

Gangaji Radio

A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 10

THE SUFFERING TRAP

Released on July 17, 2013

[00:05] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:05] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: Both in the secular world and in the world of religion, there are lots of definitions for the word suffering, but just the word itself, without any definition, brings about a feeling of discomfort. To be sure, no one is immune from suffering, but at the same time, if we really stop and tell the hard truth, are there ways we knowingly or unknowingly make it worse; in other words, is there a payoff to our suffering? Is it proof that somehow we've been wronged by another or by life?

[00:38] GANGAJI: Are you in fact feeding off of your suffering? Is your suffering story feeding off your life, and if you discover it is, you can say no to that. You can refuse to feed off the story or to be the food for that story. It's a short life, you can be free.

[00:59] HILLARY: We are jumping into the fire this month, telling the truth about how we fan the flames of our own suffering. When we come face-to-face with the prospect that calling off the search, also means putting an end to our own victimization. Could it be that the key to our salvation is truly in our own hands? I'm Hillary Larson and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

[01:26] HILLARY: For this conversation, I don't really want to talk about suffering in general, because I think we can all agree that everyone suffers to one degree or another, but for our talk today, for this month, I want to talk about one of the more sobering aspects of suffering and that is our role in making our suffering worse. And...

[01:48] GANGAJI: Good, yes.

[01:49] HILLARY: And just something else that I just want to confess, that I consider myself to be a former, world-class sufferer and victim, so I am coming from a point of experience and humility, but I also have seen what can happen when that story of victimhood is exposed.

[02:08] GANGAJI: And is that what happened to you? How did you, how did you recognize you were contributing to your suffering, magnifying it, or augmenting it?

[02:20] HILLARY: Well, you know just the whole scenario of victimhood always felt wrong to me. There was always like some part of me that was kind of coughing in the background, like do you really believe that, and I remember years and years ago somebody posed three questions to me and it reminded me of the conversation that you had on your series *With Gangaji* not long ago, and I want to talk about that; but, the three questions they posed me were: how does your suffering serve you? The second one was how does your suffering make others wrong? And the

third one was how does your suffering create, how does your suffering effect others negatively? And those, I was so ready for those three questions, Gangaji, I just, I actually started laughing when I, when I heard the three questions.

[03:16] GANGAJI: Well, that's great. You know, you mentioned the story of victimhood and I just want to interject here that there are plenty of victims on the planet and I would never presuppose that someone is not a victim, and so the story of their life may actually be a victim story and it may be a legitimate story, so I want us to be sure and not spiritualize this notion of victims, but to recognize that yes, there are victims and it can be subtle sometimes within a family structure. Certainly, a child can be victimized or a parent can be victimized, not necessarily in a gross way, but in a more subtle emotional neglect or abuse. So, let's honor that and then we start from there and we can ask questions like you just said or we can at least be willing to be present for ourselves. Be willing to offer ourselves a home, a place where we can tend to what is free even in the midst of possible suffering, because you know, I think you're absolutely correct when you say that we all suffer to some degree or another, and if by that you mean we all experience pain to a certain degree -- that's just the nature of being a sensory animal. But, then the suffering for me is when that gets drawn out, and then in particular, the unnecessary suffering is when we generate some story, and that's when those questions that you just asked are very relevant.

[05:02] HILLARY: Yeah, you know, I've always been a huge believer in confession, and I'm not talking about the kind of confession where you're just proving to yourself what a bad person you are. I'm not talking about that at all. I just feel like there's such incredible freedom in just being able to tell the truth about a situation, and you talk about that all the time.

[05:23] GANGAJI: Well the truth sets you free, I mean, when you're willing to tell the truth, and maybe in particular, the hard truths, there is freedom waiting.

[05:34] HILLARY: So, having said that, what I want to do is, I'm looking at that kind of self-responsibility that opens the door to freedom, the kind that doesn't have another story attached to it, where you're just in a place where I'm so ready just to know the truth no matter what it is.

[05:53] GANGAJI: Yes, ready to be free. Ready to wake up.

[05:57] HILLARY: And with that, I'm going to kind of throw us all into the fire right off the top, and I have a clip I want to play, and I think this is from Unraveling the Knot of Suffering. I've actually had the clip for so long I can't remember, but I think it is, and it's about a minute and a half if you don't mind Gangaji I'm going to go ahead and play this.

[06:15] GANGAJI: Great.

(clip)

[06:16] GANGAJI: No matter what the world is telling us, if our internal story of what's occurring has to do with being victimized, then we suffer. It's very simple. And if you are quite certain that you aren't telling yourself a story of being a victim and yet you're suffering, then I suggest you're lying to yourself. There has to be some thread of some ancient story of how you have been

wronged; how God has wronged you, or how your parents have wronged you, or how the nature of things has wronged you; how circumstances have wronged you, as you have wronged yourself. All of that is a story of being a victim. Being a victim. Even the strongest aggressors, if you just crack the superficial layer of aggression, you find this "I've been wronged." And so the striking out in anger, or revenge, or getting even has to do with the same victim story. If you can see this, if you can see how it plays in your life, that's very good.

(end clip)

[07:42] HILLARY: So, to me that kind of says it all.

[07:46] GANGAJI: Yeah, that does say it all, and then we have to see how we can translate that into language that's understood, because quite often there's a big -- or I don't know quite often -- sometimes there is resistance to even hearing that, because we have such proof that this is not a story I'm telling myself, this is simply the truth, and it can be a true story, but deeper than that true story is the truth. And in that there is no suffering.

[08:20] HILLARY: I love when you speak of posture, because there's a certain position one can take when looking at their own suffering, and if it's slumped over, you can feel it in your body. That there's, it's an automatic indication of a victim story.

[08:35] GANGAJI: Well, also even if it's like pushing forward, it's in the sense of proving that this story is right; under that is a victim story, but the posture is one of aggression and I think the clip really points to that. That it doesn't necessarily have to look like a victim to be motivated by a victim, and so if we're just willing to recognize that our nature as human beings is to tell stories, is to generate stories about our experiences and there's nothing wrong with that, but it's not the final truth. It's maybe the relative truth. Although, it usually gets modified by our retelling, just by the nature of our brains and how they function, but under that story is a closer truth and when we're willing to recognize the story and even recognize our attachment to the story, and just let it go for a moment -- you can pick it back up. I'm not suggesting that this is a dogma or a practice, but to realize that you have the capacity to stop telling your story of suffering. This is a great freedom, and then, then you recognize that you have choice. You can tell it and it may serve you to tell it, or it may serve to correct a great injustice, but you also have the possibility in a moment of rest or meditation, or the moment that is the rest of your life, to stop and be free.

[10:14] HILLARY: You have several questions here, Gangaji, and this one actually pertains directly to what you just said. And this person says, "I suffer from a chronic illness that keeps me from doing many of the things that I want to do in life. I sincerely want to experience the freedom you speak of, but it's hard not to be angry at myself or God for my illness. Is there a way to find freedom in my situation that isn't just one more way of being spiritually compliant? It seems like anyone would be mad if they couldn't live a full life."

[10:49] GANGAJI: Well, you know it depends on how you define a full life. There are people who are athletically superior and live a very restricted life, and there are people who are paralyzed and live and experience a full life. If you're defining fuller life by the activity of the body, then no, you can't live a full life and you are then victimized by your condition, but if you're willing to investigate that fullness and to put aside your prior definition of it, there can be a discovery that

is much richer than how you have limited yourself in fullness. And I agree, it's natural to be mad and angry when you lose something, or sad when you lose something, as you've lost prior functioning that you had, but finally that anger is the suffering. It's not the first flush of anger, it's an anger that's continued, and it's only continued by some kind of justification that God in fact has cursed you or done something wrong to you and you don't deserve this, and all of that in the initial moments can be and is, let us say, quite appropriate. But to continue it is to suffer, and actually to choose to suffer, because in, why not be spiritually compliant if in fact it reveals a field of peace and contentment and fullness that's undreamed of. If you're rebelling against spiritual compliance and holding on to your anger, just at least recognize it; that's your choice that you are victimized by that choice, so that you can tell the truth.

[12:48] HILLARY: You know, it seems like the flipside of that, Gangaji, is if somebody's yearning for freedom, and I'm actually speaking from my own experience, because I as you know had horrendous anxiety, and I wanted out of the anxiety and my yearning for freedom was sincere, but it was also a way of wanting the anxiety to go away.

[13:10] GANGAJI: Yes, it was tied into the anxiety, and so anxiety was really the leader, so it was only when you were willing to let the anxiety be there as it is and to discover what is free, even in the midst of anxiety. Or, if we relate it to the question, even in the midst of ultimate constriction; what is still free, still full, still at peace? Otherwise, the issue is always what is blocking you, or what is blocking your fulfillment or your peace, and that's generally the way we are trained, but it's possible to flip that and have the issue be peace, fulfillment, a full life, living freely, rather than the particular experiences that happen in the midst of that.

[14:10] HILLARY: You know the mind is such a tricky thing in that process of surrender, because sometimes there's a way of saying, "Oh, okay, I accept this" in the hope that okay, now freedom will come.

[14:23] GANGAJI: Well, yes and so we'll do that, and you can recognize that, because it doesn't work. It's not telling the truth. Much better to say I don't accept this and to really experience what that means within you; the refusal to accept what is given you in a moment, or a lifetime, or a period of disease or suffering are you able to refuse it? I mean you can stamp your feet or you can rally God, but it's still here. So, in truth we may say we refuse it, but we don't get away with it. So, if we say, "Okay, I don't accept this." It does become laughable. As you just said, it's laughable. It's not in your hands, and in that there's a humbling. It's here whether you like it or not, and then the responsibility or the capacity to respond to what is here whether we like it or not is how do we relate to what is here. Do we just keep fighting it, screaming at it, being tyrannized by it, or do we open to it? Do we actually discover that within us that is untouched by it, whatever it may be.

[15:45] HILLARY: You know I just love the way that works, because you know when you do get that shift in orientation, you know what you thought was so terrible, sometimes is actually really hilarious, and I don't know how that works, but it's the truth.

[15:59] GANGAJI: Yeah, well that hilarity, that laughter is the bi-product of actually in a moment instantly being free, regardless of what is here.

[16:11] HILLARY: I'm going to switch for a second from the world of physical pain to relationships with others, and you have a letter here from somebody that I thought was beautiful. He says, "I've received so much from you over the years. My life has changed in countless ways. I would say that the level of responsibility I take for my life has been the key to my happiness, and part of that is that I have no longer chosen to see myself as a victim, but I confess that I do have a resentment toward a former employer that I can't seem to shake. My question for you is: do you think it's possible for someone to fully (it's underlined) know the truth of who they are if they are still holding on to the idea that something outside themselves is the cause of their suffering?"

[17:01] GANGAJI: Well, I mean, there's an obvious answer to that, but what I'm really more interested in and it's one of the dilemmas of you know receiving questions that are written out, rather than having the person right here; nevertheless, it's the way we will work it here, but what interests me more is, if you have the answer to that question and if the answer was, sure you can have resentments, lifetime resentments, and still be absolutely free -- would that open the way for you to recognize where absolute freedom is? In other words, I'm attempting to shift the issue from being is it possible that this resentment is blocking me from my freedom, to is it possible to discover that this freedom that is here cannot be blocked by any feeling, which is then very similar to the state of health that we were talking about. Some people have more emotions than other people, and some people have had horrible things done to them and then those things have left imprints on the psyche, just as some people have physically a more difficult time, and those things are important. I don't want to deny their importance, but the issue is freedom and peace, and so if you don't even follow a question like that, you don't have the answer to a question like that; rather you are willing to discover in this freedom that is in my heart and in recognition of my capacity to take responsibility for whatever appears. What is true? If I take responsibility for this resentment. Is resentment based on something that was in fact done to you; if you take responsibility for that rather than getting into a mental discussion of what it means and what it means to your freedom; what it means about who you are; to deal with it directly. Because, the discussions that we get into can be very useful if they're pointing to this peace and truth, but if they are theoretical discussions, then they're endless and we could maybe take a survey and see who believes that you would have no resentment. If you're awake who believes that you are free to have a resentment. Who believes that resentments comes and goes, and we take a survey and they're you know 7 billion people on the planet, and 7 billion ideas or votes for what is true, but if in a moment you put aside the surveys and opinions, your own and others, and simply open to the resentment, open to what the energy of that is, if there is no story attached to that -- the wrong that's been done to you -- without a story about what wrong is, what do you find? What is the emotion, and perhaps that's what is waiting to be met more than some waiting to get rid of resentment so that then you could be free. What's the energy that's under resentment, closer than resentment, and quite often it can be fear or despair. I mean, resentment is a kind of anger and anger is usually, while very powerful, usually the most superficial of the emotions. Under anger is fear somewhere, or despair, or hopelessness, or a kind of deflation. And the willingness to meet that without a story about it, there's a great discovery.

[21:00] HILLARY: I'm going to take this to a different level if you don't mind, because I pull these different clips from -- you know they're taken from different contexts in your conversations and

your public meeting, but this kind of is going -- well, I call it you're kind of putting the hammer down, so if you don't mind I'm just going to go ahead and play this second clip.

(clip)

[21:23] GANGAJI: Your willingness to tell the truth about who it is, you are, is a willingness to no longer be a victim, regardless of pain, regardless of circumstances, regardless of others, regardless of the real horror that occurs in the world; to no longer be a victim of that doesn't mean to trivialize that, or deny that, gloss over that, or repress that. It means that you are encouraged in whatever appears, or occurs, or is experienced to meet fully the experience. To not have to hide, or run, or justify, or wail, or curse, or moan -- just to meet it. To be willing to be annihilated by it, is the same willingness to discover directly what can never be annihilated.

(end clip)

[22:28] HILLARY: I think that in that particular clip, for me, you are just really eliminating all the outs, which to me is ultimately the mercy when there's nowhere else to go.

[22:37] GANGAJI: You know you can say that, because really what your intention is is to be free. I think because of that; you use those words to reveal that there's no escape from yourself and you stop trying to escape. If someone really doesn't care about being free and only wants to be justified in their story, they'll hear those same words and not have that experience at all.

[23:03] HILLARY: I think that when it comes to this rigorous honesty that's required when it comes to freedom, there are certain ramifications that I think the mind then reflects back of, "Oh no, if I tell the truth completely, then I'm going to lose some things" and there's a woman that wrote you an email which kind of has to do with that, and if you don't mind, let me just go ahead and read this to you. "I have worked as a therapist for over 15 years. Over the past year or two, I've started to doubt my motives for why I do that kind of work. Although, I love helping people, I tend to have a bit of a depressive side myself, and wonder if a good portion of my career choice is about colluding with other peoples' suffering. Sometimes it seems easier to hide in my ignorance than it is to face losing my identity as someone who helps other people. With that comes the fear of what would I do for a living if I were to look at that completely."

[24:05] GANGAJI: Well, you might be a much better therapist for one thing. You know, it is a clinging to identity, and in particular, the victim identity that we've been speaking of that generates the identity of one's self as suffering, a sufferer. So, the most exquisite therapy, or the most exquisite satsang can only come from when you have discovered for yourself that you can lose all identities, and from that there is support, and for our discovery in deeper discovery in yourself and discovery in your clients or patients, wherever they may be, and in whatever spectrum of suffering they may be on, from your willingness to face death, to face loss, to face identity-less-ness, to be free. Then you discover the answers to that. Then you discover if there's another way you would like to make your living. It's probably available, because you are free, so I really value this. I think we are drawn to particular areas, because those are the areas that we need for our self and there's nothing wrong with that. And in fact, it's brought you to this moment where you can truly inquire, who am I; if I am not this person who helps others, I'm not this one who fixes other, then who am I if I'm not who I think I am. Who am I if I'm not who I fear

I am? Who am I if I don't know who I am with knowledge and definition? Then we are thrown into direct experience and everything is revealed there.

[26:03] HILLARY: I love the flipside of that, Gangaji, when you say to people, "You are not who you think yourself to be."

[26:10] GANGAJI: Yes, but that can only be discovered in your willingness to see who you are thinking yourself to be, and to recognize how subject to loss that is, and how we don't lose it only because we cling to it, or we practice it, or we worship it, or even we hate it and we're victimized by it. It is the issue, so in our willingness to lose everything in this moment, to really lose everything, then you discover directly what cannot be lost, what is free. And the story of victimhood or perpetrator, these are all irrelevant. These are in dust modes in the sky, resentment, or anger, anxiety; they're just passing clouds in the spaciousness of this freedom that is who you are. This is the point of our conversations.

[27:11] HILLARY: I do want to take a couple of minutes to talk about With Gangaji, because it's the reason why I actually picked this topic, and as I said at the beginning, you some time ago did a With Gangaji on the subject of suffering and it was profound, because you started with a question. And the question was: what do I receive from my suffering? And first of all, I just want to say that With Gangaji is an on-going series. It happens every month. It's a live webcast, and the thing that's great about it is that people get to talk to you directly, Gangaji, they get to pick up the phone and I know you have a long list of people that call in, but it does give someone a chance to actually speak to you personally, and I love that aspect of it. And it's a very intimate group and I always give information about it at the end of the show, and I'll do that again, but this question of what do I receive from my suffering, I feel like this is a great thing to end this program off on.

[28:18] GANGAJI: It's a great question, and I want to just add about the With Gangaji is yes, it's wonderful for me to be able to speak with people individually who raise their hand, some of the people, but also that people can speak with each other in small groups and can actually gather through the teleconference technology. And people then can directly feel this support that comes from this yes to true support and no to a false life. So, did you just ask me something and I dropped it out? Oh, in this program with that question, yes, that's a beautiful way to end this question. Are you in fact feeding off of your suffering? Is your suffering story feeding off your life, and if you discover it is, you can say no to that. You can refuse to feed off the story or to be the food for that story. It's a short life. You can be free.

[29:37] HILLARY: I want to give you information on how you can sign up for With Gangaji, the monthly series we were just talking about. All you have to do is go to the website: gangaji.org and look for With Gangaji to find out how you can sign up for that. And if you have a question or a comment for Gangaji for this show, please write to gangajiradio@gangaji.org. That's g-a-n-g-a-j-i-radio@gangaji.org. You can also catch up with us on Facebook, just search for Gangaji community. Well, that's it for us. Thank you for sharing this show with others, and we would really appreciate it if you could rate *A Conversation With Gangaji* or leave a comment in iTunes. I'm Hillary Larson, appreciate you joining us. Be well until next time.