

Finding Home

Episode 3

Glimpsing Reality

Transcript

HILLARY [00:15]: Embarking on a conscious spiritual search was so far from Gangaji's reality growing up in the South, it couldn't have been more unplanned. When Woodstock ignited the hope of being released from the bondage of a prescribed life, it was like releasing a genie that refused to go back in the bottle. It's that trajectory that leads us into episode three and the world of free love, necessary pain, profound realization, lifelong love, and, at the end of the day, disillusionment.

GANGAJI [00:53]: We know the meditation and we know the chanting, and we know the plant medicine, but it's not enough. I can see now it's because I was directing my own awakening rather than surrendering to my own awakening.

HILLARY [01:11]: Gangaji's activism against the Vietnam War continued when they moved to Washington, D.C., where her husband served as an army physician. Just two years later, they would move to San Francisco, the promised land: a place where the air was cool compared to the humidity of the South...where certain people who were intoxicated by the idea of a free life and free love could congregate. It was 1972. Gangaji's husband enrolled in the Art Institute of San Francisco and worked as an ER doc. It was a new start, even if her surroundings took a bit of getting used to.

GANGAJI [01:53]: The first night I was there, we were sleeping in the apartment, in our sleeping bags, before everything arrived, and I heard these sounds, and these weird sounds in the night. I'm sure I was up all night – just these sounds! And I was like, I thought, well maybe since this is earthquake territory, that's maybe the earth makes these adjustments and makes these sounds and it's like: what am I doing moving to a place where it's guaranteed there's going to be another big earthquake? But then the next day, I mentioned it to my husband and he said, those were foghorns. So that was totally alien to my culture, a foghorn, to be on the water. It later became a really loved sound.

HILLARY [02:39]: When I mentioned that storms were on the horizon for Gangaji at the end of episode two, the storms I was referring to were not small ones by any means. She had been privately managing pain regarding her marriage for some time, and it

didn't just magically vanish in the course of the move to San Francisco – something she would discover almost immediately.

HILLARY [03:04]: *Your husband was just such an incredibly wonderful man, just in so many different ways. But you also had misgivings and doubt and there was something that was alive in you that you were holding back and it was your secret. Can you describe that in a way that feels honoring of both of you?*

GANGAJI [03:26]: Well, it was honoring of him. I mean, when we ended up getting a divorce, I told everybody, including my daughter, unfortunately – I don't think I needed to tell her this – that it was all my fault. None of it was his fault. He was really living up to his part of the bargain of marriage and beyond. I was pretending in the marriage. I hoped that my pretense would start to become reality, but it didn't. It just got harder and harder. So it was nothing about him. He was alive, he was intelligent, and he liked to have a good time, and he was an artist; he was an intellectual, he was perfect in those ways, but I was not perfect. So I was not being true to myself, and then I had to pretend that I was perfect, pretend I was a good wife, so that became this weight that finally led to divorce. We tried some counseling. And even the counselors finally said, "No, we agree. You have to split."

HILLARY [04:43]: *I'm thinking about this paradox of moving from thinking that freedom is in being married and having this kind of picture-perfect life to: "Oh, wait, maybe freedom is the opposite of that." Were you aware of that paradox?*

GANGAJI [04:55]: Well, I was aware that we were in a place, San Francisco, in a time where you could be yourself, you could be free. And I was also aware that I was being appreciated as a person and as a being in the South, not so much in D.C. when we lived there, but as his wife, I was seen as a wife. And so there was a certain formality in my relationships with other men and with women, too, that, you know, that was my definition. And I felt the limits of that. So San Francisco didn't fix that. It actually made it more apparent. And so, as I was experiencing this freedom of place and people and air, I recognized even more so how I was betraying him and myself. And then it was just clear, heartbreakingly clear.

HILLARY [05:58]: When I asked Gangaji about what it was like to be swept up in the zeitgeist of free love following the breakup of her marriage, she said it was like being shot out of a cannon. What she was seeking was true romance rather than casual encounters. The whole subject of sex itself is important because what Gangaji considers to be one of her very first awakenings occurred back when she was in high

school. Sex stirred up all sorts of things when it came to her religious conditioning, and the fear of, well, going to hell.

GANGAJI [06:36]: In my awakening in high school, I was going against everything I had been taught about Jesus and God and the right things and being a good girl and so I was horrified when I had a sexual experience and yet I love the sexual experience.

And you know there's such extremes about the sexual life and I was, I think, in the middle of that, those extremes. Extremes are being totally promiscuous – and I wasn't, or being totally celibate – and I wasn't. I was just this healthy girl feeling this, these urges that were beautiful, and there was no place in society for that, except marriage, of course.

HILLARY [07:24]: That evolution continued when she moved to San Francisco. In the winter of 1973, Gangaji was just 31 years old when she experienced a radical shift of identity and perception that would give her an undeniable glimpse into the vastness of life. It happened in Golden Gate Park. The person who was with her at the time showed up during some of her most pivotal discoveries. And this was a huge one.

GANGAJI [07:53]: And he told me about mescaline, and I was kind of interested, but mostly scared, and he assured me that he had really quality mescaline, and he knew how to administer it, and he wouldn't be a part of the trip. We'd go to Golden Gate Park. He'd make sure I was in a protected place, and he thought it would really change my life.

And so I thought, why not? You know, pot changed my life. I listened to somebody who had felt the same way about that and she was right. So I said, "Okay," and we went to Golden Gate Park. I just have that initial memory so much present with me. So I took the mescaline and things started to dissolve. I'd never had a psychedelic before, and I got scared.

It's like: "Oh boy, what have I done?" And he saw I was getting agitated and he came over and he said, "Just surrender. If you surrender, it will all work out. If you fight it, it'll be bad." And I heard that and I surrendered. And when I surrendered, it was incredible. I just saw that nature was living and breathing and a leaf was alive and trees were alive.

I could see the respiration of the trees and even though I grew up in the South, in a place where we were in nature every day, I had never considered that nature was of the same life that I am. And that's what the trip was for me, was really meeting nature. And

recognizing that any time I started to get scared, if I just opened and surrendered, I wasn't scared, I was in bliss.

And any time I didn't open and tried to run away from the fear or whatever, I would get more scared. So that was the teaching of that particular episode – just opening. And in opening that's –I had no idea the universe is alive. I had no idea what life meant. That there's this conscious vibrating, ecstatic experience of oneself, I would say now; then I said of natural life.

So it was sobering in the best sense, in that my searching for sensual pleasure, or being protected from myself or other people, was just so irrelevant in that. It was just the swimming in the ocean was like that. Just the bliss of being. It had such impact that I had to assimilate that impact for years, but part of that assimilation was just recognizing that already here is this vibrancy and bliss of being, that I don't have to reach out to get something to satisfy me, food or sex or a semblance of love, or protection; it's all already here.

And it's just relaxing back and opening to it. Then it, it's revealed, I didn't have to figure anything out, I didn't have to work on anything, I didn't have to: “Okay, if this...” It really – I see now – I stopped the conversation. And when I stopped the conversation, that was the opening, I could recognize what is here, what's alive.

It was a fundamental shift in my approach to reality at that moment, and it was like a shift that was overdue; it was almost as if I matured into something, or I returned to something that I hadn't understood, or hadn't gotten or hadn't realized. And I didn't see the world the same way again, I didn't see myself in the world in the same way.

It wasn't about me getting, it was the possibility of experiencing what's here.

HILLARY [12:33]: Gangaji said that had she not experienced that shift that day, sitting in Golden Gate Park, she might not have been able to receive what Papaji was offering to her almost 17 years later. Jumping ahead to 1975, Gangaji was living in a house in Bolinas, co-parenting with her ex-husband. She became friends with a man across the street who was a follower of Maharishi. One day, he offered her a suggestion which would end up unexpectedly throwing her back into a feeling that was painfully familiar.

HILLARY [13:17]: *You develop a friendship with one of these people and one of his followers and didn't they suggest to you, you know, with your nervous system and anxiety: “You know, meditating would be a good thing for you?”*

GANGAJI [13:29]: A very strong suggestion. He did a psychic reading with me and out of that psychic reading he said, “You really need to meditate every day.” And he told me just to sit there and get a timer, egg timer and set it for 20 minutes and don't move, don't get up in those 20 minutes, sit there. It was excruciating at first, but really valuable. I'm so happy he did that.

HILLARY [13:53]: *There was a moment too when – I don't know how long you've been meditating, how many weeks or months, when that really dreadful feeling starts to arise and it was the same feeling you had when you were a kid and you would take phenobarbital to....”Oh, now I'm okay again...”*

GANGAJI [14:13]: Yeah.

HILLARY [14:15]: *Could you talk about that?*

GANGAJI [14:16]: That was great. I mean, it was horrific in the moment of it arising because I could tell my body would have certain sensations of sort of expanding and dissolving and...but unpleasant. And I looked at the timer and I had ten minutes to go. So I had made this commitment to myself, I'm not getting up. So I sat there and it went away. It's the first time I had really just sat with it. Because always before, even in college when I would occasionally have to take it, it felt like I would go crazy or be dissolved or just be miserable, break out in sobbing tears and I...since I just had 10 minutes ago on the egg timer, I didn't move and it's like it just popped through and it was finished.

HILLARY [15:09]: *I think about...call them awakenings or just moments when something is different and you could look at certain things as finite things, but they're not finite in sequence because one thing creates the door for the next and then the next.*

And so I wonder about your experiences, even with your plant journey, that even just this direct experience that you have faced: “Oh my God, I can't face this...” And then you're like, okay, I better open. And then you realize, Oh..!

GANGAJI [15:45]: That's right it wasn't conscious. I didn't consciously remember that: “Oh! I open. It's not terrifying. I fight it and it's horrifying.” I just knew I had 10 minutes more on the timer. And so I sat with it. And it disappeared. It never came back.

HILLARY [16:04]: Thinking about Gangaji's surprising awakening journey, there's something important to recognize about how all of us connect to aliveness in different

ways. For Gangaji, it was and still very much is through her body. I mentioned her love of dance in the last episode, but it deserves further mention. It wasn't just dance as a way of moving the body. For her, it was a true spiritual practice and a central part of her life.

GANGAJI [16:38]: The dancing part really grew to become something of deep significance to me. I had always taken dancing, and tap, and ballet, and be part of dance recitals at camp, or school, whatever, and loved it, and I had a talent for it.

But when I was in Memphis, I took ballet lessons. A friend of mine and I went to this ballet school, and we took ballet lessons, just to, you know, just to do the movements, and not that we were dancers. But then when I moved to San Francisco, I discovered African dance, and that to me really epitomized the difference in Memphis and San Francisco.

And you could sign up and take these classes, and I was taking like three or four a week: these wonderful African dances, I mean, there are moves to African dance, but, you know, you do it across the floor, and the rhythm and the sound...I was transported.

GANGAJI [17:34]: And that continued as my life changed. I always had dancing someplace. When I was in Bolinas, there was a great dance group in Point Reyes that I would go two or three times a week and dance with them. The community center would be packed, and there would be good musicians of some kind, and dancing, partnerless dancing, just dancing, and I could go hours and dance like that, and never be tired or anything, because some other energy would just take over.

GANGAJI [18:32]: It was effortless. It was like flying, like a dream of flying. I would have dreams of flying and this was on the ground but flying, where you weren't, or I wasn't, restricting myself in any way. It was something about the music and the rhythm and the movement and something else happened.

It was an experience of freedom. I can see now when I look back on it, but I didn't know that that could exist *outside* of dance. So totally in the body that you're out of the body. It's the body's participation that makes you out of the body, or made me out of my body and free. Just flying, we would, hours and hours of dancing and bliss – the bliss of a particular kind of movement.

HILLARY [19:30]: After living in California for about three years, a certain kind of weariness started to come over Gangaji. Life was full in many ways, but when it came to “free love,” what seemed so enlivening when she first arrived now came with a sense

of fatigue, and it ultimately never really resonated with her deeper longing in the first place.

HILLARY [19:55]: *There's some level of disillusionment, maybe not even a subtle level of disillusionment around this free love lifestyle.*

GANGAJI [20:06]: Oh definitely. I was just weary from the whole scene...not exactly a party scene, because it wasn't a party, but it was just a permission scene. And it was exhausting. I felt exhausted. And Bolinas was a really good place to be 'cause it was quiet. It wasn't a happening place, except intellectually and poetically. And I could be in nature, and I discovered nature for really the first time since the Golden Gate Park, on the Bolinas hills, slopes leading to the ocean. I fell in love with nature again, and so I was coming back into my body and that's when the dancing was really important, but it wasn't dancing with a partner, it was really being with myself and recovering actually from that high energy intensity of the prior years.

So I started imagining that really what I needed was a new husband, a new relationship and since visualizations were really happening then in the Bay Area as a practice of getting what you want, I would do it right this time. I would visualize it. I would get it right. I mean, I never even considered that I was doing the same thing that I had done before. It was just a kind of blindness.

HILLARY [21:29]: *So just bear with me. Okay? If we switched roles and I'm you, I'm a teacher and you're a student, and you come to me and say, "Oh, I've been visualizing this man; he's like, maybe he's blonde, maybe he's tall..." And then me as your teacher, I would say to you, "and what would that give you?"*

GANGAJI [21:57]: Exactly. Security. I wouldn't have to be out there searching for anything. I would be held in a unit, in the marital unit...exactly what I had escaped. So it was a full circle. And I knew that, in a certain abstract way, and yet I was exhausted from my "freedom." So I wanted that back, only right this time...to do it right.

HILLARY [22:28]: Going back to the visualization Gangaji was creating in all earnestness about her ideal partner, her description was very specific. He would be tall, blond, handsome, and he would be Nordic – definitely Nordic.

HILLARY [22:47]: *I want to circle back to your visualization of the tall Nordic guy and suddenly you're at a party and what you discovered was not the Nordic guy.*

GANGAJI [23:03]: But I didn't know that it was not the Nordic guy because I was still visualizing the Nordic guy. I just happened to meet this guy who was in overalls, who'd come down from his commune in Oregon, reading poetry. He kept following me around reading me this poetry and he's like this kid! And he said his name was Eli. And so, I remember when we left the party, my friend had said, "Oh, maybe you and Eli could get together." And I said, "Please, don't do that – I don't want to get with him. I'm not interested in him." I still didn't say no to somebody asking me out, but I knew it was just a courtesy thing.

So he asked me out. It was okay, but I wasn't interested in him. But he said he wanted to come out to Bolinas to see me. He knew that I was there part-time because he was interested in Bolinas. And I said, "Sure, fine." And so he came out to Bolinas and he called me from downtown. He said, "I just sold the truck I was living in and bought a little Fiat. And this is a great town."

I don't know if you've ever been to Bolinas. It's just like a little dirt town, but somehow attracted poets and artists and all kinds of incredible people. But he was just this nonentity to me. So I didn't..."Oh, that's interesting. I'm glad you..." He said, "This is my town. I had no idea this existed. This is my town." And he thinks he's found a place to live. There was a place, you know, mentioned on the bulletin board with three other people. So I gave him directions to come up, you know, to my place, and I liked him better this time. He was funnier, he was friendlier, and we put some music on. I can't remember, maybe it was Taj Mahal. We put music on, and we were kind of dancing, and there was this electric spark between us. Maybe something with electricity and the record player and something else, but we could see this electric spark, and we went, "Whoa!"

GANGAJI [25:15]: And, you know, one thing led to another, and we made love, and I fell in love with him in that moment. I saw him totally differently from the way I'd seen him the night at the party and the other night when he had come by. And it's like he was a different person. And I just fell totally in love with him. It's like, "Wow, what happened?"

GANGAJI [25:57]: And he had done all these things; he'd traveled to Alabama when it was very dangerous with SNCC in 1967. That's after the murders in Mississippi. And he had had a fellowship to get his doctorate at the University of Denver and he closed the school down in protest of the Vietnam War. He was so committed to what he believed in that he was willing to risk his life.

And I was just in awe of that, and I saw he was living what I believed in, but had always been afraid to live, because I had to get out of the South. I knew I wasn't going to do things that he was doing, and yet he was terrified when he got on that bus to go to Montgomery, but he did it anyway. He was living a life, a really outrageous life, and at that point, he had no money. But he, you know, he could, he could get by. He was the quintessential dropout...and so smart and funny. I had not been with anybody that funny in a long time, so we laughed and laughed so much. And that was it.

HILLARY [27:20]: Gangaji and Eli eventually lived together in Bolinas. As an aside, Gangaji's relationship with her ex-husband evolved into a more than amicable relationship. They took turns taking care of their daughter. And when he ended up getting remarried, Gangaji was in the wedding. Over those years, there would be lots of collaboration when it came to shared living spaces and being parents. For Gangaji and Eli, they moved in together in Bolinas and set out to jointly continue their spiritual searches.

GANGAJI [27:54]: It was a great life, but underpinning it was this total love I felt for this man. And so, I had to adapt to him because he didn't feel a total love for me. It grew for him. And he has said that I was the clearest manifestation of light he had ever seen. But he intellectually was not interested in any kind of monogamous relationship, but we were falling in love, deeply in love. And I realized that actually he loved truth more than he loved me. That's who he was true to, that's who he was loyal to.

Who, being truth. And I got it. I realized that that was the deepest experience I'd ever had with a man: a man that wanted something more than just the pleasures that were here. But it changed my life. I saw that to be with him I had to give up living a frivolous life. That it had to be a serious life, not that it wasn't fun. It had to be fun.

We laughed more than anything because he's really a funny, very funny guy and I am too once I loosen up. So we were really totally enjoying each other, totally. I was totally in love with him and committed to him and that grounded me in discovering what is it I want really? My little fantasy of a marriage: a new family – that was not going to happen with him. So I had to just realize that fantasy was just some kind of hope, a false prayer, that really would have led me down the same path. And there was something else that was being offered here, and that was no hope, really. And I was willing to take it.

HILLARY [29:57]: *It's so funny how that parallels your teaching of not offering you something, I'm offering you nothing. Yeah. That's amazing.*

GANGAJI [30:07]: Yeah, that was my first experience of that, really.

GANGAJI [30:12]: I see, you know, it's, everything is setting me up to meet Papaji, but this was a conscious setup for that, because he was consciously seeking. "Who is more enlightened than I am? Who can establish me in this enlightenment?" And I saw, oh, it's more than just meditating every day; it's a life's purpose. It had always just been one of the facets of my life. Then it just became the purpose of my life. And I entered it by wanting to be with this man. It was his purpose, so I took it as my purpose, too.

HILLARY [30:45]: *I think it was before we even started, maybe we had done episode 1, and one of the things that you were clear about, and I was clear about as well, is the danger in doing somebody's life story is painting it like this fairy tale, that that first year was a honeymoon. It was beautiful, and then you went through the fire. And that's a painful fire to go through.*

GANGAJI [31:16]: But necessary.

HILLARY [31:19]: *Yeah. Can you talk about that fire?*

GANGAJI [31:21]: Well, I don't even know how to talk about it.

HILLARY [31:26]: *Yeah.*

GANGAJI [31:27]: I don't know how to talk about it. Anyway, it was a bliss year for him because I am this subservient woman to him because I'm following every word he says. He's hysterical to me. He's the smartest man I've ever met. I love our lovemaking. It's just an incredible experience being with him and I'm growing spiritually and deeply, and he calls me on my acts, my little dramas. It's like, "Whoa, what are you doing? Why are you acting like that?" And so he was really good for me psychologically too. I couldn't charm him. He was charmed, but only when I was natural and true. So he says that was a totally blissful year because I was his devotee that year.

I was following him in every way. And then, you know, that can't last, but once we moved into the house, my ex-husband's house, things shifted and I realized I had to actually be my own person too. And that's when some of the heartache started, because before that, he would want to be with somebody else.

He would go be with them, and it was just part of my sadhana, you know. And after that, it was like, "Whoa, this is horrible. I hate this. I don't want this." I don't even know what to say about all of that. It was just...we had an adjustment period.

HILLARY [33:23]: *I want to draw a line, if I can, to...if you have two people in relationship, one is monogamous, one is in open relationships, right? And that is in the world of being intimate with another human being...for one person, that lifestyle is open and freeing and for somebody else, it's just like being stabbed over and over and over again.*

So can you talk about there was a moment where you met the jealousy and the rage...

GANGAJI [33:59]: Yeah, he had gone into Berkeley to be with somebody, somebody I knew, had met, somebody very attractive. And I was just weeping in jealousy and pain and horror.

And somehow, it's almost like an eye opened and I could see myself in this misery. And I saw that there was an aspect of it, the dramatic aspect of it, I was actually enjoying. Not in a happy enjoyment, but like you cry in a movie. So I was watching a sad movie, and I was crying in that sad movie. And in that moment, I recognized I can walk out of this movie. The movie doesn't have to change, but I don't have to, I don't have to attend the movie like this. The movie being a movie of suffering—that was the title of it. And in that moment I was free, for a moment. I got up, I stopped indulging my drama, and from that moment I could actually have a conversation as an equal with Eli about what I needed in the relationship and what was acceptable to me and not acceptable. But before that, I was a victim of what was wanted because I thought that was the deal. That I had to be a victim and there had to be a victimizer for my sub-story to continue.

HILLARY [35:50]: *You also said that jealousy didn't just magically go away.*

GANGAJI [35:53]: Oh, no. Jealousy is...it's part of our flesh and bones. It's a survival instinct. But my capacity to not be a victim of the jealousy, to actually hurt if the jealousy hurts, but to also speak out about what's acceptable hurt that nothing can be done about it, and what's unnecessary hurt and what can stop.

HILLARY [36:26]: *I'm not excusing pain. I'm not dismissing pain, but I think we benefit by being able to look in hindsight. But there's the microcosm and the macrocosm and the microcosm is this challenging relationship and parallel to that is this completely liberating wonderful relationship, but it's leading to something that you could never possibly imagine.*

GANGAJI [36:53]: That's right. But here's the thing with Eli and this whole thing. I knew that he was causing me suffering but he knew that and that was part of the deal in getting together. He had always been upfront about that, but I could point out to him that

he was causing suffering in these other women, too...that he didn't understand something about women, basically. Maybe not all women, but most of the women he was attracted to or had any involvement with were suffering because they didn't want this either. They wanted him or they wanted something stable. And when he realized that he was actually contributing to suffering, it sobered him up and he was willing to commit to a monogamous relationship. That had its ups and downs and we had ups and downs around that but the basis of the relationship changed.

HILLARY [37:57]: *When you speak of the first stage of your relationship with Eli, I just want to say that, first of all, it's really hard to imagine you as subservient.*

GANGAJI [38:07]: Uh-huh, yeah.

HILLARY [38:07]: *That's one thing, okay. And then my question is there, is there a word that's more accurate, or was being subservient what best described you during that phase?*

GANGAJI [38:24]: No, it doesn't describe me well. I was not subservient. Because subservience means I was serving him. I wasn't really serving him, I was watching him very closely, carefully. And I was in love, and we were in our honeymoon phase, so we were both being really nice to each other all the time, in love with each other, laughing at everything each other said. But I was watching him closely, and I was quiet in that watching him closely.

HILLARY [38:52]: *When you're talking about watching, it wasn't just watching as a person. Yes, that sounds like it's included, but it's like watching deeply because your attraction was to his attraction to the truth.*

GANGAJI [39:03]: That's really key. Here, this man was in love with me, but loving truth more.

And that shocked me in a really—at first—negative way, because I wanted to be loved more. But as I sat with that, it just became wonderful that he actually loved truth more, and that there was plenty of room to love truth. It's not like truth was his, he wasn't loving his truth, he was loving the truth.

And discovering how that could be lived as a regular human being, with regular emotions and regular events. And that was so new to me. I had just assumed the truth

was I want to be happy, so I'll do what I need to do to be happy. And I discovered it's much deeper than that, and maybe your happiness is included and maybe it's not.

HILLARY [40:00]: All sorts of things happened in the second half of the 1970s and early 1980s. Gangaji and Eli would immerse themselves in the I Ching and Buddhism. They studied Tai chi in Berkeley and then taught Tai chi warmups in Bolinas in the mornings. It was there that Gangaji became interested in Zen Buddhism. She also became taken with acupuncture, trained in England and started building a successful practice. All combined, it was a rich search by any standards.

GANGAJI [40:34]: You know, there were many experiences that were quite extraordinary, but I realized with the Tibetan Buddhist, it was similar to the Catholic Church. When I was a little girl and ended up going to the Catholic school, because of all the statues and the deities...the Tibetans do that even more. I mean, you chant to a deity and they can enter your body, you know.

They, you're chanting to the Medicine Buddha and the Medicine Buddha can enter your body. And it was wonderful like that. But when I discovered Vipassana and Zen meditation, it was so clean. There was nothing going on, there was no deity, there was ritual, because ritual always gets built up around any religion. But I realized that my infatuation with the Tibetans was really based on a very early sense of being saved by ritual and beauty and I have all respect for the Tibetans and for Tibetan Buddhism which is inseparable from the Tibetans and all of the teachers.

But it was a great experience; it finally was just another experience that was pushing me and pushing us just to find something that was deeper, bigger, something that we didn't know. And that was really, we were on this search.

HILLARY [42:02]: By now, it's the latter part of the 1970s. It was just a regular day when something would slip by that would be another echo of what was to come for Gangaji, although she would never have known it at the time.

GANGAJI [42:16]: We would often go in the Shambhala books. spiritual and new-age books. And this, there was always this picture of this man, and I knew that the man was named Ramana Maharshi. And there was a book that just jumped out at me, and I just picked it up; it was a small book, so I read it in the bookstore. I didn't buy it. I read it and it was like: "Wow, this is really the truth. He's really speaking the unvarnished, direct truth." But then I closed it really quickly and I said, "But, I don't know what that has to do with me. You know, I'm living in this world. I'm not going to India. I'm not attending darshan, satsang. And I've got a daughter I have to make sure is taken care of. It's not

for me, but later it will be for me.” I told Papaji about that, that moment. He said, “Ah, that's what got you here.”

HILLARY [43:31]: *It was also around that time where you had this recognition of: “I still have this core of suffering.” Can you talk about that moment?*

GANGAJI [43:41]: Well, it was humbling to recognize that you don't just wake up because you want to wake up. You don't have a chance to wake up if you don't want to wake up. But that's not enough, that I still had these really deep patterns and the Enneagram was very useful for that. And it was a revelation to recognize that I had a particular pattern that I identified as me was actually one of nine patterns of identity. And it's false identity, but it's the identity of...it's a survival tactic. And so I recognized that a lot of the drama and a lot of the suffering, and all of the unnecessary suffering and the unnecessary drama, was just coming from this fixated ego. That was tremendous, of course, in meditation and in dharmic singing or practices, there's not room for that. So you can have these wonderful, explosive and clear moments of realization, but when you put your shoes back on, you're usually putting back on that cloak of the ego, and I was, and I was unaware of it.

I just knew I continued to suffer. Finally, I just grew suspect of this drama. I mean, there's certainly drama in life, and I still experience the suffering of life, but it was a habit. And there was a way that it infused me with some kind of, “I told you so.” It's all suffering and it was painful and it's masochistic, it's a masochistic fixation and I had to recognize my own responsibility for my own suffering. I didn't really know how to stop it. But the Enneagram showed me the characteristics and the setup for the suffering for the suffering, so that was really a great assist. And at the time, I was also attending meditation at the Buddhist center in Marin which was just sitting meditation. You'd just sit for an hour, vipassana sitting. And so I was getting to see or at least moments of seeing and being able to choose to not go into an old...the old story of me and my suffering or me and the world as my suffering. Yeah. So there was great benefit and great growth in that. But it wasn't enough. There was something missing.

HILLARY [46:25]: By the time 1981 had rolled around, Gangaji and Eli had moved to Mill Valley. They eventually opened an office in San Francisco where they had thriving practices, with Gangaji treating a steady stream of acupuncture patients and Eli practicing NLP, a form of hypnosis. It was a shift from a simpler lifestyle in Bolinas to a full-on, late-night, early morning routine that seemed to create a momentum of its own. Their spiritual search was still present but the high-energy lifestyle that became the default of the 1980's created a different container for their desire for the truth.

HILLARY [47:12]: When I think about all the things that you have done up until this point, whether it's meditation, or Buddhism, or dance, or plant medicine, or the Enneagram, EST, chanting, like all the things, and still you find yourself in this place where you recognize: "And I'm still suffering at my core." Was there a particular moment that that happened that you can recall?

GANGAJI [47:39]: I think it was in Mill Valley. We sort of, Eli and I, both came to that conclusion, because our life in Mill Valley was so full and so busy, and it was still an alternative culture if you compared it to Memphis, but compared to Bolinas, it was the happening culture. It was the '80s, so it was a, just a time of excess. And so we had entered that period and we were kind of swept away in it, even though our core values were the same. And so in being swept away, it was...I could know certain things, like my fixation, the Enneagram, or I know when the meditation schedule is, but I was still indulging my suffering. And I recognized that, and I saw: I need a teacher. I can't do this alone and I had gone to different teachers who had come through because San Francisco was an epicenter of teachers coming through and I would attend them and I never really felt much. So we both concurrently, individually and concurrently recognized: we know this and this is a liberation method and we know the meditation and we know the chanting and we know the plant medicine but it's not enough. It's not enough. I can see now, it's 'cause I was directing my own awakening rather than surrendering to my own awakening.

HILLARY [49:17]: As we move into episode 4 of Gangaji's *Finding Home* series, Gangaji would find herself at a crossroads, and not necessarily a comfortable one. It was to be a valuable lesson in failing and not knowing what to do next. It was in the midst of that confusion that she would finally meet her teacher.

GANGAJI [49:42]: He said, "What do you want? What are you doing here? What do you want?" And I didn't expect that question somehow, so I hadn't planned for an answer. And I just said, "Freedom, I want freedom." But really, I hadn't thought I want freedom. And I hadn't thought, my quest is for freedom. I'd never really considered that.

HILLARY [50:10]: Before we end off, I want to play you a little piece that got left on the cutting room floor, so to speak, which points to episode 4.

HILLARY [50:24]: *There was something that happened that was a casual comment someone made to you at one point. And the person was a psychic.*

GANGAJI [50:33]: Oh...

HILLARY [50:35]: *And they said to you, Oh, someday you're going to be fairly well known and it will have to do with looking into people's eyes.*

GANGAJI [50:44]: This was the same person who taught me the meditation, the same neighbor. And I don't even think I had asked for a psychic reading, but he was giving me one. I could not imagine what that meant, although at the time iridology was really happening. So I thought, well maybe I'll be an iridologist and I'll look into people's eyes and diagnose the illness and I'll get really good and maybe, 'cause he said relatively in the area, you'll be famous, in the Bay Area.

HILLARY [51:19]: *And here you are, that's so funny.*

HILLARY [51:32]: We have three more fascinating episodes to go, including stories from Gangaji that will likely sound familiar, but many that will be brand-new. I'm Hillary Larson, glad you can join us for *Finding Home*, this six-part audio documentary series all about Gangaji. Take good care until next time.

End