

Gangaji Radio

A Conversation With Gangaji Series
Host Hillary Larson
Episode 25
EMBRACING THE UNTHINKABLE
Released on October 15, 2014

[00:05] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:10] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: As I started this month's conversation with Gangaji, I had some questions in mind that I think pertained to almost all of us and particularly in this time of craziness on our planet, and those questions were what happens when we are faced with what we never wanted and never expected? Maybe it's in a form of a difficult diagnosis, financial insecurity or just simply being witness to man's inhumanity to man on our planet right now. Where is peace and love when what feels real is struggle? How do we know when to hang on and when to let go? For some, the challenges of life can feel like too much at times but rather than giving up, can all this be a call to stay, to just stay. And as Gangaji says, to wake up from the dead and live.

[01:01] GANGAJI: I would say that I am inviting people to whatever degree they are, the walking dead to come back to life, to give life. The chance to live itself through you.

[01:14] HILLARY: So is there a way to say yes to this life we've been given no matter what the circumstance. I wonder if people who have profound awakenings experience difficulty differently than the rest of us. Do people like Gangaji no longer fear bad things happening? To be perfectly honest the answer I received from Gangaji to my question was not at all what I expected and it may not be what you expect either but it was profoundly humbling to say the least and it started out like this; I'm Hillary Larson and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

[01:47] HILLARY: I just want to mention a couple of notes that you received via the Gangaji radio email address in the last couple of days. As we are talking about facing the unthinkable which might be in the form of a difficult diagnosis, the loss of a job or really the loss of anything, a death or a chronic illness. Susan wrote in to you and she said what feels unbearable to her is the cruelty that is inflicted upon animals. And another listener wrote in this morning and she would like you to address the issue of suicide and mental illness. So we're obviously talking about a very heavy subject this month but I also want to say that the purpose is not about being modeling or indulging in pain. This feels very different than that to me and this actually feels like traversing territory where others fear to tread and really facing what haunts us and what life has put in our path and how we can translate that into true freedom. I know that many come to you as a result of a long or exhaustive spiritual search but I've heard you turn that question around and what you are actually asking is what are you running from in your search. So we might think that we want enlightenment but maybe we just want to stay away from hell.

[03:08] GANGAJI: Yes, I mean that's what - of course, it's a normal desire. And I think some version of that is what gets us all seeking happiness in some form and maybe that takes a

spiritual definition and maybe it's simply seeking the right partner, or seeking something that will save us and that gets us in the door and then we can actually begin the challenging essential work of facing what it is that we're running from and are seeking.

[03:45] HILLARY: What I think is profound and reassuring in a sense is that I think that every human being faces that or maybe they don't face it but they experience some kind of hell. I was watching that, there was a documentary series going on here in the states and it was about the Roosevelt's and it was a wonderful series. That section where they were talking about Theodore Roosevelt who was, I think he was the 26th the President of the US. He experienced all kinds of hell and in one day he lost his mother and he lost his wife. And he consciously went into action to stay away from hell. And what moves me about that is you know he was brilliant and he did amazing things and some people considered him kind of a manic but he was just like us in that way. It's like something bad happens and some people will spend a lifetime trying to get away from that thing.

[04:44] GANGAJI: Well I think we're all the same that way. We would spend a lifetime. We do spend lifetimes trying to get away from whatever it is that has shaken us to the root. I was certainly in that position, not in an extreme one having lost a partner and a parent at the same time, but I saw that my life was still tied up in a bed of suffering and I just wanted out from that. I just happened to have been lucky enough to have met a teacher who actually told me to stop my search. I never considered that. I was just always searching for something that I could keep that would work as a Talisman, an amulet or a great magic mantra that would keep away the demons, keep away the devil. And I think that that's where most people spend their time so it's actually quite rare to even consider that you stop and turn and discover what you're running from. Because you know Hillary, essentially what we are all running from is death, from nonexistence. And since we are humans and we have developed a capacity for reflection, we look around us and we see things are dying all the time. We know that we will die but that's an unbearable knowledge and so we try to deny it and we tried to find immortality in some way. And many people are searching who are listening to this right now for enlightenment to give them immortality.

[06:34] HILLARY: I remember one time somebody said something at a retreat that was so profound and moving to me, they were talking about you know the subject of suicide and they said there was this moment where they shut the door on both enlightenment and suicide. That statement was so huge to me because then you could see it was really the same thing, just like life and death.

[07:03] GANGAJI: And so they shut the door on death and they shut the door on life.

[07:07] HILLARY: No, it was more like what I was taking from it was they closed the door on their escape. You know their constant chronic escape plan from this pain and in that in closing those two doors it was like oh, like this thing like that I felt I couldn't face. It looked like she faced it in that moment. It was beautiful.

[07:28] GANGAJI: Wonderful.

[07:30] HILLARY: I wanted to get onto a letter, there was a letter that somebody wrote you that it actually has to do with death. And she says "Dear Gangaji; I experienced the death of my husband a couple of years ago. He/we still had I thought many years of life ahead of us. I have been sincere on my spiritual path for many years. I've had many times where stillness and peace were undeniable but to be honest I find that now I am having a hard time finding my way back to this love that I have known so well. How do we fall in love with love again when we are still hurting?"

[08:12] GANGAJI: Well you know the assumption in this question is that love is separate from the hurt. Where if you really are willing to meet the hurt deeply, you find you only hurt because there is love. I mean we only grieve a loss because we loved what we perceive is lost. And so it's not a matter of finding your way back to something. That's a construction in our memory anyway. It doesn't even exist. It's really the willingness to find your way through whatever is being experienced and in this case and really in the whole context of this particular discussion, it's in the worst of things and the profound grief of loss of a loved one or of seeing the suffering of other creatures, animal, human or planetary. Just the willingness to stop for a moment and follow through it, not to get away from it or be saved from it or give it back from it, which is just another idea about getting away from it. It's to really stop in be here always. That's the invitation.

[09:34] HILLARY: It seems like there is so many escape routes to that because it feels counterintuitive to just stay with that.

[09:43] GANGAJI: It is counterintuitive. It's completely counterintuitive. We are trained as animals to get away from danger naturally. And so that's a good training and it's in our cells and it's in our instincts but this is something else. This is the willingness to recognize what is free both within us and outside of us that it doesn't even depend on our survival for its freedom. Where is love that doesn't even need the objects of love to be present, whether it's our own bodies that we love or our mates or our world? And that's what makes it radical. There's finally as you were referring to the person in the retreat, there's closing the door on the exits and that means closing the door on the indulgence, and closing the door on denial, and closing the door on hiding and fighting. It's just being still an opening the mind. Closing the door of strategies of mind and opening to the openness of mind that can meet and does meet everything.

[10:56] HILLARY: You know I think, I don't know why I'm here. I don't know how I ended up in this position with you. I'm so grateful for it but it's mysterious to me how that has happened but I do know I'm familiar with this hell and I do know that I'm very familiar with the search and that when I met you I called that off. And sometimes I bring it back in again but it was, you know if it's possible to have a PhD in searching I certainly have that degree. There was a period of time that was more than just a day. It was more than a month. It was like a couple of years you know where I just felt like I was in this unthinkable hell and I'll tell you two coping strategies that are had that I really didn't see at the time and one of them was I would name it "the dark night of the soul." And I think that that's a valid thing but I was using it as a thing to name it just so I could get through it which actually may not be right or wrong. And the other thing I found in hindsight was that I was hoping if I would go deeply enough into it, if I would surrender into it and I'm not talking about indulging that honestly, I was hoping for a white light experience that I'd read about so I could just be done with it.

[12:17] GANGAJI: Yes, those are. And in a sense you know they are coping strategies but they are informed by something that is bigger. So maybe a more primitive coping strategy would be to blot it out with alcohol or drugs or work or sleep or whatever. But both of these coping strategies are already elevated you know to recognize that the possibility of meeting it you are then through with it. I mean otherwise why would we need to meet it. That is the promise of it and it is a promise of enlightenment. And in that sense these, these strategies bring you to the point of stopping. Bring you to the point of opening. And so we could call that **** ego or ego that is in service to something bigger than its own primitive strategies of running and hiding and indulging and fighting, because you weren't really doing any of those then. I mean in naming it the dark night of the soul, well that already has a context in accepting perhaps the necessity of it and accepting that the soul can withstand it and will be deepened by it. So it's quite beautiful and then recognizing that if you meet it you will be free of it. That's actually the truth. If you do meet it you are free of it. Of course knowing that and even remembering that from a past meeting is not enough because it then becomes a subtle strategy to actually avoid meeting it. Just like naming it while it comes from really support is not enough. It has to be deeper. It has to be closer. It has to be fresher. So I, I see both of those as a preparation for your capacity to actually be willing to hear "call off the search", to hear "be still, stop don't do anything" because it is so counterintuitive. But you had already taken a turn in that you had coped enough strategized enough and you recognize that that's not where fulfillment is.

[14:47] HILLARY: There is something that you said that's still kind of ringing in the back of my head and gosh this was a long time ago. This was when we did our conversation on anxiety and there was just this brief moment where you said "and sometimes you just have to get through it." And to me that shattered some idealization of what it's supposed to be like when you're really open to something, that there's some sense of spirituality kind of glosses, kind of makes things seem they should be easier and sometimes they're not easier with spirituality and without spirituality. Sometimes things are just hard. And there was some, I don't know, there was some acknowledgment of that that was so freeing to me when you said that. Does that make sense to you?

[15:36] GANGAJI: Well I think what you're referring to when you say spirituality says things should be easier, it's kind of magical thinking because really I don't know any tradition that says things should be easier. That's just what we hope for. I mean most traditions when you get deeply into them recognize and state that it is a huge challenge. It's, it is, it's the biggest challenge of a lifetime and it's the challenge to live in the face of, of death. So we can maybe idealize that idea of spirituality and put a layer on it of oh, this will be easy. This will be light, but that's not really the truth that any, any of the great mystical traditions say. It is a difficult and it's always difficult until one is willing to actually let it be difficult and then the difficulty is discovered to be limited.

[16:37] HILLARY: This is kind of our round two of a conversation in hell but other people didn't get to hear the first round of it because as I said in the God show that I had this the God voice going on in my head that, that I wasn't going to be able to pull off another good conversation with you. So we already talked about that but, but what was, what I have found as I watch you is that if somebody is just willing to sit with you and tell the truth, you will give them everything. And I mean that as far as like where you can take them and I think part of what happened to me in that other conversation that we didn't air was that I had this very deep fear going on in me

that it actually didn't want to say out loud. One of the things that was going on was I was really quite shaken by the whole Robin Williams thing because that to me was the epitome of when hell is unbearable.

[17:37] GANGAJI: Well yeah, that's suicide isn't it? That's giving up on life. It's actually choosing nonexistence over dealing with the challenge of living. And I'm not saying that judgmentally, I certainly don't have judgment against people who commit suicide. I recognize the deep suffering that it is and it's not my business actually if people commit suicide. And I have spoken, met with people who have come close to suicide or attempted suicide but always with them, I mean we were having the conversation there was choosing to not escape, to not leave. What I think I'm more concerned with is the living death that many people choose to not end life but also to not live life and that's the kind of walking dead. And that's I would say that I am, I am inviting people to whatever degree they are, the walking dead to come back to life, to give life a chance to live itself through you, uniquely through you. And when it's time your life will end or you will end it but yeah I mean Robin Williams's suicide shook up a lot of people. It was, it didn't fit with what he gave us, such joy and laughter and so I think it was shocking but hopefully it shocked us into recognizing the preciousness of each moment with each other and each moment in our own skin.

[19:29] HILLARY: I wanted to talk to you about what happens, you know when the floor falls through when you find out you know, you lost your job or you've gotten a bad diagnosis. You know I had somebody who just had a tragedy yesterday that was just like wow, just completely out of the blue. And what it brought up for me was this, and I've really been pondering this since our conversation on the essential experience and you may have meant this in a completely different context but you were talking about this thing. I think this is so important. You were talking about this the kitten and the monkey. Do you remember that conversation? And you were saying like the kitten is open and let's go and the monkey hangs on and both are needed. I think that in times of real hell, what real doubt and confusion there is an edge between surrender and doing something.

[20:31] GANGAJI: Well the thing is I mean you're saying the word doubt means that you're already doing something. You're ready having a conversation in your mind about what you're experiencing. And so if you stop that you're even doing less. And when you stop that there's nothing you have to do. You actually experience the pain, emotional, physical, whatever realm it may be happening in, without the conversation in your head, you are open. And you don't have to second-guess yourself. You don't have to figure it out. So when I use those terms of the necessity of the monkey of holding on, it was really more in the sense of then living your day to day life. How do you stay true to that that is discovered in a moment of deep shock where through grace you open completely with no narrative about this is good or this is bad or I should be doing this or I didn't do this correctly. You are just open and there is inevitably without question a profound realization. Then the issue is how do you stay true to that when life gets more humdrum or when the losses are not as profound as that one that shook you open and shook you free. Then that's where the real challenge is and that's where we had the capacity to pay very close attention and to be vigilant and to use our minds and their intelligence to reflect back on when the denial and the doubts start to get a hold again so that you can, you can be free to open.

[22:16] HILLARY: I was rereading your book *Hidden Treasure* and in there there's a chapter on the subject of hell and you've always been a really frank with the hells you've gone through in your lifetime. I was wondering are you afraid of hell anymore? Are you afraid of the unthinkable?

[22:38] GANGAJI: Well if you mean afraid of it, do I think about it? No I don't think about it. I mean if I'm experiencing hell. I mean if my husband something horrible happened to him or something horrible happened to my body, to my daughter's body, to the planet. When I'm reading the newspaper and I feel the hell of others, I'm not afraid of that experience because I understand that that's part of that comes with this mystery of one and another and of the spectrum of circumstances and of the supreme stupidity of humanity as well as the brilliance of humanity. So there is a spectrum and I can glory in one end of the spectrum and I can moan about the other end but I don't experience fear of the moaning and I don't generate scenarios in my mind about possible hells that I may have to experience at some time. You know that's, I don't, I mean, I, I use my mind I think but I'm not attracted to that and that kind of thinking is morbid thinking. That's a really unnecessary suffering where we just, creating hell rather than facing the hell that may be a necessary part of life.

[24:19] HILLARY: Do you think that that is part of your personality or was that because of what you realized when you met Papaji?

[24:26] GANGAJI: While I don't think about it in those terms.

[24:27] HILLARY: Interesting because I think that that's the - when we talk about the subject of projection I think that I wouldn't be alone in saying that's what I project on you.

[24:38] GANGAJI: What?

[24:39] HILLARY: That your worry kind of stopped after you had your experiences with Papaji.

[24:46] GANGAJI: And what you project on you?

[24:47] HILLARY: What do I project on me?

[24:48] GANGAJI: Uh-huh.

[24:50] HILLARY: Well let me see. I guess it's kind of hard for me. I mean it's hard for me to imagine anybody that has a life other than mine because my life is my life.

[25:07] GANGAJI: But you're imagining me.

[25:09] HILLARY: I am. You're right okay I just feel like I'm so much in a corner right now. So I mean it's a good point though because it's like part of what I think people come to see you because they have an idea of a certain life you live or a certain lack of suffering that you have and I do think you have a lack of suffering because of what happened to you as a result of meeting Papaji and I have a certain lack of suffering because of meeting you.

[25:37] GANGAJI: What if you don't give any energy to those thoughts that you just articulated, then what do you have? What's here? You don't need to think what is here. You actually need to stop thinking to discover what's here.

[26:03] HILLARY: Gosh, it's so part of the trance isn't it.

[26:05] GANGAJI: But what's here transcends the trance. The trance is appearing in what's here. So if we are willing to disengage from whatever we're thinking about ourselves, about someone else, someone we assume is more advanced, someone we assume is less advanced. Just it's all this addiction to thought and as you know addiction is suffering and it's suffering also in that it is running away from some suffering. It's seeking escape. It's running away from some notion of hell and in that running away and that escape hell itself is bigger and worse. So the invitation is always to stop. To stop the projections internally and externally. To stop what you imagine other people are projecting. What you are projecting that other people are projecting. What you are projecting that you are projecting. You just stop it all. It's a hall of mirrors and it gets scary when it's believed but when you stop and you are very still, there's nothing happening.

[27:19] HILLARY: You know this is so funny because we did an interview called Telling the Truth and I actually was going to send you an email and say hey you know what, I actually didn't think that went that well and I was going to ask if we could do it over again. And then you happen to mention that it was your favorite one so far and the reason why. It was hard for me because it was moments like this where you know I had my notes and I'm kind of glancing at my notes and there's a place where I just really don't know what else to say.

[27:50] GANGAJI: That's right. The space then. And that's what we're here for. That's what this program is about. That's why we're being broadcast for, otherwise we become just another talk show. I give you my opinion. You give me your opinion and we decide whose opinion is better. But this spaciousness that is possible in all our relationships and in this moment and all moments, this is the point of our meeting.

[28:32] HILLARY: To be honest I have never actually started sweating, physically sweating during one of my conversations with Gangaji but I sure felt the fire on that one. And when all is said and done, what I'm left with once again is Gangaji's unwavering commitment for all of us to know what is truer and what our thoughts are about our lives and the world around us. Frankly, what I've also seen is she is not particularly interested in conversation if the core of it is not that, it's not about that. Thank you for sharing the vulnerability in all of that. It's no small thing. And I'm going to leave you all by letting you know that the With Gangaji program that you've heard me mention and some of you are involved in, it has a new two-year program that's going to be launched next month. It's all about our relationships with ourselves, with each other and with the world. It's called Freedom and Relationship Realization in the World and in addition to the live monthly webcast With Gangaji there are going to be some in person gatherings as well. So please go to the website gangaji.org to find out more about that. Thank you so much for sitting with us again this month. I'm Hillary Larson and this has been *A Conversation With Gangaji*.