

Gangaji Radio

A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 19

THE STRATEGY OF BEING NICE

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[00:05] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:10] HILLARY: How many times, in the course of a day, in the course of a lifetime, have we chosen the road of being nice in the name of keeping ourselves from being hurt, disliked, or rejected? Most of us are taught from a young age that in order to be accepted into the pack, we need to be nice people, good people. But the problem with that is that it takes so much work, and, at what cost?

[00:35] GANGAJI: If we're so busy being nice, either for what the neighbors think or what the other person that we're engaged with thinks, we don't really get to this deeper realm of what it means to really meet one another.

[00:51] HILLARY: There is also the subject of people pleasing. In all the countless ways we work to separate out the bad parts of ourselves from the good parts, all the while overlooking the obvious, and that is that being human, with all the flaws that come with it, might not just be okay, it might actually be very good. Dismantling the Strategy of Being Nice: I'm Hillary Larson and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

[01:26] HILLARY: Well, to start off with, what I don't want to do is, I don't want to put the word 'nice' in the terrible word category because people use that word nice all the time and, in fact, many times it has to do with positive actions and good intentions. And I think that we can agree that being nice in a positive sense is part of being socially conscious. So, did you want to say something, Gangaji?

[01:52] GANGAJI: No, I wanted to say absolutely. We certainly like it when everybody is nice to us.

[01:57] HILLARY: So, having said that, in the world of using proper words and so on, there is a differentiation that we can make between being nice and being kind, and I think that will naturally come up in the course of this conversation. In fact, we talked a lot about being kind in our last show, about spiritual practice and the practice between the practice, but, for our purposes today, I want to talk about the kind of nice that takes place when we are trying to avoid something. Whether that is looking bad, or being hurt or rejected, or finding a way to get what we want. It's nice when it is used as a strategy.

[02:38] GANGAJI: That's it. That's the difference.

[02:42] HILLARY: What I wanted to do is, the announcement that we are going to be doing this episode, went up on the Gangaji website and it really created quite a lot of interest, you know, to say the least, and I just want to really just read off just a few comments and questions, just to give you an idea of the range of how it stirred people, and the first one is: "I'm nice because I don't want people to think I'm not perfect." The other person says, "I'm constantly trying to live up to other people's expectations of me, and being nice is the disguise I wear to keep from discovering my flaws." Next person, "Sometimes being nice is about taking the high road. My version of being nice is accommodating. That plays out for me as having as few needs as possible and making sure everyone else is taken care of. When other people get angry, I start to feel nervous and being nice is my go-to defense." Another one says, "There are situations where being nice is actually causing harm. It's kindness we're shooting for. Nice is largely about being fake and politically/spiritually correct at our own expense." I just want to give you a couple more. This person says, "With regard to being nice, is it better to just fake it till you make it, or is that just decorating your own prison?" And the last one here, and there are many others, but I just want to give you this one other one. "I think that people who are arrogant and are quick to anger are running from the same thing as people who are chronically nice." So, that's quite a list, isn't it?

[04:18] GANGAJI: It's wonderful. Really deep comments. Especially that last one. It is the same kind of strategy, only just different outside.

[01:07] HILLARY: You know, what's difficult about a conversation like this, like many of the conversations we've had, is there are just so many different directions to go. But, when I looked at all of those comments, there was one question that came in through your email, and that one seemed like it kind of consolidated all of them in some way, and I am going to go ahead and read this to you, okay Gangaji?

[04:51] GANGAJI: Okay.

[04:52] HILLARY: This is from Kim, in the UK. And, by the way, I usually don't mention names when I read these, but if you like your name mentioned, I am absolutely more than happy to do that. Just let me know. Her question is this: "In the audio book, *Diamond in Your Pocket*, you mentioned the Super Ego, which is a concept that I can relate to very well. I remember that Byron Katie once said, 'Don't be spiritual, be honest instead.' Truth be told, I'm a human being, full of flaws, full of judgement. Over the past few years, I find myself trying to be more wholly, more spiritual, more like you, - I'm sorry, that always makes me laugh - or other awakened ones. I feel incredibly guilty when I do something that I consider unspiritual, and I always consider hard before I act, to make sure I come across as nice, spiritual, considerate, open-minded. I'm just wondering if you can talk more about the Super Ego and how to avoid it?"

[05:49] GANGAJI: Well you can't really avoid it. It is part of the construction of our mind and it's serves a really beautiful purpose. It's part of discrimination. It's part of recognizing in acting out on your anger you actually cause suffering to others and to yourself, and so the Super Ego becomes an aspect of ego, an aspect of yourself, that comments on inappropriate behavior. But, of course, what happens is we are out of balance and so the Super Ego becomes a catch word for this internal torturer, the internal judge, an internal god, that is forever letting you know that everything you do is wrong, or flawed, or could have been better, at least. And so it's the

misuse of the Super Ego, or the Super Ego that is just running the show. In its place, it is just as it should be. Just as sometimes it is quite appropriate to be nice, even if you aren't feeling nice, to just get through it, but when that becomes a habit, or when that's running the show, then you are imprisoned by the strategy of being nice. Then it's more than just a social contract, it's actually your attempt to stay safe, just stay protected, and it makes for a small world and a lack of fulfillment as we could hear in those comments.

[07:27] HILLARY: I think that the bind that we get into, in the spiritual-seeker world, is there is a certain way it is supposed to look, and I know that you've talked about this many times before, but I had a clip that really, really addressed this well. I'm going to go ahead and play that now.

[07:45] GANGAJI: Good.

(clip)

[07:48] SPEAKER: *I have this longing to manifest more love.*

[07:50] GANGAJI: *Trouble.*

[07:51] SPEAKER: *Trouble. (Laughter) I know because that feels like another level of ego.*

[07:54] GANGAJI: *It is. It is. It's the love manifesting ego.*

[08:01] SPEAKER: *I mean, I can...*

[08:03] GANGAJI: *t's better than the hate-manifesting ego on the level of ego.*

[08:06] SPEAKER: *Because I want to be able to love the world and my husband.*

[08:06] GANGAJI: *And if that happens, ok. So let me ask you two parts of that. What does this perfect love look like?*

[08:17] SPEAKER: *It looks like never having PMS and being a bitch.*

[08:20] GANGAJI: *Yes. That's right. It means being a very good girl, all the time. Yes. This is the corruption of what is taught. This is a really deep corruption, and so the goodness in you hates the badness. This is not good. This is just, this is ego, saying I'm good, what can't that bad, ugly part go away and never bother me again, so that I can be this perfect manifestation of love to the world, my husband? Did you say child also? No.*

[09:11] SPEAKER: *What else is the point of all this? Isn't the point of all of this to purify our love so that we can just be pure love and...?*

[09:17] GANGAJI: *Well, that's the result of it, but if it's made the point of it, it is a point that you are forever chasing. You understand? Probably the point of it, probably the Dalai Lama said the point of it, the very best of all, and that is just to be kind.*

(end clip)

[09:34] HILLARY: There are two things that struck me about that and one of them was this distinction between being kind and being nice, when nice used as a strategy, and the other thing that strikes me is this true idea that there is some part of us that is just so, so pure and we are trying to somehow manifest that on the outside always.

[09:55] GANGAJI: Well, two things: You know we spoke about being kind last time a lot and so I don't know that we need to talk about that, but the way we spoke of it was that it was something natural, not an external goal of what kind looks like or feels like, that it was actually a willingness to discover kindness, and then kindness can be ruthless too. It is not always kind to be nice and I think that's what you are pointing to. And, what was the second part or what you just asked?

[10:32] HILLARY: Oh, this idea that we are just so lily white.

[10:34] GANGAJI: Oh yes. Well that's just an idea. I mean that's what our thinking mind does. It generates ideas to make sense of reality and so, when we have an experience of beauty, and perfection, and goodness, that is a true experience, but the way that our thinking minds can manage that experience, is to make a concept. 'Oh, this is the good me. This is what I always want.' And then it becomes an object, a goodness that is reached for or always missed, and that is not the true goodness. That's just made up, and, with that, it has what has been learned from parents, or schools, or religions, or spiritual seeking, further ideas that are then tacked onto it, and it starts to weigh a lot, and we can always find proof of how we're not good all the time, or even most of the time, based on our idealization of what good is, and so we suffer unnecessarily. We're suffering from the weight of goodness and our belief in the concept of goodness rather than the direct experience of what is good in this moment, this very moment. Whatever you're feeling, however you just acted, whatever you think of yourself, whatever your evaluation is, what is good? Or, maybe even better, where is goodness? If we aren't looking in our behaviors and we aren't looking in our images, and we aren't looking in the feedback we get from other people, where is goodness? And we discover it is the ground of being, but that discovery, too, then becomes a concept and I want to be the ground of being and I'm not being the ground of being, and that is the ego split into two parts – the ego and what we are calling Super Ego – it's, it's the war. It's possible to stop the war, to really be still. Whatever your evaluation of yourself, whatever your behavior has been, just to, in this moment, be completely still, and isn't that good.

[13:05] HILLARY: Hmph. I was going to give you a real life example of that fear of it's really stepping into some huge fear to be willing to lose control, to actually accept that animal part of us, because I'm not the kind of person that expresses anger. I raise my voice, but I raise my voice because I'm excited, but I don't often raise my voice at somebody because I'm angry. And a few weeks ago we had a very stressful situation in my family and I was on the phone with somebody that I actually care a lot about and we both just started screaming at each other and it was.... I would like to say it was yelling, but it wasn't yelling. It was screaming. So I got off the phone. We actually hung up on each other, to be perfectly honest. It's so contrary to how I am in my day to day life. I got off the phone and it was like, oh, that felt so great. So I didn't have a hangover because of just the sheer expression of anger, and the person I was talking to had the exact same experience. It was great for her too. We laughed about it afterwards, but there was

a hangover because I just have neighbors that just moved in and my first thought was, uh oh, what are they going to think. Are they thinking, oh my god, what have we moved in next to? And that was the hangover and it was this feeling of being so out of character for myself, but, also, I was afraid of looking bad.

[14:39] GANGAJI: Yes, well that's a part of protection. That's a strategy too. That is the way we stay with the herd, the way we aren't abandoned and left to die. We look good to each other and there is, of course, benefit in that. It maintains a certain standard of conduct, which is appropriate, but when it starts to penetrate the social relationships so that there is a lack of true intimacy, then it causes suffering. I mean, what I hear from this report of this conversation, screaming conversation, or this screaming that all conversation ended, and the results of that, that it didn't escalate into something worse, was that it was actually an intimate moment for both of you to expose some rawness and, in this case, it was raw anger, and very rarely do we have permission that we give ourselves and that we are given by those that we are intimate with to really express this sort of animal nature. I mean, if you watch other animals, you will see that they all have their cranky moments and they, most of them have no problem in expressing a moment of crankiness. But we, in our evolution, have learned to suppress that part of ourselves and, while some suppression is needed, if we totally suppress it, we don't live full human lives and we don't have full intimate relationships. If we are so busy being nice, either for what the neighbors think or what the other person that we are engaged with thinks, we don't really get to, to this deeper realm to what it means to really meet one another, of what it means to be limited and yet meet the limitlessness in oneself and in another.

[16:43] HILLARY: I think that what you said about intimacy is so important when it comes to this subject because, for some of us, the idea of conflict is very intimidating. Some people will just avoid conflict at all costs and being nice seems to be the way out, and it seems like that in itself is also this huge form of self-betrayal, so then there is a moment missed with our intimacy with ourselves.

[17:13] GANGAJI: Yes. And, of course, it beings as self-protection, but when self-protection is out of balance, or is habitual, it is, as you say, it's self-betrayal. You limit yourself unnecessarily, because as little children, maybe we learned, as part of survival, was being adorable or being sweet, or being good, and that's definitely what our parents wanted and what our teachers wanted, and what our friends, maybe, wanted. And so we have learned that, but it's not, it's really just covering the surface. And it is good that we learned that. It is a good skill to have. But when it becomes the operating principle of a life, the life is narrowed and unnecessarily.

[18:06] HILLARY: I'd like to ask you, I don't know if you've noticed this or not, but I like to ask you questions about pre-Papaji and post-Papaji and I was reading the book, *Meeting Papaji*, a few months ago and that book came out, I think it was in 1999, and one of the questions that you were asked really was interesting to me and it is, frankly, surprising to me. And I think this has to do with expectation, this idea of purity and how we project that onto other people. So the questions to you was: "Has your personality changed as a result of meeting Papaji?" And you had some things to say about emotion, but I went to this one piece, and you said, "I think in some ways maybe. My personality is a little more difficult than it used to be for people because I'm not so much as a people-pleaser as I was. I say as much because my personality is still at

first always pleasing but when people get in a little closer sometimes it's not so pleasing. That's what I'm told anyway."

[19:11] GANGAJI: I'll stand by that.

[19:13] HILLARY: Well, first of all, can I ask you about the people pleasing part because that's a big thing – people pleasing – and what, what was it? Did you see some illusion in that, or what shifted for you?

[19:25] GANGAJI: Well really, in my development of my talent for people-pleasing, I really was seeking happiness. I recognize when people are pleased they actually are more likely to be happy and to put happiness in my direction. So, in that sense, it is a very intelligent strategy. Once I discovered where happiness always is, then I wasn't as motivated to generate happiness for getting it vicariously through another person, and so the habits of my personality may still be there but they aren't rooted to this seeking of fulfillment. Fulfillment is always here, whether I am pleasing anyone or not, and I think, as social animals, we do enjoy pleasing each other, making each other smile, making each other happy, but once we become attached to that, we sell ourselves out and we miss a deeper relationship. So I lost my attachment to pleasing people when I recognized I didn't need to please people to actually find happiness.

[20:47] HILLARY: What's natural to me is I think that people have a social personality, meaning, you know, we meet somebody new, we're part of a group, people see us in a certain way, there is just a certain way we all operate in new circumstances, but if somebody, for example, followed me 24 hours a day, I think they might be disappointed sometimes when I get crabby and I think I was looking at what projections I even had on you of.. I mean, I don't find you difficult to get along with so that statement was surprising to me.

[21:24] GANGAJI: Well that's great because I think what you and I have had a couple of moments where I haven't necessarily a people-pleaser but I don't see that you demand that. There are some people who demand that in their relationships. They are so fragmented or fragile that they demand that you be pleasing for them for the space and it is artificial and so, in the ways that we have related when we've disagreed at times, I feel that we've frankly disagreed. We've had different opinions and it's no big deal. It doesn't mean anything. You aren't searching for that from me and I'm not searching to give you that. And I really learned this a lot from being with my teacher, Papaji. He was definitely not a people-pleaser, even though at many moments of a day with him were filled with a natural overflow of his grace and love and pleased many people. But that was never primary in his operational mode. He was simply being himself. Being himself as limitless truth of self and being himself as this particular life form with its personality, with its history, with its 'the way it is,' and to see that and experience that, it was liberating. It is liberating and we can be liberating for each other in that way rather than trying to please each other to get happiness. We can be ourselves with each other and, in that, give permission to us all to be ourselves. And I don't mean act out your anger or indulge your anger, but just the willingness to experience anger or fear or despair, or crankiness, without it meaning anything about who you are. Then there is a spaciousness and a permission that is given to us all, to be human beings, because we are.

[23:35] HILLARY: Well I tell you what, I wanted to... I mean, last time, when we were doing the show on spiritual practice, I said that we're going to run late and we didn't, so I feel like I have a bonus card now, because we are going to run late on this show, because I do want to finish off this part of the conversation by playing another, the continuation of the conversation you were having with this young woman, and it kind of makes the point of this whole idea of spiritual fascism. So, if you don't mind, let me just sneak this in before we go.

[24:08] GANGAJI: Good.

(clip)

[24:10] GANGAJI: But you find you aren't more kind when you are trying to manifest pure love and things keep getting in your way, whether it is outside things or internal things, they are bothering you. They are bothering this pureness. Yes. That's right. That's right. For a moment you can see that without taking it seriously because it is not so rooted in you that you are a fascist yet, but that's a direction it takes finally. It's a spiritual fascism, which is not different at all from political fascism or Nazism. We need to purify. We need to get rid of what is, from my point of view, is seen as ugly or less than, or crippled, or dwarfed, or colored. It just must be lily white, no stain. Right? That's what the soul is. You want this pure soul. That's what we are taught the soul is.

[25:16] SPEAKER: I feel like what I really want is to see everything as the self and myself and I keep separating from that...

[25:23] GANGAJI: Because you keep the self as this lily white thing.

[25:25] SPEAKER: Yeah.

[25:27] GANGAJI: Good thing.

[25:32] SPEAKER: I mean I feel like sometimes I can accept ...

[25:34] GANGAJI: That's half the self. You can.

[25:37] SPEAKER: Yea. Sometimes.

[025:38] GANGAJI: And in that moment of accepting just the humanity of it all, what's present?

[25:46] SPEAKER: The thought.

[25:47] GANGAJI: And what's the experience when no thought about what's happening, just the acceptance of the humanity?

[25:52] SPEAKER: Just peace.

[25:53] GANGAJI: Just peace.

[25:55] SPEAKER: Yea.

[25:56] GANGAJI: That's right.

(end clip)

[25:57] HILLARY: I just really wanted to get that in. And I also... This doesn't seem like it relates to the topic, but I promise I'll bring it around. I wanted to take a moment to congratulate you and the Gangaji Foundation staff on your brand new website. It's truly a thing of beauty and it serves as a new home for Gangaji Radio, but there are also so many aspects to it. One could spend a good hour or two just checking out all the new pages. The reason why I bring that up, other than the fact that it feels like a really big deal, is that when someone first opens it, they immediately see this beautiful photo that was taken of you, and some people who have never met you might open it and go, oh, this website is about a woman named Gangaji, but what has always touched me about you is that you have never seemed to claim this profound awakening that has revealed itself in you and through you as something that you did, or that it has something to do with your personality, and I find that just absolutely refreshing, and it serves as its own confirmation, in its own way, of really what doesn't come and go.

[27:05] GANGAJI: Yes, it's what's in you. What's in everyone.

[27:11] HILLARY: Well thank you for talking to us this month about the subject of people-pleasing. Somebody said that I bet you Gangaji is going to rip off the Band-Aid as mercifully as she always does, and I think you did that.

[27:23] GANGAJI: Good. Good. Yes. It's really about trusting yourself, which is not your idea of yourself, it's the truth of yourself. Trusting that, rather than your ideas of what a kind, good, nice person would be.

[27:47] HILLARY: Thank you for joining us for another episode of *A Conversation With Gangaji*. Before we go, I'd like to take a moment to talk about the radio show itself. About a month ago, a very kind person asked me how *A Conversation With Gangaji* received support. I was really moved by the intention that came from her question, and my answer to her was that this opportunity to be with Gangaji every month, in this particular way, happens only through support of people like you. These episodes are provided by the Gangaji Foundation free of charge, and, if you find these monthly conversations helpful and you'd like to lend us hand in your own way, please go to the Radio Page on the website, gangaji.org, and look in the upper right-hand corner. There is a Donate Button right there and, when you click on it, you have a choice of making any monthly donation that feels right to you. There is also a section on that first page that talks about partnering with Gangaji Radio by being a sponsor. You know the original intention of these radio shows was for all of us to come together with Gangaji to talk about the issues that affect all of us in different ways in our everyday lives and we very much consider all of you to be an important part of that. Thank you so much for your support and always, including sitting with us every month. That's is for us. Be well until next time.