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A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 17

THERAPY AND SELF-REALIZATION: WHERE ONE ENDS AND THE OTHER BEGINS

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[00:01] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:08] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: A couple of months ago, we had a conversation about the search for a better me, and some of the ways we try to change ourselves in the name of creating more happiness or a better life. It was a popular episode, so this month, we're gonna take a different slant on that subject by asking the questions: 'what is self-inquiry, really? How do we distinguish between it and different forms of therapy? And most importantly, why does it matter?'

[00:34] GANGAJI: I say over and over that I have nothing against the therapeutic model, but when it takes over our lives, it obscures what's already free, what doesn't need to be fixed, what is closer and deeper than any behavior or any emotion or any thought.

[00:54] HILLARY: While facing our dark side, or inspecting our deepest wounds, certainly can bring about a sense of freedom, is there a way that stopping with that, being satisfied with that, still falls short of the deeper freedom we are searching for? Where does therapy end, and full self-realization begin? I'm Hillary Larson and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

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[01:24] HILLARY: I was inspired to do this topic quite some time back, and it was because of a clip that was posted on the Gangaji Foundation website, and it was called 'Satsang is Not Therapy'. And I remember when I heard it my mind, it went completely blank, and, kind of in a shocking way actually, it was only a seven or eight minute piece. But it rocked me for some reason, and I can't even say why. Maybe by the end of this conversation I'll know, but... I have a couple of segments that I pulled from that particular monologue, but I wanted to start off our conversation with one of those clips, but I also didn't want to be rude and jump in without saying hello to you (chuckles), live in person first, so...

[02:06] GANGAJI: (Chuckles) Hello. Good to be here (chuckles).

[02:10] HILLARY: You know Gangaji, this is such a, this just feels like such a big topic to me for some reason, and, and I hope that other people can relate to this sort of mental confusion that came up for me when I heard this monologue. And so let me go ahead right now and play this first clip.

(clip)

[02:26] GANGAJI: *I had a beautiful meeting with some psychotherapists in the Bay Area, and I, I hope we will meet again because I really, really appreciate that we're all coming from the same place. Same with social activists, too, we're coming from a place of support, and freedom, and assistance, and we talked about, but, so, what is the difference, then, in*

*satsang and therapy? And the first thing I said was patience, that they had much more patience than I do (laughter).*

[02:53] GANGAJI: *'Cause I don't have to and I'm not trained to and, and then, and the second thing is time. You know, I, I'm not here to be in a conversation about your problem, over time. It can come up, it can come up again. But if it's coming up every couple of months, and it's taking over your life, and it's, it is the conversation you're having and believing, I really recommend that you not look to satsang to solve that. And that you not look to me to that. Or even assist you in that. That's not my role in your life. My role is very simple: and that's to, to point you (chuckles) to the truth of yourself, which is vast and free and already present.*

(end clip)

[03:42] HILLARY: I think that the reason why that intrigues me is because as spiritual seekers, especially in the Western world, we come on the search maybe because we have problems that we wanna solve through therapy. And maybe some of us have done a lot (laughs) like a lot of therapy. So, can you see how that gets blurred? I'm sure that, that you run into that all the time.

[04:06] GANGAJI: I think it's really natural, because our whole culture and, certainly the sub-cultural of spiritual psychotherapeutic seekers, is based on the therapeutic model. It's part of the medium that our subculture is in, much as maybe in the fourteen hundreds the Catholic Church would have been the medium. So it, it goes unquestioned that we are trying to get better psychologically, that we're trying to fix ourselves, our behaviors, our thoughts, our emotions. And, I, I say over and over that, I have nothing against the therapeutic model. But when it takes over our lives, it obscures what's already free, what doesn't need to be fixed, what is closer and deeper than any behavior or any emotion or any thought. And that, for me, was the startling revelation in meeting Papaji and then, through him, discovering Ramana Maharshi. That there is this capacity that we have to really inquire into 'who am I?' Not 'what am I feeling, what am I thinking, how am I acting?' But 'who am I?' And that that inquiry actually has many therapeutic by-products – you, you definitely feel incredible when you realize who you are – and your emotions do change and your thoughts begin to line up around that discovery. And your behaviors change. But those are the by-products, rather than the, the goal. The goal is to discover who you are. And so, I, I feel like I deal with, with this quite a lot. I mean, I, I know it for myself. I know the, I use the language of the therapeutic sub-culture – the ego, the superego, and we talk about regression or repression – and it's very useful language, and there are tremendous insights that have come to us through therapeutic, psychotherapeutic investigation. But that's not what this invitation is. This invitation is to stop *everything*, every investigation into your behavior, into your emotions, into your thoughts, however useful and legitimate that may have been. In *this* moment, to stop and inquire into who you are. Who are you? Regardless of thought, regardless of behavior, regardless of emotion.

[06:51] HILLARY: Even though the most essential question is the question, 'who am I?' you talk about telling the truth. And sometimes telling the truth is just to say, 'oh, I, I'm sad'.

[07:02] GANGAJI: Yes.

[07:03] HILLARY: And for somebody, that could be a huge breakthrough.

[07:06] GANGAJI: Absolutely. Absolutely, that's, and, and we have the therapeutic community to thank for the, the attention that's been put on feelings, because, I, I know in cultures where feelings are irrelevant, someone can be feeling quite angry and acting out that anger and not be aware of it at all. And so it is extremely useful to, to tell the truth, relatively, what are you feeling, as a beginning point to discover what is under that feeling, or what's inside that feeling, or what's here in spite of that feeling, or when that feeling goes, when it appears. So I don't discount the, the validity, or the necessity, of being aware of feelings, just like being aware of thoughts, that's part of being responsible for being conscious of behavior, of thoughts, of feelings, and to use those behaviors, or, which come from thoughts or come from feelings, as a springboard to a deeper inquiry. And I often recommend that people seek out psychotherapy. Some people won't be benefitted until they have explored their psyches. Or until they have shorn up their egos enough that they can inquire more deeply. So I don't say, 'don't do therapy, only do satsang'. I feel that satsang appears in your life when you are ready for something that you simply haven't considered before. I, I know that's true for me. When I met Papaji, I had considered really fixing my emotions, getting my ego better, changing my behaviors, and I had worked on that for a couple of decades, and had had success at that. And I would never say I hadn't benefitted from that, it was like plowing the field. So there are particular people – I can think of several – where I have suggested that they actually suspend their attendance at these meetings, and, and find a psychotherapist, someone who could work with their problem, with their wounding, in a way that I'm not equipped, and a way I'm actually not even interested in. We all have our roles to play in your life. And your role to play in your life is to recognize when something is, is challenging you at a deeper level, and is meeting you at a deeper level. And to recognize when it's not, and to put it aside. There's a, a way that we can get caught up in the lifestyle of psychotherapy, or the lifestyle of satsang, and overlook what's actually true for ourselves. So when I invite people to tell the truth, it's both relatively telling the truth, and then absolutely telling the truth.

[10:26] HILLARY: You know I remember one time, you were doing some sort of a telecast or something, and people were calling in, and there was a, a woman that was really describing, remembering, a very horrific childhood situation like, right, right on the phone with you, and I was thinking that a lot of people that are therapists would have said, 'you know what, this is not an appropriate place for me to be trying to handle this situation', and maybe recommended that she, you know, really get some help for that, and some support. But you went right in and helped her zero in on the core of this horror. And I (chuckles), I remember being so in awe of that process. And my evaluation of that situation was that you have such certainty on the core of the truth, that that didn't shake you. Did I just project something onto you, or am I close?

[11:25] GANGAJI: You know I, I make a basic assumption, and that is, someone who's calling in to speak to me is ready to hear what I have to say. And I also make an assumption, which I just iterated, that whoever is listening also has the responsibility to, to live their own life. Now I don't know what happened to that particular caller, maybe she hung up in disgust. Maybe she waked up, maybe it was exactly what she needed to hear, and maybe it wasn't. But my concern is that I speak what is true from my realization, from my experience. And I, I know I just said a lot about sometimes satsang is not appropriate, sometimes you're not ready for satsang, you need psychotherapy; but if you're attending or listening in this moment – as you are, whoever you may be – then something has brought us together. Some mystery that's bigger than my decisions or understandings of what you are ready for

or what you're not ready for. And I trust that, and, and that's what I have to speak from. Otherwise I would just be one more of a hoard of people telling you what you need to do to get fixed. And that's really not what this invitation is. The invitation is primarily, essentially, finally, that you don't need to do anything, you don't need to fix anything, to discover the truth of who are you. And from that discovery you are free to fix anything, or not fix anything. There are personalities that could use some fixing. There are behaviors that need fixing and, there are habits of emotional involvement that can be fixed. But my invitation to you is to come from the discovery of who you are. And then from that, see, see what happens. And be free. You can, you can begin with satsang, and then you can go to psychotherapy, and then as Papaji said to someone once when they asked him about therapy, they said 'oh, good, yes, continue your therapy, and then the, the client and the therapist will both wake up'. (chuckles) So that's, that's the point.

[13:56] HILLARY: Well, I'm gonna give us a little practical application of that. I love watching you work with people and, and I pulled an excerpt from one of your public meetings. And, it was a woman that was really describing some very deep childhood pain and shame, and in this particular section you are asking her to really let herself fully experience the shame, and then something happens, 'cause it can look like therapy on the outside, and then, something happens that to me takes the turn into true inquiry. So, if you don't mind, I'm gonna go ahead and play this.

[14:36] GANGAJI: Mmm... good.

(clip)

[14:37] GANGAJI: *So, just while you're here, right here with me, are you willing to be completely ashamed? To not fight the shame?*

[14:49] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *(deep sigh; gentle crying)*

[14:53] GANGAJI: *Really, all the way ashamed?*

[14:57] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *(crying)*

[15:02] GANGAJI: *It, it's something else, so it's not shame. What's that?*

[15:10] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *(crying) It's almost a hatred for myself for what I've done, for my own killing...*

[15:14] GANGAJI: *Yes.*

[15:15] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *(crying) ...for what I was done as a child...*

[15:16] GANGAJI: *Yes, so...*

[15:17] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *(crying) ...that I can't forgive myself for.*

[15:20] GANGAJI: *...so forget forgiving yourself. You don't have to forgive yourself.*

[15:26] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *(crying) I can't accept that in me I know what it's like to kill.*

[15:29] GANGAJI: *Forget... yes, forget acceptance. Forget acceptance. I'm just asking you to feel one emotion all the way through. So the shame led you to the hate. Right?*

[15:44] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *Mm-hm.*

[15:45] GANGAJI: *Are you willing to feel the hate all the way through? Just this one emotion, that has nothing to do with forgiveness or acceptance or being better or worse or, just the emotion itself all the way through.*

[16:00] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *(sighs) I just want to, to destroy myself from that.*

[16:07] GANGAJI: *To die?*

[16:08] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *Just, I just – there's so much cruelty in the hatred.*

[16:14] GANGAJI: *Yes, but I'm not speaking of the cruelty....*

[16:15] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *And, I want to do it to-*

[16:16] GANGAJI: *...'cause that's doing something with it, right?*

[16:18] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *Right.*

[16:19] GANGAJI: *So....*

[16:20] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *And the hatred is, is for myself.*

[16:21] GANGAJI: *Yes, I understand it's for yourself. But it's also for other people, too, it's the same thing.*

[16:26] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *Right.*

[16:27] GANGAJI: *But I'm just asking you I, I know it's, it's not therapy, it's, it's, maybe it is some kinds of therapy. But it's, I'm not interested in your doing anything with the hatred. I'm not even interested in your getting rid of it. I want you to meet it, just to really meet it, purely. It may be impossible to believe, but the hatred itself, at the core, has a treasure, has a gift.*

[17:00] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *(deep sighing)*

[17:05] GANGAJI: *What are you experiencing?*

[17:09] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *(crying) Ah... some compassion?*

[17:12] GANGAJI: *Some compassion. Yeah...*

[17:15] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *(deep sob)*

[17:16] GANGAJI: ...now, don't, just for a moment don't tell yourself any story about this compassion. Just let's use compassion as an emotion. And just experience this compassion, all the way. Just as I ask you to experience the hatred. Now you just experience this compassion, just, not to keep it, not to get rid of it, just as an experience of what it has to give you in the core of it. What's that?

[17:48] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: It's like a freedom...?

[17:51] GANGAJI: Yes.

[17:55] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: It's like a freedom.

(end clip)

[17:58] HILLARY: That was three and a half minutes, Gangaji. In the beginning, that could've gone anywhere, really, it could've gone anywhere. And in, in three and a half minutes that woman found freedom.

[18:10] GANGAJI: (sighs) It's, it's tremendous, really, and you're absolutely right, it could've gone anywhere, it doesn't... sometimes people aren't willing to actually descend into what they have been trying to escape for so long. But her willingness was clear. It didn't mean it was easy. But there was a willingness present. And this is the great mystery, Hillary. It is easy, and maybe that's not the right word. It's simple. And many many people throughout the globe when given the opportunity to fully meet what is here discover in the core this richness, this vitality, this freedom of being. And also, tragically, that is very easy to, to ignore, to deny, to betray. And that then becomes our leela, this, this mysterious play that we're involved in, a form comprising circumstances and emotions and thoughts and behaviors and satsang and psychotherapy. And so, the, the capacity and the willingness to cut through ALL of it, no matter what we have experienced in the future- I, in the past – or what we may experience in the future. Just to cut through, in this moment, what is here. And, if, if that is hatred, or cruelty, or shame, to allow that to be the beginning of what is *inside* that, what is deeper than that, what is closer than that. And then this is living self-inquiry. This is actually directly discovering, 'Who am I?' Using an emotion, or a feeling, as the, the beginning point, as the point of inquiry. So I'm really happy you played that. I remember that meeting, I remember speaking to her, and, and I appreciated the initial struggle she had, because she's aware of this horrible feeling, and she's aware of having worked to get rid of it. And to have someone say, forget about getting rid of it, forget about forgiveness for it, forget about acceptance, just turn and meet it. This is challenging to everything, to all of our psychotherapeutic models, and I, I do appreciate that some psychotherapeutic models do deal directly with meeting emotions, and I salute them, I, I believe that that's where satsang and inquiry have influenced psychotherapy, just as psychotherapy has influenced every other aspect of our lives. And so in a, a final sense maybe the distinction between the two is irrelevant. If you, you are calling out for help, and help appears in different forms. And finally, what psychotherapy is about, what satsang is about, what social activism is about, is the freedom that your life be lived in freedom. In the face of constrictions: constrictions of the body, of the particular government you live under, or your family, or genetics. But the freedom can be lived regardless of whatever else is going on.

[21:59] HILLARY: I just wanna make sure I get this, this listener question in really quick, Gangaji. She says, 'I remember the first time I heard you speak on public access. You were telling a woman to feel her sadness more, instead of trying to make her feel better. In that moment, I felt this complete freedom, because I had been so busy trying to fix myself. Since then my life has changed dramatically, but I wouldn't say that I am aware of myself as being consciousness or stillness as a result. I'm just so much more happy...

[22:29] GANGAJI: (laughs)

[22:30] HILLARY: ...in my life. I wonder if I'm stopping short, and if in fact what I do is more therapy than inquiry.'

[22:38] GANGAJI: Well I, I salute you in discovering this happiness that's available. And the happiness is already a rest and a relaxation that allows you to discover more. And there's always more. But when you are busy trying to get rid of something, you don't have an opportunity to actually discover what is more and more here; always here. So I wouldn't make a value judgment about whether you're doing therapy or satsang, I, your happiness is wonderful. It influences every aspect of your life, and every aspect of anyone who comes in touch with your life. And in fact, awakening is really about your happiness. So to discover that there is a happiness under the feeling of happiness, that is not disrupted when the feeling of happiness is disrupted, is to awaken to the truth of who you are. You are this unconditional happiness. Maybe not the way we have defined happiness. But happiness that is huge, and mysterious, and fulfilled in itself, and discovering itself in you. Conscious happiness.

[24:00] HILLARY: You know, I actually wanna dig into that a little bit more, Gangaji, 'cause, maybe that's where my blankness came from. Because there is such freedom in being willing to experience any emotion. I mean that, that's a huge gift, and could really change somebody for a lifetime. But then underneath that – I guess what trips me up is the conversation about it – because this conversation about oh, being nothing, being stillness, being awareness, is it possible that somebody could just feel the freedom of being willing to experience every emotion, and be awake? And I don't even know if awake is the, the word I really want. But do you understand what I'm saying?

[24:44] GANGAJI: I, I'm not sure, but I do understand that there are certain words or concepts that come in and, and sabotage our own deepening, our own discovery of more. And the current words are silence, or emptiness, or nothingness, or self. And if we just do away with all those words, and the concepts that, that they spring from, and we simply are who we are. Forget about consciously finding who we are or, even happiness. Just in this moment of being free of concept, free of words, free of enlightenment, free of unenlightenment. Then you can tell the truth of what's here. And it's not driven by a conceptual conversation.

[25:39] HILLARY: I remember a few months ago, when we were all preparing for the twentieth anniversary of The Gangaji Foundation, I remember you having this conversation about when Papaji asked you to go out and teach, and you saw all the different flyers, and the, at the health food stores, and the new thought book stores, of you know, 'clear your chakras' and (laughs), and 'face your dark side', and 'heal your inner child' and all that, that the fear came up in you of that you were offering people nothing (laughter).

[26:12] GANGAJI: (laughter)

[26:13] HILLARY: And how intimidating that was. And that seems like it very much connects with this conversation.

[26:18] GANGAJI: Yes, that's right. Because finally, I'm not – it's true – I'm not offering you anything. I'm supporting you in being naked to yourself. Baring yourself to yourself. And in then, from that discovering, is there more, is this enough? Is there something that is sabotaging the, the purity of your nakedness? The radiance of your naked self? It's been quite thrilling to meet people over the years and to discover the readiness in so many people, the readiness of our time. To actually take a moment and inquire, not into fixing, or getting better, or -- not into being nothing, or being silent. Just into being, what is here, always here. It's always fresh, always alive. It's always who you are.

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[27:39] HILLARY: I wanna let you know where you can find the entire clip that I mentioned at the beginning of the show. If you go to YouTube and in the search window type **satsang is not therapy**, it should pop right up. By the way, if satsang is a new word for you, it's spelled s-a-t-s-a-n-g. And if you head over to the Gangaji website, [gangaji.org](http://gangaji.org), you can find other clips as well as Gangaji's event schedule. Also you can find information there about how to register for a live webcast that happens every month, and that is called With Gangaji. If you'd like to send us a comment or if you have a question for Gangaji for a future show, please feel free to write Gangaji radio, at [gangaji.org](http://gangaji.org). that's [g-a-n-g-a-j-i-radio@gangaji.org](mailto:g-a-n-g-a-j-i-radio@gangaji.org). That's it for us. Thank you as always for being here with us. Take care until next time.