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A Conversation with Gangaji Series  
Host Hillary Larson  
Episode 48  
ORDINARY AWAKENING  
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[00:05] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:10] HILLARY LARSON, HOST It's easy to think that a sudden awakening is deeper and more profound than more subtle awarenesses that happen over time. It's like a lightning bolt versus an onion. The comparisons are easy to make but the question is, are they really worthwhile?

[00:31] GANGAJI: We have flashes of insight and we have the possibility of reflecting on where we were ten years ago, forty years ago and realizing that over time, in fact there's been a deepening of surrender, or openness, or realization of awakening. But, there's no distinction.

[0:52] HILLARY: When we are looking at the subject of awakening, is it the most ordinary moments that could be the opening into realizing who we really are? And is there any reason why we really wouldn't want that?

[01:06] GANGAJI: It's a danger to actually be willing to be free in this moment. And the danger is that you will be as you are, not as you think you should be.

[01:16] HILLARY: I'm Hillary Larson, and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

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[01:26] HILLARY: I don't know if you remember this Gangaji, but five years ago, I can't believe it was almost five years ago exactly, we did our pilot conversation and in that we were talking about awakenings and we were talking about your awakening. And we were talking about, or I had pointed out to you that I felt that most people have a more subtle awakening that happens over time. And I wanted to talk about that a little bit more in detail today. Because I think that if we don't appreciate how our own awakening unfolds, we might put attention on your awakening, for example, and what we think ours should look like.

[02:16] GANGAJI: Sounds good

[02:17] HILLARY: So I kind of wanted to walk through that in a very "Awakening 101" sort of way of the obstacles to knowing who you are, and knowing yourself as stillness. And I think the bulk of the ego is made from the nervous system, and out of that are where these thoughts and these emotions emanate, and certainly the way we feel in our bodies. And I think when I look at my own evolution I used to identify myself with my thoughts. And then, over time I've seen more and more that my thoughts are not actually who I am. It's this mental machinery that just goes in this kind of circular motion and it doesn't often have particularly original things to say.

[03:14] GANGAJI: So if we simplify it even more - because that's always what I'm interested in is in simplifying it - there is no ego in reality. The ego – the ego, I mean ego means “I am” - and it is, it's really the thought “I am.” So anything we *think* that follows the *thought* “I am” is ego, including the idea that ego is no good or needs to be got rid of or is a problem. So, if we just recognize that that's very natural to the human animal with the nervous system it has and the brain structure it has – and maybe other animals too – but we know for sure the human animal - thinks “I am” and the feelings and sensations that you refer to reflect back on that thought “I am”. They are there whether we think “I am” or not, but we give sensations and feelings *meaning* as they relate to the thought “I am”. And that's the problem. And it can be a problem that is obviously a problem, suffering, pain. Or, it can be a problem that's cloaked in ideas of enlightenment or - or pleasure or whatever, as long as it refers back, as anything refers back to the thought “I am”. Even saying *my* thoughts don't bother *me* is still ego, because it's referring back to *me* who owns these thoughts, but that “me” is a thought. You follow that?

[5:06] HILLARY: I do. I think where I get tripped up sometimes is I can see that my negative, critical thoughts aren't me as I watch them. But then I'd have to say that when I am experiencing pleasant thoughts, I tend to identify with *that*. Like, “Oh! That's me.”

[05:27] GANGAJI: So, when you say, “That's me.” What is the “me” that you're referring to? Where is it?

[05:38] HILLARY: I don't know. My mind kind of goes blank when you even ask me the question.

[05:44] GANGAJI: Because it's not there. It doesn't exist. And normally we go through our lives with this deep correlation between my thoughts and my feelings – whether they're negative feelings or positive feelings or some combination - as being real or true and then everything comes from that. And, so we have a desire for that thought to be perfected or to, in its perfection, to throw out the negative thoughts or however it may be constructed. But it's all still based on a thought, and it's a thought that's unreliable. As you know sometimes there are, there are negative thoughts, and sometimes there are positive thoughts. And then a sort of overlord thought, that is called the super ego, decides which thoughts are really me and which thoughts are just intruders or conditioning or negativity that the world or my conditioning has given me. But that's all part of the mess. And that's the beauty of Papaji's invitation to just stop all of it - negative or positive - and recognize what is un-thought, that is *always* here. What is not any object. Anything you think, including this thought of “I am me”, is some kind of object in your mind, whether it's your name, maybe it's just a bundle of experiences or, sensations or, feeling that somehow *feels* like who you think you are. As long as there is a belief in that and a, an alignment of that with your thinking process then you will, you will always be searching for a better me. And that search is bondage. And waking up is waking up from that search – for a moment stopping that search of perfection, stopping that search of getting to some ideal thought, some super thought, uber thought. And just be still. It's very simple. The awakening, the phrase ‘awakening’, ‘awakened mind’, is really referring to what remains un-thought even in the midst of any thought - a mind attack of thoughts or a mind expansion of insight - what *still* remains free of that and always present. That is how you recognize yourself – nameless, faceless, birthless, deathless self. But, given that we are human beings and we have human minds there will then be thoughts generated about that. And the challenge then, is to recognize those thoughts, both negative and positive, and simply to recognize the tendency to identify –

no problem with the tendency, that goes with the fact of having a human mind – and recognize the, the choice and the possibility to in this moment to stop that identity, be still. And then the mind IS awake, the mind is open to what is always awake. So people talk about awakening. And what they're really talking about is a state. Because we have these wonderful moments in meditation or out of the blue where there's just this – awakening - and it's exquisite – but it's still a state. So as a state it wasn't, and then it appears, and then it disappears. But to really, truly awaken is to discover what's always here.

[09:47] HILLARY: So what do you have to say about the distinction between an awakening being more subtle and gradual as opposed to a lightning bolt moment?

[09:57] GANGAJI: I think it's a false distinction. I don't think, it's only the mind that makes those distinctions. You know it's only the organization of the mind that's saying, 'Well, this was gradual. This happened over time.' Or the organization of the mind concluding, 'Ah! this is this moment.' We have the experiences of both, right? We have flashes of insight and we have the possibility of reflecting on where we were ten years ago, forty years ago, and realizing that over time in fact there's been a deepening of surrender or openness or realization of awakening, but there's no distinction. Any of the distinctions that we talk about are really only happening in time, meaning that there was a past, and there's a present, and there's a future. But those are all just conveniences of our organization of thought. They don't exist in reality. They're useful conveniences, useful for survival and there's nothing wrong with them and they come with the brain, the normal brain, the developed brain. But that doesn't mean that they are true reflections of reality.

[11:14] HILLARY: So when you had your thunderbolt moment back in 1990 and you talked about how the background moved to the foreground. I'm imagining that most of us live our lives with, you know, who we think we are is in the foreground. And I just wonder how you live your life that way - when who you think you are is actually now in the background.

[11:42] GANGAJI: Well, you know in truth I think anything I said to explain that as even explaining or speaking about the thunderbolt so long ago, only serves to confuse the issue. Because then you somehow try to apply that to your experience and to get your experience to become that, or judge your experience as not that. So, if you just are willing to tell the truth about what is always here. Whether you call it foreground or background then is another false distinction. It's the, the *ground* of being. And when you are willing to, to stop for a moment and tell the truth about that, it can be, it was for me in that moment. It's not like it's required to be. But it was a shock. It was a recognition. "Oh that! Of course, that's always been here!" But what about me? And that's the, that's where the false distinction. The mind's work is to make distinctions. That's essential for survival, to make distinctions. And, and so, in that moment there was no distinction. I, I am that I am. Doesn't exclude the foreground. It's, it's difficult to speak about because I realize I've been speaking to people about it almost 25 years now. And that's why I have to go back and contradict myself consistently, because there's, any way that I speak about it, if it gets locked into the words that are used. It's already wrong. It's an error. So if we can't count on the words or my description or anyone's description on what they're actually experiencing, whether it's an enlightenment experiences or everyday experiences, then we actually stop our effort trying to figure something out - trying to get somewhere through thought - and we, we fall back into pure intelligence. Not separate from thought. Not distinct from thought.

Not, not even different from thought, but deeper, and not needing thought for its existence. There's no thought without true intelligence. True intelligence discovers itself without needing to think itself. But anyway, all that I am saying is just an invitation to have the courage to stop, to be still, to not know what you should be like, or what you should feel, or what awakening means. The very moment that we think we know what awakening means, we're following thought. And if you take Gangaji's examples or the Buddha's examples or Papaji's examples or your own examples that you may have written down and you re-read those or you try to figure that out, it's a wild goose chase. Just stop. Just be still. What's here?

[15:10] GANGAJI: And there's this - natural state - that is a reflection of, of the trueness of being. And that state, when you begin to think or you begin to do something else will pass, as all states do. But you have the, the opportunity to recognize its passing and without chasing it, just to stop and check what is still here. Then it's your direct experience. You know Papaji said a wonderful thing to me, he said, "If God himself comes down and tells you you have not experienced the truth, you turn your back on God and walk away." I said whoa, that was, that was a strong statement and I really had to let that in – and because there I was with my guru – and, and I got what he was saying that there is something that is so deep and so true that it doesn't matter if the whole world denies it, it remains true. And any god that would deny it is a false god. And the first false god that usually appears is our ego. The thought of who we are. And that ego then begins the process of distinction, or comparison or yes but, or but I felt this way, so that therefore means I couldn't be and then we're off and running, following the mind.

[16:54] HILLARY: I've found myself in this trap in our conversations quite a few times actually (Gangaji laughs). Because, you should see I've got color-coded questions in front of me. (Hillary laughs.) They look beautiful! - because you know I'm thinking I'd like to ask questions that people want to hear you answer. But I'm going to put that aside right now. So, when I think of my evolution - and I'm referring to myself as an onion and you a thunderbolt – and as an onion I have gone through those layers of when I'm telling myself a story and really seeing thought. And emotion isn't that difficult for me to see that it's not me. My body, though, is a bit of a different situation and I, I'll give you an example. Going on silent retreat to me is always such a hugely profound experience and to actually get to that place where my nervous system quiets down and I can feel that stillness, I can be so aware of that stillness. But I have to say that when I'm sitting in that quiet place, I identify myself as somebody who's experiencing peace but *not* that I am peace itself.

[18:21] GANGAJI: What's the difference? Where's the boundary?

[18:30] HILLARY: It feels like it's my body.

[18:34] GANGAJI: I still don't understand. Where is the boundary between the experience of peace and being peace? Let's say your body is experiencing peace or your mind is experiencing peace, circumstances are peaceful. Where's the boundary between the peace that you are and that peace?

[18:58] HILLARY: Hm. I guess it's the thought that pops in.

[19:02] GANGAJI: That's right. Exactly. Very - very clear, isn't it? It's actually a thought: "This is not me, this is my body." Because it is very dangerous to actually be peace because you stop working on yourself, you stop fixing yourself – and you may conceive of yourself in a very deep sense of identity as unfinished and therefore you *need* to work on yourself. Because you're not perfected yet. And so it's, it's a danger to actually be willing to be free in this moment. And the danger is that you will be as you are - not as you think you should be.

[19:47] HILLARY: Hm. It's so subtle, isn't it?

[19:51] GANGAJI: Subtle like a thunderbolt. (They both laugh.)

[19:57] HILLARY: Yeah. I think that what comes up for me in those moments before the thought comes in of like, "Oh I'm Hillary experiencing peace." Before that thought pops up, is that there's an awareness of a certain kind of vigilance to, to put my attention more consistently on that place. And for me that is in the form of meditation.

[20:30] GANGAJI: But that's also a thought, isn't it? I mean really meditation is this willingness in this moment – and for some people you wait until you're sitting on your cushion - or in your chair, a designated moment - but it could be any moment where you stop doing anything. Where you give yourself fully to this instant or these twenty minutes or this hour or whatever it may be. So this invitation is have that moment be right now. Don't postpone that moment - under some name: work on myself, meditation, further evolvment, perfection, whatever it may be. There are many different versions of this future. But just the willingness to - to be here fully. Then, you are peace itself. And your body may participate in that or may not. The body can be agitated with disease or injury or affliction and there can still be the truth of the peace that you are.

(Music begins...)

[22:16] HILLARY: In this conversation, Gangaji and I talked about the difference between a sudden versus a gradual awakening, or actually the lack of difference between the two. And I'm gonna switch modes here for a little bit. Because I want to dig into these awarenesses that are so subtle that, they might pass us by without even knowing it. And to make that point, I want to share with you an exchange between Gangaji and this lovely lady, she's this woman who's so delightful. And she's talking to Gangaji about her realization about her own mind and how she realized she has the choice to not follow her thoughts. That's a great part, but it gets even better than that and it makes an important point. Let's listen.

(clip)

*[23:04] LADY: This morning I came and I was sitting before you know the session started and, the stillness just came. It wasn't even like I had to choose it. It was there. And it was inviting me, it was kinda like what you said in the beginning yesterday, about permission to be happy. And I'd, I heard that at a different way yesterday. But this morning I, I really heard it as an invitation to, to dwell in that space of stillness. And that I could remain there, that it's my home. And that I don't have to leave it if I don't want to. It was so, um, and again it was nothing new. You know, not like I hadn't heard it before, but experientially it was so immediate. And the amazing thing was that, um, the mind came in immediately, and tried to dismiss it. Meaning, it it was like*

*“what’s the big deal? It’s, it’s just stillness”. (laughter) “You’re just sitting there”. Like um, you like, it trivialized it*

*[24:14] GANGAJI: That’s it*

*[24:15] LADY: Yeah*

*[24:16] GANGAJI: And you saw it.*

*[24:17] LADY: And I saw it immediately! Because it was so ordinary. Like I have to say it was so extraordinarily ordinary. [GANGAJI: Yes] That stillness. I imagine that it would be like these amazing experiences that people have and I’m not saying that, that doesn’t happen, but at the core [GANGAJI: Yes] it was very ordinary. [GANGAJI: Most intimate] It, it was intimate. And I still felt the pull – I don’t know why I’m talking so much because I can’t tell you [GANGAJI: This is what happens.] what I’m articulating. (laughter). But, um, but this is what I meant by, I felt like – because I don’t normally talk about my experiences – but I felt like, it had to be, like, for myself. It had to be said. [GANGAJI: Yes, yes.]. Especially because of the tendency to dismiss it. So it’s, it’s not that I didn’t, there wasn’t my, I could still feel the enormous pull of the mind wanting to take back the attention. Cuz normally the mind is center stage and the stillness is, is peripheral. That’s why it comes and goes. But in that moment it felt like stillness was finally center stage even though the mind, I see this happening, so I finally understood what, when people say like, just let it be, that was the letting it be. Because that stillness was actually totally not fazed by what was happening at the mind level. It was the strangest thing. And as the talk went on, and oh, I just felt so much love coming from you and all the people talking up here, and that’s why I felt it was such a group experience for me coming from the energy of the group. I was kind of going into that more and what, what I had experienced and, and, because I felt like what it was saying was that, that is that stillness is, me. [GANGAJI: You are. Yes.] Yes. Yes. And, and the mind (laughter) I just have to sit with that for a moment, because, because again it was so, just a tiny spec, you know [GANGAJI: That’s all it takes, just a little shift oh good.] it wasn’t. Yeah it was. Yes, yes.*

*[26:52] GANGAJI: This is such GOOD news. Because you don’t choose that. But somehow in the mind you choose to give that its rightful place*

*[27:01] LADY: Yeah, surrender to that.*

*[27:02] GANGAJI: Yes the surrender. Yes.*

*(end clip)*

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*[27:22] HILLARY: That entire clip is actually sixteen minutes long and if you’d like to hear the rest of it you can go to Gangaji’s official YouTube Channel. There’s a bunch of videos there, but that one’s called Your Own Heart Speaking. We’ll also try to post it on our Facebook page Gangaji Community. A new With Gangaji series is starting next month. That’s Gangaji’s live monthly webcast. The title is: ‘The Call Home and Other Life Passages’. You can find a list of topics they’re covering over the next few months, you can find that on the Gangaji website*

[gangaji.org](http://gangaji.org). You can also register there for With Gangaji. I want to mention that we had a very successful fundraising campaign for Gangaji Radio a few weeks ago. It's the first time we've ever done that. And we were beyond touched by your generosity. Because of you, we get to launch our new program, *Epiphany* next month. So that's great. And we also have a new episode of *A Conversation With Gangaji* coming up. We're gonna be talking about help. Praying for it, giving it, and receiving it. And it also matches our first episode of *Epiphany*. So, we look forward to that. I'm Hillary Larson, we'll see you next time. All of you take care.

(clip)

*[28:46] GANGAJI: This is what brings us together. This is why we meet. Whatever I say, or you say, or you've read or, think. This is what brings us here. And this is alive in each one of us. So you can agree, or disagree, it's, it's much closer than that. It's live. It's who you are. It's the living truth. And it's only your mind that denies it or surrenders to it. And it will, it will guide you, your natural, luminous intelligence. And it may guide you into some very difficult situations, some painful situations, but in your willingness to be true, there's more. I guarantee this with my life, there's more. And I invite you to guarantee it with your life. Whether you ever speak it out loud or whether you never stop speaking it. Your life – what a great use of life! To be in guarantee of life, conscious of itself. Then our meeting is a celebration of that. Om Shanti Shanti Shanti.*

(end clip)