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A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 13

THE MYTH OF THE ENLIGHTENED BEING

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[00:01] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:08] GANGAJI: It was like a thunderbolt. I know that's a cliché, but that was my experience, it was just, in that moment, something was removed.

[00:17] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: For hundreds, even thousands of years, there are those who have walked the earth who have had profound spiritual awakenings. They are sometimes referred to as enlightened beings. On the surface, they seem to possess special understandings of what is greater than what the mind can conceive of – call it God, stillness, omnipresence, it is something that humans have studied, contemplated, prayed for, and surrendered to. It is ungraspable and ultimately unteachable, and yet we are drawn to these awakened ones in hopes of a true, undeniable and lasting experience of our own. That said, for over twenty years Gangaji has been pointing out to us that even this idea of enlightenment is just another barrier between what we believe to be true, and the truth of who we are.

[1:06] GANGAJI: I could never deny my experience, or my ongoing experience, and it was an experience of non-duality, and a fulfillment that has never left me, but I really don't see the point in defining that as anything separate from anyone else.

[1:27] HILLARY: For the next thirty minutes, we're gonna unravel the myth of the enlightened being. I'm Hillary Larson, and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

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[1:39] HILLARY: Today's show is special in a different way because it was almost exactly a year ago that we launched the first episode of *A Conversation With Gangaji*, but it also marks the twentieth anniversary of The Gangaji Foundation this month so, we're gonna celebrate both of those in different ways. And, with that in mind, what I wanna do is I wanna start our conversation a little differently this time around. What I'd like to do is, I'd like to go back and play a clip from our pilot show, and we did that pilot show, I think it was two years ago. And we didn't end up using that interview because we decided to focus on specific topics but I'd like to use it today to highlight the possibility of what happens when one life wakes up. And before I play it though, I wanna refer to something that you wrote about how you were feeling just prior to meeting Papaji. This is when Eli went off to find his final teacher, who turned out to be Papaji, and in the book, *Hidden Treasure*, this is what you said: 'While he was away, I allowed my inner yearning to rise to the surface. And I realized what I yearned for was to be free of myself, or what I thought was myself. I yearned to be free of my persistently, reoccurring, self-involvement.' And I just have to say, when I first read that, it just completely stopped everything. 'Cause what a statement, Gangaji, really. I don't know if anybody doesn't relate to that statement.

[3:08] GANGAJI: I, I think you relate to when you're really tired of the self-involvement. For many people, it may not even make sense because they're still feeling enriched by their self-involvement. But you were ready and that's the, that's the promise of the right fruit dropping.

[3:27] HILLARY: It brings up a feeling to me of suffocation, you know, that constant preoccupation with the story of 'Me'.

[3:35] GANGAJI: It is. It's suffocating the, the mystery and the life force of you. And the discovery of you, yes, because the story is, is circular, it's chasing your own tail. Huh... tail! Yes. (laughter)

[3:53] HILLARY: What I was thinking about was how really beautifully you articulate your life before Papaji, because really there, there's – in so many ways – it's just like the rest of us. And, and what I'd like to do is when you and I first sat down to speak back in October of 2011 I think it was, I started by reading an excerpt from a biography that was written about you called *Just Like You*. And in the first, one of the first questions I asked you to speak more about your awakening, the moment that everything broke open. Do you mind sitting with me while we just listen to that? Because there's something really particular about the way you articulated it that I, really struck me.

(clip)

*[4:37] HILLARY: You met Papaji in April of 1990, and then, I think you said it was the end of May, you had an experience, and I'm just gonna read what it says in the book, it says, 'Suddenly and simply, I realized the whole structure that supported my story was gone. All the scaffolding was gone. Every single thing that held it together: gone.' Can you say a little bit more about that experience?*

*[5:04] GANGAJI: Well I, I haven't spoken about this before, but I, I can't say I've ever captured it in speaking. It was so immediate, and it was out of the blue, I remember, Eli and I were sitting on a bed, at Esalen, and talking and laughing and just being intoxicated with the dharma and, this meeting with Papaji, and our profound good luck and just, it was like a thunderbolt. I mean, I know that's a cliché, but that was my experience, it was just, in that moment, something was removed. I couldn't say anything was added, something was removed, and that's why in that, that book I spoke of it that way as scaffolding. There was some support for myself as separate from, from this that we were laughing and speaking about, the dharma, the nectar, the bliss of being just, in just a moment, there was an opening that [chuckles] – and even opening is not quite correct because it's, that's like something was closed, but it was like that, that something had been closed or, and all of a sudden there was no door there. It, the insubstantiality of the scaffolding, of the support, was beyond revealed, it was, it disappeared, it wasn't there. And I was fully there. So it's not as if, this sense of myself needed any scaffolding to be. But over the years, over the decades, I had built up a very careful structure of myself, and in meeting Papaji, I had been dealing with stopping building that structure – and when you stop building the structure [chuckles], you actually recognize it's not there anyway – even, no matter what you've built, it's actually not there. And it was a blissful experience. But not – I've had blissful experiences before – it was extraordinary, it was out-of-the-ordinary for me. And I would say without a doubt my life has never been the same since that moment.*

(end clip)

[7:20] HILLARY: There's something about the way you describe that, the, 'the structure of the story of me', and while you were – I remember the first time I listened to that, after we did the interview and then I, I went to edit it. And I remember this really distinct sense of feeling the structure of my own story, like moving off of me, like, it was like moving from – and I've had this experience with you before – it was like the sense of being in a trance, and then all of a sudden having some distance from the trance and going, 'Oh, I thought that was real.'

[7:57] GANGAJI: That's so good, it, you both speaking of it moving and being in the trance, I mean we have the, the capacity to recognize the fluidity of our structures and then, in recognizing that they aren't solid we actually see they have no substance. But that's the disengagement. You know Ramana speaks of the 'knot of ego', 'k-n-o-t of ego', and the unraveling of that is the mystery. And so, that's, that's what meeting Papaji was and is for me.

[8:34] HILLARY: I wanna get personal with you right now, 'cause I, I wanna really look at this, since it's the anniversary of this show but it's also the anniversary of The Gangaji Foundation because, what has struck me so deeply is that, there was this moment when the thunderbolt happened. And in that moment, for me, in that moment, not only was your life gonna change drastically – or it did – but the lives of tens of thousands of people were about to change. And I'm even talking about people in the future who, who haven't even heard your name yet. And that to me, is – you, you talk about the mystery of life – but really, to sit with that, and then see how all those people's lives affected other people's lives. What strikes you when you think of that?

[9:24] GANGAJI: Oh, it's... it's annihilating to realize that. Because it is, it's really just a, a concrete relative way of recognizing the absolute oneness of us all. That it is really impossible for anything in your life to not affect immeasurably everyone who comes into contact with your life. And normally what we are spreading with our lives is our misery. Our story, our non-existent scaffolding. So to be, well Papaji would speak of it, is how beautiful it is to, to be lit, to be a candle that's lit, and then to be a candle that lights another candle. Ah! it's, it's... it is ecstasy. And then to be a candle that lights a candle that lights a candle, we see how this, to be a beacon of light is not simply 'oh, me and my light'. It is, truly, even without intention [chuckles], it's a, it's the awakening of all being.

[10:42] HILLARY: You know, I just wanna stop and make another point. And that's that, by looking at your life I think perhaps we can see the truth of our own lives, and I think that what happens – that happens in unexpected ways – and I think that's so valuable to look at how we are just like you. But I think it's also more valuable to look at how we think we're not like you...

[11:06] GANGAJI: Mmmm... (chuckles)

[11:07] HILLARY: ...and, you know, I wanna actually quickly play a clip that – this is from quite a few years ago – and it's from a CD compilation called *The Truth Alive in You*, and in this you are talking about that dilemma of people thinking 'oh, you're the guru, and you're different, but I'm gonna strive to be like you anyway'.

(clip)

[11:26] GANGAJI: *I'm not saying that it is a mistake to see the teacher, or the sage, or the saint as divine. That's no mistake, and that's the truth. The mistake is the limit that is put on the conception of what divine is. And the limit that is normally put on it is something that arises in Sunday school. Something very juvenile. Some kind of idea of divine as excluding who you are. As excluding what you experience. Because maybe often what you experience, you don't like. And so there's an assumption that in the divine, there is an escape from that. And so when a great teacher appears there is this projection: oh, that one has escaped being like me'. And then this hope gets generated, therefore, that one can give me the means to escape.' Or, 'that one can show me how to escape.' Or just, 'that one, if I, and with that one I am in escape'. But if you have been around me for very long you know that's not what I suggest at all. And, in fact, I would say finally, all true teaching proclaims that there is no escape, and that in the willingness, to surrender to no escape you discover the divine that has been here all along, within you. Whatever you think about yourself, the truth is, you are divine.*

(end clip)

[13:12] HILLARY: Your awakening has benefited so many people around the world but also has set up a, a bit of a trap of people thinking that you had something that they, they don't have. And it seems to me when I listen to your satsangs throughout the years, I mean, what you've constantly been (chuckles) saying is 'no, really, I'm just like you'.

[13:36] GANGAJI: Well that's, that's the dilemma, and, or the knot, and we build up these structures, these mental structures about who we are. And so of course we see separation, that's their function in a way, is the ego-ic function. And we believe those structures and, you know, when earlier I ask about the recognition of the structure not existing, really all these conversations are just to, to encourage you to investigate for yourself: what is here that cannot be structured? And that's what I mean by divine. And, you know, I mean if you look at the lives of the so-called divine teachers, they don't talk about the human aspect. But if you talk to people who actually live closely to those people, including Ramana, they do talk about it. And these [laughter] well I guess it just gets back to, this somewhat incomprehensible totality of being, that we are all mirroring. And we identify with a facet of that mirror to such an extent that we overlook that whatever we see is mirroring an aspect of ourselves. So that's just the way the ego functions, but finally it's the root of suffering. And that's why my suggestion is, was so strong from Papaji when he said 'stop'. I mean he really was pointing me, pointing us, to the, the capacity we, we have to, to stop that function, to override that function. And it's a, a function of separating oneself from the totality. Maybe even it's an evolved function in terms of animal consciousness. But it's, finally, just not the truth. So it's, it's really simple in that sense. It's not an elaborate, metaphysical revelation. It's actually very simple, and it's been here, and *is* here, and *will be* here, all the time.

[15:58] HILLARY: It seems like such a, a obvious human tendency to go, I think it's to depend on projection, really, because I was looking at your situation and looking at the fact that, you know, you live a normal life. You know, you go the grocery store, you probably get mad at people, you know, you fall down and hurt yourself [laughter] and there's, there's this idea that maybe your life isn't like that. But at the same time I was thinking the other day that it's kind of true in a broader sense. Because I have a friend who's a beautiful healer, she's just amazing and, and she got really sick some time ago and she had to take antibiotics. And I remember there were a couple people that were very shaken by that. Like 'uh oh, there's something not valid here' because she took antibiotics. And she was just like 'Hey, I had an

infection, I took antibiotics!' But it not only applies to you, it applies to so many areas of our lives, doesn't it, this, this fear of the ground of being not being true.

[17:05] GANGAJI: Well, it's, that fear is based on some idealism of what the ground of being is. Which has to exclude something else, to be this, this kind of conditional belief that we then come in and deny, say, the benefit of this, your healer friend, because she's actually subject to disease (chuckles). She's also subject to death. And, I do wanna take just a moment though to say that there are *yogi* practices where people maintain or establish states of mind where perhaps they don't get angry. And I don't want to discount that, but I, I do want to, to make it really clear that this is not that, that this invitation that's from Papaji, and that, that I have continued, and that you continued through your work, is, is what is always here. Not what you can attain, what you can establish, what you can maintain, but can you, are you willing to discover, what is always here? Regardless of state, regardless of whether you are separating, or uniting, with an experience. And that to me was something I had simply never heard. It may have been spoken to me, but I had never heard it. And that was what made the difference. 'Cause, 'cause then I didn't look to, to never falling, or never not getting angry, as some kind of sign that I had escaped, or sign that I was free. I had, I simply always – we all – have the opportunity to discover is, is what is always here, still here. (chuckles) It's very simple then.

[18:58] HILLARY: There's such a huge teaching in that, too, because you know you've been through your personal firestorms just like the rest of us. And, and I'm sure you've learned things from those firestorms. But I remember a few months ago there was a question, a personal question I was gonna ask you – and I honestly don't remember what it was – but I remember I was afraid to ask you, and, and the lesson I learned in that was, I went ahead and asked you the question and you answered it and I – honestly, I wish I could remember what it was – but what I got from that was, what I was afraid of, was asking the question. I was not afraid of your answer. And, and that was, it was almost like jumping off the cliff but honestly you could have said 'Yeah, I actually stay at home and drink beer and smoke cigars and watch football' and it wouldn't have, it wouldn't have thrown me off. It was the, the actual jumping off that was, was, was scary for me.

[19:56] GANGAJI: *Well I think that's, that's, an example of very good conditioning. That we somehow are reserved in asking personal questions of people. Because it's really in our asking of personal questions that we hope we will get something that either we can identify with -- 'oh, well, since that happens here, that means it's okay for me' – I wouldn't have asked Papaji any personal questions. I mean, and he certainly wouldn't have answered. And is I answered you it was just because, it was a weak moment. [laughter] Because really, so what I have a personal life. That's really secondary to what is here before this personal life appeared; and is here, as this personal life plays itself out; and is here when this personal life is gone. So once that is discovered then you see that maybe interest in personal issues with friends or celebrities or, or people you read about, but it's not significant. It doesn't mean anything about who you are.*

[21:06] HILLARY: That first interview we did, that pilot interview, there was a, a part in there where I was asking you about... it seems evident to me that when I'm watching you give satsang, and you're receiving an admiration from so many people, you know, so many people expressing their gratitude and how much they love you, and, and some of it's placed on the personality but the core of it is, is not about the personality, and I asked you about that, I asked you about how you navigate your own ego within this position you've been put

in. And so, I want to play that, your response to that because it was so... it brings up such a beautiful image for me and it pretty much tells the story of that so, I'm going to go ahead and play this.

(clip)

[21:55] GANGAJI: *I remember walking, it was in, in Europe when it just sort of burst open; and we were in Germany, and I saw all these shoes, as people had left their shoes before they went into the satsang hall. And there was a thought that arose 'wow, they're here to see me, what am I, how, what am I gonna say to them?' You know, I figured many of 'em were much better meditators than I was (chuckles) and had had many experiences. What am I gonna say? And in that moment it was just so clear, that they're not here for me. They're here for the truth of what I've experienced. And it really has nothing to do with me. And what a weight was lifted. Sweet relief!*

[22:36] HILLARY: *Yeah...*

[22:37] GANGAJI: *It has nothing to do with who you think you are. Or who you think I am. Or who you think they are. It's so, that's... that's the unburdening really of the structure.*

(end clip)

[22:51] HILLARY: *Honestly it feels like, for anybody I think, who listens to your satsangs from 1990 – I was looking at some cassettes from 1990 the other day – and, and then I was listening to a recent satsang from you and what strikes me is, the message never changes. And also, on a personality level you're not saying you're gonna be anybody's friend, or sister, or mother, or spiritual guide, you're just saying one thing, and that is, I'm here to confirm who you really are.*

[23:27] GANGAJI: *That's the task my teacher gave me. And, unless I thought that that meant, 'Oh, you are that, you are that, you are that', he also told me in one his letters 'you need to push her hard now.' And at first I, I thought, 'what could that mean? push her hard?' and really what it means is, I don't know what it means, we surrender, we have a conversation, we meet in satsang, we meet on this radio show, and the confirmation has within it a push against whatever may be denying that confirmation, or whatever may be conceptualized to try to capture that, that, confirmation. So really my work is, it's no work at all. That's the truth.*

[24:17] HILLARY: *There was a satsang I watched on a DVD sometime back and after you had spent a good amount of time helping this particular man with his inquiry, you said something that struck me really deeply; and just before he sat down really quickly, you looked at him and you said 'I thank you for your whole life'. That seemed like such a huge statement to me, and as we acknowledge this anniversary show and the, the twentieth anniversary of The Gangaji Foundation, really I think that's what it's all about. And I think that really, on behalf of so many people, I thank you so much for your whole life. And I thank you for sharing your awakening with all of us.*

[25:02] GANGAJI: *Oh... likewise.*

[25:04] ENDING MUSIC

[25:15] GANGAJI: You know we have no idea what Buddha acted like. We have reports, maybe. But we actually have no idea what Christ acted like. We have reports and they're all very contradictory. The truth is, you can't know what's going on within the mind of any other person really. And so you can stop trying to figure that out and then compare that against what's going on in your mind. All of that's a waste of time, a waste of activity. And it leads nowhere except deeper into mind, deeper into separation, well, *they* are all pure, *they* are all holy, but me, I'm know *I'm* not, I know I had a bad thought, I know I reacted inappropriately, so therefore, I must not be as they are.' And that creates enormous, unnecessary suffering. So I'm not asking that you take the teacher down from the pedestal. No, if the teacher is a true teacher, the teacher is inviting *you* up on the pedestal as well. To recognize that the pedestal has room for *all*. That it is possible, it is even your birthright, to see the divine everywhere. To see it and experience it and, in its totality, to include all apparent limitations.

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[26:58] HILLARY: I have another clip I'd like to share with you all before we go, but let me take care of a couple things here first. If you'd like to ask Gangaji a question for one of our upcoming conversations, or if you have a comment, you are always welcome to write [gangajiradio@gangaji.org](mailto:gangajiradio@gangaji.org), that's [g-a-n-g-a-j-i-radio@gangaji.org](mailto:g-a-n-g-a-j-i-radio@gangaji.org). Also you can find out how to join Gangaji for a live monthly webcast by going to the website, [gangaji.org](http://gangaji.org). All of the information about how to sign up for that is right there, just look for *With Gangaji*. And if you'd like more information about this show, and lots of other things about Gangaji, you can find that by going to Facebook and searching for Gangaji Community. Last, but certainly not least, I'd like to give special thanks to Jami Sieber, who once again contributed her incredibly lovely music – that's what you're listening to right now. You can find out more about her music at [jamisieber.com](http://jamisieber.com). As we celebrate one year of making these unique conversations with Gangaji available to the world, I want to express our deep gratitude to all of you, for joining us today. And please, feel free to share this program with others. I'm Hillary Larson, and until next time, be well.

(clip)

*[28:21] GANGAJI: There's no ranking. There's no ranking. I mean it looks like a ranking here because I'm on the stage. But that's the play. And I'm on the stage, so that you will pay attention to me as someone who has a level of something you want, so that I can tell you and invite you (chuckles) into being leveled.*

*[28:47] AUDIENCE LAUGHTER*

*[28:52] GANGAJI: This is a, it is truly a radical invitation, because it offers nothing, nothing, no great powers, not bliss every day, not anything. Only yourself.*