

[Gangaji Radio](#)
A Conversation With Gangaji Series
Host Hillary Larson
Episode 54
MAKING PEACE WITH THE BODY
Released on June 21, 2017

[00:00] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:10] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: Being in a body – such an incredible thing. It's our unique gateway into experiencing sound and touch and seeing beautiful things – having relationships with each other. But in times of pain or challenging emotions, being in a body can seem like a burden, like a sentence of some sort. If we could just fix it, if it would just look the way we wanted it to, then maybe we would be liberated, we would be fulfilled. But that begs the question: do we ask too much of these bodies of ours?

[00:43] GANGAJI: Looking for or hoping that the body will not betray you, or the body will be reliable and give you freedom. When you stop that then this duality stops. And you can really inquire into yourself whether you call yourself a body or, or space. You inquire, what is here? What is always here?

[01:06] HILLARY: Is being in a body an existential crisis or a vehicle for deeper inquiry? Making Peace With The Body. I'm Hillary Larson and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

[01:24] HILLARY: So for some reason I was in the mood to do *A Conversation With Gangaji* on the body.

[01:31] GANGAJI: Mm-mm.

[01:32] HILLARY: Our very first episode was on chronic pain. And that's a particular conversation about the body. We've spoken about anxiety. That's another particular conversation. But I really want to talk with you about different aspects of identification when it comes to the body. I think that at different moments in life, different moments in the day, being in a body can be a beautiful, glorious thing. And then there are times where it can feel like prison. So we'll try to fit this into thirty minutes, but, but let's see how it goes.

[02:12] GANGAJI: Yeah, the body – really, the study of the body and the recognition of the, of the body's variety and mystery is what first turned me to searching. When I, I look at it, I mean I was unhappy and I wanted to be happy, so there was that. But I was really unhappy in my skin because the body *is* our location of identity. So I knew myself first of all as a form, as sensory experience, and my emotions were really tied into that. But it was a, an emotional, painful experience. It was translated into physical pain. So there was no separation in the emotional body, emotional field, and the physical body. And, I really think of it that way. I think of it as a trinity: the mental body, thoughts, cognition, imagination; and a sensory physical body; and the emotional body, the, the ocean of emotions. So in my adult life I was really hoping that

correcting the course of the body and the habits, the negative habits that get located in the body and the unconscious directions of the body would give me freedom. That's what I was hoping for and I put everything into that. And I tasted freedom and my body got better and it was a much better situation. And I studied the body, anatomy, physiology, and practiced acupuncture and went to all kinds of bodywork, and I always want to say it was so valuable. I still get bodywork. I still am very interested in the body. It's an interesting world. But it cannot...the location of yourself in the body can never give you the freedom that you're really yearning for. It's discovering yourself as what the body is *in* – as the animating principle itself that all bodies are in, all form, all life form. Then you discover true freedom.

[04:36] HILLARY: It sounds to me like what you're describing is an existential crisis of an awareness that I'm really being in a body doesn't feel like a natural state.

[04:49] GANGAJI: It was scary, you know. I don't know how much our, our early childhood dictates all of this. But when I was a young girl my very vibrant cousin who was twelve years old, and I was ten, got polio and spent the next fifty years in an iron lung. And... there was a terror that struck through me in that so that I became preoccupied with the fragility of the body and the... not death, so much as paralysis or not being able to move again. I mean my cousin was the most active one of us all and maybe the healthiest, and somehow she got polio. So, I think I was afraid of the body. And I definitely felt myself as *being* the body, because we are. The body's not separate from our being. It has no existence other than our being. But...yes, it is an existential crisis because it's a, a limit on our identity and it's out of our control. I mean, what we can control, wonderful control, and you benefit from that. But there's so much that's out of our control like different viruses. You know, different everything really, that life and death, really, are finally out of our control. So yeah, it's, it was shaking me up. And I got busy. I got busy trying to find the answer.

[06:30] HILLARY: It seems like it makes sense to search through the body, right, for some of us. Because I think I told you this in the episode on anxiety is that I spent, gosh, I wasn't really familiar with a, an intense level of anxiety until I was eighteen and I was in a car accident. And then I studied the body and anxiety. And what I did was I spent a fortune, what I've referred to as chasing body parts.

[07:00] GANGAJI: Mm-mm. That's so great. Chasing symptoms in the body.

[07:02] HILLARY: And it...Yeah, because it seemed like it was "whack-a-mole" like I'd, I'd resolve something, but then two days later, there would be a twitch or, (*laughs*) or something. And to tell you the truth, in hindsight, or actually towards the end of that, I could see that I was addicted to that. I was addicted to that process of trying to solve that problem.

[07:24] GANGAJI: Yeah. Me, too. I mean I, I definitely can see hypochondria is a really, a strong part of the way this animal is made or was conditioned to be formed. And, and that's like a, a vigilance to whatever could be going wrong. And, and then, really an alarmist about what that could then therefore mean. So I would get the flu and be certain I was dying. That that was it – which adds to the suffering. And while that pattern is definitely still there, I mean just in terms of the, the way this life form is made. When, when you're willing to...okay, well, maybe I am gonna

die right now. Maybe this really is it, and to, to stop trying to whack that mole back into the hole. Just to let it be. Then, then it serves, too, like everything.

[08:22] HILLARY: And it seems to me, too, my experience was that I tended to react so quickly to something happening in my body then I would immediately try to do something about it. When I literally hit bottom, I literally just burned myself out. I was exhausted by my process. I've discovered in a humble way that almost everything I experienced just came and went. (*They both chuckle.*)

[08:49] GANGAJI: Beautiful! Isn't it beautiful to discover that?

[08:53] HILLARY: Yeah.

[08:54] GANGAJI: Yeah. Everything.

[08:56] HILLARY: And, and in that was the trust, right?

[08:59] GANGAJI: Yes. Well, health comes and goes. And disease comes and goes. And birth comes and goes. And death comes and goes.

[09:08] HILLARY: I wanted to talk about the incredible aspects of being in a body. And I...

[09:14] GANGAJI: Mm-mm.

[09:15] HILLARY: ... and I definitely wanna get to that. But I wanna address some questions here that are...you know they're...I don't know if I would call them life or death, but they're, these obviously are really serious questions, or statements. Elana says, 'I feel shackled by my body, not only the chronic pain I have, the physical and mental addictions I've had with alcohol and food, too. I have a feeling of betrayal by my body, around early sexual abuse...' So you can see there that you can't just say nice things, spiritual things and that goes away.

[09:54] GANGAJI: Yeah, things, we have wounds. We have old wounds. But always the key is the identity. So, if you are betrayed by your body, then in a sense you have been relying on your body to not betray you, to save you. And so this sense of betrayal is that the body somehow is fallible – is subject to mistakes. And we feel betrayed by that. But if, if we just switch it so that we are not *in* our bodies, but in fact our bodies are in *us*, then the, the birth and the death of the body are events that are happening in us, in life, in life as a whole. And that's...then you aren't betrayed because you are bigger than the body. I'm not suggesting that you are separate from the body...or that the body is in any way anything just to be dismissed. But, as long as you identify yourself as located inside a body, rather than the body is located inside this mystery of truth and life, yeah, you will be betrayed because the body can't match that identity. It's not big enough.

[11:27] HILLARY: Hm. (*Both chuckle softly.*) I think that it takes a certain amount of courage to inquire into or even to just tell the truth about the existential. Or maybe we don't even need to call it existential any more, despair around being in the body. And I actually happened to speak to somebody just a few hours before we sat down. And it was such a lovely conversation with

somebody. His name is John and he was talking about some trouble he was having with his body. And he was saying to me, and I asked him if I could share this with everybody, he said it was fine, was that he is at a point in his life where he has, he's around people he loves, but he doesn't have a partner. So his question was, why, there was this deeper, braver inquiry about why do I even bother to take care of myself? And I think it's the deeper question of why am I even here?

[12:33] GANGAJI: Well, if you love yourself that's not a question at all. It's quite natural to take care of yourself. You take care of what you love and you attend to what you love. And in fact, it's natural to love yourself. It only has to get thwarted in some way through some conditioning, or some fear, or some identity with yourself as limited to the flesh or to the, the mistakes or the dysfunction of a body. And then, there arises some hope that a relationship or a guru or a savior of some form will save you from yourself. But that'll never happen. You have to stop and face yourself. And if you face yourself all the way, as dysfunctional and limited as you may be in form, you will find love. And you love yourself and you love your body. And you want to tend yourself. It's natural. It's not obsessive. You know the obsessive tending, which I, we touched on I think, comes from hoping that the body will actually give you the love that you're searching for. But if you're coming from that love, it's quite natural to, to take care of whatever is in front of you.

[13:54] HILLARY: So I guess that that means that if the initial answer is, oh, I don't love myself in this body...

[14:04] GANGAJI: Well, are you saying, I don't love myself in this body or I don't love myself?

[14:09] HILLARY: Well, I can't speak for him, so...

[14:10] GANGAJI: Mm-mm. Well, so...try it on!

[14:13] HILLARY: Ok... oh, wow. There are times for me when I definitely think I don't want to be here in this body.

[14:25] GANGAJI: So, it's the body that's wrong? That's betrayed you? Or, or it's come up short in some way?

[14:33] HILLARY: I don't feel like this very often.

[14:35] GANGAJI: Uh-huh.

[14:36] HILLARY: I used to feel like it a lot. But I would feel like being in a body to a certain degree seemed like a bit of a trick. Like being in some sort of prison.

[14:48] GANGAJI: Yes. And I, I think that that's really many people's experience. And, and especially if the body is malfunctioning – because we can't just say the magic word and have it stop. We can't say, well, open the prison door now. That's what's so profound to me in dealing with prisoners, working with prisoners, is they're in a physical prison, besides being in whatever prison that they have in their bodies or their minds. So then what? That's the point of inquiry. So

you're experiencing your body as a prison. If you don't change that experience, if you don't talk yourself out of that experience, you don't rationalize yourself out of that into some idealization of totality of perfection that's free of all form, but rather experience what it means to be completely imprisoned, you stop fighting the imprisonment. You open to the despair, if that's there, or the fear, or the grief at being imprisoned in this body, in this form, in pain or lack of relationship. However it may show itself. That's what inquiry can really serve. That's meeting death. Death is not always meeting just the end. It can mean the death of what I thought I would have. Or the death of what I think I should be experiencing now. Or the death of some idealization. So in the willingness to just stop and be completely alone, be completely limited in form, and to not fix that, but to open to that, then, you are inquiring into what is here.

[16:46] HILLARY: Off and on over the last three or four weeks, I've kind of jotted some ideas for this topic. And, and then, as a separate thing, for some reason, I don't know what it was, two or three weeks ago I start getting these headaches – and they were, and I'm not prone to headaches. And they weren't debilitating, but they certainly changed my perspective of my life, you know from...my body's always doing something! (*Laughs*) But I've kind of learned to live with that. But this was like, oh, gosh I'm having a hard time focusing at work. And I was having a bit of hard time, you know, driving, just focusing. And life didn't feel spacious to me. So one morning I was looking at my Facebook feed and I happened to see a clip of you that was put up on Gangaji Community and it was like, probably like all of you sitting here or some of you sitting here or most of you sitting here. There's a ... sometimes you just run across a Gangaji clip and it's just like oh wow, perfect timing! And I wanted to use it as an experiment for all of us.

(Clip)

[17:56] GANGAJI: So if you ask yourself this question now, what is here? And just for a moment you close your eyes again. It's the same as what are you aware of? What is here? You may be aware of physical sensations. You may be aware of emotional sensations. You may be aware of sounds, the room. You may be aware of just some unnamable energy. But do you see that simply by asking the question, there's already more peace? And then as you open your eyes, there is a peaceful alertness that's capable of discovering what is here in terms of monitoring for your well-being. And also the deeper, the discovery that brings us together. The true discovery: what is always here and who are you.

(End clip)

[19:19] GANGAJI: That's it, really.

[19:23] HILLARY: You know what I liked most about that clip? That was from a, a monologue from a recent *With Gangaji* webcast you did. And I have to admit sometimes, I still have it in my mind that my awakening should be something dramatic. And in listening to something like that, I'm reminded that it's ... it can be a subtle moment.

[19:48] GANGAJI: Oh, it's, it's indefinable by any terms of... really, of either drama or subtlety. It's out of the realm of classification. That's why, to discover it in a moment where you feel imprisoned, to discover this, this spaciousness that you have discovered in a moment of feeling spacious. To discover that spaciousness in a moment of confinement or imprisonment, then,

that is dramatic. That's life-changing. And yet, it's also just - you can't even grasp it! Because the moment you grasp it you're trying to keep it and make it yours and it's free of that. You are free of ownership.

[20:39] HILLARY: Is that little bit of spaciousness enough?

[20:42] GANGAJI: Is it? You have to... I, I wouldn't call it a little bit of spaciousness myself. I haven't found the bottom of it, or the boundaries of it, or the top of it. So if we're gonna use a term for it, I would call it immeasurable spaciousness. Maybe it's perceived initially as little. But if we just go, oh it's little, if then, it becomes in our minds small. It may be experienced as small but if you dive into it to actually discover is there a bottom here? How big is this, really? In inquiry, not from outside it, but really in the depths of it, diving into it.

[21:32] HILLARY: It, yeah. 'Cause you can see that it's the, the next thought that interrupts the possibility of experiencing more and more and more spaciousness.

[21:43] GANGAJI: Yes!

[21:44] HILLARY: 'Cause the thought is, whoa, is, is that it?

[21:47] GANGAJI: Well, I got that. That, okay, yeah, I have spaciousness, now let's see but there's some...it's not enough or it's not big enough or whatever. We begin the discussion again. That's our tragedy as human beings. But we can be aware of beginning the discussion and we can stop. We can dive back in.

[22:10] HILLARY: I promised that I would, wanted to balance out this conversation with the beauty (*Gangaji: Mm-mm.*) of being in the body. And that the body is potentially a door to liberation. And I was listening to a fascinating interview about a month ago. And it was a psychiatrist that was talking about, and I think I've heard you reference this before too, he was talking about how when dealing with trauma, the memories that people have are very unpredictable and changing. But, it's the body that will tell the truth. (*Gangaji: Mm-mm.*) And isn't that something?

[22:48] GANGAJI: It's amazing. It's because it's not as subtle as our memories. (*Laughs.*) It's earthier. It's more etched in the, even if it's sand, it's, it's less subtle than the clouds. I **love** the body, and I know that our bodies can be vehicles for great pleasure, bliss, as well as for pain. And, but even the vehicle of pain can reveal a, a subtle bliss within the bliss, a peace. So that's all through experience of the body. Without this form, this form of experience, this vehicle, we couldn't even be having this conversation about spaciousness. It's, so the body, yes, let us celebrate the body and not short-change the body and, and actually use the body as the, the jumping off, or rather the jumping in point of our deepest inquiry. I really support everyone in loving their bodies and taking care of their bodies and, and loving their bodies as aspects of themselves rather than as the prison for them or the encapsulation. Because if you examine, you know, a square inch on the body with a microscope, an electron microscope, you see space. It's space and some... mostly space, and then a little flickering of something on and then off. It's the cosmos. So the body is, is both everything and nothing. Both dense and form and earthbound and spacious ... free. So it's really our dualistic tendencies to make **ME** imprisoned

in the body, or **ME** free of the body that, which is the way our minds work. Our minds work in polarity. But if we can recognize that and, and see, is there a separation? Then the body, the, the mind, mental body and the emotional body and the physical sensory body all get to taste this same I am-ness.

[25:18] HILLARY: As I, sitting here listening to you talk, I was thinking about how we began this conversation of you talking about how you viewed the body as something dangerous (Gangaji: Mm.) and that that potential of something so fundamental shifting in a lifetime is miraculous.

[25:38] GANGAJI: Well, you know, I think, I, well ...it's like most of us. I was relying on my body to give me everything. And I realized the body is unreliable. I realized that disease can be stronger than the body or just tendencies of the body...and that was such a shock to me. I ... it took me decades after that to even begin to unravel that. And I think in a cellular way it's not unraveled. It's still an aspect of this body, a kind of hysteria or alarmist or hypochondriac or whatever, however we want to classify it. But when the, when you shift from looking for or hoping that the body will not betray you or the body will be reliable and give you freedom, when you stop that, then this duality that I was speaking of stops. And you can really inquire into yourself whether you call yourself a body or, or space. You inquire, what is here? What is always here? And it's not that the body doesn't participate in this inquiry. You have to have the wherewithal and the presence of mind to inquire. The, the mind, the brain is a part of the body and... and it benefits from it. I mean the bliss that we're talking about, the spaciousness, the peace, that's felt in a sensory sense ... and, the thrill! And if you're not feeling that because you're not in relationship - or you're not feeling that because you have some big issues of chronic pain or disease, then you have an opportunity to, to not *look* for that *outside* what is here right now. So *inside* the depths of that pain, not when you're, when you're free of that pain or if you could be free of that pain, or why aren't you free of that pain, but in the *depths* of that. Then pain itself can serve. And for, for John speaking about the relationship then being absolutely alone *finally* serves. Just as I got a letter from a prisoner today who had to tell the truth, you know. When he stops thinking of time as his *doing* time, *serving* time, as this linear thing that he's counting off, checking the days, when he stops that, when he doesn't participate in that trance of suffering, time is nothing. It's, it's beautiful. He's here. He's present.

[28:35] HILLARY: When I'm driving home sometimes, when I go over a certain hill, there's a view of the, the mountain range way off in the distance in western Oregon. And, for whatever reason, it's sublime. (Gangaji: Mm.) It's just the most beautiful sight. And I think about that: I stop and kind of marvel at eyes that can see that. And when I hear the sound of a cello it feels like it rearranges my cells. So I know that it's, it's the job of the mind to look at what's wrong. But, I felt like it was really appropriate for us to finish this conversation with all that is right.

[29:21] GANGAJI: Yes, and it's not necessarily the main job of the mind to find what's wrong. It's one of its jobs. We make it the main job. It can just be one little thing, one little checking. The main job of the mind can be to really inquire into itself – as mountain range, as limited form, as spaciousness of being. Without the mind how do we even inquire?

[30:05] HILLARY: Thanks for joining us for this episode of *A Conversation With Gangaji*. Last month we released a new *Epiphany* episode. "The Last Hustle" is what it was called. The subtitle was One Man's Journey from Impossible Darkness to Unthinkable Light. If you love hearing aha moment-type stories, you'll love this one. Kenny Johnson's connection with Gangaji, it's, well, it's something, it's an amazing story. You can catch all episodes of *A Conversation With Gangaji* and *Epiphany* by subscribing to iTunes. I haven't mentioned that in a long time. You can find Gangaji Radio and lots of other ways to connect with Gangaji on the Gangaji website gangaji.org. It is generous donations to Gangaji Radio that keep these programs moving out in the world. If you'd like to help us, we would love that. Just click on the donate button that's on the website. I'm Hillary Larson. This has been *A Conversation With Gangaji*. We'll see you next time. Take care everybody.