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A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL

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[00:06] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: Control can be a good thing. But that's not what we're gonna talk about this month. Gangaji and I are gonna delve into control as a survival strategy, kind of the every day garden variety. Now I know there's a broad spectrum of control-freakness, if I can call it that, maybe in all of us, certainly depending on the day. Maybe that shows up as saying something in a conversation, not saying something, sending an email, not sending an email – needing things to be just a certain way in order to be happy. At the end of the day, the willingness to just let go of control and say yes to what is here – and it doesn't even mean we have to like it (which is the good part) – is so freeing.

[00:56] GANGAJI: The welcome is the respect in your heart for what is here, and in that, you are humbled, because what is here is bigger than any notion that we could have of control. And that's life as the guru, is here, and that's our teacher.

[01:15] HILLARY LARSON: Our control strategies can be pretty tender things to fess up to, but when control is finally met for what it is – and that's pretty tender too – then the possibilities are endless. I'm Hillary Larson, and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

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[01:36] HILLARY: I think this, this conversation between you and I, this time, in a certain way feels like a bit of a reset for me. We did a show on trauma that was recently released and it stirred up something really deep in me, and it was shocking, and I wasn't prepared for it, and the truth of the matter is that when we, we finished, and you went your way and I went my way, I was seriously considering not airing that 'cause it was so vulnerable and so raw. And I was contemplating writing you a note and then before I got around to it I tuned in to the *With Gangaji* webcast and the first thing you said was 'Oh, wow, I can't wait for everybody to hear this interview.' So I sat in my car and kind of laughed at myself that I had that plan. But the reason why I felt like I wanted to do a reset with you, and how it fits so completely with this topic that I'll tell you about in a second, is that it seems like when we first started this radio show in all honesty for me it was an interview, because I had all my, my questions lined up and I had an idea of which way we were gonna go, and then as time went on I felt like it turned into more of a conversation – which was beautiful 'cause then I could actually sit and really listen to you instead of thinking of my agenda. And recently it felt like it's actually dropped into an inquiry. And, to be honest with you, people tell me all the time how much they appreciate my vulnerability, but the truth is that that's vulnerability by choice, and true inquiry is choiceless, it's just, it just happens. So, I wanted to say all of that as an introduction to this show I would like to do on control. 'Cause it feels, as I look back on all the conversations we've had, it feels

exhausting to me to have been working that hard to not, kind of, be in the eye of the hurricane, so to speak.

[03:57] GANGAJI: Be exposed...

[03:58] HILLARY: Yeah.

[03:59] GANGAJI: ...to yourself, and of course to other people, whoever's listening. But that seems to me the real progression of a true spiritual life, is that we get into it for various reasons, but they're pretty superficial. But that's okay, 'cause that gets us into it, something piques our curiosity or imagination, and we get into it egotistically. But that's okay, it gets us in the door. And then the, when the push comes, what is the response? And, I did love that conversation we were having and your willingness on air to, to inquire, because that's the point of, of our whole meeting, is that it becomes absolutely relevant to you. You, who is, whoever is listening, and you, whoever is speaking – that it's not just another abstraction. We have plenty of interesting radio shows, and videos, and teachers, and movies, and books, and lots of great entertainment, and I support all that. But to really be willing to be pushed by unseen forces into a true inquiry, and to air it, because as you know it supports everybody. And that's, I, I – it's, it's perfect. It's perfect. We could've had, we could have gone on for years without that ever happening. I mean that's the way many people spend their whole spiritual search, or spiritual, in quotes, lives: staying safe. And control of course is about staying safe.

[05:52] HILLARY: Oh, it's so much about staying safe and, to me, I really wanted to bring that into this conversation because it was such a beautiful example of how much work it takes to stay safe, how, you know, the strategy – even if I wasn't fully aware of the strategy — of like, 'Oh, you know what, I'll have this nice intellectual safe conversation so I never actually have inquiry pointed towards me.'

[06:19] GANGAJI: Yeah, yeah because we are made to wanna be safe. And that's fine. It's just there's something else calling, and it called to you in that moment, out of the blue – somehow, a trigger, a push, or a word, or a memory, whatever. And you didn't run away from it, and you didn't fight it, and you didn't cover it. And those are our usual responses to perceived threats, threats that aren't really threats to our true survival, but are perceived that way somehow subconsciously.

[06:56] HILLARY: There's just one more thing I wanna add to that whole strategy. 'Cause you and I have talked about this before. A year ago I was talking to you about maybe it would be a good idea to have other hosts rotate with me, and part of that was 'cause I know other people have incredible questions to ask – I certainly have not cornered the market on asking you questions – but I can also see it was a way of getting out of the line of fire before it happened.

[07:25] GANGAJI: Yeah, it was on the cusp of a deepening of the conversation. It was like, in, in any relationship there's a point where it goes beyond control and safety, and there is something that is really the relationship that starts to show up rather than the, the people involved and their questions and their responses. It's something bigger. And that's what we're here for.

[07:53] HILLARY: I loved what you just said, because with intimacy, there is a, like a requirement to not be in control.

[08:04] GANGAJI: That's right. And there's a requirement, when you're not in control, that you recognize the whole relationship can be lost. And that's really what we're trying to do, in, in general, when we are in control, is to keep, keep things the way they are because at least we know how they are, and that is at least relatively safe. So when those boundaries are pushed there's a reaction in the body, mind, that's normal. And then there's choice of how you actually respond to that reaction. Do you get busy? Or do you open? You opened. And it was a beautiful, true moment.

[08:53] HILLARY: Um, well...

[08:55] GANGAJI: And it lives forever. It's in the air waves, right?

[08:57] HILLARY: ...well see that's the thing!

[08:58] GANGAJI: (laughs)

[08:59] HILLARY: If it would've been just you and me, I would've been like, well that's okay.

[09:02] GANGAJI: 'Cause it's safe. It won't get out of this room.

[09:04] HILLARY: Yeah, you know, I'm glad we're actually talking about this a little bit more because it, I think it's relevant to whatever it is, whoever is listening to this right now, whatever your situation is, it's not necessarily being on the air, or having a conversation with you. But it's, the layers of fear for me of like, what are people gonna think of me now?

[09:26] GANGAJI: Yeah, well, of that we never have any control. And the more that we can be reminded of that, the more choice we have to surrender the idea of control, or the idealism of control.

[09:44] HILLARY: Well thanks for letting me do that in front of thousands of people (laughs).

[09:47] GANGAJI: Mmmm, my joy (laughs).

[09:52] HILLARY: We were talking about intimacy, I was gonna hold this question till a little bit later, but since you brought that up – or maybe I brought that up, I can't remember – I wanted to ask a question from Lorna, she says, 'Dear Gangaji, I am in a love relationship that has taught me so much about myself. It's been the most loving and deeply compassionate and connected love I've known. Yet I'm easily worried that I'm going to do something to mess it up, much more so than any relationship I've ever been in. And this appears to bring out these not-so-subtle tactics and attempts to control her. It's painful to me. As aware as I am, I see the same pattern come up over and over again. It's both humbling and frustrating, like I'm somewhat sane in the area of relationships, and then so suddenly, I'm not. Is there any way to permanently get off of that hamster wheel?'

[10:50] GANGAJI: Well the, that's, to me the answer is to be willing to be humbled, deeper and deeper. See that even the desire to get off that hamster wheel is a desire to have this not be the way it is. And that's a prayer or desire that is a control. And I understand that, and I just wanna say again, there's nothing wrong with that. But here is very fertile, because this is something that is arising not from known sources, it's a reaction, and if you have the space within yourself to actually feel whatever you're feeling, and to share it with your partner, if it's appropriate, but to, to experience it without, without an agenda for the outcome. I mean that's one of our themes on this, these conversations – the willingness to give up the agenda – then this relationship itself is also at risk, just like opinions of other people are at risk. And that's what gives the relationship its life, because that's the truth. Everything is at risk. Everything can disappear. It *will* disappear. Anything that was not always here is, is subject, and, and definitely will disappear at some time. So, you know, in the flush of new love and the excitement of real connection of course we wanna keep it, but that desire for keeping it – even though it's not keeping away the demons that are appearing – it is keeping away a deeper surrender. And a trust, it's really trusting that if the relationship can't handle this, then the relationship won't last. If I can't handle this humbling by these old things showing up, then, then I'm being untrue to myself. And I'm not suggesting acting out anything or saying anything, but the willingness to experience it, it sounds like it's fear here primarily, fear of losing already, already setting up the loss from the fear of losing. Just lose, right now? And, and then you aren't fighting that.

[13:13] HILLARY: So when I listen to your answer to that question I think about the, the whole nature of control – and let's just say is to escape death – but in our every day lives on the surface it's to avoid an emotion we don't want to feel. And the emotion in itself is not dangerous, it's what we tell ourselves about the emotion. But when I think of extreme forms of that I think of anybody out there who's ever had a panic attack, it's the most overwhelming death-like feeling. And then the thought comes in is I hope that never happens again, or I hope I'm not in a, an environment where it's gonna happen and then I'll look foolish, or I hope I don't go crazy, whatever it is then has to happen to control that happening again – and life can get very small that way – but it doesn't have to be a panic attack, it could be a heartbreak, you know, it could be losing a job, of like, I'm never gonna have that happen again, so I'm gonna...

[14:17] GANGAJI: But how is that not all death? Fear of death? You go through a panic attack and then your fear is that it comes, it's a fear of, you're gonna die, you're gonna fall apart again, you're gonna lose it again, you're, you are... When I say it's all about death I'm not saying it's all about, on your death bed, taking your last breath, although that is wrapped inside it. But it, I mean, just, some people can't go to sleep at night 'cause of their fear of the death of the day, or fear of the death of their insides. Even when they're so blissful they can't go to sleep because of fear of the loss of bliss, or – but all of those examples you just gave are just versions of death, fear of death. So we tend to make death a kind of static image, but death is on our shoulder all the time. A day dies, every night; a, a life dies; or acquisitions that we have in this moment are subject to death; relationships die; and self-concepts die, are subject to total shattering when we are humbled. So that's what I, and that's what control is based on: somehow keeping that in measurable enough doses so that you can feel like you're getting deeper or stronger or more intelligent or even facing death. Or just opening to the, the way that we are wired as animals, which is to be safe, to know what's gonna happen, to know how it's gonna happen, and that's all rightfully so, we're wired correctly that way, to avoid death. There's nothing wrong with that. And in spiritual conversations often it gets made, the thing that stops you from your spiritual

evolution is your fear of death, or your fear of loss, or fear of the relationship's ending, or fear of another panic attack. But that's not what, what I'm saying at all, it's that it – recognize that that's natural, that you don't have to fight that. You can actually open to it, as you can open to the bigger true death of the whole organism – all mind body and history of this mind body. That's what makes inquiry alive and not just something, 'okay, yeah, alright, okay I'll, I'll deal with my fear of death, that's right, I know I'm gonna die, I know, my parents have died, I, I've experienced it, I know that,' but then I don't also don't want this to happen and this to happen. But if you dig into those, it's the same fear, same control, same kind of agenda for continuance.

[17:13] HILLARY: That is so interesting to me because I've had conversations with people that say they're not afraid of death, but if you ask them if, if they made a complete fool out of themselves in front of three hundred people, if that would affect them, you know, it's like whatever your version of death is.

[17:30] GANGAJI: Exactly. And it's infinite versions.

[17:34] HILLARY: Yeah. Wow, that's so good. I was thinking about the title of this conversation this time was – The Illusion of Control seems obvious– but I also was thinking about calling it Circling the Pool, because there's a way of control manifesting in just kind of circling around something in some way instead of, like, just, you know, jumping right in.

[17:59] GANGAJI: Waiting for exhaustion (laughs).

[18:01] HILLARY: Exactly, yeah.

[18:03] GANGAJI: Deferring death.

[18:05] HILLARY: (laughs) Like, like five years of having conversations with me (laughs). Yeah.

[18:11] GANGAJI: (laughs) Well, you know it's just dealing with what's here. It's the way we are made as animals. And we, it, we need to remember that, because that in itself is humbling, that we had these reactions, and they are hard-wired into us. And there's nothing wrong with them. There are many teachings that can support you in changing your reactions, or talk, talking yourself down from particular reactions. That's great, but that's not what *this* is. This is just absolute opening.

[18:46] HILLARY: This may not be your thing. And obviously it is mine to a certain degree, different kind of death, is, do you not have a fear of what people think of you?

[19:01] GANGAJI: Well I certainly have had, and I would certainly want everybody to think I'm great and lovable and intelligent, but, you know, very quickly, especially as, as a public person, I recognize many, many people do not think well of me, do not think I'm lovable or intelligent or any of those things. And that's beyond my control. *Beyond* my control. And to recognize that, I mean that's just really intelligent. And I could say the same to you as you put yourself forth in these conversations, do you really not care if anybody thinks ill of you in these conversations? Or are you, you would prefer it a certain way, but you're still willing to have the conversation.

That's the point. It's not that any of my feelings have to change, but I'm not willing to live enslaved to my caring about what people might think about me.

[20:08] HILLARY: I think I said this to you in a, in a conversation that actually we didn't, we didn't release just because we had, we had something else going on, and, and I was talking about your conversation with Geneen Roth. And that was a special we did about a year and a half ago. And as I was sitting there observing the two of you, you were absolutely to me two people that were completely free and, and just being yourselves – not trying to be anybody, not trying to be funny, not trying to be smart about bodies, just two people that were just free. And that was so refreshing for me to see that.

[20:47] GANGAJI: So what made us free? What did you see?

[20:51] HILLARY: There wasn't a self-monitoring happening.

[20:54] GANGAJI: Ah! That's right. That's right.

[20:56] HILLARY: Yeah. That was it.

[20:58] GANGAJI: So I, most of my life I had this self-monitoring thing going on and an, and an exhaustion that goes with that, because – and a selecting for who doesn't think I'm wonderful and smart and funny, and how can I, and that's partly what got me to Papaji, I, because I had incorporated certain teachings, Buddhist teachings and Christian teachings and New Age teachings in, into that egoic desire to be universally loved and appreciated, and live forever in the hearts and minds of all beings (laughs). And, and that, I couldn't get, find my way out of that, I mean I could see that, and I knew it was a fixation, and I knew that it caused suffering, and I knew it was my enslavement. But it really took my teacher telling me to stop trying to do anything with it. Fulfill it, or deny it, or fight it, or dramatize it, or hide from it, or – just stop. And then it had no power. It was a demon that had no real power.

[22:08] HILLARY: Did the power of that ever come back again?

[22:13] GANGAJI: I don't know exactly what you mean. I mean, there, it's, as I just said I would prefer if everybody find me totally delightful all the time but I'm, I guess I'm not willing to sell out for that preference.

[22:28] HILLARY: Yeah...

[22:29] GANGAJI: You know, except maybe socially, if, if I'm, I say hello, I, you know, I, I go through the social niceties, but in a real conversation, or a real meeting, or in a real day, all day, it's, what, what is it worth? And it doesn't work anyway, it doesn't, it's not like you can get ultimate control. It does not work. So we're not talking about a strategy that actually works, we're talking about a strategy that, it causes unnecessary suffering, in you, and most likely other people too.

[23:04] HILLARY: I think that when I look at awakening I would say I experienced awakening by degree, and I, the awareness of the exhaustion of monitoring to me, is – there comes an exhaustion just like any addiction, of just like, I can't put any more energy into this.

[23:25] GANGAJI: Yeah. Measurement. I remember Papaji saying once, 'You've gotta throw away your measurement stick.' What are you measuring? Awakening? Awakening can be measured? You know, how big is it and how big are you, the measurer? So it's already, awakening is your object then, and you're gonna measure it, and it's bigger today or it's smaller today, and you feel good if it's bigger, or bad if it's.... yeah it's a, suffering.

[23:54] HILLARY: That thing about control is that it's easy to, you know, when you're feeling chill and like oh, I can just let things be the way they are. But then on days where it's like, oh, I woke up this morning, my nervous system is a little like, wired, or I got some bad news, and then instantly the pathology comes into play and it's not as easy to say oh, I'll let go of that.

[24:16] GANGAJI: So, it, it's not even about saying 'Oh I'll let go of that'. I'm not suggesting that, although I do think deep breathing is very useful. It's about recognizing it's there, and recognizing there's a conversation that's going on, but deeper than that conversation there's an emotion. There's an, just the way your body is made to respond to certain stimuli, and with the con, conversational thinking and, and an emotion, and you can simply take thirty seconds to open to that emotion without trying to fix it or make it go away, just out of respect for what's appearing. But I'm not ever suggesting that you have a particular thing you should say to it, or that you should get back to what, what you were feeling like yesterday. I mean the real message here is that states of mind come and go, emotions come and go, bliss comes and goes, spaciousness of mind comes and goes. But in your willingness for the contraction to be respected as much as the spaciousness or expansion is respected, then contraction is not the enemy. It's simply another portal deeper into yourself. It's not part of the measurement of how good you are today, or since your nervous system is, is calm today, that's good, A plus, and if it's a mess tomorrow, bad, failing. That's the enslavement, and that's a cultural enslavement, that's something you've learned, and it gets reinforced in many spiritual and religious cultures as well.

[26:09] HILLARY: I remember a long time ago reading something from a Sufi text, and it, it talked about welcoming the fire as much as welcoming the garden.

[26:19] GANGAJI: Mmm, yes, fire, yeah. And the welcome doesn't mean, 'Oh I'm so happy to see you!' It may, but the welcome is, is the respect in your heart for what is here. And in that you *are* humbled, because what is here is bigger than any, any notion that we could have of control. And that's life as the guru, is here. And that's our teacher. And so we always have to open to that, that's the surrender. It's what all of our conversations finally get back to.

[26:59] HILLARY: Your clarification on welcoming and willingness, I think you mentioned at the last show we did as well, that was so huge, because I think the idea of willingness means you have to be in the, like you have to love what's here, and I, and the clarification that, 'No you don't.'

[27:16] GANGAJI: If you're not, you're not! It's really, in this millisecond what are you experiencing, not what you should be, what you can get to, if you deep breathe – even though I

recommend deep breathing for everyone, especially when you're nervous system is frayed, it actually works to support that – but for you, in the midst of a deep breath, in the midst of a shallow breath, to recognize you are the consciousness that is the true substance of life.

[27:54] HILLARY: I wanted to talk to you, in the time we have left, I wanna get a couple people's comments in here. I wanna get a comment in here from Jordan, he's on the Gangaji Radio team now. Glad to have him. He says, 'The Serenity Prayer sums it up for me: God grant me the courage to change the things I can, the serenity to accept the things I can't, and the wisdom to know the difference. I've been especially cracked open lately in giving myself to this, and realizing more deeply I am loved. And this is blessedly out of control. From this love I am spontaneously springs all that is needed, even if it doesn't always look pretty.' And as far as strategies go, Karen had this to say, that she got from you. She said, 'The greatest gift I have been given was an understanding towards, away, and against as the signpost of suffering. When no movement is made, no control is initiated. Then there is no problem. I am home, I am free. Perhaps with preferences, but not controlling, and not controlled by unconscious reactions. I am free to respond from love as love.'

[29:12] GANGAJI: Oh I'm really happy to hear that, yeah, because she just listed the, the primary strategies of mine, the movements of mine. And they are there for survival, for control. But when they become our habitual way of meeting life, of course we lose the identity of ourselves as love because we're all involved in the strategies, and it's endless – how many times a day do you have to move against something, or run away from something, or dramatize something, to get your way, or to get things to, to line up the way you would like them to, to stop that? This immediate nectar of being is obvious. It doesn't get generated from that. It's obviously here. It's your natural state.

[30:11] MUSIC

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[30:28] HILLARY: On the next episode of *A Conversation With Gangaji* we'll be talking about the subject of ethics. The question is – or one of them – does the desire to do the right thing, or to be good, maybe, have anything, when it comes right down to it, with awakening? That's next month. And don't forget you can sign up for Gangaji's live monthly webcast by going to the website, [gangaji.org](http://gangaji.org). You can also get this show every month automatically by subscribing to *A Conversation With Gangaji* on iTunes. You can also give us a rating on iTunes to help more people find this podcast. I'm Hillary Larson. We'll see you next month everybody. Take care until then.

[31:12] ENDING MUSIC