

Gangaji Podcast
Being Yourself
Episode 95
Host Barbara Denempont
Special Presentation of *Finding Home: From Disillusionment to Awakening*
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GANGAJI: Well, I think that was it. I was in that place of “I give up,” you know, “I don't know.” And that's a very open place, actually.

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

Today, I am truly honored to share one of the six episodes from *Finding Home* with you. *Finding Home* is an intimate audio documentary series that was created by Gangaji and Hillary Larson, and in collaboration, they traced Gangaji's spiritual journey and her challenges and realizations on her spiritual path. But I would say it is more than a documentary. I have really come to experience *Finding Home* as a listening journey for me, and it's in episode four where Gangaji is speaking very candidly about the longing for freedom that shaped her life and the moments when the search itself began to fall apart leaving her disillusioned and still yearning for something real.

Now that was something I could relate to because, even after knowing Gangaji for more than thirty years, listening to this episode revealed parts of her journey I had never heard before. And I found it reflected moments in my own life when I felt disillusioned and at the end of my rope. You may also recognize something very relatable as you listen.

In this fourth episode, we begin at a very pivotal moment. It's Gangaji's journey to India and her meeting with Papaji, the meeting that literally changed everything.

Here is *Finding Home: From Disillusionment to Awakening*.

(Excerpted from: *Finding Home*, Episode 4: From Disillusionment to Awakening, August, 2025)

HILLARY: This is Hillary Larson. Welcome back to Gangaji's Epiphany Series. In the 1970's, Toni Varner had no notion that she would find herself in India fifteen or so years down the road at the feet of an Indian guru. She also would have said that the

idea that one day most people would know her by the name Gangaji was absolutely fantastical, at the very least. Honestly, when telling the next phase of Toni's story to becoming Gangaji, or at least being known by that name, is what I call divine choreography. Whether as a child growing up in Mississippi, or a young woman trying to find her way out of the South, or immersing herself in spiritual teachings in the 1970s and '80s – all of it was a part of a mysterious journey to find out, ironically, what she had been searching for all along.

GANGAJI: I could have said bliss, enlightenment, awakening. I said freedom. And then in these meetings, I have heard freedom come up all the time. And I get it. That's always what I've been looking for.

HILLARY: As we dive into Episode 4, it's important to revisit the longing for Truth that connected Gangaji with her husband Eli in the first place, back when they met in 1975, all of which led to them meeting H.W.L. Poonja, or Papaji, as they affectionately called him. We start with a question that might easily get skipped over when naming experiences like truth or waking up.

When you met him and he was obviously more interested in the truth, at that time what did that mean to you?

GANGAJI: Well, I didn't know, but I saw that it was a deeper quest. I was meditating and I had chanted with different groups and done Sufi dancing and it was just...there was something there, but I didn't know what it was, so it was a lifestyle for me, I would say. And the meditation on the advice of my neighbor was to really calm my nervous system.

So it was this personal, psychological, physiological kind of thing. And when I met Eli, it was that All Being be happy. It wasn't limited to my wellbeing, it was – this is – a quest for awakening for the species. It was just bigger and broader, and there was not separate from any moment of my life. Before, I had these different compartments.

I was a mother, I was a waitress, I was a fun person, and I meditated sometimes. It was just one of the aspects of my portfolio. And so it was...it was all or nothing; that's what he was into, that's what he wanted. What his life was focused on then was really waking up. So that he could join those who assist humanity in waking up. So it was a huge intention. I had never considered that. It just never had crossed my mind. Before that, it was all about me. And after that, it was all about me too, but in a totally different context.

HILLARY: When you speak of waking up and there's a two-part question to that because first of all, what does that mean, waking up? And secondly, I think that many people have the experience of this desire of waking up is more about self, my, my awakening. I want to wake up.

GANGAJI: I want to be happy is what I thought waking up would be. I want to stop suffering. I want to live happily ever after. And also when I would visit different traditions, like see monks, Buddhist monks, the Zen Center in San Francisco had a wonderful restaurant, Greens, and I would go there and they didn't look happy to me

at all. They were doing a very Zen Buddhist thing in the way they would serve you and everything, in a stilted kind of way, and I thought, well, it's not Buddhism then, because I wanted happy, you know, happy like the way I felt when I was happy, I wanted to feel that all the time. And so that was really what I was looking for, and it was just very different from Eli's view — that what you were feeling was secondary to what you were realizing.

HILLARY: So then what does it mean to wake up?

GANGAJI: Well, to see how you are driven by your ego, and the results of that are suffering. But if you're just trying to stop the suffering, it's trying to get a better ego, trying to, you know, fix it up so it doesn't fall in the egoic traps. And that is a trap, of course, and we see that a lot in the world of spiritual acquisition.

So it was deeper than me, it was like what? Just like you're asking these questions now, it was like, what? But he knew that he wasn't in a steady state of awakening. And that's what he wanted.

HILLARY: So this desire to be happy can be merged with the desire to wake up without really inspecting, what does it mean to wake up?

And when you talk about waking up, not being singular, not just like “this is me in my awakening,” that feels like a different level of inspection, a different level of desire.

GANGAJI: Yeah, it is. And I wouldn't say it was a desire for me at first, but that's part of the whole Buddhist thing: may all being be free, may all being awaken to itself.

So I knew it was in there somewhere. And it's not as if it has to be in the forefront, but it's really: if you are committed to awakening, you are not just committing to yourself. You're committing that all being at least have the opportunity to awaken. So it's a little different, say, from a Christian upbringing.

And yeah, I didn't know what was possible, if that's possible. I still don't know if that's possible. We'll see. But it was a way of committing your life, you know. It was like: well, I'm in for that. And it required some rigor of actually examining my life and where my life was superficial and where it was deep and what did I really want, really asking and discovering the answer to that question, that central question.

HILLARY: It's funny how humbling life can be....the certainties we have that sometimes prove themselves to be incredibly fragile, like Gangaji's certainty that her role was as a student and not a teacher.

What you have spoken about, and you certainly spoke about it in Episode 3, is that your orientation to Eli was, I'm a student, you're the teacher.

GANGAJI: Yes.

HILLARY: And over time, by the time you moved to Maui, that orientation has started to shift.

GANGAJI: It had flipped by then, by the end of Mill Valley, so that he was saying to me, "You are my teacher." And I recognized that actually I had passed him in a certain way. I was more willing to be more ruthless in my honesty about myself or about him. And he recognized that. I wouldn't say pretense is what I saw in him, but, you know, acting out or whatever – psychological, social kind of things and, but he saw that...that I was...more rigorous in my honesty.

HILLARY: Had you always been that way?

GANGAJI: Well, once I was pointed in a certain direction, I was pretty good at staying with it.

And so he had pointed me really into a deeper realm of an area that I was already interested in and playing in, you know, the counterculture. But it was a depth charge for that, and so I got it, you know, and...it's a ruthlessness that is painful initially, but the rewards are tremendous. I can see now in looking back, the rewards are more space, more quiet, less conversation about...

HILLARY: The move to Maui signified a new hope. It arose from a sense of weariness when it came to their high-paced lifestyles in Mill Valley in the 1980s. It had been fun for a stretch, a long stretch even; that's true, but their spiritual longing was calling them deeper. They had a dream of creating a healing center on Maui. It seemed like an answer to a prayer of sorts because they really wanted their lives to be in service to others. They even had a name for it: the Pacific Center for Sacred Studies. But, as they soon discovered, life had a different plan.

GANGAJI: It was just so clear that we were just stopped at that – twice, or really three times, and it was like, whoa, well, what now? Are we just supposed to live on Maui? As beautiful as it is, by then, we weren't interested in just a pleasurable life. We really wanted to have a life of service. That was our pleasure. That's what we wanted. So we just didn't know what to do.

HILLARY: Not only were their dreams of the healing center not working out; Gangaji's career as an acupuncturist started to lose its direction as well. She had left Mill Valley as a sought-after practitioner. But as she was packing up the nearly one hundred bottles of special herbs, two treatment tables, acupuncture needles – all the things she would need to continue her practice on Maui – her clarity about what she was supposed to do next started to drift into a kind of bardo.

GANGAJI: And then after we moved there and I unpacked everything and it was all laid out in the basement of our little house, and I would go in and look at it and I would just – you know how when you just know something is not for you. And it was, whoa. I mean, really, I was focused on, "But I moved it here." It was very expensive to move all these liquid herbs. And I would just look at it. And I thought, well, maybe I'm just apprehensive about taking the Hawaii boards.

And I was just stopped. I was stymied. I couldn't move toward it.

HILLARY: I really love that story. There's something so relatable about having a certain focus in life and going down that road. This is the road I'm going down. And

then maybe your mind is the last thing to get the memo. But that just requires paying attention, right?

GANGAJI: Oh, it was just...it was a shock to me. I knew that the very thought of it, I would just feel kind of – ughh – but I assumed that was just because there would be hoops to go through to establish a practice, to make myself known on Maui. And when I realized in one of those moments of going down and look at these bottles of herbs and all this stuff that we had moved, it's like, I can't do this.

HILLARY: I have this thing I call, the thing is not the thing. When you think the thing is, "Oh, I'm moving to Maui, we're going to have this really cool healing center." And, in reality, it was leading to something that was really essential and that was this flat-out disillusionment.

GANGAJI: Yeah.

HILLARY: And if that didn't happen, the things that followed wouldn't have happened?

GANGAJI: It never would have happened. I mean, thank God I didn't have the strength or the inspiration to continue the acupuncture. And thank God we didn't get these beautiful retreat centers that we had found and that we just would lose in the last minute: somebody would come in and pay cash. But it didn't feel like that in the moment, of course, it just felt like we're failing. We're failing at what we came here to do.

HILLARY: Thank God for failing.

GANGAJI: Yeah, we have to fail.

HILLARY: When Gangaji prayed for a teacher just before they moved to Maui, she would be the first to say that she didn't know exactly what that meant. Was it a person? Was it a mountain like Ramana Maharshi had Arunachula? Was it something more ethereal?

GANGAJI: I wasn't looking for a man teacher for sure, I had seen a lot of damage from men teachers, men gurus, and certainly not a guru. So it was just a broader thing, it was more recognizing I can't do this on my own. Eli and I have reached a point, and I had to make that decision for myself, and he made it for himself.

Even though I was his teacher then, I wasn't awake. I couldn't teach him what he needed to know, or give him, or transmit to him. So I didn't have a form for it, but I wasn't thinking. Maybe I was anti-thinking about India and a male guru.

HILLARY: But I think that the funny cosmic joke about disillusionment is that one can be at a place where you're just like, "Oh, I surrender. I completely...I'm so disillusioned." And then a week later: "Oh, there's a retreat happening."

GANGAJI: Yeah. Well, I think that was it. I was in that place of "I give up," you know, "I don't know." And that's a very open place, actually. That's why I was willing to

check out this teacher in Marin. And I was willing, but I – you know, I had a slightly skeptical bent.

HILLARY: In October of 1989, one of Gangaji's close friends in Berkeley invited her to see an American teacher who had been gaining a following over the previous two or three years. Eli happened to have a workshop at Esalen around that time, so Gangaji made plans to arrive a couple of days early so she could see this new teacher. His name was Andrew Cohen. As she listened, it wasn't as though she had a profound experience, but there was definitely something different in the way he spoke.

GANGAJI: First of all, he was speaking normal English. It wasn't translated English and it wasn't English with a cadence of some other language and it was in the vernacular. It was like a conversation. And I had never heard that before from a teacher, even from these wonderful Vipassana teachers that I would drop in on. They were following a book. They were following the teachings.

And this was more spontaneous, and it seemed grounded in the teaching that his teacher had transmitted to him, but free, free form, and I loved that. I thought: I didn't even know that was possible. I had never seen a teacher that could be so free with his words.

HILLARY: With the healing center dream falling apart and Gangaji's acupuncture practice seemingly coming to an end, both Gangaji and Eli found themselves adrift. In January of 1990, Gangaji decided to spend time in Marin attending more satsangs with Andrew, the new teacher she had recently discovered, while Eli headed off to find Sufi teachers in Sikkim in the far northeastern reaches of India. She thought he was having somewhat of a midlife crisis. It turned out to be a vehicle for something much bigger.

GANGAJI: So he ended up going from Delhi to Lucknow, which is where they could process the visa. And he was just hanging out in Lucknow. And he remembered that this teacher in Marin had had a teacher who was from Lucknow.

And he was like, "Well, that's curious. I should check him out. If that guy waked up with him, I could wake up with him." So he called me and...I guess I was in Marin then. And he said, "What's his teacher's teacher?" And so I didn't know, but I found the book that Andrew had written, and I looked it up, and I said, it's Poonja.

And he said, oh, okay, Poonja, great, that's a start. And he went to the phone book where he was staying at the Carlton Hotel, this wonderful old hotel, very classically India, in like 1890 India. And there was this huge phone book, and he grabbed it and that page, that where Poonja would have been, had been torn out. Someone had been looking up some name, you know, and just tore out the page. So he was flustered and frustrated and he went up to the roof of the Carlton and meditated and it was just, just, you know, "Help!" And he looked up in the sky and he saw what later he discovered were kites, but he hadn't recognized that.

In India, the kids fight with kites up in the sky, and he saw – is that trash? These two objects going around in the sky – what is that? And he said, you know what, I'm

going to go to right where those are flying over and see if that's where the teacher is. Maybe this is a sign and that's the teacher. And so he made his way, he could see where it was, not so far away in the same area of Lucknow.

And he was walking down this little street, you know, with open sewers on the sides and a little narrow street. No car could have gotten into it...and neighbors all around. And he asked somebody, does Poonja live around here? He said, "Oh yeah, Poonja lives right down there." And they directed him to it. And he was just, you know, he couldn't believe his luck.

He couldn't believe that he had actually found a Poonja. He didn't know if it was the same Poonja because the whole page had been ripped out of the phone book and he knocked on the door and Papaji's son, Surendra, opened the door and saw Eli and he said, "Come in, he's waiting for you." So Eli almost fell over backwards.

HILLARY: What's even more amazing is that it turned out that Papaji wasn't actually waiting for Eli. He had been in the hospital for a few days due to his diabetes, and a group of Buddhists had been waiting for Papaji to return home. When Surendra answered the door that day, he assumed Eli was one of the Buddhists. So it was a "lucky mistake," I put in air quotes, that Eli met Papaji in the first place. Not only that: they were able to spend the next week together – just the two of them – in Papaji's home.

GANGAJI: It was so blissful, it was so incredible, really. He would write these letters to me: "This is the real thing, we have really found it, you will not believe this." And I would get these letters and even before I opened the letter, I could feel the transmission of his bliss in these letters, really thick—like page and page—although you know, tissue paper, thin pages that you had to use for air mail from India then.

And I got that I'm in the wrong place and he said, "Get back home. I'm coming to get you. You have to come here. You've got to be here." And I got it. And that's right. I should be there when my thing with his student who's not really getting me and I'm starting to feel that things aren't so great with his group that's following him, that's gathered around him. So I said "Well, that's great, fantastic."

Eli came back through San Francisco, and so we met up and he was silent. His transmission was silent. He was not thinking, or planning, or moving, or remembering, it was just this transmission of silence. It was just radical. He was himself. And I'd never experienced that before, in anybody.

HILLARY: Gangaji's misgivings about going to India took a backseat even before Eli arrived back from his time with Papaji. When she boarded the plane that day in April of 1990, she was propelled by a force clearly bigger than herself.

Could you tell me about the day you met Papaji?

GANGAJI: Yeah, I remember it really well. Because he was not in Lucknow then because it was too hot. It was April, so he had gone to Haridwar, which he always went to when it got too hot in Delhi. And Haridwar is right on the river Ganga. And when Eli had been with him before, they had gone to Haridwar and had found a

place for Eli and me and Joan to stay, which turned out to be right across from where Papaji lived.

So we were in this...it was like a state bungalow, but the state owned it or something, so it seemed relatively clean, although I realized there were rats running over my feet at night, or maybe some rat-like creature, because we weren't right on the water, you know. But I could see where Papaji lived and he had a little balcony there. So I remember the next morning we were due to meet him and we would all go the next morning, but that afternoon Eli said, "Let's go, I think we can just knock on the door and see if he's available." So Eli and I went over and it was tea time, like four o'clock in the afternoon. And we knocked on the door and Papaji answered the door. And he was radiant and this smile was so encompassing and he just said, "Welcome, come in. Come in. What do you want?" And I was so happy to be there, you know, it was like: oh my God, to be in the face of this, I wasn't even thinking of myself, that I am there, it was just to witness this presence, to be in the presence of this force, was thrilling.

HILLARY: I think about you and I think about Papaji and how connected you are and how you will be for eternity. And when you describe the welcome with Papaji it feels like, oh, we know that welcome. Because it's so present in you.

GANGAJI: Well, I'm welcoming myself as I was welcomed by my Self. And really, that's it. Are you willing to receive the welcome from your own self?

HILLARY: There's a particular question that Gangaji has asked in satsang over these many years. It's the same question Papaji asked her during that first meeting.

GANGAJI: 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, Hillary, I hadn't thought "I want Freedom." And I hadn't thought my quest is for freedom. I'd never really considered that.

Now, as I recall these sessions that we've had, I see freedom has been a theme throughout it, but I wasn't conscious of that. And I was even surprised that I said the word "freedom," because I even thought, well, what could that mean, you know?

And he said, "Ah, you are in the right place. This is the right place. Welcome," he said again, "Welcome." And then we had our tea. This wasn't a regular satsang; we were just meeting him for tea. And that started it.

HILLARY: Remember when you were talking at the beginning of episode 2, you were talking about being in the 7th grade and sneaking out and seeing Elvis for the first time? And you used the word "freedom." Yeah – you said free. You saw somebody who was free.

GANGAJI: Yeah, I heard that in different...in other times too in these episodes. And it's...because I remember I've said to people I said "freedom." And I've often said, "I don't know why I said freedom." I didn't think of it that way. I would have, I could

have said bliss, enlightenment, awakening. I said freedom. And then in these meetings, I have heard freedom come up all the time.

And I get it. That's always what I've been looking for. I didn't know it when I found it.

HILLARY: You had an epiphany from your epiphany.

GANGAJI: Yeah, exactly.

HILLARY: That's what they're for, anyway; so that's perfect.

HILLARY: Can you describe what it was like to be with Papaji in that little room?

GANGAJI: Well, I see it, really vividly in my mind, you know, the colors in India are vivid even when they're faded. And the room was painted in some beautiful faded color, sort of yellow, maybe blue around the edges, and the sounds coming up from the street, as well as the sounds of the Ganga rushing by, and the heat, it was already getting warm there.

And this smell and taste of this milk tea that we were drinking with the little biscuits that they served from the holdover from the English Raj. It just... there was this atmosphere of rest in what was so unique. I had never seen those colors or smelled those smells or been in the presence of something this big. And then watching the few people who were there, there may be 12 of us there for satsang and hearing their questions and his answers,...and the wap-wap-wap of the fan. It was a transportation into something. Some other realm of being that I had never been in, and certainly India and its foreignness to me was a major part of that. But also the peace of this room and these pilgrims who had made it there. There were a couple of French people there and a couple of people I knew from the Buddhist community were there. And then the three of us...and just this gathering place, and he was, in that first moment, those first meetings, he was in a very gentle, easy mood. He had the full range of moods, and they were all wonderful and powerful in their own way, but this was a very gentle – I don't want to say like visiting your father or your grandfather because it didn't have any history with it, it was just – all of a sudden I was in this unique place of welcome and rest and strange beauty, with this force of personality that would turn on particular people in the room and ask them the equivalent of what do you want, you know, why are you here, what brings you here?

And just simple conversations, you know, very simple, and long periods where no conversation is happening. We're just sitting there drinking our tea, maybe. Then Surendra, his son, would come in and collect the tea cups, and Papaji would look up at the clock, and then he'd look up at the clock again, and he'd say, "Ah, bas, that's enough." And we would leave. And then just all of us, you know, there were...it was like 12 of us and maybe a couple of, the French people had been coming for years and so they weren't so interested in us. But all of us newbies, you know, were like, "Wow, whoa, what do you think?" So it was just some kind of miracle of a whole plaid of people who had been on a spiritual search for a long time, ending up in this room and knowing they were in a very special room.

It was a special, unique time that each of us knew we had to take full advantage of.

HILLARY: When you had that moment where the door opened and Papaji was there, such an undeniable moment...and as you were just talking, I was thinking about the visual of a domino falling and then hitting the next thing and the next thing and the next thing.

And I honestly think too, since we're speaking of your story specifically, the first domino fell the day you were born, you know, and then it's like, this is uncontrollable once...you know, once you're here, you're here.

GANGAJI: Yeah.

HILLARY: And what was to come: the sequence of what got you there and the sequence of what was to come. You could never plan that in a million years.

GANGAJI: No, you wouldn't have any of the pieces to plan it.

HILLARY: Wow...

GANGAJI: Yeah. Mystery of life.

HILLARY: Beyond meeting Papaji, there was a remarkable synchronicity among those gathered in that sacred little room. Ironically, the former professor who had guided Gangaji through her mescaline journey in Golden Gate Park—an experience that reshaped her view of both herself and the world—was now sitting right beside her, nearly 27 years later—a reunion that was completely unplanned.

Even more revelations awaited her beyond the safety of that little space. If you've never been to India, the streets can be chaotic and loud...and even crossing the street can seem like risking your life.

GANGAJI: It was really important when he took us all to the market one day. Because by then I had grown very attached to this little room. We had the twelve of us or maybe there were nine of us by then. And it was market day and he wanted to go to the market and so we all went, and I was missing the little room where it was quiet and we were all just together. This was very much not quiet.

India is a loud place and there are a lot of people there so there's a lot of shouting to be heard, and there were all the market vendors shouting their ware, and there were some really uncomfortable sights. There was one sight of this poor horse that was just being beat. He was hauling something, and his owner was just beating him, and his horse was just barely standing up. And I saw in that moment, there was nothing I could do, I mean, there was no way I was going to enter that scene and tell this man he shouldn't be doing that.

So I saw this suffering and I saw that there was a choice in that moment. To see the suffering, to experience the suffering, and yet to not suffer with it. I didn't get that until days after we had left the market...because when I left the market, I remember I was in a rickshaw with Papaji. There were probably three of us in there. And I was just, "Oh my God."

And Papaji was himself. He had...I don't even know if he noticed that, because that was really a common scene in India. But it was important somehow in the suffering of this animal who had been captured and imprisoned was really an example of the suffering in the world, because in a much grander way we have all been captured and we're all being used in multiple ways and we're suffering.

That poor horse showed really what suffering is. But there are people who suffer like that who are on thrones. So it was this teaching of the reality of suffering and my inability to do anything about it, that I wasn't going to fix suffering or save people or animals from suffering.

And that was, you know, I had been a Buddhist for a while, I had been, and it had all been about—you know, saving people from suffering. I had taken Bodhisattva vows, and this was so stark and humbling, sort of like losing this election recently. It's like you're just finally humbled, you know, you're not in charge of it.

Your vote isn't enough. And to actually have to welcome that too, to open to that too, as much as I open to the little beautiful blue room and riding back with him in that rickshaw, I could feel the pain of that, but it was then pain – I wasn't identified with it, it was pain and part of the collective pain and part of the pain of ignorance of this man's ignorance with his animal.

Any notion of grandiosity about my awakening and what my awakening would do for people or the world was obliterated in that moment.

HILLARY: Before you arrived in India, and you mentioned this before, “These are the reasons why I wouldn't go to India, is the food and getting sick” – and then there's the food and then you got sick.

GANGAJI: Yeah.

HILLARY: But there was something pivotal about that as well.

GANGAJI: Well, I got malaria. It was going around, and there were mosquitoes in this bungalow that we were staying in. And I was in some kind of ecstatic state before I got malaria. And then I got malaria, and it was clear I had malaria. And Eli was saying to Papaji, shouldn't we get her the medicine? Because you can just get malaria medicine at the corner pharmacy.

And he said, “Not yet, not yet, let it just be here just for a couple of days.” And I had, wow, such out-of-body experiences – of like the beginning of the cosmos: malarial dreams, but in just this vast context of truth and the history of our planet.

And the history of our sun, just everything, just...it's really tripping, malarial tripping. But here I am in Papaji's space. And there was some discomfort with it physically, you know, and after a couple of days he said, “Oh good, give her the medicine.” And once you get the medicine, it was a couple of days and I was fine.

But he saw that I needed some kind of...or that I had an opportunity, let's say, for some kind of experience there, with him as the ridgepole of that experience.

HILLARY: During those times sitting with Papaji, Gangaji would generally just sit and listen. There was one time, however, that she had a report to share with Papaji. For her, it turned out to be a rare and profound exchange.

HILLARY: When we were talking about, when you met Eli and Eli, his...his priority was the truth. And then we talked about what that meant to you. And surely before that you had moments in meditation; you had your mescaline journey, which was life changing for you. When you were with Papaji during that first period of time, would you name it, like...Ahhh, this is this?

GANGAJI: Yeah, yes, in the first period of time. I remember I'd come in and say, "Oh Papaji, I had such fear last night...."

PAPAJI: Ah then, Mrs.Toni (laughing)...

GANGAJI (Mrs. Toni): Last night, we sat by the Ganga and felt it. And I realized I had kind of thought...yes, I will give it all up. I'll give my life to Poonjaji. But that was a little piece. I still thought: "And then it will all be wonderful." And then last night I felt it as the whole universe.

GANGAJI: That was one of the first times I had spoken to him; always before he would just look at me and laugh and smile, but this was a conversation and...and I said something about "It's all unreal. It comes and it goes..." He said this is reality.

PAPAJI: Yes, fear of possession. If the possessions were sitting by the bank of the Ganga, the Ganga will take away the possessions, so some fear will come. But when you know Ganga as your own consciousness and everything is contained within yourself, then there's no fear.

GANGAJI: And I felt struck. It's like: this is reality. And all the little circumstances and happenings and everything are just moving in and out of this – this is reality.

GANGAJI: And he saw it, and he was thrilled, and you know, in the next two or three days, that's when he said: "I had a dream about you last night. I dreamed you were the Ganga, the Goddess Ganga." And he said, "So – you have people call you Gangaji." And I didn't know even what "ji" meant. You know, I knew we called him Papaji, but I didn't know if that wasn't just part of his name. I had no idea about the language. And that's when he started saying, "Yes, you'll go to these California people, you'll tell them the truth."

And he said: "People will catch it from you." And I said, "What I say? I'm not ready at what I do. I need..."

"Just be still. It's all there. It'll all take care of itself."

HILLARY: After six blissful weeks with Papaji, Gangaji and Eli reluctantly prepared to return to Maui. There was one more gift, though, that he would give them as they parted at the train station in Haridwar.

GANGAJI: It was our last day and we were leaving and I was: "Okay, we're going..." I was, you know, maybe a little cavalier about it, we're going now, and he said, "Yes, yes, go and then see if you can go. See if you went anywhere, by all means."

But before we left, he cut out a picture from this magazine from Ramana Ashram. But it was, it's a nice, like bound magazine and he cut out this picture of Ramana and he said, "Take my teacher with you."

But just the leaving, you know, it felt like, should I leave? Can I leave? Will I leave? And then we were gone. We were on the train, and he's waving us off; I think he came to the train station with us and waved us off. We had this picture of Ramana in our hotel room in Delhi.

We got the picture out and the picture was like moving. It had become dimensional. This is like a movie now, but it had become dimensional. And I realized we were meeting Ramana. That Papaji had given us this to really have us meet his teacher. And so this picture was alive. I mean we were coming off being with Papaji and we hadn't gotten sad about leaving Papaji yet, because this transmission of Ramana—I saw that a picture is alive and you can receive everything from a picture.

And like talking to you with Papaji now, Papaji is alive in here. It's not past. It's a description of events that were past but the truth of it is alive.

GANGAJI: And then we got on our flight and finally, a couple of days later, ended up in Maui, and we had sublet our house so we were staying at a place on the beach for a couple of nights until the people moved out of our house.

And I remember, I could hear the ocean, you know, which is normally really a beautiful sound to hear the ocean coming in. But I was missing Papaji so much and missing being in Lucknow and the sounds of India which I had many times found quite irritating: the food vendors, the honking, and then the dust and the tea kettle going off, just these sounds that had become so embedded in me as a part of my master, my teacher, and my awakening... that I felt cut off. I felt like Maui was kind of a hellhole. How could this be? Maui is truly a heaven realm. But it felt like hell.

HILLARY: Not long after leaving Papaji's side, Gangaji would experience what she refers to as a thunderclap. As you'll hear in Episode 5, it was a total reorientation of who she thought she was. As important as that moment was for her, that thunderclap – and everything that had come before, would also come to impact others for decades to come. And that began to happen almost immediately.

GANGAJI: She came over and sat closer to me and she said, "Can I say something to you?" And I said, "Sure." She said, "I just feel some burning when I'm close to you...some burning, and I don't know what it is. Do you know what it is?"

HILLARY: The seed that began with that very first student changed Gangaji's life. Here was a person named Toni who was about to become known to thousands as Gangaji. How was that for her? After all, she was still very much a regular human being. Now she suddenly had a new name and a whole new level of attention being directed at her. How would she handle that? And who would show up to help?

I'm Hillary Larson. It's my pleasure to be able to share Gangaji's remarkable story with you. We have Episodes 5 and 6 coming up. Without any spoilers, I think you will love them. Take care until then.

BARBARA:

Listening again to this conversation, I find myself deeply touched by how each of us has the capacity to follow our heart, and the capacity to call of the search even for a moment to realize, I am Home.

In the other episodes in this series, Gangaji reflects on the challenges growing up in Mississippi, the counter-culture movement that she was part of, and of course, all that unfolded after her meeting with Papaji. And as Gangaji shares her story, you may be inspired to look more deeply at your own: your own moments of discovery, your own forks in the road. I certainly have.

And if you'd like to continue this listening journey the complete *Finding Home* series is available through the *With Gangaji* program. I would absolutely love to welcome you there.

To find out more, just visit gangaji.org that's g-a-n-g-a-j-i dot o-r-g.

And let me remind you that scholarships are available for the *With Gangaji* program.

I thank you for listening to this special presentation. And my thanks to Gangaji and Hillary Larson for producing this beautiful series. It's my joy to offer it to you here today.

My name is Barbara Denempont. Until next time.