

Gangaji Radio

A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 26

THE ANATOMY OF GRATITUDE

Released on November 19, 2014

[00:05] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:06] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: It's very human as we go through our lives to be more grateful on some days than on others. But it also seems that some people simply find gratitude easier to come by. Does that have to do with one's upbringing or is it just the way some people are born? For most the good news is that if we put our attention on it, gratitude is something we can cultivate and that's great. But what about the moments we look around, we see people being grateful and we can't seem to find that sort of gratitude ourselves? What if we don't feel grateful?

[00:40] GANGAJI: You're free to not be grateful for what's happening to simply experience what's happening and then gratitude will reveal itself in the course of events.

[00:51] HILLARY: So what exactly is gratitude? What does it have to do with telling the truth? How can one feel grateful in the midst of a challenging situation. And is the direct experience of gratitude ultimately what we call God or omnipresence or just pure love? Yes, it helps to make gratitude lists. But in the long run is gratitude just a part of who we are naturally without trying? Is it possibly the simple awareness that we are here? I'm Hillary Larson and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

[01:28] HILLARY: It seems to me that we've started some of our conversations lately on the subject of vulnerability. So last month we did a show called embracing the unthinkable and I referred to that as the marshmallow show because it felt like at the end I got roasted like a marshmallow.

[01:45] GANGAJI: Soft, soft inside.

[01:47] HILLARY: I'm soft and mushy now. So I thought well why not do a full conversation on vulnerability. So I just want to give everybody a heads up that we'll do that next month. And also what I wanted to say since the subject of this conversation is gratitude, I just wanted to take a moment and just to thank the people who have written in recently and there's lots of people that have written in over the two years that we have been doing this, but I just want to mention some names. There was Joe, Anya, Frank, Hanna, Eisha, Batina, Abby, Vinnie, Tara, Kay, Suzanne. There's a bunch of names and I'm sorry I, I obviously have missed some people. But I just wanted to say that your letters mean a lot. They mean a lot to us and I think that there is, there is, you know, when somebody writes in to you and they have a question, you know, I do the best I can to get it in on a show somehow but our recording schedule is difficult. But what I said to somebody the other day was that just writing in with reports. I write letters to you too and there's

something about writing a letter that feels like almost like I'm writing a letter to myself. So I wanted to say how important those letters are just in my viewpoint. And also what I love when I'm responding to somebody to let them know that I've passed the letter on to you is..., what I love to tell them is that you hold close all of those letters and you read every single one of them and I think that has a lot to do with gratitude.

[03:26] GANGAJI: Well, I'm really grateful that, in so many ways, grateful that people would use me, use you, use this radio show and everything else that's available to recognize the possibility of ending their own personal suffering. And I'm just grateful that we gather, all of us, and there are many people who don't write and that's absolutely fine. It's not that it's a formula and that makes you closer. It's simply the invitation to write or to speak as to.... It is an internal call. It's an internal command. So if it's not there for you, that's fine too. It's, it's just right is what I'm saying. You're listening to this show and your willingness to take in the show is also a source of great gratitude for us.

[04:19] HILLARY: I called this episode the Anatomy of Gratitude because I really kind of wanted to dissect gratitude itself and it seems to me that some people are just naturally grateful and some people really have to work at it and I wanted to ask you do you think some people are just born that way?

[04:39] GANGAJI: Well, you know, always it depends on what you mean when you say gratitude. I'm not exactly sure what, what you are meaning with that word. It's a big word like love and compassion and all the good words. But we generally have our own personal meaning for those words. So if all of us are willing to dissect that, what do we think when we use the word gratitude, then maybe we can actually eventually get to what is inside that word gratitude that really cannot be dissected.

[05:18] HILLARY: That's so interesting because I actually didn't think of defining the word gratitude as part of this conversation. So I was thinking that for me gratitude has everything to do. It's the experience of what happens when I tell the truth. So there was an example I was going to give you in fact because there's, what happens when you write down all the things you're grateful for and then there's the experience that happens with that. But there's also, to me, there's the back door of gratitude and that was, my example is a few weeks ago I, I felt like I wasn't very welcoming of some people and I felt like I was actually borderline rude and, and that weighed on me and I didn't feel good that week honestly and then when I stopped and I wrote those people a little note and I just said gosh I'm really sorry. I, I could have done better. My gratitude came back instantly. So in that case it was just, just the willingness to tell the truth, open the door to. I think to me gratitude is the experience of openness.

[06:27] GANGAJI: Well, what I'm hearing when you say that is it really ties into another show that we've done together; I think we've done it. But I've heard you say it anyway about kindness. Just the willingness to be kind and in this instance you were being kind to those people that you had been rude to and there was also, in your experience in that kindness, you were naturally kind to yourself. So I don't see a, I don't see that we have to differentiate between words like kindness and love and gratitude because finally they, they are an expression or an experience rather of this open love. They are aspects of open love and if we try to define that we separate ourselves from that. And yet we DO define it. We read the word or we hear the word the first

time. We look it up in a book and it tells us what that word means and then we, we give our own personal meanings to that. And then somehow gratitude or kindness becomes separate from who we are. It becomes separate and it becomes something we have to get or get to or manifest or act like. And, and that's exhausting. It's burdensome and it also evokes the superego to keep a list of when we didn't get to it or when we weren't expressing it.

And so my suggestion is that we, we forget the word gratitude and we forget our concepts of gratitude and we forget trying to capture gratitude and we actually, in this very moment, open without a list, without a definition, open to what is here. I mean in the very deepest sense aren't we all grateful to be? Simply to be. And that's here at this moment. If we start thinking what we are grateful for. That's beautiful. It can definitely evoke gratitude, but it also is a polarity for what we're not grateful for. And closer than those two things as legitimate as they are. I'm not against that. There are certain things we aren't grateful for.

We're not grateful for war. I mean we could say the war we can be grateful for it because it shows us where we need to go or the inhumanity and how we need to work on ourselves. But it seems that war just keeps going. We don't learn that. So I don't think we have to impose a gratitude on events or things. But we can drop deeper or closer and to recognize that the simple, profound gratitude that I am and beingness conscious of itself is naturally Ananda, love, gratitude, compassion and really that's, that's always my point.

We are free and even if we weren't free to, to experience gratitude or ingratitude for different things, if we don't concern ourselves primarily with those things but rather with the source, then we find gratitude is natural and it allows actually all kinds of experiences of ingratitude or frustration or what may be judged lack of kindness, lack of expansion.

So that's always my invitation is to just get closer and deeper and the way we do that is to see how we are defining anything. How we're separating that from something else and then how we use that to suffer unnecessarily either about somebody else. They aren't grateful enough. They aren't grateful to me. I'm certain many mothers and children know this. This is a dynamic of the relationship of parents and children or relationships or bosses and employees and it all becomes this attempt to extract gratitude or get your due of gratitude or pay gratitude. And if we just back off a moment and have the space to, to not be happy with everything that happens but to recognize that we are profoundly happy to be.

[11:07] HILLARY: There, there actually was a comment here that had to do with what you just said and it was somebody who was talking about entitlement and they were talking about the entitlement of our particular society. To me it seems like it's getting more intense all the time because a lot of it is, is, I don't know, I guess I would call narcissistic because it's about me. It's about my Facebook page and my Tweet or what, you know, or my video or whatever. It's like me and so it almost seems like the antithesis of gratitude.

[11:42] GANGAJI: Well, you know, I, if I can trace that back, I think that it really started with the whole empowerment movement that we be empowered which actually came out of the whole sense of suppression and being powerless. So there was a natural breaking free of our suppressions in whatever culture we're in or gender or love choice or the way we're made. And so it was really beautiful at a certain point in our history where we, we stood up and if we were

Black we said proud to be Black. If we were women, if we were gay, transgender or hermits or social activists or whatever, we were just claiming our, our space and our right to be the way we are.

But like most revolutions, and I think that was a revolution, it, it turns into actually the very thing that. If it continues rather than stopping and then allowing the natural to flower, it turns into what it was actually revolting against. I mean we can look at historically that's always true. The French Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, the Russian Revolution, the American Revolution. And so that was a beautiful, pure period but it's now turned into a kind of a suppression of other almost. It's give me what I need. Give me what I want and as you, as we see that sense of entitlement, it doesn't release us from suffering. It actually causes more, more suffering because we can never get enough. We can. You know, nobody can ever acknowledge you enough if that's where you're seeking your, your release or your peace, your gratitude. And you can never acknowledge yourself enough if that's where you're seeking gratitude.

So I'm not talking about you as a person because if we look at our, our situation here on this show and the privilege of that and the fact that we can speak and speak freely, we have a lot to be grateful for, but there are also other things happening, you know, in our bodies and our circumstances and, and so we're not so grateful. But if it's all about, you know, I have to be..., I have to gather more to be grateful for, well that's a life spent suppressing one's self in a weird, twisted way. It looks like we're actually being more free but that's not the experience. The experience is in more of lack.

And so that's why I'm really inviting everyone at this time, in this season, on this show, to just step back. I think that's what happened when you told the truth, when you first of all had told the truth. You said well I was rude to those people. And then you stepped back and then you wrote a note of apology and that allowed you to step back again. You were getting out of your whatever was going on for you when you reacted that way. But you weren't doing it to get something. To even be a, hopefully, to be a better person. You were just doing it because it was actually natural when you step back. Because kindness is actually natural and gratitude is really already here if we're just willing to step back from our pursuit of self-empowerment or our pursuit of entitlement or more appreciation from others or I pursued the comings of my idealized human being. Just at this time as we're listening here as we're speaking just to step back and to fall into what is here and that's naturally gratitude, love.

[15:36] HILLARY: I wanted to take a look at what can happen when somebody's in a situation where it doesn't seem like gratitude is possible. I know quite a few people have written in and they also participate on the forum, your With Gangaji Forum. And they have some serious situations going and the question is how can I possibly be grateful in the midst of what seems like a terrible thing and as I've said before in other conversations, sometimes there's something that's difficult that happens that lasts a day. But sometimes difficult things happen and they last for years. So I ran across this, this exchange you had with this lovely woman and she was diagnosed with Lyme's disease and the freedom and the gratitude that came oddly enough out of her experience with the terrible symptoms of Lyme's disease just seemed like a teaching moment and I wanted to share that with everybody.

[16:35] GANGAJI: Great. Just before we share though I would like to say that you aren't required to feel gratitude. I remember this exchange and this, this arose naturally for her. Sometimes we hear or read about beautiful examples and then we try to impose that on our situation because we think we should be feeling gratitude. And that just creates a bigger burden. You're free to not be grateful for what's happening to simply experience what's happening. And then gratitude will reveal itself in the course of events.

[17:08] HILLARY: Good clarification. All right. Let me go ahead and play that.

(clip)

[17:13] SPEAKER I've had Lyme's disease for over a year and the body's been uncomfortable. The mind's been worried a lot at times and yet just recently like it feels like maybe within the last week even, the mind recognized that in order to feel peace it had to be comfortable with the worst case scenario which would be not getting over the Lyme's disease. My work is physical so not being able to do my work. Not being able to support myself, live on my own. If you have Lyme's disease and you have a child apparently it's passed on, so maybe not feeling good about having kids or, you know, worse case if the body becomes debilitated not feeling attractive to a partner. Like just...

[18:13] GANGAJI: All of it.

[18:14] SPEAKER: It was like everything could leave.

[18:15] GANGAJI: Yes.

[18:16] Next Speaker: You know. Everything that this mind, body wanted to experience could leave. And....

[18:20] GANGAJI: What an opportunity.

[18:21] Next Speaker: It really was. And I was surprised that, that when I, when the mind just allowed itself to experience that in the moment, there was this incredible force of love that was underneath all the things I thought I wanted and it's just awesome. Like it's kind of funny that I never noticed it before. But that's like, that's like who we really are. Like this is all you've been saying for nine years and I feel like I'm hearing it more than I ever have been and I'm so happy.

[19:01] GANGAJI: Yes.

[19:02] SPEAKER: And so grateful.

[19:03] GANGAJI: It's always heard more. Endlessly more.

[19:04] SPEAKER: It's true. Each year I come I hear more. But this year....

[19:05] GANGAJI: Yes.

[19:06] SPEAKER: *Yeah, this year is the most I've heard.*

[19:11] GANGAJI: *Well you're brought to it. It wasn't abstract at all because you actually had to face things that most or many young women don't have to face, or deny that they have to face it. So what a gift this Lyme's disease has been.*

[19:29] SPEAKER: *Yeah. I'm really..., I'm seeing that.*

[19:31] GANGAJI: *Yeah. I mean I certainly hope it is cured and I hope the best for the body, but sooner or later, sooner or later everything that we want to experience.... Wanting to experience it doesn't take care of it. You know, you want to experience children and then you have children so then you want to experience your kids grown up. And on and on and on. You know, we keep..., we are, we are experience junkies and so that's..., it's kind of hitting the bottom. It's recognizing I won't get my experience that inbreed in the self, and you, you faced it because look at you. This is what every.... Look at this face.*

(end clip)

[20:26] HILLARY: *Wow.*

[20:27] GANGAJI: *Yeah, it's. I mean I just want to go back to. So we hear that an experience like this and we're having a, a crisis of body or mind or circumstances and we, we actually want to take what this young woman discovered and impose it on the crisis that we're discovering so that we don't have to really meet the crisis. And I just want to always be clear that, that her meeting was a free meeting. She simply, in her maturity, recognized that she was generating more suffering than the disease was generating by the, by the story she was telling us because they were horrible stories and there's a, there's a lot of horror that can happen to bodies and minds and circumstances.*

But when she realized that she was contributing to the suffering and that for her mind to be at peace, I think is the phrase she used, that she had to stop. She had to actually open to the worst case which is always the invitation to open to death, to open to loss. For her it's loss of a life as she thought it was going to be. So it's not like you ever have to..., I think I even said, so the Lyme's disease was a great gift. But some gifts are horrific and it's not like you need to like the gift or you need to see it as a, a birthday present. It's, it's a gift from life and it's.... Life is ruthless and life is forever pointing us to the fact that we will lose everything.

So the sooner we are willing to mentally lose every idea of what our future, or our present, or our past should or would or will be, then we are left with gratitude. Gratitude that we can even inquire into that. We could even consider these issues which is very different from trying to impose gratitude or trying to be nice or trying to do gratitude because then I will be happy. It's a willingness to, in this moment if you're not happy, to be completely unhappy, really unhappy. Really to lose your hope that you will get happiness and to lose your hopelessness that is involved in whatever narrative you're telling yourself about your unhappiness and just open. And then unhappiness in whatever form is actually the vehicle that opens and reveals what is closer than any unhappiness and I never want to make light of people's unhappiness. There is some very stark unhappiness, misery in this world. Maybe to those listening. Certainly to billions

not listening. And in our willingness to have compassion for, for suffering, compassion for our own and other's suffering, without entitlement, without thinking we shouldn't be suffering, which of course is a natural thought, but without following that thought and railing endlessly about the fact of suffering just to pull back. It doesn't mean you have to like your suffering, your pain or your events. Physical, mental, emotional, circumstantial. But just to pull back, retreat. And that's what holidays are about really in a sense. We, we stop our normal functioning. We retreat and maybe that retreat in that retreat we join people, we celebrate, we, we experience love. But in order to really experience that we have to retreat all the way home and then we know what we are grateful for.

[24:46] HILLARY: There was something that you said earlier that really struck me because I.... There are two questions from, from listeners that I absolutely want to get in, but I didn't want to let this go by without because this is so practical. What you were talking about was, you know, you and I get to sit together and have these conversations and it's so..., I just..., I'm so grateful for them. But that doesn't mean I'm grateful about my whole life because I have a couple of things in my life right now that I'm not grateful for that I don't like and where I go with it is I have like a fork in the road and I go into resistance with it and I suffer. Or else there's a place in me that one of them is actually a physical condition that I've had for years and it's exhausting for me and there's something that's been evolving with my own stopping and that was just almost an appreciation for the searching and the appreciation for the sincerity in the searching and then an appreciation for the exhaustion of the searching. And then within that is, is, is the gratitude which is always such a surprise.

[25:58] GANGAJI: Yes, it has to be a surprise. That's beautiful. Yes.

[26:04] HILLARY: I wanted to make sure I get in these two questions. One of them is from somebody who says, "Dear Gangaji, when I'm out and about in the world with other people I feel happier. But when I'm at home by myself my worries feel bigger and my happiness disappears. How do I stay in a place of being grateful no matter where I am? Thank you for your answer."

[26:26] GANGAJI: Well, I think we've answered it, you know. Gratitude is not a place. It's in your willingness to recognize you don't like being alone and to open to that rather than escape it through being saved by gratitude. But actually meet this darkness in this case of aloneness or, or separate from contact with other loved beings. You don't have to be grateful for that. But you can open to that and it reveals gratitude. Gratitude is not a place. It's not separate from who you are.

[27:07] HILLARY: We're, we're running a little bit over on this one, but I think it's appropriate for this particular show because I just really wanted to make sure I got this question in and this question is from Leanne in Victoria and she says, "Is the full encompassing sense of gratitude we have for this moment, this life, the closest we can be to God?"

[27:32] GANGAJI: Well, it's always closer and we can be so absolutely appreciative of this moment of oneness with life that we don't need it to get any closer. That that's not even a consideration of – "is there closer?" It's the mind is open. It's not thinking about future or past and it's, it's all.

[28:05] HILLARY: There are so many ways of objectifying God or the experience of God or, or different words for God and, and it seems like that that bypasses all that because the experience of gratitude maybe is what we would define as God.

[28:25] GANGAJI: Excellent. I like that.

[28:27] HILLARY: Well, we're grateful for you. I'm grateful for you.

[28:31] GANGAJI: You, too, Hillary, and these meetings, this radio show and all the people that it affects that we will never even know about and all the people that then they affect. So really supreme gratitude for all.

[29:05] HILLARY: Since we're running a little long this month I want to keep this short, but I do have one more clip I want to play for you. One more clip on gratitude. But first at the beginning of our conversation I was talking to Gangaji about the letters she receives. If you would like to send her a comment or a report, if there is something you'd like us to know, please write gangajiradio@gangaji.org. That's g-a-n-g-a-j-i-radio@gangaji.org. Gangaji isn't able to answer your emails directly but know she reads every single one of them and your questions and comments are always welcome. Gangaji's live monthly webcast titled With Gangaji just recently started a brand new two-year program. It's all about relationships. All kinds of relationships. You can sign up for that by going to gangaji.org. We are always grateful to you for joining us. Here's one more clip of Gangaji. With huge thanks, take care.

(clip)

[30:07] GANGAJI: So if you aren't experiencing gratitude, I'm not asking you to impose gratitude onto your state of mind. But I am asking that you just tell the truth about what it is you have to be grateful for, to be courageous enough to tell the truth about that. There's a kind of misery in company. And you sort of have to stand up by yourself to acknowledge the gratitude to be, and the gratitude to see. The gratitude that somehow you have this astounding leisure in your life, and the desire to know the truth. The desire to be free. That those are together. That those have come together in a lifetime. It's a miracle.