

Yoshikami, Emiko Oral History 2022/03/09

Interviewee: Emiko Yoshikami

Interviewer: Kit Heintzman

Date: 03/09/2022

Location (Interviewee): Oakland, California

Location (Interviewer):

Transcriber: Sally Velez

Abstract: Some of the things we discussed included: Being a homebody during a stay-at-home order. Spending more time with partner; emotional labor; support; going on walks. Roommates' unsafe behavior during the pandemic and deciding to move out. Moving from San Francisco to Oakland during the pandemic. Changing ideas about masking and outdoor safety. Fear of getting others sick. Erring on the side of caution with incomplete information. Surrogate partnering; career. The need for radical change, individuals' roles within the collective. California's apocalyptic sky (9 September 2020). Protesting during the pandemic: risk, social distancing, waking up. Health through the lens of disability justice. A feeling of great possibility during the pandemic. George Floyd, BLM, whitelashing. Isolation and suicide. Interconnectivity, Buddhist philosophy, agape love, meditation, both/and Spiritual bypassing. Meditating over Zoom in multicultural and BIPOC groups. Taking long periods of silence and being with oneself weekly. Wanting a world with more love and more care; seeing into the sacred nature of one another.

Kit Heintzman 00:00

Hello.

Emiko Yoshikami 00:02

Hey.

Kit Heintzman 00:04

would you please start by stating your full name, the date, the time and your location?

Emiko Yoshikami 00:09

Yes, my name is Emiko Yoshikami. The date is March 9, 2022. The time is 1:43. And I'm in Ohlone Land in Oakland, California.

Kit Heintzman 00:23

And do you consent to having this interview recorded, digitally uploaded and publicly released under Creative Commons License Attribution Noncommercial Sharealike?

Emiko Yoshikami 00:33

Yes.

Kit Heintzman 00:35

Would you please start by introducing yourself to anyone who might find themselves listening to this? What would you want them to know about you and the place that you're speaking from?

Emiko Yoshikami 00:44

Oh, my goodness. I have no idea what people would want to know. I don't know what people would be interested in. Um, I could guess maybe, I'm 40 years old. I'm mixed race, Japanese and white. I- just to throw it out there, I'm a meditator. I have a spiritual practice. And, let's see, I thought of other things people might want to know. But now I forget. Yeah, if I, if something comes to me, I wish people could just ask me, I'm kind of an open book.

Kit Heintzman 01:34

Maybe I'll come about as we go on. Would you tell me a story about what life has been like in the pandemic, for you?

Emiko Yoshikami 01:44

Just one?

Kit Heintzman 01:46

As many as you like, but like, I figure we'll start with one.

Emiko Yoshikami 01:50

Um, oh, my goodness. It's, it's funny how to like book end to make a story, you know? Ah well, I guess, you know, a way to make a story is I, at the beginning of the pandemic was living in San Francisco in a home with three housemates, one of whom was my partner, still is my partner. And I was really unhappy with the way that my housemates minus my partner, were handling what was happening and not taking the precautions that I wanted them to take. That's a small reason, but a small reason that my partner and I decided to move and we actually moved during the pandemic. And it's been weird living in Oakland during this last like, year and a half, not feeling like I'm fully experiencing Oakland, because it's, it's, you know, places that are shut down, and it doesn't clearly it doesn't have the same vibrancy and, you know, going to places to eat and which I, you know, still don't really do. So, yeah, that's one story, I suppose.

Kit Heintzman 03:29

Would you share some of the things that your roommates with, with the exception of your partner, were-

Emiko Yoshikami 03:35

Mhm.

Kit Heintzman 03:35

Doing that was feeling less safe for you?

Emiko Yoshikami 03:39

Yeah, totally. Um, well, when I, you know, when I was getting information about like, oh, there's this virus, it's really contagious. People are dying. I was like, alright, housemates, you know, we are not going to be around other people. We're like a pod. We're gonna stay indoors as much as possible. And one example of something my housemate did is he went to the beach, cool, he met a person cool. He

was unmasked and almost kissing that person for a period of time. It's like, wha- why? And I mean, it's hard because my household was filled with slats and it's, you know, I want peace to be able to do the things that they want to do. And, you know, like, I get the, the psychological like emotional difficulties and yet I was like, but y'all this kind of serious. And I remember another house, we know the other house mate of mine. You know, we're thinking about like, how to clean the surfaces and like the banister and the doorknobs to the to our apartment. And she had like this spray bottle and she's like, oh, we can use the spray bottle for I forget what we were using at that time. Like I think it was alcohol was the good you know, was said to be a good um, disinfectant or what have you. So I started using that kind of, you know, in great amounts. And then she was like, oh, no, I haven't put alcohol on that bottle, it's something else. And I was like what!? Why am I using this thing that is actually not effective? And at that point, I just had a bit of a like meltdown of like what? I, I di- ah, yeah.

Kit Heintzman 05:28

What were the conversations like that along the way?

Emiko Yoshikami 05:33

Yeah. You know, on the one hand, it was hard, because we were all doing different things. And on the other hand, there was a sense of like, wanting to do what's right and wanting to really respect each other's where each other's coming from and what's up for each other. So actually, with the housemate who almost kissed this person, you know, told us which I was really thankful for, like, thank you. And he said, What would you need to, you know, from me, and we said, we would like you masked when you're in the common area, and like washing your hands all the time, and etc. And he did that, which I thought was awesome. For I forget what period of time. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 06:23

Do you remember when you first heard about the pandemic?

Emiko Yoshikami 06:25

Yeah. I mean, I don't know if I remember like the first words. But my, it was from my ra- I remember a conversation with my brother and he was like, Emiko, this shit is going down, this is a big deal. And I was like, Oh, my brother is so overdue. He's such a worrier, I'm sure it's fine. And like, another friend too, the doctor, she wasn't, didn't seem that, you know, concerned. So I was like, I don't know, we'll see. I, I didn't, I, I definitely didn't have the concern that some folk did until it was clear like, oh, no, no, this is this is this is real. But I don't remember exactly how I first heard.

Kit Heintzman 07:19

Do you remember what turned up the volume? On-

Emiko Yoshikami 07:23

Good question.

Kit Heintzman 07:24

The severity?

Emiko Yoshikami 07:25

Good question. I mean, I'm sure it was hearing things in the news, you know, like, this is this is spreading quickly. The hospitals are filling up. And it was, you know, it wasn't too far into the pandemic that I started being like, okay! You know, like, we're really.. Oh, well, I mean, it was the state home order. I think it was like, oh, we're shutting down. Okay, like, y'all were shutting down and we need to do our part to make this happen, otherwise, you know, this isn't going to happen.

Kit Heintzman 07:57

What was the stay at home order, like for you? How did it change sort of day to day living?

Emiko Yoshikami 08:03

This is the funny thing. Because it turns out, I'm a real homebody. And though I adore people, like I adore my friends, like, I love hanging out with humans. It's a lot for me, and I don't actually like leaving the home that much. So with a stay at home order, I actually really enjoyed it, which was another weird dynamic in terms of like, it was nice to then not be living with my housemates to not feel like I needed to kind of curtail their behavior, because I was living with my partner, who I got to then spend all this time with, we didn't have to go to work. I had no obligations to go hang out with my friends. (Inaudible) You know, part of me, of course, wanted to hang out with them, but another part is like, I just rather stay home. So when my partner and I moved to this new place, I, I felt the sense of like, I don't know if I'd say freedom, but just like that kind of that pressure lifting. And being like, oh, I really, I really kind of like this life. And then with that, you know, guilt and weird feelings as so many people around me are like, this is the hardest thing. Everybody is suffering. This is the worst. And then just like me being like, I really need to stay quiet, because this is a very different experience for me.

Kit Heintzman 09:33

What's partnership meant to you over the course of the pandemic?

Emiko Yoshikami 09:37

like the pacif- pacific partnership I mentioned? Or a partnership in general? The one I mentioned? What's it been like, is that what you said? Yeah, Um it's going great. Yeah, I mean, I, I yeah, Um like, it's so funny. I'm like, I could tell you a whole long story about partnership during the pandemic. I mean, we have done a lot of emotional labor, you know, so we spend dedicated periods of time just talking about, like, how things are going, what we want to, to tend to how's like, our personal emotional health, like, how's our relationship doing? And I think, really tending to that. And we also asked, like, how much space do we need? You know, like real questions about, Yeah, how can I support you, you know? That I think we've done a pretty great job, and we just happen to really like each other. So yeah, it's, it's been really good when everybody else I hear just like, you're like, I gotta get away from my partner, aarrh! Oh, a cute little side story is my partner (inaudible) suggested that we go on walks every night or every day. And we started doing that. And he got the idea from Fauci, like I heard Fauci say that him and his wife take walks every day. And I'm like, you know, that guy's old, he can do it, we can do something really silly like that. And so we take walks now every day, which is delightful.

Kit Heintzman 11:22

How are the walks? The- how I imagine that you've seen sort of different amounts of people also on the street at different points-

Emiko Yoshikami 11:32

Right.

Kit Heintzman 11:32

In the pandemic. What's that been?

Emiko Yoshikami 11:34

Right. Yes, it can be complicated. When we were living in San Francisco, it was fairly easy to walk to a residential neighborhood, you know, at night where there weren't folk out, we wear masks anyway. Because at that time, like, really, I just didn't have any clarity of how this was spreading. So that was really nice. And then yeah, when we moved to Oakland, and if we were walking to, like, during the day, like, oh, that lake, like everyone's at like Marriott, and that did not feel comfortable. But there are residential areas on the other side of our place. It did feel more comfortable. And initially, we were like, avoiding people and you know, going to the other side of the street if we saw people, and then it was like, okay, we're not avoiding people, but we're wearing masks all the time. And then it was like, oh, okay, when there aren't people around, we won't wear masks. But then when we see a person coming, we'll put on a mask. So those changes, yeah, we we lived through this change, I guess. And, and we're at a point now where it's very unclear when we put on our masks, and when we don't as we're walking around, so.

Kit Heintzman 12:49

Going back to that sort of early moment of the pandemic, when we really knew nothing, there was like, very little knowledge, you could lean on with any kind of confidence or certainty. How were you making decisions about the best practices that you can do?

Emiko Yoshikami 13:07

Mm hmm. Definitely turning into the news, you know, like, yeah, so what does Fauci say? What does the CDC say? And knowing too, that like, you know, I, when I'm like, oh the CDC is so telling everyone, no, don't, you know, you don't need n95 masks, or whatever I was, like, they're saying this, because they don't want to run on the masks, like this is very clear to me. And, you know, so like, also just holding the complexities of like, how are the decisions up top being made? But yeah, I think I was like, okay, the peeps in charge are saying this, you know, it looks like the data is saying this. Let's try to be as cautious as possible, it doesn't hurt to be, you know, to err on the side of caution. So, yeah, that's how I was making decisions. And also, to a certain extent, asking my peers but also realizing that my peers, you know, are getting, have different ideas of things and like, really trying to be like, who, who really has the information? You know, because we are so swayed by what we want to believe or what makes sense to us. And that's was another such a tricky thing. Like, I wanted to understand, like, okay, how does this virus work? How does it spread? So that I could make decisions from a place of understanding how things work, but like, fuck, you know, like, so little information was known. I don't, you know, I'm not that on top of shit. Also, I'm lazy so researching is a pain in the ass. So it was kind of like, okay, here are the directives. I'm gonna go with what is being asked.

Kit Heintzman 14:52

So, there was sort of this notoriousness to 2020 and then a notoriousness to 2021 and 2022 is also shaping up to be a lot. I'm wondering what, in conjunction in addition to the pandemic has been on your mind over the last few years?

Emiko Yoshikami 15:14

You mean, for me personally? Where in the world? Yeah, yeah, I mean, the move was big, I had been living in my place in San Francisco for over 11 years, I think, which is the longest I've ever lived anywhere in my life. And so yeah, that that came was its own everything, my feelings about San Francisco, my feelings about Oakland, my feelings about moving and gentrification and the middle of a pandemic, and, you know, on and on. And then actually, I'm in the middle of planning a move to Richmond, which is a whole nother thing, which has really been on my mind. And also related to COVID. It's been really funny, because I love Oakland so much. And there's this East Bay Meditation Center that's now like a fucking stone's throw away from where I live. And it has been closed the entire time, I've lived here and it's gonna be closed, you know, before I moved to Richmond, so this, these, this year and a half, or what have you in Oakland is going to be this kind of like, oh, I didn't. I moved here for various reasons, but one of the big reasons I moved here was to be close to this place that I didn't get to actually be in during this time. Also, work for me has been. So I was working as a surrogate partner, where I was working one on one with clients in a very intimate way. Because my work involves touch, it involves like, you know, breathing the same air, you know, there was very physical. But I had taken a sabbatical from that job, right? It was August of 2019. So then when the pandemic hit, I was like, Oh, I'm staying on sabbatical that's super easy, super easy decision. But then there was a question of like, okay, well, what do I want to do for work? What makes sense? And, you know, that whole thing of figuring out okay, what am I doing with my life in terms of job livelihood? Wasn't has been a deal. Something that occupies my mind for sure. And then could I ask what, yeah, just to add on to that, like, just, you know, state of the world, like, we know, we're moving towards pretty bad shit, you know, with a course. I don't want to list off the list. It's, it's bad out there. So like this bigger question of, clearly, in my mind, we have to radically change our lives and our relationship to the world. And so how do we do this? How do I kind of shift my thinking in order to be able to, you know, be a part of the, of the bigger shift.? So yeah, spend some time thinking about that, too.

Kit Heintzman 18:14

Before I go back into questions about the world. I wanted to just ask you to explain what a surrogate partner is to anyone that is listening to this

Emiko Yoshikami 18:21

Right. Hi, people who are listening. I know this is something that a lot of people don't know very much about. But there's a lease link documentary about it if you want to check out, on CNN, this is life with Lisa Ling. Felt funny it like it just made a plug. Yeah, so surrogate partner is somebody who works with clients one on one in an intimate way. Clients who have issues around intimacy, emotional, physical and sexual. So usually I'll find out about it. A therapist will have a client who needs like actual work with a person and they'll involve me and I'll be like, great, let's work together. And we'll do like touch exercises, exercises that build like emotional safety and involves various levels of sensuality and

sexuality. And I get to be like the partner for folk and it was my dream job for five years. So yeah, hey, people out there. It's a good thing.

Kit Heintzman 19:33

I promise I'll get back to the world. How is your relationship to touch changed over the course of the pandemic?

Emiko Yoshikami 19:41

Oh, interesting. I don't, I don't know. Um, I don't know if it has my partner and I touch a lot We are like very we, when we take walks we hold hands. It's very cute. Yeah. Yeah, that's an interesting one. I don't have an answer for you. But yeah, that's, I'll carry that question outside of interview.

Kit Heintzman 20:23

And back into the world without coming to a place of listing everything that's happened, would you say something about how the intersection of so much happening has been shaping your experience in the last few years?

Emiko Yoshikami 20:46

Mhm. Well, I remember the day of the apocalyptic sky where the fires were so bad, that the sun didn't rise. It was orange sky. It was freaky. And I mean, everybody had different reactions. My partner had less of a physical, physiological reaction. I certainly did. I felt weird in my, in my body, like my system felt like, this is strange. This isn't right. The sun is, you know, just it's just an orange sky with an orange circle. And of course, feeling that, yeah, that is the world. This like that this is real, it felt very, you know, oh, all right. We live in the apocalypse. Yeah, and I mean, 2020, of course, was also the murder of George Floyd and that was tremendously huge. That was a, you know, those, that was a point where it was one of those things where there was going to be a protest, this is in the middle of a pandemic, we're not supposed to be around people, you know, at least six feet, or I forget exactly what the, the parameters were at that time. But it's like, no, I'm fucking risking it. And my partner, and I were like, we're fucking risking it. And there were throngs of people. And we were marching, and there was no way to be to have that distance. And we were chanting, and it was a moment of like, no, this is actually this is worth the risk given that, you know, that this is feeling like a pivotal moment where people are maybe waking up at a different level to what's happening, and canm we contribute to folk waking up to this. So yeah, (inaudible). Watching during the pandemic, wow, this is just getting into a whole nother thing of, you know, discourses around police violence, and how we saw what it felt like, you know, with the Black Lives Matter movement, like people are getting it, you know, like, oh, my God, you know, maybe this pandemic helped people to like, shift into really being with the truth of what is in a way that maybe they couldn't have, you know, given their like, nine to five and busy lives and whatnot. And then we're to a point now where, you know, Biden is saying, we don't need to defund the police, we need to fund the police. And it's like, what the hell happened? And I feel like one of the pieces that happened is, with the pandemic with everyone's suffering, yes, like crime rates increased, and people aren't doing too well. And the white lash from black lives matter now. created, you know, is creating this environment where it's like, oh, oh, yeah, this is not where I was (inaudilbe). You know, it's, it's fun- like, there was such possibility in the pandemic, in terms of oh, shit, life could look differently. You know, when there weren't cars on the streets, how nature quote, unquote, started to move in, you know how like, right,

people were actually getting some rest some of the time, you know, things. There was there was such a sense of possibility. And then it's like, oh, right. And here we are.

Kit Heintzman 24:25

Thank you so much for sharing that.

Emiko Yoshikami 24:28

Thanks for asking. That was actually I had no idea that would come out and like, wow, this is really great to reflect on this period of time.

Kit Heintzman 24:36

I'm curious, what does the word health mean to you?

Emiko Yoshikami 24:39

Oh, I don't know why I had that reaction but I totally did. Yeah. Yeah. I think about that, you know, because we have this idea of health means a certain kind of ability to. That's gonna sound really weird. What am I trying to say? We ha- like, I feel like mainstream culture has this idea of what health looks like that I'm a little bit, almost suspicious of. Because I, you know, it's not just being alive. It's not just like, definitely not just like being productive in a capitalist system, man I'm giving all my stuff away (inaudible). Like, oh, this is an anti racist episode, anti capitalist, pro sex person we're talking to? Yes, I'll admit all that. Yeah, you know, it's sorry, there's ambulances outside. It's, it's not about you know, like, being a productive member of society or being, you know, a good consumer or, like, you know, having the statusy things like the all the a lot of ways that we measure health, I think are really inadequate, and I feel like health needs to be so much about the heart, you know, and so much about the ways that we feel ourselves to be in this world. So I guess when I think of health I don't just think of physical health, it's basically what its boiling down to because I, I think even you know, also as a disability justice advocate. I also don't think that the goal is for somebody to be like, on a standard of, of health, you know, like, oh, your body should be functioning in this way. So, yeah, I think it's really subjective, it has a lot more to do with how one feels in in their own bodies in their own. Yeah, how they experience life.

Kit Heintzman 26:55

Thinking through the last few years through the lens of disability justice, what are some of your observations about what's been happening?

Emiko Yoshikami 27:04

Oh, it's so hard. Okay, a couple of different things come to mind. Oh (inaudible). So one thing is how difficult this pandemic has been for so many folks who are immunocompromised, how there's, you know, we have this, such this idea of individual freedom, which just does not in any way take into account our interconnected nature and how all of our decisions affect each other. And so you have people who are like, well, I don't need to wear a mask, because it's my decision affecting me and not realizing like, oh, my God, no, you're I mean, that was my biggest fear in the pandemic was like, I don't want to spread some shit. You know, like, I actually am not worried about getting sick and dying. I am worried about passing this to others. I forgot your question. I had so much come up.

Kit Heintzman 28:03

thinking about the last three years, few, few years through the lens of disability justice and-

Emiko Yoshikami 28:08

Right. Right. Right. So yes, so that 100% I, I read a Mia Mingus article not too long ago, that was basically like, what the hell you all like. I think the title was let's see. 'You are not entitled to my death' or something like that. Like, really calling people to, to task on if you're not going to wear a mask, really know what that is doing to our community. So I yeah, definitely been feeling that and also the complexities because health is also the emotional component, and that is real and not saying one has to that one has to balance these in any way. But also wanting to bring in the psychological impacts. I actually had a client who I was working with for years, very, very dear. And a whole variety of things contributed to this, but definitely COVID and the isolation from COVID contributed to this and he took his life. And he wrote actually a like a letter to me that he sent before he killed himself. And you know, talking about what happened and on the bottom he like hand wrote like I forget exactly what it was, but you know, talking about COVID-19 being like I didn't survive it, basically, and other people who worked with him being like, yeah, he was the victim of COVID-19. And that had had nothing to do with physical health. That was all. Yeah, yeah. Having to isolate like that.

Kit Heintzman 30:13

There's been, we've really all been mired in death.

Emiko Yoshikami 30:19

Mmm.

Kit Heintzman 30:23

And I want to gently ask about how your heart has been doing-

Emiko Yoshikami 30:34

Mmm.

Kit Heintzman 30:34

Throughout this?

Emiko Yoshikami 30:35

Yeah. Yeah, I mean, that's interesting. So I told you about the clients, and there's a, another former client who also took his life during this time. And clearly, I mean, like, that is impactful. And that's, you know, a whole other thing to, to talk about, which I won't talk about to the public, sorry, public. But, you know, I haven't lost folk. I haven't, like per- my my personal circles, have not, I have not lost anyone in my personal circles. It's, it's more like, friends of friends, it feels distant. So apart from the deaths that I just mentioned, there, I haven't felt those effects. They, I felt other people feeling those effects. Which has been strange, because in some ways I, I, it. What is it like I feel? Yeah, it's like, I feel strange not having that experience, when a lot of people around me are having that experience. So definitely, you

know, feeling for the people having that experience, but it feels very different not directly being my peeps who are dying. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 32:06

What are some of the things you want for your own health and the health of people around you?

Emiko Yoshikami 32:11

Oh, I want people to care about each other, so super cheesy, but I really do like I want, I want a collective like, you know. I want a collective investment and like, how do we care for each other better? How do we support each other? No, it's we have ideas of, yeah, I mean, I think our ideas of health can be really messed up and individualistic, and like, I was saying, you know, production or I had, did you know, you? When it's, you know, I do I feel like health is about how we, how we care for each other and if somebody has health issues, health concerns, as opposed to meeting them in a way that's trying to like, I don't know, cookie cutter, this feels weird. I'm noticing, as I'm talking that I'm talking within the context of a conversation about COVID. So I feel like I want to be kind of aware of that. And where I'm thinking about going is very much like meeting folk where they're at in terms of abilities in terms of, you know, in terms of how health is looking like on a physical emotional level and saying, Okay, how can we help in this situation? How can we help with this person? And then yeah, I don't know just more understands of interconnectivity, you know? Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 33:58

How do you think we could get there?

Emiko Yoshikami 34:02

Meditate? No, I'm just kidding. I'm just kidding. But I mean, so I mean, if I'm talking to mainstream folk this is just gonna sound so woo. And I've been like a little anti woo in different points of my life. But, like, there is this piece where I just, you know, I'll just say because it is how I feel that there's this, there's this way in which we have to connect to like, that agape love, right? Or our that you know, in Buddhist language, you know, might be called suchness or the deathless or Nirvana what other people might call God, damn, this is something so off the hook, but, and there's this way I'm we're so goddamn interconnected. We're so each other, are so not these isolated beings. And I feel like it's going to take, really not just knowing that, but really like feeling into that really like, knowing that right on the deepest level to connect with, okay, we're, we're, it's hard to put in two words, but you know, like, we're in it with each other, we're in it for each other, we are each other, you know? And I, I, I, and that might be an impossibility and that's it. But, um, yeah. Feeling into. Yeah, I guess just feeling into our inner connectivity.

Kit Heintzman 35:47

I want to assure you that that does not sound very woo , but perhaps different thresholds points. And I also want to say that, while I can't, I can't know what a historian will value. I mean, I can't know what a historian now in my time will value who isn't me, and I definitely can't know that for someone 10, 50 years ahead. But I do know, that by the standards of my discipline for this moment, your experience exactly how it happens is the most important thing. You like, you don't have to impress them. Being who

you are is the most valuable thing you can offer. And I hope whoever is hearing this feels very grateful for what you're offering.

Emiko Yoshikami 36:43

Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 36:47

Can I ask what spirituality means to you?

Emiko Yoshikami 36:50

Yeah, that's a great question. I'm curious to know the answer that question. So this is going to be such inadequate answer. But they're, the way that I'm holding it now. Is it's really helpful, just in terms of how to think about it cognitively, is putting, thinking about two realms. Yeah, the ultimate, unconditional realm and the relative historical realm. And spirituality for me is touching into swimming in those waters of ultimate reality where it's all good. It's all I mean, for life this is what's so hard is because this unconditioned place is without concepts and without dichotomies. So you can't say good because that didn't like that doesn't actually capture it. You, you know can't actually say anything about it. Which makes it just so goddamn difficult. But to try to say something, it's like the ocean of some people call it like, loving awareness or timeless awareness. Where there's, you know, no separation, where there's no, you and me that it's just suchness. And to touch into that allows, like a spaciousness and a ease that I think is really important for our living in this relative condition realm, and I actually think that we, you know, going back to what's going to get us there, you know, I think we need that I think we need to touch into we need to bring that into the relative world. So that's a spirituality is for me.

Kit Heintzman 38:38

What are some of the ways that you've been using meditation to connect?

Emiko Yoshikami 38:43

Yeah, well, I'm still trying to figure out what meditation looks like for me. I have a long history with meditation, I was raised by a, a convert white Buddhist in the Insight tradition, which was really popular here at this time. So I was meditating the pasta style, since I was a a kiddo. And that's helpful on a level of just like being aware of the moment. But meditation more for me has veered away from that like kind of investigative mind into kind of like, okay, can we connect with that nameless place? And can we make enough space in our consciousness? To like, allow? Again, words allow like that beauty to move through or that that love to move through. So in some ways, I'm like, I'm not sure what meditation is. But I'm leaning or what do you say like turning myself more toward, less towards like, the the what right now is really popular with mindfulness meditation, and more towards how can I just really connect with that place where I can swim in the, in the, in the ocean of the ultimate?

Kit Heintzman 40:26

Would you kind of summarize what insight meditation and the meditation of our moment as you're observing it is? So the thing you're turning away from?

Emiko Yoshikami 40:38

Yeah, yeah. Well, the classic ways that it's being taught in western convert Buddhism is moving your attention to your breath. It's like, you know, small point, whether your nostrils or upper lip, or, like, you know, your chest or abdomen rising and falling. And then you notice your mind thinks, because that's what minds do. And you come back to noticing rising, falling, rising, falling, and your mind goes, and you come back, and that's the practice. Yeah, did that answer your question?

Kit Heintzman 41:14

Yeah.

Emiko Yoshikami 41:14

Okay.

Kit Heintzman 41:15

Absolutely. What does safety mean to you?

Emiko Yoshikami 41:21

Yeah. Oh, my gosh, I'm just- there are so many stories I could tell. Just not related necessarily to this question, but just what's come up for me in terms of all that we've been talking about. Okay, safety. Yeah, well, one of the things that I'm hoping to do this does not answer the question directly, but indirectly, perhaps,? In terms of thinking about, you know, my life, now, I used to be a surrogate partner, now, I'm wanting to actually do one of the elements that I did as a surrogate partner, which was creating safety for people. You know, and I think what safety looks like is actually letting your body relax, like letting your breath be full. That feeling that you can lean back, and somebody's got you that you don't have to, like, tense and hold, and, you know, be on guard and self protect, that you can actually just release. And so what I want to do is I just want to hold people and have that happen and create that space. So that's what I'm hoping to do.

Kit Heintzman 42:38

I want to just take a second and invite some of the stories that would have been rushing through your mind. A sort of front, if you'll share them.

Emiko Yoshikami 42:46

Yeah. Yeah, well I can't remember exactly how it got there. There's an really interesting, like, you know, I have some interesting stories. And and that I forget how it threaded in here. And I'm like, okay, what's the context of this is as COVID? Because its not COVID related at all.

Kit Heintzman 43:19

It doesn't have to be, right? Because like, we're all whole people in this moment. And like, it doesn't have to be a COVID story, it can be something that explained you, in part, because the way historians use archives, is we use them for all kinds of things that they weren't intended for.

Emiko Yoshikami 43:41

Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 43:41

So stories that don't feel like they're about COVID might still be great treasures to people looking at something else.

Emiko Yoshikami 43:51

Cool. I think I found this thread we'll see, we'll see if it goes. So one is my partner and I read "Parable of the Sower" during I think it was pre COVID times, it's a Octavia Butler book. And I was kind of like, oh shit she is talking about now like this is just so incredibly relevant. And this question of like, what, you know, what, what is it going to take to, you know, create a different world than the apocalyptic- post apocalyptic world that there is a real fear toward. Yeah, I'm trying too hard to read this. Okay. So is that like, ocean of, of, you know, be another word, ocean of agape love or what have you. So, when I was doing more the Vipassana meditation for some reason, okay, you kn- sorry, I'm gonna just pause and see what's going on with me. I think, I think maybe what it is, is that like, there are stories that I want to tell that kind of like bubble up, but I'm not actually sure here is the place to tell these stories. So I'm just gonna like check in. Maybe if they maybe they come up at some other moment, I'll kind of be like, okay, yes, we'll feel that out. But for now I'm gonna just let it go.

Kit Heintzman 45:34

Thank you so much for taking that moment to do that. What are some of the ways that you've been taking care of yourself, over the last few years?

Emiko Yoshikami 49:50

Hm. Definitely through meditation, Sangha, Sangha is a Buddhist, the word for community or community of practitioners. And I've very much like fucking thank God for Zoom, or, you know, these spaces where we can get together online. When the pandemic started, you know, we didn't know how long it was going to last. My friend Marge, and I were like, hey, should we get together and like, meditate every morning? I was like, yeah, let's do it. On Zoom, right? And then I was like, oh, can I invite my mom? And she's like, yeah, can I invite my friend Sue? And so we started meditating every morning, like, we'd hang out for, for a little while, meditate for half an hour hanging out. So it was like an hour from 11 to 12 every morning, having like, you know, I felt like, oh, maybe this will be a month. Just like, hold it down for a month. It's been, God, you know, it's been almost I- wait, how long? Two year, don't tell me its been three years, it's been two years, right? 2021, okay. Um, and we're still meditating, not every morning, but three times a week, we meditate from 11 to 12 together, which is incredible. And so you know, we're just real about what's going on in our lives. There's also this amazing online community that happens Wednesdays, from noon to 1:35, where a group of folks get together through the East Bay Meditation Society, and, like, meditate together, and then share. And I think it's so much is in that sharing of like, hey, we're just here witnessing each other. We're just here in the real of our lives. There's this Friday group of BIPOC meditators, that meets from three to 4:30 Pacific Time, though they're located on the east coast, so it's Friday evening for them, but we're from all over. meditating together and you know, being with each other. Also, friends, yeah, different like meditation friends, people in, people who are concerned, both with how we do this in the quote, unquote, real world, like how we move towards more justice and kindness and compassion and care. As well as what does meditation or, you know, spaciousness or spirituality look like? Like, how can we grow ourselves in that

way as well? So yeah, shitload of Sangha. And you know, my partner is pretty great and cooks food, and that's been lovely and walks. Lemme think, those have been the main ones for sure. Yeah, a whole lot of, a whole lot of Budhistry stuff came into my life recently, that has been really- oh, yeah, that's the other thing. Oh, this is big. Thursday. So Wednesday night, at 10 o'clock, I turn off all my electronic devices and I go into silence from Wednesday night through to Thursday at two o'clock. And I don't talk with my partner. I don't like do any kind of, you know, stimulus, stimulus, stimulating things. The kind of meditation I do is not formal. It's just being it's just like your job for this entire time is just to, to like, be with yourself in a, a-there's another Buddhist Sanskrit term Apranihita, which translates into aimlessness. And it's like, honey, your your job is just to be aimless. Your job is to do nothing, and it's not a do nothing, it isn't like I'm doing nothing. But like, hey, you get to just look at the sky, you get to just like breathe, as the sun moves light across your room, you know, it's that kind of just, like, do nothing space which can be so goddamn rejuvenating, and just yeah allows for that spaciousness when life is so very much life and these (inaudible).

Kit Heintzman 50:50

you had mentioned being a homebody earlier, and I was wondering if you had prior to the pandemic being going to Sangha's in person?

Emiko Yoshikami 51:00

Yes. Yes. The midday Sangha, the one on Wednesday that I was mentioning, just a special, I was going to at the East Bay Meditation Center, and I lived in San Francisco. So you know, every Wednesday, I take the BART across the bay and attend the Sangha. And loved it so much. So clearly, like, I wanted to live closer to it. But now I don't have to leave my house, because it's all online. But that, you know, was my Sangha for years before everything went online. And then I was like, oh, I have access to more things as well.

Kit Heintzman 51:38

Would you say something about how? If, and if so, how, the transition to being in a group or community and person to transferring that community online, what that's been like for you?

Emiko Yoshikami 51:55

Yeah, yeah. I mean, when, like, oh, part of losing the damn person was, we had a potluck that was our schtick, you know, like, we meditated together and then we ate together and talked. And that was really just sweet. I mean, we'd like for each other, you know, break bread together. I mean, there's this kind of beauty in that community forming way. That is, you know, Not that we cannot reproduce that. And at the same time, like it, you know, a lot of people say, oh, you can't build that kind of trust, or you can't really build community on Zoom, or it's so hard. And I'm like, actually, I think that's kind of bullshit because it has worked, you know? It's a different gro-some peeps are the same, you know, regulars I was saying, and some new folks have come in, and it's like, oh, my gosh, no, this works, this feels so incredibly special. And that peeps, you know, from all over the place, get to come here. Because we want to be here together is amazing. So there was definitely lost there and there was also like this, this is incredible. So yeah, yeah, all of it.

Kit Heintzman 53:17

How are you feeling about the immediate future?

Emiko Yoshikami 53:20

I don't know why I'm tickled by that question. Um, the immediate future? Yeah, that's interesting to the immediate future, how immediate are we talking about? Like, immediate as in the rest of today, and like, yeah I work today, uh. And like feeling okay about it, not great about it. The immediate future a little bit later into the immediate future. I'm curious. There's a lot of curiosity I have, I don't know what's gonna happen. And actually, I wonder if meditating as a child, like fostered a lot of curiosity in me, or if that was already there, or who knows. But I do have a lot of curiosity. And it does really feel like the world is going to shit. And luckily, there is this way in which like, I really am curious to see what happens. Like, I really don't know what's going to happen. This is interesting. So yes, I'm feeling very curious about the immediate and more long term future. It depends on the moment that you asked me, I think I'm feeling because sometimes it's like, oh, what the ever loving ah! And sometimes that feels like possibility. And sometimes it feels like no, there's no possibility and yeah, it, it's, it all depends I think on the moment that you have.

Kit Heintzman 54:53

What are some of your hopes for a longer term future?

Emiko Yoshikami 54:56

Yeah. Oh, yeah, I shaha, you know, uh. What I want to say, and this is so interesting that I am kind of thinking about what audience might be listening, A land is this going to make- is this going to come across the way I want it to? And you know, I don't have control over that. And I think about myself hearing these words, say 10 years ago, or 20 years ago, you know, 25 years ago, feels very, very different. Like, I, I so want us to, like, fall in love with the world, you know? Like I so want us to see the sacred nature in all of which is. And it's so hard because people are in so much pain. And we have, we're very well, well learned in ideas of self and other and what protection looks like, and with good reason we think about us and them, because that's, you know, what has defined so much of our life, and so much of our life. And what my hope would be and I don't know how possible, or realistic, a pipe dream this is. But that, yeah, that we could see into the sacred nature of each other and, and really start making this division. And it sounds so naive as I'm saying it. You know? But it's just it's, again, like one of those things of-because it's, I think what it is, is it sounds it can sound so easily of spiritual bypassing, which, you know, hey, audience, which translates to, you know, oh, we're all one, we just have to love each other, we need to stop thinking about our differences and thinking about, you know, our similarities. And that's not that, that does not take into account the realness of people's the effects of the world of us, then dynamics and power. It does not take into account like the fact that people are dying and suffering and under so much oppression, and colonialism and racism, and you know, like the ways that how easy people can ignore how what we do, regardless of our intention affects folk in very, very real ways. So I want to be like, yes, there is an us and there is them. And the them are the people who are trying to kill us, you know like, this is the way it is. And there's this part, that's like, oh, you know? And they are like, that can't be that thing. It is it is we and I, it's hard for me to try to put it into words, because it's one of those paradoxes where it's both. And I feel like if we don't like really touch

into that side of the paradox, where it's like, hey, you are me, then we're we're just fucked, we're just fucked.

Kit Heintzman 58:50

And this is me signaling that I'm winding down, but

Emiko Yoshikami 58:52

Okay, okay great.

Kit Heintzman 58:54

Not done. Um, so you had mentioned Fauci earlier. And we all like, we all know that there's all of this biomedical research happening, right? Because there has to be.

Emiko Yoshikami 59:04

Yes

Kit Heintzman 59:05

Um, I'm wondering what you think people in the humanities and the social sciences can be doing right now to help us understand this moment?

Emiko Yoshikami 59:12

Oh, God, I don't know. I would like to know. Oh, gosh, I so want to turn that question on you. What do you think? I don't know. I don't know. I mean, you know, it's like one of those things, like, I just want people to understand and to listen and to like, you know, get it I want people to get it and I actually don't, I don't I don't know. Like, you know, there's a lot of discourse like W=who are those people, those anti vaxxers? And who are those people who are just you know, are claiming let you know freedom lalalala? And even- with this idea of like, we just need to get them to understand and like see the facts. And I'm like, I don't think that's working y'all, you know? Like there's something where it's like, I don't think that's going, I don't I don't think this is effective. But I don't actually know what would be effective because it's like, you know, it's like the whole thing of we're living in different worlds like people are anti Fauci like sending death threats, and it's like, okay, like this, we're coming from completely different assumptions about how things are working. So it doesn't help to keep reinforcing assumptions that other folk don't have, you know, like this. It's it's not, it doesn't match up. And I so don't know how I, fuck, yeah, I don't know.

Kit Heintzman 1:00:56

And this is my last question. I want you to imagine some historian very temporarily far away far enough that they have no lived experience of this moment. What would you tell them cannot be forgotten?

Emiko Yoshikami 1:01:15

Wow.

Kit Heintzman 1:01:17

What would you tell them? These here, here are the kinds of stories you need to hunt for that really matter.

Emiko Yoshikami 1:01:36

I feel like those are two different questions in some ways, you know, like, yeah. Yeah, I guess I can imagine, in the future looking very, you know, I don't want to say one dimensional, but like, you know, very, very easily scripted. Like, there were these people, and there were those people and, you know? And then I think of people like my partner's father, who, like, you know, is going through your life in a very different way that is and isn't affected by COVID. And, and I think of, let's see how (inaudible). Gosh, yeah, I don't feel. I mean, I can imagine your response, but I don't feel qualified to to answer this. But I think you know, and I'm, yeah, and I'm like, and people are already going to be thinking about this. But just, you know, like, I think about how different systems, different. I'm thinking of, about a lot of black folk who are like, I don't want to get vaccinated because I don't trust this. And it's like, of course, you don't trust, like, you know, the medical system has been horrible and racism has been so rife through, like, through all these years of oppression and that violence. I don't know, I want I want more of like, the complexities of how we understand what's happening. Yeah, I mean, I'd be curious. I just, yeah, cure now, now you got me wanting to be a historian be like, I want to hear other stories. Like, you know, I think about folk who just have a very different relationship and understanding to what's going on. And it's so, it is so interesting how yeah, how many stories- I'm sure there are like, I'm thinking of a friend who is very much not getting vaccinated and has a whole story around that and whole story around, like, how she has been isolated because of it. And my story would be like, of course (inaudible), like yes, and also I don't want to isolate you further and me being like you need to do this is clearly gonna just isolate you further, so I don't know. Yeah, I wonder. Like, I wonder if this was like, really like just highlighting the different narratives that everybody has of these situations. Hopefully not into like a binary of like, there's Fauci and there's anti Fauci, like whatever it is, but like really like, I don't know all these different ways in which we make assumptions about the world, because it does feel like it's, it's breaking up into some very strange ways like fake news, fake news to whom? Like, who do you really trust, and it is, you know, that's what it is, it's really a matter of like, people don't know what or who to trust, with good reason. But because we're like, such scared humans that need to be able to trust people, of course, we're gonna be like, I trust my friends, or I trust this person that bla bla bla bla, when in actuality, they're they're, you know, this is gonna sound bad, but like, you can't actually trust anyone to know the shit. And so then it's like a question of like, how do we be able to like move with each other in a way, that we're not just calling on some outside thing to be the thing that we can trust? It's kind of convoluted. But that's all I got.

Kit Heintzman 1:06:07

I want to thank you so much for your time, and the generosity and beauty of your answers. And those are all of the questions I know how to ask at this moment. But if there is anything that you'd like to say that there hasn't been space to say yet, please, take it.

Emiko Yoshikami 1:06:25

Well, now that I feel like I'm talking to the future, like I have all these questions for the future, like, you know, I wonder, in Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower it was like, or Parable of the Talents actually. It

was like, you know, this whole Christian movement took over in really horrible ways. And like, what is the role? Like, what, what are going to be the what do you say? Like, what's going to be the, the ideology? That becomes the next, I don't know. I also wanna say, like, oppressive force? Like, you know, we're in a real moment of time, where it's like, ait, pweople would reelect Trump? Like my mind hurts so hard, so hard. And what is that like? What are those? What is that dynamic gonna look like? Like, how, how are people going to be interpreting, you know, like, the history of the US? Or, you know, like, what, I'm so curious, what are the stories that are going to be told? And what lines are going to be drawn? You know, like, right now, it feels like very much, you know, this, like, the liberal camp and the like, conservative camp and even more like the, you know, like the what do you say like the social justice warriors and the, you know, conservatives and like, what, how, how are these? I mean, yeah, I'm just curious. The end.

Kit Heintzman 1:08:00

Thank you so much.

Emiko Yoshikami 1:08:02

Yeah. Thank you, Kit.