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A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 38

ABANDONMENT AND SELF-BETRAYAL (RELATIONSHIP SERIES PART 2 OF 3)

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[00:03] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:11] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: The fear of abandonment can be driven by all sorts of life events, some conscious, and some not. Sometimes, in order to manage this fear, we compromise our own integrity, we turn away from what we know, in the name of not losing, not being left. It's what I'm referring to here as self-betrayal, and in that, we ironically, or tragically, end up abandoning ourselves. So, that's betrayal from within. But what do we do if we are betrayed by the person we are in relationship with? Gangaji shares her own teaching story when it comes to betrayal.

[00:49] GANGAJI: What was so humbling, and what is so humbling, about betrayals is that they do strip us naked of our beliefs, of how we've ordered the universe. And in that, they serve us very deeply. And they humble us.

[1:06] HILLARY: This is part two of our three-part series on relationships. I'm Hillary Larson, and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

[1:18] HILLARY: We were kind of joking around before we started the, the recording that abandonment and self-betrayal are kind of the universal – I don't know what you wanna call it – the universal...

[01:28] GANGAJI: Issues.

[01:29] HILLARY: Issues, plight of mankind. And I think that most people, that end up on a healing path, for lack of a better term, end up addressing the subject of abandonment. And you know I've, I was quite jaded about the subject of abandonment when I was in my twenties. And I had just gotten into recovery, and I used to sit in women's meetings, and many times the topic was somebody was dating somebody and they really loved this person, and then the person didn't call them back anymore, or something. And, and it was a lot of drama, and I frankly would sit there and roll my eyes, thinking 'oh my God', you know? It's not that big a deal. But the reality was, is what, is I hadn't opened myself up to my own fear of abandonment, so I just judged it to protect myself.

[02:27] GANGAJI: Yeah, so in a sense that's abandoning yourself, with protection. Well, I do believe it's the universal issue, and maybe it's just part of being born. And being subject to death. Because if we are abandoned – really, at any time in our lives, even hermits are supported by the environment in some way – if we're abandoned, we die. And so it's, it's clearly in our best interest, physically, mentally, and emotionally, to not be abandoned. And yet we are! Continually. So...

[03:08] HILLARY: Yeah, it's funny, because when you said that I was thinking about all the ways we try to resolve abandonment, and you know I think most things we'll never be

conscious of. You know, it's like some people maybe it's in the process of birth, there's a sense of abandonment. Maybe some people have experienced horrible abuse. Maybe some people have experienced a life or death trauma. Maybe even you're in the grocery store and suddenly you don't know where your mom is, and you're six years old, and it's terrifying. I don't know at this point in my life, looking back, how much addressing each issue to resolve or heal abandonment is actually, ultimately, the final solution.

[03:53] GANGAJI: Well, absolutely. My position is it's not the final solution (chuckles). The final solution is really, in this moment, to be willing to experience being completely abandoned. Because then you are actually experiencing the reality of certain death. And that's what inquiry finally is. And to open to that, without the, the hope of rescue, or the drama of rescue, or, or further abandonment. 'Cause I'm not talking about getting into the process of a narrative but, to the pit of the stomach, or the chest, the starkness, of being alone, being abandoned. No help. No rescue. But opening to that. Then, certainly, there are stories or memories that may arise, but we don't have to go looking for them. And, you're free to go looking for them, and you can even gain insight in going looking for them. But, that's the beauty of this teaching to me is that it just cuts home right away, immediately. Because we may not have time to go through all our issues to get to some goal of resolution. That resolution is here, right now.

[05:19] HILLARY: I think the, the issue, though, is the willingness to see how we avoid abandonment, the feeling of abandonment, and the terror around abandonment. And, so to me, that leads us right into the subject of self-betrayal. Because to me self-betrayal is about how I maneuver in my life, how I manipulate things in my life so I don't have to feel like I'm gonna be left. And I was reading an article the other day, it was great article, it was about – it was written by a woman who'd been a couples therapist for over forty years – and the title was 'There's Only One Reason Why Relationships Fail'. And it's like, 'what?' like 'what? what is it?' (laughs) 'tell us!' And she said it was self-abandonment. That any time you take a movement outward for somebody to be responsible for yourself, for your happiness, for your security, for your well-being, that's a recipe for failure. And I, I thought that that was spot-on.

[06:32] GANGAJI: It can be. Unless that in itself becomes a strategy for protection. And so then there's no merging, there's no opening, there's no recognition, that in fact we all do need each other. There are, that there are aspects of living a life that you can't do by yourself. And so, really what I'm suggesting is it's possible to open to that raw need directly without being strong. Or without being self-sufficient, just to open to it. And then there's a discovery of a, a self-sufficiency but it's not a self-sufficiency that has any illusion that, that that will make you survive. Or even make you happy. It's, it's a recognition of maturity. And in that, then, yes, you can recognize the, the forms of self-abandonment. Because the one you describe I think is particular to you. But I abandoned myself very much in my life but in a, a really opposite way of the way you describe. Mine was more dramatizing, the abandonment itself, as a superstitious dance to keep it from happening again. It was like, 'if I torture myself, then the gods won't have to do it'. And, and so when there was nothing really to be tortured about, I would generate the possibility of abandonment as a narrative in my own head. And that's self-betrayal. So it's, and really finding all narratives that are avoidance of, of the deepest experience which may appear to be death, but is finally the same resolution. That's, that's what we are speaking about, finally, is the willingness to stop. To meet it all, to discover who you are.

[08:40] HILLARY: About twenty years ago, I got a divorce. It's hard to imagine it was twenty years ago. Maybe it was less than that – anyway, it seems like it was twenty years ago. And, and you know, breakups, since, since our series is on relationships I wanna talk about that specifically. And breakups can be so emotional, and painful, and they're a perfect opportunity to turn away, and say that's, that's *you*, it's not me. And so, my ex-husband and I loved each other very much – we still do – but part of the reason for that I think is that in the midst of our separation, I sat down with a pad, a paper, and a pencil, and I wrote specifics – I was very clear – and I wrote down all of the decisions that I made that were based on trying to get him to not leave me. In my own little paranoid world, but, like, buying a house, or going on a certain trip. All the times where I, I was trying to avoid a feeling, I thought if we do this then, then our relationship will be more secure; the reality was that wasn't really necessary in our relationship, because we had that base love, but my own insecurity was playing that out. And I've heard many people say that in the midst of their relationship, these moments of self-betrayal in order to keep something, and ultimately I lost. But by looking at these moments of self-betrayal, and being honest with myself, I could see clearly that I had caused my own suffering, and it really had nothing to do with him. And we had actually a very beautiful divorce, we are very good friends now, but it could have gone down a really ugly road if I didn't face my own self-betrayal: how did I cause this?

[10:36] GANGAJI: It's so important. Because obviously in relationship there have to be compromises, too. And then, you, you do do some things you don't wanna do. It's not really mostly, even, about doing what you wanna do. But, there's a way, when that's not addressed, or when you're not open to yourself about this, that you're actually doing this for the relationship, then, then it goes underground. And, and appears in very weird ways, 'cause I, I also had that experience. My very, my first marriage was really, it wasn't really about the relationship, it was about my self-protection. It looked like this would be my ticket – it was my ticket – out of a certain trajectory of my life to that point. And he was a good man, he is a good man, and, as you say, I mean, we loved each other, good friends. But, I had actually started the marriage under false pretenses, to be my savior. And I'm hearing you say to protect you in some way. And so you can't grow up in that. There's no maturity possible in that, it's just a substitution for the parents. And the rebellion that comes has to be the same rebellion that comes with your parents. And there are regrets about how I did that break-up. Even though we also ended friends, it, it was unnecessary hurt because I was still an adolescent in my mind. And I knew I had to get what I wanted, and, so I got what I wanted. And that also didn't satisfy me – being a single woman, being free to have lots of lovers, lots of friends. It's like 'oh well, it's not here either'. So, then we can begin to ask the, the question in the *depth* of the question, which is, 'what do you really want?' Yes, we want good, fruitful, satisfying, thriving relationships; but what will that give us? What do we want right now, even if we're alone? Or even if we are in a relationship that we would like out of? If nothing changes, what do we want, and where will we find it? And I think this gets us back to what you were saying, if we're looking for that in some other, we will continually be disillusioned. Because it's, it's all our internal drama projected outward.

[13:13] HILLARY: To me the, when somebody betrays us – because people betray each other all the time – it's the same thing as when we betray ourselves, and I, I wanna read this section to you from a book that you wrote called *Hidden Treasure* and this was, this came out like four years ago I think, time has flown by. But I remember when I read this section, I had tears rolling down my face, because your courage and your humanity I think is one of the things that stands out about you, in my opinion. And I think between the two of us I'm the mushiest one, so I hope I don't (chuckles) start tearing up when I read this again. But, you

write: 'In two-thousand-five, I discovered that my husband was in love with another woman, and had been having an affair with her for the previous three years. The fact that she was also his traveling assistant and student complicated and deepened the shock. Anger, disbelief, and deep hurt flooded through my emotional body. This was an unexpected story of betrayal that shook me in every way. I contributed to this story by giving vent to my anger and indulging my hurt. I screamed at him, and threw things. I never wanted to see him again, and I felt hate. The power of disillusionment brought me to my knees, and yet there was also never an absence of love. There was always silence at the core. By the simple and profound recognition of the ever-present silence, I didn't have to dig out my old rags of victimhood. I didn't have to continually, mentally reenact the tragedy and torture myself. I could feel whatever feelings arose, and recognize myself as both connected to all those feelings, and free of them all. I could stand naked as silence as the weavings of old stories of betrayal and loss appeared and disappeared, essentially naked, I could meet this story.' There's something else I wanna read from this, but...that's a teaching story.

[15:25] GANGAJI: Mmm... good. Well as you said we all have betrayals, either from us or to us. That's the nature of, of experiencing what it means to be a human form.

[15:47] HILLARY: I was gonna ask you in those, were there moments where you, before you found out, were there moments where you went, 'something is off here and I don't want to look at it'?

[16:00] GANGAJI: I didn't say I don't wanna look at it 'cause I would say I knew something was off, and I just thought the relationship needed work. (chuckles) You know, because we both traveled a lot, we, we were separate from each other a lot, and it's always been a volatile relationship. We both like center stage. We were well-matched that way. And, and when it's going really well, as it has been actually since then, there's a fluidity in that. One is dominant, the other submissive, and then it switches and it's, it's quite nice. But I knew something was wrong, and, and once the whole exposure happened, I could then look back and see that I just didn't wanna deal with it (chuckles). I could see it was wrong in, in, when I replayed the scenario I could see even what was going on, but you know, I just didn't want the mess of it. I didn't wanna have to deal with it. Because it, at the deepest level of both of our lives – which is also written about there – everything was really working very well, this was just in our personal relationship. And there was a way that I compartmentalized that. And I knew it wasn't right, but it, there was so much more that was right. So, you know, that's the, the power of reflection, or hindsight, however you wanna call it, and, and it was a great learning experience. And humbling. And humanizing.

[17:45] HILLARY: I wanted to -

[17:46] GANGAJI: I do wanna say one thing about that, because I read a teacher's comment about that and, someone posed the question to this teacher, 'Would you take your husband back after something like that?' And the teacher said, 'Absolutely not. I would never betray myself that way'. And when I heard this teacher say that, I realized, I would have said that too. But the truth is, you don't know what you will do (laughs). And it, and you cannot know what you will do until the moment arises. And so what was so humbling, and what is so humbling about betrayals is that they do strip us naked of our beliefs of how, how we've ordered the universe. And in that they serve us very deeply. They humble us. Because, who could have known? (chuckles)

[18:44] HILLARY: Well, you know, somebody had asked a question about, kind of relationships in general, but this seems like this pertains to the resolution, so to speak, of your situation with your husband, was... and this, this question came up with several people, was: 'What do you do when you're in a relationship where you're working deeply on yourself and the other person isn't?' and it sounds to me, based on this paragraph actually I wanna read, well, let me just read it. 'I realized that our old story as a couple with all its twists and turns now needed to end. We let each other go. We stopped our story. And while we each felt the enormous pain of losing each other, we also felt freedom, as the burden of "us" fell away. The emotions that followed were many and complex. There were many tears. I was living through the death of the illusion of my indestructible relationship. It wasn't easy, but it was necessary. As much as I cherished him and our relationship, I knew myself as fulfilled and happy, even in the grief of losing what I loved.' And reality was that you stayed together, but.

[20:00] GANGAJI: Well, we got back together. After that severance.

[20:03] HILLARY: When I tie that into this question, which I think is a, a common question, is I'm in this relationship; I'm really looking deeply at my own issues; and I'm with somebody who really doesn't do that. Do you think it was your ability to look deeply at yourself and his ability to look deeply at himself that allowed you to move through, probably, a whole different level of intimacy?

[20:30] GANGAJI: Well, I think that that's what got us back together. And then the work, the next year was really just dedicated to working on unraveling whatever knots still remained and, and that required both of us to be participating. That's the nature of a relationship, finally, so are meant to, our relationship finally matured after this crisis. I don't know that it, it certainly couldn't happen the way it happened if both of us hadn't been willing and, and really wanting to, to deeply examine, and be honest. But that doesn't mean that you can't live a fulfilled and, and spiritually truthful life if you're with somebody who's not interested in that. I don't wanna ever say that there's a formula for how it should be. I think we discover how it *must* be. And there were many times in this thirty-plus relationship when one or the other had wanted desperately to leave, and said, 'it's over – we're finished', because we always had a volatile relationship. And somehow the other one said, 'no, stay with it, let's work it out'. And, and so there was, it was a mystery to me that it had made it so far, as different as we were, and as egocentric as we were. So it's all such a mystery finally. And we can be naked in the mystery, and tell the truth, and tell the truth about what we want, and be able to speak, at least be able to speak openly to our partners. Whether the partner wants to participate in any particular psychotherapeutic or spiritual process, then you see what happens. We don't have to control it, but we do have to tell the truth, to end our own self-betrayal. And it's a hard truth sometimes, and it can be a stark truth, because it is the, the rawness of abandonment, being alone. And for me, in this particular incident, when I was briefly alone, out of this relationship, I realized I had judgment about people who were alone, especially aging women who were alone. And then I realized how absurd that was, it really felt good (laughs). So it was just, so, it was just all very useful, and very painful; and, not useful in that it, it *had* to happen that way – that's not, that would be a denial of the missed opportunities along the way to tell the truth, and to get at it – but that it *did* happen that way as useful because, you know, it's the perfection of imperfection. And, and what we can learn from that and how we can deepen in that, and how we can stop the betrayal, both directions. To other and to ourselves. It always works in two directions.

[23:44] HILLARY: I don't want to overemphasize this, but your willingness to tell the truth is humbling to me. And...

[23:53] GANGAJI: I'm glad. Yeah. Humbling is, is opening.

[23:58] HILLARY: I wonder, on the subject of self-betrayal, did you use that, your own learning about your own self-betrayal, as a springboard into a different place. Meaning, your relationship to me now looks like a fine wine. It's been through, you know, it's been mused around, and....

[24:22] GANGAJI: It's been crushed (chuckles).

[24:23] HILLARY: ...and crushed (chuckles). And now it's, it's reaping the benefits of that.

[24:27] GANGAJI: Yes it is.

[24:28] HILLARY: 'Cause it would have been easy to say, 'I'm out of here'.

[24:32] GANGAJI: And we did say that. But some mysterious force pulled us back and, and our mutual desire for truth, when we came back we had to face, but we hadn't faced how we had lied. So, yes it all serves. And that's the possibility, is, it all *can* serve if we open to it. And it won't serve unless we do open to it. But it could've gone different ways and still served. It's not how it, it looks that makes the service of it all. It's, it's the, the inner discoveries and the possibility of being with another, maybe some other than my, than my husband. It, I would have had to be with, if it had been another person that I was in relationship, it would've had, I would've had to have brought to that what I discovered in this. So it serves. Or if I were alone: same.

[25:44] HILLARY: You've spoken so many times about the capacity of the heart, and just allowing the heart to break open a million, gazillion times. And I appreciate that you practice what you preach, you know, because...

[25:58] GANGAJI: Yes, well, that's why we preach it, right? So we (chuckles) have the opportunity to practice it.

[26:04] HILLARY: I think that part of the teaching story in this is that there's a difference between my plans and my designs when it comes to love; I have certain ideas of what I want, what I think will make me happy in a partner. And I went through my own variation with somebody I loved *deeply*, and he had a situation going on that I couldn't, couldn't be part of my life. And I realized in that moment, because I was willing to have my heart break open completely, that love itself was bigger than my plan for my life.

[26:44] GANGAJI: Yes, that's beautiful. That's the right perspective. Usually we have love serving us, but in the case of truth as you're describing, we serve love.

[27:03] HILLARY: There were lots of directions I think this conversation could've gone, and I had ideas about different ways this conversation could've gone, but really I feel like we hit the core of it through your sharing your experience, is that, I think the biggest barrier to intimacy is the feeling like, 'oh, no, if I love too much I'm gonna be abandoned.' And, and that there's some doorway there that allows us to be free if we're willing to be abandoned.

[27:35] GANGAJI: That's right. And, and we have that not just about relationship, we have it about life in general. If I open too much, if I live too much, if I am myself too much, we, we feel the, the superstitious nature of that, and try to control it. So we can recognize that, and just open, just love, intelligently. And as you said, I recognize when there's situations that you can't accept, that you can't live in, but that doesn't have anything to do with the love. The love is independent of form. And form, yes we have certain needs for form. But when we attempt to, to be in charge of love, that's a betrayal.

[28:28] HILLARY: Thank you for sharing your awakening and your discovery and your freedom with us.

[28:37] GANGAJI: Thank you, Hillary – and all. (chuckles) It's beautiful.

[28:59] HILLARY : The last in our series on relationships is coming up next month, it's on the subject of being alone. Is being in a relationship better than being single, or is being single better than being in a relationship? And what is the remedy for loneliness? Gangaji will address those questions and more. And if you're a frequent listener to *A Conversation With Gangaji* and you'd like to leave a rating or a comment in iTunes, that would be super great for us, that actually makes it easier for people to find Gangaji on iTunes. And before we go, I just wanted to share some thoughts I have about the topics for the new year. We have plans to do a show on grace and manifestation. I wanted to take a look at grief, what it means to say goodbye. And the subject of hope is on the list: when does it serve, and when is it a barrier? So those are just a few things that are sitting out there on the table. You're always welcome to write in if you have your own ideas. We always appreciate your letters, so please feel free to write anytime: gangajiradio@gangaji.org. I'm Hillary Larson. Until next time, be well.