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A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 34

BEING YOURSELF

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[00:02] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:11] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: Have you ever asked, What does it mean to be yourself? Just be yourself, that seems easy, but maybe not. What about the times you feel you're not quite yourself. "I'm not quite myself today", what does that mean? Have you ever felt that you had to be a particular person depending on the situation you were in. For some of us, we can be so practiced at who we think we should be that the question of being our true selves can be surprisingly perplexing.

(clip)

[00:41] GANGAJI: *This invitation is an invitation into that 'not knowing'. Not knowing, completely not knowing who you are, and for a moment, not searching for what you should be.*

(end clip)

[00:55] HILLARY: Are you your sex? Are you whatever role you play in life? Are you what you think or feel deep down inside? Do you identify yourself as your successes or failures? It could be one of the most important questions a person could ask. What does it mean to be yourself? I'm Hillary Larson, and this is *A Conversation with Gangaji*.

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[01:26] HILLARY: I don't know if you all can relate to this, but when I was growing up I looked around and I calculated who I needed to be in order to get by. And I don't remember anybody telling me to do that, it just sort of happened. Sometimes I thought I needed to be quiet and reserved and sometimes I thought I needed to be helpful and sometimes I thought I needed to be funny; and it's not like I was always planning the way I should be, but when I was in situations where I felt uncomfortable, I would consciously do that. And I remember, when I look back when I would take drugs that would go away. And I felt like I was just being myself. And it was this huge relief. So when you say, 'just be yourself,' it seems like that should be easy and obvious, but in this really odd way it's not. Especially when you've been practicing being somebody else.

[02:18] GANGAJI: It's because who we think we are is, is just something different from what we've been practicing, we just need to know what that is, and that's still an object and it still has a form. It still has a look, or a way of being. Because that's what our culture tells us and that's what advertisement tells us and that's what we recognize in moments of dis-inhibition with alcohol or drugs or whatever we get free of. But we're so conditioned to have some object in mind or some image in mind and we just know then that those don't work. Maybe they worked for a while or maybe they work in specific instances, but they don't work as the ease of being.

But we begin to search for one that will work. And so we try different styles of being. I can remember in the 70's, dressing in all white and putting flowing clothes on because now I was going to be a spiritual being. And it felt great! It was so different from being this 'miss popular' homecoming queen or this mother with husband, it was like 'Oh! I'm finished with those. Now I'm going to be this,' and pretty soon it also started to feel false, or empty. Not, not me. And maybe I would feel a little bad about that, I should try harder, I should use more incense, or essential oils or something that would give me myself. So I think that this is a universal problem.

[03:59] GANGAJI CONT'D: I think that most people recognize that who they present, while it may be successful, is not who they are. And yet, this void or this emptiness of not knowing who one is is what's run from and why we search for another identity. So really being yourself, in the deepest sense, means being willing to be nothing, nobody at all. Not your idea of nothing and nobody, because that's still something and it's either disempowered or it's transcendent, however you cloak nothing or nobody. But to really discover that underneath all of the ways you have presented yourself or the ways you have feared yourself to be, underneath that there is this space and we know that it's with us every moment, but we don't trust it. Because we're fed by our culture and we're fed by advertisements and we're fed by others' ideas of who we should be. So really this invitation is an invitation into that not knowing, not knowing, completely not knowing who you are. And for a moment not searching for what you should be. Not searching for what will give you the right image of yourself, the right way of being. Just be still. And it is a kind of death in that moment. It's a death. It's feared as a death because our identities help to survive. These are skills, strategies, these way of being. And so it's really an invitation to just suspend all of your strategies, all of your ways of being, just for an instant, for recognizing what's here.

[06:01] Hillary: When you were talking I was thinking about the habitual part which feels like it can be so physical like just an automatic thing that goes, and it may be led by a thought, it probably is. I have this thing call it 'first date syndrome'. You know, when you're on a first date and you just feel so awkward and you're making conversation but it's not funny, and you're like "really, honestly I am funny, but I don't sound like it," and I was thinking about how easily that gets triggered for me and I was talking to somebody the other day about this subject and I was almost afraid to say outloud that I feel like as many very close friends as I have and people that I feel comfortable around, even somebody that I feel the most comfortable around, there's still a hold thing, there's still a protection happening so I don't feel that complete letting go.

[06:57] GANGAJI: But it sounds to me like you then now made that mean something.

[07:02] HILLARY: Yes

[07:03] GANGAJI: And so there's some ideas that if you could really let go then you would be funny all of the time, or the you would be at ease all of the time. But what I'm speaking of is something closer than that. You don't know what you would be, you don't know what you are. It's really the willingness to not know. When I was with Papaji and I started going through my whole repertoire of different presentations of myself and I saw, I experienced directly, he wasn't interested in relating to any of that. I was the 'good student'. I was the 'loving and enlightened one' and he wasn't interested. And he let me know in nonverbal ways that what am I doing? It was a dance I was doing. I was dancing different steps for him. And when I recognized that, and

recognized that I had failed in all my presentations to win him, it was a kind of regression and I went back to feeling like I felt maybe when I was eleven and I just felt awkward and stupid. I was awkward and stupid then with him. I mean. Just everything was a regression and also that didn't mean anything to him. It's like it had to play itself out. All of my successful strategies were really covering this identity of myself as unloveable or foolish or stupid or ignorant.

[08:33] GANGAJI CONT'D: So when all of my successful strategies weren't successful, I was left with that. And there it was. And what could I do? I was with my teacher and so I was listening to my teacher and he said, "Don't do anything. Just stop." And then it goes up in smoke. It's only held in place because we keep trying out ways to defend it, or cover it, or not let anybody see it. But when you recognize you're already transparent, everybody already sees it, then you stop the war with yourself. You stop the war dance. And you just are yourself. And certainly the body has its own identities. Yes, and the emotions have their identity and the thoughts have their identity. But you are already free of identity. You're not the body, the body is in you. You're not your emotions, your emotions are in you. You're not your thoughts, they are in you.

[09:42] HILLARY: I think you just answered this next question. I don't know how you manage to do that, but you do. Timothy had a question, he says "I feel like I have a performance going on inside me, even around my close friends. How do I know and trust a deeper truth when it seems like I rarely feel like my full myself?"

[10:00] GANGAJI: You know, again I don't know what Timothy is referring to when he says 'myself.' Is he talking about, you know, this version or this idealization of authentic self, or he is talking about the spaciousness that doesn't need to know that, is already free of that. And body minds, and by body mind I mean the emotions, thoughts, the physical sensation, the ancestry, the genetics, the conditioning, all of that. There are certain ways of acting and one of the ways is performing and another way is succeeding, or helping, or being the warrior, or whatever. That's all just going on, that's the Leela, that's the performance, this play. And there's nothing wrong with that. It's actually quite mysterious in its own right. But when we're identified with that as reality we suffer, and we just want to get a better reality. We want to get a better performance or a performance that everyone universally will love, and say was great. And one thing that's never going to happen. And the other, it's a waste of your time and energy. Your body and mind will perform. Some people are natural performers, have a gift for performance. Beautiful. We can appreciate that. It's the identity with that that makes us suffer and makes us still feel worthless because the performance is based on covering this abyss of worthlessness.

[11:41] HILLARY: We did an episode a little over a year ago on telling the truth. And that came up for me as I was looking at creating this conversation, my thoughts on this conversation, and I was thinking about the relative truth and then the ultimate truth, and sometimes just telling the relative truth is the doorway. I'm going to give you an example of relative truth. This seems like this has so much to do with just being ourselves and I have a friend who came out recently as transgender, and I watch her it is this hugely courageous process. That's a new area for me, I don't understand the area. I have compassion for it, but I just don't understand it. She posted something on her Facebook wall and it was a story about these parents and they had two little girls, and one of them clearly wanted to be a boy and it wasn't just like when I was a kid I was a tomboy, but I also loved being female so I didn't have that confusion, but this little girl wanted to

be a boy, and she was not happy. Her parents were so patient and open and brave. There was this moment where they almost got hit by a car and this woman in this moment said, "I wonder if I've not served my child by just letting them be who they are."

[13:05] HILLARY CONT'D: And so, you know, they made arrangements for the child to change schools so that she could have a boy's name and wouldn't be made fun of, and so they're allowing her to do that. I just think that we all have areas in our life where we're holding onto something and we're afraid that if we tell the truth about that thing, we're going to be abandoned or rejected and then hence, there's this performance and I see that the freedom that's possible when you're willing to stand up and tell the truth about yourself even if the surface is on a personality level or a body level or a sexual level. So, this person I'm speaking of actually had a question for you. She said, "How can I completely accept myself if I feel like that puts me in danger? How can I trust myself?"

[13:57] GANGAJI: Well, you just said a lot so let's get to the question in just a second. Because I appreciate this relative absolute and I'd even written this down when you told me what we were speaking of, being who you are, I've got 'relative' and 'absolute' written down. And it is really important to be able to tell the relative truth, it just doesn't help you in terms of the deepest suffering. You know you may want to be the opposite sex of what you were born or what your body says you are, and that may be really important to make that transition, but you will still be left with the identity that you are this thing and there will still be suffering. It won't solve the suffering. It may help you to feel better about your presentation because now you're presenting as a female or as a male, whereas you were presenting, the presentation or the performance didn't feel right. You weren't well cast.

[08:33] GANGAJI CONT'D: Some people want to be beautiful, some people want to be rich, some people want to be athletic. Some people want to be an artist and we can create a whole mythology about 'if I were only that', if only I were in a relationship, if only I were something, then I would have what I want. And that's a fallacy. Beautiful people don't suffer any less than really ugly people. And stupid people suffer as much as really intelligent people, unless there's been a discovery of what is the truth of who you are. And it can be a risky discovery, but it's not risky in the terms of transgender which can really inflame people and you can be killed or tortured for that choice. It's risky for yourself because you have to first not know who you are. If I am not a man and I am not a woman. I'm not male and I'm not female, who am I? If I'm not beautiful and I'm not ugly, who am I? If I'm not talented and not talentless, who am I?

[16:09] GANGAJI CONT'D: This is where the real crux of the absolute answer, then, then you are free! Change your gender, change your life. Live your life fully, but you will live it from fulfillment rather than hoping that change will give you fulfillment. I've talked to enough people who've made the transition to know that they're left with the same issues of true identity. I mean, just the trivial example I gave at the beginning of the lifestyle change, I mean it was scary to me to start acting like a hippy because I came from a very conservative thing and I was ostracized by many of the people I grew up with, I mean even just political stances I took ostracized me. And that was good, that was right. I was fulfilling some aspect of my persona, but it wasn't enough. It's never enough because it's not telling the truth about who you are. That's what, when we, this program today is about *being who you are*, not who you think would make you feel like who you are. But it's closer than any thought.

[17:27] HILLARY: In this odd way I once again I thought that you were going to say something completely different. I mean you ended up where I thought you would, but getting there was a total shock to me, so I'm just sitting here. I was thinking about the different ways we just operate as human beings and how some people are super friendly, and other people might be kind of harsh, and some people kind of step back so they don't stir things up. And we all I think have distinct personalities in that way, but those traits seem to me are the way we just came into the world and then what maybe what we experience when we're younger and how to kinda survive, but...

[18:12] GANGAJI: It's the way we're made, too, those traits. Look at nature. I mean you can see two roses, and they're both roses but they're totally different. They're made differently. Our bodies are made, our emotions are made, our thoughts are made. Who you are is not made. And it can't be manipulated, or formed.

[18:44] HILLARY: Hmm, that is just what I was going to ask you about was manipulation. Because we recently did a show on emotions, and there was a moment when I was talking about a time where you and I had gotten angry with each other and then we talked about that, and I said something like, 'I actually am relieved that you get angry' and I was thinking that, that is actually not the truth. You know, I was like, I don't like it, I feel uncomfortable. And if I don't move from it, it ends up to be fine and then it's great. But in the midst of it, it's almost like, I think my point is, there's a certain manipulation on my part of moving forward going, 'oh, I'm so glad you get angry.' And you know, I was like, well that's actually not true.

[19:36] GANGAJI: But even all that, getting angry, not getting angry, having a problem with somebody getting angry, not having a problem with somebody getting angry, that's like 'oh, there's a rose petal with a bruise on it.' We tear that petal off or we leave that petal. That's all in a certain realm. It's interesting, but there's a deeper realm. And that's really what the call is to, a deeper realm where all of that is really recognized to be the ripples on the surface and they make interesting patterns. And you can change ripples by changing the water or the weather, but you can't change what's at the depth of that. And if you're interested in the depth of who you are, then we really have something to talk about.

[20:29] HILLARY: Could you talk to me about then about the distinction between opening and fixing, because...well, let's just take this example. So the willingness to tell the truth and say oh, you know what, even if nobody on the outside knew that that was a certain, subtle form of manipulation on my part to say the right thing. The willingness to look at that...

[20:55] GANGAJI: Yes

[20:56] HILLARY: ...open and say, 'whoa, that's what I was doing' seems to be this doorway that you're talking about.

[21:03] GANGAJI: Well, if you're willing to recognize what motivates that, because that's a surface thing. And if we're just concerned with a surface then you learn how to 'oh' you just say or to feel right away, 'I don't like that, but I like that,' later when I sit with it. But if you recognize that that's linked to fear, some kind of fear, that if anger is there it triggers some fear in you that

either you're not accepted, or you could be killed, or you could be left or rejected, whatever it may be. And because all of that's relatively superficial too. But the fear itself is where the real doorway is, to open. That's where opening is. It's not so much opening to your behavior, your behavior can point to what is. What's the energy underneath the behavior? What's the engine of the behavior? And that will be fear, or despair, or grief, or, fear of emptiness, fear of being nothing, fear of losing, whatever it may be.

[22:11] GANGAJI CONT'D: Usually, with most human beings it starts with fear. And it can end with fear. In the willingness to open. To not fix, just to open, to meet. And there's a discovery that can't be articulated, but is available. So, it took, it takes the relative truth telling to recognize that habit. To recognize, even if it's not a habit, to recognize, 'oh that wasn't the truth? Let's see what is the truth.' But you don't stop with the relative truth, you recognize there's a deeper truth, a deeper, relative truth. And then there is something that is holding the whole presentation. That without that, there is some sense of what, for different people it may be different things, but it's loss of something. Loss of life, loss of respect, loss of what I want in this moment or what I want for my life. So that has to be met. That's where depth is.

[23:22] HILLARY: Hmm.

[23:23] GANGAJI: Then you're free to have whatever experience you have, you know. 'I like that, I don't like that.' It doesn't have the same meaning then. It doesn't say anything about who you are. It may say something about your personality or the way you were brought up or what your Grandmother passed on to you genetically. But it has nothing to do with the truth of who you are. It's personality issues, or neurosis, or whatever label we want to give it.

[23:54] HILLARY: I remember some time ago; it was years ago actually. I remembered you saying, and it's very possible that I don't have the wording right, but I remember you saying something like, "You're drawn to me (you were talking to the group), you're drawn to me because I'm myself." And you weren't saying it in an egotistical way and those words just came right in because it was like, huh, like what does that mean 'to be yourself?' Because then I look at you and I go you know you do seem like yourself to me because just on a personality level, you don't seem like you're trying to do anything.

[24:37] GANGAJI: Yea, I gave it up. And I was successful at trying to do certain things. But, it's an empty success, like the performance the person was speaking about. You can never do it enough and there's always someone who's going to walk out on the performance. So, you just clear the slate. Then you may find yourself performing, but you aren't invested in it. You know the performance has a beginning, and a middle, and an end. And you are always here.

[25:11] HILLARY: I wanted to tell you that while I was kind of jotting down some notes about this topic, I started thinking about when I really feel like myself and that tension isn't present and I'm so conscious of it, is when I'm laughing really hard. Also when I'm crying really hard, when I'm creating something that feels beautiful to me, I don't have any considerations on any of it.

[25:38] GANGAJI: Because you aren't even creating it, in that moment. When you're laughing, you're not thinking. There's no creator and no creation. There's just this.

(clip)

*[26:15] GANGAJI: So in this moment as we are gathered here with our attention on this, in just this moment, for just, five seconds, thirty seconds you just put aside the whole story of who you think you are. The story that you had a horrible childhood, story that you had a good childhood, story that you're beautiful, the story that you're ugly, the story that you're superior, the story that you're inferior. The story that you're brilliant, the story that you're stupid, just this moment, just put it aside. Then where does your attention go? If it doesn't go anywhere, where does it go? Where does it rest? This is present...always. In everybody, in every moment. That's the glorious good news. Let your attention rest in itself, in awareness. And experience yourself.*

(end clip)

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[27:54] HILLARY: So glad that you could join us here this month for a conversation about being yourself. The next few months Gangaji and I are going to be talking about racism. It's a hot topic, especially right now. And we're going to talk about justice. What do we do when we feel that we've been wronged? And what about social justice? We're also going to be taking a little bit of a different look at intimate relationships. We have many more topics lined up in addition to those, but I just wanted to give you a little head's up about what we're thinking about over here. And you can find out more about Gangaji Radio and Gangaji's other programs by visiting [gangaji.org](http://gangaji.org). Let's listen to Jami Sieber as we say goodbye to all of you. That's [jamsieber.com](http://jamsieber.com). Thank you everyone. Be well until next time.