

Gangaji Podcast
Being Yourself
Episode 75
Host Barbara Denempont
Living a True Life, Not Just a Lifestyle
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GANGAJI: How is “Who am I?” relevant to who I am? How is it relevant? What does it mean to live consciously, freely, openly, in inquiry, in discovery?

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

Today I wanted to bring you something that not only speaks to the absolute but also speaks to our daily lives. We’ve been on a journey of discovery to discover the very truth of who one is and then the question is: how do I live this? How can I be true to this? How can I truly be myself? I mean, that’s the title of this podcast, *Being Yourself*, and that is the challenge of a lifetime.

So, I have this wonderful monologue and exchange that was recorded at the Strawberry Rec Center at Marin. So many wonderful memories there and you can hear all the background noise of the Rec Center in this recording but it doesn’t deprive you of really receiving this deep invitation to honor your life and to honor Life itself.

(Excerpted from: ***Living a True Life, Not Just a Lifestyle***, Satsang with Gangaji, March 18, 2018, Strawberry Recreation Center, Marin, CA)

When I first got interested in spiritual matters, it was the early 1970s, and it was a lifestyle choice. It seemed like a deeper lifestyle choices than my other ones, but still there was a particular way of dressing and a particular way you should act and you should think and you should be and you should get more of that as you progressed in the spiritual school.

And then I met my teacher, Papaji. And he showed me so clearly and so directly that I had been trivializing this deep yearning to know the truth, to realize the truth. I had all the words for it, but he showed me how using those words and trying to fit my yearning into those words was trivial, and nonsensical, and just the same old cycle. I just had substituted dressing more lovely and thinking nicer thoughts and eating better—I’d substituted that for real inquiry.

And when I met him and he said, “Stop where you are,” he was saying in this moment, stop. Just be still. Recognize what is always here. But he was also saying, stop trivializing your life; stop making your life fit into your idea of what your life should be, or someone else’s idea or rebellion against those ideas. Be still. And when he asked me to come and speak to you, he didn’t ask me to come and teach you anything, or offer you anything, or give you anything. He asked me to come and confirm in you what is alive and of the greatest significance. And the possibility that your lifetime can be—and is to some degree, but can be more and more and fresher and fresher—an honoring of that. That you can stop trying to fit it into a lifestyle or a belief system or a list of shoulds and should nots. You should stop trying to use your life to copy someone else’s life. And the only way that’s possible is when you’re willing to be still. To not know what you should think or believe, to not know what you should feel or experience or what should happen or what the results of that will be. To stop this forward thrust of accumulation, of a lifestyle, so that you give your life, the attention of your life, to discovering what is life. And then the question, who am I, can never be answered satisfactorily by, well, I’m a woman or I’m an enlightened woman or I’m an unenlightened woman or I’m a good woman or a bad woman. They just crumble; those answers are things that are fed to us but they have no substance.

Your willingness to ask that question—truly, not as a fad or a style—and to give your full attention to it is where your freedom is, is where Truth is. So Ramana said the question is, “Who am I?” Papaji said stop. And in our meetings, I invite you to join me and us in conversation to discover how is “Who am I?” relevant to who I am, to this life—this unique and precious life that will disappear sooner than we expect. How is it relevant? What does it mean to live consciously, freely, openly, in inquiry, in discovery? And this obviously can never be taught, because if there’s a teaching there are shoulds and should nots and there are things to learn and you will graduate one day. But there’s no graduation here; there’s deepening, there’s freshening, there’s realizing, experiencing what it means to be who you are. And I’m not talking about your gender, although that’s interesting, and I’m not talking about your history, although that’s interesting too; I’m not talking about your problems—especially not talking about your problems. There it may be interesting to you. They’re like somebody repeating their dreams every morning at the breakfast table; it’s only interesting to you. And you must be tired of it too. I’m talking about the truth of who you are. And those words don’t do you justice, but they’re the words we use. And I’m talking about your full and absolute capacity to discover That, to be awed by That, and to surrender your life in the recognition that That is always bigger than any aspect and yet always connected to every aspect that appears in this life that you call yours.

So, in order for me to play my role I invite you to play your role, which is that we give each other full attention, that some of you who are called come forth, and we really engage in a conversation that is alive, that has the possibility to crack the veil of personal identity and unnecessary suffering. I make no promises about pain in your life; I expect all lives have pain. But the suffering, which is what is added to that pain by the narrative of what should and should not be or can’t be or won’t be—this is unnecessary. That’s the veil. And in your willingness to stop that narrative, to be still, to inquire, who am I, then you’re willing to put down everything to discover that directly.

I say and probably will say, I am saying today, it is very simple, but it's not easy. It's the challenge of a lifetime. And the only way that you know that you're ready for that challenge is if you experience some quickening inside—I don't mean from this meeting; I mean in general—something that is calling your attention to the mystery of what it means to be. Something that won't let you get away with ignoring it, even though I'm sure you have tried to ignore it, because it often doesn't fit in with what we call normal, or sociable, or even likable.

So I invite you to be yourself; and if you've found it impossible to be yourself I invite you to expose what it is you think blocks you from being yourself.

Okay. See? It's that easy. And then we will see where our conversation goes. Because it is a conversation. I'm not giving you a Sunday school lesson or a new dogma. I'm meeting you.

PARTICIPANT: Hi.

GANGAJI: Hi.

PARTICIPANT: Hi. I was up here once 15 years ago or so.

GANGAJI: Here in this venue?

PARTICIPANT: No, it was a Lake Tahoe retreat.

GANGAJI: Ah.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

GANGAJI: Well, 15 years is like that, huh?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah. A lot changes. So I'm here to ask you to help me with something that I feel a block with. Because even though I've been on the spiritual path for so many years, circumstances in life seem to bring up the humanness or the challenges that prevent me from seeing the bigger picture in situations. And so right now the challenge is dealing with people who lie.

GANGAJI: All human beings lie.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, on a lot of levels I think we're always lying. But then just about even like this is here or is it not. It becomes, you know, the philosophy versus the reality-

GANGAJI: It sounds...you're losing me now. I liked it when you were talking about lying, and you keep coming up against I think you said the humanness of it all.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah. Yeah.

GANGAJI: Yeah. Yeah, that's what we want to escape, isn't it? We want to somehow get out of this realm of humanness, where nobody lies, where everything is open and there's just this recognition of one Self as the totality of being. But then this damn humanness keeps coming in. Maybe I should say goddamn humanness keeps coming in.

PARTICIPANT: How do you deal with it?

GANGAJI: I don't see the problem.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, I wish I couldn't. That's what I'm trying to get to, to not see the problem.

GANGAJI: Yeah, so really that's it. You identified it as a problem.

PARTICIPANT: Mm-hmm.

GANGAJI: So what does it actually stop you from? The problem...you said a block, I think, and that's...What's the block of this?

PARTICIPANT: I just wonder, are there any rules in life or are there no rules in life?

GANGAJI: What is this...Who knows?

PARTICIPANT: Hmm.

GANGAJI: What do you want?

PARTICIPANT: I ultimately-

GANGAJI: Ultimately.

PARTICIPANT: ...want to be fine no matter what's happening.

GANGAJI: Even being fine with not being fine? Like even to be fine with being a human? A flawed human?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah. Sometimes-

GANGAJI: And the other humans and their flaws? It's a huge question. Because we have an idealistic view that we'll escape this human realm. And sometimes we put that, you know, after death we'll go to heaven, or we'll reincarnate into a better life—something that's not this. But really the invitation here is this. In the totality of this. The sublime wonder of this and the mundane horror of this. The yin and the yang of this.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, I think I struggle with the concept that we're creating our reality.

GANGAJI: Oh, yes. That's right.

PARTICIPANT: And so when negative things come-

GANGAJI: But, you know, to some degree that's true; your thoughts influence your experienced reality, but then that gets taken and made into a religion as if you are in control of reality. And that doesn't leave room for accidents, doesn't leave room for something bigger than your thinking mind, your creative mind. So it ends up being a very small philosophy, and a punishing one too, is what it sounds like. If I am lying or still seeing people who are lying, if I am having this negativity in my life, I've created this.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

GANGAJI: Well, if you're going to say you create your reality, say you create the totality of reality. Then live with your creation, rather than trying to back out of it. What's wrong with negative?

PARTICIPANT: Mm-hmm.

GANGAJI: It's just contraction, right? Or night. Or no. Absence. But when we get caught by a belief system, we have...yes is better-

PARTICIPANT: Than no.

GANGAJI: ...than no. Positivity is better than negativity and daytime is better than nighttime and presence is better than absence. It's just an unnecessary limit. And in this moment, you can experience dropping that belief system. And you can actually be humbled by that. How about you don't create anything? That's much bigger actually. Everything is here, including your ideas of creation or not creation.

PARTICIPANT: And all the emotions are fine?

GANGAJI: Are they? What's not fine?

PARTICIPANT: It would feel good if they were.

GANGAJI: Well, how do you know that?

PARTICIPANT: Because there's so many concepts like this is not okay, this is okay.

GANGAJI: That's right. So you already know that it will feel good if it's fine. The emotion itself may not feel good, or the circumstance may not feel good; it may feel horrible.

PARTICIPANT: Mm-hmm.

GANGAJI: But if you add on to that, and it shouldn't be here and if I were a better person or a better practitioner or a better creator, it wouldn't be here, that's

unnecessary. That's the unnecessary suffering. So, like, what's an emotion that you have trouble?

PARTICIPANT: Like feeling upset or jealousy. Things like that.

GANGAJI: Oh. Those human emotions.

PARTICIPANT: Yes.

GANGAJI: So can you bring one to here? Can you evoke it in some way?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

GANGAJI: Some memory or some statement that you can do?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, I think jealousy is a big one.

GANGAJI: Jealousy is a big one.

PARTICIPANT: Mm-hmm.

GANGAJI: Well, wait till the hormones stop; that goes away.

PARTICIPANT: Really?

GANGAJI: To some degree.

PARTICIPANT: It's not even on that level. It's just the tension.

GANGAJI: Okay. So jealousy. It's, like it's a monster in there. But in your willingness to be jealous, can you bring it here? And just actually not judge the jealousy—not judge it as correct because of the actions that have evoked it and not judge it as incorrect because you shouldn't be feeling something like that; you should be more evolved than someone who's feeling jealous. Just jealousy is here.

PARTICIPANT: Mm-hmm.

GANGAJI: Where is it? Where do you find it?

PARTICIPANT: In my body? I mean...

GANGAJI: Yeah, in your body.

PARTICIPANT: Like here.

GANGAJI: Here.

PARTICIPANT: Mm-hmm.

GANGAJI: Can you let your attention just leave all the stories about jealousy, for it or against it, just leave them all behind? Just for a moment. This is inquiry. And actually let your attention fall into jealousy, in your body. Emotions are always in the body.

PARTICIPANT: Mm-hmm.

GANGAJI: What do you find when your attention falls in?

PARTICIPANT: It starts to dissolve...

GANGAJI: Oh, that's interesting, isn't it?

PARTICIPANT: I feel the intensity is dissolving.

GANGAJI: Isn't that interesting? Now, now try to drop your attention into it with the hope that it will dissolve. It's very different, isn't it? Because one is you use inquiry to try to get what you want, to feel better; the other one, you in this moment were actually curious enough to follow, well, I feel jealousy here. If I let my full awareness just go into it, what do I find? It was an innocent question. And you found it starts to disappear. If you don't make that right or wrong, just a curiosity that's following inquiry, and you discover what's here as it disappears. Maybe another emotion, I don't know.

PARTICIPANT: So if someone keeps evoking it...

GANGAJI: No, no. No, let's stay right here with this.

PARTICIPANT: No, with this though.

GANGAJI: Yeah, but let's don't go theoretical right now.

PARTICIPANT: No, because it is happening.

GANGAJI: In this moment?

PARTICIPANT: Not this second, no.

GANGAJI: Okay. Let's come back to this moment, because the rest, who knows? But if this moment is alive and true for you, then you will discover something that is astounding. So when you now let your awareness fall into where jealousy is or where some other emotion is that has taken its place, what do you find? There's really no right answer.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah. I'm just feeling lost a little bit.

GANGAJI: Lost.

PARTICIPANT: Mm-hmm.

GANGAJI: Okay. That's excellent. That's honest. So the same with lostness—if you just put aside, at least temporarily, the judgment about being lost. Being lost is a scary feeling. But you're willing out of curiosity, and because you're up here, just to experience complete lostness.

PARTICIPANT: Hmm.

GANGAJI: Yeah. What's that? What do you experience? Just in this moment. That was just like a second. What did you experience?

PARTICIPANT: It's nothing. It's not too bad.

GANGAJI: It's not too bad. It's not what we think it is. It's not what we tell ourselves it is.

PARTICIPANT: I guess I've been thinking my emotions make me up.

GANGAJI: Yes. That's right. You're then the slave of your emotions. So this is about the willingness to not be a slave anymore. And you aren't a slave. It's not even about getting free; it's about recognizing, oh, what I think enslaves me—and jealousy is a very enslaving emotion—I will just actually turn and meet that. As you did. Because when you meet, your awareness is present; that's all we have to meet.

So you, you showed us the simplicity of meeting this very complicated emotion. I don't have any idea if jealousy will continue or cease. I don't know; that's in the future. But I do know that you always have the capacity to not be enslaved by it. I don't say you have the capacity to not feel pain by it, but to not be enslaved one way or the other—either by being the good girl and getting it out of your system, or following it and making someone else suffer.

PARTICIPANT: So if emotions come, I should just observe and ...?

GANGAJI: Well, you can. I wouldn't say you should. I say you have a choice. And it's a choice that most people have no idea they have. And it's a choice that can show you that a lot of the suffering you feel with particular emotions is generated by unnecessary narrative, or replaying unnecessary narrative, or imagining possibilities that are unnecessary narrative. And when you stop the narrative—and that's really, are you willing to meet...in order to meet the jealousy you have to stop the narrative; you had to for a moment stop it and go, okay, well what is this I'm experiencing? Not, what do I think about this that I'm experiencing and how can I get rid of it; it's what is it? And when you actually turn to it in this fresh, innocent demonstration that you're giving here, it wasn't there. It can't survive that.

But, I don't want you to take this as a trick that you can do with jealousy.

PARTICIPANT: I was trying to do that.

GANGAJI: Yes, of course. That's natural. But it doesn't work because the innocence is lost then, and it becomes another method. This is not a method. This is a willingness in a moment to put aside all your methods of obeying jealousy or fighting

jealousy or being victimized by jealousy, and just turning your awareness to where it is and entering that. The energy of it, the vibration of it. And in that instant, it doesn't have power over you.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

GANGAJI: But it's not a should. It's not a dogma. It's not even a process. It's your willingness to stop processing. To stop everything. To stop fixing. It's to stop making it safe for the future so that you won't have that pain. You just stop and investigate, what is here? It's the same question as who am I, only it's, what is here? And jealousy, you know, seems like a demon until you actually put your awareness totally in it, and then it's nothing.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

GANGAJI: So that's a choice you have. It's not a choice you're required to make; it's a choice you can make. And you can see the results then for yourself of the different choices you make with different emotions.

PARTICIPANT: How freeing it is to not have to do anything.

GANGAJI: Yes. That's the point. That's right. And you realized it directly.

PARTICIPANT: I have a lot of shoulds that...

GANGAJI: Yes, well...You've learned your lessons well. This is a heresy for those shoulds, for those lessons. It's part of the tradition, you know. Ramana was teaching and Sri Aurobindo was down the road, and Sri Aurobindo would not let his students come to Ramana because he would ruin their practice. Papaji was in Rishikesh and Maharishi Yogi had a big center there, and he wouldn't let his students come to Papaji. I don't know what your teachers are telling you, but you're here and that's good enough for me, and I confirm you in your heresy and I salute you in your freedom from whatever your particular religion is. And I mean that as your own personal lifestyle religion. Whatever you are doing to punish yourself and reward yourself and shoulds.

There are...you earlier said are there no shoulds, or, but of course, you know; we live together, there are shoulds. You shouldn't hurt people unnecessarily, you shouldn't steal, you shouldn't murder. Yes, of course there are shoulds. But I'm talking about that self-punishment that you aren't some idealistic king or queen of what you think you should be now, given what you've learned, your spiritual teachings. That's the false idol that I'm interested in shattering.

PARTICIPANT: Thank you.

GANGAJI: You're welcome. You are beautiful.

PARTICIPANT: Thank you.

GANGAJI: Thank you for coming up here again. Fifteen years. Don't wait so long.

BARBARA: There are so many facets to this conversation that I find invaluable. I hope you feel the same way and I want to remind you that this is just the tip of the iceberg, this podcast. There are so many wonderful resources that the community of volunteers and donors have created over all these years. It is available to you.

You can go to website gangaji.org, that's g-a-n-g-a-j-i dot o-r-g to access them, whether it is more podcasts, blogs... Also you can learn about the online gatherings with Gangaji each month and if you can't afford that, you can also check out the scholarships. There are retreats and the whole schedule for 2025 plus you can learn more about the outreach programs, the Prison Program with the Gangaji Foundation, just all the ways this community serves this possibility of living a true life, not just a lifestyle.

So, I thank you for listening today. It is always my joy to bring you these recordings. My name is Barbara Denemont. Until next time.