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A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 12

FINDING GOD

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[00:01] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:06] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: It might be said that the core of self-inquiry is that it requires us to inspect any belief that keeps us feeling as though we are somehow separate from the truth, that we are separate from whatever we believe God or our connection to truth to be. With that in mind, there is one last obvious question that needs to be faced: somewhere, deep down, in the depths of being human, is God just a concept that humans made up to somehow explain and cushion the impact of life?

[00:37] GANGAJI: I suggest give up the belief in God, and feel unsafe, and feel the fear that's under that lack of safety, and the hope that some bigger something is watching out for you, or be there for you, is covering your back, if you want true inquiry.

[0:57] HILLARY: When it comes to the sense of stillness or peace that comes from meditation or reading a teaching that we deeply resonate with, hiking through the forest, sitting in satsang, I wonder if what we call God or stillness, is just the sophisticated inner workings of the brain. What then? Today, we're facing the final holdout of doubt, when it comes to ourselves, and our sincere desire to know who we are. Where is God? Where is stillness? What is true? I'm Hillary Larson, and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

[01:35] HILLARY: What I'd like to do is, I'd like to spend the next thirty minutes venturing into what I think, I think it's the last holdout – it feels like the last holdout – it has to do with our fear, despite our spiritual practice, how many times we've meditated in a lifetime, how many times we've read the Bible, the Koran, the Torah. And to me it's about the fear that there is no God. And I'm just gonna use the word God just because it's the most generic word I can think of, but the reason why I was, I had actually thought about this some time ago was, I was going on a walk with a friend of mine who's being meditating for thirty years and she's a, she's a devout spiritual walker is what I would call her and so aware, and we were in this, in the middle of this beautiful conversation and at some point, she turned to me and she said, 'Wonder if there is no God; wonder if none of this is true; wonder if this is all just brain stuff.' And then, you got a question in actually that had to do with that and it was, from a, a man who says I, he says he considers himself to be an atheist, because I don't really believe in God, I think that, that feeling of peace might just be the result of how the brain works. Is there a way to use inquiry to find out whether or not that's true? So that, I mean it's a big juicy question but here we go.

[03:02] GANGAJI: Well, you know from my perspective what does it matter if it's true or not? Maybe the brain wave is what we call God. I'm not attached to a belief in God. I have no problem with it, you don't need to believe in God or not. You don't need to believe in, in peace to discover peace, you don't need to believe in love to experience what we call love. So this word God of course means many things to many people but the way I'm hearing you speak of it now, it's, it's more security, like God is some *something* whether it's an entity or

an energy that tells me I'm safe; tells me I'm alright; is there in the end. And, that's wonderful, that can be a resting place but, for many people in their intellectual exploration or existential exploration, there's a realization that, that, that *is* quite often just a safety device for the, for the mind. So I suggest, give up the belief, in God. And feel unsafe. And feel the fear that's under that lack of safety, and the hope that some bigger something is watching out for you, or be there for you, is covering your back - if, if you want true inquiry. Because really inquiry demands that we not bring any belief to the inquiry. Certainly the bigger the belief, the more it's in the way of, of true inquiry, of discovery. In my experience, what is here? That can of course as you know start relatively and, and go deeper, but once we start giving a metaphysics to that, then we start giving it a structure that we can cling to. Then it's our magic. It's our amulet. And, I'm not saying anything's wrong with that. But I am saying that inquiry is not concerned with that. It's more, it's more scientific, even though it's totally subjective. It's scientific in the sense that it assumes nothing, and then begins the, the adventure of truly questioning. When we're young, in particular, when we're children, we need some kind of structure, just like we need parents. And, and so we are given structure and, the idea of a benevolent universe or a benevolent being, is part of a, a safety structure so that our nervous systems can develop. And most of humanity is still in a very young phase in that we, we need some sense, some belief in something bigger than ourselves. We have a sense of something bigger than ourselves but we need to give it a form to satisfy the conceptual thinking. And even if that form is formless, when it is a concept in the mind, it's still avoiding something. It's still hiding from something, and what it's hiding from is at best aloneness, the possibility of having nothing, the possibility that it's all just brain waves and, when your particular brain waves stop, well, certainly we know your particular brain waves *will* stop, and that's it for this entity. And that is so frightening to us, and that's really why we are back at the fear of death, because we want to believe that there is no death and, if we are Buddhist we believe that there's another life, which is just another substitute for 'there is no death', and the possibility of inquiry is to be aware of those beliefs, and not to cling to them, to actually open to, to not knowing, to not knowing that you will ever have another lifetime, to not knowing that this is your *only* lifetime, to not knowing either side of it, to not knowing that there is a God, to not knowing that there is no God, to, to really trust what - it's called direct experience here - but even direct experience, once it's been experienced, becomes a concept in the mind. So not even to, to believe the way we have ordered our direct experience, but to be willing to directly experience freshly.

[07:44] HILLARY: I was thinking about awareness, and, when I was a little kid I had a near-death experience and it was, pure awareness. It was absolute awareness and there was no attachment to body - I didn't even identify what I was looking at as my body - it was incredibly peaceful. But then when I got older I didn't really realize what that was. When I got older, I heard people talking about near-death experiences and I thought well, what, you know hey, I had that too, and then I, you know, from time to time I'd run across some scientist that said oh, well, that's just the neurotransmitters or the, it's the brain firing off as the brain's shutting down, and, and I have to admit I kind of went into a little fear, cause my direct experience was so clear. And then I think a couple of years ago I was reading a book, maybe it was a year ago I was reading a book by a woman who had, who had died, and she actually went down the hall of her, as awareness she was down the hall in the hospital and she, you know, she heard the doctors speaking, and so she was gathering information that was far more than just her brain firing off and, and when she came back into her body and she could tell people what they were doing, when they weren't even in the room, I was thinking oh, well, that's such proof, of awareness. Not being in a body. But I also caught myself going oh, but that's kind of a hope.

[09:06] GANGAJI: Well, that's true. Because we are just beginning to understand the powers of, of the brain, and the powers of mind, so who's to say that our brain can't be aware even of what's set up for the future or what's happening around the earth. We know it can, there are psychics who are aware of that. There are people who are, who have extra-sensory perception, and can actually affect things, so, I, I'm just saying if we recognize that hope that gets attached to a belief, then we'll see that's still an attempt to organize what maybe is beyond our capacity to organize, and maybe even the organization is a part of developing capacity. Again I'm not saying it's wrong, I'm just saying it's still limited. So there, people who have these exquisite near-death experiences where they are out of their body, they hear the doctors are down the hall, and then use that, based on what we know of the localized awareness, to prove that awareness is God, or whatever. But awareness may be much bigger than, than local, you know that you can be in touch with somebody, they can call you on the phone, you can sense them and they're here, and, and those are just mundane ways. So I think we sell our brains short. And I remember in a group once, suggesting, What if it is just brain waves? And one person in particular was incensed. And as she left the group she said to me, 'I am not just a brain wave.' You know she was telling me, 'I am God, I am of God', but I don't see the two as separate. And that separation is dualistic, finally, and really in my discovery what inquiry directly reveals is a non-duality where we don't need these categories, called brain activity, or called God. We can use them, in our scientific exploration or our metaphysical exploration, but we can also be aware of an interconnectedness, and a region of our brain (laughter), I think it's the right brain, that doesn't recognize those categories, that is free. Free, limitlessly free. Without need of category or definition. But in our culture, in, in all our learning and East or West culture we are conditioned to rely on our left brain, which makes its wages (chuckles) by defining and categorizing so it's, it's just, maybe just out of balance there.

[11:59] HILLARY: You know, I've been smiling the whole time you've been talking 'cause I was thinking, I knew you would catch me on that near-death experience, and one more concept out the window; you know it seemed like a good one, too (laughter).

[12 :09] GANGAJI: It's beautiful, and it was a, I would never deny the validity of the experience, and the power of it, and how it destroys our boundaries, our limitedness. We just don't need to then make another boundary, another limit, even if it's called the omniscient one. And we can! But we can recognize that we are doing that out of our thinking, conceptual function, rather than our opening, realizing, limitless inseparability.

[12:47] HILLARY: You know, with that, I would love to, if you don't mind, I would love to move into the area of actually applying inquiry. And before, I have a couple clips I'd like to play. There was a woman in one of your compilation CDs that you so beautifully guided through her own questions about stillness, where is stillness. And I wanna preface it by saying that a couple years ago I went to satsang, and afterwards I was speaking to this gentleman, and he was very sincere in his desire to directly experience himself. But what he said was he got thrown off by the word stillness; he thought it was some kind of code language or something, so, and I actually have found that I, like, I don't know how to explain it either. I, so, I wasn't much help to him. But I realize that language does – I mean you've said it so many times before – somebody could be experiencing stillness but they don't think they're experiencing stillness 'cause they're not using that word.

[13:47] GANGAJI: They don't name it that, yes. Names are, are limited. That's why I love what Papaji said when he said, 'You have to look inside the name.' You don't cling to the form of the name, but the name itself is informed by this quality of, of what then gets named stillness, or God.

[14:10] HILLARY: And having said that I, the reason why I picked these couple clips is 'cause it's so clear, by the time you get done with this woman, it's so clear, but at the same time it was so overlooked. Anyway, if you don't mind.

[14:23] GANGAJI: No, do it. go ahead....

[14:24] HILLARY: I'm, I'm gonna go ahead and play this first one, it's a little over a minute-and-a-half...

(clip)

[14:28] GANGAJI: There's a feeling, and the interpretation of that feeling, since a feeling is agitated, is that what you mean? A feeling is agitated so then there's a conclusion well therefore, that means I'm agitated. And maybe there's a mental agitation that goes along with that. So that's further proof I am agitated. But I am here to tell you that you are still.

[14:50] (Laughter from audience)

[14:54] GANGAJI: And this agitation is in your body, perhaps; in your emotions perhaps; in your mind, perhaps; in the elements, perhaps; but you are the awareness that recognizes the agitation. You follow this? There's agitation. Can there be a recognition of that agitation without some awareness of that agitation?

[15:20] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: No.

[15:21] GANGAJI: Right, it's simple, isn't it.

[15:23] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Laughs)

[15:24] GANGAJI: Is the awareness of the agitation, agitated?

[15:30] (Laughter from audience)

[15:33] GANGAJI: Yes, it bears checking. Just take a moment to check. There's agitation, I understand, a lot of agitation. And there's awareness of that agitation. Is awareness agitated?

[15:47] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: No.

[15:48] GANGAJI: That's right.

[15:50] (Laughter from audience)

[15:53] GANGAJI: *Awareness is still, isn't it? Yes. I say to you, you are that awareness. Agitation comes and goes. Calmness comes and goes. Awareness is eternal, it is eternally still.*

(end clip)

[16:10] HILLARY: I just think that's so, cuts through that, that mental concept that is so universal that, if I'm feeling peace 'cause my life is peaceful, then I can experience stillness or God, or whatever word you want, but when I'm in turmoil it, it's left somehow.

[16:28] GANGAJI: Oh yes, because our attention goes on to the turmoil. And that's, to me, the, the great gift from Ramana and Papaji, is, is this discovery of what is always here. And, certainly when I'm at Papaji I was just searching for more peace in my life, I, I really did not have a clue that the peace he was pointing to was the peace that [chuckles] is beyond understanding. It's present in the middle of the marketplace; present at 4 a.m. in a, waking out of a nightmare. It doesn't mean that the agitation is not present. It just means that there's something closer than that agitation. And whether we call it awareness, or, or stillness, or some other name, it doesn't touch the truth of it, and it can be experienced by everyone, by anyone.

[17:27] HILLARY: You were talking the other day about: there's thought, and there's emotion, and sometimes that emotion can be confused with peace, or bliss, but you were talking about something deeper than that and, I felt all these light bulbs go on, like oh, 'cause it's so easy to think that peace is a feeling.

[17:49] GANGAJI: Because there are peaceful feelings. And, I'm not sure what moment you're actually referring to, but I remember recently talking about this. There can be a moment where our emotions, and our circumstances in that moment, and our thinking mind are all in a kind of alignment, and it's, well it's called a sat-fit moment, there's no disturbance, it's like a clear pool. And in that moment, the body, the emotions, the thoughts are all reflecting the awareness that is the source. But it's the nature of bodies and circumstances and ponds, to get agitated. And in the agitation, if in the agitation we overlook the peace that is deeper than any movement, that just before maybe the moment reflected, but in this moment is not being reflected by our emotions, or our circumstances, or our physical being, or our, our thoughts, that's the point of this inquiry, what is still here. In this moment, and in every moment, it's a revelation. Because there are peaceful emotions, but they're relative. They, they are caused usually, or they're the result of some cause being removed. We know them in deep sleep, we know them in drifting off to sleep, or in wakening. We know them in beautiful moments with loved ones, or in nature. But those are all conditional. And the great boon of discovering what is always here, is that it's non-conditional, and that it is therefore here in the worst of moments, in hell. And, that's extraordinary, I never imagined that, I just thought I had to make sure hell never came back, or make sure I got more heaven, or got closer to God, or developed my mind in such a way that it was always still, it was always peaceful. And this was what Ramana and Papaji just, so, expertly cut through, penetrated, with this question of inquiry. What is always here? What remains?

[20:20] HILLARY: In the rest of this inquiry you have with this woman, she's actually talking about her suffering and, and you are saying I'm not discounting you're suffering so, so I wanna finish this off 'cause it's so, to me it's just such a beautiful example of how inquiry works.

(clip)

[20:36] GANGAJI: *I understand the suffering. And I don't want to trivialize the suffering, or dismiss the suffering as nonexistent. I mean it is, but I don't want to dismiss it as that.*

[20:49] *(Laughter from audience)*

[20:57] GANGAJI: *Yes, I wanna wait till you do that! Then we'll laugh together! Because there's, there's a weight there, and there's an identification there, and I'm not asking that you now layer on top of that identification another identification called 'I am awareness', 'cause then they're just stacked, you know, and you can walk around saying 'I am awareness' and smiling and laughing and then four o'clock in the morning, you know, oh yeah, comes up.*

[21:27] *(Laughter from audience)*

[21:31] GANGAJI: *Because it's just another belief. But if it's not a belief, if it's in fact a direct experience, then whatever arises, in whatever time of day or night, you can investigate the truth. Has awareness been diminished by this? What is the separation between me and awareness? Do you find one? A separation between you and awareness?*

[22:01] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *I do at the moment.*

[22:03] GANGAJI: *At the moment? Because you identify yourself as a body separate from awareness. But, but awareness is here always, and this body comes and goes. Even in a day! I'm not even speaking about deep sleep now, but in a day, aren't there moments when you're not aware of your body? Yeah? You're aware of other things?*

[22:25] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *Yeah.*

[22:26] GANGAJI: *Yeah? Or you're aware of spacing out?*

[22:28] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *Yeah.*

[22:29] GANGAJI: *Aware of day-dreaming? Aware of, of working intently, focused? Aware of dancing, aware of liking something? Aware of not liking – oh, then aware of the body, aware of the heartbeat, aware of the breath.... Back and forth. The constant in that, is awareness.*

[22:45] *(Laughter from audience)*

[22:46] GANGAJI: *Yes, yes, this is it, you've got it.*
(end clip)

[22:50] HILLARY: *I just thought that that was beautiful, how it was completely hidden from her. And then those examples that you gave of, of where is awareness when you're dancing, or you're working, or you're falling asleep. It's so subtle.*

[23:03] GANGAJI: *And so present. So undeniable. When we actually open to the inquiry, open to the, the curiosity even. Well where is awareness? Has it been absent? From any moment? But, and, the, the issue here, then, is that in spiritual circles sometimes the very*

word awareness is pointing to a kind of elevated, or transcendental awareness, but there's the awareness that's aware of the elevated awareness, and that's the awareness that I'm speaking of, the one that's not disrupted when mundane awareness takes the place of transcendental awareness.

[23:46] HILLARY: I would love to be able to squeeze in somebody else's question here, because I think it brings us home to the final kind of glitch in whatever mental machinery we have going. Because it feels like what you constantly do is just push, push, push somebody back into themselves, so the, the mind has nowhere to go then. And this, to me, this is a perfect question for that. She says, I am aware of this silent, still conscious presence and this 'that', that is unaffected by anything. But there is still this 'I' that is aware, that seems separate (laughter). I heard in a DVD Papaji say, if you take the 'I' away, what is here? Stillness is here. But the 'I' is sometimes here too, is what she's saying. Can you please help me, beloved Gangaji.'

[24:36] GANGAJI: (chuckles) Well really the inquiry here is to discover what the boundary between this 'I' and stillness is made of. What's its substance? So rather than trying even to get rid of 'I' or trying to, to make it be awareness, just, if, if you are perceiving it as separate, that's a beginning point of inquiry. So you allow your attention to fall more deeply inside. And you discover, is there boundary between I and stillness? And if there is a boundary perceived or felt, what is it made of? what is its substance? For this, you need no belief that 'I is stillness'. You need no belief that 'I' needs to be got rid of. You simply have your own, intelligent, attention to discover (chuckles), what is it all made of? What's the substance of stillness, what's the substance of 'I'. And are they separate, in your direct experience? Closer than your beliefs.

[26:11] GANGAJI: The most sublime truth of all has never been stated. Or sung, or written. Not because it is far away and can't be reached. But because it is so intimately close. Because it is closer than anything that can be spoken. It is truly alive as the stillness in the core of your being. Not my being, her being, his being – *your* being. Alive, in the stillness that is the core of your being. It is too close to be described. Too close to be objectified. Too close to be known, in the way that we think of knowing as knowledge, as objects. But it is yours already. It's already present. And the only reason that I have appeared in your consciousness is to simply confirm that.

[27:29] HILLARY: Thank you so much for joining us again this month for A Conversation with Gangaji. If you have feedback, a question, or you would like to suggest a topic for Gangaji to cover, please write to gangajiradio@gangaji.org, that's g-a-n-g-a-j-i-radio@gangaji.org. You can also find updates on this show, as well as lots of other information about Gangaji, on Facebook. The only thing you have to do is search for Gangaji Community. And as always, I want to remind you of Gangaji's live webcast that happens every month. If you go to the website, gangaji.org, and look for With Gangaji, you can find out about how to sign up for that. Well, that's it for us, thank you for sharing this show with others, and as always, we would appreciate it if you could take a moment and leave a comment, or rate *A Conversation With Gangaji* in iTunes. I'm Hillary Larson. Thank you so much for tuning in. We'll see you next time.