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A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 14

CHOOSING FORGIVENESS

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[00:01] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:09] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: Forgiveness: it is a word that contains the potential for both suffering, and for healing. As a conscious choice, forgiveness is an ability that is seemingly only granted to human beings. It is a great gift. When we open to it, forgiveness carries with it the possibility of liberation from pain and isolation. But sometimes we do terrible things to each other, not to mention to ourselves, and in ways that can seem impossible to forgive. How is it that we can courageously and honestly look at our own personal stories of betrayal, and what are the possibilities if we let those stories go?

[00:47] GANGAJI: If we cling to that as the ultimate reality, we continue to suffer, and either we suffer righteously, or we suffer subconsciously, or we, we suffer, you know, with a mission, or we suffer as victims. And it's not necessary. At a certain point we can stop. At a certain point we can actually forgive God, forgive the whole flawed plan.

[1:15] HILLARY: What do we do when we feel like we should forgive, but we simply can't? And what is the price that we pay when we choose not to forgive? I'm Hillary Larson, and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

[1:36] HILLARY: I thought November would be a good month to talk about forgiveness. I mean it seems like (chuckles), maybe every month is a, a good month to talk about forgiveness but I think that this subject has a particular rawness to it. And it can be the source of so many unresolved emotions. And no matter what spiritual or religious teachings there are on the subject, it still comes down to the sense of being wronged, and that can be a tough one to sort through. So, what I'm looking at is there are the hurts that come from everyday life, and I think the accumulation of those and how they affect our lives could no doubt be wearing. But today, I really wanna talk about the types of inner and outer betrayals that can go on for years, even a lifetime. And, I wanna share a couple stories with you about that, but first I'd like to say hello to you. Hello!

[2:26] GANGAJI: Hello, hello Hillary... and all.

[2:30] HILLARY: Gosh, you know I was thinking Gangaji, over the last twenty-plus years you've probably spoken to many people on this subject of forgiveness.

[2:37] GANGAJI: Well it definitely comes up. It's an issue in people's' lives because at a certain point, there's a realization that 'I want to forgive', and, and maybe it's not possible in that moment to forgive so people are often asking for support, and how to, how to discover forgiveness.

[2:57] HILLARY: Well, you know, along those lines, there's two stories that I think are really pertinent to this, and one of them actually came when we posted something as we sometimes do on Facebook and let people know we were doing a conversation on forgiveness, and, right away, a gentleman posted something and I found it to be really touching. And let me go ahead and read this to you, it's a pretty long note: this is Dave, and he says, 'I've sat with Gangaji in Crestone, Colorado, and also in Marin County, and I have not forgotten who and what I am entirely, but I forget from time to time. I stop, look, and am reminded oh, that's right, I am that. As a youth, I was locked up in a warehouse under the guise of treatment. I was there in this', he calls it, 'mind-rape mill, for three years, from fourteen to seventeen. It has been thirty-five years since I was abandoned there. Scars run deep; nightmares are persistent; several phobias can be traced back to that time period and incidents that took place. I have PTSD, and I know that I will always have PTSD as a result of this particular organization. I am convinced the,' he calls it, 'the F word, forgiveness, would and could alleviate much of my symptoms yet the idea of forgiveness is repulsive in that subsequent rage typically ensues after entertaining the idea. I am heavily involved with a community of survivors that all struggle with this legacy of institutional child abuse, not only myself, but thousands struggle with this concept of forgiveness. My personal efforts have not brought me very far. The inability or unwillingness to forgive creates a bottleneck of sorts. My best effort has only been to forgive myself for not being able or willing to forgive systematic abuses received as a child, or accepting it's propagation today. Any insights would be gratefully appreciated and shared with my community.' That's to you.

[5:01] GANGAJI: It's so, so profound, and such sorrow in that. And, as, this, this man realizes, he certainly can't force forgiveness, and he's clearly not ready to forgive, there's something, maybe some way he still needs to be heard that he hasn't been heard by the perpetrators of the abuse, or, or those responsible for getting him in that. And that, that's important to recognize that we don't just give up the victim role, but we recognize at a certain point that, that we have taken on the victimizer role, and we're victimizing ourselves, ourselves. And I, I don't know if it's true for this man or not, I mean, that's something that he would have to look at very closely: is his war, his internal war – and maybe there's an external aspect to it also – is, is this war worth his life, worth his life energy? and maybe it is, I mean for some people that is their dedication, there are very good people who are making war, on injustice and abuse everywhere, and all to the good for us as a species and for particular situations. But there's also another alternative, and it's not something that can be pushed on anyone and it's, it's really only when someone is ready to, to discover what it means to work against abuses without being at war with those who participated. And actually what it means is, is being willing to feel compassion. You, I don't know his situation obviously, but I know of other situations where the people who perpetrated the abuse, in this type of thing, in institutional abuse, that was maybe thought to be helping him, or perpetrating it out of ignorance, or misguided altruism, even. And we can recognize that in ourselves, how we have done things that we thought were right or good and that turned out not to be so right, or so good. And in that, as he has said, we have to find the willingness to forgive ourselves. And to move on, that's where the move on comes in. So it's, it's not a formula that I'm offering, it's just a possibility of exploration. And in his case, I would really want to inquire more deeply is, is this, this war actually eating at *him*, is he the one who's actually being continually victimized, by this internal, emotional war? And, I haven't been to survivor's meetings, I don't know what goes on, but I, I respect it, and I certainly respect his, his point of view, whatever it

may be. But I'm just offering the possibility that we can work for correction of injustice without being at war. And in that we actually discover a great wellspring of energy, and compassion. And that's pretty wonderful, I mean, I had to discover compassion for my alcoholic mother; and I had to realize that her alcoholism and the emotional neglect that came with that, really had nothing to do with me. I was in the wake of it; I suffered from it; and from my personal point of view it had everything to do with me. But from her point of view, it wasn't about me. This was about her narcissism, or her alcoholism, or her ignorance. And in that I could really tell the truth about my love for my mother. And be free to love her in the face of all of her flaws; in the face of her ignorant action. And in that, quite startlingly, I also discovered there were some wonderful things that she did. Her personality was actually quite wonderful. And in fact, I did love her. And so, then, forgiveness was natural, it followed. It follows love. It follows compassion.

[9:37] HILLARY: I don't know if you remember this, but I was going through some compilations as I always do when I'm preparing for these conversations that we have and there was one that, that I found recently, or came across again recently, that was from Standing in the Truth of Who You Are, and it was a story that you were telling about going to Europe to do a retreat. This was some years back, and it just so happened that there was a group of Americans and a group of Germans, and there were people who were Jewish and there were people whose ancestors had been Nazis. And this kind of organic meeting came about, and I wanna play this particular clip. It's a longer one, it's over two-and-a-half minutes, it's a longer one, but I think it gets to the crux of really facing what seems so hard to face.

[10:32] GANGAJI: I, I wanna just add something right before you play it. Also at that meeting there was an African-American woman, and there were two people who were from Japan. And so what got flushed out and met was the horror that has happened to African-Americans all over the world, but in this case, from the United States. And then with the Japanese people it was the, sort of an apology, for the excess of our, our atomic bombing, and, and the Japanese lady said 'Well, we started it', and I said 'I know you, oh, that's right, you did.... Pearl Harbor was the start', but then there was an excess of horror and revenge, and lack of forgiveness. And so it was, it was a very fertile, rich, emotional and cathartic time.

[11:25] HILLARY: I think, yeah before I play this, I appreciate you saying that because also you know you and I are talking about very broad issues, but I think this clip could pertain to any way that there's this place of 'I can't forgive.'

[11:37] GANGAJI: Yes...

[11:38] HILLARY: Whether it's, whether it's myself, or somebody on the outside. So, let me go ahead and play this for us.

(clip)

[11:44] GANGAJI: And there's a point that's reached, where really as a, an individual incarnation of consciousness, you have the opportunity to really discover within yourself, what is it you can forgive? and what is it you can't forgive? What you can forgive, you can experience the forgiveness of, and the release of that. You can't force forgiveness. I mean we've tried that (chuckle). It doesn't work. It's not about should forgive. It's not about that at all. It's just telling

the truth, about what's possible, how, how much can the heart open to forgive, and what can't be forgiven. And at the point of what can't be forgiven, that's the point of inquiry. Because in that there's enormous pain. There's enormous legitimate pain. And that's the entry point, into a deeper revelation. Leaving 'forgiving and can't forgive', at the surface, not changing that, just dropping into the pain of 'can't forgive', and you can imagine in this group there were people who, I mean young people who knew that almost all of their families had been wiped out. There were several, several people that was true of. And so this was a meeting, you know, really a meeting and it was filled with tears and pain and laughter, and some could forgive, and some couldn't. That's just the way it is. But everyone at least got to examine it, and take responsibility. It's really finally possible for us to take responsibility for the whole human race. And it's not about Germans and Jews or, victims and perpetrators. It's the whole thing. The whole mess. I mean, we're happy to take responsibility for the beauty of it, the art, the sublime moments, the achievements, the evolution, that's easy. That's why we're not even speaking of that. It's the mess, can we take responsibility for that? Not because we did it. But because it, it is what is part of our humanness. It is our history. It is our present. Whether it's our future, who can say? But in the present, with it being our history, what can be forgiven, what cannot be forgiven, and in the 'cannot be forgiven', what are you willing to experience?

(end clip)

[14:26] HILLARY: There was a second story I wanted to share with you, that leads into another question I have, and that is, I remember a couple years ago, and I have heard you know many stories like this from time to time, I heard about this woman from Minnesota who had one child – he was a little boy – and he was gunned down by a sixteen-year old who lived in that neighborhood. And this young man was sentenced to twenty-five-and-a-half years, and I think he served like eighteen of those. And for the first few years she felt just anger towards him, she had lost her only son, I mean I can't even fathom what that would be like. But then she realized that she had to forgive him for her own sake. And she went to prison one day to visit him, and, and there's a long story attached to that, but you know this woman was able to forgive this most unimaginable loss, and in fact they, they live next, I mean they live right next door to each other now, and there was this decision on her part to forgive but it seems as though there was some grace that allowed them to both open to this, in this like extraordinary way. And my question to you was, when I look at forgiveness, and I look at calling off the search, I sometimes think about personality types, and calling off the search is stopping our internal story. And it seems to me some personality types might have a harder time calling off the search of the mind, constantly going, and some people might have a hard time calling off the sense of betrayal, the story around that. Does that make sense to you?

[16:08] GANGAJI: It's hard for everybody. Because we're identified with our stories, and I don't think any personality type has, has it easier than another, it just shows up in different ways. But the, you know, to, to recognize betrayal is, is part of a narrative story. I'm not saying that makes it wrong, or illegitimate, just like the search is not wrong or illegitimate, it, it just, it can only take you so far. And to stop doesn't mean to stop and go blank, it means to stop and let the mind open; and, it, what it actually reveals is there is a narrative that's been going on that we haven't even noticed because we've been so caught up in our personal narrative. It's a cosmic narrative, it, it may not have words and paragraphs and thoughts like we know them, but it's the vibrance of life itself. And the same, with forgiveness, as long as we are unable to forgive, or

maybe more importantly, as long as we *believe* we are in fact unable to forgive, rather than recognizing to this very moment we have been unable to forgive, it's just very different. Because one throws it into the future: 'I am simply unable to forgive', rather than 'I *have* been unable to forgive.' But what is it that I am avoiding in this moment, by either continuing the search, my narrative, or by continuing my, my war, my rage, against those that did me wrong, that betrayed me. And that's when I say that's the moment of inquiry, that's the moment where there is a deeper pain that is actually allowed to the surface of one's consciousness. And in both aspects of searching, or lack of forgiveness, it's the, the pain of the despair, of the powerlessness, of one human life, one, one poor human life. And rather than just overlaying that with more affirmations of, of the perfection of the beauty, and the harmony, there's actually an opportunity to meet it rawly – you used that word at the beginning of our conversation – to meet it in a very raw, naked state. And not to begin the narrative from there, but to continue to meet it, and in that continuing to meet it, which is very different from indulging it, or fighting it, or denying it, we drop more deeply inside. It's an inner dive. We dive more deeply inside. And there is a great discovery. It's a discovery that under the anger, under the fear, under the despair, under the broken-heartedness, there is a radiance that has never been harmed. That has never been lost. That is the truth of who one is. There's a wholeness, there is reality that is still here, and all that keeps us from that is our, our narrative. And people have heard me say this, and either have just written me off as delusional, or have assumed that that means that therefore the narrative is wrong. I'm not saying that, I mean that's what we have as human beings, we, we naturally generate narratives. That's part of the evolution of our thinking process, and it's, it's beautiful. But if we cling to that as the ultimate reality, we continue to suffer. And either we suffer righteously, or we suffer subconsciously, or we, we suffer, you know with a mission, or we suffer as victims, and it's not necessary. At a certain point we can stop. At a certain point we can actually forgive God, forgive the whole flawed plan that even allows injustice, allows innocent people to be victimized by ignorant people, or ignorant forces, or even just the natural forces of the world. Forgive the forces that generate a tsunami, or an earthquake, or a horrible fire or flood. This is a part of our earth's history. It's possible, that's all I can say. Whether someone is ready or not, it's not for me to say. I, I can extend the invitation. And I can support, but I, I'm not here to be a missionary for forgiveness or for even stopping the search. Just, just pointing out that it's possible. And if we tell ourselves it's not possible, then we just close off that possibility. So to simply be willing to discover, freshly, is it possible that it's possible? That there's a deepening? And that that deepening may reveal what cannot be searched for, because it's not separate from oneself, or this ocean of forgiveness, which is natural, to simply accepting imperfection as imperfection. And in that the discovery of what is inherently perfect.

[21:52] HILLARY: You know how some spiritual paths talk about, well they talk about 'die before you die' and that's what I hear you talk about in your own language. And I imagine right before somebody dies, the veil's moving, and there's this realization that the things I thought were actually real and important actually were not real at all. And I'm not talking about in esoteric terms, I just, the things, the mental concepts and the, the intense emotions that seem so real. At some point, there's this reality that they're not. And then with that is this, I don't know, it's like a, a sadness of 'oh, I spent my life thinking that those things were real', and I know that you talk about that you can experience that twenty years before you die, or five years before you die, that that, that full experience of seeing what's true can happen in a moment.

[22:54] GANGAJI: Well in that moment, whether it's on one's death bed or in this moment, really there's not even any sadness because that too would just be bringing another narrative: 'oh, look what I lost'. When someone really reaches the point of surrender and opening there's no story about what's lost or what's gained. There's this surprising, fresh revelation of the mystery of life and the mystery of death and the profound beauty of that mystery. And that we participate in and as that mystery. And then the rest, the details, are just what they are. But I've never seen anyone become sad in that moment. I've only seen them explode in grace and serenity, and beauty, and that's what's possible for us before, before our death bed, how beautiful it is if it happens on a deathbed. But we needn't wait that long, we can actually recognize now, what is, what is truly essential? What is the wonder? Where is the mystery? And in that, there may have been pain, great pain, suffering, but there is something always bigger than that, and it's glorious.

[24:18] HILLARY: I wonder, Gangaji, in your daily life with the clarity that you have, and I'm sure, you know, people do things that tick you off (laughter), people do things to offend you,

[24:28] GANGAJI: Me? (laughter) Moi?

[24:32] HILLARY: I'm just saying, for example (laughter).

[24:34] GANGAJI: Yeah (laughter) – just saying!

[24:36] HILLARY: I was wondering, do you have a hard time forgiving, do you have a moment where you go, 'I can't forgive' and then you have that clarity of, what's to forgive?

[24:48] GANGAJI: I don't have that conversation, Hillary, I don't have, 'I can't forgive', or "What's to forgive?" It's not a conversation. I may have anger that arises, I mean right now we're having this whole political thing that is so absurd, and harmful to so many people. And it generates anger for me. And then, it, it goes where it goes, you know it could be fear for my country, it could be despair of the human race, alright, and then there's, there's openness and clarity but– my point is we don't need to have a conversation about forgiveness. We can just actually be aware of the effect of lack of forgiveness. Or the effect of forgiveness if that's present, but in the true meeting and the revelation of forgiveness even the word forgiveness is superfluous. It's, it's unnecessary, you know. You may need to say to someone, 'I forgive you', or 'Please forgive me', but in the actual experience of it it's simply expansion and grace and peace. It's peace – peace with what *is*, peace with what *was*, and peace with what *will be*, which is of course for most of us individually means our death, or the death of the human species, or the death of the planet. And that peace is not, is not understandable to our thinking minds, because it's so big, and our thoughts really in the face of that are small.

[26:25] HILLARY: I think that I want to say, as we wrap this up, that this feels like a very, solitary, private – I don't want to call it process – experience, because there are situations where somebody will never receive the 'I'm sorry' that they're looking for. It's – it's like...

[26:45] GANGAJI: Yes.

[26:46] HILLARY: ...it's kind– it's all inward, isn't it?

[26:49] GANGAJI: It's, it gets very complex, and I realize what I wanted to add to what I was just saying is that, when we have this conversation, 'Oh I'm not forgiving', that's usually because underneath that conversation is a thought, 'I should forgive'. 'I should forgive, and I'm not forgiving'. And that's part of the mess. If we just remove that 'should', if you're allowed to experience the anger, the heartbreak, the betrayal, the, the despair. Then 'should' is not keeping you from this inner dive, and it's not even relevant, it's not a question whether you should or should not forgive. So in that sense, yes, it gets very complex and it's very deep and, and there has to be a willingness to perhaps feel a pain that's, that there's emotional scar tissue that has isolated it from one's life. And there's a willingness for that to break loose, so that there can be fluidity and greater range of emotion.

[28:00] HILLARY: Well I never thought I would say this, but I thank you once again for annihilating every single one of my questions (laughter).

[28:07] GANGAJI: (Laughter) Oh, it's my pleasure., my joy. I think we have a wonderful – I couldn't call it sport – because it's, that sort of trivializes it, but a wonderful meeting of two minds here.

[28:24] HILLARY: That wraps up our episode this month of A Conversation With Gangaji. Thank you for joining in with us again this time around. We have some really great topics lined up in the coming months. In the meantime, please feel free to drop Gangaji a line if you'd like to share your thoughts, or if you have a question or a suggestion for an upcoming show. The email address to write to is gangajiradio@gangaji.org. That's g-a-n-g-a-j-i-radio@gangaji.org. The clip I played during the show today is from a CD, it's called *Standing in the Truth of Who You Are*. You can find that by going to the website, gangaji.org, and also when you go to the website you can find out how to register for a live monthly webcast with Gangaji. It's actually called With Gangaji, and it's an opportunity for you to ask Gangaji questions directly. We so much appreciate you sharing this show with others, and if you'd like to go to iTunes and leave a comment, or rate this episode, we'd love that as well. We look forward to meeting up with you again next month. Until then, take care.