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A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 51

BURSTING THE BUBBLE OF ME

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[00:03] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:09] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: There's this thing I'm calling the "Bubble of Me" that's made up of my body, my thoughts, my worries as well as my hopes, dreams and desires. In and of itself it's fine, it's a good thing. It's actually part of being human. But sometimes there can be a preoccupation with this bubble of me which perhaps is a distraction from a deeper anxiety.

[00:32] GANGAJI: There's a point in everybody's life where we have to be willing to recognize the anxiety, which is a kind of loneliness inside, and not run from that. Actually, turn and face it, and of course, that's what this time in history is offering us.

[00:53] HILLARY: Part of this conversation includes the bubbles we create around our political, social and spiritual beliefs. How do we venture out into territory beyond our own bubbles or even recognize we're in a bubble to begin with? And last but not least, where do we find compassion in all directions, starting with the bubble of me? I'm Hillary Larson and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

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[01:28] HILLARY: Not exactly sure how I want to just open this show on "the Bubble of Me." It's been something that's really clear in my daily experience, but it's a little bit hard for me to articulate. I got to go to Fallen Leaf Lake for a silent retreat with you last year amongst many other people. And it's so beautiful there and it's such a place to rest. But it's also a place for me where I'm so aware of my own privilege and my own bubble. And I used to be out in the world that was a harder world frankly. It was, you know, working in a kind of a dangerous part of town and seeing a lot of poverty and seeing violence. And after ten years, it was exhausting to me. But my world now feels kind of spiritual and warm and cushy and there's a way I want to stretch beyond that bubble. And so that's why I really wanted to have a conversation about the bubble of me with you because we all have our own particular bubbles.

[02:31] GANGAJI: That's a great description because when you're speaking like that – this comfort, this cocooning which is really necessary to recover from particular nervous system stress. And we are privileged in that we can retreat. And yet, the cocoon itself is something we have to outgrow, that we have to leave. We can know it as home. We can recognize it, but if we are called to live a life that's involved and engaged in the world, the cocoon is false then. It's a false bubble rather than a real refuge.

[03:18] HILLARY: Yeah. I think that within that I'm so aware of my thoughts about my life and my world, um, and that's certainly its own bubble as well. This feeling, there's a trance in that where there are times where I don't even know that that's what I'm doing. I'm so immersed in the show.

It sounds like I'm joking, but I'm not. But I was looking up, looking for some photography equipment the other day, and I swear to God, I saw like ten different products for selfies. (Laughs.) Because this culture is so much about like "me." It's me, my Facebook page, my post, and this is what I just did. And lots of that can be beautiful, but there's still a way that it feels like it's a subtle way for us to be separate from each other.

[04:15] GANGAJI: It seems to me it's a reflection of some deep loneliness and that we're trying to find ourselves as true companions. And maybe this comes out of the self-help movement which I totally support. But it's perhaps an immature aspect of that. That if I just like myself, my image enough, then I'll find love and I won't be lonely. But you know there's a point in everybody's life where we have to, or everybody's life, spiritual life or life of depth and commitment where we have to be willing to, to recognize the anxiety, which is a kind of loneliness inside, and not run from that. Actually, turn and face it, and of course, that's what this time in history is offering us. It's a time where there's a level of fear or anxiety that can appear and that's not bad. That's actually good. That anxiety is a recognition of the world is not what I thought it was or the world is not necessarily a safe place, certainly not for everybody. And in that then we can rather than avoiding that with another selfie or another distraction and distractions have their place as selfies have their place which is what I hear you saying. But there's something deeper and that's the willingness to turn back and open and meet this loneliness, this anxiety.

[05:57] HILLARY: There's some compassion in this being self-absorbed, because I'm certainly, in certain ways, am very self-absorbed and I don't necessarily like that. And at the same time, I understand that the nervous system itself calls for that, it calls for me to pay attention to me and in that there's got to be some mercy and compassion

[06:23] GANGAJI: Absolutely. That's the word, isn't it? Because usually self-absorption points to a kind of spinning where there's only me. And so we try to fix that by ignoring that or pushing through it and it doesn't work. The nervous system as you know just gets more sensitive. But if it's not self-absorption, it can just be attention to what's needed in this particular body – loving attention, gentle attention – and recognizing the limits of this particular human form. The limits in all ways – the physical limits, the moral limits, the capacity to love limits, all of that – just to recognize that without having to fix everything. And then, there's a humbling that comes to this sense of me, this bubble. It's popped in a way or at least deflated a little. And normally we associate that deflation with the misery and the lying on the couch all day and only thinking of me and the self-pity, the indulgence of the absorption. So there's a balance point here where we recognize there is this body here and in this body, there is this particular consciousness and this consciousness is also equipped to be aware of what this particular body needs or at least to discover that. And that's beautiful! But when it starts, indulging that awareness to the point of neurosis, then it's miserable and we look to more indulgence to get out of the misery. But finally, we have to really come back to the inherent limitedness of form, this form, your form, my form, this life, my life.

[08:31] HILLARY: I want to read this, a couple letters, a couple comments and questions from people on the Gangaji Radio team. But first I wanted to ask you, I know that sometimes you don't like it when I compare myself to you, but honestly, it serves in the most surprising way most of the time. So, when we're talking about this bubble of me, when you're going through

your daily life, do you ever catch yourself like, whoa, I've been thinking about myself for the last hour or something? Do you know what I'm saying?

[09:05] GANGAJI: I don't have that kind of meta comment. If I'm thinking about myself, I'm thinking about myself. I don't see that it's wrong. To me it's part of having a brain and a mind. I don't have that level of judgment that you have about that. And my reasons for not particularly liking it when you compare yourself to me is that usually it's based on some kind of really, some version of me that I don't know. Some idea you have of who I am and how I live my day. I don't know if you think that I just walk around with no thought or blank or that this body doesn't exist for me. I have no idea. But each time you've said it, it's like, whoa, that just doesn't relate in any way. You're free to continue, of course, but I've never, never once, when you have said that, has it had anything to do with my actual experience as a human being.

[10:09] HILLARY: Well, see, that's actually why I like my question, because your answer is the wakeup call. It's the like, Oh! I didn't really realize I was doing that again.

[10:19] GANGAJI: Uh huh.

[10:20] HILLARY: Again.

[10:21] GANGAJI: Yeah, because my answer is just throwing it back at you. (Both laugh.)

[10:28] HILLARY: All right! Moving on then. (They laugh.) Let me read you this. This is from Lisa. And I kind of wanted to move into we have the bubble of ourselves that we think we are. But then we have these other bubbles around us, whether it's another person or an organization or a set of beliefs or a democratic party or a republican party, we crash into each other. And I like that we are doing, this last couple shows, actually November and January here, on topics that are happening like right this moment.

[11:00] GANGAJI: Me, too.

[11:01] HILLARY: So, Lisa says: Right now there's a great disillusionment sweeping the West. It inspires deep emotions of fear and the sense of separateness causing egoic movement in reaction to those feelings. It can also invoke a moment of Truth where we see through the projection we were calling a bubble, that we are calling "them" or "me" and we are galvanized to live true to what is revealed in that parting of the veil. As a community, how do we support this in the best way? How do we support each other in this dark night of the soul in the depths of this disillusionment?

[11:44] GANGAJI: I wouldn't call this a dark night of the soul. I think that's making more of it than it is. It'll get much worse for it to be a dark night of the soul. We don't need to ... we are disillusioned, but that's part of what maturing means. And it's not just West. It's East and West. It's everywhere. That's the nature of what the world gives us. It refuses to conform to our idea of what it should be. And in that, the world serves us. Because we, it won't play our game of dolls. So we can support each other in my view by being willing to tell the truth – and live the Truth and be true to the Truth without knowing what that is until it shows itself. And not, I mean, look: we are in our house that's heated; we've been fed; it's not raining bombs outside. Dark night of

the soul? That's a different, a whole different level. And I'm not saying it couldn't be here within a week. But it's not here right now. And for most people listening to this, if you have the capacity to be in a place where you can actually listen to this, you are already way ahead of the game. So I would say we have to first stop pitying ourselves and stop dramatizing our situation. And then, there's a level of clarity that's available to actually contribute. That we can discover what that contribution is and maybe it's just a contribution of being present and loving one another. Who can say? I don't know. Ramana never really did anything. He never left his cave or his ashram, but he's contributed to all of our lives immensely. So I don't have a format for what anybody, including myself, should be doing. But I know that it has to begin with some willingness to open to what's here. And it's very good right now even though things have happened. The election, the racism in our country, the horror of human trafficking that's happening in our country as well as every other place in the world, the starvation, the poverty, but to be able to open to that, to open to that and bring your life without cowering from what's called and what's called for is for you to be fully present. And for that, you have to stop thinking about yourself so much.

[14:32] HILLARY: Can we take that from the relative, starting at the relative then?

[14:36] GANGAJI: Oh! That's what the world is. It's all relative then.

[14:41] HILLARY: So, when you said it's important to tell the truth, there might be those of you who are listening right now, the first thing that came up, and I'm just using this as an example, the truth is that racism is wrong and I need to stand up to it and disagree with it. That may not be someone else's truth. It was telling the truth for me.

[15:03] GANGAJI: Yes.

[15:04] HILLARY: But if I stop there, I'm mad at the people that are racist.

[15:09] GANGAJI: Well, that's actually the beginning point of your inquiry potentially though. Racism is wrong and I want to stand up to that. But when you recognize racism is wrong and yet racism is here, can you open to that? And even can you recognize even then, even good people can be racist. Many good people are racist. Maybe you've known some that are racist. I certainly have. And in that then our world is actually more – it's interesting. It's simpler in the recognition of the complexity that's present. We don't have to simplify it because that becomes very complicated. Racism is wrong. If you're racist, then I'm angry with you and I want to fight with you. Racism is wrong and I may feel anger. I may feel despair. I may feel sadness or happiness if it's defeated. But there's also something more, something bigger. And then, there's a lot that's wrong. Racism is not the only thing that's wrong – and there's a lot that's right in spite of racism. There is a human spirit that's quite extraordinary that can be found in racists and non-racists.

[16:33] HILLARY: That was beautiful.

[16:35] GANGAJI: Mm-mm.

[16:37] HILLARY: You know we did the show on the election. We called the show “Blindsided.” Boy, we got more response from that than we have any episode. And I have to say, all the letters we’ve gotten in and that you’ve gotten specifically, they’ve just been so beautiful And people have questions for you and they’re grateful for what you present here and what you’re offering here. But there were some angry letters that came through that one and that was a little, that was new for me – and angry people. And there were people that were – I mean I’m talking about like seven. But there were people, if you really loved Trump, that show was probably not going to (she laughs) be the best episode for you to listen to. So one of the comments that came across, it was from a woman who said, Gangaji’s like my safe zone. She wanted you to be neutral.

[17:37] GANGAJI: Mm.

[17:38] HILLARY: Like a spiritual teacher should be neutral. I understood what she was saying but that has to do with kind of the bubble of being a spiritual teacher and the bubble of being somebody who’s listening to a spiritual teacher perhaps.

[17:51] GANGAJI: Well, I’m not interested in being safe anyway, for anybody, myself or anybody else. People have often criticized me for being a person (laughs) rather than some cardboard cutout who they think I should be as we do. We tend to want our dolls lined up with the roles we have assigned them. And so, I don’t have any problem with people getting agitated. People have walked out of Satsangs because I either pushed them too much or didn’t push them enough. You know people walked out on Satsangs in the beginning because I wasn’t Indian. I had an Indian name. They expected an Indian teacher and there I was this Western woman and they were furious. And so, it’s the way the world operates. And in that sense, that didn’t do anything to dampen our willingness to have a conversation regardless of what people say. You know when Papaji said to me “if God himself comes down and tells you, you are not the Self. Then you turn your back on God.” And that’s the essence of this teaching. That you question, you profoundly question this notion of authority – primarily, your own egoic notion of authority, but also how that gets projected out into other. So that you definitely know you can make mistakes and be wrong and you discover that in all kinds of different ways. But that you are free to discover it by telling the truth as you see it in any, in any particular time.

[19:32] HILLARY: There’s another point I want to make about the election and it, I’m bringing up the election, but it can be anything. It can be a death. It can be an illness. It can be a ...

[19:44] GANGAJI: Shock.

[19:49] HILLARY: ... loss of finances. Whatever! It could be actually a spiritual teacher that you just happen to turn on YouTube and you see the person and you hear somebody saying exactly what you need to hear that just wakes you up.

[19:57] GANGAJI: Mm.

[19:58] HILLARY: And it kind of cracks this sense of complacency which I think is the upside of this. And what I would say is the people I know, the people I know are beautiful, responsible people. They care about the planet. They care what happens to other people. But like me, they

might not be involved in politics. They're more observing. And I swear every single one of them is like "I want to do something." It's almost like if you get a diagnosis and all of the sudden it's like "Wow! I have to change my diet!" Like, I have to do something. And it's a beautiful and inspiring thing to witness.

[20:39] GANGAJI: It is beautiful. Yeah, and I think in spiritual circles that idea "I want to do something" is really assumed to be negative ego. But it's a bodhisattva thought. It's a bodhisattva intention. You want all being to be happy. And you recognize, we have to recognize that it's our complacency and our absorption in our own bubbles that keeps us from supporting all being being happy.

[21:09] HILLARY: When we recorded "Blindsided" what we didn't include in that was our sound check. And what we were talking about in our sound check was, it was an article I had read that somebody from the radio team, Matt from the radio team, had posted about somebody talking about what it's like to grow up in a red state. Because as a liberal, I can easily go, I'll just listen to my people. Like, I want to hear from my people. But what you and I were talking about was before that we actually started the recording was like this ability and willingness to reach out, break through our own bubble to somebody else's bubble

[21:48] GANGAJI: Mmmm.

[21:49] HILLARY: And how are we going to resolve this unless we're willing to do that. It's like, why did you make that decision? What do I need to know about you? Maybe, there's something in you that's exactly the same as me.

[22:04] GANGAJI: Yes. Dialogue. Meeting. And yeah, that's the challenge, because it's very normal to get into tribal groupings, and go to war. We see that continually throughout history. And we know that in our own impulses, they're wrong. But to be willing to, to not indulge that initial impulse "they're wrong" even though you can obviously continue to say, I disagree completely with their conclusion. But you, we, can all be open to at least listen. And then listening to our bodies is no different from listening to our neighbors or people in different political categories. We can actually listen.

[22:57] HILLARY: That's such an interesting comparison. That really brings it home, doesn't it?

[23:02] GANGAJI: Yeah. And it's one's self....listening to itself.

[23:08] HILLARY: I just want to read a couple statements here from Kriya and Michael. Kriya says, "I reckon I go in and out of my own bubble of me multiple times in the day cuz if I don't have that bubble I imagine I would be totally overwhelmed by all the insanity that's going on in the world." Whereas Michael says, "My issue is that I tend to get sucked into the world and I wish I could put myself into a bubble in respite." And so that I think that they're kind of saying the same thing but.

[23:39] GANGAJI: Well, it's some belief in this idea of me rather than trusting into the Truth of myself. So I know that there are times when we all need to retreat from the news or the headlines or the people in the next room. We just need to retreat. But I wouldn't call that a

bubble. I would call that a retreat. And it's...you can trust what's discovered in that retreat and then you, you listen. You know you take care of your nervous system as it's needed. But we don't need a cosmology based on our particular nervous systems. It's, it's simpler than that. And in that simplicity, retreating when you need to retreat then the complexity of the world can be met.

[24:30] HILLARY: Mm. I wanted to share with everyone something that I learned this year that – I'm bringing it up because of what you just said. So, (Hillary pauses, chokes up) I'm surprised. So, my mom and dad both passed away this year. (with emotion) And it was quite unexpected. And...if someone would have told me a year ago, "Here's the deal. Here's what's going to down. Your dad's going to get sick and die really quickly. And then months later, your mom's going to get diagnosed and she'll die three months later." I would have gone, NO! Like, that can't happen. Because first of all, my dad was the one taking care of my mom to a large degree and the scenario would have just felt overwhelming to me, just the thought of it. But, those things did happen. And...in every moment of every hard thing happening, of everything I didn't want to have happen, I just said yes! And I felt sad sometimes. And I felt scared sometimes. But I almost always felt grateful. And so, my mom passed away in October. What I have shared with people is that what I learned from the worst that I could think of was losing my parents – that was going to happen someday – but in the way that it did, was that Life is trustworthy.

[26:05] GANGAJI: Mm-mm.

[26:07] HILLARY: Like, everything happened in a way that was bigger than I could have thought of and I could have planned. And I always got what I needed. So my bubble of me broke.

[26:24] GANGAJI: And you didn't break.

[26:26] HILLARY: Mm, mm.

[26:27] GANGAJI: So, you are trustworthy.

[26:28] HILLARY: Well, actually, I did break. I broke open. Bigger than, bigger than I ever thought I would.

[26:33] GANGAJI: So then you're really trustworthy.

[26:36] HILLARY: Ah...

[26:37] GANGAJI: And in that, then you aren't separate from life.

[26:42] HILLARY: Mm.

[26:43] GANGAJI: But you thought you were before you actually were faced to it. This is, this is the proof, Hillary. Everything you just said. This is the proof of living a life as it comes, rather than what we think can come or cannot come.

[27:05] HILLARY: Yeah. And I think about that because I, I get scared about the future, too, with everything that's happening right now. And I think to myself, whoa, did you just forget your lesson? That's the biggest lesson that I maybe ever had in my life, that Life is trustworthy. And if I think forward in my mind of the possibilities of what could happen? It's true suffering. But when I remember how trustworthy life is, life is full of gratitude

[27:34] GANGAJI: Yeah. And in that, I don't see anything wrong with fear or sadness or anger or whatever may appear. That's a part of life. It's not separate from life. It's not the totality of Life. But it's a part of Life. Life is more than anger or fear or sadness. But sadness is filled with life.

[28:03] HILLARY: What else also seems really clear to me is that...there just seems like there's something **so big** that orchestrates everything. And whatever that thing is or that force or ... I don't know what to call it. Some people would call it consciousness or God or whatever. But what's really clear to me too is that that. that thing is bigger than whatever person we're afraid of, whatever threat it is that we have in our life whether it's the form of a politician or whatever feels threatening to us. It's so clear that that's bigger.

[28:45] GANGAJI: You know horrible things happen. And I don't ever want to deny that. And I don't know that Life has any problem with horrible things happening because they have happened throughout the history that we know of and the history we uncover. And without diminishing the horror we can say, Life is always here. And in that sense, it is trustworthy, even if it means the end of our planet. It may. That Life, and I don't mean life-form as we identify ourselves as life, our cats as life or, the polar bear as life, but the life that gives rise to us and our cats and our polar bears and our planet, that is, that's **big**. That's really big. And in that, we are essentially insignificant, really. And if we can recognize that, then the bubble of me-ism is burst and there's a wonder, and not a child's wonder, but really an adult's wonder. Knowing the horrible things that can happen to me and to those I love and yet still, Life is here.

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[30:25] HILLARY: We're running over this time so I'm going to keep this short. Please feel free to venture over to the website [gangaji.org](http://gangaji.org) for more Gangaji Radio. You can also find other programs like Gangaji's Monthly Webcast and the video library. There's also Gangaji's Event Schedule. So, all of that is on the website. Next month we're looking at Karma and Choice. Are our lives predestined? Is there really such a thing as choice? In the meantime, we're glad to have you here with us. I'm Hillary Larson. This has been *A Conversation with Gangaji*. We'll see you next time.