

[Gangaji Radio](#)

A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 56

WAITING TO HEAL

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Clip

[00:03] GANGAJI: So I'm very happy to offer you the invitation to stop. To stop searching for relief. To stop searching for healing. It's that you stop the search for something to rescue you from yourself.

End clip

[00:26] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: When trauma happens, it can change the trajectory of a life. It can color how we see the world around us. We can retreat, we can act out, and we can certainly spend our lives running from it, managing it, or even trying to heal it.

[00:44] GANGAJI: We start working the wound, you know, digging at it – I mean if we think of a physical wound that we may have had and, and just worked it unnecessarily, and it can't heal, because we won't leave it alone.

[00:56] HILLARY LARSON: You'll notice that this episode is a little bit longer than our normal ones. There's a reason for that. At the very end I was about to wrap it up and then it took a very surprising turn and I was gonna edit it out, but in reality, it's probably the realist conversation Gangaji and I have ever had. So I'll be brave and keep it in. I'm Hillary Larson, and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

[01:23] MUSIC

[01:31] HILLARY: I wanted to talk to you this month about the subject of trauma. And I wanted to start, perhaps, by just the anatomy of trauma and how that sets us up, even for the search to begin with. And in my mind, you know, something happens in life when we're young and everybody has a, a different version of what that is. And I think we have multiple traumas that happen in life. And then there's, there's assault on the body, and the psyche, and then there's a, a thought about what that means, and then it somehow colors our perception of the world. And then after that there are these kind of unknowing coping mechanisms that, that get set up to protect us from having to re-experience it. So, I wanted to talk about how that can set the stage for either victimhood or awakening.

[02:33] GANGAJI: Well, life is filled with trauma, there's no doubt about that. And trauma is necessary for the development of the nervous system and the reflexes and, and the intelligence to discover when to get out of the way, when to run for help, when to escape, when to fight. And there are many lives that have just the horror, the so beyond trauma, as we think of the word trauma seems tame, that, really horrible, I mean you read, or watch documentaries, whatever,

about these child soldiers who were kidnapped and then made to fight, to kill, and drugged up so that, with methamphetamines, or other speed drugs, so that they could kill. And, and, you know some of them have made it out of that, once they were found and released and have been able to come back and there've been some extraordinary books and stories written about that. And then the child prostitution, children assaulted, I mean there are some really horrible traumas. But for most of us it's really just the overreaction of our nervous system to the fact that life is not sentimental about its life forms. And the disease, or other people, or global situations, does not take *you* into account at all in what you're feeling, and what, what it may feel like physically or emotionally, how it, it may stay in your psyche. So for me the, the real possibility is to cut through that, rather than processing it, which can be of course very useful, there are many psychological avenues for processing trauma, and getting released from trauma. But to really just cut through it and to discover what has really been unaffected by all that trauma, that you really don't have to identify with a nightmare that you may re-experience periodically, based either on just your own madness or the madness of, of the environment you *were* in, or you *are* in. You really have the capacity in spite of trauma, or in the face of trauma, to not be defined by it. At least the people who are listening to this, I don't know that that's true for everyone. But I know that if you already turned toward what is true freedom, and what is always here, then you already have the capacity.

[05:30] HILLARY: I certainly, certainly don't wanna make this conversation anti-therapy, absolutely don't want to do that, but I do wanna share some realities that I've seen and experienced with regard to therapy. And that is I think it's, it's hugely beneficial to have somebody basically sitting across from you saying, 'I see you. I see you.' There's a way though I think it can take a turn. And, I have spoken many times, on this radio show, about my journey with anxiety. And my anxiety appeared to be post-traumatic stress disorder that started when I was young. And, and then it got evaluated many, many, many times over. So not only did I then have the anxiety, I had other people's story on top of my story, and, and frankly by the time – I think right before I had met you – I felt like I was in a knot, a knot of evaluation, and a knot of being supported in some level of victimhood.

[06:35] GANGAJI: Yeah, it's a burden of the trauma then, or the anxiety in your case. So you're burdened by it, you, you're not necessarily burdened by it if you don't know that it's wrong, or it shouldn't have happened or you should be like something else. It may be quite unpleasant, whatever it is, but I think you're really absolutely correct, as valuable as someone listening to you, someone suggesting the possibilities of the way that you could get through it, or even get clear. Very valuable, but, once it, it reinforces the identity of this thing that has captured me or makes me unfree, then that's a possibility of really looking deeper. Not fixing it, looking deeper.

[07:27] HILLARY: There's something to me about victimhood that is important to, it was important for me to inspect, and that was, I had to be willing to acknowledge that I liked it, that there, I, since I couldn't resolve the anxiety at least I was getting attention and comfort in some way. And that was, that was a loop in itself. But when I started telling myself the truth about that, things started to change.

[07:54] GANGAJI: Yeah, that's a – you grow up. You recognize, you stop playing it, you stop working it. And when you stop working your suffering, really the suffering then can resolve itself,

to whatever degree it, it can, and it's, it's not even in your business to whatever degree it can. Yeah I, I understand that.

[08:19] HILLARY: Before we started recording I was telling you that I, I really have not been terribly interested in the subject of trauma because I spent so much time trying to work it out, and a couple weeks ago I saw a documentary called The Keepers, and it impacted me greatly. And it was about a, a sister that was murdered in nineteen-sixty-nine, and the story around it was that she was finding out that there was horrendous sexual abuse going on, and somebody shut her up. But in the midst of it these women told their stories, and this one woman who had the most horrific – it was just horrific, it was beyond comprehension – she had blocked it out. And when she started remembering, this was just so magnificent to me, she made a point of, she had like a prayer room – she called it a prayer room, meditation room – and she went there by herself, and she sat, and she let all of the memories come, because she said she didn't want somebody to corrupt the memories. And she was, she had just such character, and it, it really made me see the, like, pure healing, it, it seemed like pure healing to me. It looked like inquiry.

[09:41] GANGAJI: You know what I hear when you say that, as beautiful as the story is, is there was some inherent trust in her character to be able to do that. So for those who don't have that trust then may this report foster that and nourish that trust where you recognize that finally no one can take this away from you, and no one can give you the victimhood, you have to open to it yourself. And in that you do reject the idea of yourself as anything other than this pure consciousness that is experiencing.

[10:22] HILLARY: I wanna read you, there was a big response from this topic, and I wanna read you as many comments and questions as I can. This is from Anna, she says, 'I experienced sexual abuse as a young child. As much therapy as I've done many decades away from the abuse, I still feel shattered in some way, that there are certain things in life that aren't possible for me, like being in a loving relationship. It's like some die was cast in that moment. I have surrendered many, many times to the grief of that, and those moments have been beautiful. But I still feel the loss of not having the life I imagined I could have had if the abuse had never happened. At the same time, I see that I'm still here, that that has never been touched. But that doesn't mean that I'm not disappointed sometimes that things seem to be out of reach.'

[11:16] GANGAJI: Well, I, you know, at the risk of sounding very harsh, there's a lot of investment in the drama of that. And there's a storyline with that drama, and there's, if, if you open to that shattering, you discover what is not shattered, has never been shattered. But you can very easily reweave the story, certainly easily if there's been this horrendous trauma. So there's a time for resolve and a sobriety and a, a willingness to not indulge the suffering, just as you were saying about your anxiety, this is a little different, but there's still indulging in it. And the disappointment and the, the drama that follows that is, is self-abuse, you're, you're torturing yourself unnecessarily there because, I mean, it's, it's said in that, you know, Anna says that, you know, I, I see what's untouched. But still. It's that 'but still', that is the return to the hell realm. And you can recognize that with the 'but' and just stop. Don't follow that thought. It, it has a groove, it has a power, but it's, it has, has no existence without your following it. Without your once again telling the story of what you lost and why you lost it and what the result is. It's unnecessary, is what I'm saying. And your willingness for it to be unnecessary, you grow up. You really grow up. You're not that child. That child is now just in your mind. She doesn't exist. You

are a living, breathing woman and you can, you can really, with all respect to the, the child that was damaged and the woman that has continued that suffering, you can stop, you have that power. It's your choice, nobody can stop for you.

[13:22] HILLARY: Juan-Carlos says, 'I'm very much interested in the relationship between healing and awakening, and how Gangaji speaks about the need to have a strong mind to take the leap into the abyss. But once you have leaped there is no reason to continue going back into processing the past unnecessarily. The temptation to identify as the wounded one is habitual. And so is the seduction of the entertainment found in fixing myself.'

[13:50] GANGAJI: There you go. There you go. And there's a, this kind of masochistic seduction of the turning the knife in the wound. And that's what we have to be willing to tell the truth about, and then at least if you turn the knife, you, you are conscious of it, and you recognize you're choosing it, it's not being done **to you**, you are doing it yourself. It was done to you, and now you have taken on that role as perpetrator.

[14:19] HILLARY: There were several people, including Juan-Carlos, that brought up the subject of the strong mind, and that sometimes it's actually the therapy that can create the strong mind. Megan says, 'It was the traumatic and extenuating circumstances of having lost my mother to suicide, my own heroin addiction, and facing the potential loss of a limb that drove me to Gangaji's invitation, ultimately revealing the liberation that was always here, regardless of circumstance. What I am pointing to in my experience is that I don't know that I could have heard or discovered this without the desperation of my traumas, and simultaneously I couldn't have heard or discovered while still holding.' I love that.

[15:05] GANGAJI: Yeah! You know what that points to for me is something that has to do with resolve because you could have continued to indulge the trauma, and, and gone into a whirlwind spiral downward into misery. But there was some inherent grit there, that in the face of all this there was some – and maybe that's what I'm pointing to when I say 'strength of mind' or 'character' – it's some unwillingness to be victimized, unwillingness to participate in the victimization, and in that you discover the lifeline that is either in a teaching or a relationship or nature, to just in your own heart, recognizing I am free. It never touched me.

[16:00] HILLARY: When I look back on the subject of the, the woundedness, and the coping mechanism around that woundedness can manifest in all sorts of things, you know – it can manifest in addiction, or workaholism, or perfectionism, or being good, or whatever that is. And it even then can flip into the spiritual search. And that moment when we recognize, for those of us who have been on a spiritual path for a long time that no matter what we did, no matter our good intentions, no matter how many workshops or whatever, that that woundedness is still here. That, that moment of recognition is, can be painful, but it to me is just so extraordinarily beautiful.

[16:53] GANGAJI: Yes, it, it, the beauty is there. What happens when that beauty is denied and the victimhood or the suffering is indulged is we start working the wound. You know, digging at it, I mean if we think of a physical wound that we may have had and, and just worked it unnecessarily, and it can't heal. Because we won't leave it alone. We can, we're milking it, in a certain kind of way that is unhealthy for the mind/body, unhealthy for living a life of appreciation

and wonder, rather than a life of, a story of loss, and what could've happened. And, 'cause who ever knows what could've happened, anyway? It's, we're, we're making all that up, but we know that in this very moment there is choice to be open, and to recognize the habitual pull to suffer, in whatever way, and to stop. That's what takes resolve and strength of mind.

[17:57] HILLARY: Did you ever have a trauma that haunted you that you were on a mission to fix and then you saw that you actually didn't really have to fix it?

[18:08] GANGAJI: Well I was, my mission was to fix my mother's alcoholism (chuckles), you know, and it was useless, she wasn't interested in it being fixed. She was quite, she quite enjoyed her alcohol. And I would write her little furtive letters and leave 'em by her bed, you know, and she never acknowledged them or paid any attention, so my victimhood was around if she were different, if I weren't embarrassed about my mother, then I could be happy. Then I, you know, would be, everything would be fine! And, and so that got caught in to my spiral, and to – that was my wound, that was my psychic wound. And then she was ready to die. I went to see her on her death bed, and she knew she was dying and, I saw I loved this woman. You know, I just desperately, deeply, profoundly, loved her and, she didn't (chuckles), you know, she, she was never going to change, unless she wanted to. And here it is, it's, my life is not gonna change based on her. And I could just be there with her, in the love. And she felt it of course, you know, and there was a peace between us that I, I dropped my agenda. I didn't win my agenda, of fixing her, and getting her to treatment, and making her be like other mothers. I dropped my agenda, and she was perfect, she was beautiful. And (laughs) she taught me so much! So of course, you know, I had boyfriends who didn't love me, and they, you know fed into my different traumas. But I would say that was the big one. And I, I had different, different events, but that was the, the one that I just somehow felt, if I could change that, if that weren't so, if she didn't do that, then I could be happy. And that's, what a setup that is. Happiness has nothing to do with events.

[20:17] HILLARY: When I think of that I, I think of Anna's letter here and that something happened to her body, and whatever that, the die was cast, then, it prevents her from being in a relationship, in whatever way that is. So that's heartbreaking, but in a certain sense, so, with your relationship with your mom, if your mom wasn't there was there a way you would project that onto other people, that was causing --?

[20:47] GANGAJI: I don't know, I don't know, that would have to get too psychological for me. I mean, what you were just saying about Anna, it's heartbreaking, but it's not true. So it's an unnecessary heartbreak. The heartbreak happened, but for it to happen and happen and happen and happen how many decades later, this is what's unnecessary.

[21:09] HILLARY: We've talked about the false idea of needing to be fixed in order to wake up. And there's something quite touching actually about waking up, even as a, as a person who's been shattered in some way. Isn't that the redemption we're talking about?

[21:28] GANGAJI: Well it's the stopping postponement. It's, and that's all happening mentally. Your idea of yourself, your idea of what you could be, or should be, or could have been. You just stop all that, it's an indulgence, a mental, a mental self-torture – as Juan-Carlos says, a, a kind of entertainment that, that you can outgrow. And you can recognize you're somehow being

entertained by or using to justify or failure in whatever way that you're saying you're failing now, and you can just stop it, really, you can, you can grow up. And I mean that in the most compassionate way. You can grow up, you can stop telling yourself you're still a child, that you need things to be different from how they are.

[22:23] HILLARY: Tathina wanted me to bring up the subject of generational healing, and when I look at societal trauma, generational trauma, for example, racism, the Holocaust. A good example would be, for us would be nine-eleven, you know, and after nine-eleven it's just, there's this hyper-vigilance, and this – we need to arm ourselves, we need to, you know, we need to interrogate people, we need to build these prison camps, and...

[22:52] GANGAJI: You mean torture when you say interrogate?

[22:54] HILLARY: Yes, yes exactly. All in a, an attempt to not have to experience that again. And I mean I can feel it in my, my bones sometimes, my own lineage. I talked to you one time about finding out when I was, after I got clean, that my grandfather had died on skid row. I didn't know that. But I did know it, and...

[23:19] GANGAJI: But my, my question is, does it work? Does it work? Re, rehashing and trying to figure out how to stop it? Does it, does this generational trauma, as real as it may relatively be, although each generation has had one. Does the attempt to fix that, and resolve that, and purify that, work?

[23:45] HILLARY: Well in that case it happened to absolutely, organically, I had no intention of really healing anything in that way, and it came up as a surprise and, a 'aha', it was an 'aha' moment: oh, that's what that awareness was. So it wasn't a matter of digging or processing, it was one of those, I kind of call it like the trustworthiness of life that, you know, they come up if they need to.

[24:11] GANGAJI: You know, I've read some Holocaust literature and been really moved by a lot of it, and there's certainly a lot of legitimate anger and angst with all of it. But the thread that really just is the light of that is the, this call to live. And this recognition that life itself is the beauty in the midst of the horror, and that if somehow you can – I mean Victor Frankel is the one that expresses that the best – you can actually discover this light, you can make it through anything. And that's a horror we can't even imagine. That's beyond our, our generation to imagine, that makes the nine-eleven horror look like nothing. It *is* nothing in the scope of things, in the scope of historical horrors. It may personally be a lot for someone, like your experience with alcohol, and then discovering your, your grandfather's death. And my experience with my mother, but in the scope of things, what is that? It's nothing, it's really nothing. And are we willing for it to be nothing? Or does that have to have the defining power of our identity?

[25:39] HILLARY: Yeah I mean I think there's a difference between, like, oh, my, you know, my family was in the fam— or what, whatever this, the, you know, true story is. If that is something that's just a continuation...

[25:55] GANGAJI: Right.

[25:56] HILLARY: ...of, of torment, then yeah, boy, is that some kind of suffering. If it's somehow that in just being open in life something like that does come up, that generational thing, it's the openness that allows for the freedom and the healing.

[26:14] GANGAJI: And what that is, was you, it wasn't personal. It was something in the genes, it had nothing to do with you as Hillary. So that it cuts something potentially, and then of course you can put it back together in all kinds of ways. But that's really the point, that, it's taking it personally in this way of being personally entertained by your own suffering that, that has no basis in reality.

[26:48] HILLARY: I'm a little surprised by this conversation.

[26:51] GANGAJI: (laughs) Why?

[26:53] HILLARY: (laughs) Again!

[26:54] GANGAJI: Is that a good thing?

[26:55] HILLARY: Well, I feel there's a certain staleness to it. I wanna scramble to make it bigger than it is.

[27:04] GANGAJI: You know, I don't have that feeling, so what can I say? It doesn't feel stale to me, but I could be freshly in love, and you could be out the door (laughs).

[27:17] HILLARY: (laughs) I think that, basically...

[27:21] GANGAJI: Maybe your trauma feels stale to you.

[27:23] HILLARY: It totally does. It really does.

[27:26] GANGAJI: Good.

[27:27] HILLARY: It really does.

[27:28] GANGAJI: That's healthy.

[27:30] HILLARY: You know, I've put, I put it on the list a long time ago – oh, trauma, that, you know, that makes sense to do that. But there were other subjects that seemed so much more alive to me and then, that, listening to that documentary, or watching that documentary, really was like wow, that's, it was not the, the stories about the trauma that were moving to me, they were horrific, but that was ten percent of it. The other ninety percent was, wow, look at these people, look at their....

[28:07] GANGAJI: Look how they didn't get defeated by it.

[28:09] HILLARY: Yeah.

[28:10] GANGAJI: And that's the possibility, of course that's where the juice is. Otherwise it's just the same old sad movie. Yeah, that's what's alive. That's what we've been talking about, from my point of view. I think trauma is a very important subject, it's, it's a primary way that we identify ourselves. So if it can be exposed as absolutely unnecessary without trivializing the actual trauma and the suffering around that, and respecting that, but without going to hell because of it. I've never been told I was in a stale conversation before.

[28:56] HILLARY: No, no, I felt like me, it was me.

[29:00] GANGAJI: I think it was me, me (laughs).

[29:02] HILLARY: It was me. No I mean, cause I felt, you know what, you know what...

[29:05] GANGAJI: That's 'cause my mother thought I was a stale conversation.

[29:09] HILLARY: (laughs) You know what the problem is? I guess I was afraid of having an authentic conversation with you about it, and, the truth, the truth was, 'cause... Yeah, I was (laughs).

[29:20] GANGAJI: So, what does that, what do you mean? What was, were you inauthentic, or have you been inauthentic in this conversation?

[29:28] HILLARY: Yeah.

[29:29] GANGAJI: In what way?

[29:30] HILLARY: Well (laughs), a thought here... (deep breath) I'm just trying to determine my extent of vulnerability.

[29:57] GANGAJI: Don't determine that. It'll take care of itself.

[29:58] HILLARY: Yeah. Yeah.

[30:06] GANGAJI: If you're completely vulnerable.

[30:10] HILLARY: Yeah. I just, I didn't wanna make this a, a conversation where I was kind of standing off to the side. I guess I can, this is where I'm holding back, okay, and I'll just see if I wanna edit this out, but that letter from Anna? I can relate to that, I mean, I can relate to that, I can relate to having something feel like it's cast in stone, and living a good life, a really good life, but having a certain area where it feels like...

[31:01] GANGAJI: Why is that, within yourself?

[31:10] HILLARY: I feel like, like relationships are hard, because something gets triggered.

[31:16] GANGAJI: But that space, that, that then this thought, relationships are hard because something gets triggered, what's the, where's the concrete, just if you look right now, just simply,

this thing that has made your life not as full as it could be, as full as it *is*, not as full as it could be, where is it when you look for it?

[31:43] HILLARY: It's right, right in my gut, it's just sheer disappointment.

[31:46] GANGAJI: So, disappointment, if you just in this moment, just release every story you have about that, the causes of that, the effects of that, and let your attention fall into this disappointment. Be in this moment, just to be completely unencumbered in your disappointment, is there some other feeling there?

[32:30] HILLARY: It's more like a thought, of like I didn't get it right.

[32:33] GANGAJI: So that thought, if you let that thought go, what's the feeling?

[32:38] HILLARY: Back to disappointment.

[32:39] GANGAJI: Yes, so the thought is a way of avoiding the disappointment. And the disappointment, if I'm hearing it correctly, is some deep sadness, or grief, or loss, or something. Disappointment is also a label; I, I'm not sure what the pure emotion is of that.

[32:58] HILLARY: Well it's sadness, for sure.

[32:59] GANGAJI: Sadness. So can you just give yourself purely to this sadness without having an explanation or an escape? What do you find?

[33:23] HILLARY: Sadness is fine with me.

[33:26] GANGAJI: What's, what's, in, is sadness still here?

[33:32] HILLARY: Yeah.

[33:33] GANGAJI: Then go into the bottom of it, there's something underneath it. But to get to that something underneath – whether that's good or bad, we don't know – but to get to it you have to be willing to dive into this vulnerability of sadness.

[34:05] HILLARY: (sniffle) It's definitely a feeling of, I mean the word is 'being flawed' but the, that's just a word.

[34:16] GANGAJI: Mmm-hmm. And what's the feeling attached to that word? What's the emotion?

[34:25] HILLARY: Hatred.

[34:26] GANGAJI: Hatred. Here we are. Yes, this is really the honesty that's required. And if you just open to that, self-hatred, without fixing it, or justifying it, or avoiding it.

[34:44] HILLARY: It seems like, I wish I could have gone into it this deeply before. It actually feels like, just hatred, like a good person like me wouldn't wanna feel that kind of hatred.

[35:00] GANGAJI: So if you dive into it, there's something underneath that hatred too. Just like you found this hatred underneath the sadness, and the sadness underneath the disappointment. So, so this is self-inquiry. These are emotional identities. What's underneath hatred?

[35:35] HILLARY: I'm finding myself wanting to have the right answer be peace.

[35:40] GANGAJI: Yeah, well, you see that though, and you don't get away with it. So, listen you don't have to come up with the, any answer right now, this is the direction that in order to really fall into this direction you have to be willing to see what the stories are, as you did, and this latest one was looking for the right answer. And you just reject those stories and dive deeper.

[36:05] HILLARY: Yeah it's amazing to me, 'cause I, I felt the sadness, and I felt anger, but I've never felt the hatred, or I've never let myself feel the hatred.

[36:15] GANGAJI: Yeah, yeah, that's...

[36:16] HILLARY: It breaks all the rules of what's supposed to be.

[36:18] GANGAJI: It's shocking.

[36:19] HILLARY: Yeah, yeah it really is.

[36:22] GANGAJI: It's liberating.

[36:23] HILLARY: It is. Isn't that amazing?

[36:24] GANGAJI: It's absolutely amazing.

[36:27] HILLARY: Wow (laughs).

[36:33] GANGAJI: So I really suggest you give yourself some time, like to not just move on from this and, you know, we, we'll finish up the radio show, but really, not as a process or as a direction, but really honor this willingness that is uncovered here to dive deeper.

[36:55] HILLARY: (chuckles) I'm so surprised right now.

[36:57] GANGAJI: Yeah. Beautiful. Surprise is a kind of wonder isn't it?

[37:05] HILLARY: It is, it's like the, you know, the layers of the hatred and then the shame and the...

[37:14] GANGAJI: Yeah. If you keep diving, keep diving, just gently, effortlessly, not to get anywhere but just to discover, until you discover what the ground is of it all.

[37:33] HILLARY: I don't, I don't actually know what to say, I didn't expect this conversation to go this way.

[37:37] GANGAJI: That's just what we want, isn't it? That's what this conversation is about. I'm happy with it. It's a good way to close.

[37:45] HILLARY: Yeah. Thank you (laughs)

[37:48] MUSIC

Clip

[38:01] GANGAJI: There is a treasure that is who you are. And it's saying 'come in'. And because it has been hidden for so long, it grabs, appears dark and ugly and forbidden, and you have gained support to not look at it. The whole socialization is to not look at that. But here you are, unsocialized, (AUDIENCE LAUGHTER), blessedly, at least to the degree where you can recognize that there is a yearning, a great yearning, to know who you are.

End clip

[38:57] ENDING MUSIC