

We Outside Podcast Transcript
Episode 3: Sacred Gifts and the Ecosystem of Spirit with guest, Ellina Yin

[Opening Quote] Ellina Yin: [00:00:00] There is something to be said about the power of stories. 'cause if particular stories weren't powerful, there wouldn't be such a thing about banning books, because those are the stories that have the power to liberate and decolonize the mind, and that's why they're so hellbent on suppressing them.

[Static Intro] [00:01:00] Ain B.: Welcome to the We Outside Podcast, where we explore leadership through the lens of spirit restoration and transformation. I'm your host, Ain B., a restoration practitioner and founder of New Seneca Village.



In each We Outside episode, we engage in generative conversations with guests who are redefining what it means to live and work outside of the dominant imagination.

Today's guest, Ellina Yin, has such a heart for community. In particular, she is at the forefront of inviting people into civic participation by demystifying and clarifying the structures, systems and processes of local government.

In this episode of We Outside, we explore spirit as ecosystem, ancestral gifts, and their role in shaping identity, the impact of storytelling, and the power of collective action.

You can find Ellina's full bio in the show notes and in the end credits for this episode

Join us as we move beyond the confines of conventional thinking and into other realms of possibility. Now let's dive into today's conversation.

Ain B.: [00:02:00] Hi, Ellina.

Ellina Yin: Hello.

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Ain B.: Thank you so much for being here. I'm really excited to have a chance to talk to you because I am so inspired and delighted and non paternalistically proud of all the work that you're doing, in particular to demystify our governance and to essentially democratize democracy, which you shouldn't have to do.

Ellina Yin: You should not.

Ain B.: But you're doing it, and I'm so grateful for that. So I'm excited to lean into the conversation, but first I want to just welcome you to the podcast and ask you to give our listeners a sense of where you are right now as far as location, what your pronouns are, so they can be thinking about you and referring to you in the way that you desire.

And then just share with us a little bit about what's your internal weather today or in this moment, and why.

Ellina Yin: Hello everyone. I'm really excited to be here and I am tuning in from a Muwekma Ohlone land in, also known as San Jose, California. And I would say my pronouns are, she / they, and my internal weather system right now is very much trying to sink into the change of the season.

So adjusting to the light. It started raining and things are looking a little bit more gloomy, but things are just slowing down. And so internally I find myself also trying to slow down and adjust and then conserve my energy and like really focus on, you know, the next few months ahead.

Ain B.: Yeah. Thank you so much and welcome. My name is Ain B. Pronouns. She /they. I'm located on the ancestral and unceded lands of the Muskogee people, Alabama. And my internal weather in this moment is crunchy. Crunchy, like the leaves on the ground. I know it's fall because the lights are going down earlier, but I really know it's fall when I'm crunching across leaves everywhere I go, which I love 'cause I love the fall. So my internal weather is breezy, crunchy fall, leaves brown on the ground after having done lots of good work all summer.

Ellina Yin: Mm-hmm. It felt like the shift happened really quickly with the weather and the sun and I was like all the sudden, why is it so dark?

Ain B.: No, truly. I was like, so much trying to not be with the brutality of summer here in Alabama and then I'm like, but the, but the sun, you know, it seemed like as soon as it got cool, then the sun stopped.

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So I'm like, it's an invitation to myself to how do I enjoy all the seasons for what they bring, even if I don't love all of the parts of what they bring. Yeah. So I love the sun being up later, but I don't like the heat so I can enjoy the sun.

Ellina Yin: Yeah. I love sweater season. I do.

Ain B.: Yeah. Yeah. Fall is, fall is a fave. So thank you for being with us. I wanna begin our time or conversation with the question of what is spirit and how does it move through you?

Ellina Yin: [00:06:00] Spirit? To me, I would say that spirit is an ecosystem and there's many levels to how spirit moves through me. And I think the first and foremost is the spirits of my ancestors and what has been given to me.

And you know, that's my DNA, what I've built with my lived experience, their lived experience. And then there's the spirit of where I physically am located. And so the lands and all of the other living beings past and present and future. And, so to me, spirit is like this big ecosystem and this sensory organ of a body that is constantly feeling and taking things in.

And so there's different, I think, aspects of spirit that move through me and speak to me, you know, throughout the day, throughout the seasons. And so it's a cacophony of many things. And practicing mindfulness and tuning in, especially like tuning out all of the constant input from all of our devices and work and urgency culture.

Spirit is the things not captured by our devices. The real things, felt and unfelt. And so to me, spirit is an ecosystem and it's very much dependent on where you're rooted. And so we're connected. I believe we're connected to different spirits depending on where we are, the community we have around us.

And so my spirit ecosystem is very particular to my locale and my culture.

Ain B.: Beautiful. Thank you so much. I really hear the relationality in the spirit as you name it, in this moment. And when I think about ecosystem, which I do often, I really think about the energy flow, right? Like the reciprocity inside of that connection and relationship that's like, Hey, I've got it right now, and in a moment you'll have it and back and forth that we're in this together.

So I really love this description you have for spirit. Of feeling very grounded in the togetherness of it and just the relational aspects. So thank you so much.

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Ellina Yin: Yeah, you're welcome.

Ain B.: Can you share a bit, I heard clearly about ancestors. Can you share a bit about spirit working through them and through you?

Ellina Yin: Mm-hmm. So there is this study that some folks might have heard about. It's about intergenerational trauma and it's about these mice that they had in a laboratory and, you know, they had the mice smell cherry blossoms and then every time they smelled the cherry blossoms, they were accompanied by a shock, an electric shock, not very nice.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Ellina Yin: And they did this a few times and then they stopped. And when those mice had babies, they monitored the babies as they grew up. And when those babies smelt cherry blossoms, they had like cortisol spikes and they were really stressed out even though their physical bodies hadn't experienced that experimentation.

They carried that lived experience passed down from their parents. And they found that up to, I think the second, maybe third generation of mice. And so when I talk about the spirit of my ancestors, there is that aspect that I think our culture really focuses on. But our ancestors, I believe, you know, they passed down a lot more to us than just trauma.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Ellina Yin: And so there's a lot of gifts from hundreds of years and centuries that have been passed down that has kept us alive and helped us develop particular skills. I think there is a lot of different ancestral spirits that I carry, and throughout my life, I think there's certain ones that speak louder than others.

And so it's kind of almost kind of like that movie, Inside Out. And, you know, new spirits are introduced when you enter pubescent.

Ain B.: Yes.

Ellina Yin: And so I think when you enter different stages of life, there's like, you know, another door is unlocked. And so that's the intergenerational part of, you know, relearning my language, spending time with my parents and learning more and more about my grandmother, my great-grandmother and different occupations. Like I found out one of my aunts was one of the first female

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pharmacists in Cambodia, and we had architects in our family. And so there's all of these things that I've always enjoyed, but I didn't know why.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Ellina Yin: [00:11:00] And I was like, oh, maybe because my aunt is into it, or my uncle was into it. And there's certain things that I come across in life that sometimes I find like I have an innate attraction to it or like a keenness for a specific topic. And then, you know, later I'd find out, oh, that was something that your uncle really enjoyed. Funny that you enjoyed that too. And so I kind of see it in that way.

It's like it's dormant and it awakens when things happen or at certain times. And I've been really focusing on the gifts. And focusing on nurturing certain skill sets and things that I have a natural curiosity for.

And so that's kind of like my intuitive compass of what I want to explore next is what is that desire? Where is it taking me? Why is it taking me there? Is not as important as just the journey of, I'm being drawn to this place, I'm just gonna go and I'll find out later what it's all for.

Ain B.: Yeah. Beautiful. So I really hear a lot about curiosity and also craft, right?

Ellina Yin: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: So that your ancestors practice craft around certain things or even just resonance if it's a thing they like. I love that. Oh, your uncle liked that, interesting about you.

Which again, is relationship. It's how are we not only being in relationship with whatever that task is or whatever the area is, but also in relationship across generations without even necessarily proximity through the energetic field, which I love so much.

Ellina Yin: Yeah. Yeah. I love that you brought up relationships because, you know, that was them being in relationship to my mother or my father. And it makes me think about, you know, my relationship to my niece and to the children, to the many children I have been blessed with in my life, and like how I interact with them, as well as colleagues and people I collaborate with, you know, the folks at [New Seneca Village](#) that I still keep in touch with.

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Ain B.: Mm.

Ellina Yin: [00:13:00] And it's definitely given me a sense of reverence for the relationships in my life and being really intentional in how I cultivate them and take time to nurture them because we only have so much time in a day and there's always a competition for our attention and our energy and focus.

And it's like a constant battle to pull that energy back to yourself. And I was like, no, I'm gonna direct it over here.

Ain B.: Yes. Yeah. That reminds me of, feed what feeds you, right? As a way of thinking about discerning what and where to spend, to your point, very precious time. In a very long, but also very short life.

Ellina Yin: Yes.

Ain B.: Can you share more about how your gifts show up in your contribution to our civic duty and access?

Ellina Yin: Mm-hmm. So. It definitely started with circumstances that were beyond my control or my parents' control. My parents are survivors of a genocide and so they came here as war refugees and back then in the early eighties, not that much has changed now, but most of the forms are in English.

And so they were here with no money. They had to learn a whole new language. And so I grew up in between cultures, very much immersed because physically I'm here now. And then also in my home it was a different culture and so my parents leaned on me to help them interpret the world. And out of circumstances, there is no blame at all or shame anywhere in this story, it was just the circumstances that we were all in.

And so I had to learn at a very young age how systems work and the importance of words and navigating and also interpreting because there's certain things in the English language that are just not transferrable to the Cambodian Kumai language.

There's like a whole different way of being inside languages. And an example I would share is the word chet, which is the Kumai word that kind of means like your, your heart and your mind, but it's one thing versus if you think in English, the heart and mind is not only separated, but there's a hierarchy of which comes first, especially in professional settings.

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[00:16:00] And so there's a lot of code switching and culture switching. And so I've always existed in this space where I'm constantly reinterpreting and putting things back together in a way that made sense to me and it was because of those years of interfacing with our government that naturally as I got older and I started voting and figuring out all these systems, I started seeing, I think the mycelium network of, I guess the larger government system.

And it is complex, but it's not rocket science and it's not as inaccessible as if we were in a completely authoritarian government, which is a thing right now, right, that we're working through.

Ain B.: Yes. Yep.

Ellina Yin: [00:17:00] And so I just. From this talent, I guess, or skillset that has been cultivated out of circumstances. I'm now applying it in community service to San Jose and to Santa Clara County.

And, community service is also culturally a very important thing in Cambodia and one of the things I hear a lot from people who have been to Cambodia. They always say, oh my God, the people are so nice and they're so helpful. And that's a culture thing. And my parents always really instilled a strong sense of community service and love for your country and service there.

And so I feel like this is, you know, my service to my community is to take these things that I do have a unique understanding of, and then explain it in a way for folks to also feel, not that they're just absorbing information, but that they're receiving it in a way that empowers them. And begins to, to cultivate a sense of agency that they do have the power to change these circumstances.

But democracy is not a solo sport. It's a team sport. And so you have to build your community and once you're able to find that community and you figure out how things work with persistence, things do change.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Ellina Yin: It's constantly back and forth and we definitely need more organizing and more systems to support people, the people who should be in charge. And so I feel like part of my life's work that I guess I've just been gifted through the circumstances of how my parents came to America and what I have been able to figure out through this self-teaching model is what I have to give. It took a while to accept that, but it was just, it was so incessant.

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Like any moment that I was relaxed or doing something else, as soon as I found a homeostasis and I would get into the creative zone. It'd be like, oh this government system, and like, I see how it connects. That's where my mind naturally always went.

And I was like, why? I just keep going there. And I don't know if you've had those experiences where you had this idea, but you don't act on it and then you run into someone else that's like, that was my idea. I totally had that idea.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Ellina Yin: [00:20:00] But it didn't physically manifest, like you didn't do anything with it, which is not a right or a wrong. I think there are these ideas that kind of exist in the spirit ecosystem. And they latch onto whoever's listening. And they have the opportunity to come through many individuals. And maybe that's the idea that latched onto me and I just decided to act on it.

And there's other people who had the same idea as me, but didn't act on it. But I'm so thankful that you acted on it. And so this is the thing, the spirits have been very, very incessant and very loudly speaking through me. And the more and more I listened, I feel like the more and more easy things got. It kind of just fell into place. And so that's kind of how I got into local government and explaining local government, and it's been a lot of fun because when I see it work, it's really exciting.

And there's also definitely a lot of heartbreak, but it's part of the process. And when I have community members that I'm organizing with, it's not as heartbreaking anymore because I see the process of organizing and civic participation not as a one and done deal.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Ellina Yin: You know, like there's just endless seasons of football and soccer. Like, you just keep going. It's just something that you keep doing. And, then bring in the practice of mindfulness and like eating and sleeping and all that stuff. But I have time carved out to work on this stuff, and then I have time carved out to be with my loved ones. And be in nature and do other things. And so these boundaries keep me in a healthy place. And that's been a big focus since the pandemic, really being firm with my boundaries.

And so now that I have these lanes and I know when to go into which and when to take a break. I feel like that's been like the ultimate superpower of staying

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sane and still being hopeful and still being able to have enough spirit and energy and focus to do things.

Ain B.: Yeah. Thank you so much. I resonate with so much of what you're sharing in particular, the sort of field of spirit and that the concepts that resonate with our hearts come to us, but could come to anyone. And it's whether or not we pick up the phone when it's ringing to say, okay, fine, sure it's me.

You know, I'll say the [Village](#) is a direct result of a similar practice of hearing spirits say for me to do this. And me being like, no thanks, that sounds like a lot of work. It sounds like a great idea, but a lot of work. No, thank you. And then over time it just kept returning. And as we know and see, Spirit is touching many others with this concept and these concepts.

So I wonder if you would say a bit more about this transition from, well, I was resisting a little bit and then, oh, I finally got on board and then what transforms as a result of getting on board with spirit.

Ellina Yin: [00:23:00] Mm-hmm. So it was quite traumatic. It was kind of a moment in time where everything else was just falling apart. And it was definitely during 2020. It actually happened around December 2019. And then there was just a series of events that happened in 2020 where we were all very confused, especially during the beginning because we had no idea what was happening.

Yeah. And, I think the coronavirus and having seen and experienced so much death and carnage in the world and everybody being so scared and also being very isolated from each other was very eye opening. And it just felt like, this is it. This is the moment. Do or die. And I was like, well, if the world is ending, I might as well just go for it.

Ain B.: Right.

Ellina Yin: And, so it was definitely a series of circumstances. I think one of the biggest transition moments was, it's actually around this time, so I remember it distinctly, It was the night of August 16th, 2020, and we had the most amazing and phenomenal electrical storm, this thunder and lightning storm I had ever seen. I've lived in San Jose my whole entire life. I've never seen anything like that.

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But those were the same lightning and thunder that started the fire. And so then we were stuck inside with orange skies for a month. And I was like, you know, marking the calendar and it was exactly a month that we could not go outside.

So from August 16th to September 16th, we couldn't go outside. We still went outside 'cause we did have to go outside to go, you know, groceries and things like that. At the time, I was part of this kind of mutual aid at a local farm in San Jose, and every Friday there would be like 13 of us and we would go and harvest food from the field and fill a box, 40 boxes for people who were facing food insecurity during the pandemic because they had lost their jobs.

And so we did this every Friday for pretty much since like February until December. And, there was a point where the organizers did call it, like, you can't be out here, it's so unhealthy.

Ain B.: Ah,

Ellina Yin: But our essential workers were still out there.

Ain B.: Right.

Ellina Yin: So there were just all of these compounding events. And so I felt like, if essential workers can still show up and, you know, keep the system going. I, at the very least, can answer this call and do a podcast from my closet.

Ain B.: Yeah.

Ellina Yin: And then it was just like, you know, step by step. And the first month that I launched the podcast was actually just a few weeks after the Black Lives Matter protest started. Oh, I'm getting emotional thinking about this.

Ain B.: Mm. Take your time.

Ellina Yin: Yeah. and so everything was on Zoom. We were fully in the zoom verse and people were showing up to city council meetings for the first time ever across the nation, talking about police budget and just budgets in general.

How does our city budget work? And so I found myself right in the middle of that, like interviewing the city manager. Here's how the city budget works. This is the committee that you go to to find out how they're working it. And this process happens every year for Santa Clara County and the city of San Jose. It starts around December and it really takes off between March and June every

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year. And, as I was going through this, I kind of just started meeting more people. People started reaching out to me and one of the things that came out of launching the podcast, answering the call, was a person who had just gotten a job with the city of San Jose in the newly formed Office of Racial Equity that we marched for in June. And they were coming from the east coast and they found my podcast and they were listening to it and they were like, this was a really great job orientation.

Ain B.: Yes,

Ellina Yin: I learned so much, and I'm really thankful. Do you wanna turn it into a class for the city? And so that led to a contract and we ended up launching this civics masterclass that's now gonna be in eight languages, which has never been done before in the nation. Like, no other major city has this in eight languages.

Ain B.: Congratulations, Ellina

Ellina Yin: Thank you.

Ain B.: That's a big deal. I mean, as a former government employee myself, who could have used your podcast because I'm like, when was the last time I even took civics? Fifth grade? Sixth grade? You know, it's like totally disconnected from my life at the time. I had a master's in public administration, had worked at the city, but still there was so much that I learned just on the job through the eight years. And it's like that. Not everyone can go get a job at the city to learn how the city government works.

Ellina Yin: Mm-hmm. And that shouldn't be the way democracy works.

Ain B.: No, no, not at all. And, you know, like even at the city, they didn't have documents translated into eight languages. So, congratulations.

Ellina Yin: Thank you.

Ain B.: That's a big deal.

Ellina Yin: [00:29:00] Yeah. Really, really exciting. So I felt like the more I got into this, the more affirmation I got from my ancestors. They were just like raining down affirmations and little signs here and there. And then I started getting messages from friends, and now they call me like the civic doula and they, I get messages like, I'm really angry about this. Like, what do I do?

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Ain B.: That's beautiful. Yeah. Oh, thank you so much for answering the call, but also for sharing with us about it. Right. Because, I think spirit in its innumerable definitions and manifestations is not a thing we talk about often.

And, it often does come down to those moments of being very much stripped bare so that something new can come in, or so that you can hear the thing that's been there the whole time. You know, and finally lean in, pay attention, get curious about that.

And it's just lovely to hear a bit of your path to it and then, you know, in celebrating what has come and become and still becoming that you are able to really be a contribution for others, but that also others are getting to come and learn how they can be a contribution to others through your work. Right.

Ellina Yin: Yeah.

Ain B.: It is, it's about all of our government is about all of us. You know, as much as we talk about voting, I'm like, that's just the beginning. That's barely the beginning.

Ellina Yin: Barely beginning.

Ain B.: There's so much work to do after the voting. And if you tap out, you know, if you're just tapping in and out for that, you're missing most of it, you know, so.

Ellina Yin: Yeah. And I would say that's not, it's not our fault

Ain B.:No. At all. No.

Ellina Yin: It's the mis- and dis-information of our part of it, of our education system. Ever since desegregation happened, there were certain things that started getting pulled behind curtains and kept from us. And I feel like the biggest lie that we're told is that the cornerstone of democracy is voting.

Ain B.: Right.

Ellina Yin: And it's not. Right. It really isn't. It's an important part.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

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Ellina Yin: Very important. But the most important part is direct participation.

Ain B.: Yeah.

Ellina Yin: In democracy, which is many things, many people creating the solutions that we want. Nobody with however many degrees they have from wherever, will know the answer as intimately and efficiently as the person experiencing the problem.

With the lived experience, their solution will always be much more efficient and resonant and relevant than anybody that is termed, I feel like an expert. The expert shouldn't be there to, you know, to check the codes and all that stuff, but they should be more of facilitators.

The director should be the community. But you know, there is a process and I'm definitely not here to tout that government is great right now. It needs a lot of work. A lot of work. But if that work is only done by the same few hands as it's always been done, it's gonna be the same old problems.

Ain B.: Right.

Ellina Yin: And so there is a lot of work around accessibility. I'm definitely seeing, you know, my lane as creating these instruction manuals and videos and podcasts to help orient people. And then there's gonna be a next generation and there's gonna be a next to iterate because it's not supposed to be stagnant. I think that's part of the problem.

Ain B.: Yeah.

Ellina Yin: [00:33:00] Like when you see how many times you have to press - I confirm to these terms and conditions. And how they're always updating the terms and conditions. Like we need to be updating our terms and conditions.

Ain B.: Yes.

Ellina Yin: Just as much to respond to what's happening in the world. And what's happening to our environment.

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When we don't, we end up living in a past that no longer exists and it just becomes so painful until everything breaks and like you're forced to rebuild.

Ain B.: Right. Yeah. Which I think part of what you're describing is what's unfolding at this point, you know?

To your point, never is it to blame the people. It's just a reminder that, yeah, most of our systems are designed to be obscure for a reason.'Cause it's about power and keeping power where it's always been kept.

Ellina Yin: Yes.

Ain B.: [00:34:00] And government in particular as a system is our system. It's the people's system. Even as wildly chaotic as it is in this moment, it still belongs to us.

Ellina Yin: Yes.

Ain B.: And I hear that in what you're naming of, you know, us as the directors of this thing and how we need to be thinking. I always think like, I'm more in my agency when I can see myself in a different role.

So, I consider myself an active civic participant in the sense of yes, voting fundamentally. But also showing up for jury duty. People are not gonna have a jury of their peers if their peers don't show up to be on that jury, you know?

And like, not actively trying to get out of it or sitting on advisory councils or boards that are, you know, active in your city and have a lot of decision making power, or at least influential power, depending on the model.

Ellina Yin: Yeah.

Ain B.: And also what I heard implicitly in what you're sharing is that there are so many ways to participate. There's not just one. There's not, okay, now I gotta sign up and be at every city council meeting until the end of time.

Ellina Yin: No, no one should do that.

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Ain B.: Which I would not advise that to anyone. Although there are some who do it and we thank them for their service, but, uh,

Ellina Yin: Bless their hearts.

Ain B.: Bless their hearts. But you know, what is the way that I can be of service and how can I be grounded and active in what I'm drawn to? Similar to responding to Spirit around your own dreams and desires, but also a role you might take as a citizen, as a full civic participant, you know?

Ellina Yin: Yeah. And you know, in terms of government belonging to us, there are no shortages of grievances that we have. But one thing I do wanna point out that I have been paying a lot more attention to is that our government does so many things, and oftentimes the branches and departments of government that get the most eyes and mainstream attention and Hollywood movies are the departments with the guns.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Ellina Yin: And that's just one facet. And that facet definitely has a lot of problems and issues that need to be reconciled, dismantled, reconfigured.

Reparations. So many things. And then there's like other parts where like it's the postal service.

Ain B.: Yeah.

Ellina Yin: It's the libraries.

Ain B.: Yes.

Ellina Yin: It's the weather system. And that part of government, there's some of some parts that work really quite well.

And not that they don't have room for improvement because government is supposed to be living, because it's responding to living beings.

And we are alive in a world that is alive. That's constantly changing. And so it should be changing and adapting just as much as life changes and adapts with

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each passing day. And there are certain things that I love about our government, and I wish we taught more in school.

And when we say we hate the government, it's not one big umbrella that covers everything. It's really quite nuanced. And in terms of whether it's climate or early education or whatever you might be interested in, there's probably a board and commission doing that work.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Ellina Yin: [00:38:00] And typically those boards and commissions meet maybe for, for one, maybe two hours a month or a quarter. And so it's like less time than it takes to grow a garden. Like a tomato plant or something like that. And so that's one thing that I was surprised when I started doing the process was that oh, okay. First off, it's really boring. It's so boring sometimes it's so boring.

And I feel like that's a design as well.

Ain B.: Yeah.

Ellina Yin: But when I got my friends to show up, then it was fun.

Ain B.: Right, right. Well, as a former, Oakland, California Library Advisory Commissioner, 'cause I love the libraries. Yes, it could be boring, but it was also infinitely interesting if it's something you love.

To your point of these other places and spaces that are also covered within the governance structure parks, I'm always thinking national parks. You know, when I get really frustrated with paying taxes, I'm like, okay, all my money is going to national parks. And the postal service and you know, wishing we actually had participatory budgeting. That's a whole other thing.

Ellina Yin: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Ain B.: But I appreciate you calling in the varied ways that we can be of service and that it's not that much time, considering. Right. Yeah. Especially considering these days when so much of us spend so much time just on social media. Yeah. I'm like, give TikTok back those two hours and go down and meet some people and learn some things about your local fill in the blank.

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Ellina Yin: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ain B.: You know, Ellina. I appreciate you lifting up this piece around how our attention and energy gets hijacked in a way to the men with guns.

Ellina Yin: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: And, just to say agreeing with you a hundred percent of like, yes, but there's a yes and. There's a lot for us to pay attention to and that's actually our responsibility to think broadly.

But I also think about, you know, how, and you've brought this up, about how our subconscious is really being, dictated is the word, but controlled by the same forces that want many places of power to remain obscure. And so redirects us over here.

So I would love to have you share a bit more about your thinking about that, hive-mind or story that gets told that is disempowering and untrue.

Ellina Yin: Mm-hmm.

[00:41:00] I love storytelling and this was kind of my, the bread and butter of my career was in storytelling, is still in storytelling. And, story is very powerful.

So the mythologist Martin Shaw says, bad stories create spells and good stories break them. And there is something to be said about the power of stories. 'cause if stories, particular stories weren't powerful, there wouldn't be such a, you know, such a thing about banning books and attacking our most marginalized people, because those are the stories that have the power to liberate and decolonize the mind. And that's why they're so hellbent on suppressing them.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Ellina Yin: And there are two psychological effects of the way social media impacts us. So one is like the mere exposure effect, which I'll take an example.

Like before the launch of ChatGPT, AI was non-existent in our daily lives. And now all of a sudden it's like summarizing my Google search, is like on my phone.

Ain B.: Oh my gosh. It's everywhere.

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Ellina Yin: Trying to suggest, you know, trying to summarize my Zoom meetings. And nobody asked for this.

Ain B.: No.

Ellina Yin: [00:42:00] No one asked for this, but it's so inundated in our daily lives. Then number two, it starts desensitizing us. And so now we're stuck into this narrative that I see being pushed on, you know, the general public of AI is the future and it is inevitable.

And really it's about like this level of persistence of like just bombarding us with AI that our minds, even though intellectually consciously, we are against it, our minds are not designed to be like that.

There was the Atlas of the Heart by Brené Brown. She was saying, you know, the human mind, like our lizard brain parts we're supposed to believe what we see. You know, I see rain clouds, that's water, that's life and death.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Ellina Yin: I see a lion. I should not go that way. And so the things that we see, impact our, our psychology. And you know, how we think and perceive and also what we pursue. And there's also this weird dissociation. Like, you know, going back to the mice study, the mice were physically shocked when they smelled something. And we're seeing things, we're seeing terrible things, but we're not physically experiencing them. And so it's a little bit different.

So we're in this new place where the mind can't trust what it sees or it has to like, think about it in a different way. And so, I remember growing up and there wasn't such a culture of gun violence in movies and TV shows. And now, like, I can't even watch a trailer without seeing, it's like, wow, is that like PG 13.

Is it like, why is it in a trailer? And now we know it's like the leading cause of death for children, yet how many years, how many decades were we desensitized to that first. So that when it happened in real life, it just became a part of all of those images that we had been ingesting for decades.

And so part of, you know, removing ourselves from that is first to remember that these devices, someone's controlling the algorithm. And if you're feeling helpless and you're feeling depressed, it's not you. It's by design. Because when you're feeling helpless and depressed, the last thing you feel is like action to go into city hall and feel like you can do something.

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Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Ellina Yin: But you know, when we talk about our tax dollars and like, let's redirect it somewhere, those are lines of code that exist that we can rewrite.

Ain B.: Yeah.

Ellina Yin: 100%. We can rewrite our tax code.

Ain B.: Yeah.

Ellina Yin: We just need enough people working on it. Together with strategy. We can do that because there's more of us than them.

Ain B.: Yep.

Ellina Yin: That is the number one thing I always try to remember is like there's more of us than them.

Ain B.: Yep. Yeah. All power to the people.

Ellina Yin: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: [00:46:00] Yeah. Thank you for bringing AI into this conversation in particular about storytelling. I'm always so mindful about how we have, because of all the things we've been naming and more, the intentional design that we have yet to actually fully inhabit our humanity, much less getting into bed with these algorithms.

All of it coded by, you know, the input into the outcomes by dominant culture, that has never considered us or prioritized our own stories and our own understanding of ourselves.

And I'm just in hearing you sharing that it is not only that we have the choice and power to literally change anything at any given moment, that is my full core heart belief. That it's just a matter of making a new choice at any given time.

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But also that the stories that we tell ourselves and the stories that we believe about ourselves are so, so, so important to our ability to grow and learn and evolve. And if we're trapped in a story that someone else has written for us, then we get the outcome that someone else wants for us.

Ellina Yin: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: [00:47:00] So, thank you so much for this time and this conversation and just your clarity and your contribution that we get to tell the story of what is done in our communities, which impacts what is done in our homes, which impacts what is done in our counties, which impacts, right, like all of the interconnected ecosystem of society. Society that's touched by and has our future and our present in relationship to governance, but also in relationship to our own power and the choice and resonance of our own spirits.

Ellina Yin: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: So, thank you so much. I wanna see if there's anything else you wanna say before we move to the sacred shout out portion.

Ellina Yin: I would say, I think as Gen Z says, go touch grass, you know, like, It's so important for us to be in real physical experiences more than we're on our phone so that we can remember what is real, you know, just the power of tapping into your local ecosystem.

It's a sleepy, quiet little town, San Jose, but it's also what I say is like the belly of empire. And I was like, I have friends everywhere and so we're gonna, let's tap in. There's so much you can do. Yeah. There's so much impact you can do by focusing on where your two feet touched the ground.

That is the best place to start, is wherever your two feet touch the ground that you call home, that you're registered to vote. Like that's the place to start.

Ain B.: Yeah. Beautiful. Thank you so much.

Well I would love to know what has been inspiring you or something you're in awe of or grateful for, or whatever you wanna share in that way.

Ellina Yin: [00:49:00] So I have lived in this particular spot for a decade, a little over a decade. What I'm in awe of is when I walk around my neighborhood, I know specific plants and trees.

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I know when they bloom and I look forward to them and I have neighbors with different types of fruit trees. I was like, I can't wait for plum season. And I also noticed, I was like, oh, my blackberries were very early this year.

And so I noticed shifts in my climate and that there's been a lot of changes in the last five years that I have noticed about my neighborhood and like the amount of birds. There's like crows now where there weren't crows before. And so I'm in awe of just the land that calls me home that has claimed me.

[00:50:00] And I see it changing and I see it speaking and I'm in constant awe of, you know, this beautiful place I get to call home. And that there is so much left to protect and honor.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm.

Beautiful. Thank you so much. Yeah. I also really hear in your sharing the deep listening and noticing and awareness that you're practicing in relationship with your land. So I just wanna honor and acknowledge that, 'cause we can live in places a long time, and just be living there.

Ellina Yin: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: So, thank you. My sacred shout out right now is the Jungle video, "Keep Me Satisfied". The main dancer Will West is a dream. All the dancers are a dream, but he is a vision and the choreographer is Shay Latukolan who I am in love with, he makes me feel like I can do these dance moves. I cannot do these dance moves.

Ellina Yin: That's good storytelling.

Ain B.: Yeah, man. You can do it. Seriously. I'm like, oh, I could almo - no, not quite. But it's just so highly relatable, but still so majestic and the energy that the dancers bring, and even just the design, like the one camera shot with dancers moving in and out of the frame. It's just really, I'm just like sitting watching it over and over, and I don't really even do music videos.

Ellina Yin: Oh my gosh. I'm so excited now.

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Ain B.: Yeah. So please check it out. So that's what's giving me sacred shout out. I'm just, I'm just in awe of humans, in particular, humans who are well connected to their bodies and can move them in ways that feel like otherworldly.

Ellina Yin: Thank you for sharing.

Ain B.: Ellina, is there anything you wanna say about your AI organizing?

Ellina Yin: [00:53:00] Yeah, so I am working with [Masheika Allgood](#) of Allied Consulting and we're doing a lot of organizing around data centers and specifically hyperscale data centers, which is what is used for generative AI and stuff.

Our traditional data centers that we've had for many decades that streams our music, hosts our email. They're not the problem. The problem is this new type. And so we are working on equipping communities with the right questions and bringing them into the process of how these data centers get approved. And it's usually in a planning commission where there's like 12 people maybe paying attention to it.

And then by the time it hits, you know, the headlines, you're not too late, you're never too late until the shovel hits the ground. And even then you're not too late until they're finished. And so. Masheika and I are working to put together this toolkit. We've actually recently partnered with the [Human Rights Center in the UC Berkeley Law School](#).

And so we'll be launching a bigger toolkit of how people can track these data centers and how they can organize to protect their water, their air and, you know, the livelihoods of their community.

And the thing I love about this toolkit is that it's just really applicable to the civic process. So you remove data centers and put any kind of project in place of it. It's the same process. And so I really hope that it is helpful and people can use it no matter where they are, to get more involved in their community.

Ain B.: Beautiful. Thank you so much. Thank you for doing that work for our planet, essentially and our communities and just adding my quick plug for let's get as many of us as possible on every planning commission possible.

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Ellina Yin: Yes.

Ain B.: 'Cause they hold so much power. So much power. They're like sim cities. They just decide what gets built and what doesn't.

Ain B.: Mm-hmm. So much power

Ellina Yin: And there's too many realtors on there.

Ain B.: Yeah. Hello.

Ellina Yin: It's the number one hangout for realtors. And then we wonder why.

Ain B.: Right. Our neighborhoods look the way they do. Yeah.

Ellina Yin: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: I just really wanna thank you again for all that you do for templates, for, in a way that's scalable, applicable here. Twist a few things for the governance structure and it's applicable here, that folks across the country can have knowledge about how to be powerful in the matter of what happens to our communities in particular when it's impacting things like our air and our water. Hello.

Ellina Yin: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: That we need to literally live and breathe and survive. Yeah.

Ellina Yin: Non-negotiable. Non-negotiable.

Ain B.: Yeah.

Ellina Yin: We all have cities and counties. It's like the foundational local government structure. I would say one thing is that in focusing so hard on cities and counties, after I'm done with this last civics masterclass, which is the county version, you can take that and you can use it anywhere.

And so by focusing on what I can do with my two feet on the ground in this area, I actually started realizing how impactful this work is for other areas. And

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I'm here to share, not to dictate what other communities should do, only they know what's best for their community, but I'm just here to share the tools.

So that they don't have to grasp in the dark like I did during COVID.

Ain B.: [00:56:00] Yeah. Yeah. So thank you for taking the light that you have cultivated and helping us all shine it wherever we are across the country. Because the only way we're getting out of all of this is through community and through showing up.

Ellina Yin: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: Ellina, is there a question that you're holding now that you wanna leave our listeners with, or a prompt or practice you wanna invite them into?

Ellina Yin: [00:57:00] So a question I'm holding is, what will the next 250 years look like? Because next year is supposed to be America's, you know, 250.

Ain B.: Yeah.

Ellina Yin: Interestingly, I do a lot of stargazing. I love looking at the stars. Especially our solar system that I can track. You can see up to Saturn, you can't really see beyond that. And each planet has its own cycle.

And, the United States is one Pluto years old. And I was like, oh my gosh. When you think about it that way, I was like, we're only one Pluto years old.

Ain B.: Wow.

Ellina Yin: And I am, you know, barely one Saturn years old.

Ain B.: Uhhuh cute.

Ellina Yin: And so a practice I would, would wanna share, is definitely the next New Moon is to track. To just every night go out and try and find the moon and look at it and watch it, you know, change shape and do its revolution because that's real time. You know, this is constructed by man.

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So I always practice existing in the physical world and before there were watches like that is how we told time. And in Asia and Southeast Asia, there's lunar calendars instead of the Gregorian calendar. And so that was something I started really practicing during the pandemic.

And it's very cool to just look at the moon. Yeah. And you know, whenever there's a new moon in whatever constellation, it takes about six months for there to be a full moon in that same part of the sky.

And so I think there's all these really cool patterns. And so how I started slowing down and, and living, I feel like at a pace that's more natural and in sync with the sun, the moon, nature is just by being in relationship with the moon.

And so I invite everybody to cultivate a relationship with the moon.

Ain B.: Beautiful. What a gorgeous elemental being to be in relationship with. Always changing, but always just the same.

Ellina Yin: And then imagine the 250, you know?

Ain B.: Yes.

Ellina Yin: Imagine something radically different.

Ain B.: Yes. I love that invitation, and thank you, I didn't know about the 250 years. It gives me actually a new perspective on what's happening right now, but I love the invitation of like, yeah, what's next? Because life goes on.

Ellina Yin: Mm-hmm.

Ain B.: Thank you, Ellina, for being for community and for showing up. I love the spirit ecosystem that you are. I really appreciate the work that you do.

Ellina Yin: Thank you for having me, and thank you for our new Seneca Village and answering the call.

Ain B.: Aw, thank you for answering our call back.

[Guest shares their bio] Ellina Yin: I am a Cambodian American first generation multidisciplinary artist, and right now I'm working to reimagine what the future looks like at the intersection of culture, technology, and civic life.

I am doing a lot of podcasting. I do in-depth oral history research. I also work in different mediums of art, and I am of community service to my locale and the past and future generations to come.

[Static Outro] Ain B.: The We Outside Podcast is produced and hosted by Ain B., and produced and edited by Aisha Jordan. For access to resources mentioned in the episode, check out the show notes.

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