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A Conversation With Gangaji Series
Host Hillary Larson
Episode 20
IN THOUGHT WE TRUST
Released on May 21, 2014

[00:05] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:10] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: Thoughts, they come in the form of an endless stream of considerations and evaluations. They consist of our hopes, plans, dreams, fears, successes and failures. I like my life. I don't like my life. I have enough. I need more. Some are exalted and some are painful. Either way, they are still just thoughts. But most of the time, they appear real. They appear to be the content of who we are.

[00:37] GANGAJI: Just as an experiment, as an investigation, just right now, stop trusting your thoughts! Why not? (Gathering laughs.) Haven't they failed you over and over and over? (Gangaji joins in the laughter.) Yes! Yes, do you see, this is telling the truth then.

[0:57] HILLARY: With our thoughts being so convincing, how do we know what is truly reliable? What is the role of intuition? Doesn't that seem like something we can count on? And what is the solution for those who find themselves living in their heads? Where is freedom there? From getting caught in the thoughts that make up our daily lives – to asking the deepest question: Who am I? Where is it that we put our trust? And what if our thoughts ultimately are not true? I'm Hillary Larson and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

[01:33] HILLARY: I would to call this the whole enchilada – because I was listening to someone the other day who is a mindfulness practitioner and she helps people deal with chronic pain issues and cancer and, you know, serious, serious things. And she was saying even when people spend weeks consistently observing their breath, observing their body sensations, it's still really, really difficult for them to consider that they can also observe thought. And also even that, that they're telling themselves a story because it's just so – it's like glue! And I have come to refer to thought as one continuous drunken bender.

[02:17] GANGAJI: Well, I mean – we are – deeply, profoundly programmed to identify with thought that's linked into our survival but it's also part of our culture, and it's part of the way that we have assumed so much power as a species. And, and it is powerful. And, and it is wondrous! The fact that we think – surely, other species think too – but that we think and have language. And then of course, the language, the spoken language, reinforces the internal dialogue and so that becomes... reality. Thought becomes reality in our minds, in our thoughts.

[03:03] HILLARY: You know, I wanted to actually start with like, a really practical life stuff - which is what you and I do here anyway. So, I wanted to break down thought, if you don't mind and. First of all, I think it's actually easier to start with a story, "I'm telling myself a story," rather than thought itself cause that goes deeper. And I was thinking about – the other day I was giving

somebody an example of I'd sent an email to somebody and – and I expected them to respond fairly quickly. And I'm sure everybody has had this experience, at least, I hope they have. And, you know, the end of the day, no response. A couple days later and I was so full into some story of, of why they hadn't responded. And ultimately, why they hadn't responded had absolutely nothing to do with me, but – even though I am vigilant about stopping, there was something so sticky about that that I couldn't just drop it once and for all. It was almost like I had to find out, ultimately, why their email, you know, came back late. And then, of course, there's the humbling of oh, like oh, oh right!

[04:13] GANGAJI: Well, we see how attached we are. And I think you hit on it when you said you figured out why in your mind, in your narrative, in your story, they hadn't answered. We give meaning to events with our narrative, our story. And I just want to always say, I'm not saying that's wrong or a bad thing. It's just that it's limited. And if we are just focused, or just believing our stories, our narratives, the same thing happens that you just described. We go off on tangents, drunken benders. And then maybe, later, we find out the truth that had nothing to do with what our narrative was. But in the meantime we've suffered unnecessarily. And that's the power that our internal, personal narratives have. And it's huge! And we have to recognize that. That's the first point of actual inquiry: is first recognize what am I saying to myself? Don't change it. Just recognize it. I mean to change it you get too involved in it anyway. Then there's a whole narrative about "am I changing it? Did it change?" But just recognize it. Don't change it. Recognize it. Let it roll! And recognize it. And then you see that there is consciousness that can disengage with this narrative. Then, then you are conscious of your narrative.

[05:49] HILLARY: I actually did want to talk to you about if we could break down thought more because then there are thoughts that are harmless that we don't attach to. And then there are thoughts where we somehow merge with them. So, for example, I was taking a walk with a friend last month and I was thinking about this show. And I was like, how do we create something concrete that we can all relate to. And I was looking at this tree and it's like, well, when I look at the tree, it's the tree! You know, it's green, it's like, it doesn't have meaning to me. But then, let's just say, I start talking about the time I fell out of a tree and there was pain involved. And then all of a sudden, there's, it's almost like a membrane. It passes from being out there – nothing to do with who I am and the world and then it crosses over into this, this is who I am.

[06:45] GANGAJI: Becomes personal.

[06:46] HILLARY: Yes!

[06:47] GANGAJI: And that's what we do. That's part of our thinking mechanism. We make the world personal. We survive better. I mean in your, your story about the tree, then you see trees and you know it's dangerous if you fall out of trees. So, it has this purpose and I keep coming back to this. There's a purpose or a deep purpose in thinking and in personalizing. But it's limited, that purpose is limited. And if we can become conscious – just as you were relaying – of how we personalize, how we make it personal, then we actually have a choice. First, we have to see that we are doing it and then the choice can arise to actually stop. And even in the naming of the tree – because the naming is the beginning – and we name things to separate from them. And we separate from things to have power over them. And we do that for survival. So if we

don't name tree and we don't name each other, we don't name male, we don't name female, we're already in some spaciousness. And it's scary – because we don't have the power over that thing then. And that scariness is, is the adventure of life. And so many people hear the invitation to disengage from your thoughts or to stop thinking and assume that it will be a life of ignorance or a life of stupidity, or a kind of brainwashing. And it's really the opposite. It opens up! I mean, then the name tree, you can name it, but you've had a moment where it's not named. And you recognize no name can ever touch reality. And so, we may name, but the power of the name is revealed to be a mirage.

[08:44] HILLARY: I want to play you a clip that just completely, coincidentally aligns with what you just said. (Laughter) We're on a roll here. So let me play this. It was from a woman that – she was so lovely - I just love the people that get up and speak with you. They're so sincere and they have such intelligent things to say and their inquiry is so deep! And this woman got up and spoke to you and she was talking about being betrayed by lots of people: "I don't trust people anymore because they've betrayed me." And what you were saying, it's not the people that are the problem. It's your trust in the thought that they have betrayed you. So let me play this.

(clip)

[09:23] SPEAKER: *I mean it though.*

[09:24] GANGAJI: *Yeah, so right now, do you give up any thought of what anything should be. You stop trusting any thought that you have of what anything should be. Yes, give that up. Give the trust in your thoughts up. Just right now as an experiment.*

[09:38] SPEAKER: *But what about the trust...*

[09:39] GANGAJI: *No, right now. As an experiment. (Laughter from the gathering)*

[09:46] SPEAKER: *Okay, I'll just go to sleep!*

[09:48] GANGAJI: *Really? (Woman giggles) Go to sleep, then. (Pause, waiting.) Are you asleep?*

[09:56] SPEAKER: *No. (More laughter from the gathering)*

[09:59] GANGAJI: *So you were putting your trust in a thought. A trust, well, if I do that, then I will go to sleep.*

[10:05] SPEAKER: *I have no idea what'll happen.*

[10:07] GANGAJI: *Well, that's great. (Laughter) That's a beginning. So in that, there's a little opening. "I had NO idea what will happen." Excellent. Then, you can see, the habit of the ideas of what will happen or should happen or DID happen. Don't trust those. Just as an experiment. Not as a religion. Not as a liturgy. Just as an experiment, as an investigation, just right now: stop trusting your thoughts! Just as – why not? (More laughter). Haven't they failed you over and over and over? (Gangaji joins laughter)*

[10:43] SPEAKER: Yes.

[10:44] GANGAJI: Yes! Yes, you see this is telling the truth then.

[10:54] SPEAKER: (Sighs) Well, then, I am utterly, I'm just - clueless.

[10:57] GANGAJI: Good! (Laughter) Clueless – then that's a place of innocence. That's a place of innocence.

[11:05] SPEAKER: I'm a little afraid.

[11:07] GANGAJI: Yes, I understand. Often with innocence, if innocence has not been met, fear arises because innocence has been abused in the past. Definitely, that's also part of the experience on this planet. But, right here, for this moment, you give yourself one second. One second - to be absolutely, completely clueless - to NOT know. And then tell the truth about the space of that.

(end clip)

[11:41] HILLARY: Wow.

[11:42] GANGAJI: Yeah, she was wonderful. That's to me really the spirit of inquiry - is that we bring our knowing to a moment and we bring our self-betrays, other betrays to a moment, but there was a willingness that was demonstrated in that clip – of maybe first...

[12:06] HILLARY: Clinging.

[12:07] GANGAJI: ...to the knowing. Clinging to the idea, to the thought, but a willingness to actually, just as investigation, in this moment. What's here – that remains uncatchable by any thought, uncontrollable.

[12:25] HILLARY: Hmmm. Just what you said to her when you said, just for a moment, give your trust in your thoughts up. When I look at that, I look at, the religion of trusting thought.

[12:36] GANGAJI: That's right.

[12:37] HILLARY: It could be the deepest religion there is. In fact, I think that I've heard you say – crossing my fingers that I've heard you say that – that thought is really the ultimate addiction, and but it just goes overlooked because there are so many other addictions that take up – that are, that are more obvious - drug addiction, and...

[12:57] GANGAJI: Yes. So, I think I did say that, but I would like to clarify it. It's not the thought per se that's the addiction. It's our addiction to thought that's the addiction. It's our – and really that's the power of thought. Because when we think about something there's a way that we are managing reality. And that, even though it may be a miserable thought about something, the reality that we come up with is an unhappy reality, there's some sense that we are in control of it

because we can actually think about it. And so, that's a hard one to give up. It's a willingness as it was in that clip for her to be clueless, to be vulnerable, to be exposed, to be – and yet to be conscious! I mean, we fall asleep each night and we give up these thoughts. And but to stay conscious in the waking state and let it all go, there's a great discovery! And it cannot be thought (chuckles) beforehand, even if you've had a true experience of it. Whatever you've thought about your prior experience is useless in this moment.

[14:17] HILLARY: I was thinking about the trap of that because if you say to somebody, "Just for this moment, let go of your thought" then, it becomes a doing-ness, so to speak. And there was another exchange you had with somebody that just is so. It's something that I think comes up over and over again. This woman's predicament seems common to me and her problem was that, like "I'm always stuck in my head." So I wanted to play this exchange you had with her.

(clip)

[14:46] SPEAKER: *I live in my mind.*

[14:47] GANGAJI: *Ok.*

[14:48] SPEAKER: *I admit that.*

[14:49] GANGAJI: *Great! So then this is an opportunity to see what maybe is deeper or closer than your mind. So if for a moment, what you are trying to grasp you recognize you will never grasp. Does that evoke any emotion? (Silence.) What if certain failure is guaranteed in this grasping category. Is there any emotion that is evoked? In your gut?*

[15:21] SPEAKER: *Probably – a feeling of surrender.*

[15:23] GANGAJI: *Oh, really?*

[15:24] SPEAKER: *Yeah.*

[15:26] GANGAJI: *Probably?*

[15:27] SPEAKER: *Yeah. (Laughter)*

[15:28] GANGAJI: *Like theoretically? (More laughter)*

[15:30] SPEAKER: *I'm still in my mind.*

[15:32] GANGAJI: *Yeah, so in order to really answer this question you have to drop out of your mind and just let your mind drop into your body and see if there's anything agitated in there – or anything that feeds the staying in the safety of theoretical discussion.*

[15:50] SPEAKER: *I have to confess that I live in my mind and it drives me crazy when therapists and people tell me to drop into my body.*

[15:58] GANGAJI: Ok, well, I'm here to drive you crazier than you have ever been driven.

[16:03] SPEAKER: Ok, I'll try. (Laughter.) Ok, I'll try. Ok, I'm working on it.

[16:07] GANGAJI: Yeah. (More laughter.) Because you don't just live in your mind. It's impossible. It's impossible.

[16:14] SPEAKER: I understood what you said when what you are here to invite us to is NOT something that is able to be expressed in words.

[16:28] GANGAJI: Mm. Oh, beautiful!

[16:29] SPEAKER: I understood that.

[16:31] GANGAJI: Yes, and that understanding is deeper than your mind. Because in that understanding there's a resolution of paradox – and opposites – and that's more than the mind can handle. So maybe what you're calling the mind is actually more inclusive of the depths of being. So in its – maybe it's like the Buddhist mind, Big Mind, which includes every phenomena, every appearance, every disappearance, every thought, every emotion. Then there's no problem with mind. But this mind still lives in you. You don't live in it.

(end clip)

[17:15] HILLARY: I want to tack on a listener question that pertains to what you were saying to this woman and this person says: "Dear Gangaji, I hear you talk about how untrustworthy thought is, but what about intuition? How do you trust that?"

[17:30] GANGAJI: Well, I don't suggest that you DO trust intuition. Finally, of course, intuition - a sense of this is what I should do, a sense of this is going on – is somewhat – it's unformed thought maybe and then it gets translated into thought and sometimes it's correct and sometimes it's wrong. You know we have thoughts that are intuitive and creative. And we have thoughts that are correct sometimes and sometimes they're incorrect. There's...if we're speaking of trustworthiness, what's trustworthy is what does not appear and disappear. It's what's always here. And intuitive flashes appear and disappear. Sometimes they're right, sometimes they're wrong. Thoughts appear and disappear. Emotions appear and disappear. Phenomena of all kind appear and disappear. It's not that they're wrong or right. It's just that they're not ultimately trustworthy – as reality. People would ask Papaji "What is reality?" And he would say, "reality is what doesn't come and go." And so that's our assignment, as thinking creatures, to recognize that what we have based our hopes on, our thoughts, are unreal. They come and go. They change. They change according to what our digestion is or according to what somebody looks like our mother, or talk to us in a strange tone of voice. I mean they're very fickle! They're expressions. They're manifestations, but they aren't trustworthy as reality. And that's the point. We have the opportunity, not to grasp reality, but to take a moment and open to reality. Thought, the mechanism of thinking is a mechanism of grasping. It's very intelligent, very powerful. But reality's too big! It's bigger than can be thought. You know the Buddhists, the Zen Buddhists talk about the unborn face. I used to really ponder that: what could the unborn face be? And, it's, it's what's here.

[19:44] HILLARY: That's an interesting way of putting it, isn't it? I, um, I know you're not fond of comparison, (laughs) but I found it really useful in certain ways and in surprising ways, because I was thinking about the example I gave of the email – and tell me if I'm wrong on this but – I, I still think you're unique. But that doesn't necessarily, like I feel like I put that in a different category in my life these days, in that I have not continued to pursue what I think you have. But I think that your awakening created a sustained awareness of what – is – Real. And so that my idea is that if you send somebody an email and you don't hear, you actually don't give it much thought. Or is that true?

[20:39] GANGAJI: This is your narrative. And this is why comparison is useless. Or you know, I may or may not. There's not a formula. I don't hold myself to a formula: I should or I should not give it meaning. I tell stories. I think. I'm right or I'm wrong. I'm unique, just as you're unique – but, our storytelling is not that unique. And it's based on past experiences and the interpretation of those experiences and the management of present experiences based on those past experiences. And so, when you're invited to just be here, just be present, to stop, it's – it's an opportunity to recognize that in the deepest sense the slate is already cleared. That we're just thinking on top of this spaciousness and this clarity. So if you don't tell yourself that story about what I would do with an email coming in, then what you did with the email coming in is more meaningless. (Chuckles) It was just a story that was generated. You may even have a laugh at it.

[21:58] HILLARY: I did. (Laughs)

[21:59] GANGAJI: Good.

[22:01] HILLARY: Well...

[22:02] GANGAJI: That's the opportunity, really.

[22:04] HILLARY: Yeah, I mean - and I think that, we, we unfortunately, I just really love this conversation and we only have three or four minutes left and I want to get this last clip in. And the last clip is actually is like really what the ultimate function of the mind is outside of survival. And you know when I look at the question I just asked you about you know how you experience an unanswered email compared to me, I look at the function of the mind and that is protection. So, this is the continuation of this conversation that you had with the woman who said, you know, that she lives in her head.

(clip)

[22:44] GANGAJI: *In general, when one lives in thought, it's an avoidance of something that is big and uncontrollable – called Life – or Self, or Truth – or Death.*

[23:00] SPEAKER: *So, how do you get there?*

[23:03] GANGAJI: *Uh-huh, well, you don't get there.*

[23:04] SPEAKER: *But...*

[23:04] GANGAJI: *That very question, I can appreciate it, and, it's natural and it's appropriate. It's already here.*

[23:10] SPEAKER: *Okay.*

[23:10] GANGAJI: *It's like saying, how do I get to Life? Life is already here. You're in Life - or Life is in you – or both. So you don't have to do anything to get there. What is useful is to see how you are avoiding being where you are – and you've already seen that. You came up here saying that about your thoughts or your intellect.*

[23:40] SPEAKER: *Mm-mm.*

[23:41] GANGAJI: *Nothing wrong with thoughts – nothing wrong with intellect – both exquisite powers –but regarding Reality or the Continuum of Being – in this meeting, at least, useless. So, you can never grasp who you are – because to grasp it you would have to be separate from it as a subject grasping an object. (Silence.) But you can be who you are – not who you think you are. Closer than that.*

(end clip)

[24:20] HILLARY: You know, what you speak of often is the wanting to avoid what's under the narrative – and that could just be the fear, fear, fear of rejection, fear of being alone.

[23:31] GANGAJI: Fear of death.

[23:32] HILLARY: Fear of death. Yeah!

[23:33] GANGAJI: Because that's what fear of rejection, fear of being alone is based on.

[23:37] HILLARY: Yeah.

[24:40] GANGAJI: Loneliness would have no sting if it weren't for death, the fact we need each other. If we're alone, our loneliness is a survival drive to find another, so that we live.

[24:56] HILLARY: I would love to wrap up this conversation talking about freedom. And I know I'm talking about relative freedom, but I was doing a little research on somebody who had been a racist for their whole, they grew up that way. They were trained that way. And later on in life, they examined the thought of "this person is less than me" – and in some miraculous way they were able to go, "that thought actually is NOT true" – and there was this freedom in just dropping that thought! And it may not be the ultimate freedom, but I think that's so valuable.

[25:36] GANGAJI: It's not separate from the ultimate Freedom. And in fact, it's a reflection of the ultimate Freedom, it's, in that the hold that that thought had, had no power any more. So, yes! That's the ultimate Freedom.

[25:52] HILLARY: Well, I, I feel humbled again. As usual, I usually feel humbled at the end of our conversations. And I appreciate our conversations. But this one in particular that feels like it's the root of suffering in general. This conversation between you and me and all of us that are gathered as part of this conversation, it feels like the, the opening to true Freedom.

[26:19] GANGAJI: Yes. That's right.

[26:33] HILLARY: If you can give me about a minute. I have one more clip of Gangaji talking about thought and the power of the mind. But first I wanted to say that last time I mentioned that the Gangaji Foundation has a brand new website and it's very much worth checking out. When you go there it's Gangaji.org you can sign up for Gangaji's live monthly webcast and that's called With Gangaji. You can also click on the radio page to check out past episodes of this show. Last month we talked about the strategy of being nice, but we've also had conversations about financial insecurity, addiction, love and intimacy, lots of topics. If you'd like to become a supporter of this show, please click on the "donate" button you'll see there. Your support makes this show possible every month and it's very much appreciated. Finally, if you have a question for Gangaji for this show, there's a place where you can click and send an email right there on the radio page. And if you're not on the website, you can also write gangajiradio@gangaji.org. That's (she spells out) g-a-n-g-a-j-i-radio@gangaji.org. To finish off our conversation about the power of thought, here's one more clip of Gangaji. Thank you for joining us again – until next time.

(clip)

[27:49] GANGAJI: Just the moment of simply being, without being anybody, without being anything, without getting it right, without missing it, without naming it, without knowing it, just being. This is the moment of awakening. And the truth is everyone has those moments every day! But it goes overlooked. Each moment goes overlooked because of our infatuation with this power of mind. And mind is not present in any of those moments. And then mind arises and we get on with the business or we get on with the definition or who's wronged us or who's righted us or who we have to get or keep or what we have to know and then, all of a sudden, there's a moment: just being. Not needing anything. Not wanting anything. Not knowing anything, and yet, BEING KNOWN.