

Gangaji Radio

A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 23

THE ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCE

Released on August 20, 2014

[00:05] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:08] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: There is an essential experience that happens maybe with most people, even if it goes unrecognized. It's a moment when the perception of one's personality is somehow absent, when there's no considerations on thoughts, feelings, and circumstances. It can happen in nature, in the midst of a trauma, or in a moment really nothing in particular is happening. A common question that comes up when one hears of this essential experience is have I actually had one or I had a brief one, but I'm not so sure it was a true experience and what about now? How do I find that experience now?

[01:48] GANGAJI: In a bigger sense, we've all had it. It's the initial experience of I am and so in a certain way we spend our lives denying who we are to try to manage the bigness, the hugeness of being.

[01:07] HILLARY: The memory of these profound experiences is what sometimes drives the desire to know a bigger life. It is the longing to come home. It is the desire to be free. I'm Hillary Larson and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

[01:22] HILLARY: I wanted to take care of just a couple things before I started into our topic today and one of them was just something I've kind of had on my mind for the last, it must be the last three or four months. We did a show called *The Strategy of Being Nice* and you know, you get some really beautiful letters with some great questions and a woman named Kim from the UK had written in months ago and I read her letter. I was like, oh, I can't wait to use this letter and at the beginning of the show I was reading her letter and there was a moment where I said, that always makes me laugh, and when I went back to edit it I felt like, oh gosh, that sounded kind of invalidating and I didn't mean it to come across that way, so I just wanted to tell her I was laughing because I just, I so thoroughly loved her letter so that has been kind of weighing on me so I'm glad to get that out there. I also wanted to address a couple of questions that I get asked and one of them is do you get nervous interviewing Gangaji and the answer is yes.

[02:31] GANGAJI: Really? I'm surprised.

[02:33] HILLARY: You know, after about five or ten minutes I kind of calm down, but the other one that I get a lot was how do you hold your own for that length of time and I want to say that I actually don't, because I want to give an example. We did a show called *Telling the Truth* and that was a couple months ago and I, you don't know the topic before you sit down, but I've made notes and I've got the clips and on that particular show we were about seven or eight

minutes into it I looked at my notes and they were pretty much worthless so in that respect I think that our conversations you are so quick to take somebody out of their mind and then the question is how do you communicate for the next you know, 17 minutes. So it's a different kind of conversation.

[03:20] GANGAJI: It's a discovery really. We don't have to...I mean you can have notes obviously going into anything, but then the conversation of these two people and all the people listening even, somehow contribute to that and so neither one of us directs it I would say.

[03:40] HILLARY: Oh, it's so clear, it's so clear. Anyway, so how about if we start on this topic of the essential experience.

[03:46] GANGAJI: Great.

[03:47] HILLARY: I wanted to actually play a clip from one of your satsangs. I think I took this from Moment of Choice, but I think it's a perfect way to start off our conversation this month.

(clip)

[03:58] GANGAJI: There are people who have death experiences, accidents, or whatever, where they die and leave their body and are conscious of their body for a moment or then return, but their life is never the same, as they will tell you. Their life is not the same because they had, for maybe it's just an instant, recognized that there is an existence independent of what they thought was reality, what they thought would be lost in death. So this happens, this can happen by accident, you know, in anesthesia or whatever, it just can happen and it can happen from the grace of the teacher, or it can happen out of the blue in a moment or a clap of thunder moment, and the story, even though it may reappear, the emotions, even though they may reappear, the circumstances may get better or get worse, but some essential shift has occurred. Everyone in this room has had that essential shift. You may not remember it, but I guarantee you you could not sit in this room for yesterday and today without at least an echo or a resonance in yourselves of that essential shift. Maybe you were born with the shift, maybe it happened pre-verbal memory so you can't put it together as part of the story of me, but it is possible for you to recognize that once this essential shift has happened, to whatever degree it's recognized has happened. There's choice.

(end clip)

[06:05] HILLARY: You know, I bet you there are a good number of people listening to this right now that don't think they've had an essential experience.

[06:12] GANGAJI: Well, that's one of the big habits of mind is to deny the essential experience because in a bigger sense we've all had it. It's the initial experience of I am and it is so big that we then try to fit that I am into I am a woman or a man or I am this woman, this man, and so in a certain way we spend our lives denying who we are to try to manage the bigness, the hugeness of being and then something else happens in our life and we deny it because we somehow idealize what we should be once we've had an essential experience. Someone listening may say, well if I had had it or if that experience was true, then I wouldn't get angry anymore or then I

wouldn't still be afraid or then I wouldn't act like I act and this is all just a denial based on some idealized version of what an essential experience has the power to do and in that it overlooks where the power is in this essential experience and really the confirming sign is that you are called to something bigger than the life that is defined by your name, by your gender, by your history, by your job, by your relationship. That very call comes from the essential experience and then there is a reinforcement of that once we surrender to that call and once we say yes, then through grace there is a moment where there is a conscious shift, where we recognize, where we are conscious and we recognize, oh, this is it. But to even get to the brink of that, you've already had a shift. You know this doesn't happen to everyone and I'm not saying it's better because it does happen to you, of course that is my point of view, but I know there are plenty of people who are happy, content, where it doesn't happen, so that's not the point, that this is what you need to do, this is what you have to do. It's just simply the fact that something has shifted your life from the trajectory that it would have taken normally being the child of the parents that you're the child of, raised in the way you were raised. Something interrupted that, some mystery, and I'm here to support that interruption.

[09:06] HILLARY: I think that's so interesting because I was actually thinking earlier about there are people that, probably most people go their whole lifetime and would never even really want to have a conversation like we're having right now.

[09:18] GANGAJI: Yes.

[09:19] HILLARY: And I guess that can be for many reasons, but at the same time I wonder if there's a certain level of dissatisfaction and desperation that guides people down a certain road.

[09:31] GANGAJI: Well, I don't know if you remember or if you ever read about R.D. Lang, but in the 60's, I think he was around in the 1960's, but he was saying depression in a world like we live in is actually a sign of sanity, so this discontent that we feel is actually a sign of something bigger that we know exists, something more free, something more loving, something kinder that we know is here and so yes, we are discontent and we can blame that on our parents and maybe our parents have a lot of responsibility in that, but it's not just our parents, it's our own bodies, it's the world, it's history, it's change that happens. So all of that tends to feed into something, some sense of the way life is defined is too small and it's constricting and it's limiting.

[10:33] HILLARY: I wonder, do you remember the first time you had an essential experience?

[10:39] GANGAJI: well, I remember being a little girl and falling in love with Jesus, so that was an essential experience because my heart burst open. I must have been six or something. I have other memories before that, not so pleasant and some quite pleasant, but that was something that was a revelation that so much love could be present and I think I was in some kind of state for a while because it made my parents very nervous. It did not fit in with our definition of what was acceptable. So I, of course, picked up on that and denied it, I guess I would have to say, denied it with my life. It was too big. It was too over the top.

[11:28] HILLARY: Maybe you could help us with that then, because maybe part of the problem is if somebody has an experience of just experiencing profound love, they may not think of that as their essential experience.

[11:43] GANGAJI: Well, what could be more essential? That's the point of it all, this, this revelation, annihilation by love, whether it's in a fraction of a second or whether it's through a relationship, whether it's through nature, all of that is secondary to the hugeness of this very small word, love, but the mystery of it, the fulfillment of it. Yes, that's essential.

[12:19] HILLARY: As I'm sitting here listening to you, I was thinking, wow, you know, in a certain odd way, falling asleep at night is an essential experience.

[12:26] GANGAJI: That's right, beautiful, I like that. It's a surrender and it is blissful really. I mean we actually can remember the next morning if we did fall asleep deeply because we are so nourished by it and we remember if we didn't fall asleep deeply because it's in and out of different states and yeah, so essential experience is here and then the shift becomes - do I say yes? I have experienced that and open myself to what the source of that is or what the depth of that is.

[13:15] HILLARY: Last month we did some kind of special and we aired the pilot show that you and I did almost three years ago and there was one moment in that conversation that you and I had and I was reminded of it when we put this one out, was there was a moment when you talked about your awakening and your awakening is extraordinary to me in that it's different and there was a moment where you said, well it is different, and it's important to note that, and then I said something like, but for most of us it might be more subtle and you said, yes, and what I would have loved to have done is follow up on that conversation we were having right there because I think for most of us it is more subtle, but that doesn't make it less important or less impactful.

[13:52] GANGAJI: Absolutely, and then what makes it not so subtle but absolutely obvious is the perspective. When you look at your life, the perspective of time, and the capacity we have to reflect on what was our life like a year ago or 20 years ago and if it has been affected by a very subtle maybe, just out of consciousness, essential experience, you see the, you see that the life is richer, it's fuller, it's more true. There may be pain, there may be failure, but there is a force that can't be denied.

[14:36] HILLARY: I've told you before that I had a drowning incident when I was a kid and I saw myself and who I was so clearly, but what I think is different between the two of us is that on a bad day, for example, I lose that awareness, it seems like a million miles away, and you seem like you have a sustained awareness of that truth.

[14:57] GANGAJI: Well, something happened to me after meeting Papaji, because I had had experiences before meeting Papaji and when Papaji pointed to that that is here, that hasn't moved, and somehow he turned my attention to that and he gave me permission for that and he pushed me into that, so not that I could force it or get it, but there was a moment where I did get it. I got that this has always been here, this is bigger than my mind can hold, and it's true that there is...my life has never been the same and so I'd say my life was never the same after

experiencing this love of Christ that I had, but there was a way that that easily was put out of sight or put into the background or forgotten and I don't even know that I remembered it until I met Papaji and sort of it was rekindled. There was permission to love, permission to be, and then following that there was the call to vigilance because we do have the capacity to deny it and cover it and veil it again and when someone asked Papaji, do we have to, how long do we have to be vigilant and he said, till your last breath, because we do have thinking minds and as long as we have brain activity we have the capacity to redefine our lives in a smaller way than is true. And so I would say I discovered what to be vigilant to and it's joyous to be vigilant to that. It doesn't mean I don't have bad days. It doesn't mean that I keep that in my awareness even in the way that you imagine that I keep it in my awareness. It's, it is both more subtle and more profound than that and it's grace, but it's a grace that comes from surrendering to the truth of that.

[17:22] HILLARY: I want to talk about grace for a second, because several months ago, this was back in November, you received a letter and I love this letter so much, but we had just done the myth of enlightened being which it would have been perfect for that, so then I was thinking, wow, this is going to have to sit on the shelf for a while, but let me just read this to you. It says, "Dear Gangaji, during my 82 years as an ardent seeker I have been lucky to have personally met a few truly illuminated individuals. Their common experience so striking and telling to me is that, number one, each was transformed unexpectedly out of the blue. Number two, seekers from all over somehow found them. And number three, the essence of their transformation has stayed with them, although all have passed away their influences on going. You're obviously another, awakening permanently somehow by being with Papaji, now with decades of having people from all over seek you out, as I have. Many of us have had epiphanies, insights, and illuminations that at first seem to fill that missing something in our lives, showing us who we truly are and where home truly is, but they only last long enough to keep us seeking. We join your audience again as kittens before a warm fire, being reminded and hoping the next realization, epiphany, insight will stick. Therefore, it seems likely to me that you and the others I mentioned have somehow, for lack of a better word, been graced by some ineffable something beyond and that without such grace we keep on seeking simply because there is nothing better to do."

[19:00] GANGAJI: So of course that's true in a certain sense, but also there's great responsibility for calling off the search, for recognizing when the seeking starts after a true moment. Of course it's essential to seek until there is a moment there is an epiphany or there is just some stopping of the mind or revelation of love. And then the habit is to seek another one like that or a bigger one or to get the feeling of that one back and it has to be very strong, a strong responsibility to stop, to not deny what has happened to you and to not look for it to happen again. So when this experience that I have written about and maybe we've even spoken about that happened when I was sitting on the bed with Eli at Esalen, and really shifted everything, when it came, I wasn't looking for anything. I was really content. I had met my teacher. In his presence and out of his presence I had experienced beautiful feelings. I felt I was in the grace of that. Nothing else needed to happen. I wasn't looking for anything and in not looking for anything we are open, naturally open, but that's where the responsibility is. Yes, we are kittens and we have to be open like kittens and playful and soft, but also, we are responsible and they talk about the kitten and the monkey. The monkey holds on and doesn't let go of his mother as she's leaping through the jungle and it has to be that level of commitment too, they go together, and I think it's easy or it's habitual to just want more of the good feeling and really

to recognize I've had enough. I don't need anymore. I can feel bad for the rest of my life and still know that I have been touched by grace. Then it doesn't matter what you're feeling. You're not looking for a feeling or any central experience because you know who you are.

[21:20] HILLARY: A few weeks ago when I was thinking about doing this topic, for some reason I pulled this book off of my shelf and it's, for those of you who know this book, it's *The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous* and at the very back there is a chapter called The Spiritual Experience and this was after years, AA had been going for years and what they were writing was that there were actually...looking back, there were very few people that had "white light experiences" like the founder did, but most people had awakenings that were of the educational variety and I really sat with that and I was thinking, you know, for myself, I almost have awakenings and compartments of my life where I'm not quite seeing the truth clearly and then there's some way of telling the truth and then some shift happens in that part of my life.

[22:09] GANGAJI: And that's a light isn't it? A light goes off? I mean that's the cartoon even. The light bulb, it's like oh, there it is, yes.

[22:19] HILLARY: I want to actually go deeper than that if you don't mind. I have this clip that I pulled and it's a conversation between you and this woman and she's talking about times where, oh, I'm awake and then I'm asleep and then I'm awake and then I'm asleep and in particular this part of the conversation I love is where you refer to Papaji talking about people who are half-baked, so let me play this.

(clip)

[22:44] GANGAJI: Now I believe it to be so. I'm not sure about this, but I believe it to be so that in order to discover what's closer than awake or asleep, you have to first have had an experience of I'm awake, because there's this tilt to an experience of ignorance, sleep, sleep, and then poof, there's an essential experience, an awakeness, where you recognize I am not this personality. I am not this set of this story. I am not this story. There's a recognition there and it is a beautiful recognition and it is filled with light and freedom and joy and laughter. That's an essential experience because it's the counterpoint to the normal experience, but it is not the final experience. It's the opening of the final experience. It's what Papaji would call half-baked. Half baked, but half-baked is half-baked, right? Half-baked, good. So back in the oven is to discover, okay, if I am aware when I'm awake and I'm aware when I'm asleep, who or what is it that is aware? So when you say I'm aware, who is aware? Is it not awareness itself that is aware?

[24:29] UNNAMED SPEAKER: *That seems...*

[24:30] GANGAJI: Like right now. Isn't there awareness of this exchange and awareness of whatever may be happening or awareness of no awareness of what's happening, but awareness is here, so close, closer than any thought, closer than any heartbeat, closer than any awakening, and closer than any sleep, closer than any identification, and present in every identification as well as every awakening.

(end clip)

[24:04] HILLARY: That's the part I really wanted to look at right now because I remember a couple months ago, maybe it was last month actually, on With Gangaji, which is your live monthly webcast, the topic, and you always have a topic, was a kindness and you had a lot of responses about kindness on the forum that's part of With Gangaji and there were a lot of people talking about the beauty, just the, it's just impeccable to feel just pure kindness and then I wondered though, is that half-baked? Is that just a state that comes and goes because the feeling of kindness does come and go just like love.

[25:42] GANGAJI: I would say kindness is a byproduct, that it is a natural byproduct, like compassion, or fulfillment. So if you identify kindness as something you're going for, you're overlooking the source of kindness that's here. That's awareness conscious of itself as you, then kindness overflows because nobody is in your way all of a sudden, nobody is a threat to you. You know, you might not be so kind to the burglar who crawls through your window because that's a threat to your body, but in general, the barriers, the armoring, defense systems, have no need to be there, and so kindness is the byproduct.

[26:30] HILLARY: In that clip, you're talking about awareness, just pure awareness, and to me that feels like the stepping back, even beyond kindness.

[26:41] GANGAJI: Yeah, so be aware of yourself is awareness and then see what the byproducts are. Be aware of the byproducts. But if you, my point is, if you're going for the byproducts, kindness or compassion or love or fulfillment, you're still going for a state that is subject to appearing and disappearing, but when you are willing to really investigate and find for yourself what is always here, it's not that you make it be here, it is always here and then it is conscious of itself. You are not separate from that, which is always here, then you are conscious of yourself and there are many byproducts and then you also have the capacity with your thinking human mind to be vigilant of that.

[27:36] HILLARY: There was a quote that I've heard you say many, many times over the years and it so much pertains to what we're talking about right now and it's that quote from Kabir where he said, "I once experienced reality for 15 seconds and the rest of my life was spent in devotion to that." And he wasn't saying that I tried to get another experience that's just like that or I worked for another experience. It was that experience and you said that actually in a retreat recently that I was in and it was so funny because automatically my mind went to, oh, I haven't had that experience of reality that he's had and then I stopped for a moment. I stopped the circuit and then I thought to myself, oh, I've had so many experiences of pure love and awe and they weren't near death experiences. They just came out of the blue.

[28:32] GANGAJI: Out of the blue, out of the blue, that's right. It's life experience.

[28:38] HILLARY: And so I'd like to end off by asking you, Gangaji, what do you say to the rest of us when you look at that Kabir quote and somebody is reaching back in the past of like, oh, I once had a really profound experience. How do I devote my life to that? Because it almost feels like you have to pull it back in again to recall it.

[28:58] GANGAJI: That's only if you're thinking it. Devotion is different from thinking. Devotion is...you're at the feet of it. It informs your life from then on. You don't have to recall it. You don't have to replay it, but you allow it the seat, the seat of primacy in your heart.

[29:17] HILLARY: I just feel like it's possible in this conversation to recognize something that has been overlooked.

[29:24] GANGAJI: Yes, there's a beautiful quote from Papaji and to me he's really pointing to this in the quote. He says, "Never deny your true majesty. In this essential experience some majestic quality of being and being conscious of that being is, is revealed."

[29:49] HILLARY: Thank you.

[29:59] HILLARY: We are running late this time, so I'm going to wrap things up here as fast as I can. I want to thank Dick for your letter that I read in the show today. I knew we'd find a way to get that into one of our conversations somehow. Thank you so much for your patience and if you're interested in Gangaji's live monthly webcast, her event schedule, or you'd just like some more information on Gangaji please go to the website, that's Gangaji.org. Well, we try to keep these episodes to 30 minutes but I would really like to send you all off with the second part of that last clip I played. I was afraid we wouldn't have time for it, and we actually don't, but I'm going to play it anyway. It's a good place to end. This has been *A Conversation With Gangaji*. Thank you for listening.

(clip)

[30:43] GANGAJI: You see it? You catch it, what I'm talking about here? This is not just giving you another spiritual search. It's not giving you a religion or a set of beliefs. It's first of all acknowledging that you have had an essential experience. If you haven't, you don't know what I'm talking about and you will have one. You'll get one, because they're contagious. And it's what you want, so you'll have it. I mean your mind is turned in that direction, but I would say 90-99% of the people in here have had an essential experience, even if you don't remember the exact experience, you have the echo of that experience resonating in your being, even if that experience happened with some substance, even if that experience happened in your sleep. It's there. That's great. Now, what was unchanged even by that experience, by that blessed, hoped for, prayed for, searched for, worshipped for, worked for experience? What is unchanged by that?