

Gangaji Podcast
Being Yourself
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Host Barbara Denempont
Get More Sober
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GANGAJI: The willingness to be silence is the willingness not to be who you think you are, not to get what you think you need, not to have what you think you have. There's a kind of nakedness in that.

BARBARA DENEMPONT, HOST: Hello and welcome to *Being Yourself, Self-Inquiry with Gangaji*. My name is Barbara Denempont. This month I have something a little different. It's an excerpt from an interview that Gangaji recorded with Mark Groves. It's a wonderful conversation about what it is to be still, what it is to be silent and why are we afraid of silence, why are we afraid of stopping?

I so appreciate how Mark shares his own experience in this interview. I found it very compelling.

(Excerpted from Mark Groves Podcast: Get More Sober with Gangaji, November 15, 2021)

MARK: You've had such a profound impact on my life, your words. I found you in the depths of a breakup, maybe like a week after I went through the breakup and a friend of mine sent me your podcast and I was struck by the words, "Silence is who you are." And you know, at first, I was like, what does that mean? But there was like a truth to it that my bones were like: yes, yes. And I know how I had been feeling called to kind of like enter my own form of Vipassana in that moment. So, first off welcome and that was a profound beginning to a journey deep within and then meeting you in Hawaii and now we are worlds apart from that time. So, thank you.

GANGAJI: Oh, I'm really, really happy to see you again, meet you again.

MARK: Yeah, in Hawaii it was like right at the beginning, it was right before all the sort of things unfolded so our world is certainly in a different place and I found like a lot of, even that conversation about silence is who you are, a lot of it being preparation, you know, to go through what we're going through. And I was wondering if you could sort of speak to that, like to how that relates and to even what you mean by that.

GANGAJI: Yes, well..

MARK: Because I think so many of us are afraid of silence. Sorry, please..

GANGAJI: That's right and, and we've been punished with silence in the past, you know. We've been told to be quiet and don't speak out of turn and so we have, like with almost every word in our language, we have polluted the purity of the word and so first we have to get through that and to recognize what does it mean when someone is saying, "Just be silent. Just be still." It's actually just, "Come home. Just, just rest in yourself for a moment." And, as we know, if we are readers of history in any degree, there are always very intense things that are subject to happen in any age and we're going through one of those now. I mean, besides the war that's going on all over the planet and the starvation, there is this disease, this pandemic and it was shocking. It is shocking to people to have their lives just

turned in a different direction and the shock can serve of course, because shocks are here in our lives in varying degrees and that shock can serve to actually throw our attention back to the spaciousness that the word “silence” is pointing to, to the fullness, the emptiness, the presence and ultimately, the consciousness of oneself. As we get, especially as human beings, and maybe even as searching human beings, we get so attuned to our sensory world, our outside world, what others are impacting in our world that we just overlook this free, spacious, peaceful, fulfilled (I think fulfilled is really the word) presence that is here. And so, the shock can serve for that and certainly the, I know it’s opening up now, but the way we didn’t have the ability to socialize with one another in the same way – which is beautiful: we are social animals and we, we want to do that and beautiful interactions come from that and we share with people in verbal ways, in limbic ways. But it did throw us back into finding, what is it we want? What is always here? And that is the crux of my teacher’s teaching: What is always here? What doesn’t come and go when it’s harmonious times, when it’s catastrophic times, what is still here? So that’s what I mean when I use the word, “silence.”

MARK: Well, that idea of what is always here. You know, I remember someone speaking to you and sharing about how they’d gotten sober and they’d stopped all the things, and that they were still sort of trying to find, you know, what you can’t put your finger on, the sort of mystical thing, and you said to them, “Get more sober!” And at the time that was relevant to me sitting and watching because I had quit drinking, I’d quit really any, any what I thought I’d quit, all, all the things I could quit and when you said that, I was thrown to a loop of kind of like: well, yeah, get sober from everything that pulls you away from now.

GANGAJI: Yes. Yes, get sober from your unnecessary suffering. We get drunk on our unnecessary suffering. Sometimes we get high on it but we always crash with it and so the, the call to sobriety at any level is the same call to, to silence. And we’re afraid of sobriety and silence. We’re afraid they will be dull or dead or nothing will happen. We don’t trust ourselves to be simply who we are.

MARK: It seems like technology has really continued to facilitate that. Like, obviously, technology can be beautiful, it can facilitate these conversations from different places in the world but like anything that, that can bring us joy, and bring us dopamine hits, it seems to have made it so like even in silence, like I don’t know that young people although I’d say all people who have phones, that’s a fair statement of like, we don’t really stand a chance against a lot of the technology that’s constantly at us. All the research that’s like, how do I get more of your attention? And we don’t really know boredom any more. I’m curious what you think about that.

GANGAJI: Yeah, I think that’s really a good point. I mean the whole point of being tuned in or linked in all the time is so that there is no boredom. There’s nothing, there’s very little you have to do to be stimulated from the outside and as you say, it, it’s all built on that so, you know there are plenty of jokes about it – people running into trees or running into cars which is no big joke, but it’s true. Everywhere I go I just see people, you know, linked into their screen. I mean, sitting in the park, you know, at the screen and so that is I think a generational thing and an essential thing and something will happen to shake that up in some way or we will just become even more extensions of our machines. But I think everyone has that issue and I think that’s part of what the social structure serves – as a way that we aren’t bored, as a way that we’re stimulated and, you know, there’s a very good part to that because our brains like stimulation: they grow, they make connections and that’s beautiful. But our brains also like to rest and we forget that and nobody’s going to remember it for us. We have to take responsibility for that and so when, and that’s what you do when you get sober. You actually don’t wait for somebody to offer you, whatever the substance is that maybe keeping you suffering, ultimately suffering. You take responsibility for that. Whoever offers you anything, you take responsibility for this spaciousness of being. And

even those words, you know, I'm aware that it can sound kind of bleak or dull or boring, but it's not.

MARK: Right

GANGAJI: And you don't know that until you discover that. It's like meeting death. It sounds like morbid and horrible and why would I do that? I just need to keep escaping death. But in your willingness just to turn and open. Well, death is what we sense in being bored or in stopping we feel we will die because in a real sense we are conditioned to move and to seek stimulus because that's our survival drive. But when you're willing to recognize that and you're willing in a space of safety – I'm not suggesting you do that in a place with bombs falling all around you or some natural event that is threatening you, but in a space, in your house or in nature or, just to take a few moments and experiment with what does it really mean to me to be silent, to be still, to stop, to open, to there not being a next moment, to stop the trajectory of throwing oneself in the future and just be here. It's so simple and that's what keeps it out of our reach because we are programmed and conditioned to be complicated and then as you say, the devices are, accentuate that complication, the noise.

MARK: What do you think it is that, you know like, when we think about stopping that, that aversion to, I guess it's sort of the death to the hustle, it's the death of the continuing movement. It seems to be like, I remember when you first sort of invited that space to stillness, you also followed up with a question like: what are you afraid you'll find there? And immediately I was struck with just, "More of myself."

GANGAJI: Ha!

MARK: Yeah, and then I just had a lot of grief but like a good grief, you know, of like I've missed me.

GANGAJI: Mm, yes, you've been searching for yourself.

MARK: Mm-hm.

GANGAJI: That's what all the stimulus is. Of course, it's physically translated as survival, even if we're searching for the perfect mate, it's some kind of survival because then I'll be happy. It's about me always, but it's me in some future rather than me just in this moment with whatever is going on: misery, bliss, whatever, just to be still in that. It's, it's your nature. It may not be second nature. What is second nature is our thrust outward and to seek the stimulation – and I'm not making that wrong in any way. I think that we are made for that and it can be beautiful, it's wonderful and it can be treacherous and addictive and then misery, because you, you miss yourself even if you don't know that you miss yourself, you do. You're trying to fill yourself so that you can find yourself, but you are always right here.

MARK: The simplicity of that is almost confronting, you know? It's like..

GANGAJI: Yeah.

MARK: It's so simple and yet we're reading books, and on this journey and, okay, books are great and personal growth is great and all that stuff

GANGAJI: Yes.

MARK: And I often think like what you're ultimately inviting us to, to just actually let ourselves arrive, like let ourselves be.

GANGAJI: Yes! Yes, it's, all of our books are stimulating that, that sense of, "Yes, I want that, I want to be free, I want to be full, I want to be true!" But it's somehow putting it in the future – and if I do this I will get there – even books that are pointing you back to the present. There's a way that our mind translates that as, "Oh, I have to do this." I mean, even what I'm saying here: just take a moment and be still. Okay, "I've got to take a moment and be still," that's a future action, but in reality it's already here. It's the willingness to stop creating anything. We are, I know in my generation, create your reality was a really big deal and the point of that was to recognize how we add negativity to reality and then we suffer. So, it was very valid but became a whole movement to create your life or to create life itself or to create God. And, of course it just became an ego trip, you know.

MARK: Mm-hm

GANGAJI: I will do this. I will be God and so that's very tempting and can be scintillating, but the invitation to not create anything, to see what is here before your creation and then during whatever is created, whoever you think creates it and after that creation dies – because if it's born, it will die – and that's the really good, good news. We think it's, we think sobriety is bad news, you know? It doesn't sound like fun if we're really into the stimulation, but the news is, and that's what you're reporting is it's, it's not what it's thought to be. It's much bigger and deeper and it is fulfilling.

MARK: It seems to be that that fear of, at least I'll speak for myself, that when I was confronted with silence, confronted with, almost thrust into it because of grief, you know, like the rooting nature of grief, of loss, that I really couldn't run from it, that grief was coming to get me and it was going to hold me still. And, in the experience of being in that stillness, I then confronted death in a way that I never had. They felt very interlinked, like I felt an immense amount of grief about not being present in myself, but I also started to process what it means to be a mortal being - maybe that's to do with age too, you know, that, that I turned forty and you know there was – I, I'm curious what your thoughts are about our aversion to even thinking about our mortality or, and what does that cost for us, you know, in our lives? Where do we struggle because of the suffering of not wanting to just accept mortality?

GANGAJI: Oh well, you know, what a meditation those very questions are. If everyone would just ask themselves those questions: "What is the cost of my fear of, of – we know about mortality, we see it all around us..

MARK: Right.

GANGAJI: We somehow think we are the exception, you know. We can't think that way. It's possibly just the way our brains are wired to keep us reaching for immortality. Yes, so then the willingness to be silence is the willingness not to be who you think you are, not to get what you think you need, not to have what you think you have. There's a kind of nakedness in that and, yes, it can be fearsome. I felt great fear when my teacher told me, "Just be still!" And I tried to sort of imitate being still, I got into a meditation posture and he said, "No, no, that's too much." It's really be still and I felt a terror arise in me. I can see now maybe it was a terror I would die. I was just, it felt like to me if I was still, I would lose everything I had been building all those years of improving myself, that I would somehow regress back, which is a kind of death. So I think it takes different forms for different people but it is finally, yes, meeting the, the reality that everything that is born, dies - and the deeper reality that what is always here, is here now and always. And so, in that there is a capacity as an individual, as a human being, as a brain, to actually come back rather than reaching, which is, is our nature and we have reached all over the planet, we've conquered the planet and it's time to come back.

MARK: Yeah

GANGAJI: For our planet's life, for the other species and for each other – to come back to what does not need any acquisition for its fulfillment. But it may initially feel, as you were saying, threatening. It's like, "Woah, but if I go back, I'm, I'm subject to death." Somehow we've, we like the trance of not feeling we're not subject to death.

MARK: Yeah, right.

GANGAJI: But it is a trance and so the willingness is to have the trance broken. So, we could, we can say sobriety but it's also maturity in the best sense. It's really, you're growing up and in that you're recognizing what is ageless, what is truly ageless. It may not, it certainly doesn't have anything to do with you as an individual but the recognition of this presence of consciousness that you as an individual in your own capacity for awareness, can, can recognize as your own source – so, as is the source of every tree and every animal and everybody. So this is transcendent realization but recognized with a very simple willingness to stop feeding, for a moment, and I'm not saying as a practice, I'm just saying for a moment so that you at least, one at least has the experience of the, the fulfillment, the presence, the sobriety, the completion.

BARBARA: Let me take one more moment to thank Mark Groves once again for this wonderful conversation. If you'd like to hear the entire conversation, you can visit the community blog pages on gangaji.org that's gangaji.org.

When you visit the community blog, you'll find not only Mark's interview but lots of other beautiful contributions from the community. And speaking of contributions, I also wanted to thank everyone who contributed to the financial wellbeing of this podcast and to the Gangaji Foundation. We did meet our goal at the end of the year, plus. So, thank you, thank you for making this podcast possible each and every month.

I appreciate you in so many ways and I thank you for listening.

I'm Barbara Denempont. Until next time.