

Gangaji Radio

A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 22

JUST LIKE YOU

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[00:35] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: That piece of audio you just heard, well, it was taken from the pilot show of *A Conversation with Gangaji* almost three years ago. Although I've mentioned it here and there over the past 21 episodes, it's never been released in its entirety. But this month as we approach our third year of conversations, we wanted to share it with all of you. It's a special piece and it's special for a number of reasons. From the very start, we knew we were going to focus on specific topics for each episode. And, that's what makes them unique. And we've done that and we will continue to do that. But for this one, I wanted to ask Gangaji about herself. What was the most profound moment of her awakening like? And with so many people unexpectedly drawn to her following that, what impact did that have on her daily life? What were some of the challenges she faced with regard to her own ego? In the end, I wanted to see how Gangaji's experiences inform us about our own lives. What does it mean to us? Is there some way that it can point us to something we've overlooked in ourselves in a brand new way? To start off our conversation, I referenced a couple of stories from a great biography of Gangaji. It's by Roslyn Moore, and it's titled *Just Like You*. So, as we look all the way back to the beginning of these conversations, this is the first one. This is how it all started. I'm Hillary Larson, and this is *A Conversation with Gangaji*.

[02:08] HILLARY: Gangaji, I'm going to just talk about your meeting with Papaji. And, your initial awakening, I guess I would call it. And, I kind of want to talk to you about what happened after that and the weeks following that. And, there was a part in the book where you talk about being at Esalen. You met Papaji in April of 1990. And then I think you said it was the end of May, you had an experience. And, I'm just going to read what it says in the book. It says, "Suddenly and simply, I realized the whole structure that supported my story was gone. All the scaffolding was gone. Every single thing that held it together, gone." Can you say a little bit more about that experience?

[02:50] GANGAJI: Well, I haven't spoken about this before but I can't say I've ever captured it in speaking. It was so immediate and it was out of the blue. I remember Eli and I were sitting on a bed at Esalen and talking and laughing and just being intoxicated with the dharma and this meeting with Papaji, and our profound good luck. And, just, it was like, a thunderbolt. I mean I know that's a cliché, but that was my experience. It was just in that moment something was

removed. I couldn't say anything was added, something was removed. And, that's why in that book I spoke of that way as scaffolding, there was some support for myself as separate from this that we were laughing and speaking about the dharma, the nectar, the bliss of being, just, in just a moment, there was an opening that, and even opening is not quite correct because it's, that's like something was closed. But it was like that like that something had been closed, or, and all of a sudden there was no door there. The insubstantiality of the scaffolding of the support was beyond revealed, it disappeared. It wasn't there. And, I was fully there, so it's not as if this sense of myself needed any scaffolding to be. But, over the years, over the decades, I had built up a very careful structure of myself, and in meeting Papaji, I'd been dealing with stopping, building that structure. And, when you stop building the structure, you actually recognize, it's not there anyway. Even, no matter what you've built, it's actually not there. And, it was a blissful experience. But, not, I've had blissful experiences before, it was extraordinary. It was out of the ordinary for me, and I can say without a doubt my life has never been the same since that moment.

[05:11] HILLARY: Did that structure start to reconstruct itself at some point?

[05:14] GANGAJI: At a certain point a couple of years after that, I was aware of this sense of myself, of a me-ness, and I was like, oh, no, what does this mean. Because I had been counseling people to not reincarnate in this life, to not reconstruct themselves. And, I was aware of this, and there was a moment of does this mean I've lost anything. And, but I knew by then to check and see. And, I realized that this scaffolding or this sense is like, I mean, sense is really a good word for it because it's like some kind of perception that's part of the body-mind, the animalness. And it did disappear, and it did reappear. But, the truth, it needs no scaffolding. It's also not bothered by any scaffolding, by the play of the mind, or the play of the senses, or appearance and disappearance. So, it was actually a really good teaching for me that it reappeared, this sense of I, because I got to inquire. In that I saw it appears and disappears all the time, even in a day for everybody. Only until we have an experience of it disappearing, and that the true "I" is still here, only then do we have a possibility to actually recognize the appearance and the disappearance. Not irrelevant, and this kind of trivializes it, but it doesn't really touch the truth. So, at that point, I feel it was a reincarnation as a more ordinary human being, and yeah, it's, I mean people speak about integration and how do I integrate this, and I still say don't integrate it. Let it take care of itself. And this in reflection I can see was an integrative experience. I didn't know that at the time. I wasn't thinking in those terms, just as all of a sudden, it was gone. And, I couldn't say all of a sudden it came back. It came back in slow increments. But, I didn't fight it coming back because I wasn't always aware that it, whatever came back, an emotion or sense of me or a negative thought, whatever it may be didn't touch what had been revealed in that instant at Esalen.

[07:57] Hillary: Actually, it's beautiful that you describe it in this detailed way that you have because it kind of leads me to the question that I wanted to ask you because there's this, it's not an idea, the truth that just like you. But, then there's a way where it doesn't seem that to be true, and so when I, when I was looking at this sequence of what happened with you, and that you describe something that happened the next morning when you were sitting at breakfast with Eli, and this woman next to you started shaking and described this intense burning sensation. And, she thought it was coming from you to her. And, I mean, A) I don't, I mean, I've been in spiritual circles for many, many years, and I don't know that many people, I'm trying to think if I know

somebody personally that's had the experience that you just described, and that it was sustained. And, that because of that, there's this incredible impact on the people around them. And so, that feels like I can relate to so many parts of your story, but that, it's like, I think maybe there's a way in the mind that it would be easy to go, well, if I don't have that experience like Gangaji then I don't quite get what she's saying.

[09:09] GANGAJI: You mean if I don't people burning when they sit next to me?

[09:12] HILLARY: Or, the complete dismantling, do you see the two things, it's like those things, those are the two things that make you, why hundreds of people will sit in a hall, or, you know, wait two hours in the rain to get in the door. You know, I don't have that experience in my life.

[09:28] GANGAJI: Well, I understand. I didn't either before. So, I can appreciate that. There was a difference in before that moment. I mean I had beautiful experiences with Papaji and before meeting Papaji in other realms of my life I'd had beautiful experience. But, in that moment some sub thought, sub flooring of self-doubt was removed. And so, that is a moment that is precious and huge. And, in that sense if someone has not had that moment there is a difference and that difference needs to be appreciated. And that is why people come to hear me because they recognize I'm just like them in that I'm a regular person, but I have discovered something that is possible for them to discover. And, maybe they have in part and maybe they have in whole and they come to celebrate that. But, if you haven't discovered it, then I'm here to support that and here to demonstrate that. And, there to point out where we are absolutely alike as we have in conversation and as you have gotten from the book, and how there is something that is not like our life. Now, how that happens, or when it happens for somebody, in my experience, you have to finally stop looking for it to happen. And, simply, in that moment when it happened for me, this thunderbolt, I was just in the gratitude of what had happened. I wasn't measuring myself on what should have happened. And, in fact, that's one of the things Papaji would say is stop measuring yourself, throw away the measuring stick, he would say, and I took that very seriously and I stopped measuring. And so, I wasn't comparing myself to anybody else. I wasn't thinking of myself as partially enlightened, completely enlightened. I removed those definitions. And, that to me already just opened, I was just supremely happy in that moment. And, my happiness was a spacious happiness. It wasn't a happiness that was determined by the fact that I was sitting with my beloved husband and we were in this beautiful spot. And, it was just global happiness for me. So, I take it back. I rewind it to my first moment of meeting Papaji because until that moment when I actually saw him when he opened the door, and I saw his face and his beauty, to me he was this beautiful man. He also did look a little bit like my father to me. I had a good relationship with my father.

[12:29] HILLARY: Which can or could not be helpful.

[12:31] GANGAJI: That did not hurt at all. And he was just so utterly welcoming, and there had been anticipation about seeing him and Eli had been reporting this as the real deal and he was reporting his revelations of being in bliss, and I had seen Eli come back from Eli and he was just this quiet space that he was transmitting it. And so, I was prepared to meet him and I listened. And when he told me to throw away the measuring stick, it was quite easy to. So, if I hadn't had that initial recognition, this is the teacher I've been praying for. And, he is the real deal. I've had reports from that from people who have been with him. And, I am seeing him. And, I'm feeling

something that is different in my life. I mean, I did feel his Shakti in that moment, but I wasn't in, you know, it didn't knock me to the floor. It wasn't in some altered state. I just recognized I could rest here, and I could pay attention. So, that to me was the pivotal moment. And, what followed couldn't have happened without that moment.

[13:37] HILLARY: And, it seems to me that there are thousands of people that have experienced that same moment with you. They might not have moved onto this you know complete dismantling. And, maybe it happens in more of a subtle way, who knows what that is. But, what I find really interesting to kind of follow those lines, is, I'll give you an example, I received an email from somebody the other day, and he was telling me about a woman that he knew that was going through, you probably heard this story several times over, many times over, but she was, flicking through the channels and she stopped on public access, and she heard your voice. She didn't know who you were, but she heard your voice and something in her stopped. And then she continued to listen that caught her mind's attention then. And, she just started crying. And, I've heard, you know, I have my own experiences, and I've heard so many experiences. And so, I think one of the things I've always wanted to ask you is what is your orientation to your ego because you know that what's, you know, I've watched people in complete adoration, and I know sometimes that can be misplaced on the personality, but it's way bigger than that. I mean, did you have to work with that. Did you have to, I mean, is there a way that your ego will some days go, you know what? I'm pretty cool.

[15:03] GANGAJI: Well, you know, I, especially at the beginning, when all of a sudden, hundreds of people were showing up, it was a double edge, both negative and positive. Or, deflated and inflated in that I remember walking, it was in Europe when it just sort of burst open, and we were in Germany and I saw all these shoes as people had left their shoes before they went into the satsang hall. And there was a thought that arose, wow, they're here to see me. What am I going to say to them. You know, I figured many of them were much better meditators than I was and had many experiences. What am I going to say. And, in that moment, it was just so clear that they're not here for me. They're here for the truth of what I've experienced, and it really has nothing to do with me. And, what a weight was lifted. So, that was sort of a negative thing like I had nothing to say, or, oh, my god, what would I say because always I had to identify myself as a student, and I loved that role. And, I was a good student and I paid attention to all my teachers. I mean even in high school I was a good student because I liked the role. I liked the learning and receiving. So, to all of a sudden be in the position of a teacher, and I had taught in high school before but it was totally different. I had to realize that, I mean, it was just so clear. They weren't coming from me. They didn't know me. And if I approached it as having anything to do with me, I would be betraying what I had realized in that moment. So, that was a thought that arose from old constructions of myself as deflated, and then there was a corollary, another arrogant thought that like, whoa, they're coming for me. And, it was quite clear, no, they're not. They're not coming for me. And, that is just so true, so there are moments, you know, if I, and I've said this in meetings. I've said, whoa, I really said it that time, you know, where it's felt like somehow putting this that cannot be put into words almost got put into words. But, even that's actually not about me. It's about the function of the intelligence that somehow speaks and puts words together. Because this me, when you say "ego" that really is the construction, and I'm not saying I'm without ego, I mean that definitely appears, but it has nothing to do with what draws people to me. And, with what happens in meetings. And if it appears in that, it's so obvious because it has weight, it has noise, it has associations. And it's

just obvious, and then if it appears, it's also no problem because it's so obvious. And, do I want to carry that? And, it's certainly not. And, I did recognize it in this period in Germany, the same period because I could feel myself puffing up a little like a toad or something like, and it was like, whoa, what is going on here. And, it was just so clear. And, that's why I say to people don't deny the arrogance that may appear and don't deny the deflation that might appear or the self-hate, or the lack of worth, or the self-doubt. But, just be willing to not follow it, and discover what's underneath it. Then we are free to be human beings, but we are not bound by being human beings.

[18:45] HILLARY: I remember, I think it was about a year ago, and I have been absolutely thrilled and blessed to do different work for the foundation. And we were in a meeting, and I described you as an enlightened being. And I remember in this moment, you gave me this look. And I thought to myself, well, I think I'll not say that.

[19:05] GANGAJI: Yeah, it's, you know, it's like calling me god or something. It's a way, and the way the word has become so corrupted. And so, it made separate from ordinary, regular people, just like the word god, or course, that has its power. Just like you were referring it to it earlier, but there is a difference because it has been an experience but, I could never deny my experience, of my ongoing experience, and it was an experience of non-duality and a fulfillment that has never left me. But I really don't see the point in defining that as anything separate from anyone else. So, that's why I don't like enlightened being or master, and people run through those usually as projections. There's nothing wrong with them, and they usually just play out if they're really paying attention because I did that with Papaji, you know. And, I actually had to see Papaji in ordinary situations. I see him get angry with somebody, see him misunderstand somebody, see him not hear somebody correctly, and then answer the question and get mad at them for not getting the answer. You know, he, by the time I met him he was in his 80's and he was starting the pain in his body, and pain often makes you cranky. And then I read about Ramana, who's supposed to be this absolute saint and never gave an ugly look to anybody, and actually he was cranky in the end too when he had cancer and his body was suffering. And, it allowed me to start to see that there's room for these aspects or attributes that we have determined, keep us unenlightened. And that they're pretty superficial. They're just functions of mood or body or emotions.

[21:11] HILLARY: You know with this kind of amazing phenomena happening of people having profound experiences around you or because of you in some way. I mean your life must change just dramatically.

[21:26] GANGAJI: Yes, yeah, it did. It has changed dramatically in certain ways. In other ways, I wouldn't say there's been any changes. I still like chocolate. There's still vanity present. I still like movies. I still like to read books. I enjoy a good discussion. What changed, well, I have spoken before when I had such profound gratitude to Papaji of saying how can I express this gratitude to you, and he said give your life to it. He'd actually said that in the first visit before this experience that we spoke about last time at Esalen. And, I started just really realizing what that meant that all of a sudden the, what had priority in my life was obedience to this silent, open fulfillment. And, in that then as you mentioned, certain people had certain responses that they wanted more, and they wanted to know how, and what they needed to do. And, I just began to speak and Papaji told me just speak from your experience. You don't need to teach them

anything, just speak from your experience. And so, I did. And, that's what this is about too, of course. Just sharing my experience and not that it's the right experience or there's a formula, but that in the depths of my experience, I had to recognize that always this had been here. This that we wait for it to happen is already here.

[23:09] HILLARY: And, that thing, Gangaji, is that what you're seeing when you look at other people?

[23:14] GANGAJI: Well, it's not a thing.

[23:16] HILLARY: And, I'm not talking about with your eyes.

[23:18] GANGAJI: It's, yeah, I'm seeing myself in different forms. Just like internally, we have different visions of ourselves. I mean we spoke before about inflation and deflation, and arrogance or self-doubt. It's the same inside and outside. And, finally, this, each of us has this capacity to recognize, but always, and maybe in one period in your life, it's in the background, there is this continual presence. And, in this shift that occurred, it was in the foreground. So, that has never left the foreground. The background moves, but the foreground is stable. Before I had this experience that the background was stable, but I was attending to everything moving in the foreground. And, you know, I spoke before about this meeting with Papaji being the pivotal moment, but what Papaji said to me was actually the pivotal moment was 20 years before that when I saw Ramana's picture and I read his little book, and recognized it was true. I recognized it was true because it was so simple, so clear. And then I closed the book and put it away and said, but that couldn't have anything to do with me with the complications of my life. And, it was that actual recognition, and then the denial of it that took the 20 years. And then Papaji said he just came in to give the final push. So, that's what I see in people. That actually by the time people are even interested in what I have to say, experiences have already happened. We have just put them into categories, or files and we're waiting for a big category that obliterates all of those or consolidates all of those. And, it's that postponement that can stop and we can recognize at some point, even if we don't remember. Like, I can remember opening the book of Ramana's. But, we don't even have to remember it. It leaves an echo, maybe it happened. We came in with it, or maybe it was something we learned when we were children in just a moment out of the blue. And, we didn't have a context for it. Or, we overrode it with complications, but it's already happened. I'm just here to confirm it, or to challenge it.

[26:01] GANGAJI: I have been asked if I am a guru, or the head of a church or religion. I do not think of myself as a guru, and I am definitely not the head of a church or religion. Some call me teacher, but in truth I am no different from anyone else. I am only able play the role of a teacher because I know that no role is finally real. The true teacher is alive within each of us, and finally reveals itself in everything on the apparent inside and the apparent outside. This is a time of the ordinary awakening. This means you. Not those born under the brightest stars, but the ordinary person as well. My intention is not to fix anyone or teach anything. Regarding the simple absolute truth of who you are, nothing needs to be learned. The truth of who you are is closer than what can be learned. What if in this moment, just as an experiment and in the spirit of self-inquiry, you put aside everything you have learned about who you are including all of your hopes and fears of who that might be, and open your mind to discover the truth of who you are.

It is very simple. That truth is always here. My invitation is to stop all movement of your mind away from truth, so that you can discover directly for yourself this jewel that is alive within you.

[28:10] HILLARY: That little piece there that I put in at the end that's from *The Diamond in Your Pocket*. And, as far as the interview goes, I'm just really happy to be able to share that with you. I never really heard Gangaji speak in that way, and at that length, on the subject of her awakening. So, I'm glad we didn't keep that one on the shelf. And, as we look forward to starting another year coming up here in October, I want to thank you not only for tuning in, but also for sharing these conversations with others. If you found them helpful, we would really appreciate your help in keeping them going. Just go to the website, it's gangaji.org. There's a donate button up there in the right hand corner. Your monthly donation, no matter how big or how small, it makes a big difference to us. Thank you to Jami Sieber for your exquisite music. It's always exquisite. Jami is at Jamisieber.com. That's S-I-E-B-E-R dot com. And for all of you, thank you for joining us again. *A Conversation with Gangaji* is not only for you, but it's inspired by you. Until next time, be well.