

# SO GLAD YOU ASKED about Religion and Disability

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## SPEAKERS

Ilyse, Megan

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- I** Ilyse 00:18  
This is keeping it 101 a killjoys introduction to religion podcast. In 2022- 2023 our work is made possible through a UVM reach grant as well as a Luce AAR advancing public scholarship grant. We are grateful to live teach and record on the current ancestral and unseeded lands of the Abenaki Wabanaki and Aucocisco people's and as always, you can find material ways to support indigenous communities on our website.
- M** Megan 00:41  
What's up nerds? Hi, hello, I'm Megan Goodwin, a scholar of American religions race, gender and politics.
- I** Ilyse 00:47  
Hi, hello. I'm Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, a historian of religion, Islam race and racialization and South Asia.
- M** Megan 00:53  
We have new mics, new mics.
- I** Ilyse 00:56  
We're very excited. And you know what, Meghan? I feel a little self conscious because my entire voice wants to drop into an NPR register, just because this big fancy padded microphone is up in my biz.

**M** Megan 01:07

Yeah, I'm Sylvia Poggioli. And this is whatever show she hosted. I don't know I was there a long time ago.

**I** Ilyse 01:12

Anyway, I'm kind of doing like an SNL in the 90s like sweaty balls moment, but that's a different.

**M** Megan 01:17

I think you're thinking of the delicious dish knee that's exactly what I mean.

**I** Ilyse 01:21

I mean, I only remember the punch line because it's me. But yeah, that's right.

**M** Megan 01:24

I remember all of it because those were the calls I was fielding while I was at the front desk of WBUR Boston's NPR news station. So when the lady called for the recipe about the turducken, which I had never heard of at the time. It it struck a chord.

**I** Ilyse 01:40

let's uh, let's move on from job related trauma and move into our personal traumas because nerds. We have a so glad you asked. That is actually an amalgam of many questions that some of y'all asked Megan and I to talk about our own mental and physical health and ability and how it informs our research since in dribs and drabs over the last two years we've said things like "our bodies don't work". Others of you have asked us to talk about how ableism impacts religious practice just as a general query, Dr. Emily Gravett asked us to talk broadly about religion and disability. And because you all asked all of those questions, we have an episode to record why I'm so glad you asked!

**M** Megan 02:26

We sure, do you care a lot about this question and about disability because we are humans with bodies, and all bodies will eventually be subject to rot seeing is how we are literal sacks of meat. always my favorite visual. It's a terrible operating system. You are welcome. I also want to say out loud that I care about this question specifically because I am at least on paper. I'm

finding myself qualifying this already but also in material ways that I really struggle to talk about and frankly admit even to myself sometimes am disabled. So to talk about religion, and disability is both really important and really hard for me, which I guess is the job. Let's fucking go.

I Ilyse 03:05

It is the job. And I'm going to do that thing that best friends do where they say I'm really proud of you.

M Megan 03:10

Hey, thanks

I Ilyse 03:11

You're welcome. Let's start simple Goodwin, since I feel like both of us are both going to get emotionally invested in this question. Goodwin we always say that religion is what people do. Way back, way back in season two, when we thought the pandemic might be over imminently. We said that if religion is what people do, and people invariably have bodies, yes, all of them we need to care about things like race, gender, and sexuality, because those are also things that people do and have done to them in their bodies. Yeah, that's correct. Now ability we didn't touch because we needed a thesis statement for season two, and we were already doing way too much because what kind of morons put gender, race and sexuality into one? Like eight episode season.

M Megan 04:00

US morons? Those are the morons.

I Ilyse 04:03

But we're here to rectify that because people have bodies because bodies comes in all shapes, sizes, capabilities, health statuses, and more. A framework of disability is yet another thing we have to take seriously if we take religion seriously.

M Megan 04:20

Religion is what people do. People do religion in their bodily homes, their bodies demand care. They demand attention and accommodation. Yes, good. Got it check. So in short, we can't actually think about the range of human experience of, with, around, in, through religion without thinking about ability and disability. We just can't, can we?

I Ilyse 04:40

No, no, we cannot. So to reiterate, we are so glad you asked about our own bodies, how religious bodies navigate ability, and broadly so the ask the questions that we can think about religion and disability with y'all. Yeah, that's that's a lot. Megan for one little episode.

M Megan 04:59

Correct.

I Ilyse 05:00

So as usual, I think what we're doing here is given like a taste of these huge topics, and we're gonna point folks to where they can get fuller meals in the homework later

M Megan 05:09

Dope. Yes, good

I Ilyse 05:19

all right, let's start at my favorite place, which is to say definitions. Always always a stone cold, enthusiastic, it's like, you know, she gives it she's giving melatonin.

M Megan 05:30

Okay, I love melatonin and definition. So let's set up.

I Ilyse 05:33

Alright, so Goodwin. Here's what we need to define. What do we mean when we say disability? What do we mean when we say ableism? What do we mean when we say accommodations or inclusion?

M Megan 05:43

Okay, yeah, sure. Great. Cool. Come out the gate like that's fine. Good. I expected by now but also still the nerve, the Gall, the absolute gumption? Fine, fine. I will define disability just real quick, cool. Um, there is no one definition. Because disability is a concept but it's also a legal category in the United States, among other nation states. So like very, very broadly. Disability refers to mental and physical realities that might limit or impede or structure one's movements, senses or abilities. In terms of how activists and theorists and people living with disabilities talk

about it, disability's often framed as any so called deviation from normative assumptions about movement thinking, emotional processing, and just the way our brains work or are supposed to work.

I Ilyse 06:31

Yeah, yeah. And okay, so as a framework of analysis, disability or disability studies is asking us to think about how bodies move, sense operate in the world, how they think how they process which bodies we value as so called, good, normal, active, industrious, strong. And all of that is in scare quotes. Yep. And disability or disability studies are asking us to question why and how those rules came to be. It's also asking us to think about why we're so comfortable ignoring disability or blaming disabled people for their disabilities or why we are so set on one way to learn, to think, to move, to be in the world is the only way that we can actually do anything, right. So the idea that there is A way to get from the first floor to the second floor, and that if you do not get up that way, you are somehow wrong, different other, disposable.

M Megan 07:27

Or just stuck on the first floor. Like, that's just your fault. No second floor for you.

I Ilyse 07:33

Disability studies in the framework of disability as a concept of analysis is asking us to ask why the fuck is that? Yeah, yeah.

M Megan 07:41

If this were Scooby Doo, this episode would be ripping the mask of disability off to reveal you guessed it, straight, white, cis, Protestantism. Will I find a way to make this conversation about graham crackers? I most certainly will nerds you. Stay tuned.

I Ilyse 07:53

All right. Let's stay on target, Mary. We're still defining our terms. Goddamnit.

M Megan 07:56

Fine, right. Yes. Okay. Okay. You also asked about ableism, which in its simplest terms, is the assumption that all bodies should function at 100% of what we assume is normal all of the time. If your body needs help, that's your too bad. I am being snarky here because of course I am. But I also really want you all to hear that we live in a society, which means we must care for and protect each other. And we all have bodies made of meat, which I have already stated categorically is a terrible thing to build an operating system out of because it has a 100% fail rate. And it starts breaking down immediately upon launch, much like your iPhones. Folks lucky

enough not to have to confront these incontrovertible facts. They fucking suck at acknowledging these setbacks, much less making space for bodies to be different from one another and need different things. So we see ableism at work when systems and people decide that making space for those bodily differences is just, it's just too much work. So Oh, well. We see ableism at work in for example, what's now the United States when systems that are supposed to make it possible for you to access medical care, a thing that 100% of all meet body's need at some point in their lives. When those systems become inaccessible through cost or distance, or frankly, in difference. Insurance, which already fucking sucks is getting more expensive because 2.5 years into a pandemic, more people need medical care. What the actual fuck. So ableism assumes that if your body which includes your brain, BTWs, isn't normal, then you as a person are less deserving of care or consideration or humanity. You are less capable of making your own decisions or having autonomy, less capable of being a productive member of society. Please hear both the scare quotes and my slash our absolute disgust at that capitalist bullshit, which is of course white western Europe, Protestantism with the serial numbers filed off. Ableism means we work while we're sick because even being thought or perceived as disabled, is frankly dangerous. Ableism like racism and sexism also makes someone's level of ability or disability all you need to know about them. Ableism makes ability, the truth of ourselves, makes disability the defining quality of a person or group of people. Ableism is for my part, why I came out as queer a fucking decade before I came out as disabled. Why I and so many of my neurodivergent colleagues and friends didn't get the help they needed earlier in life. And ableism honestly makes needing help a problem and a personal failing, ableism should suck my dick. But ableism should not enjoy it. No, it doesn't get to enjoy it. No.

I Ilyse 10:28

Now ableism can suck my dick also. But not enjoy it. Ableism sucks a lot and is so omnipresent, even in ways that that most folks don't think about. We know, I guess we'll come back to later on as we get into some of some of the the meat of this episode. But I want to stick on definitions because my job as executive functioning Chief, Chief Officer of executive functioning is to keep us on track. So we have one more thing to define, which is "accommodations and inclusion", which I'm lumping together here for time. And because I actually in a political way, want those things to be the same. Yeah. So would you like to take a stab? Or do you want me to?

M Megan 11:07

I will try. Accommodations are also one of those tricky words. Because it's both a framework. How do we make adjustments to our teaching? To our buildings? To the way we literally accommodate folks with varying degrees of disability or ability. But accommodations is also a legal framework, at least in what's now the US. And it centers on employment law or education usually, which is really tricky, because that means the onus to prove disability is tied up in forms and paperwork, often medical diagnosis, often institutional surveillance in really creepy, gross ways I say from personal experience. But it also means that those formal paperworks and diagnosis can be held against you later on, which is sadly a common experience for disabled people, including me. I filed for FMLA leave last fall in large part because my university really pushed me to which is a longer story. And while Massachusetts is among the best states in the country to knead medical leave in, my employer covered that the time that I was on leave at 100% of my salary. Federally, your employer is required to cover 0% of your salary while you're

on medical leave, you're allowed to take it, but they don't have to pay you. So just stop there for a moment. So okay, filed for FMLA leave, I truly had a best case experience while also being deeply traumatized. And PS, we're two years out from a presidency that actively tried to dismantle the Affordable Care Act. Getting rid of the ACA would be disastrous for a lot of reasons. But the idea of being out in the streets with a documented pre-existing condition, and a documented request to accommodate that condition, frankly, kept and keeps me up at night. So yeah, accommodations are how we think about meeting disabled folks where they are. Hey, did you know for example, that you can anticipate and plan for common disabilities in your event or your classroom, even if your students or your participants aren't registered with the institution or university? Because you can, but accommodations are also a legal category in the context of employment and education. Certain protections require folks to jump through hoops to prove they need, deserve help, which is gross. That's fucking gross.

I Ilyse 13:04

Yeah, and talking about accommodations in education is a different day. But all of you should be doing Universal Design Learning Strategies, because you should anyway. I piggyback accommodation with inclusion on purpose because I want I want them to go together lots of activists, particularly disa- disabled activists really want us to stop thinking about how we can accommodate which is like a cousin to tolerate, disability. Rather think about how we can lower the barrier of access to as many people as possible. So how do we include as many people as possible given any given setting? So let me give an example. You just said the FMLA, FMLA in my universe of parents is usually what women use to take maternity leave. Yeah, because Pregnancy is a disabling event, according to your insurance, right? And it's also being a lady as a pre existing event, because at any moment you could get pregnant and thus be disabled. So aside from that example, which everyone, you should be doing drugs about,

M Megan 14:02

yeah, do a lot of drugs about that. And obviously, women are not the only people who can get pregnant or are affected by this, but they are clear terms in the insurance world of forms.

I Ilyse 14:12

Let me give you an example. One of my favorite go tos on how disability is conceived as the obvious one, right? Like in the US, we use an image of a person in a wheelchair, just a stick figure in a wheelchair as our symbol for either handicapped or disabled, depending on where you are and what kind of phrasing you use. But often in regards to parking and other things that require, wait for it... access. The movement to make sidewalks usable for folks in wheelchairs and other assistive devices was one of the most visible campaigns of the early disability movement, which in the United States is we're just celebrating the 25th anniversary of the ADA. But like, not only wheelchair users use sidewalks or benefit from this movement, which got ramps and on sidewalks and like curbs being lowered. For example, parents using strollers, able bodied grownups elders who find the step up kind of hard in this example, not just benefit from the accessibility, but also we can conceive of those people, a parent with a stroller, an elder with a mobility issue, we can conceive of them as being limited and impeded by ableism. Not necessarily by disability. Right? So, we see that those things are different,

which is to say that disability is a theoretical framework thinks about access, regardless of the user. It's not saying, let's make this accessible for paraplegics. It is saying, how do we lower the barrier for participation across the board? Yes, for paraplegics, but also elders, moms with prams, me on a bad arthritis day, you name it? How do we include as many people as we can, while maybe accommodating people with specific needs, but not only those people, all people?

**M** Megan 15:58

Yeah, let's say that again, one more time, because it's important all people benefit when we prioritize access. Yes, all of us, it's better for all of us, it should be enough that it makes it better for any of us. But in reality, we all benefit when our world is as accessible as it can be. So this conceptual framework, which has been built by disabled activists and scholars, is often referred to as Crip. Lit. And it comes from disability studies and queer studies, places where folks are navigating and resisting the labels abnormal and normal. They're pushing those boundaries, it's a movement to center disabled and increasingly chronically ill, mentally ill, and neurodivergent voices as a way to push back on ablest ideas about the world. There is infinity more to say about this, but we want to get to the religion of it all that is our beat. So why do we care about crip theory and religion?

**I** Ilyse 16:56

Well, shocking, no one, I have three, three main reasons.

**M** Megan 16:59

The reasons were threefold.

**I** Ilyse 17:01

Number one, all religions already address disability, whether we think they do or not. Now, they don't always address them well, positively or kindly mind. They're certainly not addressed evenly. Disability is a hallmark of human life, and our religions are already thinking about it. So if we skip this, we miss shit.

**M** Megan 17:24

Correct.

**I** Ilyse 17:25

Number two, people with bodies of all abilities participate in including leave religious traditions, and are themselves making sense of ableism within these spaces, so again, if we ignore these folks, we miss the story. And third on my list is, is us. We're going to talk about ourselves in this section about how we're experienced as religious people with varying levels of ability. So let's



actually dive in, let's address disability what's address point number one how religions already addressed disability. Now nerds, like this is a drive by okay, we're doing like some real shout outs here. It's not enough but you know what homework? So for me, sometimes I'm stuck on how this looks really shitty, right? So in Abrahamic tradition, disabilities, particularly physical, what's perceived to be physical disabilities are punishments from God. Yeah, it's a fairly common perspective in Abrahamic traditions. Or you get this shitty place where disabled people are meant to be more pious. So like, yeah, disabled people are uncommonly pious are, uncommonly good because look at what they have to manage and they're still so brave or grateful. Yeah, no bull. This particular bit. Where like, disabled people as special on some sort of like piety pedestal is fairly common, but I'm going to call it out, especially in both Christian medieval philosophical traditions, and modernity.

**M** Megan 18:54

No, yeah, no, like contemporary. There's a whole gross corner of the internet where particularly Christian, but not only Christian folks are using the language of angels to describe particularly their disabled children, which makes me want to peel my face off with my fingernails because they're not angels, they are children with disabilities. And also,

**I** Ilyse 19:12

I don't want you to be at an exposed meat face.

**M** Megan 19:15

Well, then the world needs to get better.

**I** Ilyse 19:17

Okay, you heard it here first, get better or expose meat face.

**M** Megan 19:23

Those are your options.

**I** Ilyse 19:24

Yeah, so and sometimes we see disability particularly in Abrahamic traditions, and I'm staying there because it's comfortable. We see disability, particularly around mental illness, being lauded in ways that I'm uncomfortable with right like healers or speaking with Gods are speaking in tongues are being touched. So folks that we might today say they're having struggles with mental illness and might could use some support or medication or community. It's like, no, they're a profit. They're a seeker. They're communing with God. And so in some

traditions that gets lauded and in other traditions or another settings, that gets medicalized and institutionalized, but we see religions, understanding disability from the textual level. So like, this is not new. This is like, you know, ancient texts.

**M** Megan 20:11

Well, and there's also a flip side to that, right? Because folks that I'm in community with and folks that I have studied, have ecstatic religious experiences, have conversations with the divine, and the flip side of that is having those experiences, dismissed, denigrated pathologized as mental illness. So this is a complicated space. And I'm just going to assign some readings. I think it's what's going to happen there, the end.

**I** Ilyse 20:36

The Yeah, I mean, and it's also a really racist space, right.

**M** Megan 20:39

Very racist and sexist.

**I** Ilyse 20:41

One of the spaces where modern and medieval philosophers derived Islam as a false religion is calling Muhammad, an epileptic, and therefore, he is broken and damaged and a false prophet. Now, I want you to hear that all of that is fucking fucked up. Yeah, that's gross. It works in both ways. And so I think, yeah, it's complicated. Let's just leave there. Yeah. The other way that traditions have already addressed disability is sometimes it actually looks like access and help. So I actually went to this talk recently, that like my shul did on this like disability access thing. And like I have, I have lots of critiques. But the thing that I thought they did well was in the Jewish tradition, there's this moment where Aaron and Moses, and Moses has this like severe speech impediment, and Moses is embarrassed to talk, but he also has to lead his people and his brother Aaron helps him out. Right. So the idea here is that Aaron helps him without shame without judgment. And just because I know you can do, not overcome, but I know you can lead our people, and so let's work with you until you do it. So that was used in this setting of like, Midrash spaces to think about how we already are doing things like accommodation and inclusion in our texts, we just have to find the places to celebrate that.

**M** Megan 22:00

Yeah, oh, I really like that. Well, that is nice. And then I'm going to bring it back to gross stuff. Because

**I** Ilyse 22:05

I threw in one nice because we got a sandwich, we got sandwich good.

M

Megan 22:08

The other thing that immediately comes to mind, we're talking about religion and disability, in the US context, are spaces where white Christian nationalists tried to breed out disability in some really gross ways that Hitler for one found really inspiring. So I am thinking of communities like the Oneida as a new religious community in upstate New York, that had very specific ideas about how their residents should have sex, and to what end, specifically to perfect human genetics. I said I was gonna make it about graham crackers. And I am graham cracker emerges out of again, another white Christian nationalist, although not explicitly white, Christian nationalist, but not. Those serial numbers are not all the way off. Efforts to perfect Americans and by Americans, they mean, specifically white, able bodied Christian men and women, especially men. But not only, graham crackers come out of the idea that if you control the body, you can control the mind. And so if you don't get yourself all riled up, you won't have the wrong kind of sex with the wrong kind of people and make the wrong kind of babies. So just think about that. The next time you have this more, you're welcome. The last piece I want to bring in is that these white Christian eugenics trains of thought, were weaponized and enacted on the bodies of black and native folks for as long as we've been a country. So we see forced sterilization of black and native women, access to health care denied and so black and native families less able to have their own children. This is it's so structural, that it's I think, what we want to do here again, is just name it and say, we'll get you some more resources in the show notes, but you need to know that fixing and breeding out disability is also a raced, a gendered, a sexual struggle in religious spaces as well. Yeah, absolutely.

I

Ilyse 24:11

And it's really hard, particularly the modern era to talk about disability without talking about eugenics. Yeah. Just straight up. Yeah.

M

Megan 24:17

Which you know, we see popping back up in times of COVID. And who should get care first and how. Yeah, anyway

I

Ilyse 24:32

okay, the second way we said that religion matters in this is that people with bodies of all abilities participate in religious traditions and they are thinking about ableism in their own tradition. So one of my favorite examples for that is that in Islam salats, or salah when the man is prayer, and there's a prescribed physical component to it. So you stand up you bow you kneel you prostrate in a very particular order, but for eons, elders whose knees have gone just like, you know, bring, bring a chair to the back. And they make accommodations to do the prescribed ritual motion in a way that is amended for, say, an arthritic body. And I'm using that as an example like notice nerds, I keep using elders as an example, because as we said, at the top, we are all living in rotting sacks of meat like that is who we are. And so things that we,

disability activists for years have said, we all have the potential to become disabled. Yeah, if you live long enough, if you live long enough. And so there's this way in which Islam is already thinking about that. And we see that in Islamic legal traditions, but also like folk and common practices, it's not making a big deal of it. Broadly speaking, no one's like standing up at the front and being like, Okay, everyone who's elderly and gets that like crack, snap, crackle, pop in their knees, y'all come get a chair and hang out. It's just how else are these elders going to make this work and God is merciful Alhumdulillah, God is not asking us to do shit that harms our body. So of course, you should pray in the way that makes sense for you.

**M** Megan 26:03

Sorry, this is Islam. It's not Catholicism, God loves it when we harm our bodies. This is a long conversatin.

**I** Ilyse 26:10

And we're not going to like we're just going to pause on your traumas. And I once went to North, can I tell a story? I once went to an orthopedist in New Jersey, New York. And this guy was like this big fucking hotshot. And he was like, such an orthopedic bro. And if you know what, I know if you know if you know, you know, right. And he said something like, Catholics have kept me in business for 25 years because of because of all the fucking kneeling. And I was like, 16 or 20, whatever. It was, like my mid it was my middle knee surgery, whatever the middle knee surgery was, and I was like, I don't think that's like, I don't I don't think you're supposed to say that. But I was also like, that's funny. I don't like I don't know what that's, that's funny. But he was dead serious. Like, that was not a joke. He was like, No, for real, like Catholics have paid for my pool. It's awesome.

**M** Megan 26:59

You're welcome?

**I** Ilyse 27:02

Yes. So let's, let's keep going, shall we, okay.

**M** Megan 27:06

So again, chronic illness is a thing. Sometimes our bodies are temporarily disabled or when you require special circumstances. Even if you're not claiming to participate in disability activism. People have for generations made accommodations. Without maybe using that language, right. A breastfeeding room at your church is an accommodation that lowers the barrier of access for all people, right? Using microphones is an accommodation for people who are hard of hearing. But it's also an issue of access for folks with a number of other issues, including neuro divergence, undiagnosed or unnoticed hearing loss, et cetera. This is I'm gonna stop and plug we get a lot of conversation in conference spaces where there's always one person and I have

been this person who doesn't want to use the mic, because they're very loud already. Best practices for accommodations for ability for access, is you use the microphone, because even if you don't need it, you don't know who benefits from it. Everybody benefits from it. And don't put the onus on the person who needs help to do what's best for everybody. Anyway. We also see accommodations like ramps and elevators and assistive devices and all of those seem like they might be for disabled people, but they help kids they help moms, they help elders.

I Ilyse 28:27

They also just help us not get so goddamn sweaty walking, like no one wants to live in a six storey walk up.

M Megan 28:32

No, it's Stinky So that's better. Like sometimes you have to move a box. It's just nice to have options. Plus, disability isn't always in everywhere genetic, right? So paying attention to things like churches and schools and mosques, managing amputees and war veterans as community members, parishioners, but also thinking about like theological concerns starting in the mid 19th century, but definitely spiking after in really horrifying ways after World War One.

I Ilyse 29:00

So, yeah, so these are not new issues, because what used to kill us many years ago, doesn't kill us anymore because of medical intervention. But it means that we need to then figure out how do you deal with a community that, I once, I don't remember whose article was but if I can find it, I'll put in the homework. I once read an article about when churches became mic'd. So like when did everybody Oh, right there sound systems. And it was really after World War Two, and everyone was like a a tech boom, and it was like, Nah, all of these men came home deaf from ammunition rounds. Yeah. And so it wasn't just that the technology was available and affordable. It was also a need in their community so that people could listen to the sermons.

M Megan 29:42

No, that's really smart. Or I'm thinking of and I'll put this in the shownotes as well. Lynne Gerber's work on the tape recorded sermons for members of MCC San Francisco during the AIDS crisis. Folks were too sick to get to church. So they recorded all the sermons. So that they could listen at home.

I Ilyse 30:02

Yeah, yeah. Which is to say nothing of like creative community, right, like deaf Deaf communities that have started wholesale Deaf churches. Yeah. Because the mainstream churches wouldn't or couldn't or refused ASL interpreters. So like, you see an exclusion and

then you see the creative creation of space precisely to meet that need. Yeah. So in conclusion, not In conclusion, but to cap off that section, people of all abilities are doing religion, and they're doing religion in ways that serves their multiple abilities.

**M** Megan 30:35  
Yes, they are.

**I** Ilyse 30:42  
All right. Our third thing was we care a lot about religion and disability, because we are religious people who are also chronically ill or fit into disability frameworks.

**M** Megan 30:51  
Yeah, yeah, we are. Yeah. And this is a thing that I am still struggling with and learning about. In part because yeah, internalized ableism means I don't like thinking that my body isn't fine all the time.

**I** Ilyse 31:06  
You fucking potato eater?

**M** Megan 31:07  
I know I'm fuckin, so Irish Jesus. So I'm like, okay, yeah, internalized ableism also sometimes looks like the family of your birth and or raising convincing you that needing care is a personal failing slash and imposition on the people who love you question mark. And I'm still unlearning that, but it's also for those of us who are neurodivergent. Learning later in life, that things didn't have to be so hard, even if you got through, that has been a mindfuck to like, oh, shit, I wasn't enough of a problem to get help, is really still messing with me. And I still feel like I'm cobbling together, learning and knowing about my body with the help of other disabled folks, because those resources aren't widely available to so many people like us. So that's frustrating, being diagnosed with MS. A month after I defended my dissertation. That was, that was, I'm still dealing with medical anxiety around knowing that my immune system is attacking me body like, literally attacking and scarring my body. And there's, there are things I can do about it. But I can't fix the lesions that are already in my brain and spine. They're just there. That's what happens. And some of it is just dumb stuff. Like, my ankles are bad. And there might be medical reasons for that. And there are certain things that I can do it but like, truly any outing with me and Ilyse can attest to this has to think about I am at any given point 25 to 75% likely to roll an ankle. So what are we doing if that happens?

**I** Ilyse 32:39

I have to say I treat you like I treat my kids. No, but different. Like, the way I treat my kids is at any minute we could go to the ER because they're wild. For you, it's like you I don't I've never seen feet work like this, and I got some busted ass feet. And yours just you know what, they just don't love supporting you all the time. Sometimes. You know what I need? I need a rest.

**M** Megan 33:00  
Yeah, I'm out.

**I** Ilyse 33:01  
But like mid step. Dudes pick it pick your battles. Not right now. No, they don't make good choices for me, or for them. I imagined them as independent. They seem unruly.

**M** Megan 33:12  
This was actually this is a fun thing that I learned. I took a class that had a unit on acupuncture in college and the practitioner came in received about, I also learned about dowsing. Anyway, the acupuncture practitioner that came in and talked about how acupuncture works said that in modern acupuncture practice, the way that they talk about realigning the energy in bits that aren't working, is that they're basically being selfish. Like they they're not doing the best. They're not being good communists, they are not getting with the system.

**I** Ilyse 33:44  
And your ankles are fucking capitalists,

**M** Megan 33:46  
They are so fucking capitalist, they are capitalists swine.

**I** Ilyse 33:51  
So we care about this because it affects you directly. But also I think if I can maybe reframe you and so cut me off if you think I'm being unfair. And I it's always weird when we disclose that we're like super besties in this way. Like I also think that your practice of religion and particularly the ways in which you do witchy things you do so in a way that is gentle and works with your body and its various descriptors rather than works against it. And so I think for you the religion disability pieces that you found a space that was really affirming of your body, particularly of the way that normative spaces other your body. Yeah, and so I think that's a really fruitful place for you.

**M** Megan 34:27

Megan 34:57

Well, it's also it's been a fun series of revelations to realize, Oh, this isn't me, this is so many of the people I care about, including my religious communities of like neurodivergent queer people tend to move in herds like dinosaurs.

Ilyse 34:54

We say with love dinosaurs are fucking cool. Yeah.

Megan 34:57

But like it's it's been a cascading waterfall of having other witchy friends be like oh maybe this also maybe the autism maybe the ADHD man Oh, and the overlap between witchy folks, queer folks, and neurodivergent folks is that's almost a fucking circle. It's um, may be self selecting but it is a space of possibility and I I like that and I celebrate that. So I guess it's your turn.

Ilyse 35:26

It's my turn it is your turn. I have had arthritis since I was a kid. I have been diagnosed with PTSD and chronic PTSD for all sorts of reasons which we will not get into, my mother in law is deaf and born deaf. My grandma my I called him grumps, my grandfather was an amputee, World War Two veteran, and I have worn glasses since I was in high school. So there are lots of things that I use and need accommodations for, right? Like, we often don't think about glasses because they're funky, but I can't see without my glasses. So it's a disability.

Megan 35:57

It's just a disability that we've normalized so much that we don't talk about it as such. That's exactly right.

Ilyse 36:02

And it's it's a common experience. And therefore we do not see it as the same kind of impediment. We saw it maybe 100 years ago, when it was very expensive and hard to own glasses. Right? So as access increased, stigma decreased.

Megan 36:17

It's also like you don't get the conversations about like, it's your fault that you need glasses.

Ilyse 36:22

No, but you do get the conversations like it's your fault, you're failing, or it's your fault. You're



not doing well in school. So like there's a history of having worked at an eyeglass store for, for a number of years. Yeah, most people that are that would be labeled as legally blind in the world just don't have working glasses, right? Like it's actually an access and accommodation issue, not a wow, this percentage of the world can't see.

M

Megan 36:47

Yeah, it's also this is a conversation that I have a lot with myself, and also the internet around stuff like autism and ADHD, but particularly the autism piece, because there is a whole really robust conversation about whether or not autism should be thought of as a disability, because it's a lot about the world doesn't work for you, you're seeing as you're seen as a problem. And if we reconfigure access and what we expect of people in community with one another, would it still be a disability, the way that particularly nonverbal autistic folks are treated makes autism a disability. But there's a question about whether or not it has to be and whether anything has to be a disability, or whether we can rebuild the world so that it works better for more people.

I

Ilyse 37:32

I think that's right. But I think that where the religion piece comes in is that we have notions that pre exist, our own cultural relevance about what normative bodies are, and are supposed to be. And again, we've talked about that in terms of race. We've talked about that in terms of gender. This is really more focusing on the ability piece, but we're not ever going to escape the fact that, like, deafness shows up in the Bible, and it's not really a good thing. And so how do we navigate that is a political project as much as it is a religious project? Yeah, I think I think we're done with primary sources. We care because we live in rotting bags of meat. Mines like a crunch, mine has like too many bones or something.

M

Megan 38:17

You have way too many bones,

I

Ilyse 38:18

I have way too many bones.

M

Megan 38:21

Primary sources!

I

Ilyse 38:23

Yeah, what a fucking bummer. All right, let's sum it up. Disability Studies asks us to take seriously that people's bodies are varied in their shape, size capability, and further asks us to look at the power inherent in making some bodies labeling some bodies incapable to wrong to

be allowed, dangerous or not entirely human. This matters because people doing religion are doing it with their bodies. And our understandings of bodies are, as you know, shaped by religious ideas, and then often codified into law, whether that's religious law, or state law, as we see in the US, which has done some fucking monstrous things to disabled people, like institutions for the mentally ill, which were really just homes of abuse, which included like depressed, postpartum people and deaf folks, and you know, queers, broadly. But I'm also thinking about the ways in which disabled people are imagined as disposable, unemployable uninsurable, unhomeable unlovable and absolutely murderable, which like we can cite the Nazis but we can also cite the US government and its treatment of disabled people, particularly black and native disabled people

**M** Megan 39:34

I like I specifically want to because this is a conversation that happens not just about access, but equality. Disabled people have to maintain a certain level of poverty in order to maintain access to disability benefits.

**I** Ilyse 39:47

So tell me about it.

**M** Megan 39:48

I know you know, I'm not sure that our nerds know that like, not all disabled people can get married because joint income means they lose access to their benefits.

**I** Ilyse 39:56

Where benefits is health care.

**M** Megan 39:58

The stuff that keeps them alive. Yeah.

**I** Ilyse 39:59

Hmm, we can also think about the ways in which historically and contemporarily disabled people are allowed to rot in various systems of so called care whether that's the school system that pushes them through or ignores them. Whether that's carceral systems where mentally ill people are locked up at a higher rate than the so-called normal average public. And this is about the removal of disabled bodies from our line of sight rather than creating accommodations or creating spaces of inclusion or god forbid care. Yeah. Yeah. So in conclusion, we salty about disability access, and we think you should too, so let's you know what, Megan? Yeah, we've got some homework, we do want to homework.

M

Megan 40:41

Well, so I want to underline again, it's not just that we're salty, it's not just that it's disability, it's important that you hear that our understanding of disability is a religiously informed way of thinking about bodies whether we are seeing it or not. It comes out of some really messed up white Christian hetero capitalist thinking, the root of our discomfort as a society with bodies that quote unquote don't work right our brains that quote unquote, don't work, right. That's not outside religion, either. The end,

I

Ilyse 41:14

And I might stash in the show notes some of the stuff that like missionaries were doing with disabled communityies. It's just so depressing. Alright, let's, let's just assign some work. That's time for homework. Shall we take turns it? Alright, so there's a Crip Lit syllabus that's just available online, and it's pretty great. And it's an intersectional, queer crip lit syllabus, and I think it has a lot of really great stuff that I'll stash on there. Katie Rose Gues Pryals work is outstanding. And I want to I want to highlight exactly like the most relevant of her work, but like we'll link to her whole shtick. It's called "Life of the Mind interrupted: essays on mental health and disability in higher ed". And frankly, if you are someone who's in higher ed like us, you should read this book. A friend of the pod Kelly J. Baker has also done a lot of writing on disability, especially on mental health, and one that I think is accessible and really kind of good to read is called "No Shame in the Medicine Game". Hmm. Sara Imhoff is another go to for me and she's got this she's got a whole book on disability Zionism in one particular figure of that movement, but I think this is the thing you should read, which is Why Disability Studies Needs to take Religion Seriously. So it's a critique of disability studies from the religious studies standpoint, which I think is really excellent. Nice. Now I'm only partway through this new book, Meghan because I do all my Crip Lit stuff, like in bits and pieces when I can handle it. But it's a book by philosopher Joel Michael Reynolds. I'm gonna qualify that this is a dude doing continental philosophy, which is not usually my thing. And his book is part memoir, part philosophy, but what I like about it so far is that it is 100% a takedown of ableism in philosophy and it has my attention. It's called The Fife Worth Living: disability, pain and morality. Hmm. In terms of it's like a little bit niche, but my next one I actually really liked. It's by Robert McGrew, or it's called "crip times disability globalization and resistance". Nice. And not my usual bag. I don't think I've ever ever assigned a poem for homework in anything I've ever taught. I'm gonna say ever outside of a Sufism class. Oh, damn. Maria Palacios 2017 teen poem called Naming Ableism is great. It's like fucking great. Oh, and the last thing I wanted to say was Leonard Davis's "Enabling Act: the hidden story of how Americans with Disability Act gave largest US minority its rights" is also a pretty dope book. Guess that's a lot.

M

Megan 43:35

It is a lot but all of it sounds great. And I can't believe you poem getting soft in your old age.

I

Ilyse 43:40

Who the fuck am I? I'm an imposter.

M

Megan 43:44

Love it. So I just I'll add a couple more things I've already mentioned Lin Gerber's word work, but she specifically wrote an article about being fat in the time of COVID. And having being fat be a preexisting condition. That means that you are assumed to be more likely to get COVID. But the you were also facing a lot of cultural resentment about getting access to vaccines earlier because of having that condition. So that was a whole mindfuck. She also has, again, this great projects that she's doing on MCC San Francisco and the audio archives of sermons of for folks who couldn't be there in person because they were living with HIV AIDS in the 80s and 90s. I honestly hadn't thought of that as an ability/disability issue. But of course, it is so, thanks to you, Ilyse for opening this conversation that was helpful. I'm also going to shout out Anthony Petros work and "after the wrath of God" thinking about AIDS in the way that religious communities rallied for folks dealing with a disabling and for many people, killing event. Last one, Rebecca Epstein Levy has a great piece that again, I don't know that she would qualify as disability studies. She has other stuff on too disability explicitly as well. But the first thing that I thought of when we started having this conversation is a piece that she wrote about how medieval rabbis can help us think better about sexually transmitted infection, which sounds like a stretch, but it's really not. The article posits that medieval rabbis knew that contamination was inevitable, right? Like you fall in and out of ritual purity. So rather than treating, getting sick, as a moral failing, what if we assume that because we have bodies that are crumbling around us at all times, that we're gonna get sick, and we plan for it. And we make plans to bring people back into community, which I have found really powerful. And then the last thing I'm going to recommend, which has very little to do with religion at all, but does have a bunch of medieval paintings that have religious imagery on them. I'm going to recommend Hannah Gatsby's "Douglass", which is a special on Netflix, and it is her narrating her way through being diagnosed as a high functioning autistic woman in her 30s So that has been really useful and illuminating for me and a number of other people that I know so you should watch it. It is both funny and was really helpful for me.

I

Ilyse 46:12

Shout out to Evie Wolfe, Rachel's Zieff and Juliana Finch the key I want one team whose work makes this pod accessible and therefore awesome, listenable, social mediable and among other things for which we are very grateful.

M

Megan 46:22

Yes, we are. You can find Meghan that's me on Twitter @mpgPhD, and Ilyse @profIRMF or the show at keeping\_101 Find the website at keepingit101.com Find us on Insta and now on tick tock just juggernaut on our way into 2017 Drop us a rating or review on your pod catcher of choice and with that peace out nerds do your homework. It's on the syllabus