

Gangaji Podcast
Being Yourself
Episode 64
Host Barbara Denempont
Celebrating 30 Years of Love in Action
Released November 14, 2023
www.gangaji.org

BARBARA DENEMPONT, HOST: Hello and welcome to *Being Yourself, Self-Inquiry with Gangaji*. My name is Barbara Denempont. This month, I am going to share with you something very different, something that's not actually out of the archives. This is a soundtrack, actually, to a video that we created to honor the 30th anniversary of the Gangaji Foundation. Now, you can watch the video, of course, at gangaji.org, and I hope you will, because the video is beautiful, too. But I wanted to bring you this soundtrack here to this podcast, because I would love for this acknowledgement to go far and wide, for it to go all the way around the world.

The piece begins with Gangaji's first meeting with Papaji, and then it celebrates what unfolded over the last thirty years through this community of volunteers and donors. For me, it is a remarkable story, and it's also a teaching story about what is possible when we're true to ourselves, when we're true to what we've realized, and when we're simply available.

(Soundtrack of the *30th Anniversary Video* celebrating love in action, narrated by Barbara Denempont, October 2023)

(Note: It includes featured music from Jami Sieber, Kirtana and Amber Terrell.)

BARBARA DENEMPONT, NARRATOR: This story that I want to share with you begins in India. It was on a search for a Sufi Masters that Eli Jaxon-Bear was unexpectedly led to the door of Papaji's home in Lucknow. Eli soon wrote home to his wife, Toni, telling her, "You must come. He is the real deal." It wouldn't be long before she arrived.

PAPAJI: First of all, most important piece, burning desire for freedom.

BARBARA: Toni and a friend were on their way to see Papaji in Haridwar. In that moment, she couldn't have known how much her life was about to change after meeting Papaji on the banks of the Ganga.

GANGAJI: And when I met him, I saw a fire in his eyes, a light in his eyes, and I was so happy to see it, and a welcome in his eyes. And it was like, me, he's welcoming me? He doesn't even know me. He doesn't know if I'm a good person or a bad person, if I've done my homework, if I've done my good deeds. He doesn't know how imperfect I am, how selfish I am, how vain I am. He doesn't know any of those things, and he's still welcoming me.

BARBARA: From the beginning, Papaji and Gangaji exchanged many letters.

GANGAJI: Dearest Papaji, beyond one and the many, I am.

Beyond light and dark, I am.

Beyond teaching and no teaching, I am.

Beyond knowable and not knowable, I am.

Beyond, beyond and not beyond, I am.

Beyond describable and not describable, I am.

Beyond the reality of this *Sutra* and the non-reality, I am.

I am love, being conscious.

I recognize myself in all form and in formlessness, and beyond all that.

I said, "Whoa, you've given me so much. What can I do? How can I, How can I merit this? Where can I give back for this?" And he said, "You give everything. You give your whole life, and never ask again."

BARBARA: She had arrived as Toni Varner, and six weeks later, she was leaving as Gangaji. Yes, she would give her life to this. Yes, she would share Papaji's message of peace in the West. On the plane ride home, it was bliss. But after returning to Maui, she felt certain it was a terrible mistake to have left Papaji's side.

GANGAJI: I remember being at home in Maui, and not seeing the beauty in Maui at all, just aching to be back. I felt we'd made a mistake that I should be back there. I should have said I would sweep his steps, you know, if I could just stay. And there was like, "Whoa, what was the teaching?" And just this, "Whoa, peace and radiance." And then later, we actually were at Esalen later, and a couple of weeks later or something, and it just, there was something that shifted that it was just so obvious what is always here, and that any suffering is on top of that.

So if you have a question, please feel free to ask it. My name is Ganga, and my teacher asked that I be called Gangaji.

BARBARA: Gangaji held early meetings at her and Eli's Maui home and began responding to invitations from spiritual seekers to come to Carmel, Santa Cruz, Seattle, Santa Fe, Oakland. Her life on the road was just beginning. Her essential opportunity was to always be true to what she had realized.

GANGAJI: It was a fire, it was really a fire, because it was a razor's edge, you know. All of a sudden, there are these huge groups, and if I identify it, even the slightest, negatively or positively, like, "Oh, I can't do this," or, "Oh, they're all coming to see me." I'm sliced on this razor that I'm living on, so it was really a necessary fire. I just couldn't identify, I had to be quiet. I had to be still, I had to be, what I was telling them was possible.

BARBARA: In November of 1991, Gangaji received a letter. It was an invitation to come to Boulder, Colorado. In part, it read, "We would all very much love to have you with us here in whatever way will work for you. So on behalf of the many friends here and in places near from where they might travel to see you, we extend our invitation to you."

GANGAJI: Since you find yourself in *Satsang*, very luckily, and found yourself in *Satsang* for a year, I can pass on to you the help that my teacher passed on to me. He gave me this task, to pass this on to you, that the lineage goes to you.

SINGER: ♪ Within the heart ♪

♪ The whole and part of everything I see ♪

♪ Behind the eyes ♪

♪ Beyond the skies ♪

♪ Reflecting me ♪

♪ At the silent core ♪

♪ And yet before phenomena began ♪

♪ Oh, and after it ♪

♪ And after it, I am ♪

BARBARA: It wasn't long before the meetings in Boulder began in earnest. In the summer months, Gangaji might offer four meetings a week. Many stepped up to volunteer, to organize the meetings, rent the hall, book the flights, set out chairs, pass the donation basket, duplicate audios, or put up a poster. They were all working on the fly, and something was clearly taking hold.

In 1993, the community came together with Gangaji and made it official. The Gangaji Foundation was established as a non-profit in Boulder, Colorado. While Gangaji's world tours continued, new aspects of the Gangaji Foundation began to reveal themselves.

One of the most important invitations Gangaji ever received came from behind bars. It was 1994. A group in Colorado's Englewood Prison asked her to come meet with them, planting a seed that would grow into the Gangaji Foundation Prison Program. The letters that came from prisoners were extraordinary. Their discovery of freedom on the inside took all of us deeper.

GANGAJI (reading a letter): This is a maximum security joint known as the *House of Pain*. Some of us know it as a *House of Healing*.

EX-PRISONER: I didn't see the love, the unconditional love, until I met you. I didn't know what unconditional love was until I met you. Then I come to the *Sangha* and there's more unconditional love.

BARBARA: Prison program volunteers would share videos in prison, a correspondence program was born, and donors raised the funds to send books to prisoners free of charge. Today, Gangaji's *Freedom Inside* course supports the spiritual inquiry of prisoners in over two hundred and fifty prisons.

From the earliest days on Maui, Gangaji's meetings were being recorded, first on audio, then on video. Video *Satsang* became a real thing. Eventually, hundreds of volunteers would open their homes, inviting others to come over and watch a video and have a potluck. Then in Maui, someone ran into the meeting hall saying he had just seen

Gangaji on public access TV. The public access TV program was putting Gangaji on the air, and many people first met Gangaji just by flipping through the channels.

GANGAJI: Hello, everyone.

BARBARA: A steady stream of volunteers transcribed those recordings. Those transcriptions then soon evolved into the first book by Gangaji, with more to follow, books that would be translated into many languages: German, Dutch, Japanese, Spanish, Hungarian, and many more. Technology kept rolling along. There was this new-fangled thing called the internet. It wasn't too long before the first *gangaji.org* website appeared, and eventually would offer a new kind of meeting hall, a virtual hall.

And today, we have the joy of welcoming people to that virtual hall from over 40 countries. Then one day, radio shows turned into podcasts, a conversation with Gangaji launched in 2012.

HILLARY LARSON, *With Gangaji* HOST: I think that's kind of probably the question that comes up for you over and over again is that you experience things differently than, than we do, and I just like the fact that you get angry.

GANGAJI: Yeah, I think it's good news, but some people run the other way when they discover that Gangaji or any other teacher is still a human being.

BARBARA: *Epiphany* followed with beautiful teaching stories, and then we opened the archives to create *Being Yourself*. Would you be surprised to know that Gangaji's podcasts have been downloaded in one hundred and ninety countries. Now, our work is making this vast archive of recordings, estimated at over seven thousand hours, accessible, searchable, and freely available to future generations, perhaps over the next thirty years.

SATSANG PARTICIPANT: I'm back into my insanity again, and my depression and my despair.

GANGAJI: That's not what I see.

SATSANG PARTICIPANT: I know, at this moment, I'm very happy. (Laughter)

GANGAJI: Oh, boy, that's a cut, you know? Yeah, that's right. That's when it's really funny, when you don't even know what's funny. (Laughter)

SATSANG PARTICIPANT: God, for fifty-seven years, I thought it was serious. (laughter)

BARBARA: Gangaji has told me more than once, "Give your job away," which means be willing to leave space for something new to happen. When we look back at the wake of our boat, what you see is the ripple of mysterious consciousness that includes every new idea, every event, every prisoner's letter, every photo taken, every book written, every person that showed up, every moment of grace. In a word, it's love, the love alive in the heart of All Being, alive in this community, alive in you and me, alive in Gangaji and Papaji and Ramana, all coming and going in silent awareness.

GANGAJI: And this is now quoting Ramana, "Inquiry is a means to eliminate ignorance, which obscures love from shining forth, for the nature of the Self is love itself. Love cannot be practiced as a practice or *Sadhana*. All that is possible is to surrender to it. There is no such thing as preparation for love. Love is already here, it alone is. All that is

needed on your part is to give up thought, which makes you imagine yourself to be apart from love, and so to merge in love. Then there is only love, which is bliss beyond imagination. To one who has discovered the ecstatic joy of volition-less love, practice is a laughable absurdity."

SINGER: ♪ Om Namō Bhagavate Sri Sri Sri Ramanaya ♪

♪ Om Namō Bhagavate Sri Sri Sri Ramanaya ♪