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Diane Bondi: Hi, welcome to the Yoga For All podcast today. It's Diane Bondi today. Poor Amber couldn't be here. She's away at a conference, but today, we are talking to, I'm gonna say I'm fan girling a lot, to Colin Hall. He's the director of the Bodhi Tree in Regina, Saskatchewan and he was introduced to the study of mysticism in the late '90s.

Diane Bondi: He started teaching yoga in 2001 and has been teaching full time ever since. He has a background in religious studies and I believe you teach religious studies at the University of Regina, is that right?

Colin Hall: That is correct.

Diane Bondi: Right. Colin studies and teaches full time integrated approach to yoga that incorporates biomechanics, psychology, philosophy, and storytelling which is my favorite. His classes are hilarious. I can tell by your Instagram feed they are.

Diane Bondi: They're challenging explorations of the depths of the body and mind and in addition to public classes, he does teacher trainings, workshops, lectures, talks. He's on Yoga International. Yay, yay, yay! And he lectures at the University of Regina for the department of kinesiology, sociology, and religious studies.

Diane Bondi: So, welcome to the podcast. You're the second whole podcast we've done so far. Amber and I are just launching this as part of the Yoga for All revolution. You and I were on the Embodiment Conference awhile ago and we didn't get chance to talk about yoga and colonialism which is one of my favorite topics and I also wanna dive into a little bit of how do we decolonize yoga and how does colonization and yoga really create this particular yoga body that's in the image of European beauty standards, like those are the people who get to come to yoga.

Diane Bondi: I wanna talk about all that juicy stuff and maybe a little bit of Canadian politics because nobody ever talks about Canadian politics, right? We're so focused on what's going on elsewhere.

Colin Hall: It's so intriguing right now, too. There's so much to talk about. I think a lot of Americans actually have a very romanticized view of Canadian politics.

Diane Bondi: Totally.

Colin Hall: Like we must just be so nice and friendly and healthcare all the time but there's a lot of really dark, dark stuff in Canadian politics these days. It's worth talking about.

Diane Bondi: I think so too and it never comes up because we look like this utopian society because wow, everybody has healthcare and wow! Every time I go to America, they're always like, wow, you're a socialist and I'm like, well, kinda not really.

Diane Bondi: I hate to burst your bubble, we have all kinds of bullshit going on here too which doesn't quite make it to the news on the same scope as it does in America just because America's huge. The population of Canada is 30 million people which is essentially the population of California and we're sleeping next to a huge giant of, what, 332 million people?

Diane Bondi: At any time, the Americans can just roll over in bed and crush us, right? We are really fully aware of that. We're holding our ground. I always tell Americans, I live in a place where the War of 1812 happened, there's plaques all over my city and all that. I always tell Americans, we won that war. Americans beg to differ but if they had won, this would be America, would it not?

Colin Hall: It sure would be. It's funny. When you're digging back 200 years to try to find some national pride, it tells you a lot about your country.

Diane Bondi: Yep.

Colin Hall: Sometimes you talk to some sports fan and they're like, "You know, I remember back in 1971, we won the championship."

Diane Bondi: Whatever it was. We had the Stanley cup! Yeah, we do that. Canadians, I remember in grade 12, we had write an essay on the Canadian identity and that was like trying to find a needle in a haystack was the thought on that. What is it to be Canadian?

Diane Bondi: Whenever I hear you speak, I live here on the border so my accent has been greatly diluted by Midwestern America but when I hear you speak, I long to move into the interior because you, to me, sound Canadian. People always mistake me for an American, but yeah, I like to hear you speak.

Diane Bondi: I wanted to talk to you a little bit today about your perspective on yoga and colonialism and I'm really interested in hearing this perspective especially from a white dude. You know what I'm saying? I like to hear white dudes talk about this in a way that can educate all of us.

Diane Bondi: I'm really curious around yoga class, diversity, socioeconomics, the whole beauty standard around yoga, who gets to show up on the mat, who doesn't,

and how this kind of all started. I know, that's a huge conversation to have in 40 minutes.

Diane Bondi: But, I was disappointed you didn't get to talk about it and I wanted to hear your perspective on it. The way I started thinking about yoga and colonialism is I read Mark Singleton's work. I read it shortly out of my first teacher training which would've been, can't remember now, 2000 and something. 2002, 2007, something like that.

Diane Bondi: It was recommended that we read this book and I was interested in it on the origins of asana. Where does this asana come from? This idea that this 5,000 year old practice that everybody keeps saying it's 5,000 years old and they're referring to asana like there's a cave somewhere in a mountain somewhere where we've got the Ashtanga primary series on the wall of this cave and that's what we're all doing.

Diane Bondi: We all know that's not the case, that back in the time when Krishnamacharya was putting together the whole physicality of yoga, it was to appeal to a more physical culture and that asanas really made 100 years old if anything. It's not actually based in any ancient tradition. It's a lot of things that are kind of mashed together.

Diane Bondi: We've kind of made this up. I believe somebody had written it, if it wasn't Mark Singleton, that revolved triangle wasn't even a pose maybe 10 or 15 years ago or flipping the dog for sure.

Diane Bondi: Remember Wild Thing? If you're an Anusara person, there's a pose called the Wild Thing which is basically a side plank variation but that wasn't a thing 20 years ago. We're just kinda making this all up as we go along.

Colin Hall: Mm-hmm (affirmative). A couple things there. The asana practice is actually quite old. Modern asana practice, so standing postures and hand stands and arm balances and backbends and sun salutations, that stuff, the things if you went to a yoga studio today that you practice. Definitely that is 100 old.

Colin Hall: Now, you can go back and look at pictures of people hanging upside down from trees, standing on one leg, wrapping a leg behind their head, doing an arm balance with their elbow in their stomach. I don't know if you know Mayer asana, it's a terrible posture.

Colin Hall: That stuff, you can go back and find 500 years, 600 years ago, even as far back as about 1,000 years ago. People were definitely doing asana, but like you said, postures evolve over time. Krishnamacharya really drew from a number of different sources.

Colin Hall: It's a bit of a sticking point in a lot of yoga circles, but he did borrow from some European gymnastics. There's Danish gymnastics that are in modern yoga. Triangle, side angle, warrior two, these are all from a series of gymnastic postures from Denmark.

Diane Bondi: Wow.

Colin Hall: It's a fascinating story and I don't wanna dig too deep into it 'cause it gets a little bit yawnish, but there was actually a YMCA conference, it's from the YMCA! There's a YMCA conference at the Mysore Palace where Krishnamacharya was working. This is back in 1920s and it's like any fitness conference today.

Colin Hall: People get together and show off their different sort of techniques and new systems and stuff like that. Krishnamacharya saw these guys doing these gymnastic postures and was like, hey that looks cool.

Diane Bondi: Yeah.

Colin Hall: I like it, I think I'm gonna borrow it and just call it yoga. It's an amazing situation. It's funny because I think a lot of people would look at something like Wild Thing or Rockstar or any number of the newer variations on yoga postures and go, that's not traditional though.

Diane Bondi: Right.

Colin Hall: That's not traditional, real yoga. But I think when you look back into the history of yoga postures, what you find is that tradition doesn't count for much.

Diane Bondi: No.

Colin Hall: We have been innovating the whole time. We've never not been inventing postures. People inventing postures is traditional.

Diane Bondi: Nice. I always tell people because I teach from our Yoga for Everyone or Yoga for All perspective, that I'm teaching to what we consider nonconforming bodies. If we go ahead and google 'yoga' right now. Open up a browser, google 'yoga'.

Diane Bondi: You are going to see what we call conforming bodies. Usually women, usually young, usually either hyper mobile or have a certain amount of ablebodiedness. You're not gonna see a yogi like Matthew Sanford as your first image. You're going to see bodies that are able and that are thin and really, quite frankly, align with European beauty standards for the most part.

Diane Bondi: You'll probably have to scroll through a few pages before you find somebody ... Actually, when you start scrolling through the pages, you'll actually see animals

doing yoga before you'll actually see somebody of color or somebody with a disability or somebody working with a larger body before you'll see that.

Diane Bondi: There's kind of this hierarchy of what yoga looks like and for Yoga For All, I always feel like we are also bending tradition because I'm teaching to people who are bigger. When you're in a bigger body and you're practicing asanas, stuff runs into other stuff.

Diane Bondi: You have to move things out of the way and you have to sometimes use blocks or the wall or chairs to make these things accessible. I'm grateful for Mr. Iyengar for producing all these props and giving people permission to use props in a way that can align the body.

Diane Bondi: But we've taken all kinds of liberties with changing what asana looks like to accommodate bodies. I really feel that if we truly stuck to tradition, that we would get stuck or we would get lost and things wouldn't grow. But I love that you said it is traditional to innovate. That actually validates those feelings I've always had of I'm changing something that's really traditional.

Colin Hall: Yeah, it is traditional to change it. One of the most liberating things that I learned studying yoga history was that the modern postural yoga tradition not only is it only 100 years old, but it was designed for 14 year old boys and not just that, but wealthy, privileged, ablebodied, a very particular athletic style of 14 year old boy.

Colin Hall: The notion that I'm supposed to be able to practice hard enough that I'm going to eventually make my body look like a 14 year old Indian boy's body, it's absurd. That's never gonna happen. That is literally, there is no amount of practice that I can do that's going to make me look like BKS Iyengar.

Diane Bondi: Yeah. The genetics around his particular culture are different than the genetics around your particular culture and my particular culture. I always tell that to people when they pull out Mr. Iyengar's book and shows me all this stuff.

Diane Bondi: I go, okay, look at his body proportions. This is the history of his culture. It's gonna be very different in your body. When I was in Anusara yoga, there were these things called universal principles of alignment which always blew my mind because I'm in large body and these are not universal to the size of my body.

Diane Bondi: I spent a lot of time feeling less than as not only a practitioner but a teacher because I'm never gonna look like these perfectly aligned poses with inner spiral and outer spiral and body bright and all this garbage that we talked about. Sorry for those of you, if I'm offending anybody.

Diane Bondi: But all that stuff, I could never achieve and it was really heartbreaking for me in that practice.

Colin Hall: Just the notion of a universal principle of alignment, that itself is pretty deeply flawed.

Diane Bondi: Yep.

Colin Hall: It assumes that there are universals, that there is obviously one universal human body that has one universal set of principles that apply to it. It's pretty clear, it's not difficult to figure out. Just look around, there is not one universal principle that applies.

Colin Hall: You could say universally, we all stand on our own two feet to do mountain pose. Mmm ...

Diane Bondi: Right, no.

Colin Hall: Actually, no. No, we don't. Some people do not stand up.

Diane Bondi: Yes. It's true. I bought into that. I call it a cult all the time but I bought into this whole thing that somehow I was not doing this right because I couldn't figure out kidney loop or I couldn't figure out calf loop and all these things that didn't actually make sense to me.

Diane Bondi: It wasn't until Anusara yoga fell apart due to what usually brings a lot of yoga deities down that I could actually look at yoga as a place of connection for everybody, that nobody was gonna fit into this idea of a universal principle and nobody had to know what kidney loop was. Your life would still go on and yoga would still be good.

Colin Hall: Yeah. There's nothing quite like sex, drugs, and money to ruin a yoga cult, eh?

Diane Bondi: No kidding and it happens time and time again and we never learn. We're always surprised when the next big yoga person gets taken down by sleeping with their students. It always happens. I don't know. It's a human tendency? I don't know. It's a rockstar tendency? I don't know.

Colin Hall: I think that's the one right there.

Diane Bondi: The rockstar tendency, yeah.

Colin Hall: This is a topic for a different podcast but sadly we have moved away from yoga teachers as teachers-

Diane Bondi: Yes.

Colin Hall: And now we have yoga teachers as stars.

Diane Bondi: Yes.

Colin Hall: We don't have students anymore, we have fans. It's a really, really big problem because you start relating to a yoga teacher as a rockstar. They're gonna start acting like a rockstar.

Diane Bondi: It's hard not to.

Colin Hall: For sure, no, if somebody starts adulating me, I start feeling naturally, well obviously, I'm worth adulating.

Diane Bondi: That kinda is with your fun bio which I like it when you say at the bottom of your fun bio, "I walk into the center of the circle and flex like Arnold Schwarzenegger while hollering 'Colin!'" Right? If that's not a rockstar, I don't know what is. That's the best.

Colin Hall: Oh yeah. Something I should add on that bio is that I probably weighed about 139 pounds at the time.

Diane Bondi: Perfect.

Colin Hall: Six foot one, 139 and just flexing hard.

Diane Bondi: Flexing hard, an imposing presence. Tell me a little bit about your work around yoga and colonialism.

Colin Hall: In 2004, 2005, I started work on a Master's thesis. What started me off was I wanted to look at the sort of transition that's happened from yoga gurus to yoga teachers. That gurus were this general source of authority in yoga and in your life where yoga teacher was an authority in a particular field. They had one specialty.

Colin Hall: I thought that was a really interesting change. That sparked off my research and it took me to India where I was interviewing yoga gurus and got to sit down with a number of really well known teachers. I sat down, had a great chat with BKS Iyengar and those travels really got me interested in India and Indian history.

Colin Hall: One of the main takeaways that I had from my research was that the history of yoga and the history of colonialism are so tied up with one another that you can't talk about one without the other. I don't think you can actually understand modern yoga without understanding colonialism as well.

Diane Bondi: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Colin Hall: I think that sort of sets the backdrop or the canvas that I've been working on for the past 10, 15 years or so where as much as we would love to have a depoliticized yoga, where it's just nothing but crystals and dolphin sounds and ...

Diane Bondi: Unicorns.

Colin Hall: Yeah, pan flutes and unicorns playing pan flutes.

Diane Bondi: Yes.

Colin Hall: You have to know about politics. You may not want to but if you wanna understand yoga, you gotta understand the political side of it. Short story without blabbing on forever and ever, the short story is that yoga really is a colonial practice.

Colin Hall: I don't think it is in the way that most people think it is. I think when we think yoga and colonialism, we imagine really a beautiful, idyllic yoga world in India where people were just happily practicing and meditating peacefully and with love in their hearts and then evil, Western colonial people showed up and were like, "I'm gonna ruin this! I'm gonna take it and I'm gonna turn it into a product and make money off it! Ha ha ha ha ha!"

Colin Hall: The history is much more complicated of course. It's way more complex. At the heart of it, that kind of is what happened. Ultimately. When the chips are down. But the process was way more interesting than that and one of the primary things that happened and I think the main takeaways I would say from this talk that I hope people get is that the ideology of colonialism, the way it works is you get into people's heads.

Colin Hall: If I want to take over a country, what I need to do is convince the people living in that country that the way they think about things is not as good as the way that I think about things. All things western and European become better, higher, more authoritative, better for business, you'll succeed more, you'll be better looking, you'll be happier. All of these things are true.

Colin Hall: If you are more Indian in your outlook, you'll be poorer, more backward, everything is just worse. Yogis very early on in Indian history recognized this. Not necessarily white yogis, not people in North American. Iyengar, Krishnamacharya, Kaivalya, Kuvalayananda, [inaudible 00:20:19].

Colin Hall: If these names are coming out of left field for you, they're not hard to look up, these guys are pivotal figures in the history of modern yoga. But they recognized, if we keep yoga very old school, traditional, not modern, we're gonna get passed by. People are just gonna overlook us.

Colin Hall: If we wanna be taken seriously, we need to make our yoga fit this colonial model. Part of what that meant was more research. Backing stuff up with evidence and science because the Westerners all did everything based on science.

Colin Hall: If I have a gut feel for something versus having evidence for something, evidence is always better. Now, here's the fascinating thing. That is a colonial adaptation that happened in the history of yoga and I don't think it was bad. I think that was actually a really good adaptation. I'm glad that happened.

Colin Hall: Now, other things that happened. Being strong and powerful and being able to impose your will on people, being exceptional, beautiful, and magnificent and having your postures be very photogenic. These also became very important and we see this in the Complete Illustrated Guide to Yoga by a student of Swami Sivananda's, name was Jishnu Devananda.

Colin Hall: He actually set up the Sivananda ashram in Montreal. His book "Light on Yoga" by BKS Iyengar, they're these very photo driven, very aesthetically based systems of yoga. It's all about how it looks. That is also a colonial adaptation. That's a response to colonial technology, photography.

Diane Bondi: Yes.

Colin Hall: That one, that's not as good. That one didn't pan out so well. It's really tempting I think to go, "Oh yeah, colonialism. Terrible." It's terrible. Well, some things are terrible for sure. Some things are really quite bad.

Colin Hall: Some things though actually end up panning out for the better. Having a more evidence based yoga practice is going to be good. That will work out, so I'm glad that happened. I don't think we wanna get into the positives of colonialism.

Diane Bondi: Yeah, let's not have people stone us. Yeah, yeah.

Colin Hall: You know what, I'll tell you, primarily the reason why I don't wanna do that is because of where I'm sitting right now.

Diane Bondi: Yeah.

Colin Hall: 'Cause I'm sitting in the body of a six foot tall, middle class, privileged white guy.

Diane Bondi: Yep.

Colin Hall: That is not how I roll. If somebody else wants to go, hey, you know what, slow down, let's look at some of the good things that have happened, I want to encourage people to do that but I think where I sit, I need to be more critical.

Diane Bondi: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I appreciate that.

Colin Hall: Yeah. I think that's just an obvious one that anyone who's got their eyes open right now recognizes let's maybe tone down the white guys who are like, "Let's keep things the same!"

Diane Bondi: Right.

Colin Hall: "I think things are working out just fine!"

Diane Bondi: Exactly.

Colin Hall: I think maybe we've got enough of that.

Diane Bondi: Yeah.

Colin Hall: Where things went wrong and where things are really quite problematic, I think you gotta go back to Krishnamacharya and like you were saying, these pictures drawn on the wall. Ancient yoga practices that have been handed down from generation to generation.

Colin Hall: That's a myth that was invented. It was invented for a good reason. It was to make yoga old school, traditional, Indian. Something that Indian people can be proud of.

Diane Bondi: And can own, yep.

Colin Hall: They can own it, the modern postural yoga dates back to the time of Patanjali. The yoga sutras are this authoritative yoga text. This kind of stuff. As it turns out, that was a justification. That's something that people came up with as a strategy to fight against colonialism-

Diane Bondi: Yes.

Colin Hall: The justification's great, I understand it politically. I get it. Practically speaking though, we end up in a pretty bad spot.

Diane Bondi: Yeah.

Colin Hall: Because if the sequences set up in yoga are sacred and traditional and you can't bend them, otherwise you're messing with the whole thing, now we're stuck. Now we're stuck. You end up going to an ashtanga class, traditional ashtanga class and you're like I can't do lotus though. I hurt my knee, I can't do lotus and they're like, well ...

Diane Bondi: You're out.

Colin Hall: You're gonna have to figure it out.

Diane Bondi: Yep.

Colin Hall: Figure it out or leave. That root of looking at yoga as something old school, traditional, mystical, magical, that it cannot be messed with, that puts us in a whole world of hurt.

Diane Bondi: I agree. It's almost like fantasizing something. Do you know what I mean?

Colin Hall: Absolutely.

Diane Bondi: When I think of it that way. For a long time in changing postural yoga for people who are practicing with disabilities or in bigger bodies or changing the context of the class to appeal to a different cultural group and when I speak about that, I'm speaking about people of color.

Diane Bondi: Sometimes the spiritual aspects around yoga can turn off people of color who are particularly religious 'cause I constantly see posts online about the spirituality of yoga being against whatever their religious values are.

Diane Bondi: When I go into spaces where that might be an issue, I don't frame it in a spiritual context. I frame it in a context of okay, we're highly stressed people. People of color are highly stressed in the current climate, right? We're seeing what's going on in America at the borders. People are feeling depleted, people are feeling discouraged.

Diane Bondi: I'm using that as the platform in my community. Diabetes tends to be high and heart disease tends to be high and there's a whole lot of economic reasons for that. There's a whole lot of historic reasons for that and I'm trying to appeal to that demographic to get out and get moving and get some breath and get some stress relief so that we can reduce some of the symptoms if not help them heal from these diseases or injuries.

Diane Bondi: I think it's very important that we know that when we look at things in a certain traditional context. Sometimes, that's fantasizing something.

Colin Hall: Absolutely. If I can go back to this idea of this spiritual aspect of yoga, I think what ends up happening is kind of a strange little flip because if you go back and again, looking back at yoga history, one of the innovators, one of the main people that developed not modern postural yoga but traditional hatha yoga, the yoga that was around 1000 years ago. His name is Gorakshanath.

Colin Hall: Goraksha mythologically is said to be the student of a guy named Matsayendra, who we know from a pose called Matsayandrasana. It's a twist in yoga. But what's really interesting about Goraksha is in a lot of his books, he talks about

the conflicts in India between the Hindus and Muslims and how he feels sometimes like a Hindu and sometimes like a Muslim and very often, like neither.

Colin Hall: He feels like a yogi. I love that idea that you can be at times a Christian and at times not feeling like a Christian, not feeling like ... That's not really where I identify. At times, you can just sort of let go of all of those sort of religious identities and just practice yoga.

Colin Hall: That's really going back to this whole idea that yoga is for everybody. At the outset, the first person to practice yoga was like let's not get hung up in identities about who's who.

Diane Bondi: Yeah.

Colin Hall: Let's try to make a yoga that's for everybody. Rather than saying, yeah I'm gonna develop a new style of yoga called God Yoga or Jesus Yoga, rather than trying to find a little slice of yoga for my tribe and for my people, let's look at taking the barriers off, taking some of the shackles off and actually trying to find ways to legitimately integrate Christians into modern yoga.

Diane Bondi: Yeah.

Colin Hall: Not find a yoga that works for Christians but to stop putting up these walls to keep Christians out. I think it's a little bit of hot button issue, but it's very tempting to go, well, saying om is not religious. That's not a religious thing.

Colin Hall: Well, let's dig into the yoga sutras, what does Patanjali say about it? Patanjali says "om" is another word for God. When you chant om, that's an invitation to God. For somebody that really has a hard time with the idea of another God other than God, I'm thinking particularly of Muslims, they're not gonna wanna be in a class where you're chanting om.

Diane Bondi: Yeah.

Colin Hall: That is not friendly to them and I think that it's very tempting as a modern yogi to be like, oh, you know what, it's just a spiritual practice, it's not a religious practice, stop being so hung up about stuff.

Colin Hall: Well, I think that we actually need to go a little bit deeper than that and rather than just accepting the fact, say well, it's not religious, it's spiritual. What if someone else thinks it's religious?

Diane Bondi: True.

Colin Hall: That doesn't make it not religious. That's drifting a little bit away from colonialism but it is something that Sarah and I were talking about last night and it is really interesting to me that I never even thought about accessibility from the perspective of religion.

Diane Bondi: I don't think many people do.

Colin Hall: Didn't occur to me.

Diane Bondi: I don't think many people do really.

Colin Hall: Yeah. Are your classes religiously accessible or are they limited? Are they limited to people that sort of fall into that spiritual but not religious, New Age-y-

Diane Bondi: Category.

Colin Hall: I believe in karma and reincarnation but not in the ten commandments. If that's your market, fair enough, that's cool. But it's kind of weird to say I teach accessible yoga when you have millions and millions of people that go, I would never practice that, I can't.

Diane Bondi: Yeah, I can't.

Colin Hall: It's against my religion. That's an interesting little nugget.

Diane Bondi: It is and I've never given it as much thought. Now that you mention it, it's going through my head because for me, with accessibility, if it was going to make people in my community not come, I took out whatever aspect that was gonna be troubling for them.

Diane Bondi: Not om'ing and I tell people in my teacher trainings, if you really wanna make yoga accessible, if you're gonna open a studio, no Buddhas, no pictures of Nataraj on the wall, no Ganeshes at the desk. Have a space that's just completely neutral. Do you know what I mean?

Colin Hall: Yeah.

Diane Bondi: Just have the props you need to do the physical practice. You can talk to people about managing stress or navigating the world. I always talk about yoga connected to social justice, navigating the world with their practice using that to help them see what they need to see or get what they need to get.

Diane Bondi: But to just take off all the iconography that we see with yoga and when I talk about things like that, I'll get the diehards in my community complaining that I'm now watering down the teachings. That now, I'm not being authentic 'cause

there's a couple studios here in town, right in their advertising in their tagline, they're saying, "Authentic Forms of Yoga".

Diane Bondi: The problem that I have with that is that these are privileged white women who may have done a lot of studying but feel like they're some kind of authority on this yoga practice and are teaching from this borrowed perspective. Do you know what I mean?

Colin Hall: I sure do. Yeah. There's Joseph Alter, wrote a book about yoga and wrestling and the connections between the two. That a lot of yoga practices are actually drawn from Indian wrestling techniques. They're workouts. The sun salutation for example, it's basically a push up.

Diane Bondi: And a burpee, right?

Colin Hall: And a burpee.

Diane Bondi: If you're gonna jump forward, it's a burpee.

Colin Hall: He's talking about people doing burpees and thinking it's a spiritual practice when it has been a workout in India for hundreds and hundreds of years.

Diane Bondi: Yep.

Colin Hall: He has this line that he says. As he's talking about this stuff, he says, "Handing note" for everybody, "there is no authentic yoga." No authentic yoga, no authentic yogis. No such thing. That doesn't exist.

Diane Bondi: I love that because it takes the pressure off of everybody, doesn't it?

Colin Hall: Chill out!

Diane Bondi: Please! We're making this more difficult than it needs to be. We're being decisive where we don't need to be. Whenever I read that advertisement or see that advertising come up, I wanna storm into the studio and, "Tell me! Tell me exactly how you're authentic. Tell me."

Diane Bondi: Because you chant? Because you do these specific postures? I get we wanna hang on to the tradition and I get that we wanna acknowledge where this comes from. As a person from the black community, my culture gets appropriated all the time. Nobody ever gives credit for that, so I get the feeling of not wanting to dilute it.

Diane Bondi: But, do you know what you're diluting is the question. Do you honestly know where this comes from? Can you honestly speak to this authentically or has

somebody, a guru that you follow, told you this is how it is and you just take their word for it?

Colin Hall: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. Let's circle back around on that because we talked a little bit about our conversation on modern yoga at the Embodiment Conference.

Diane Bondi: Yep.

Colin Hall: When colonialism came up, I brought it up when we were talking about Sanskrit and the use of Sanskrit in classes. Now here we have this really interesting situation. I think it's fascinating because again, I'm not an answers guy. I'm a questions guy.

Diane Bondi: I appreciate that.

Colin Hall: I don't have answers on this, I just got a really interesting question. The question is in terms of accessibility and inclusivity, making people feel comfortable, probably ditching Sanskrit's a really good idea.

Diane Bondi: Yeah.

Colin Hall: Just use English. It makes people feel at ease. You start using Sanskrit, people start to stress. They're like, ah, I don't even ...

Diane Bondi: What is that?

Colin Hall: Know what you said. That makes sense to me. However, yoga came from India. Sanskrit is the language of yoga and I think to some extent, don't we need to ... I'll phrase it this ...

Colin Hall: There's two ideas I'm gonna put on this. One is in India, during Neeraj, British colonialism, a lot of the cities got renamed. The name Bombay, that was first the Portuguese showed up and they were like, "Hey, this is a really nice bay." Bombia. Literally, it's nice bay. Bombia. They just named it this is a nice bay. So, nice bay in Portuguese is Bombia.

Diane Bondi: Oh wow.

Colin Hall: Then the British show up and they're like what is this place called? The Portuguese say it's called Bombia and they're like, "Bombay? How delightful."

Diane Bondi: Oh gosh, yep.

Colin Hall: They just slap their own damn name on it, right? No context, no history, no checking with people that live in Mumbai to say, "What do you call this place?" Nope. It's called Bombay now. I feel the same thing can happen really easily.

Colin Hall: You take something like virabhadrasana. This is a pose dedicated to an incarnation of Shiva who is this fierce warrior who is dangerous and aggressive and violent and in the mythology of Virabhadra, he is violent because of loss. He's been wronged and that anger has to get tamed and toned down by letting go of his past.

Colin Hall: It's a beautiful story and I think it really informs our practice of the posture. Now, when we say warrior, what? You had this amazing mythological reference. Virabhadra, there's a whole story and we switch it. Warrior.

Colin Hall: The pose baddha konasana used to be called Gorakshasana which is a reference to Goraksha who I talked about earlier, this student of Matsyendra, one of the innovators of traditional hatha yoga and we change it to bound angle and then people are like baddha konasana, I don't really like saying that, I'm just gonna call it butterfly.

Diane Bondi: Makes everybody happy.

Colin Hall: Then we end up with this same situation of this to me is appropriation.

Diane Bondi: Yeah.

Colin Hall: I don't really like what that's called, I'm just gonna call it something else and if we're not careful, two or three generations down the road, the mythology of Virabhadra, of Goraksha, all the history and the richness of yoga gets stripped out and we've got just randomly named postures that don't matter.

Diane Bondi: Yep.

Colin Hall: Right?

Diane Bondi: Yep.

Colin Hall: I think there's a tension in modern yoga that we need to resolve and we resolve it by having conversations like this.

Diane Bondi: Yes.

Colin Hall: Just talking about it. To what extent do I teach based on inclusivity, accessibility, and putting people at ease? And to what extent do I teach in recognition that I am entering into somebody else's culture? I am participating in it and as a result, I have an obligation. I have a responsibility to that culture.

Colin Hall: I need to represent. They're not simple issues. It's not like just never use Sanskrit or just always use Sanskrit. It comes down instead to we just gotta get smarter. We just need to learn more. We really need to focus more on education in yoga and to have these really difficult and interesting conversations.

Diane Bondi: And I love these conversations. I have these conversations a lot in my teacher trainings because I come from a culture that's highly appropriated, I feel bad about appropriating somebody else's culture. In teacher training, I will have somebody come in and tell the story, somebody from the culture come in and tell the story 'cause I kinda feel it's not my story to tell.

Diane Bondi: I'll often do that or often will reference people to books that they should read that they know the rich history behind it. Then when I usually teach, I will teach in English and then I'll say, "In Sanskrit, they call this pose" this post for this reason just so that I'm giving both contexts, I'm giving both the English and the Sanskrit.

Diane Bondi: My other feeling around the Sanskrit is I'm probably butchering this pronunciation, so I'm already ruining it. Do you know what I mean? I don't feel comfortable, it's not my language. I'm not a Sanskrit scholar, I heard so and so say it.

Diane Bondi: I downloaded an app when I was in my second yoga teacher training where it taught you how to phonetically pronounce these words and I spent a lot of time trying to make sure I was doing it justice because I feel ...

Diane Bondi: A friend of mine was teaching at a class and she was saying savasana which is how we've all been kind of taught to say it and she had some South Asian women in her class who would giggle every time she would say it. Then at the end of the class, she says, "We actually pronounce is suh-vasana."

Diane Bondi: She was like oh. You know what I mean? I just don't want to ruin something that's not mine or just that whole Bombay, that's what I'm doing initially by mispronouncing the Sanskrit.

Colin Hall: We don't wanna end up getting freaked out-

Diane Bondi: Too late!

Colin Hall: When you're talking anatomy, that's Latin. We don't say my shin bone, right? We recognize, there's two. There's a fibula and a tibia down there. There's two different bones. We use the Latin. Most people are totally cool with that.

Diane Bondi: Yeah.

Colin Hall: Right? It's a different language and you do have to learn a different language if you wanna learn anatomy. But we don't think to ourselves, oh my god, am I gonna pronounce the Latin correctly? We don't stress over that. We just learn the language.

Colin Hall: I think mostly it's because there's no question, universally, we accept Latin is the language of anatomy. We've accepted that, so it's a non-issue. We just deal with it. Would we rather say arm bone than humerus?

Diane Bondi: Right.

Colin Hall: But arm bone is so broad, it's so vague, it's not descriptive. A humerus is just a humerus. We know exactly what it is and I think we can get to that with yoga. I think it's possible to just start to develop.

Colin Hall: We have now a global, a transnational yoga. This is all over the world. There's people who speak all kinds of different languages. The reason why we have a global, universal language for anatomy is so that people don't mess up.

Diane Bondi: Yes, we're all talking about the same thing.

Colin Hall: If you say I have a broken tibia, you don't want your doctor being like going in and doing surgery on your femur because they messed up.

Diane Bondi: Right, or your humerus or my big word of the day, your lesser trochanter.

Colin Hall: Whoa.

Diane Bondi: Whoa. That's my big word of the day.

Colin Hall: These words matter.

Diane Bondi: Yes.

Colin Hall: They have real meaning. There's a reason for them to be there and I think the same is true for Sanskrit. I think that it is difficult and it does freak people out a little bit and it might be worth it.

Diane Bondi: Yeah. I could talk to you all day about so many topics, so I have to invite you to come back on the podcast. I wanna talk about the problems with yoga celebrity.

Colin Hall: Oh yeah.

Diane Bondi: You must get this too. Sometimes I go places and people look at me with this huge admiration and I usually start by saying please don't, I'm just a yoga

teacher. I've maybe learned a couple things that you haven't figured out yet and I'm trying to save you some steps on the path by showing you a few things.

Diane Bondi: But, I'm gonna fart or swear or eat something you don't approve of and then I'm gonna fall right off the pedestal you put me on. I would love to talk to you about students versus fans, the rise of the yoga-lebrity. I think that's another great topic and how that's kinda destroying the whole purpose of yoga.

Diane Bondi: I'd love to have you back on the podcast. I just, I enjoy your persona so much on Instagram. If you're not following Colin on Instagram, you really should. I love it when you do your yoga dance party and you superimpose yourself with a rainbow afro and you're wearing some kind of '80s get up. I just think ... In England, they say you just take the piss out of it, right?

Diane Bondi: You just take all this tension out of it. You just have fun with it and I appreciate that about you so much. I think you're freaking hilarious and you are what we need in modern yoga because I think we've just taken it all so seriously and everybody's just so freaked out and nobody's getting exactly what they need anymore.

Colin Hall: It's funny. Again, no answers from me, just more questions but on the one hand, I'm like, you know what? We need to get more serious about yoga education.

Diane Bondi: That.

Colin Hall: We really need to learn more. Yes, I agree. And we really need to lighten up. We just need to frickin' relax, have a good time, have a laugh from time to time. Again, I sit in this really odd, tense place between I'm superimposing my face on John Travolta on the one hand.

Colin Hall: On the other hand, I'm like I would really like to learn more about Sriendra's yoga institute in Mumbai.

Diane Bondi: Yes. I think that's a great dichotomy. I think that is complimentary opposites. I think that's amazing. I love the idea that more yoga education and I really try in my 200 hours to direct people to be inquisitive, to be contemplative, to not just believe it because I said it, not just believe it because this is what somebody wrote, but research it and be curious.

Diane Bondi: Let's not be sheep, right? It just seems like we just follow along 'cause somebody somewhere said this once. I can't tell you how many times I've been caught misquoting great gurus. For the longest time, I was saying that Mr. Iyengar said, "You're only as young as your spine is flexible." It turns out that's Joseph Pilates who says that. You know what I mean?

Diane Bondi: There you go. That's not me. I need to educate, really source out what I'm talking about and not just repeat what my teachers say all the time, right?

Colin Hall: Let me sign off by saying as far as yoga celebrity goes, I aspire to have to deflect the level of yoga celebrity that you have, Diane.

Diane Bondi: No. Stop, stop, stop.

Colin Hall: The only thing I get is really sort of impressionable undergrads who seem to think I'm smarter than I actually am. This doe eyed thing in class.

Diane Bondi: That's your celebrity right there. You know exactly what I'm talking about. Colin, what are you doing with your life these days and where can we find you?

Colin Hall: I think my Instagram's a good place to start. It's @colinyogin and you know, Facebook. I manage Bodhi Tree Yoga's social media accounts so you can look up Bodhi Tree Regina. We are gonna be heading back to Pennsylvania to film some more Yoga International classes soon.

Diane Bondi: Fantastic.

Colin Hall: People can head to Yoga International. I've got articles and classes up on there and yeah, Sarah and I have just been over the course of the last year or so trying to find ways to maintain what is a really excellent yoga community here in Regina, Saskatchewan.

Colin Hall: I'm so happy to be a part of and we've really I think done ... I'm really proud of the community that we've built at our studio at Bodhi Tree and the emphasis on yoga therapy is I think something that is rare and something that I really wanna maintain.

Colin Hall: We're trying to balance that now with this pull to be teaching out of town more and doing more workshops and teacher trainings and filming more online classes. This is sort of the place that I'm at right now is how do I maintain a really strong connection to my yoga community here in my city and still be traveling and teaching and sharing what I think is really important stuff with the rest of the world and with a broader sense of the yoga community.

Diane Bondi: I'll be looking to you to see how you figure this out and then you're gonna have to come back and share on how that exactly works. Thank you for being a part of the podcast today.

Colin Hall: It was a great pleasure.

Diane Bondi: Thank you! And we'll have you back. Colin Hall, everybody. Check him out on Instagram at @colinyogin. You can check him on his website so you can just

google Colin Hall and I really, really recommend that you follow him on social media because it's like the highlight of my day to see you superimposed on John Travolta's body.

Diane Bondi: I just gotta say, I wanna come to your DJ rocking out yoga party because I just need more joy in my life, right? Yay. Thanks, Colin.

Diane Bondi: Hi, thank you for listening to the Yoga for All podcast. You can listen to us on Itunes. Please make sure you like, share, and rate. We'd love to hear from you. If you wanna get in touch with us, you can always email us at yogaforalltraining@gmail.com or you can reach out to us on our social media pages.

Diane Bondi: Me, @dianebondiyoga on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter and @ambercarnsofficial all on her social media channels. I'd like to thank Kyle for producing and editing this podcast. If you wanna be on the podcast or if there are any topics you would like us to cover, please reach out. Don't forget, you can always email us or find us on social media.

Diane Bondi: Thank you, everybody. Until next time.