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A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 35

SEEKING JUSTICE

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[00:05] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:11] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: Life isn't always fair. We all know that. We've experienced that. How many times have we felt betrayed by a lover, or a friend, a family member, or even an institution? What about when we see others treated unfairly, people we care about, maybe people we don't even know? What about our planet, what do we do about that? Perhaps it's built-in for human beings to want justice, and that's not necessarily a bad thing. But when we get caught up in it, it can make life not so pleasant. So, is there a deeper question here?

[00:46] GANGAJI: What do we want for everyone? Not just for ourselves in this moment, or for the, the underdog or whoever we're identifying with but, what do we want for all? What is our collective desire in terms of justice?

[01:02] HILLARY LARSON: When it comes down to it, when we are seeking justice, when we are looking for a remedy for unfairness, perhaps in the bigger picture we are merely just seeking peace and understanding for everyone. I'm Hillary Larson, and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

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[01:26] HILLARY: I was driving down to, from Portland to Ashland today, thinking about this interview. And I was thinking about this subject of justice and seeking justice and what's fair and what's not fair and, I was thinking about all the times in the course of a week or in a day that that subject comes up of like 'oh that's fair, that's not fair'. And I was – unless you really pay attention to it – like I really never noticed how much I, I have that defined in my life, right? And just in the course of the week I was thinking about, my blood sugar was low one day and I was standing in line at the grocery store and somebody cut in front of me, and my first thought was 'that's not fair!' and then I was, like a lot of people, at the time we're recording this is this story about the dentist in Minnesota who, you know, pays fifty thousand dollars to kill this innocent lion. And then there were, in Portland there were people hanging down from the St. John's Bridge to try to stop this shell tanker from going up to the Arctic to do drilling. So what came up in me in, is this child-like sense that I've had ever since I was a kid, and I'm sure everybody can relate to this to one degree or another, is this like, I wish I was a superhero, and I wish I could just jump in and right a wrong.

[02:55] GANGAJI: Yeah, well, I think that we have played the role of superheroes, and jumped in and righted wrongs, and, and created more wrongs in the righting of the wrong. So this, the whole topic of justice is so big, and it is, it's really the topic of our times. And I don't mean just these current times. But say the last thousands of years, say for the last five thousand years. As we have evolved, and as we have, as we continue to evolve, we, we really see that, that it's not, it doesn't serve to just do what you wanna do. Or for someone else to just do what they wanna do, because it can often cause great harm. So justice evolves. But by no means do we have the, the bead on justice, do we even know what it is?

So I would really like for this conversation to be a, an acknowledgement of that. That it's a, it is a huge subject, and we can be humbled by the subject, and open to discovering what does it mean? I mean I can say for me, it's a beautiful ideal, the ideal of justice, so that, fairness, you know, so that we don't harm one another, so that we don't cause unnecessary harm. But once it becomes some kind of idealization, and then we use it, feed it into our ego, and co-opt this beautiful ideal, then it either becomes some point of our own neurosis, or it becomes some punishment that we're wielding on the world. And either way, that has nothing to do with fairness, or justice. So it's a, it's such a subtle, fine line. And I think if we're willing to be humbled, and recognize that we, we can do our best. And of course, that's what the court system is about. It's all based on justice, it's, that's what a democracy is about. And we see, I mean the court systems are often quite corrupt, and have nothing to do with justice. So it, just to recognize that it is, I mean, moving target, it's, it's more than that, it's, it is so close to us that we can't see it. And, I think we make huge mistakes, and we go to war in the name of justice. And we, we put people to death in the name of justice. And we, we shun and shame people in the name of justice. And then, then there's the, the, you know, counter-revolution to that, in the name of justice. Reign of Terror was in the name of justice. Stalin's Gulags were justice. And, and so it, it's just a cycle. So if we're willing to not be the superheroes, if we're willing to really just step back and allow our minds to clear, and not get entangled in our emotional reaction, but just recognize that there is a deeper question: what do we want for everyone? Not, not just for ourselves in this moment, or for the person, the underdog, or whoever we're identifying with. But, what do we want for ALL, what is our collective desire in terms of justice?

[06:25] HILLARY: Or when you speak of putting our emotions aside and really seeing, like, what do we want for everybody, naturally there is a process of, of experiencing emotion in, in our inquiry, right? So let me read this question to you, okay? It has to do with this, this is, a, question is from Corey, and he says, 'I see people use awareness teachings like Gangaji's to deny themselves the right to feel angry, helpless, or trapped by societal injustices. I think it's actually endemic in spiritual subcultures that Gangaji talks about'. And he says, quote unquote, 'I listen to Gangaji, and I should be happy. If I'm angry, hurt, depressed, anxious, traumatized, whatever, I must not be understanding her teachings as well as I should, or I, I must be mentally ill. Or I, or I must be weak. If I were truly enlightened, I would just walk away, I'd be able to walk away.'

[07:24] GANGAJI: But see if you really hear what I'm saying, I'm saying that you stop that story about your emotions. It's all a narrative about an emotion. You stop that, and you experience emotion, and then there's a possibility to, to find real clarity. You can't find clarity on top of 'I should be experiencing this, I shouldn't be experiencing that; this is a spiritual reason I'm experiencing it, or not spiritual reason'. All that is just a made up story. Just stop, stop that, and experience what you're feeling. That's what I'm saying over and over and over. So I'm not sure what Corey's talking about when he talks about teachings like Gangaji's and awareness teachings. I'm not teaching awareness. How could I teach awareness, it's already here? I'm pointing out to all of us that when we believe our stories, whatever they may be, that we're right or that we're wrong, we're fumbling in the dark, and we're missing some deep profound clarity.

[08:36] HILLARY: It feels like it's so ingrained. And I know you and I have spoken many times in relation to many of the topics that we've discussed, this, the, the beginning of something, and the beginning of this sense of right and wrong, fair and unfair, just and unjust, happens when we're young. Because children like, life isn't fair for them; they don't

get to go to bed when they want to, they don't get to, you know, buy the toys they want to. They're in-

[09:04] GANGAJI: Yeah – they may be starving, I mean, getting to go to bed when you want to, what a privilege, you know. I mean, most children in the, in war zones don't survive. And that's not fair. That's not right. So our capacity to see that I think is much bigger than just not getting what we want, and that not being fair. It's the, it's a, a deeper issue of an innocent person being cut down, being harmed. The innocence being hurt. And that's, that's more than 'I wanna do this, and I don't get to do this, and that's not fair'. It's, it's very deep and that's why, that's why it's such a big issue. That's why it means something. So I, it's, it really, I believe, takes an adult to actually even address the issue of justice. Before that it's, 'I want my way, and I don't get my way'. And children are conditioned and socialized and they need to be (laughs) I mean if you watch animal movies (chuckles) you see how chimpanzees are in the wild. They'll even cannibalize a, another tribe that they are fighting with, you know, it's a way of actually growing and discovering how is it possible to live together in harmony. And the, I don't mean that as a superimposition of harmony – 'cause that's not true harmony – I mean real harmony, and really lives of justice, and lives that support that. And it's a hard, it's a hard question, it's a ruthless question, and it's a very deep question.

[10:49] HILLARY: It's a very deep question, and the reason why I was talking about the childhood thing is because I think that that's where this core instinct is developed in a certain way, with certain individuals, because this need for justice, this call for justice, can manifest in, maybe somebody ends up in their adulthood becoming a judge, somebody else becomes a police officer, like we maybe are driven by these deeper desires for justice. And sometimes that's a great thing, and sometimes it's not.

[11:20] GANGAJI: Well, yeah, I – yes, it's a, it's something part of our development, is, we were talking earlier, it's part of the, the evolutionary development. Of course, you can be a rebel, be an outlaw, in the name of justice. I mean justice can be used by anyone. But what is real justice? That's, you know, that leaves the word behind. And you know and then, it is in particular a Western issue because – not that the East doesn't have it, but the East, you know, settled it with karma, with the notion of karma. And that's fine, I'm sure there are plenty of people listening to this who totally accept karma, and, and that that's where justice is. But I think for our purposes as Westerners that we don't, we don't wanna escape to karma, the idea of karma. It's, I think that the real inquiry is being willing to, to open oneself to the fact that there, great injustices go on that have nothing to do with karma., or people who deserve it, or payback, and how do we live with that? How do we live with the, the paradox of that? That you can be very good, you can do, live a righteous life, and still be harmed unnecessarily.

[12:49] HILLARY: Well, can I give you a couple of listener questions with direct questions about that rawness of what do I, what do I do with this sense of unfairness? Sylvan from New York, he says, 'Growing up, I quite naturally became the caretaker of my chronically ill mother at home. We were very close, and it just felt good to tend to her needs. My father and brother quickly accepted this role, and eventually expected me to play it. As an older person, I became resentful at the situation, which felt like an uneven distribution of responsibility. I felt the situation was unfair, but I do realize we all participated in the dynamic that I co-created that arose systematically somehow. I wanna let go of the anger, but I can't seem to do it. Can you help me?'

[13:40] GANGAJI: No, I mean, I don't know how to deal with something like this. This is not my, that's not my area. That's something you would work with a counselor with, I mean, I wouldn't even put that in the realm of justice. It's something he, he was doing and felt good about, and now doesn't feel good about it. So to me, when we speak of justice, it's not, it's not something like that. Or otherwise we shouldn't call it justice. Call it, 'I don't like the way things are right now', or 'This was okay with me earlier but it's now not okay'. And then, then we can have a talk about that. But if we're gonna speak about justice, I think we have to really look at how much injustice there is in the world. And, are we contributing to that? And if we're contributing to that, can we take responsibility for that and stop? Then it's, it lifts it from a kind of realm of not liking what's going on, to right, whoa, what is going on, what is really going on, and how am I participating in that, and playing in that, contributing to that?

[14:54] HILLARY: So if we use those examples, that I gave you at the very beginning, I mean, standing in line at the grocery store... you know, some things it's, who cares, right, like, you know?

[15:02] GANGAJI: It's really 'who cares?'

[15:03] HILLARY: A half an hour later I'm not gonna...

[15:04] GANGAJI: Exactly.

[15:05] HILLARY: ...I'm not gonna remember that, right. But, I also am thinking about the example of, you know, watching our planet be destroyed in all these different ways, and you know, innocent people being murdered, innocent animals being murdered. That just seems so overwhelming sometimes. Like, how do you face that?

[15:25] GANGAJI: Well, let's, let's recognize how big it is. How much bigger it is than somebody cutting you off in traffic, or in a line, rather than using our little, our minor injustices or unfair actions as a deflection from this bigger issue. Yes, how, how do you deal with that? By you open to it. You open to it, and in the willingness to really not even knowing what the correct response is, you open to it. You let it be overwhelming. Be overwhelmed by both the beauty and the horror in the world. 'Cause they're both present. We think we want just the beauty, and we want everything to be set up to just promote the beauty, especially for us. I mean, who knows? That lady who cut you off in line, who knows what was going on with her, it may have been absolutely the just thing to do.

[16:20] HILLARY: Her blood sugar was probably lower than mine....

[16:21] GANGAJI: To, to – right? Much bigger than that. Much bigger. We can't know those things. But we can be, we can open to them. And then our conversation really can have depth, and meaning. And then it's not about, well 'help me fix this problem; help me not get angry when I shouldn't be angry.' It's like 'wow, what, what is this?' Who knows? We don't have an answer for this. And that's where the real questions are, where there's no pat answer. And there's no, you know, behavioral modification that you can do to fix it. As valuable as all of that is at particular realms, when we use the word justice, for me that takes it to another, another realm.

[17:08] HILLARY: Well it's so interesting to me because the questions that I got from people were about personal situations. So, I'm not gonna read the rest of them (chuckles).

[17:17] GANGAJI: Well, there are, there are personal situations you know, but let's speak about real personal situations that are not just. You know, a child being harmed or, or genocide happening. I mean those are very personal, you don't get much more personal than that. But let's not, let's not put our dramatic response in the minor stuff. Let's put it really where the world is crying for it to be put, in what's major.

[17:47] HILLARY: It seems like at the root of it, at the root of this injustice, that we see all over the place, at the root of it feels like there's, it's about not being in control, right? 'Cause I can't, like, some things seem like they're spinning out of control, the things that seem the most unjust. And that's, it seems like activism is the way of, like, trying to rein that in.

[18:14] GANGAJI: Well, yes, I think it is a way of standing up and saying, 'this is not right; this is not right'. And quite often what then happens is, 'I know what *is* right, and you should be punished', and sometimes that's quite appropriate, I mean, people who are harming each, other people need to be separated from the people they're harming, or separated from people in general. So, and, and if you are to be an activist you will discover that in opening to the hugeness of this. So I think we get paralyzed by spinning in this, this thing, you, you know, you shared a letter with me, and this person had discovered that she was actually married to a psychopath. And this is a very personal thing, but it's bigger than just a minor problem, this is a, this is a big problem, that she's married to somebody who, who really isn't capable of empathy, and capable of understanding that, or caring, that he's causing harm. And what to do, then? You know, and she took the intelligent move, and got out, got away. But now the issue is, does, does she let the person he's in relationship with now know what she knows? And these are, you know, I mean, I, I certainly have my opinion about that, but this is, this to me is, it's real, you have to really say well, what is the whole notion of justice built on? And when I look at it, fairness, certainly, but even more so, it's some kind of deep concern for each other, and I, I see that takes us back to the golden rule, you know: do unto others as you would, would have them do unto you. And when someone is not acting as he or she would want done to them, then that's, then we're speaking of, there's injustice, and of course there're degrees of that. And we know that every society everywhere is, is guilty of horrible degrees because they acted not even personally, but as a group. But if we break it down to a personal responsibility then we can start to see there is this huge paradox of beauty and horror. Of, what it means to be a human animal. What it means to have desires that may be in conflict with other people's desires. And then, then we're speaking of degree, and at a certain point, the degree is so big that it, it becomes unjust. And your willingness to, to get what you want at the cost of whoever has to serve, suffer. Well then that's the tyranny of the ego, in extreme. And that's, that's what I'm speaking about, injustice. And we know it in minor degrees, because we torture ourselves in the same way that the psychopath or the tyrant or the perpetrator of genocide would torture others. And so we can begin to take it, take responsibility by, by stopping the torture ourselves, where we are.

[21:34] HILLARY: Well when - if I can refer back to that letter, yeah I know it was an intense letter, and I think the core of her question she says was, well let me just read what she said, 'When, when faced with suppression such as this, and seeing the potential that other people will be hurt, what's my responsibility in stepping up and making the actions of this person known? It's hard to tell if this is just some veiled form of retaliation on my part, versus the desire to do the right thing.'

[22:05] GANGAJI: Well that's, yeah. So it's important to be clear. Because there can be just a desire for revenge. Because he left me, or he betrayed me, or whatever, and that revenge can then look like justice, act like justice, talk like justice, but not be justice at all. It's just some perpetration of, 'I'm gonna get you back'. So that's where the clarity of stopping the narrative, stopping the story, experiencing the enormous pain she must experience it, as she said, all, all kinds of levels to it -- rage and sadness and grief and betrayal and -- just to be willing to experience that, whether it's in something like this failed relationship, or, or the world pain, or ecologically, just to, just to open to it. And then there is a clarity that arises that, you don't have to figure out what doing the right thing is. You discover what the right thing is. It comes from clarity.

[23:11] HILLARY: Speaking of clarity, I was thinking, one of the things that popped into my head when I was looking at doing this show, was your, the various times that you brought up your social activism against the war, you know, long before you met Papaji. And, I mean, I remember you talking about, well it turned out it was almost the same kind of anger, your activism. But when you met Papaji and you so clearly see that you're not the mind, and you're not your reactions, if you could go back to that time, having had all the awarenesses that you've had, what would your action be against something you don't believe in? like war?

[23:55] GANGAJI: Well, I, I'm very happy with what my reaction was then. To me it was very liberating, to be able to recognize the veil dropping, whether it was about racism, which it was partially about because it was a civil rights activism, and, and then the war, and, and then after that in California I went to jail for protesting the, the California Power, Pacific Power was putting a nuclear power plant on an earthquake fault. Which they just found, recently, that, they, that P-G-and-E did lie about the, the test results of that earthquake fault. So, yeah, it, so all of that, I loved. What I discovered was that it, the way that I was approaching it was in some sense of superiority. That, I'm better. I remember in the trial when the P-G-and-E spokesman came up, I felt totally superior to him. He was on the wrong side, we would say now the wrong side of history. You know, and there was a superiority in that that I recognized and was very distasteful to me. I, I saw that, I, I certainly didn't think what I had done was wrong. I loved it. It took me to that point where I could actually see that, that something was missing in my own development. Because I had just substituted feeling powerless in the face of that, to feeling like the powerful, intelligent, right one. And that's what I was interested in was, was getting out of that dichotomy. But my activism was very alive, and true, so I don't think I would do anything differently from what I did.

[25:49] HILLARY: So when you think of the image of these, these guys hanging off the, the St. John's Bridge trying to block this big tanker, and, what do you think of that now?

[26:01] GANGAJI: Well I appreciate the beauty of the idealism. I mean you've heard me speak about idealization. And I make a big distinction between idealism, and idealization. I don't know what's going through their individual minds of course. But I know that there's a time in one's life where there's idealistic yearning for truth and beauty and freedom, peace, whatever it may be, is beautiful, and is worth putting your life on the line for, which they did. What they then make of it in the ego-ic structure, we will see, but, but then, then you get to deal with that. But the action itself is part of what, I think, thrust our whole species forward. But we see what happens in general with revolutions that start out with absolutely the best intention of justice, of correcting a massive wrong. I mean we can look at the French Revolution, look at the Chinese Revolution, or look at the Russian Revolution. We can look at the American Revolution! (chuckles) and we can see they are really beautiful, they're

right, and people died for that rightness, and then, then, it also, the revolution itself becomes corrupted by the idealization and that's a, that's really the pollution of the ideal of beauty, the ideal of justice.

[27:34] HILLARY: Hmm. When you look at your life today, are you an activist?

[27:42] GANGAJI: I don't, I wouldn't, I don't label myself (chuckles) truthfully. No I'm not an activist. But I'm not inactive. I'm not an 'ist', is what it is. I'm not a buddhist, I'm not an activist, I'm not an invitist. (chuckles) If I'm anything, if I'm any 'ist', I'd say I'm a humanist. I am, really, my role is to support fellow humans in discovering what's really possible for a lifetime. And not settling for the latest possibility. But to dive deeper into what's possible.

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[28:36] HILLARY: We have something special coming up next month on *A Conversation With Gangaji*. Actually we've got two things. First, we're gonna do a show devoted to the topic of racism, and we're really gonna dig in to some of the more uncomfortable questions about race. Are we willing to tell the truth about our own prejudices? How do we deal with the prejudices of others? And what about the parts of our self that we deem as inferior? Is that any different than racism? It's a perfect time for this particular conversation. So we're looking forward to that. And right after that, we're gonna release a special interview between Gangaji and Prince EA, on that same subject. Now if you haven't heard of Prince EA, you're in for a huge treat. His videos about this question of 'who am I?', have received over a hundred million views. And once you take a look at those, you'll see why this is gonna be such a great conversation. And I know those of you who already know who he is, can see why we're so excited. So, we're gonna be posting a couple of those videos on the Gangaji website, [gangaji.org](http://gangaji.org), as well as on our Facebook page, Gangaji Community. We'll do that over the next few days so you can have time to get acquainted with him. So, two great conversations on the subject of race, and we're looking forward to both of them. For now, we're out of time. I'm Hillary Larson. This has been *A Conversation With Gangaji*. Take care.