

[Gangaji Radio](#)

A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 55

WILLING TO LOSE

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[00:00] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:08] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: Gangaji has always said that inquiry isn't theoretical, it's about real life. We've talked about that many times on this show, and this episode is a perfect example of that. Many of you have heard that Gangaji experienced a serious leg injury recently, and she's gonna give us an update on that, but we are also gonna take this opportunity to continue our conversation on the body. Difficult things happen to people, no matter what their level of awareness, so how does that play out with someone like Gangaji?

[00:43] GANGAJI: I really don't want to create the impression that I'm like happy with whatever happens, I'm not, I, I don't think it's necessary to be. There are things I like, things I don't like. But deeper than that, there's this truth of what is.

[01:02] HILLARY: Sometimes when bad things happen, it triggers our fear of losing. Sometimes just every-day life brings that up. It's a lot to look at. So, here we go. I'm Hillary Larson. This is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

[01:16] MUSIC

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[01:25] HILLARY: This is a little bit of a different episode of *A Conversation With Gangaji*. I had my intention of doing an episode called 'Willing To Lose' and ironically, just last month, a month before last, we did an episode on the body, and right after we did the episode on the body, you were in Berlin, and you were doing a, about ready to start a retreat, and you fell. And it sent a bit of a shock wave through the community of people who know you. And, I would love it if we could give everybody an update, who are sitting there wondering how you are, and what happened, and...

[02:05] GANGAJI: Yeah, I appreciate that. And I really felt the good wishes from so many people and yeah, I, I fractured my leg (chuckles). And I was in a place where I got really good care and I'm feeling the results of that good care. I'm, I'm not in pain, I have never been in pain with this, which is quite lucky and, I don't take any credit for that but I really appreciate that. And I'm just waiting for it to heal. I'm just now able to put some weight on that leg, when I walk with crutches, and just being good with it.

[02:45] HILLARY: As I received news of you falling, and just as somebody who really loves and cares for another person, there's certain natural emotions that come up, and I certainly feel like I shared those emotions with lots and lots of people all over the world. And I wanna talk about

loss, but first I wanna talk about the body, because we were gonna do, actually maybe, a follow up to the show on the body and look, here we are (chuckles).

[03:09] GANGAJI: Mmm.

[03:10] HILLARY: So, there was something that you said in our last show, and sometimes you'll say something to me and I will, it will be such a mind bend for me. I actually don't even fully absorb till I go to edit the show, and there was one thing that you said and it, in that show, and it was, 'you are not in the body, the body is in you'.

[03:32] GANGAJI: Mmm, that was right at the end. Well that's really the point you know, that's the, that's the result of inquiry, if you're willing to, to look deeper than your experience as a body. Because we have that, we are identified as bodies, without making that experience as a body wrong or bad or something to transcend, but just willing to look deeper. I mean, who are you? Are you this body? Are you this body that can be injured? Are you this body that can lose limbs, or functions, and are you diminished when the body loses? And most of us have at least some experience of the body losing health at certain times, or function, or capabilities, and it's, it's a challenge. And so the possibility is that that challenge actually drives you deeper into discovering what the body appears and disappears in. Same as what thoughts, thought bodies appear and disappear in. Same as the emotional bodies that appear and disappear. But the physical body is where our biggest identity really is, because we are hardwired that way. So it's a, there it is, it's, it's made to finally destruct. And so the fact of that is horrifying to our identity, but enlightening when we actually are willing to meet that horror. This is, this has always been what this teaching is about, from Ramana, who dies, what dies, what remains.

[05:26] HILLARY: Now this potentially could be humbling for me (chuckles). Setting myself up for something here. A year and a half ago I really put my back out badly. And, I got good help, but there was a way that people were having trouble putting it back in again. And so it wasn't just a thing, I'd thrown it out before, and you know I'd get a treatment, and the next day I'm fine. It was like, one week, two weeks, three weeks, and there's a way, with pain, that time kind of collapses in on itself and it was really, gosh, the thought of like, is this gonna be the way I am? It's so natural for that to come up. And I'm wondering, in the midst of what you went through, do those thoughts come up for you?

[06:09] GANGAJI: Well yeah, I mean, I'm a human being, and this human being, the human being-ness is identified as this particular human being-ness. And I was in a hospital and there were lots of people in different degrees of distress, and some were in accompanying emotional distress with that, and some weren't. And I realized that the, the line that separates surrender and opening to whatever is happening in this moment and attempting to fight what really is out of your hands in that particular moment, like when your back is out or when this injury happens or any number of things, when there's a virus moving through your body or you stub your toe. It's already happened, and so the, the tendency to like make it not have happened (chuckles) is some kind of magical thinking that I think comes with humans, as a maybe a strategy of just dealing with it. But the possibility is to not go there. You know, just to, just to open. And of course it's more difficult when there's pain, but it doesn't mean it's, it's not, you can't do it when it's pain. Pain becomes then where you go, right into the middle of it, whatever degree of that pain is. And I fully support you, you getting help for pain, I'm certainly not saying you need to be Spartan

about your pain. But sometimes you can't help the pain, it's a, and we know there are different, lots of different kinds of pain, and... So even discomfort, say, if we start with discomfort, and we go to extreme pain, eight, nine, ten, pain, there is still an opportunity for you to discover what is intact, what is free, what is already free of the pain – very different from you getting free of the pain – because then you really instill a struggle with the pain. But discovering what in this moment, and the veiling between the resistance and the surrender is, I mean it's insubstantial, but it's so insubstantial that it's not even a step from one to the other. It's, it's just opening. It's really what do you want. And I, I know someone who's quite ill right now and really resisting it enormously. The pain hasn't even arisen, but this person is resisting it, and, and won't even entertain a, like a question, 'what do you want?' You know, I want this not to be here. I want this to go away. I want my life back. I want my body back. And those are fantasies. This is what is here.

[09:10] HILLARY: So can I ask you about the, I don't want to be glib, so, when, when I hear you say you're not in the body, the, the body's in you, I, I have to admit that it, that's not a hundred percent real to me.

[09:29] GANGAJI: Well, where are you looking to find the reality?

[09:33] HILLARY: Well, in sensation.

[09:38] GANGAJI: Uh-huh. So sensation is in the body. Right?

[09:41] HILLARY: Yeah. Yeah, so I feel like I'm looking out of my eyes from inside my body.

[09:48] GANGAJI: But when you close your eyes and you don't have any stimulus?

[09:54] HILLARY: Mmm.

[09:57] GANGAJI: Or when you meditate or when you fall asleep. As you're drifting in to sleep, and you aren't concerned with the actions of the body or the feelings of the body or the thoughts, are you still present?

[10:16] HILLARY: Mm-hmm.

[10:18] GANGAJI: Clearly, right?

[10:21] HILLARY: I think I notice it the most when I'm really into creating something, 'cause I'm not aware.

[10:27] GANGAJI: That's right, but are you absent in that moment?

[10:29] HILLARY: Mm-hm.

[10:30] GANGAJI: Exactly, so that's it, so you do have an experience of it.

[10:33] HILLARY: Hmm-hmm.

[10:34] GANGAJI: Everyone has an experience of it in some way, maybe it's athletically or artistically or just going to sleep or meditatively or just out of the blue, but there are many moments that don't get confirmed in our lives that really show us that we are this, this spaciousness, and let's don't even name it spaciousness or truth or peace, just this mystery of being, that is here. And that can be discovered not, not exclusively in an artistic moment or in an athletic moment or in a moment of pain, but it can be recognized in any moment you have the capacity to stop. And discover what is here that is always here. Not to figure it out, not to be able to describe it, but to directly experience yourself.

[11:39] HILLARY: I wanna ask you a question from – thank you – I wanna ask you a question from Susan, she says, 'How would you describe the difference between how you handled an illness or an injury before Papaji as compared to now?'

[11:53] GANGAJI: (laughs) Well I was, you know it fed into my whole story of, there are many facets to that story, but they all bring you to suffering. And one of the facets was, you know, 'Why me?' Another one is, 'Oh, this always happens to me?' Another one is, 'What did I do to deserve this? What am I missing?' But always something about me in control of everything, which really even denies the word accident, and, and some kind of need to put a bigger template on it so that there's no room for just random chaos in the world. It had to be, there was a fault with this, it was me, let us assume it was my fault, and let's see what I did, what was I thinking, what was I hoping. So I just would use it to spin into a deeper hell of suffering. And of course we all have opportunities for that, because the body is fragile and I, I've talked about it before, I don't know if it was on here, in the radio conversation or in a bigger meeting but, I've talked about I watched a squirrel keep falling off of a branch outside my bedroom window. And it was like, 'Oh, creatures fall, bodies are not perfect in the way that we idealistically imagine them.' And when we recognize that, and we recognize that then they die, we really have an opportunity to, to look deeper than the hope of perfection, of not falling, of not dying. And, and then there is this recognition of mortality and fallibility and imperfection that is the gateway for freedom.

[13:58] HILLARY: So, on a daily basis... like I know you went to the doctor yesterday and you got really good news, that your bone is mending just fine. When a worry comes up of like, uh-oh, like, wonder if the x-ray is not gonna turn out so good.

[14:11] GANGAJI: Mmm, yes.

[14:12] HILLARY: So for you does it, the thought just come up and you see it for what it is, and you let it go?

[14:17] GANGAJI: Well I, you know, I, I'm made a particular way, and I have a deep pessimistic streak: about politics, about bodies, about the climate, you know, whatever it may be. And there's plenty of room for that, it's not like I have to change that, or oh, I have to meet this. I, I don't process myself that way, because it is just a thought, and it is just an emotion, and even the thought, 'oh, now it feels like I *am* healing, I think I *will* get a good report', is also just a thought, you know. It's really, desperately trying to know something that's in the future, before the doctor's visit, or the future in six more weeks, and then just surrendering (laughs) 'cause you

don't know, you can't know, and what else could happen, anything else could happen, *will* happen (laughs).

[15:14] HILLARY: I like when you talk about your, what you refer to as hypochondriac, because it's so beautiful, 'cause it's so human, that's such a human thing, and at the same time like this awareness that you have is so, well, it's what blows people open, right?

[15:30] GANGAJI: Well that's, recognizing the human thing (laughs) is a great spiritual gift of humility. You really cannot idealize yourself when you tell the truth about the very human aspects, and that there's room for that, and that we have them, and squirrels have them, and dogs have them, and higher beings have them. And there's room. So I think that where we get in trouble as spiritual seekers and spiritual conversants is this idealism of a perfection that we should be working toward and that if we don't have it, if we haven't achieved it by our mental terms of what it is, that we are failing, and that we're less than truth, or less than the spaciousness or mystery. And that to me was the exquisite gift that Papaji gave me when he said, "Just stop. Just be still". And he, he wasn't saying 'Stop and *never* go', it's not like stop and don't go to another movie or read another book. Just stop for a moment. Then life is leela, it's a play of consciousness, your own consciousness, which is the totality of everyone else as well. And it plays rough, sometimes. And sweetly, even in the roughness.

[17:12] HILLARY: So many times I've heard you say that there's more and more and more, and Crea had a question for you, she says, 'What has been your deepest learning in relation to fracturing your leg?' Is there something you've learned about yourself, or...?

[17:29] GANGAJI: Life is filled with surprises (laughs). And there's nothing like a fall to surprise you. It's not like we fall intentionally (chuckles). If we do, we call it dancing. But to fall is a surprise. And so it's, a surprise is always something new. So I was profoundly surprised to fall -- in that moment, at that time.

[17:56] HILLARY: Were you surprised at times like that of your own capacity?

[18:01] GANGAJI: Mmm, I've never thought of it like that.

[18:05] HILLARY: Like the, the capacity to open to, *to* surprise.

[18:09] GANGAJI: Well, I was calm, I knew I wasn't suffering. There was some pain at that moment, and, maybe it was shock, I think that does happen for people where you get through what you have to get through and... It's, the thing is, it's all a surprise. So yes, I am surprised. That's the wonder of it all.

[18:33] HILLARY: Yeah, it's so interesting to me as you're talking because I, the same incident could have happened to somebody else and they would, the thought that could come up in their head of like, 'Oh my God, I was in the middle of Europe, I was so far away from home, I was supposed to be giving a retreat, and this thing happened, and now I've got weeks of rehab.' There's an orientation to it.

[18:57] GANGAJI: Well I didn't like it that it happened. You know, I mean, I, I think I even said a curse word. I wasn't happy that it was, that this surprise, initially wasn't happy, but it, here it is! And it did create some logistical problems and issues. But it's out of your hands. I mean certainly it was out of my hands, on the floor, I couldn't get up. So there's a, there's a choice, well I can keep trying to get up, I did make a couple of attempts to get up and it was quite clear this body is not getting up. And I, you know, as I was saying to you, I was surrounded by really beautiful support: the paramedics, the ambulance, the emergency room, the surgeon, the nurses, my roommates, the, so, what a surprise, I never would have known that world. And I don't want to be glib about that or trivialize the, the fact that I *definitely* disliked falling (chuckles). I didn't want it to be a fracture, when we got the news it was a fracture I didn't, at first they told me I would have to be three weeks in the hospital. So when they came back and said he made a mistake and it was actually three, three to four *days*, well, what a good surprise that was! (laughs) You know, I mean what a set-up, what a surprise! So, it's mixed, I, I really don't want to create the, the impression that I'm like, happy, with whatever happens. I, I'm not! I, I don't think it's necessary to be. There are things I like, things I don't like. But deeper than that, there's this truth of what is. (laughs) It has nothing to do with my liking it or disliking it.

[20:46] HILLARY: I think that, first, many shows actually to be honest that we did, I beat the enlightened being thing to death (laughs) but I think it's in times like this that there might be a perception of, of you experiencing pain differently than other people.

[21:06] GANGAJI: You know I, I really always am trying to dispel that illusion that I'm somehow different from you, and we *are* different in our pain thresholds and, maybe I have a high pain threshold – I have had lots of injuries in my life – and maybe I just got lucky, and there was not that much pain to actually challenge me in a way that I would've been fighting it more than I was fighting it. I, I wouldn't say about that, I don't know, how could I know? But I know that this veil, or this illusion of an edge between surrender and resistance is, is really non-existent. In an instant, you can surrender, about anything – you don't have to wait for an accident, you don't have to wait for the edge of pain. Anything that is causing you any degree of emotional, physical or circumstantial pain. Just take a moment and stop fighting it. It doesn't mean you don't go back to fighting it, it may be legitimate and necessary to fight whatever it is. Maybe you're a, a political activist and things need fighting. But you take a moment where you're not identified as the fighter. Where you're identified as the space, where all of its appearing.

[22:37] HILLARY: I'm sitting here looking at the time and I, I really wanna try to mush two shows together so we might go long on this one, because of the opportunity right here to look at real life, and we've talked about the body and the other dimension of that, to me, what arose was the willingness to lose.

[23:00] GANGAJI: Oh yes.

[23:01] HILLARY: And the willingness to lose function in body, what you've hoped to do with your body, all of that. But also I have to say, for those of us in the bleachers that received news of you falling and being injured, I would like to say that I'm evolved enough that (chuckles) I could just say oh, like I, I could, whatever happens happens, and I could let go of that. But I, I'm also very attached to you and your form, and I love you, and lots of people feel that way about you. And it stirred something in me.

[23:34] GANGAJI: I, I, I love that. We, we are attached to what we love. And there's nothing wrong with that. So the willingness, when I say the willingness to lose, maybe I need to clarify that. It doesn't mean that we should, or will, have this sense of 'Oh, okay, all gone'. That's kind of the happiness to lose. So I don't mean willingness like that. I mean there can be huge resistance: *no*, this should *not* happen, I don't *want* this to happen. Go back. It's the recognizing of that 'no' is appearing in a field of inherent willingness to face whatever has to be faced. And I really wanna make the distinction between happy and willingness. Willingness is a mature truth-telling: 'I don't want this, I hate this, this doesn't feel good.' And that truth-telling is like 'yes, that's so, that's so, that's so.' And then there's a deeper possibility. I remember when Papaji died, twenty years ago, this, next month. I felt a deep ache and a pain. And I know there were some people who felt ecstatic. And then I, I felt an expansion and a, you know, everything, all kinds of things. But I would never deny this grief I felt at losing his form. I mean later I would recognize that his death was actually as big a gift to me as meeting him, because they both proved the same truth, that what is always here, is here now.

[25:24] HILLARY: It's almost like, I'm not so sure human beings care for change that much.

[25:28] GANGAJI: (laughs) No! We certainly don't!

[25:30] HILLARY: (laughs) So, even driving, even driving here to do our interviews I, I often pull up and I see your car out front. And when I'm in here working, you know, I kind of see you coming and going. And, and I didn't like that change, that that wasn't happening this time, I was just was watching myself feel sentimental to a certain degree, but...

[25:51] GANGAJI: Well some changes aren't likable. Can, are we willing to not like things without using that as a, a rationalization for suffering unnecessarily? If we just can fully not like something, then we don't need the story of why it shouldn't be the way it is, or what it means the way it is. We can just experience, 'I don't like this. I don't want this.' And then, there's space, and there's, yes, any, any judgment, or any feeling can appear. And it disappears.

[26:26] HILLARY: You know what's so amazing to me about that is, that all the things that I've anticipated in my life, you know, the big ones, the experience of it was never even really close to what I was imagining. And you know one of them, as we've done these conversations, real life things have come up. And we integrate them into the conversation. And you know a year ago we were talking about my parents dying. And, you know what, there's a little kid part of me that was just always in the back of my mind dreading that moment where my parents would be gone. And I'd have to say that because I opened and I said yes, moment by moment by moment, it was *nothing* that I expected. It was painful, it was sad, it was scary, sometimes, but it was never like, 'Oh my God, this shouldn't be happening, this is terrible.'

[27:22] GANGAJI: It's not the end of the world. Yes.

[27:24] HILLARY: No! And in it, something shifted in me. Some thing, some... life got bigger.

[27:30] GANGAJI: Then, then it's actually a gift. Then these events, these changes that we don't want, when we're willing to not want it but still have it be here as it is, yes it's all a gift then. All of it.

[27:46] HILLARY: I wanna read this little note from Grace that she left on the, the Gangaji Radio team. She said, 'My father dropped dead from a heart attack when he was fifty-four. Knowing the majority don't know when they will die, that really does stress me. In nineteen-ninety-five, after my sixteen-year-old son died from injuries he sustained in a car accident, I prayed to die. Now I pray to live as long as possible.'

[28:12] GANGAJI: Hmm. That's beautiful.

[28:15] HILLARY: Grace. This is a perfect name.

[28:18] GANGAJI: Yeah. That's grace.

[28:20] HILLARY: The thing that I wanted to include in the, the section about willing to lose: it's so obvious to think about major things, of people dying, of losing a job, or losing some physical ability, losing a loved one. But I am so aware more and more these days of my resistance to lose in my daily life. Whether it's saying something, not saying something. I, I think you and I joked around a few weeks ago, maybe it was a few months ago actually, that even with me sitting with you there have been times where a question has arisen and I was afraid to ask the question because I thought I would lose something. You would get mad at me. You would say, 'Okay, that's like, that's it.' (laughs) Like, so, but that's just an example of little, like these little things I catch myself doing in life. Not willing to lose.

[29:12] GANGAJI: Yeah, well you're seeing it, you know. That's, that's the maturation, you're seeing the child-like conditioning, and in seeing that then there's actually choice. And that's where then the willingness to lose, to live your life, to ask the question, to make a mistake. I think that's what really that's about, to make a mistake, to fall off the branch looking for the acorns, to, you know, I mean there are people who, who live totally shut in from life and you know this as a direct experience, and part of that is because there's so many mistakes out there waiting to happen.

[29:58] HILLARY: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Yeah.

[30:02] GANGAJI: That's the nature of living as a life form, because forms are limited and imperfect.

[30:10] HILLARY: Is there anything you're afraid to lose?

[30:13] GANGAJI: Oh - certainly. Name, name something.

[30:19] HILLARY: Well I know when Eli got sick there was, I mean, it's funny...

[30:25] GANGAJI: It's not - I, I can't say that I'm afraid to lose Eli, in that I generate pictures of losing him in the future and then have a, an emotional response to that. I really don't go there.



There are times when I'm afraid for his health or something, but it's, it's not a drama, it's not a drama in our house, for either one of us. We know it could happen at any time, and he could lose me, we, the whole world is, is subject to loss. I mean I was upset about the whole election and the political repercussions and now the, this absurd scary theater we have going on in our presidential office. So, but it's not that I, I am suffering with that. I may have strong feelings with that, I certainly do have strong feelings about that, but I'm not identifying with them. And it's different from feeling them, I can feel whatever I'm feeling, I can have judgments, I can have opinions, but I, it's not keeping me up at night.

[31:43] HILLARY: Funny...

[31:44] GANGAJI: But let me just say something about that. If it were keeping me up at night, that's okay too. I don't wanna set that up as some kind of, 'Oh I get it, if it's not keeping me up at night, since it's keeping me up at night, it's bad, I should get... You just, you stay up a couple of nights. You know, it's, it's recognizing what is here, even when there is a worry, even when there is a fear, even when there is anxiety, even when there is a bad fall, even when there is loss, what is still here, what remains?

[32:17] HILLARY: I wanted to wrap up this conversation by having a little chat about The Gangaji Foundation. I know that you had to cancel your retreats in, or your participation in the retreats, in, in Europe. And, and you're gonna be scaling back with your retreats, not traveling as much, you know, over the next year. And I wanted to address that, because I have a certain perception of that, but I wanted to talk, I wanted you to, you, you go first.

[32:46] GANGAJI: Well, it's, I mean I actually, for twenty years, been saying I'm gonna scale back. But the body has reached a certain point, I'm seventy-five years old and I'm strong, I, I feel fit, I feel healthy, but I, I can't take the hits of the road as much. And I've never particularly liked the hits of the road, but it's just clear, it's time. So I have had to cancel events, I'm going to Santa Sabina soon, and I'll go to Boulder and I'm going, going to Australia, and going to New Zealand, because those, all of those are actually easy enough on the body, there's enough support and it's, it's more simple. Europe is complicated, it's just the travel within Europe, and I will go back to Europe, God willing, to Baden Baden, for the retreat that we have there. But I just won't do the individual cities, Hamburg, and Berlin, and Amsterdam, I just, I can't do the inter-European travel. And then, who knows?

[33:54] HILLARY: So that's at a logistical level. In your – oh, gosh, how do I say this – I heard you once say that you would teach until your last breath. I think that's what I'm talking about.

[34:10] GANGAJI: Yes, yeah well that's what this is, right here.

[34:14] HILLARY: Yeah.

[34:15] GANGAJI: I'm in a wheelchair, teaching, with my last breath.

[34:22] HILLARY: There's nothing to say after that, right? Yeah.

[34:28] GANGAJI: God willing it's not literally true yet (laughs).

[34:30] HILLARY: (laughs) Yeah.

[34:32] GANGAJI: Yeah, wheel myself out and get hit by a car, and that's it, these things happen though. I mean what if bombs were falling? How many people on our planet are suffering greatly from immediate true danger and without care, without facilities, without access to, to what we have access to? I mean that's... what we need to recognize that our unnecessary suffering on top of our privilege really causes harm.

[35:07] HILLARY: My perception of change is, it's funny how I said human beings resist change; at the same time there's a certain way I welcome change. And I feel like, you know with Papaji he didn't have webcasts, he couldn't, you know, people couldn't tune in to see him from all over the world, and with you they can. And so it's so beautiful to be able to see you in person, and people will, will be able to do that, coming maybe an extra distance, but for those people who, who can't do that, and who never will be able to do that, you're so available, you're almost more available than ever through this radio show and through your webcast, and lots of things we're cooking up behind the scenes. So that to me is super exciting.

[35:52] GANGAJI: Yeah it's wonderful, it's really a, such a benefit of the technology available.

[35:58] END MUSIC

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[36:07] HILLARY: There are lots of ways to connect with Gangaji. If you go to the Gangaji website, you can find out how to join Gangaji every month for her live webcast. It's a time where you can ask Gangaji questions directly. There's also *The Oasis*, that has over a hundred recordings of Gangaji's meetings, plus there's *The Oasis* magazine, which I've never mentioned, that has incredible articles and poetry, it's just so worth checking out. If you're hoping to see Gangaji in person you can check out the calendar. All of that's on the website, [gangaji.org](http://gangaji.org). And of course there's Gangaji Radio, which is supported one hundred percent by your donations. The website is where you can make your donations to help us put more shows out here in the world. In the coming months Gangaji is gonna be covering topics like trauma and control, that's just to name a couple. I'm Hillary Larson. This has been *A Conversation With Gangaji*. We'll see you next time.