

Gangaji Podcast
Being Yourself
Episode 30
Host Barbara Denempont
The American Dream and the Bodhisattva Heart
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[00:05] GANGAJI: What does the heart of a bodhisattva look like?

SATSANG PARTICIPANT: The heart of a bodhisattva is always open to anything that is around it, and to the experience of others, and doesn't experience anything else as separate from itself.

GANGAJI: Ah, how do you know that?

PARTICIPANT: Because I know that's true. I mean, I know that's true, but I don't live that all the time in my life.

GANGAJI: But how do you know that's true?

[00:28] BARBARA DENEMPONT, HOST: Hello, my name is Barbara Denempont, and I am the host of *Being Yourself, Self-Inquiry with Gangaji*. It's my joy to welcome you to Gangaji's podcast each and every month. And this month I'm going to bring you a clip that I found really—well, I just loved it, that's all I can say—that really is about how we reconcile what we consider our spiritual lives, and what we consider our worldly lives. It's a wonderful exchange with a young man that met Gangaji in 2003 in Marin, after he had just taken a bodhisattva vow.

Let's take a listen.

(Excerpted from Marin County, CA Public Meeting with Gangaji, January 5, 2003)

[01:12] PARTICIPANT: I come to you today because I took the bodhisattva vow a couple of years ago, and maybe I took it a long, long time ago, I don't know.

GANGAJI: Yes, you reaffirmed it most probably.

PARTICIPANT: But I want—there is nothing else I want more than to have a truly pure bodhisattva heart, and to be a vessel of light.

GANGAJI: And ...?

PARTICIPANT: And I want to know how I should do that. How I can cultivate the heart of a bodhisattva.

GANGAJI: What does the heart of a bodhisattva look like?

SATSANG PARTICIPANT: The heart of a bodhisattva is always open to anything that is around it, and to the experience of others, and doesn't experience anything else as separate from itself.

GANGAJI: Ah, how do you know that?

PARTICIPANT: Because I know that's true. I mean, I know that's true, but I don't live that all the time in my life.

GANGAJI: But how do you know that's true? Haven't there been bodhisattvas that have been like screaming maniacs? And said, "No, I will **not** accept this, this is **not** acceptable." Isn't that part of the bodhisattva's responsibility to say, "No, this is not acceptable."

PARTICIPANT: Um.

GANGAJI: Yes.

PARTICIPANT: I—maybe that's why I feel this way now, because what's happening in the world really, really, really bothers me. And I don't feel separate from it.

GANGAJI: So and you, but you feel like it shouldn't be bothering you?

PARTICIPANT: I feel like I should have my life be more focused and centered on this desire that I truly want.

GANGAJI: Which is to have the bodhisattva heart?

PARTICIPANT: Um-hm.

GANGAJI: Well, I say you already have the bodhisattva heart. Otherwise you wouldn't be so tormented. The way I understand it, the bodhisattva heart is a little different from the heart of nirvana, or the transcendent heart. It's the heart in real life. It's the heart that experiences the blows and the breaking. And the tendency of certain bodhisattvas who come to me and ask me questions. It's like this is a healing bodhi—it's like a Bodhisattvas Anonymous group. (laughter) But most often what I hear is, "The pain that I feel," or "The hurt that I feel, I shouldn't be feeling, because if I really were being true to this desire to be a pure vessel, I would be above it, or not feeling it, or it would be going through me, or ..."

PARTICIPANT: No. No, it's more that I feel like I spend time in my life on things that aren't important and ...

GANGAJI: Like what?

PARTICIPANT: ... that aren't giving, and that are selfish, and ...

GANGAJI: Like what?

PARTICIPANT: You name it, sex ...

GANGAJI: So, is it possible to have a bodhisattva heart for this human being?

PARTICIPANT: Is it possible?

GANGAJI: Yes.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

GANGAJI: And so you are speaking about human things, because part of being a human being is, there is a selfish drive in there that stays alive, whether it's sexual or some other appetite. Now I don't know if you are obsessive in those realms, if you are, you can tell the truth and you have to be really **ruthless** in your profound protest to say, "No, this will not go any further." But if it's just being used, and to some degree it is with you, as a way of, it's like torturing yourself as a reflection of the torture that you see outside yourself. So that's what has to stop. That, that, there has to be a refusal to continue to torture yourself. So that you can be used to—in some degree, which may seem very small, but is still worth everything, some degree—to be used to stop the torture outside yourself. So the responsibility then of the bodhisattva heart is to stop that self-torture. Which is usually this conditioned, cultural or religious, super-ego. This whip. Now I am not speaking of indulging the selfish drives, but you know the difference.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, more than anything I feel like I am hypnotized by the American dream.

GANGAJI: Really? You don't look it. I mean, although that is a computer chip on your ...

PARTICIPANT: You're right.

GANGAJI: But it's right at your heart, so ...

PARTICIPANT: My parents, my parents immigrated here and I was, I immigrated myself also, and so ...

GANGAJI: From where?

PARTICIPANT: From the Ukraine. And so I think there is a lot of conditioning that they have spoken to me, the conditioning that is more silent inside about needing to be established materially, and have money and

GANGAJI: Everyone in this room has that conditioning, we all had that conditioning ...

PARTICIPANT: I know and I really feel ...

GANGAJI: ... that **is** the conditioning of the American culture, that's right. And it is very strong, and it is, of course, it's a world culture. So it is very strong. That's right, you have that, and you know you have that.

PARTICIPANT: And I feel like that's what keeps me from me being the more selfless person I want to be.

GANGAJI: Well, that doesn't keep you from being anything. The discussion about that is what keeps you from being more of who you are. Do you follow this?

PARTICIPANT: Um-hm.

GANGAJI: It's the discussion. You say, "Yes, that's there," just like the, whatever genetic conditioning you have, whatever defects that were in some ancestors that got passed on, or whether that's emotional or physical or mental, you know, we all have, like, defects. That's the nature of being human being, there is some perfected aspects and lots of defects. And you just spoke of one of the defects of the American culture, and of course one of the perfected aspects is that we can gather like this and speak of these things. So, it's wonderful, and you don't want to lose sight of either one, because you want to be able to tell the truth that you see both, and you see what is deeper. Now if you are spending, you know, all of your waking time, or too much of your waking time obsessing about making money, or being established materially, then yes, you see it and only you can stop that, and you must stop that. Or you will be miserable, because your bodhisattva heart has different plans for the use of you. But you don't know what those plans are.

PARTICIPANT: So, this may be it, the American dream may be the plan for my bodhisattva heart.

GANGAJI: Well, it maybe the milieu, it is, at this moment it's where you are.

PARTICIPANT: Right.

GANGAJI: But the American dream, no, is not, is not the bodhisattva plan.

PARTICIPANT: Good, I am glad to hear that.

GANGAJI: **You**, being true to your, to the bodhisattva heart is what you are here for. Not being true to the religious or cultural conditioning or anti-conditioning, conditioning or rebellion against that conditioning, or the religious, Christian or Jewish or Muslim or Buddhist conditioning. Because they all have wonderful aspects, and they all have defects. And part of the defects that you are speaking of, one of the defects that you are speaking of is the Buddhist defect of, you know, the pure heart looks a certain way.

PARTICIPANT: The vow of poverty.

GANGAJI: The vow of poverty.

PARTICIPANT: You are saying that's a defect?

GANGAJI: Yeah, it's a defect. When you are going to be a burden on your society while you are being true to the bodhisattva heart, you are going to go around begging? Aren't there enough people who actually are in poverty that we don't need to swell the ranks of poverty? (laughter)

PARTICIPANT: Thank you.

GANGAJI: You know, if you are in poverty that's a different thing, but to assume poverty as if it were holy, this is a defect. It's just a defect, that's all. You can send the Buddha to me if he has anything else to say about it (laughter). But not all Buddhist sects take the vow of poverty, you know, I mean that's a cultural thing. It's—where is the true richness? Don't take a vow of poverty there. That's the richness of your heart. That's the love you speak of, that's what you recognize here and that is what gets confirmed in this meeting. This richness, this fullness that has nothing to do with any dream.

PARTICIPANT: It's real.

GANGAJI: It's real, that's right, and you know it's real. I have spoken to you before, I know you know it's real. And I understand that there are forces that pull on your mind, I understand that, that's the taking refuge in what is real. And the community that supports what is real, and sees what is real, and recognizing that what is real is here as the awakened truth of oneself. Without knowing what that will look like. And yet, ruthlessly telling the truth when there is an allegiance to either the following the materialistic temptations or following the flagellistic temptations. Because that's what poverty is. And we have both in our life, naturally. There are aspects of your life where there is overflowing bounty and richness. And there are aspects of your life where there is poverty. But to take refuge in what is true and awake and in support of that in all, this is, this is deeper and closer than any aspect. You are, you are always welcome.

PARTICIPANT: Thank you so much.

[12:44] BARBARA: As always, I hope today's podcast is supporting you in taking refuge in what is real. If this is the first time that you've joined the podcast, I invite you to go to the website gangaji.org, that's gangaji.org, to find all the podcasts that we have available there, or you can also find them on Apple and Spotify and other mediums that you like to get your podcasts on.

And I also wanted to mention before I go that Gangaji is going to be having a weekend retreat online on March 6th and 7th. You can also learn more about that on the website. I invite you to come because it's your opportunity to actually connect and speak with Gangaji, and bring your question to her just like this young man.

Thank you for listening. Until next time.