

Gangaji Podcast  
Being Yourself  
Episode 14  
Host Barbara Denempont  
Free of the Noose: Being Released from Our Egoic Prisons  
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[www.gangaji.org](http://www.gangaji.org)

[00:00] MUSIC

[00:02] GANGAJI: I really more than enjoy reading Kenny's letters to this group, to us, to our culture. Kenny's background is very different from this privileged background. From the streets of Kansas City, a black man, whose whole life was about, as he said, "One step ahead of death." To read his letters of the noose being cut just in time. To read them to you gives me great joy. It is the same prison, of course. It is the same noose. And when I walked into this prison and he was somehow mysteriously open to hearing what I had, had to say to him, it is as if I walk into here every day. And whoever is open has the noose cut.

[01:25] BARBARA DENEMPONT, HOST: Hello and welcome to *Being Yourself, Self-Inquiry with Gangaji*. My name is Barbara Denempont and today I'm going to share with you a recording of Gangaji reading a letter written by Kenny Johnson. Kenny met Gangaji while he was in prison, and he wrote this letter to her shortly after he was released.

What I found so powerful about Kenny's letter is that while we have walked profoundly different paths, I could truly see myself in his words. Now I have never faced the extreme circumstances that Kenny did, living in a physical prison. But as you might appreciate and relate to, I did live in my own mental prison for many years. I was doing time in my own mind. Now gratefully, he and I both recognized what is beyond any circumstance or any thought. And that's what this piece I'm going to share with you is all about – freedom.

Let's take a listen.

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(Excerpted from Marin, CA Satsang with Gangaji, March 8, 1998)

[02:26] GANGAJI: Many of you have heard me speak about Kenny. And for those who haven't, I will just give you a brief history. Kenny was a prisoner in a prison in Colorado. He had been in prison in many prisons, but this was his last stay. And he was part of a group that asked that satsang come into prison. And for some unknown reason, I was commanded to say, "Yes. Satsang will come into this prison."

And so a group of us went in, and it is a prison, maybe there are three thousand inmates. And of three thousand inmates, at that particular satsang maybe there were eleven or twelve. So it wasn't like it was a stampede to satsang. But these men were quite interested. Also

mysteriously their lives have been some preparation for that. And of this group, two or three of the men really caught fire.

And Kenny was one of those that caught fire. And he began writing me, and I his letters. Of course when you are on fire, your letters are poetry, your letters are sutras. And so I would read his letters and the time came close for his release. And he had told me at one time that he had been in hell, on the streets, and in prison, obviously prison can be hell. But what he feared most was being released. Because he had discovered in hell this perfect resting place, this place of peace, the truth of who he is. And so he knew that when he was released this would be challenged by everything that he thought he was.

And he was released, and he wrote me a beautiful letter that, I think I may have read to this Bay Area group, about how he had met this challenge and it was no challenge at all. And at that point his parole officer was calling Kenny his Guru. So he has written many beautiful letters. He has been out now for some months. And I just want to share this, it just came from him:

*For so long I have just, I have been just serving. And not really looking at Kenny. For so long I have done nothing but feel others' pain, confusion, longing, and so on. And not really looking at Kenny. Yesterday an old prison acquaintance and I talked very intensely about all the people we knew. And how they are either dead, or literally criminally insane. I am so very grateful. All of these men we talked about were very strong physically. I feared them as a young man coming up in the streets and different prisons. I would have to think fast in order to stay alive around these killers. My entire life on the streets was spent staying one step ahead of everyone, even my woman. There was really no rest.*

*Now here it is thirty years later, and my life is okay. So very grateful. All day yesterday I was just quiet. Quiet with my daughter, quiet with my mother, and also with my grandkids. Quietness. This morning, Saturday, I woke up and was watching a Western movie on television. I love Western movies. All was well until the end. This young man was about to be hung for being a thief. The noose was in place. The wagon with his coffin was under him, and all the necessary players were in place. The nod was given, and he was now dangling and struggling to live. One woman ran and grabbed this young man and screamed for someone to help. At the last moment the rope was cut and the young man lived.*

*Gangaji, everything was in place for me also. I had done many years in prison, and was still in prison. And while still in prison I was planning even more scores, crimes. I was forty-four years old and one more crime would keep me locked up for life. But I would have to chance it one more time. The stage was set for me, the noose was in place, and the crowd was watching. The nod was given, and there I was struggling, dangling for being a thief. Then she stepped forth and grabbed my legs and asked for mercy, and grace was dispensed to me September, 1994. I cried tears of gratitude. I cried tears of gratefulness, I cried tears of joy. My life was spared. Because a beautiful lady stepped forth and entered prison. I have tried to emulate the very same love, the very same devotion. May God be with us.*

*In Love, Kenny.*

I really more than enjoy reading Kenny's letters to this group, to us, to our culture. Kenny's background is very different from this privileged background. From the streets of Kansas City, a black man, whose whole life was about, as he said, "One step ahead of death." To read his letters of the noose being cut just in time. To read them to you gives me great joy. It is the same prison, of course. It is the same noose. And when I walked into this prison and he was somehow mysteriously open to hearing what I had, had to say to him, it is as if I walk into here every day. And whoever is open has the noose cut.

When I met my guru I was dangling in a noose. And he cut the noose. How he did it, I have no idea. That he did it, I am certain. How Gangaji did it for Kenny, all I am certain she didn't, and if she did, I have no idea how she did. But there is something that is present in one, when the noose has been cut, that is available to everyone who is struggling in the noose and looking around to see if there is any help. If there is anybody in the crowd who cares. Anybody who has the courage to step forth and say, "Stop". See what is hanging you. See what is killing you. See what you are struggling against.

Since this is a spiritual group, I know that you *know* intellectually, mentally at least you know that what you are struggling against is this ego. And what the ego is, is a sense that the "I" that you go by is different from the "I" that the person next to you goes by, or that I go by, or that your enemy goes by. And it is true. That's true. So when I entered that prison that day, and spoke to Kenny and the others there, I said very simply, "Turn your attention to this 'I'. This individual, separate, struggling, imprisoned 'I'. Rather than continuing the struggle, rather than escaping the prison, turn your attention to *who* is imprisoned, *who* is struggling, to this 'I'".

And if you are successful in shifting attention, then you see the door is open, the knot is untied, and you are free. You are free to walk out of prison. You are free to walk out of the egocentric life. You are free to walk back into prison as well. You are free to tighten the knot as well. You are in fact free. Gangaji doesn't give you, or Kenny, that freedom. Gangaji was just used, is just being used to point to the open door. Most of the men in that prison weren't even interested in satsang. The ones that attended satsang, most of them were interested but on the periphery. Wanted to talk about it, discuss it, see how it fit historically, or philosophically, or intellectually in line with what was known. In line with the noose. What fiber of the noose is this?

Many people have asked me, "What is it you do?" And often people will say to me in the midst of a kind of burning explosion, "What did you *do*?" So I want to say once and for all, I am not *doing* anything. I am not using occult powers, I am not using secret shakti, I am not conjuring devas and gods to break you free. I am not doing anything. Presence, my words, my history, is a pointer to the open door. The door that my teacher pointed to me, that his teacher revealed to him. That you know already in the core of your heart.

Kenny didn't stop to ask me what my political alliances were or what my opinions were, to decide if he would then listen to what I had to say. Likewise, I didn't stop to see if Papaji and I were in agreement politically, socially. We weren't, actually about a great many things. Didn't matter, doesn't matter. It is not of that realm. I am sure Kenny and I disagree about a great many things. It doesn't matter. It has nothing to do with Freedom, with what is Freedom. He never expected some honky woman coming in, telling him what was so. Didn't matter. I never

ever, ever expected to be at the feet of an Indian Guru. Doesn't matter. It is of an all together different realm.

So if you find your mind preoccupied with anything, that's the counting of the fibers in the noose. It doesn't make you not free, doesn't make you not the Self, doesn't make you not Consciousness Itself, but most likely it does obscure the experience and the realization that you are free. That you are Consciousness, that you are Truth. So out of the crowd has appeared this form, this phenomena that goes by the name of Gangaji. That has appeared in your Consciousness. At least for this moment. Will disappear from your Consciousness at some moment, in some time. But for this moment it is here in your Consciousness and it is asking for attention. And when that attention is given, then the attention is reflected back so that there is an enormous force that can turn your attention to who you are.

You have capacity to make the utmost, highest use of that force. It is an innate capacity. Maybe it has never been confirmed, but it can never be taken from you. So when we sit quietly at the beginning of satsang, that is the pointing. When we speak during satsang, that is the pointing. If you hear, if you investigate, if you inquire into the truth of yourself, you must see, finally, that every event, every circumstance, every thought, every emotion, past, present, and future is pointing to That. It is quite interesting that before one's attention has been shifted to the truth of who one is, every event, every circumstance, every thought, every emotion, is pointing away from That. But in this crucial shift, which is really a relaxation, a surrender, an allowing of individual attention to fall back into the Source of attention. In that shift, all is a vehicle. All is in service, everything that appears in Consciousness, and disappears in Consciousness, every moment. So it is to honor that shift and to honor your attention to that shift, and your attention so that all being may recognize Itself as That, that I salute you and welcome you to satsang.

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[20:12] BARBARA: Since that letter was written, over 20 years ago, Kenny has been sharing what he realized in prison with people living both on the inside and the outside. You can catch up to Kenny by visiting his website: [ThisSacredSpace.org](http://ThisSacredSpace.org). *[Editor's note: As of February, 2020 Kenny's website is located at [kennydjohanson.com](http://kennydjohanson.com).]*

And if you want to find out more about Gangaji, her prison program, which continues to this day, her calendar of in-person and online events, just visit the website: [gangaji.org](http://gangaji.org). That's spelled [gangaji.org](http://gangaji.org). If you have a moment to give us a review on iTunes, I would appreciate it, and I'd love for you to share this podcast with others if you feel called. That's how we can make this invitation to freedom ever more available around the world.

As always, thank you for listening. Until next time.