

Gangaji Podcast
Being Yourself
Episode 74
Host Barbara Denempont
What Can Death Teach Us About Life?
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GANGAJI: There is a possibility of meeting the *Satguru* which is death – it's the final great teacher of us all. Not as a morbid meeting; not as a dramatic meeting but a very simple opening.

BARBARA DENEMPONT, HOST: Hello and welcome to *Being Yourself, Self-Inquiry with Gangaji*. My name is Barbara Denempont.

Just last week we released the newest instalment of what we like to call *The Sacred Text Series*. This new piece is called *The Sacred Fire of Death: Reflections on the Katha Upanishad*. The Katha Upanishad is one of the most beloved texts of the Vedas. It is so beautiful and perhaps the simplest way I can describe it for this introduction is, it's a dialogue with death. So, naturally, it's inspiring this podcast.

I wanted to find something out of the archives that would reflect how timelessly relevant this teaching story is for all of us and I found this wonderful monologue from 2006. I just thought this is the perfect match to the Katha Upanishad and remarkably, synchronistically, this monologue happened to be followed by an exchange with Chris Mohr, and Chris Mohr is no other than the creative force behind the whole of the *Sacred Text Series*. So that is a perfect circle, really. And I will say more about *The Sacred Fire of Death* audio piece at the end of the podcast. But right now, let's dive into what Gangaji calls the final teaching, the teaching of death.

(Excerpted from: ***Gift of Grief***, *Satsang with Gangaji*, September 30, 2006, San Rafael, CA)

I was recently in Boulder and in the community in Boulder, there are three people who are close to each other and close to me and part of the *Sangha*, who are dying – various stages of death – maybe some it will come in a couple of years or in a couple of months and it was a very powerful experience because everyone in the community knows about it and there were many reactions to it. A couple of people were just hysterical, deeply upset – naturally their friend is dying. One person in particular whose husband almost died was very upset and the wife of one of the men was extremely upset. It just brought it home closer. That we are about, what this invitation is about. She's really facing death. But not just facing death because we're all facing death, but opening to death. Actually opening. And at the end of the retreat I could see, in particular, in the wife of one of the men, she was relieved of her

burden of struggle with the death – it's not that she wanted it. It's not that they won't still fight to whatever degree a flight is possible, but she was free of the struggle. She could actually be happy, even knowing her husband is dying. He was happy. I never saw him struggling with it. That was the amazing thing - that three people who were directly facing it had somehow already met something in the reality of it. It was the, those of us circulating around it that had to hear somehow an invitation – which is the invitation of this teaching – to retreat, which is not to escape; it's not to forget about death or to pretend that death is not coming quicker than you think or hope. Not to glorify it, but just to open to it in retreat and in that, the story of death stops and there's a possibility of meeting the *Satguru* which is death – it's the final great teacher of us all. Not as a morbid meeting; not as a dramatic meeting but a very simple opening. Not as an escape from life, just the opening to what is inevitable, what is here.

This is Ramana's gift to us. This is Papaji's insistence to us and it's a possibility for each of us in its own way because each of us has deaths – maybe physical, maybe relational, maybe ideological. I mean there are world deaths, pick up the newspaper and death is saturated in this planet. Horrible deaths, horrible tragedies and personal tragedies, personal deaths. But there is a possibility without escaping any of that to open to it in retreat. And that's what we're here for because each one in this room has the capacity, and in that capacity has the certainty, if it is chosen, to discover really what is deathless. I'm not speaking of some metaphysical thing. I'm not even speaking of the soul. I'm not speaking of you, but really what is deathless. And in that, you are free. Until that happens, there will be running from the waves, hiding, escaping in spiritual ideas or psychological ideas or political ideas, personal ideas, what's right for somebody, what's wrong for somebody – the same old thing.

So, it's my intention that this weekend be a deeper offering of the possibility for you, in this moment to die to everything you think you know about anything – certainly about yourself and certainly about other, which is still yourself – not to escape, but to retreat. So that when the weekend is over, as it will be – it will die. When this meeting is over, it will die – you, you live from that meeting. Your life is lived from the meeting, not from the avoidance, not from the opinions and story – from the meeting, from your own death – and it is good news as many of you here know, and it's endless this meeting, as everyone will discover. It's not that you meet it and now I've finished with death. (Laughter)

It's you meet it and you meet it and you meet it and each meeting amazingly reveals a deeper bliss, a deeper freedom, a deeper joy of what cannot die, how it's not mine, not yours, not me, not you – what cannot die. So, it's possible that every conversation that happens here, no matter what the subject matter, it doesn't matter what the subject matter is – that it all be an invitation of how we resist that and how we can open to it and how simple the resistance (pardon me that's not right), how simple the opening is and how infinitely complicated the resistance is, how subtle the resistance is, how obvious the opening is, how justified and legitimate the resistance is and how simple, unjustified the opening.

And, amazingly it's choice. It's not a choice for everyone because there's a kind of mechanical reaction that happens: open-close, open-close. But for you it's choice. You are already free to choose. That's why you chose this weekend. There were

many other choices. That's why you said 'yes, I have to, I don't know why, I have to'. It's your choice we're here. We're dying together. We're living together. If we're living together out of our resistance to death together, it's the same old story: there will be war with one another – I will fix you and you will fix me and you'll fall apart and I'll have to fix you again, then I'll fall apart and you'll have to fix me again and we'll keep busy till we die. (laughter) And it's terrifying not to be busy because if we're not busy, we aren't doing our purpose. To stop, to actually stop, let it all fall apart, see what can't fall apart. Is everybody in the right room? (audience laughs) Because I have to say at that same retreat in Boulder, I think it was there, somebody came up and wanted to know something about how to get financial security (audience laughs). Is that right? It was like woah, wrong room. Yeah, Chris – *Sat-chit-ananda*.

PARTICIPANT: I didn't know if I was going to come up to speak until you spoke of my friends and it was actually the reason I feel like that I am here because not only my three dear friends there in Boulder but also other friends and family are close to death. So, it's hitting really fast and hard right now and I guess I'll just cut to the chase – I'm very angry at God. I am really surprised because I didn't really think that I held that kind of image of God at all, but in the face of this grief that I'm feeling, I'm just so angry that God would set it up like this. I wouldn't do it like this if I were God (audience laughs). So, I'm embarrassed to admit this but you know.

GANGAJI: Ah, it's beautiful Because this is it! If I can, I would just like to show you what I'm seeing here. There's enormous grief and that grief seems like a bottomless pit. So, it's actually easier to feel anger and not only is it easier to feel anger, but then if you can find a target for that anger – God – my God, who's in charge here, God. And then, even that then goes into a mental dialogue: 'I wouldn't have done it like this.' So, if you just rewind, as Papaji would say.

PARTICIPANT: Yes.

GANGAJI: You just rewind, you let go of that thought, you experience that anger until it brings you back to that grief and you open your heart to that grief – without a story, without a God.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah. I'm really going to miss these people.

GANGAJI: Ah, that's true. Maybe, I don't know. Maybe you won't. (they both laugh). So that's a, that's a, now we're back into a story of it. You don't even need the story. The story evokes the grief – that's beautiful. I'm going to miss these people, so that evokes the grief, but don't stay with the story. Let you, let your consciousness be completely enveloped by this grief. Don't resist the grief is what I'm saying. Open to it.

PARTICIPANT: You don't waste time, do you?

GANGAJI: What was that?

PARTICIPANT: I said, you don't waste time do you?

GANGAJI: No, why would we waste time? It's all we have. That's right. All the way. Nothing but grief. No God, no people, no you, no control. No control. Because that's where the choice is. So that you can control it. Even the anger feels better than grief – there's some power in anger. And then to find God – what is God thinking? You know, how can he be so unevolved to set it up like this. The promise of life, the beauty of life and then it's over. That may be legitimate. I'd say let's assume. I think it's as skilful as an assumption that that's legitimate: how could God set it up like this? How did we end up with a god like this? (laughter) It seems almost malevolent at times, you know. You see what happens – people's lives, the planet, the earth. So, as legitimate as that is, if you stay there, you're avoiding your own death in this moment, this grieving.

PARTICIPANT: Grief does feel bottomless too.

GANGAJI: Yeah, it does, that's why we avoid it.

PARTICIPANT: I'm surprised at how, how bottomless it feels right now.

GANGAJI: Yeah, so let there be no separation between you and grief and there's no hope for the grief to be over and then you'll feel free and then you'll be enlightened. Just, what is here is bottomless. (Chris takes some deep breaths) What are you experiencing?

PARTICIPANT: It doesn't even feel bottomless. It just feels here.

GANGAJI: And what's the experience of it, just feeling, just being here?

PARTICIPANT: Fear of my own death and just sadness.

GANGAJI: Okay, so if you just, for a moment, put the sadness aside, because that, that has its own course – just drop into the fear.

PARTICIPANT: Mm

GANGAJI: That's what we avoid the most. Even sadness is easier than that fear.

PARTICIPANT: It's just so out of control. Just (he sighs).

GANGAJI: Well, that's the choice – to not be in control in this moment. (pause) Without a story.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

GANGAJI: What's here?

PARTICIPANT: I'm just seeing different impulses come up.

GANGAJI: Excellent.

PARTICIPANT: Like dramatically crying or going back to the rage or whatever and just kind of...

GANGAJI: Yeah, so it's a very sobering inquiry.

PARTICIPANT: Just, just allowing myself to stay on, on the tract of being here.

GANGAJI: That's right. Stay on the, the fear. And going deeper into it. That's right. All the impulses will give you legitimate justification for avoiding what must be met.

PARTICIPANT: And even that right now, just the thought of it. Gee, I thought I've done this before.

GANGAJI: That's the biggest one.

PARTICIPANT: I thought I was done

GANGAJI: I've already done this. Never. It's always fresh. It's always fresh. It's a deeper, deeper layer. I mean, our whole body is layered with fear – how else could we have survived? There's nothing wrong with fear. Fear is physiological – necessity. Fear of death? Certainly, a physiological necessity. There's nothing wrong with that. There's, it's not that it's wrong to feel this fear. It's just that the possibility of going even deeper than feeling it – actually being it. Being one with the fear, where consciousness is one with this fear. (Participant sighs)

PARTICIPANT: Just this doom, just this.

GANGAJI: Doom. That's deeper than fearing. That's right, that's under fear. Fear is actually easier than that. That is the despair of birth and death. Despair of hope is there, there's hopelessness there. You have no control of a birth and death. So there is a normally an unmet despair – doom – doomed to die.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

GANGAJI: It's possible to not tell a story about that and just let yourself be one with that doom. (Chris makes some noises, between crying and sighing) What's that?

PARTICIPANT: It's just, just that, that sense of doom just reverberating in my body

GANGAJI: What's the experience of it when doom is reverberating in your body.

PARTICIPANT: Well, a lot of trembling and you just, it's just like the body's falling apart before it falls apart.

GANGAJI: Uh-huh? How does that feel? It looks great.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah. Well, it's um (he laughs) It just feels like the release of a pent-up energy.

GANGAJI: That's right.

PARTICIPANT: You know?

GANGAJI: Exactly.

PARTICIPANT: And um, oh (sigh). The body just feels like it's following the thoughts, you know, the anger and the body does anger, fear and the body does fear, doom and the body falls apart.

GANGAJI: How about you?

PARTICIPANT: Oh. Oh. (He laughs)

GANGAJI: Can you see? You have to see this (talking to the audience). It's not the words obviously.

PARTICIPANT: Not many words for this. This is the (he laughs). When I see my friends, especially the ones in the *Sangha*, who are facing this in ways that just blow me away because they're not running circles around it like, like I

GANGAJI: This is what you see.

PARTICIPANT: It's what I see and there's been even an envy about that too. (Gangaji holds a mirror up to him)

GANGAJI: It's that.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, that's what I see. It's just, it's life. It's, I see there's life in them. I see life in you. I feel such life here that.

GANGAJI: Yes.

PARTICIPANT: I can't explain it. I give up.

GANGAJI: You don't need to. Me too.

PARTICIPANT: I, it, it. It's just a supernova of just presence. (Gangaji laughs) I'll shut up. Thank you. Thank you, thank you.

GANGAJI: All I did was point you. It was your choice all along and all I pointed you to was what Papaji pointed me to.

PARTICIPANT: What Papaji points me to.

GANGAJI: Yes, points. It's better. Better tense. More accurate. That's the, that's the truth. It's not to say that there shouldn't be conversations of commiseration and weeping over the death of these beautiful people. Of course! It's natural. It's human. But to get stuck in that...

PARTICIPANT: Right.

GANGAJI: is to avoid just the absolute dying, is to avoid death. It is not an abstraction. Every life has this opportunity.

PARTICIPANT: Thank you for sharing this moment with me so much.

GANGAJI: Likewise, thank you, because it's always a fresh moment.

PARTICIPANT: Yes.

GANGAJI: We're here to share this moment together, this brief moment of life that doesn't exclude death.

BARBARA: Those last few words are so powerful to me: "We are here to share this moment together."

I hope this podcast has served you in this opportunity to meet death, for it to teach us what it has to teach us.

And to find the new production, *The Sacred Fire of Death*, go to website gangaji.org, that's g-a-n-g-a-j-i dot o-r-g. There's an online store. You will find it there. You can download it for ten dollars. Or, if you are one of the members of our media library, you can just access it directly as one of your free monthly downloads.

I feel profoundly grateful to be here with you. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Until next time.