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A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 21

TELLING THE TRUTH

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[00:05] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:08] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: Let's just suppose there are two different types of telling the truth. There's the relative truth and the ultimate truth. But what does that mean? On a personality level, the relative truth is about telling the hard truth. It's the willingness to admit to sadness, or anger, or fear, to expose the moments when we have betrayed our own integrity and hurt those around us. In a world where looking good often is equated with success and stability, telling this kind of truth can be a very brave thing to do. These moments when we face the more difficult parts of ourselves can be painful. But they also provide a sense of liberation that only comes through humility. And it's a good thing, a very good thing. And it can be life changing. But what if we stop short of a deeper possibility?

[00:56] GANGAJI: So the invitation to really tell the truth, to freshly, more deeply than you can know, more deeply than can be referenced by any other experience of telling the truth, is the invitation to come home, all the way home.

[01:13] HILLARY: So what is the ultimate truth? Is it love, is it kindness, is it stillness? Do our concepts of what it might be, or should be, obscure the simplicity of what it really is? I'm Hillary Larsen and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

[01:30] HILLARY: It's funny just before we actually hit the record button you and I were talking about the importance of telling the truth. And um, I don't know, I think that it has everything to do with happiness. And I think it has obviously everything to do with true freedom. And it also has everything to do with real intimacy to me and. It's funny because it seems like it's the most powerful tool we have has human beings but somehow it's like it's the hardest thing or, or, it's the least obvious tool to use. And I was just kinda just looking at a list of things earlier today of like, you know, there's meditation that can bring happiness., there's working hard, there's helping others, there's acquiring things, there's understanding things. And then there's oh right, yeah, just telling the truth.

[02:16] GANGAJI: Yes. Because, you know, all, all the ways that we get happiness, or pleasure, or fulfillment, are passing. We don't get lasting happiness by doing anything. And when we're willing to tell that radical truth, that, that yes, we have experienced happiness, and we have experienced fulfillment, but we have also experienced losing happiness, and losing fulfillment. And so in THAT truth telling there can be a deeper truth telling. And really that's the invitation. To recognize that as human beings we have the capacity to always more deeply tell the truth. You know to first perhaps tell the truth about how we are lying, what we are avoiding and then to tell the truth of what's under that.

[03:10] HILLARY: You know what I wanted to do with you Gangaji, is, a lot of people have questions about the relative truth and so I want to start there. I want to start kinda with the basics and. You know, we've talked about spiritual practice and what's not a spiritual

practice, or that our thought can be a spiritual practice, but, to me, the practice of telling the truth is the most important spiritual practice. And before we ever sit down I always think of real life experiences that can really make these conversations that we have concrete. And um, I was thinking about when I first got sober, and that was twenty-eight years ago and I was told I need to let go and let God. And I really had absolutely no idea of how to do that. So I knew at that time I had to create some way that I wouldn't go back to the horrible situation I was in. And so I started my own practice and the practice was, I would ask myself many times a day at first, what is your motive? And it, it kept me in that place of constantly asking myself the truth. Because I would go off on all sorts of tangents that would get me back into bad situations so it was quite a profound spiritual practice for me.

[04:25] GANGAJI: It's beautiful. It's really inquiry.

[04:27] HILLARY: And, and I wanted to say that in my life today the same thing is true because I just had a profound awakening of another way I lie to myself recently. And in the midst of it what happened was, this thought came up of, oh, what I need to do is get into a relationship. Or what I need, then the second thought was no, I actually think I need a, a new car. (laughter) [GANGAJI: Yeah] And it was like, what a minute, what do I not want to feel here?

[05:00] GANGAJI: Yes, well that's, a group I was with in the early seventies would call those doors. That we have these doors of escape. And often they're drugs or alcohol, but they can be, you know, a piece of cake or, or even positive doors like a run around the block, or meditating or whatever, but they're ways of escaping the immensity of our feelings at a particular time. And those feelings usually are generated by particular circumstances. So there's nothing wrong with the doors necessarily, of course they can become addictive and be quite destructive. But, there's nothing wrong with going through a door, there's nothing wrong with escape. But when you recognize that this escape is, is a betrayal of your capacity to discover what telling the truth actually means, doesn't mean the escape is a lie, it's the escape is just something known that will save you from the unknown. And the deepest spiritual inquiry always opens the mind to what is unknowable.

[06:15] HILLARY: I was thinking about that in relationship to what we talked about a couple times in the last few shows was just this subject of intimacy. You know that, when I look at that moment of thinking, oh, what I need is a car, it was like, in reality there was this moment of like – at this time in my life I don't want to miss that intimacy of feeling whatever I was trying to avoid because it's, it's there's a relaxation into that.

[06:44] GANGAJI: Yes, because you get to stop fighting what's here. You get to stop managing your emotions, you, you actually give yourself permission to tell the truth about what you're experiencing. And it's the relative truth and there's a deeper truth, but it's a beginning place of, of inquiry, what am I experiencing? What's my motive? What do I want? All of that just directs the mind back to the experience rather than – how can I get out of this? What do I need right now? And those are all routes of escape, perfectly legitimate, until what you truly want, is to discover the truth of yourself. Not so much what you truly want is to tell the truth about what you're feeling, but to discover what is closer than even what you are feeling. Sometimes in our psychotherapeutic culture we, we use the phrase, telling the truth, to simply mean, and to only mean, I, I'm feeling angry, or I think you're wrong, or I think you have hurt me, or I think I, I shouldn't have done that, whatever it may be. We, we keep it superficial. That to tell the truth, the relative truth it's really an opportunity to open the door to

something that is unknowable. The truth that is not known. To recognize there is a deeper truth then. A truth that is free of our knowledge.

[08:21] HILLARY: That is such an important distinction what you just said. Because I think it is easy to get caught in the, there's some deep satisfaction in just being able to tell yourself the truth about a feeling or a situation and. What do you say to people who maybe don't know what you're talking about when you say don't stop short of that?

[08:42] GANGAJI: Well it's a very good beginning place. And I, and until you're willing to tell the truth about what you're actually feeling, you don't begin. It's just not the end. And, usually we're, as you said, it, it feels relaxing. It feels good to actually finally tell the truth. So we, we often willing to stop there and there just so much more. Papaji used to tell a story about a feast that was given by an enlightened monarch and he invited all the people of his realm to come to the feast. And just to receive this deep bounty. But most people only got as far as the gate. And at the gate, they had already received pleasure, and happiness, and so they took THAT and walked back home rather than coming all the way in. So the invitation to really tell the truth, to freshly, more deeply than you can know, more deeply than can be referenced by any other experience of telling the truth, is the invitation to come home, all the way home.

[09:52] HILLARY: I wanted to play a clip for everyone and for all of us about that fact that some time, in a lucky lifetime, even the idea of telling the truth comes up on relative level, but also on a deeper level. So let me play this for you Gangaji, and everybody.

(clip)

[10:12] GANGAJI: So when there arises in a human lifetime this mysterious grace of actually wanting to know the truth, and not being satisfied with another spiritual philosophy, or spiritual words, or even spiritual good feelings – as satisfying as all those are – recognizing that's not enough – I have to know the truth – and then of course you are drawn to people who are speaking the truth. And naturally what happens is that the words are taken. Maybe they are new words, maybe they are the same words, but they're learned. And they're spoken, but it's still not the truth. And so there's left this, hunger. I mean we have all at this point, or most people in here have heard about self-inquiry. Which is really what Ramana, my teacher's teacher, offered. Who am I? Who dies? And this is so powerful, so profound. It's the essential question. Who am I? But it's so easily corrupted by the mind. So it becomes a way of avoiding the lie of one's life. Who am I? Well I'm, in an instant you can recognize limitless consciousness. No one separate from consciousness. And if that's then overlayed on a life lived in betrayal to that, then there's still suffering. Then inquiry itself has become co-opted by the mind. And we're experts of that. We have to really be willing to tell the hard truth, about the power we have to corrupt the most pure, the most sublime recognition of truth, reality oneself.

(end clip)

[12:23] HILLARY: Well that's the truth.

[12:26] GANGAJI: I think it's so relevant for people listening to this because most people are interested in happiness, interested in self discovery and. We, we try to mimic that because that's the way we learn as human beings, as primates. We learn by modeling parents, and

teachers, and society and so we try to mimic someone who's speaking the truth or we read of Ramana, or Buddha or Christ or any number of the saints or sages who lived in the past, and we try to imagine what their life is like and to then to step in that. And that's all part of the lie of the imagination rather than the creative force of the imagination – that's the way the imagination is used to constrict us, and restrict us, and keep us separate. And it's not telling the truth.

[13:31] HILLARY: I was, I was at a video satsang last night with people here in the Portland Area and this was the topic of conversation afterwards, was this real earnest conversation about what does it mean to tell the truth. And I'd have to say just listening to you, you know, I'm humbled because honestly I think that a lot of people certainly myself, stop at the feast, because it feels beautiful to tell the relative truth. But I, I have to say I go a little bit blank when you speak beyond that.

[14:04] GANGAJI: Yes. That's, that's, if, if you can recognize that then there's the willingness to not know what the truth, the deeper truth is. But to open to that, so telling the relative truth, I just want to say again, is perhaps essential, it strengthens the mind and the resolve, and that strengthening is the way we discover the capacity for the mind to open to its own source. For the mind to recognize its own limits. For the mind to recognize even this definition of truth is limited. And to actually stay conscious and open in, into what cannot even be defined or spoken about. But just to HEAR, that there is that possibility, and there is that spaciousness and that it is absolute. It's present regardless of the relative experience. But somehow the relevant truth telling is a mind strengthener that allows us the possibility of that opening and surrender. It's really maybe surrendering to the truth maybe is more accurate than telling the truth. Telling the truth gets us to the point that we can actually surrender to something bigger than what we know.

[15:33] HILLARY: You know on an individual basis I had an opportunity to walk, take a walk with somebody about a month ago, who's known you for a really, really long time and I asked her, what was the same about you before Papaji and what was different. And what was, her answer was so beautiful. She said that what attracted her to you before you even met Papaji was your willingness to tell the truth, your willingness to tell the truth and she described it as profound humility and that she felt like you had an unusual courage. And, I think that's an important thing to know. It's, I don't know if we can create that kind of courage. And I don't know if that made you a bigger target. But I've heard that about you before. And, and I think that we all have that capacity, or maybe we don't.

[16:24] GANGAJI: If you've, if you've turned from the life that was given you as a conditioning, as somebody else's idea, whether it was your parents, or your first husbands, or your boyfriends, or your cultures, or the newspapers, some IDEA, if you've recognized the hollowness and the lie of what was given you. And, and called, this is the life you should live – I don't mean recognize it as "oh, they gave it to me" – but recognize it as part of your deepest conditioning for who you think you are. Just the recognition for that, of that, then generates this courage and this clarity and this willingness to experience the pain that, that is part of the initial experience of truth telling quite often. Because we have, also we have these inflated images of ourselves and when we recognize that they are hollow we feel like we are losing something that felt really good. As you know when you gave up your addiction, there's a moment where you, you're, you're giving up momentary pleasure, of course you're also giving up the suffering that follows that. But often we resist giving up the momentary pleasure of our addiction, or of our surrender to the conditioning that has been given us, but

I, I really assume that everyone listening to this has already taken that initial step or, or else this wouldn't be of any interest to you, or make any sense to you. So you've already taken the essential step and that can be fed with your life, with telling the truth relatively to yourself – I'm not speaking about telling the truth to anyone else, it's not about – as I used to think, you know, straightening somebody else out – it's just telling the truth, what am I experiencing? What do I want? As you said, what's my motive? What am I thinking and what is really here? In the core, at the bottom, before, during, and after whatever it is I think I want. Whatever it is I am experiencing. Whatever I am avoiding. And that's where the strength is revealed. I, I don't necessarily think it's cultivated, but it's revealed and there's always more. And it's, it's thrilling. So we, we recognize that that jump in to the unknown, the rewards are so much bigger than the initial fear, or the initial sense of loss, or the initial pain. That it's, it's more than worth it.

[19:19] HILLARY: I'm about to play this clip where you talk about really, that ultimately it's about being completely alone. Because nobody will really know if I'm telling the truth or not, I mean, it's, that's something that I have to know, on my own? So I just really, I think this clip really points that out in a beautiful way.

(clip)

[19:41] GANGAJI: Suffering, has to do with lying, dodging, avoiding, justifying, explaining, understanding, numbing, acquiring, losing, getting, and in this business you are absolutely on your own. In that moment there is no teacher, there is no teaching, there is no God, there is no devil, there's no heaven, there's no hell, there's no enlightenment, there no unenlightenment. It's simply a matter of telling the truth. You can get away with it, if you lie. There's nobody who will say "gotcha". I mean, there will be, but they're probably doing their whole thing too. This is the beauty of this Leela. This is where you are absolutely alone. All the support has been to that moment. And teachers are fooled all the time anyway. Because teachers believe those who are trustworthy and don't believe those who are not trustworthy. They don't want to waste your time not believing somebody. Right? You understand what I'm saying? You can't count on somebody "well you'll let me know if I'm off". No YOU are the only one who can really finally know. There are lots of great acts in the world, but you know. And this is a rare and precious moment, this moment, before the choice of suffering is taken up again.

(end clip)

[21:39] HILLARY: So true huh?

[21:43] GANGAJI: Yes, I mean, really it's simple too, you just stop acting.

[21:47] HILLARY: We just have a couple minutes left and I just wanted to say to you that – I've heard you talk about this before – this really pure, sincere, earnest, call to be free, this call to the universe for the truth. I think that when you put that call out, that it will come. It will stalk you. It will hunt you down in answer to that prayer. Like maybe we don't have to work so hard.

[22:19] GANGAJI: Yes. Yes and we, we definitely don't have to work so hard. But sometimes the moment of opening to what you have asked for FEELS hard. Because it's unknowable.

It's uncontrollable. And so the willingness to open, regardless of how it feels. And opening really finally always means, not knowing.

[22:43] HILLARY: That not knowing Gangaji I, I really am grateful for this conversation. And I'm a little bit, I don't know, just personally, I'm a little bit dumbfounded because I didn't really realize I had such a question about the relative truth and kind of staying in the realm of the relative truth and not, not really knowing what's underneath that. It's a, it's a bit of a shocker.

[23:10] GANGAJI: Yeah, well, then that's already pulling you, so the depth of your being is pulling you deeper than however delightful the surface may be, there's something deeper.

[23:19] HILLARY: There's something so beautiful when somebody says, speaks the relative truth, there is something so beautiful about that, but what you were talking about what Papaji's saying that's like, kinda hanging out at the feast.

[23:34] GANGAJI: It's hanging out at the doorway to the feast. It's not even coming in to the feast. It's in the shallows of life. And you can play in the shallows and have fun, have pleasure and hang out there. But if you don't know the depths, you can't even really appreciate the shallows.

[23:52] HILLARY: When all is said and done really it's about asking that question of what does my life stand for?

[23:58] GANGAJI: Yes, what is my motivation?

[24:00] HILLARY: I'm going to finish off by playing a clip before we go, but I think that, I don't know about everybody else but this has given me a whole new viewpoint on what it means to tell the truth.

[24:14] GANGAJI: Hm, good.

(clip)

[24:25] GANGAJI: The question I hear the most is "*HOW, HOW*"? (laughter) I know here, but how when I'm there? It's really very simple. And often the question HOW is so complicated that the simplicity is overlooked. Stop. Tell the truth. Be still. So there's a moment where there's an awareness of the suffering or the mind spin, or the grasping, or the rejecting. Stop. Tell the truth. Even if the truth is – I don't know the truth. I can't do this. I want out of here. I'm miserable. I'll never make it. Whatever it is, tell the truth. Be still. Under the relative truth, feeding the relative truth is some emotion, some feeling, having to do with reaching for or rejecting. If it's positive it's usually reaching for. If it's negative it's usually rejecting it. Stop. Tell the truth. Be still. And then that can be experienced. Under every relative truth there is a deeper truth, unknown to the mind, but revealed in the willingness to investigate. And there is not end into the depth of truth. Until finally there is no one stopping, no one telling the truth, no one being still. Just truth recognizing itself as the indefinable totality of being.

[26:40] HILLARY: I just want to say a little thing here at the end. One thing that Gangaji mentions when she speaks of telling the truth is the self-hatred that has to be faced in order to actually get to the ultimate truth. And that's a really big subject and we unfortunately didn't

have time to get to it in this conversation. But there's a compilation that addresses that in detail. It's called *The Heart Can Bear It All*. And you can find it by going to the website gangaji.org. If you're appreciating these conversations there's a couple of things you can do to support us here. One, is by becoming a monthly supporter of this show. If you go to the Radio page on the website there's a donate button there that makes it super easy to do. Also if you're listening to this on iTunes, it would be great if you could leave a comment, or rate *A Conversation With Gangaji*. Doing that makes it easier for others to find us there. And as always please feel free to write any time with questions or comments for Gangaji, that's gangajiradio@gangaji.org. Well that's about it for us. We have another great conversation coming up next month. See you then.