to feel like. And then you can take those skills that like once you start building that into your nervous system into your muscle memory, then you can maybe take it to a set of blocks, and then maybe take it down to the floor so that you can like progress through those skills as you build strength. And as you get your nervous system used to moving in that way. And I just think it's really brilliant for stuff like that. For folks, also, I love using it to teach folks the skills to get up and down off the floor.

You know, I think especially for older students, or folks that have, you know, maybe are coming back to activity after being sedentary for a while, maybe they're recovering from an injury or something else. You know, getting up and down off the floor is like a real fear for some folks, like I don't want to get down on the floor and not be able to get back up. And I totally get that. And I think that it's a, it's really important to be able to do the things in our lives that we you know, wish to do. I think yoga Asana can be

AK

Amber Karnes

37:44

a great tool there to keep us, you know, moving. And so the seat of the chair is really great, because you can practice those skills of like, what is it? What's the strategy, actually, to get up off the floor with your own steam and like, you know, it's so I think a really good prop for that because it's sturdy, it's something that folks can grab onto in their own home, they're going to have something like a chair or a couch or whatever, to be able to use it. And so anyway, that's

JH

Jivana Heyman

38:11

one I'm going to add to that actually, I would say one of the practices I've been adding in my classes is to work on stand standing from sitting. So that's a movement that is really important as we get older to be able to get up and down from a chair. And you know that, that takes a lot of strength in the legs. And actually, there's some research that shows that the strength of your quadriceps in particular correlates to your life expectancy. So there's there's some relationship there. And I'm not going to say exactly what it is, you know, I'm not a researcher, but it's interesting. And yeah, the one thing you can do is you can do you can kind of just for someone who isn't able to stand actually, you can still engage legs leaned forward in the chair holding the side of the chair and just put that the weight of the body into the legs and hold for two seconds without actually even lifting the your sit bones up off the chair seat very much. But strengthening legs that way kind of like a chair pose and a chair. And I think it makes sense. For people who have more flexibility or strength in the legs, you could do the same you could actually get up and down from the chair or do it with one leg at a time. That's a really great practice to get up and down from a chair with only weight on one foot. Take some balance and I would only come up a couple inches maybe but it can be a really fun way to work on strengthening the legs. I love I love the idea of getting stronger and making you know making everyday activities more accessible. And using using chair yoga in a functional way. also working on balance is important even if you're doing chair yoga because a lot of issues with as you get older have to do with balance and fall risk. You know once if you're senior and you fall and break a bone or have a can really Become detrimental to your health. And so

there's a lot of research around how we can reduce fall risks and seniors. And that can be a focus on training people to be more balanced, strengthening to is important, but balance is so I like to work on fun things in the chair, and people follow me maybe they seem like blocks on my head, things like, right

AK

Amber Karnes

40:23

back in the element of balance in the chair

JH

Jivana Heyman

40:25

Exactly. Like you can bring any element of balance. And, you know, even if you're sitting in the chair, you can so work on that you can work on balancing the torso, shifting the weight of the body, sitting on something that's uneven, maybe and work on balance with the hips. Well, there's there's many fun ways to do that. The other thing I want to mention about chair Yoga is just that you're starting from this flexed hip position. And I think that just needs a lot of attention. Like I think the starting position in most mat yoga classes is either Tadasana, you know, where you're standing in basically neutral spine, or Shavasana, which is also kind of a neutral spine. But in chair, the chair Tadasana, which I recall is like a seated upright position is a flexed hip position in flex knees. So just need to be aware of that. But you're not you're not moving from neutral. And right. I think I would de emphasize more flexion. So like, I don't like to add a lot more forward bending. In chair yoga, especially more spinal flexion like rounding the back very much like I don't feel like that's very useful for people that are practicing, sitting sitting in the chair. And if possible, try to add hip extension, which means that what that means is that the knees going back of the hip, do you know what I mean? Does that make you take

AK

Amber Karnes

41:53

your leg behind your body? Like when you push off with a roller skate like that?

JH

Jivana Heyman

41:57

Yeah, exactly. And I got moving is a little hard to do. And when you're seated, so sometimes you either have to scoot to the side of a chair, to extend the leg back or turn sideways in a chair and kind of sit halfway on it and bring a leg back. So you can do like a lunge like a lunge movement. I think that kind of a hip extension movement is really great to add into a chair yoga practice, if it's accessible for someone to do that with their legs. Also, I think just to be conscious of your lower back. So even if you're not going to do that, still just notice the lumbar curve. Because when you're in a flexed hip position sitting in a chair, probably actually it's not probably there's research, which shows that you have less of a lumbar curve generally. Right? Yeah. So you have to protect a little more anterior yoga, I would say, then you would in a mat practice and just bring that awareness into the curves of the spine, as you're moving all the time.

AK

Amber Karnes

42:54

Yeah, so did to do that? Do you just do that through verbal cues and awareness? Or is there specific ways that you teach the Asana differently?

JH

Jivana Heyman

43:03

Yeah, I would say all those things, I think, awareness, just trying to bring people's awareness to their lower back and how it feels as you're practicing. And I guess, like I said, maybe avoid a lot of forward bending. And see if I can find backward bending like spinal extension in the chair, which can be hard, you know, it can be hard to do that as well. Some good poses for that could be like cobra pose, and the chair or even a fish pose, I like to do a fish pose on a chair where I kind of, I put a prop behind the middle back and lean back over it. That's a nice way to get that spinal extension. Also, just what just to be aware of that, like when you're adapting any other pose that it's like, you know, you could do like a chair version of a tree konasana or a chair version of like a warrior. But all of those poses you basically are doing with flexed hips today, I mean, so I think, be aware of that. What does it do to your spine? How does it feel in the low back and the pelvis or the SI joint? That's the other area, I think that people in chairs need to be careful. The sacroiliac joint where your spine connects to your pelvis is very sensitive. And I

think we need to be aware of that, that the pelvis is basically the grounding point and chair yoga. Do you know what I mean? Not so much the feet.

AK

Amber Karnes

44:24

Yeah, the pelvis is the fixed point. Is that?

JH

Jivana Heyman

44:28

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So either to just bring consciousness to that in the Asana and make sure you're adopting With that in mind, or allow the pelvis to move or instruct people to move their pelvis, which might happen naturally in a standing version of the pose. Like an uttanasana. There's going to be some pelvic movement, that probably won't happen in the chair just because it's the fixed point. So I feel like some of those things are useful.

AK

Amber Karnes

44:58

Yeah, that makes sense. sense, is there anything that you want to talk about as far as like, how to think about adapting a posture? Let's say folks are listening, they want to try out some stuff in a chair that they've done on the mat, you know, maybe standing poses or things like that. How do you think about adapting poses to the chair?

JH

Jivana Heyman

45:19

Yeah, I think, well, the way I always teach adapting practice is to focus on the purpose, the benefits and the contraindications to do a little exploration or study of the pose and think about like, Why, what is this pose do? Like what is the benefit? And maybe what's the danger even, like, how can people potentially get injured or what might be contraindicated for example, like, you know, glaucoma inversions are contraindicated for glaucoma. So even in chair yoga, you wouldn't really do a lot of inverting where you use, then all the way forward

and hang the head down. Unless, you know, if you if your students might have glaucoma or even hunt on regulated high blood pressure, you'd be cautious of that, too. But I would say so. So I would start from that really, either researching it or just exploring it in your practice, like, what is the benefit of this pose? So if I'm doing a standing pose, like, what should What should we talk about what pose? Even once before we talk,

AK

Amber Karnes

46:25

okay, standing pose. Let's see warriors, lunch. Trees. So

JH

Jivana Heyman

46:34

yeah, maybe, maybe we could talk about warrior warrior too. Which is interesting, because in a way, it's, there's a little bit of a hip extension that we just talked about. There's so many benefits in warrior two. So virabhadrasana, two, you have the strengthening in that front leg, you know, and that's maybe the thing people think about the most. Also, you have this, there's an element of balancing there, even though you're on two legs, and your legs are very wide apart. So you have to have a kind of a firm wide stance and really connect to grounding, you know, energy moving down, energy moving up. Also arm strengthening, having arms out at the sides for a period of time, right, holding your arms out is strengthening like that. There's a little bit of rotation in the torso, I mean, the spine is twisting a little bit. There's focus, what else? What else are the benefits who would say a warrior to

AK

Amber Karnes

47:33

I think like, you could bring in maybe the energetic perspective to have like, Warrior Two is a big powerful pose, you're taking up space, you have a fierce warrior gaze, you know, you like you can bring that kind of intention to the chair pose too.

JH

Jivana Heyman

47:49

And yeah, so maybe that, in fact, that could be a great place to start. So I mean, you can choose any one of those benefits and start there. So you could start with that powerful feeling of being a warrior and think, how do I bring that into the chair, maybe my lower body is barely changed at all, I'm still in neutral, like a neutral leg position, or my feet are? Well, I would say not even just under the knees, but slightly forward of the knees, I like to have a chair yoga for stability, the legs a little wider than hip width apart is more stable. And then I could keep the torso right where it is and extend the arms out at shoulder height. Look over one. And do a warrior like that without even turning at all. And you know what I'm saying? So it could be that I bring in the energy of fuel that warrior like the power of the warrior in your arms and in your face and your stare. Bring that in right there. You know what I mean? Or you could look at something else. What's another, you know, another benefit is like that back leg, getting that hip extension, and maybe I'll turn and extend one leg back. Like I mentioned earlier, I really focus on that piece. Chair warrior.

AK

Amber Karnes

49:03

Yeah, to do it all at once. Exactly. Yeah, I love like kind of picking a focus. Because, you know, like we just said warrior two can be so many things that and you know, and if you're constructing a class or a practice, maybe for yourself, if you're not teaching, you could have you know, four or five, six times during the practice that you do a warrior pose and each one could have a different intention or focus or essence. And I think that's kind of the fun part. You know, it's like yoga can get it will Asana and sequencing and all that stuff can get a little rote sometimes we kind of like get stuck in our, the stuff we're comfortable with. And I think this is like the creative part that makes me excited and like, whenever I you know, go to a teacher training or talk to other teachers like you, like, kind of makes me fall in love with yoga a little bit again, like oh, yeah, there's so much here. You know, that we don't have to just like, okay, warrior to step. You're free to park turn, lift your arms look over there, like it doesn't just have to be the shape of the body, but that we we can really participate with our whole selves. And I think that's the kind of like, Cool creative part about adapting practice is that we get to make it our own a little bit.

JH

Jivana Heyman

50:17

Yeah, exactly. And, and like that, less isn't class less is more. Less is more. And so like doing it that way. Breaking it down, like you just described is not only fun, but also effective, that you

can actually focus on one element or quality of a practice and really refine that. Yeah, rather than do a pose like like a warrior to is actually very complex. There's so many things going on, in that practice. And that's, that's like what we do in the accessible yoga training as well, which is break break poses down and then kind of rebuild them from the bottom up, focusing on one benefit or another. And I just find that to be really a fun way to explore Asana. Are all of our yoga practices Really? By like, Why Why am I doing them?

AK

Amber Karnes

51:11

Exactly. Yeah. And I think too, you know, going back to what we talked about a little bit at the beginning, like, I think this emphasis that's 10 tended to show up in the yoga world around like, extreme Asana or physical prowess, like, we tend to, I think, maybe bypass some of the benefits that Asana can even bring us when we, you know, are doing something that is so effortful, that we can't be like, present in the body in the way that, you know, we know as possible and Asana or we're moving so quickly, that we're not even like participating in the poses, do you know what I mean? Whereas if you take if you slow your roll, and if you you know, to really take time to be with and be in these postures and these practices and these shapes, there's some stuff to do there. There's some stuff to discover there and to and to, you know, there's a there's a whole different sort of requirement that you're asking of yourself and your body and your mind and all of that to hold. Let's say warrior to for 10 breaths, then you're for half a breath as you pass through it on a vinyasa sequence. And, you know, I don't want to demonize vinyasa, like vinyasa classes are fun. I love vinyasa, but also like, right, because I think, vinyasa and like influence of like gymnastics, and contortion, ism, and all those other things have kind of showed up in our visual understanding and language of the practice. We miss out on some of that subtle stuff. That's like the really powerful stuff like you said.

JH

Jivana Heyman

52:43

Yeah, and I think actually, restorative Yoga is a great example of that, like the power of slowing it down. But it doesn't have to be just in restorative yoga. You can, like you said, you can bring that same quiet stillness that away that that extra sensitivity and awareness into any Asana and I'm in a way, that's the goal. I mean, that is, that is what we're trying to do. We're trying to get energy moving. Right there is that I get it. So like vinyasa practitioners probably focus on that, like there is that benefit of energy moving in the body. But that's just one piece. The other piece is increasing sensitivity. Becoming acutely aware of what's happening inside the body and also where my mind is, while I'm practicing. Yeah, and whether my mind is focused on the

sensations I'm having on some other focus in the practice or if I'm more in my mind, my mind is wandering. That's, that's really, I would say, kind of the ultimate definition of an Asana is that your mind is present there. Yeah. Yeah.

AK

Amber Karnes

53:49

Okay, wow. I don't know Cheerio, guys. Like it's a rich thing. I know. We've only kind of scratched the surface, but I just I think I love it because of how it like you said democratizes the practice and I think just is such a cool tool for exploration that is pretty much available. almost anywhere. Yeah.

JH

Jivana Heyman

54:15

Yeah, exactly. I mean, it was really fun. Maybe we can put a link for my course in the show notes because people can still take it even though it's it's recorded now but you can still just watch the recordings that share yoga one on one it was really fun to just dive into chair and and to like, think about it myself more like how can the chair be the platform for this? for freedom? You know what I mean? Like this is a practice of freedom and, and empowerment and I love that like I want to like make the chair like the throne, you know that we

54:49

Oh my god.

JH

Jivana Heyman

54:52

Yeah, seriously though. Yeah. It's like our yoga throne. It's not like less than it's not like Oh, just people You can't do yoga on a mat have to sit in a chair. You know, it's not that's not what it is.

AK

Amber Karnes

55:08

Yeah, prop is not a punishment for not being able to do the quote unquote real yoga like props or power tools. Don't get it twisted.

JH

Jivana Heyman

55:18

It's not exactly it's a power tool. That's beautiful. Yeah, a power tool, like a throne. Yeah. Like I'm saying, yes. powerful place to to work on ourselves and connect with ourselves. Yeah.

AK

Amber Karnes

55:34

So I know the accessible yoga training, you're going to be running that again, in January 2021, which will be here before we know it. Can you tell us? How, what can people expect? As far as like? Is this a chair yoga course? Or how two chairs come into practice? And like, what about what we talked about today? Well, we'll be in the training. Can you just talk about the training a little bit?

JH

Jivana Heyman

55:59

Yeah. I mean, a lot of it is chair yoga. To be honest, I like to talk more broadly, in that training, you know, around like, accessible Yoga is this or that. But really, I would say almost all the Asana practices chair, maybe, or maybe like 75%. And then we do do bed yoga. We do a lot of adopting mat, work and standing. But I guess, yeah, chair is really maybe my favorite prop. So we do a lot there. And I think the things we talked about today are really the core of that training, really looking at the why. And not only like the purpose of yoga in general, but the purpose of Asana, and then how to adapt that how to make it work for anybody, and how to do so in a way. Like we talked about, that's collaborative, and creative and fun. Sharing power with our students, I think that's really the key, as teachers learning to cultivate agency within our students through the practice of yoga, which is a which is, I think, maybe the theme in the training. And also, also to look at the reasons why people aren't participating, what is what is currently inaccessible, or inaccessible about yoga, and how can we address those things like

art, you know, how do the other marginalization that we experienced in Western culture, affect yoga spaces like racism, cultural appropriation, lack of consent, things like that, we also address that, but I would say most of the, most of the time, we're talking about adopting Asana and also creating integrated spaces where people can practice together at multiple levels, which I, which I'm really passionate about this idea of, like mixing it up and bringing in people, some people in a chair, some people on the mat, in the same space, and to me, like I just love that idea of moving beyond segregation, and in yoga, yeah. Like, that's a really important, that's like a vision that I hold for yoga. No, and honestly, I think that we don't even see it, we don't even see the ways that we've created a segregated yoga culture. where some people are allowed in some spaces, and some people are allowed and others. And it feels like, contradictory, or, I don't know what the word is, like. It's not it's not in alignment with, with yoga itself, with the underlying teachings and philosophy of yoga. To do that, yoga is about coming together in the, in the universal truth of who we are, while embracing our separate experiences, so I guess that's kind of the theme of the training, if that makes sense is like, you know, identifying the differences, and honoring them even celebrating the differences, but also connecting with our shared I don't know what universal spirit for the shared the essence of our humanity. That is really what Yoga is leading us towards.

AK

Amber Karnes

59:18

Yeah, that left unique lived experience of what it means to be human. I love that. Yeah. All right. Jivana. Um, you know, we like to leave people with a question at the end of this. And I wonder what question you would leave us with? Oh, my

JH

Jivana Heyman

59:36

goodness. We've talked about a lot today. Like all over the place, but I feel like I'm really happy that we had this conversation, I hope, I hope people like respond, or like, I don't know, right? Can they write reviews and mention something or reach out to us because I'm curious what they'll think about this. Yeah,

AK

Amber Karnes

59:58

sharing share. tag us, you know, come to the comments on our social media. Let us know what you think. We'd love to hear feedback from y'all leave us reviews, wherever you get podcasts that really helps us to, to be able to know how y'all are feeling about this and give us feedback for how we can make it continue to make it better. And let us know what you'd like us to talk about to you know, we like to talk about everything. So we could take requests, what do you think?

JH

Jivana Heyman

1:00:27

Yeah, requests, we could do that we could collect some questions, maybe for a future episode, and just kind of answer questions from people. And I think that might be that might be fun. But I want to go back to leaving people with a question today. What what stuck with me a little bit is our relationship to our bodies? And, and what that what is that? Like? What is the right relationship with your body? To know, like, I'm just interested in that and exploring that question. In the context of yoga, and spiritual practice, and maybe like, how, how do we? What is the appropriate way to engage in a physical, spiritual, embodied spiritual practice? So I just I don't know if there's, is that clear that it's clear, because Yeah,

AK

Amber Karnes

1:01:15

I think so. Yeah. What does it mean to have a right relationship with our body? Like, what is the you know, maybe what's the balance between we've we've talked about how the balances like, off balance, like, oh, the focus is always on extreme Asana or the focus is on the body's appearance. So where, yeah, what is the right amount of focus on each of the things that's in this practice? Yeah, like that.

JH

Jivana Heyman

1:01:41

Yeah, exactly. And how do we use the body in a healthy way or not to use but engage and appreciate the body in a healthy way, rather than rather than using yoga as like? No, like punishment or as unreachable goals or whatever?

AK

Amber Karnes

1:02:01

The body? Yeah,

JH

Jivana Heyman

1:02:02

yeah. Yeah. What is the what is a healthier way? I don't know. I'm thinking about that a lot myself.

1:02:09

I like it.

1:02:10

As I get older, and older, Oh, my gosh.

AK

Amber Karnes

1:02:16

All right. We're gonna leave it there today. Thanks, Jivana.

JH

Jivana Heyman

1:02:20

Thanks, Amber, talk to y'all next time.

AK

Amber Karnes

1:02:24

Thank you for joining us for another week of the accessible yoga podcast, I wanted to let you know that the new cohort of Jivana Heyman accessible yoga training online is now forming. The next section of this flagship training will run January 22 through February 5, and the accessible yoga training is a 30 hour continuing education program that will teach you a new way of thinking about yoga postures and practices that honors the essence of yoga, but allows you to design multi level classes where students of different abilities, ages, shapes, sizes, and experience levels can all practice together with ease. You'll get support from experts around topics like trauma informed teaching, working with larger bodies, yoga for seniors, yoga, marketing, and much more with our team of accessible yoga trainers. And since we're learning at home now, there's no travel expenses, everything's recorded with captions, and you can review materials and work at your own pace. So if this work is calling to you, we hope you'll go to [accessible Yoga training.com](https://accessibleyogatraining.com) and sign up for the waitlist. Over the next few weeks, we'll be sending out information about the course and teachings from Jivana that will help you make your classes and learning spaces more accessible. Whether you're teaching online in person or don't know what the heck is happening next. So spend the beginning of 2021 developing your skills as a teacher who can make their classes accessible for all and have every student leaving your class feeling affirmed and successful. Join the waitlist now and accessible Yoga training.com. We hope you'll leave us a review wherever you subscribe to your podcasts and also subscribe to this podcast. We love hearing your feedback. It really helps us to make it a little better each week, and we hope you'll give us some input on future guests or topics that you'd like us to cover. Just send us an email through our website [accessible Yoga training.com](https://accessibleyogatraining.com). We'll see you soon. Thanks