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A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 29

WHAT I THINK ABOUT YOU (AND WHAT THAT MEANS ABOUT ME)

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[00:02] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:07] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: Sometimes human beings can be controlling, needy, pushy, stubborn, arrogant, critical, or self-absorbed. And perhaps one, or all of these traits trigger us in some way. But these reactions, are they a sign that the things that we don't like in others are what we have a hard time facing in ourselves? They're called 'projections' and sometimes they're so close to the bone, they're so automatic that they're hard to spot in ourselves. And if we do spot them, it can be difficult to digest that what we resist in another is often, not always but often, what we have in common. But take heart, inquiring into these areas where our personalities clash doesn't necessarily have to be a deadly, serious process. In fact, it can be just the opposite.

(clip)

[00:58] SPEAKER: *I want them to do good for themselves.*

[01:01] GANGAJI: *Yes, you want them so they'll stop bothering you with their victim story. (laughter) I know what you mean, I wish you would wake up so I could take a walk! (more laughter and applause)*

(end clip)

[01:18] HILLARY: There is no doubt that projections and assumptions can cause a whole bunch of different kinds of suffering and all kinds of trouble in relationships. But if we take ownership of them, if we see them for what they really are, what are the possibilities? *What I think of you, and what that means about me.* I'm Hillary Larson and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji.*

[01:44] HILLARY: So, I was thinking that I could have called this particular conversation 'The Hall of Mirrors' or 'Living Life as an Assumption', but I went with 'What I Think About You, and What That Means About Me' because I think it gets right to the point when it comes to personal relationships and that's kind of what I wanted to talk about this month. I wanted to talk to you about how the triggers in our life, the people that trigger us, in different ways, you know, we think about what that has to do with them, but I actually want to look at what that means about us. And also the assumptions that we make about the people around us, what it means about us and ultimately what that has to do with our own suffering. And it seems like such an obvious door to investigating what's real and what's made up.

[02:35] GANGAJI: Yep, I agree. It's in our faces, it's so obvious.

[02:41] HILLARY: And ya know, and I think also, there are people certainly, maybe most people on the planet, that don't think in those terms, they've never inspected that. They've

never inspected the thought that “Wow, that person is so stubborn. That person is so stubborn I can’t stand being around them.” And then they just leave it at that instead of like, “Wow, is that some part in me that I’m just absolutely am unwilling to face?”

[03:09] GANGAJI: Well, you know there are so many people on the planet who may have those thoughts, “this person is so stubborn” or “this person is terrible,” but they’re so caught in the relationship, the fabric of the relationship or the cultural relationship, that they just suffer with that. It’s not like most people have the freedom to even leave a relationship that they find unsatisfactory. They’re caught in it. So, we have the freedom to leave and I think when people discover that freedom they just left or changed relationships in the search for the perfect relationship. But then finally you get to a point where you recognize that the same triggers are showing up and the same suffering is showing up and that’s where I think our privilege is, is that we actually have the privilege to leave relationships that, we, from our point of view, are dysfunctional or bad. And now we have a deeper privilege to be able to stop and reflect what is that triggering *in me*? What is my responsibility for my own suffering in this relationship?

[04:22] HILLARY: I was looking at the, kind, of like two different categories of, there are assumptions we make, assumptions we make about people and then there’s ways that people trigger us. And you know, I was driving around the other day with a friend of mine and we were talking about projections and the subject of projections and I just mentioned one that seemed kind of mundane. And frankly it feels a little bit embarrassing to admit, but sometimes when I get an email and it’s somebody I know, but say, it’s somebody like you for example. It doesn’t happen every time, but if I get an email out of the blue, my instant thought is, “Oh, I’m in trouble.” (laughter) I was thinking, and it’s so instantaneous and I have *no* idea where it comes from and what she said to me was, she said, “You know, I actually think you’re not the only person that has that thought that comes up.” It’s so, like it’s so out of the blue. It’s just there.

[05:28] GANGAJI: Yea, so you’re threatened by that email. Threatened with some kind of punishment or threatened with being proved wrong or something. So it’s a really very useful trigger, I mean because it is an assumption that you’re making but you see that it’s triggering an emotional response that is inappropriate to the event. And that’s what can be really useful, when we see that, you know, a car comes out of the blue and we almost get hit and we’re flooded with the fear adrenaline, that’s appropriate. But when we have some kind of inappropriate response, or feel threatened inappropriately, that’s a moment where we can just stop, and recognize, not the analysis of *why* it’s appearing, but *where* it’s appearing in our bodies, in our experience, and actually go back and open to it. So, in a moment like that, to just really for a moment open to being in trouble, deep, real trouble and what that evokes for you. And are you willing to simply, in the moment of inquiry, really be in trouble, without moving? Because of course, life is filled with troubles and then the great trouble of death or disease or major suffering. So, to meet that *consciously*, rather than being haunted by it, is a way to really discover a deeper freedom.

[07:07] HILLARY: Yea, because it’s *so*, you know I want to say that it is harmless because it’s not affecting other people outwardly, but it does, it does certainly. It causes my own suffering, for sure. I can feel it deeply.

[07:22] GANGAJI: Well, when it causes you suffering, in some way it’s affecting other people. Some reaction to that suffering, either indulging it or repressing it or denying it or acting it out in some way will cause some unnecessary suffering. That’s why really inquiry can *seem*

selfish, because what harm is that doing? But it *is* doing harm. There are ripples of that that then pollute your relationships and make, make people, you the victim of your relationships in some way. And then you know, only you can look at that and see how that shows up. Of course it may show up very differently with different people, but the nature of inquiry, while it is, it is a moment of reflection and it takes a lot of privilege to even have a moment for reflection, is that it's more than just for you. It's actually for all, because if you dismiss yourself as effecting the whole then you're already in denial of the effect that you have on everyone you meet in one way or the other.

[08:39] HILLARY: It's almost like, what you think is what you see...you know, meaning, I have this other example I wanted to give you, there is a woman that I met years and years ago. She was probably in her sixties and she'd had this long term, a very kind, of hostile relationship with her brother, and he seemed, from her description, he seemed like, you know, a completely unpleasant person, judgmental and putting her down and it just went on for years. At one point somebody suggested to her that she sit down and write down all the things, some harmful things that she had done to him. And it was hard for her to get going, but she ended up sitting, off and on, for two days and just writing and writing and writing all of the things that she had done to him. And then after the two days, he called her out of the blue and invited her for Christmas. Their whole relationship changed, but it had nothing to do with anything that she said to him, it was just, she just looked at the truth of her own victimhood and she did it in detail. And it makes me really look at the fact that we *can* change the world one person at a time, when we wake up.

[09:55] GANGAJI: Yes, well we can clear the air, at least. The psychic space, this unknown web of communications that's happening, much deeper and much more mysteriously than our spoken words or our realized assumptions. We can just, we can be free and that freedom is really an invitation to all to be free.

[10:23] HILLARY: I wanted to talk a little bit about the assumptions that we make, and everybody's got their own variations on that. But I wanted to actually take some time, really looking at the whole process of projection, what I think about you and then what happens if we actually can look deeper than that. And I happened to just yesterday run across a clip that does that just so beautifully. The thing about it is that it is way longer than I'm used to using. Usually the clips that we use are two minutes long, the longest one the last time was six minutes. But if we go over, I think it's well worth it because this clip to me is a perfect example of really looking at the journey of a projection.

(clip)

[11:11] *SPEAKER: Most of my clients are in a victim role and are very self-destructive.*

[11:17] *GANGAJI: Yes, yes. (Looking to the audience) Is that familiar? (Audience laughs) Just take a moment. That is a mental health problem, isn't it?*

[11:25] *SPEAKER: Yes, it makes me sad. If I see people destroy opportunities, it makes me sad.*

[11:31] *GANGAJI: Yes. So you become victimized by their victim story.*

[11:35] *SPEAKER: That is correct.*

[11:37] GANGAJI: *(Laughter, audience laughs)*

[11:40] SPEAKER: *I want them to do good for themselves.*

[11:42] GANGAJI: *Yes, you want them so they'll stop bothering you with their victim story. (Fits of laughter) I know what you mean! I wish that you would wake up so that I could take a walk. (Audience cracks up laughing. Applause.)*

[12:02] SPEAKER: *I want them to be happy.*

[12:04] GANGAJI: *Yes, be happy damn it! You're bringing me down again. (Laughter) I can relate to your story. (Laughter settles down) It's an edge, isn't it? It's an edge to work with people who are suffering greatly.*

[12:37] SPEAKER: *Who want to suffer!*

[12:38] GANGAJI: *Yes, who want to suffer! And you don't want to suffer!*

[12:29] SPEAKER: *They hold on to it. I don't get it.*

[12:41] GANGAJI: *So how is it that you are suffering?*

[12:43] SPEAKER: *Why do they do that to themselves?*

[12:45] GANGAJI: *I'm pointing to how it is they do it.*

[12:47] SPEAKER: *Why do they do it?!*

[12:48] GANGAJI: *They do it for exactly the same reason that you do it to yourself.*

[12:51] SPEAKER: *I am usually trying to be happy.*

[12:54] GANGAJI: *But right now. Same thing, they're trying to be happy. They're trying to be happy, very desperately. So how is it though, and I'm quite serious in this, how is it, their suffering makes you unhappy? What is it you have to do with their suffering to make yourself unhappy with it?*

[13:23] SPEAKER: *(Contemplating) Mmm...mmm...well, it's their suffering, I suppose.*

[13:25] GANGAJI: *Well, that's true that's fine. We know that. But there's something that happens that makes it your suffering, and I just want to know what that is? Because then you will have a real clue as to what the dynamic that they try to be happy and can't be happy, how that operates.*

[13:45] SPEAKER: *Maybe letting go of the sense to be responsible for their happiness.*

[13:51] GANGAJI: *No no... now you're looking for a solution. I am asking you to look and see what is the mechanism? What is the mechanism in your thought process? What is the moment where their suffering makes you unhappy? I am not saying it's a bad thing, I don't think it is a bad thing. So I'm not saying it's something you should correct. I think it's actually quite useful. Then you get to experience unhappiness and that actually, your heart can break*

even wider. So, I'm not saying correct this. But your question to me was, "Why is it they do this? How is it they do this?" And the answer to that is found in how and why **you** do this.

[14:37] SPEAKER: (Contemplates) mmm, hmm, okay (Begins to laugh)

[14:41] GANGAJI: So are you aware of some story that you tell yourself about...take a particular client in your mind, that after you have been with, you're sad because they won't get off it or they won't stop suffering. What do you tell yourself?

[15:02] SPEAKER: Well, I tell myself this is an intelligent person and they ought to know, and tries to be spiritual. Reads literature, so they ought to know they're God and live as if they were.

[15:16] GANGAJI: That's right.

[15:19] SPEAKER: And how come they can't translate what they know into their actions?

[15:23] GANGAJI: Yes, so now we're speaking of the paradox. This is exactly, exactly the point of our meeting today. This is an intelligent being who's had experiences of God, spiritual experiences, and yet still they continue to be unhappy, to suffer. They can see what they do. They can see the consequences of what they do, so we're not speaking of someone who can't see that.

[15:48] SPEAKER: No, we're, I'm talking about intelligent people.

[15:50] GANGAJI: Yes, good. I'm happy you are because that is where the paradox is. So if you don't fix this paradox in yourself or in them, just for a moment. I love that your work is to fix it. But just for this moment, you don't fix it with philosophy and you don't fix it with religion. You don't fix it with what they should be doing. You don't fix it with what they are doing. You just meet the paradox. Here is intelligence...and gross ignorance, because you're speaking of ignorance. How is it that the two coexist?

[16:38] SPEAKER: Yeah. I don't know.

[16:40] GANGAJI: That's the beginning. And in that saying "I don't know" is there an energy that you feel, or an emotion?

[16:54] SPEAKER: (Contemplation) I don't want to say sadness.

[16:57] GANGAJI: But there is. There is sadness there, I can see it. Yes. There's nothing wrong with that. What's wrong with sadness? You see, in our simplistic view of spirituality we keep sadness out. But what if you invite the sadness that is there, in? Closer? What if you meet this sadness with your full being, with your full intelligence? Not with spiritual or psychological, or philosophical shields, but just directly.

[17:50] SPEAKER: I get, um...like it's um...like a slide downward, slide...

[17:58] GANGAJI: Yes, so let's go down. We'll go together.

[18:00] SPEAKER: OK.

[18:01] GANGAJI: *Let's drop into something deeper even than sadness.*

[18:07] SPEAKER: *Mmm...ah...I don't want to.*

[18:09] GANGAJI: *I know, I understand that. But just for the purposes of investigation. For discovering a why and a how that has not been discovered. Let's go together where you don't want to go. (Silent pause). What are you experiencing?*

[18:41] SPEAKER: *Like...like hopelessness.*

[18:48] GANGAJI: *Yes, that's right. That's deeper even than sadness. So let us go into hopelessness just as you went into sadness. Not keeping it out because it's not spiritual, it's not intelligent, it's not psychologically hip. But just to meet it, not indulging it with some story, but meeting it, with your intelligence.*

[19:24] SPEAKER: *It feels like the soul thing, of everything. It feels like the soul thing, there is no more form.*

[19:31] GANGAJI: *Yes, let it go, just for our purposes. Let it all go. In this experience of disillusion, which is different from the theory of disillusion and the direct experience.*

[19:53] SPEAKER: *Well, actually for me that's okay.*

[19:58] GANGAJI: *It feels all right, doesn't it?*

[19:59] SPEAKER: *For me it does.*

[20:01] GANGAJI: *For everyone.*

[20:04] SPEAKER: *It's like, who cares really?*

[20:10] GANGAJI: *Really, but not a casual who cares. It's really a beautiful experience. It's the experience of joy and laughter.*

[20:21] SPEAKER: *Yeah, yeah! It's the opposite of control.*

[20:24] GANGAJI: *Yes. (laughter) So you have clearly experienced that in other realms. But in this realm of like being with your clients, or being with aspects of yourself, without the shield of either substance or practice or mantra or amulet or ritual. Without the shield of that, and there's nothing wrong with any of that. It all has its place and it's all beautiful. It all serves. But in a moment of just nakedly meeting what hasn't been met, then there is another opportunity for disillusion.*

[21:13] SPEAKER: *Mmm...yeah...it's not bad.*

[20:16] GANGAJI: *At the very least it's not bad. And in the beginning of not wanting to go there, there is a sense of it's bad. Yes, that's right. That's right. I don't want to go there. That's right. So we go together.*

(end clip)

[21:31] HILLARY: That was such a beautiful description of this therapist talking about her clients who are victims and then when you turned around and showed her how she was actually being a victim about their victimhood.

[21:44] GANGAJI: Well, you said it earlier, it's the hall of mirrors. It just keeps reflecting back on ourselves. And you know, sometimes we are victims and sometimes we are overloaded with the misery of the world and so I don't want to make that a wrong thing, but it's possible to recognize, and it's possible to recognize that we are somehow putting the blame for our suffering outside ourselves rather than just stopping for a moment and opening to it. Opening to some personal discomfort or some personal horror. Or some discomfort in the world with someone we know or someone we just read about in the newspapers, or the beauty. So we are connected that way, it's really as you were telling the story of your friend just recognizing how she had actually victimized her brother and she wasn't *just* the victim of him. And in opening to that, a space clears and it's in that clear space that our hearts are open and we can discover what it means to really relate, to really be here, even though there might be irritations, small and great. Even though we may choose to leave relationships because they're abusive or not satisfying in some way. We can open to it as not being a source of something that's being done to us, it's part of a whole. It may be being done to us but in some way we are participating in that and that clarity is space that opens.

[23:37] HILLARY: Well, speaking of that there is a listener named Jan and she wrote in. She had a question for you actually about relationships. She says that "in relationships how can we know where our own truth exists and where we are just protecting our own illusions or stories into that relationship? When I think I've found the truth my ego just seems to step up the game and ensnare me once again."

[24:05] GANGAJI: Yeah, well when you think you find the truth, truth is somehow separate from where you are, who you are. And then when you find something, you can lose something. So if you discover what's never been lost, what's always here, whatever the narrative is that's going on in our thought stream, then you discover who you are, and that's the truth. And of course there are challenges to that, all of life is a challenge. But you can always take a moment, a few seconds to just stop the narrative. To be still, and to open, and see what is here that is always here. That is not contingent on somebody treating you a certain way or on you feeling a certain way. It's not conditioned by what you say to yourself about what is. Hillary, you said something about what you think is what you see or something, it's really what we think is how we interpret what we're seeing or what we're feeling, what the sensations are. And so the willingness to recognize that *everything* that we think about *anything* is probably polluted already by what we thought previously about it, by what we've been taught, by how we've been victimized and how we have victimized others. How we have been stressed in some very great ways. But we have the capacity and the privilege to just take a moment and stop. Then the freshness of that moment, the clarity, the lucidity informs thought. And thought is not just the same old wheel going around, it's insight, it's creative, it's mature. And it serves then. So it's really the willingness to take responsibility, to stop for yourself and see what is always here. Who am I? Who am I before I think who I am? Who am I before I think who this other person is? What they are giving me, what they should be giving me, what they should not be giving me. Just to return to the original truth of who you are and then to discover that this doesn't move when conditions change, and conditions always change. But this, the truth of yourself remains. It's always here.

[26:54] HILLARY: Somebody had written in another question that was short Gangaji, they said, "When I look at a sunrise or I look at a photo of you," he says, "I feel complete love. Is

that just a different form of illusion? Is that just good illusion, there's good illusion and then there's bad illusion, the kind that feels good and the kind that feels bad."

[27:22] GANGAJI: Well, it's like if we go back to the hall of mirrors. You know, if you stop movement, then the reflection that you get is a pure reflection. It's still a reflection so there may be some distortion in the mirror and in that sense is some illusion, or the illusion is what then you think about the reflection. But if you're willing to stop, then nothing else in the mirror moves either. And so, in that willingness to stop and really see yourself eye to eye, in this mirror, reflection of sunset or other. To recognize that what wells up within you, if your mind doesn't try to own that or deny that, doesn't try to package it as, "Oh, this is reality" or deny it in the package of "Oh, this is illusion" but just simply opens to it, then what is an illusion is reality. I mean it's the great Vedic saying that, "*All the world is illusion.*" Only God, only self is real. All the world is only self.

[28:56] HILLARY: I want to say thank you to everyone who submitted a question this month. I have attention on the ones we haven't been able to use on the actual show yet. Over these episodes Gangaji has received so many questions from many of you and I am just pondering how we might be able to use them down the road here. Maybe we'll do an episode from the mail bag. I'll keep you posted on that. But I just wanted to make sure that you all know that your questions and your input are always welcome, always. This episode we were talking about projections and assumptions, especially with regard to relationships. And speaking of relationships, that is the topic for the next several months on With Gangaji, Gangaji's live monthly webcast. Gangaji will be addressing specific areas like doubt, neediness, sexuality, and lots of things. So go to the website if you're interested in that. That is gangaji.org. If you would like to support us here at Gangaji Radio, by becoming a donor please drop us a line at gangajiradio@gangaji.org. That g-a-n-g-a-j-i-radio@gangaji.org. Thank you all for joining us this month. Until next time, be well.