



Recorded Events

Jessamyn Stanley and Nicole Tsong discuss Every Body Yoga

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[00:00:36] Hi everybody. Good evening. I'm Stesha Brandon. I am the Literature and Humanities Program Manager here at Seattle Public Library. Welcome to the central library and to tonight's event with Jessamyn Stanley and Nicole Tsong. I also wanted to say a special thank you to all of you for being here on such a gorgeous day after so much rain. So thank you so much. I wanted to thank our author series sponsor Gary Kunis and the Seattle Times for their generous support for library programs. We're also grateful to the Seattle Public Library Foundation private gifts to the foundation from thousands of donors help the library to provide free programs and services that touch the lives of everyone in our community. So let's take a moment to thank all of the wonderful folks who have helped make tonight's event possible. Now let me turn the podium over to Karen Madea Allman from Elliott Bay Book Company to introduce the rest of the program.

[00:01:24] Good evening. OK who here follows Jessamyn Stanley on Instagram or Twitter. Yes. Yes. And everybody who's not OK. You know what you got to do after after the talk. So thank you so much for coming tonight.

[00:01:40] To to hear adjustments Stanley speak and meet her in person. She's a yoga teacher and a fat film. Love it that she owns that more of us should or could. And also a blogger extraordinaire with over two hundred twenty five thousand followers on Instagram more after tonight where she offers readers wisdom on yoga positive body image and self-love in their beautiful images. It's just wonderful to open that up and see her smiling face on that Instagram. She's helping us understand that yoga is for all of us particularly for those of us who for whatever reason have thought yoga was

not for people like us and some of us will know kind of intimately about that. And I have to say we chose this particular venue because we wanted people to feel welcomed and comfortable and that you're all here. And so many different kinds of people some probably yoga people probably just interested in yoga or may be interested in what she's written about and talked about in terms of body image. So that that you're all here I think is good information for us as to who who likes this space and who feels good about the space.

[00:03:00] So I'm so glad that you're all here. So she's also going to be appearing in conversation with a local luminary Nicole Tsong. She's a Seattle based yoga teacher and journalist and her column Fit for Life has appeared in The Seattle Times Pacific Northwest magazine since 2012. She's also a blogger. She has two books yoga for hikers and yoga for climbers. And she's also the president of a nonprofit called Yoga behind bars. So we just thought it would be really wonderful to bring the two of them together tonight to have a conversation. So we'll also be asking if you have questions that you'd like to ask after they talk a bit. You'll be invited to do so and then just men will be signing her book at the front table. We have copies of Jessamyn's book everybody yoga at the Elliott Bay Book Company and also a few copies of Anna Nicole's book as well. So please join me in welcoming Jessamyn Stanley and Nicole Tsong.

[00:04:08] Hi everybody. Nice to see you. I'm really just a man and I have already had a very rich conversation before we got here and I was like maybe we should save it for you guys because it's been really fun to talk to her. You get to meet her and you get to know her. How many of you guys have copies of books ready you brought it here to sign. Oh good. I'm glad to hear it and then for those of you who are interested and when it's a show start off by sharing a few things. I read her book and I'm a yoga teacher and I love seeing different approaches to the language of yoga. And really for me Chesterman has this approach is just so Frank. And if you know her well she's also quite profane. And I was I've been laughing in my yoga classes when people are getting that strange look on their face I'm like You should really read Jessamyn Stanley. She says yoga is fucking hard and then

[00:04:58] Laughs And then we're like OK. And I apologize for the recording on that. Is that OK. All right. OK.

[00:05:08] And it's smart and it's fresh and it's just it's there's a space of accessibility I also think that is really important in the world of yoga. That's in your book. It's in who she is in her social media. And it's really powerful. I really I know she's kind of she's like oh my gosh.

[00:05:23] Stop talking about me in a nice way and I'm going to quote a few things from her book first just to get us rolling and really like her yoga lessons make me laugh like sun salutations. She compares to yoga cocaine or caffeine. If you don't want to go down that drug addiction around I love she had this one. It's actually a footnote. It says if you don't consider yourself to be fat just insert your bullshit body baggage here. It's so true. It's true. And she also really is a talented writer. If you you

know and you probably have experienced that on her Instagram and even this and this is her talking about a beauty pageant situation when she was younger and it said I remember being introduced to my pageant week roommate and her mother who managed to evoke the spirit of Mama Rose but with a diet Pepsi tartness of Peg Bundy she wants to chime in on this. No. This is the thing.

[00:06:18] So first of all it's you know this is so hard to read what you've written and very much. This book was like I just have to get all of this out. And I had a really amazing editor who does not get enough credit Maisy Tidman. And she really was just like trying to allow that to be. But so in my mind when you're reading my back I'm like Fuck man. I was on one when I was writing.

[00:06:44] I'm so glad that I was because that woman in that other one the woman and the girl at the pageant by weren't like that. And I think that in yoga is fucking hard. And I feel like it's really important for people to know that. But I'm also just like oh Jesse.

[00:06:59] I'm gonna make her uncomfortable just for a few more moments. Quoting one more thing because really when she speaks about yoga the practice of yoga it is powerful because she speaks from her own voice. And I think it's a really universal experience for anyone who's done yoga attempted yoga looked at the yogis on Instagram and wondered if maybe I could do one or two of those poses quote. I think that if you have body issues or you got shit raging in your head about your body shape size or condition particularly as it pertains to yoga then I do think you can learn a lot from my experience because you're totally right. I'm fat. I'm not the person you would typically imagine teaching or practicing yoga or even sitting behind a reception desk in a yoga studio. I know how it feels to be an outsider. When I found yoga I was completely buried under the melodramatic woes of my life. My practice helps me transcend the all consuming nonsense of daily life. It allows me to step outside of my mundane fears endless obsessions and senseless anger. It's because yoga is not just exercise. It's a life. Path. And if you allow it the yogic path will envelop every moment of your life. Every breath every interaction every gaze and every thought what she sharing with us is big. It's really big. So I wanted to share that and really just dive into a conversation with you around the book around yoga practice you even where to start with this if that brings up something for you it's never so much as that you've just said I've just been sitting here like OK I just gotta wait.

[00:08:45] I want I don't wanna be a burden I just want to wait until she is like said everything that she wants to say. So when I was listening to that I was just reminded of how not central to like one kind of body experience this is because the more that I do this work the more that I see practitioners across the world. Everyone has the same shit like everyone has something and it's always people that you would never think do to. I remember when I was in London like the front row of the class there was this dude this like an attractive white guy.

[00:09:22] I don't pay attention to what they look like but like he could have been on a magazine right. So you know. But he was you know right up front and I was like OK whatever you know. Chattering

guys all day we're doing this. And then after me after the class he came up to me. He was like oh my gosh I just want to tell you look I feel so much better about myself. I just this was such a positive experience for me and I was like you know. It's like what the fuck you know like it's like it's amazing to me how much we all tend to because I feel like people see me and they're like oh so fat black girls feel like you know what I mean like this is that she is the teacher for them or or OK all fat girls or else that's you know whatever but it's never that maybe it's just about being honest about where you are today in that in that honesty you can allow everyone to be honest with themselves and that I I'm very uncomfortable like hearing positive things about all of this.

[00:10:20] But I think that I'm very grateful that that honesty has brought us to be able to talk about this.

[00:10:27] Well it's one of the things I think that makes you stand out in the world is that you are so honest about conversations that I know personally I have a hard time talking out in a bigger way. Racism gender you know there's a lot of stuff really really that you go out there body positive body politics in a way that I think you do things on Instagram that I'm like. I don't know if I could. You know and I think that for all of us and people I've been talking have been very excited that you're here you're in the audience as well. It's like it's just amazing and refreshing and I always wonder if you ever have moments where you're writing these things and then you're like I share or do I just go boom. Who what. You know I want to know how you think through this stuff.

[00:11:09] Oh all the time because I especially like in terms of non things that don't seem like yoga. Everything is fucking yoga. So like this there is no thing that we're talking about that is not that but whenever something that like maybe people it's polarizing. So people don't want to talk about it.

[00:11:27] I definitely will be like Is this something that I feel like getting notifications about all god damn day people saying things like their opinion about whatever it is that I said because the reality is that I do not like.

[00:11:40] Honestly at this stage I think that if you put anything on social media that you have to understand that everyone is gonna have an opinion about it. And if you can't stand in the truth of it then you shouldn't be.

[00:11:52] And I think that I mean like because what's the point.

[00:11:56] You know like I'm not going to sit up here and defend my opinion or like try to explain it for somebody else's like comfort level. And but the real thing is like I feel like listening to this and it's always something that because I do I'm very interested in the dialogue that it provokes. That to me is like the oh that's why we have this shit you know what's the point of just putting all this crap up there that's like it all looks the same like Instagram in large part can be really fucking boring to look at

because it's just like the same thing over and over again like carefully curated picture. My food here this yoga here you know and I'm just like what are we saying here. What is the purpose of this. There has to be a reason that for the first time in history humans across the whole planet can communicate with one another. This has never existed before. So if that's the case what is the purpose. So that we can all hear one another for once. It's like the Tower of Babel except on the computer.

[00:12:56] I mean whatever that metaphor it seems extrapolate a bit later here.

[00:13:00] Anyway the point is I feel like if that's what it is and we're all talking and we're and you can say something you should say something that you at least think is true and I think that in that there are a lot of people who have negative pushback and I think that's awesome because not everything that is good is happy.

[00:13:25] And sometimes the good is the negative. And I think that what we all learned in November regardless of where you sit on sit on the side sit on the aisle if there is an aisle really and I think there's a substantial argument that there's not.

[00:13:43] But I think that you have to see that we're just not communicating with one another. And even if it means that you're gonna be fighting even if it means that people don't like it. And sometimes I will post things because I'm like oh maybe I'll piss people off.

[00:13:58] And I was just thinking recently that maybe I'll start putting pictures of my cat in like food and just start putting it like random shit underneath it and see if people like just aren't into it anymore know because I feel like there's. Well I could literally sit up here and talk about the ins and outs of my associates psychology around social media. I'm not gonna do that. Also since this was like my first opportunity to talk I wanted to say there is a snapchat filter for this event since we're on the topic of social media. If you use it it's me doing yoga in my underwear it's really worth it to just click. So yeah. Anyway.

[00:14:33] What actually brings us this conversation too. And you know we're speaking about it a little bit is that it's an interesting conversation that you're broaching in the yoga world which we're actually it's reflecting our countries conversation around race. Right because that actually yoga itself is a really interesting space because I feel like you're one of the few teachers out there who are as a person of color who's really and also leading the charge in that conversation in a space that tends to be very wealthy tends to be white and really beyond the reach of people of a certain income. And how does it feel like do you feel like maybe our country is catching up to a conversation you are already having or do you feel like it's an important conversation to be having or is it simply one you just have. So you put it up all the time.

[00:15:16] I think that the idea of the identity of a practitioner is way more one dimensional than what my life just is. And so I'm not like trying to bring up hot topics. I'm just like this is what's good in this corner of the woods and like a lot of people don't know what's going on on the corner of the woods. They don't even think because this is going into kind of a deeper place. But I think that like in a lot of ways people don't respect black women in particular specifically black queer women. And I think that there's a tendency to just kind of make assumptions about what it is that is important to us or like what. What could be going on and so I think that's part of why the things that the things that I say seem like wow this is I really wasn't thinking about this because to me it's just like this is just how the world is. And I think that it says a lot that so many people are surprised by how the world is or. But this is the other thing I don't think anybody's really surprised and what I'm hearing more often than not is that everyone wishes that they could say the things that I'm saying.

[00:16:27] And I'm like if that's the case then why are you not saying what is it.

[00:16:33] What is the fear. Where where does that fear come from. And that to me is like a way more interesting conversation than the actual topics because I feel like that's just kind of everyone's going to have their perspective. Did that make sense.

[00:16:48] I mean you guys all relate to that. I think that we all do and I feel that to write that those conversations like I have safe spaces to have certain kinds of conversations that I won't broach in other areas of my life race being one of them and that you are sort of a guy I don't know egalitarian about it you are just universal around those conversations that are happening and you put them out there over and over again. And I'm with you on that conversation of like what's the fear that holds any of us back from saying something that we know to be true.

[00:17:15] I am definitely very selective with my language in a way that I am not when I am not talking like my my my social media is just like a journal. And so I'm just writing down things that I think. But I'm finally clued into the fact that there are people other than me looking at it and as a result it's like just the I think it's important to think about the way that it's being said not because I want to change how I feel about it or like make sure that it's comfortable for other people but so that other people will be receptive to ideas that are not immediately going to be comfortable for them especially if the idea is based around colonialism or it's based around like you know in privilege and privilege that can't be explained any other way than what it is. And because I think that if you ask the right questions later then I guess what I'm not sure it's the right question.

[00:18:18] Yeah I mean I think it's it's a conversation that's an interesting conversation that is happening in lots of different places and you have it in a particular area. Then you and it's a fascinating one you know I love that I can click on anything that you've posted and I think there's always a really interesting conversation. Rich conversation that's happening with you and with followers and things like that. But even what you say itself in that little chunk is so rich and I know for

myself it's very inspiring. In addition to all the other imagery you put out there and the conversations that you're having but it's the conversation I think that's coming out of it that has made such a difference. I feel like for others in this room as well as for myself.

[00:18:53] So interesting to hear you talk about it though because I'm really not trying to do any of that. I'm just I'm like I don't and I don't even I just I think that everyone should be honest about their experience on this planet. I think the problem is that we're not being honest enough about it and that there are a lot of people who just feel like they're you know kind of in show outer shells and not actually engaging with what's going on inside of that show. And I feel like I don't want for it to be a voyeuristic act of watching someone else like be inside of their show or trying to shed their show. And I feel like that's kind of where the conflict lies for me where you know like the being watched aspect of it you know. And and then like Is this really is this making the right impact or is it just like a girl in a cage dancing. This is the other side of it right.

[00:19:47] It all saw fun and games when it's pictures on Instagram there's real well I would actually frame it a little differently in that I don't think it's necessarily I know for me and I'm sure for other people it's not just like watching kind of a deal that in seeing what you do it's an observation on self for how we can shift and change what we do because everyone's working on something right. I mean I am working on multiple things always at any given time. And so this is an area where I think for you it's like you're having a conversation for you you have worked through this one. And so it creates inspiration and I think that's awesome.

[00:20:23] It's also a wild thing though when you I was talking with us a little bit earlier how in having a really deep yoga practice like yoga practice that is just kind of the only thing it's I feel awkward for the other people in my life that I care about because I care about this so much not just like not the teaching aspect of it even as much as just the N word search because it is ultimately can become a very selfish act. And I find myself like just in this place of trying to understand it and at the same time it's being shown on social media like that is really what it's like. And I think that for me it's very strange to be in this place of hearing any kind of positive thing about it because I think that it slips into that egotistical place which is as a practitioner you're always trying to walk away from that and then that's being shown to other people is like oh this is what yoga is you know it's this girl who's on tour across the country and has a book and you know and I think that that kind of behavior is really encouraged in our current yoga in the modern yoga world.

[00:21:30] I think it's totally normal to act that way. It's unquestioned because we live in a materialistic world and I don't know. I mean I think that these are the kind of the conflicts that I wish were happening on a larger scale as well because when you talk about brands and then what then the real reason that we want for the yoga community to expand. I feel like that's where I really want to see everybody kind of direct in the conversation instead of like I don't know this is.

[00:22:04] Is this too I feel like it's dark but like I'm into it because I'm into that thing into myself. But I also feel like you know I mean like yoga practice right. That you can look at the light in the dark and I would say for those you guys who haven't read her book or haven't gotten it yet that it actually you do a really great job of diving into the stuff that she has had to you had to work through in your life

[00:22:25] And that she actually has really cool sequences related to it like the one that really made me laugh for a couple of well there's the beauty pageant one. So you've talked about being in a in a beauty pageant. How old were you I was eleven in 2011 and twelve and so that turned into a sequence she calls I want to stand strong which is cool. So there's actually a sequence related to that. And then she also talked about an experience of being arrested for drunk driving which turns into a sequence. I need to chill the f out. Right. And so that you really relate what it is the practice. Like the true practice of working through whatever it is you're going on in your life it is going on in your life into yoga which is ultimately really what the practice is about. So I would say that the book really gets into a lot of this space which is cool.

[00:23:10] That was really important to me because I feel like the reason that the teachers who have had the biggest impact on me did so because they were really honest about themselves and not in like a TMI kind of way like I know too much about you. But in a way where it's okay to accept the times when you've slipped and accept the times when you've fallen and smashed your face. And I think that ultimately that is why people really come and are enamored of this practice because it is so so beautiful to finally come to terms with the shit that has just plagued you your whole life whether it's an injury whether it's a a loss early on whether it's a drinking problem that it's because you were in this constant state of healing and in a state of recovery that's why it's so powerful and that it's not so powerful because awesome also knows dope. I mean I'm not saying it's not but it's just it's not all there is. And I I think it is ultimately gonna be the thing that makes you want to come back. Like on the surface. And so it's important to focus on it. But I also wanted to give a space for people to be okay with things that maybe they've been taught to not be okay with because there's so many things that we don't move past and we don't even acknowledge that they're the it's the. You know you could be practicing yoga for years decades and not ever get to a place where you're really like doing anything other than trying to copy the other people who are in the room.

[00:24:48] It's true that it is really to read that practice is an internal one and we practice it and it can look really external. You can look really external but it's actually really internal one. So what would you say for that people then who maybe practice or like a little scared of practicing there's something about practice and they're here because you have inspired them to somehow think maybe I should do yoga. There's something to that yoga thing.

[00:25:09] Won't you tell them just then after I just was like Oh man it's so dark and do you do yoga. So this is gonna be fun.

[00:25:20] Well so this is the thing I think that a lot of times we expect immediate gratification. And so when you when someone says yoga is awesome and then they're like here's this fat girl doing it. So you're like cool I must be able to do it and then you go and you're like That was hard as fuck. So I feel like there's a feeling when it's hard as fuck to be like I shouldn't have even come. It wasn't even worth it to try. I'm not good enough. And the reality is that you're not going to know what you're doing initially. Nobody does. And ultimately you should never really be to a place of thinking you know too much because that means you're gonna fall on your face. So if you are okay with that then what's the next thing you're afraid of.

[00:26:02] Are you afraid of what other people are going to think. So this is like I think the most who in here is afraid has has not tried yoga before or who has been before it was maybe intimidated by the other people who were in the room or you felt uncomfortable or felt like you should have been there yes. Right. So I feel like that fear of other people is a previously interesting building to work on because that's something that is not just in yoga that's out all the time kind of thing. And we as a society I talk about in the book how we're so obsessed with complete strangers and totally give no value to our own opinions and that shit is wild to me because you're like in this place right.

[00:26:49] Yeah.

[00:26:50] It's like you will be so inclined to like you could feel like you look great and everything is awesome and then it's just one bad look from a stranger and it's all gone. And I think that that's something that you should or we should all in present company included.

[00:27:08] I still do this and it's something that I'm like actively I think people see me and they're like she's got it all together you know like you you you must feel great in every environment and never question anything but like you're gonna go into yoga classes and have pe people are gonna be looking at you regardless of it's not just large body people everybody is gonna have somebody in the class at some point who's looking at you cockeyed. And the reason that they're looking at you like that is because that's how they're looking at themselves. We don't acknowledge that but like everybody has the shift so that we're all in like a Mexican standoff with one another about nothing you know. And I think that if you are fearful in that way coming from somebody who has been fearful in that way it's very helpful to assess that conversation for yourself and then see where you are on the other side of it. And I don't know what that's going to mean for you because I don't.

[00:28:01] I'm also not gonna sit here and be like It's so easy you know. I mean just stop caring what people think. Just go to that one class.

[00:28:08] It's not that hard. Like I don't know your life. I don't know what's happened to you but I do know that you need to assess that. And also yoga is literally not about anything other than breathing. And if you can do that you can do this even if you can't get out of a bed. If you can do that you can do

this. So I feel like if you know that and you know the other check points then you should just see where you are on the other side of it.

[00:28:36] And then just go and and also I emphasize the home practice a lot. I think it's really important regardless of how many classes you go to because I think that it's important to have a space where you always feel safe where you can practice and your home doesn't necessarily mean like the house that you are in. It just means a place that is home for you and that place could change depending on where you are on the planet. But it is still that thing that belongs to you and so often we think that are awesome to practices specifically belong to other people as well that belongs to your teacher that it belongs to the person on the mat next to you and that their opinions on it are just as important as yours. But truly it is an experience of the self through the self to the self not any other self. So if you can get into that place of wanting to pursue that journey at home to some degree it can make such a difference especially if you are just starting out that answer your question we'd love to open it up to the audience for questions. You

[00:29:48] Guys have for you can raise your hand and then we'll repeat the question. Was so bold one. Absolutely.

[00:30:00] I started practicing yoga. Oh the question was How did I get to do this. Basically I had to start practicing yoga. That's basically a question though.

[00:30:09] So I was in graduate school and I was studying nonprofit arts management and I'd worked in a lot of different arts organizations but I had gotten to a place in my academic program where I felt like everybody was elitist as fuck. This is really common in like upper X in upper academia in the arts specifically like classical arts.

[00:30:32] It's just a lot of people with their heads up their asses. And I was like I feel like that is what I'm becoming is a person with a head with my head on my ass. And I don't. I have so little connection with what I'm doing. I don't I'm not emotionally connected to this at all.

[00:30:48] And I had also been my high school girlfriend and I were breaking up and we'd been together for like all through high school like the end of high school and college and graduate school and so it's like it feels like the end of the world. You know your whole identity is wrapped up in it. And one of my classmates was like really into Bikram yoga at the time. And if you've never tried Bikram yoga it's a style of hot yoga that is performed in a room that's about one hundred and four degrees and it has a beautiful purifying effect. And as a result it can create like kind of a cult experience for the people who are really into it.

[00:31:23] And I say that in the most loving way. I have a lot of love for that. But you know it's got a cult. So she's like It's very like they drink the Kool-Aid. So she's like Oh my God you're gonna love it.

Bikram yoga it's amazing. It's just going to change your life. And I was like I'm not doing that because I had actually tried it once when I was in high school. And so backtrack this is the first story that I tell in the book. My aunt was really into Bikram yoga when I was 16 and she had also drank the Kool-Aid. She was like Oh my God you're gonna love it. And at the time I was like Man I'm fat I'm 60 and I got nothing better to do why not go to this pot yoga class sure. So I remember walking in and it was like having a hot damp washcloth trapped across your face and it's like it's 104 degrees like this is no small temperature. And like I was just like I'm sweating from places that I didn't even know you could sweat.

[00:32:12] Like I'm sweating for my eyebrows and my elbow creases and the backs of my knees. And she he and this we hadn't done anything.

[00:32:21] I'm just standing there. That particular sequence. So Bikram is it's a very specific sequence. This is like the fucking McDonald's of yoga you all like you could go anywhere in the world and get this sequence. It's twenty six poses ya know.

[00:32:38] It's twenty six is done two times and it starts it's bookended with these double rounds of printing on my breathing and probably Emma is so beautiful so magnificent in that printing Emma the first time that you do it regardless of who you are it's gonna kick the shit out of you like it is an intense experience. And I was like How am I gonna survive this if the breathing part is awful and everyone is doing these like huge faces anyway so I feel like I made it maybe a third of the way into the class I'm probably being too generous but I was like I can't do this anymore I can not be in here I think I'm in a tie and they tell you not to leave the room but I was like These people don't know me I have to get out of here. And I walked out and immediately feel amazing because there was a sea and it's great. And then I came back in and then I learned why they tell you not to leave the room because the temperature shift is so extreme that you will probably get noxious. And I got extremely noxious and I was like I'm not doing this. I left and I was like just this is not for me. And so when my friend kind of back to seven years later you see whether there were telling two stories here we she was a she said Do you want to go and I was like Hell no. And she wore me down eventually because they had a Groupon pass and I was like What do you got to lose. And I went and I loved it. Everything about it was exactly the same. It was so hot as fuck it was the hardest fuck everything about it was the same but I didn't realize it and my day to day life when I was like going to class and hating myself and hating the work I was doing and just feeling so miserable and I didn't realize it but in those experiences I was not engaged I was not connected at all to what was happening.

[00:34:24] It was just like wake up go to class go to work have same conversations over and over again go to sleep wake up do the same thing and not emotionally trying to break out of any boundaries not trying to stretch my limits and these Asana were so monumentally difficult. Everything about it was it seemed impossible like I'm one of the first poses in the sequence is awkward poses a variation on sheer pose. Were you like Rise up onto your tiptoes and bend your knees and I would

just like try to rise up on my toes and then immediately fall over and I would get so pissed on myself and cause like I'm always I was very frequently the fattest person in the room. Frequently the only person of color and I would just feel like so at a place like everybody's where you know they got there like in Bikram everyone's got like hot clothes on so like they're like perfect it's and perfect bra tops and I'm just wearing like my shorts from Walmart with holes in them and like my giant t shirt and I would just be looking at myself and like talking shit to myself and be like you're not good enough. Like why do you even think that you become you can't do it blah blah. And then I got to a place of thinking Yeah but you could just try you know you could just try.

[00:35:35] Yeah you might fall down you're probably gonna fall down but you could just try.

[00:35:40] And then I would catch myself just trying and just actually focusing and doing the things that they said and not like being immediately like I can't do this and that shit was a game changer for me because I was not doing this I was just like if I thought that I couldn't complete a goal I just wanted to even try. Or like I would stop at the place where I thought that I could go where I thought I could complete it. And this is across all parts of life. And the thing about the yoga that we for that kind of gets lost is that it's not really about what's happening on your mat it's about your application of it in a larger sense. And if I'm able to surprise myself and leap hurdles here on my map where the fuck else can I do this that I'm not doing it.

[00:36:30] And it gave me so much confidence I was practicing a lot because I had a work study at that studio and this is kind of a long story. All right with you I guess I had this work study I was practicing a lot. It gave me the confidence to leave grad school which infuriated my parents and everybody else and I moved to Durham where I live now and when I moved to Durham I didn't have the money to practice in studios we forget this but practicing yoga in the West is extremely inaccessible to those without means or even those with limited means.

[00:37:01] And I had no means I had no job I had no plan and it was just like I just gotta get out of that situation that I was in. And during that time I quit practicing for a couple of months and a bunch of sad things happened.

[00:37:16] I only talk about one of them in the book which is my aunt passed away which was I think that people don't really understand like how you know I'm not going to go there. The point is my aunt passed away. It was very upsetting for me. Also around that same time my then girlfriend brother passed away. My grandma passed away. It's just all this should happen. And I found myself sliding back into this place of depression that I'd been in before. And I'm prone to depression and anxiety so it was not really like a surprise or anything but I was like what was helping before yoga. Okay I just got to find a way to start doing this again. Like something so at home I would practice eight to 10 of the Bikram awesome that I felt comfortable with but then I felt like I was OK enough with a home to do and then I would occasionally like take other styles of classes but when I started to really learn about

the Yasser style yoga and learn about other types of awesome. It just was like this insane rabbit hole that I am still in that has. It was like there is this whole universe of ways to understand this world where I don't have to constantly be wishing for another moment or thinking about the future. And it's turned into something where it's bigger than just that thing that I do on my mat like when I can.

[00:38:42] Now it is every single be every moment and yeah I hope that that answers your question. So I feel like I'm answering you for 45 minutes.

[00:38:55] Oh Lord.

[00:38:58] Absolutely I do. And I also have to tell you that I saw you walking down the street earlier and you reminded me of my friend Whitney so much and I had so much love and it's so weird that you just asked the question and that you're sitting in the front row at this because it wasn't even here.

[00:39:12] And that sounds really creepy you know. Anyway so yes because the thing is it is not like a magic cell. It's not like Oh I figured this out bitch. And if you just go get it at the store or like if you just do it enough times it's gonna be good.

[00:39:28] Now it's like so I have this practice that is kind of intense and I have to do it literally every single time that I interact with people and it's basically that because of a sample situation I am at Whole Foods I've been practicing yoga for a couple hours and I'm hungry. It's on me.

[00:39:45] So like I'm getting my food on my plate and I see people looking at me like looking over like what kind of foods are there. She's pretty fat.

[00:39:52] You know I feel like I can I have and I have all of these thoughts that are running through my head like I know what they because this is you know almost three decades of being in a fat body and there is a lot many layers of damage that can't just be cured overnight.

[00:40:07] And I have to consciously tell myself it doesn't matter what other people think you can eat what you want to eat. If you do you not want to eat this food do you not. And then like I'll go it's like I'm arguing with myself because that's really the issue is that it's going on inside and it's something that it's like because I don't know what other people are actually thinking. And there's no reason that I should even be concerned with that. But I've been conditioned to think that that's the way that I should be processing this world.

[00:40:35] And so it is an active like unplugging of that machine every single time. And I think it helps to be really like compassionate with yourself and understanding of the fact that like yeah. Do I know that that's why you're. That's why you're feeling that way. But like it's OK you can eat what you want to eat. You can wear what you want to wear. It's OK. It doesn't Yeah. That person is looking at you.

They're looking at you because they don't understand. They're looking at you because they don't have the confidence to wear what you're wearing and they don't understand how you could have that confidence. It's like literally explaining it to myself on a loop every single time. It is hard work to be in a state of confidence. And I think that it is really misunderstood as being easy that it's like oh yeah it's just so great. Oh it's like that's why it looks like you don't care because you're so damn busy trying to talk yourself down. I feel like if you can get to a place of like having the conversation really having the hard conversations with yourself and like just focusing on that. That's my only tip. Like people everyone says dumb things like Montrose and look in a mirror that has just never worked for me. I'm not that kind of person in respect to those who can. I hope that answers your question. I love this so much because I feel like I always get Oh yeah. I feel like I get asked this a lot.

[00:41:59] Like Jasmine You know I'm not fat and I'm not black but like I love everybody and I want for everybody feel good. My class is girl like what should I be doing. Like what. I don't want people to feel this way and I'm like Listen I'm not doing anything that I don't think everyone else can do.

[00:42:17] And the reason I know this is because of the teachers that I've had that I would really consider to be like the most body parts teachers. One of them Michael Johnson in Asheville North Carolina if you are ever there he is like a very beautiful spirit. He is a six foot three white guy like very traditional looking beautiful arm balanced practice like very.

[00:42:44] He looks like like the normal Yogi. I don't know what. I don't know where that came from but I just wanted to say it. Anyway. He looks like super normal right. And he makes these spaces where he's being so honest with himself and it's it's him being honest with himself. He is very gracious and compassionate and he laughs at himself and he is not too serious and he doesn't make you feel like there's anything wrong with what you're doing. He is complimentary. He makes he. He holds a space of love and compassion that is coming from a love and compassion that he has for himself and that I feel like is really all that makes a body positive environment is when if it's in a yoga context that the teacher is really just accepting themselves and being compassionate about themselves and accepting because what's happening a lot is like being trying to be fake or something or like trying to pretend as though you're something different than who you actually are and trying to act like like you're shit don't stink are like you don't like your alignment has always been perfect or like you like you never you've never tripped and fallen or like you've never or in that that feeling makes the people who are in the room feel unsafe.

[00:44:05] And I think that the only reason that I am like noticing that is because I have felt so unsafe and continue to feel unsafe in different environments but I don't think that that's anything like. I don't think that you have to even know everything about I do think it's important to know how to adjust for or how to adjust circumstances for different bodies different circumstances these are all things that can be learned like you can. You can read books about all these different things. And I think that's just a part of being a informed teacher. But I think that the real thing about just making people feel good is

just you know being complimentary and being positive overall and not creating a competitive environment and making space for people to have whatever experience they need to have whether that's you know crying on the mat by themselves. But they're not by themselves or in a roomful of people but they don't feel weird that that's happening or the person who maybe they're poses looks really different from other people. Like letting them know you look great. That looks good. Good job. You know because they I can't tell you how many people have told me you told me good job and I have heard that in years. And that's a fucking problem.


[00:45:23] Like and it's it's understandable because we don't live in a world where we're like actively complimenting one another we always are looking for the faults. And I think it's if you're in a position it's so lucky to be in a position where you can focus on the positive and you can really shine a light for somebody because that makes people grow further I think than trying to tamp it down. Thank you so much for asking about this. OK this is a whole chapter in the book because I know I'm not always wore my hair natural and that is oh my god I'm so I'm so glad that just because like this is something that I think is all too common across lots of different groups. But specific to the black female experience it is just not talked about at all. And that is part of the issue. So like I spent time when I was 8 my mom locked both of our hair. She was so excited about it it was like maybe the best thing. This is awesome. I didn't feel that way. The problem with internalized racism of yourself and being taught to hate the way that you look and going to schools with all the black girls have relaxers and you're the only one that doesn't.

[00:46:46] Is that that fucks you in the head really bad. And like I hated my hair so much. There was like Now everybody's got a natural.

[00:46:56] Everybody's got locks but in the mid 90s that was not a thing in like it was extremely rare and there is so much like racism within the black community talking about like what it meant to have natural hair and long story short. This is much more detailed in the book. But my mom was really really sick when like shortly thereafter she got really sick and while she was in the hospital like literally trying not to die one of her friends who had always hated my hair was like and hated just the whole thing. She was like Oh do you want to like I can give you braids. And I was like yes bitch.

[00:47:34] Why are we. What are we waiting for. Let's do it right now. God like what has to happen.

[00:47:39] And so like she cut off my locks and gave me a relaxer and then gave me crochet braids and I wore my hair braided to some extent for twelve to 13 years after that. And I like I would on wash day I would go like make sure that no one could see my hair like make sure it's wrapped up like I am. I was obsessive about it because I did not have any kind of internal dialogue with it. I would like to say that my mom was fucking pissed when she came out in like cut this person completely out of our lives. My mom still has beautiful locked hair that is about every time that I look at it. It's just it's such a testament to everything that she has been through. And I think that it's an interesting journey for me



to recognize all of that now and that is such a huge part of why I wear my hair natural now and that I specifically do not put any chemicals in it at all and that I think wigs are so fun. It's amazing there's all this amazing. It's like really cool technology now but I cannot engage in that because I mean like as an act of personal self care I cannot do it. It's like and I don't. I have mad love to every woman of color who has any kind of thing extra happening with her hair but in my own life there are wounds that have to be healed.

[00:49:01] And it's no small act. And I think that that's something that again with like this experience not really being told that much. It's like wow that that's how you felt about your hair and I'm like Yeah.

[00:49:13] So when we were all in the same school like watching bringing on together and we were also having so much fun going to Gabrielle Union and Kirsten Dunst like I was there with my natural hair. It's supposed to think that my hair is beautiful or whatever. So yeah. No there's issues there.

[00:49:28] Well just I mean you're such a natural and gifted storytellers and it's amazing and thank you for sharing yourself so openly in so many ways and in this conversation. And if you brought a book she'll sign it happily pen for you and then she also you can also purchase books as well. Thank you gentlemen for being there.

[00:49:47] Thank you Seattle Public Library. Thank you. And you were you were you

[00:49:54] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.

