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A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 37

LOVE, ATTACHMENT AND DEPENDENCY (RELATIONSHIP SERIES PART 1 OF 3)

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[00:03] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:09] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: As part of our special series on relationships, this month we're gonna take a look at the subject of love and attachment. What is the difference between the two? We can love a partner, a parent, a child, a pet a teacher... but what happens when we're attached to the object of our love? Does this attachment keep us from experiencing something that we don't want to face? Or is it the vehicle that helps us discover what love truly is? In reality how much control do we have over what or who we love?

[00:43] GANGAJI: Love is the Satguru. Love is the teacher. Love finally – if you're willing to surrender to it, rather than to try to control it – love teaches you who you are.

[00:57] HILLARY LARSON: Whether you're in a relationship, looking, hoping for one, or if you find relationships difficult, this conversation is for everyone who has ever experienced love. Does this love have the power to heal the broken parts in us that cause us to reach or withdraw from love in the first place? It's the first in our three-part series on relationships. I'm Hillary Larson and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

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[01:26] HILLARY: I thought we could talk about love this month. We're doing the series on relationships, and what I would really like to do is sort out this thing, like the difference between this thing we call love and what is more about attachment or dependency. But first of all I just wanted to start out by saying that I don't know if there's a better feeling than being in love. You know, whether it's a lover, or a friend, or a pet...

[01 :53] GANGAJI: Nature.

[01 :54] HILLARY: Yeah, an incredible feeling, you can relate to that feeling, yes.

[01:57] GANGAJI: Well it's more than a feeling. It's, in that moment, of, of recognizing love. It's not just love, it's peace, it's fulfillment, it's joy, maybe there's some fear, but that's the adventure of it. It's, it's much more than what we, we think when we say the word love. We need many words for love. And to be really in love, is to *be* loved... no separation.

[02:27] HILLARY: There's a term that I hear a lot these days, the last few years actually, and I'm not a therapist, and I'm not a clinician, but it seems to be around a lot and, that's this term attachment disorder. And as a lay person what I understand it to be is that if in your very very, the early part of your life, let's say the first couple of years, if you don't receive nurturing on an emotional level and a physical level in particular it sets your nervous system up in a way that you are then constantly looking to the outside for fulfillment and some sense of safety and, and that can show up in ways that are inappropriate, it can show up in ways that are frustrating, ways that don't last, and, and I think that perhaps most people in one

degree or another, they have that. So this question actually is, this was sent to you some months ago and I'm so glad. This is from Sylvan in, in Montreal and basically Sylvan wanted to know, how do you tell the difference between love and attachment?

[03:33] GANGAJI: Well you know in a, in a pure sense there is no difference. Because the word attachment, actually, the way it, it used to be used in Jane Austen novels anyway, meant love. When you said 'I'm attached to you' or 'I'm attached to this person', it meant there were these bonds of inexplicable connection. So in our day, you know, we've made attachment pathological, or unspiritual, or bad. So if we're willing to remove the judgment about attachment, then I think that we can get a, a clearer view of appropriate attachment and inappropriate attachment. Or attachment that is doomed to failure 'cause it won't give you what you're seeking the attachment for, what the bonds of attachment can deliver. And love which is, it remains a mystery. We call it love, and we spell it love, but we really can't define it. And, and that's bigger, whether it's in one-on-one relationships, or one-to-all, or oneself, or, or, or nothing at all. It, it's a bigger word. So attachment I believe, we usually use for relationships, when we're speaking of a couple, or a parent and a child, some relationship. And, and let's assume attachment starts with love. I think that that's, that's the truth. If we assume that it all starts with love, then we can see how it gets corrupted into what, what we usually mean when we say attachment, which is somehow we're imprisoned by the attraction or, or by the relationship. Does that make sense?

[05:25] HILLARY: Yeah, that's a great clarification. I actually really loved, I really love that you said that attachment actually comes from love. Because one could also assume that it comes from this void, and that puts a different twist on it, doesn't it?

[05:42] GANGAJI: Well, you know, then we even have to go back and, and this void, if it's met, void is love itself. Love is the emptiness of being. Not love, as we may define it, but this, as you were just saying, is the feeling that is the by-product of that. Generally we're so afraid of the void that we then seek things to rescue us, help us escape from the void, and that's what then generates inappropriate attachment, whatever it may be. It could be to work, or fame, or it could be to 'other'. But when we actually turn and meet this that we are running from, this void, this emptiness, death, it's quite startling to discover it's actually true love.

[06:37] HILLARY: I have this, two ways of describing two sets of people, this doesn't describe everyone obviously but, but I think it, it's a good way of exploring this subject. Because I have this group of people, I would refer to as 'the Velcro people', and those are the people that in relationships and they cannot, they're attached at the hip and they cannot separate themselves from each other. And then there's the other group of people that actually remain single because being in a relationship is so triggering, it's easier to be by yourself. And with the Velcro people, that seems like it could be workable. But in a moment where there's some threat that you're gonna lose that person in some way, it blows open the whole structure of that kind of attachment. And I was wondering, have, have you ever been, have you ever been a Velcro person?

[07:26] GANGAJI: Oh, absolutely. I was deep Velcro. And I, I believe that it was, it was a beautiful phase. I, I don't begrudge it at all, it was tremendous, it was hugely bonding. And maybe that's what neither one of us had gotten from our parents, I don't know, I, I didn't try to dissect it psychologically. But it was, it was just, we never wanted to be out of each other's sight. And it went on for years, with my husband Ely, and, and it, and then naturally, we started to see each other (laughs) as we actually are rather than what we were imagining in

this swirl of, of bonding, bonding attachment. And so we began to individuate. And yet be as a couple, we, we didn't have to throw the couple out to, to begin to find our places of autonomy and yet still in a couple. Because it seems to me that there's the one part of the couple and the other part of the couple, and then there is this entity that is the couple itself, that is, is actually more than the sum of its parts. It's, it's not me, it's not him, or her, it's, it's a third entity. We could call it the Holy Ghost (laughter). It's, it has a life. It has to be tended, it has to be nurtured, or it has to be destroyed, if that's appropriate. So for me, the, the Velcro phase, the deep bonding phase, was, has never been inappropriate. And I've done that with every person I've been in deep relationship with – girlfriends, in high school, we were just inseparable, we, you know, slept in the same bed, we called each other up all the time and, and that was beautiful, we're, you know, I never see her but I occasionally go back and there she is and we, we know each other. She's gone a totally different path from me but we are bonded, in a way that doesn't even matter how our lives have changed. We *met*, and when you really meet, it's more than you and this other person meeting. Something is realized and I call that love.

[09:53] HILLARY: So, when you describe that relationship with your friend, and your relationship with Ely, it sounds like there's then two categories. There's the category of attachment, and then there's the category of dependency.

[10:06] GANGAJI: Oh, I think that's really good, Hil. Yeah. Although in that (chuckles) period of attachment there was dependency. Maybe if we look at the, the natural, the dependency that *is* attachment, but then if we somehow suppress the growing out of that, the maturing of the relationship, where the dependency is a kind of cocoon that gets shed at a certain point, and if it doesn't get shed, it is a bondage. And so, it seems to me in relationship is where we really get the opportunity to mature, because in some deep sense they are really uncontrollable – by our agendas, and our plans.

[10:53] HILLARY: I'm trying to figure out which sequence... I have this, two questions that are so perfect for what you just said, let, let me actually read Mariam's question to you, she's from Seattle. She said, 'Dear Gangaji, I have, I met you two years ago, and the instant I saw you, I fell in love. Sometimes when I feel depressed I watch your videos and feel better almost immediately, it's like instant love. I'm afraid it might be a dependency, I'm confused.'

[11:17] GANGAJI: Mmmm... we're very afraid of dependency. But the truth is we're all dependent on each other. (laughter) I mean, this radio show, is dependent on each of us and everyone who listens for it to, to *be*. To have an existence. So that fear of dependence I think is often what keeps people isolated from falling into love. It, and it, usually comes because we have felt betrayed in love, or we felt hurt, or we felt the bonding was only going one way, and, maybe perhaps, became bondage. But the opportunity if you're gonna live a life that's really full, is to be willing to fall in love regardless of the consequences and from that, then, that doesn't mean you act unintelligently. You may fall in love and realize you have to leave the relationship, the relationship is, is not good, but that doesn't mean you have to leave the love. The love doesn't have to be shut aside. And this, the, the writer is mentioning this love of student and teacher is, is so misunderstood, especially in the West, it's a forbidden relationship, because the teacher could misuse you, or brainwash you, or put you in a cult. And so we stay separate, and usually in that staying separate we really don't open to what the teacher has to offer. Whether it's a person teaching, or a mountain teaching, or a friend, or a lover, it just, this, distance we keep from love and trying to keep our independence, is

based on a, a false understanding of independence. We're not independent. We don't exist as independent entities.

[13:12] HILLARY: Well, do you mind if I throw a monkey wrench into that?

[13:15] GANGAJI: Let's see if you can.

[13:16] HILLARY: Okay, I'll give it my best shot.

[13:18] GANGAJI: (laughter)

[13:19] HILLARY: So, I also feel like there's a way that that dependency, or attachment, there's so much momentum to it, there's such a strong emotion that's attached to it as well, that seems like it could keep a person from feeling what they don't wanna feel. And, and I'll give you an example. Now this is normally something that I would write you in a letter, so I'm feeling a little intimidated right now, is that – you know, I had this same experience, this Mariam from Seattle, Mariam's letter, when I first met you, which is out of the blue, it was like oh my God, like what is that? But it was through your writing, 'cause I met you through *Diamond In Your Pocket*. And, and then I saw you on a screen, so, so the love was evoked by your words and transmission first. So then, things progressed, and somehow magically I ended up doing this radio show with you. And somebody wrote me recently and said 'Wow, you're so lucky to be in the position you're in' and I, I said 'Yeah, I am'. I'm like, stunned, by the position I'm in, always. But in that has been my own learning because I would find there was just like such joy when I'd get to do an interview with you, and it was so beautiful. And, but then I found that there was some, like this personal relationship that you and I have, it's, like other relationships it comes and goes. So about a year and a half ago, I was really in this period of disillusionment, of like, 'oh, look how attached I am to what comes and goes'. And, it was hard. It was hard. Because I liked the honeymoon phase frankly. And so, and I can't tell you that I've quite found the bottom of it. But it was, I think my inquiry switched from being child-like in a way, innocent but, and child-like, and now it's innocent but it's sober.

[15:16] GANGAJI: Beautiful.

[15:17] HILLARY: Do you see, do you see what I'm saying? As far as the distraction goes.

[15:18] GANGAJI: I love it, I, I don't see it as a monkey wrench. I love it. It seems to me one of the phases of actually telling the truth and the honeymoon period does come and go. If it's true love, the love doesn't come and go. The flavor of it can change, and it can be anger, disillusionment, whatever else is apparent, but the love doesn't come and go because that's who you are. So when you read those words and you experience love, the truth is those are just words, and they, they didn't have that power with innumerable people who read 'em. That love came from you. It has its origin in you. And in, in it being evoked, by some words or a person, a teacher or nature, whatever it may be, it's reinforced it's, you are seen, you are really seen. And you recognize you're seen, but we don't have the vocabulary for it. And that's why we don't always leave the sight of the one who's seeing us – we may read the same words over and over, people do, or look at art, or listen to music, because we are, we are somehow known in that moment for who we are. And YES! that obliterates all negative feelings, how beautiful, there's nothing wrong with that, it's a place of refuge, the sanctuary of the heart. And maybe it obliterates those negative feelings forever. And if those negative

feelings reappear, they reappear in the safety of love. And really recognizing, finally, truly, recognizing yourself as love.

[17:10] HILLARY: (chuckles) I just watched myself with my viewpoint stuck on, 'oh, attachment's bad, dependency's bad, it's so...' It's like, of course it is! You have to get rid of it. And listening to you it's just, I actually don't even really know what to say.

[17:27] GANGAJI: Yes, that's great. Yeah, so if, that's a whole different way of approaching attachment. It *can* be bad, it can be destructive. But it also can just be the beginning phase of, of resting, of truly resting in love. And if we are fighting it from the beginning, it doesn't have an opportunity to develop, and, and disappear, as a cocoon would disappear. Then I think that gets back to your earlier definition of attachment disorder. Because, I don't know, maybe human babies can't be given the right nurturing and so this, part of this attachment disorder is part of the evolution of, of what it means to be a human. But the danger is in pathologizing these experiences, and then that then, trying to control them, trying to keep them out, and then wondering why we are empty-handed, why we're alone, why we can't commit, or can't surrender. Yeah.

[18:38] HILLARY: And I've heard people say that when that level of, let's call it damage, is done, with the nervous system not fully developing in a way that feels safe in the world, that it's very difficult to heal that later in life. And I wonder if you think that's true.

[18:59] GANGAJI: I would say not necessarily. It may be, circumstantially, or just with what life presents you. But if you're really interested in truth, freedom, or love, that is the source of the healing. That brings you home. And ALL disease, ALL sickness, is homesickness. So when we are called home, that's, that's the healing.

[19:29] HILLARY: I wonder with that, when you were talking about your own forms of, quote unquote attachment, that now sound so beautiful to me, you know, really, I wonder, when you had your experiences with Papaji, did that really dramatically shift your perception of what love is?

[19:53] GANGAJI: Well maybe it shifted my perception of attachment. I did fall in love with him, right away. And I was prepared for that. I, I knew I wanted a teacher, I knew he was a true teacher, but I didn't know I would be so *emotionally* in love and open. And, and there's a vulnerability in that, of course. But he greeted me with such openness and welcome, that I felt safe. And it was only later when I saw he greeted everybody (chuckles) as he greeted me, that some kind of oh, sibling rivalry reappeared. But at that point there was a maturity and a, an overhearing of the conversation that was starting in my head about 'oh, he said that to me, does he mean that to everybody?' And it's like, well yes, he does mean it to everybody! And I could open to that. I could lose my specialness, because I had somehow linked the love as limited, and only was able to be given to a special few. And this is deeply conditioned in our life, whether it's only a special few go to heaven, or only a special few make it, and that's probably linked to survival and our human history. But who we are, whether we die tomorrow, whether we are, don't make it to heaven, we are, whether we're in hell in this very moment – if we're willing to, to really meet who we are, we need love. Love is here. It's the nature of consciousness. It's the nature of truth. It's not separate from consciousness or truth. That's what satcitananda means.

[21:44] HILLARY: The Sufis, they talk about the four layers of the heart. And that the first layer is the – they call 'em 'the nafs' – the desires, the ego; and the, the next layer is the heart, the emotions; and then the next layer is the soul. And the layer after that, the deepest layer, is the secret, it's the unity. And I was wondering, when you speak of silence, are love and silence the same thing?

[22:15] GANGAJI: Yes. And so is, as, as you just described with these layers that the Sufis talk about, you get to unity, but that doesn't mean that the first layer is separate from unity. Unity contains everything. Unity is the core.

[22:34] HILLARY: I realize that, after I had been with you for some time, that I, I mean I don't know if you see it this way, but I was thinking one day, like 'oh, what you do is, you walk people through the layers of the heart.' And that's love, it's silence, it's truth.

[22:56] GANGAJI: I don't, you know, I'm not aware of doing that. What I am aware of when I'm with people is meeting them. And then, then we see, we both see what happens from that. I really don't have an agenda beyond really truly with all my being and all my experience, supporting you, whoever that may be, the individual you, the collective you, you that includes me, in discovering the truth that cannot be taken away. That we can call love.

[23:33] HILLARY: I would have to say that, I mean we've, we've spent a lot of time in this conversation talking about you, and then I wondered, I mean honestly, it's really easy to love you (chuckles). How does that work in our lives with people that may not be as clear as you?

[23:53] GANGAJI: Well I don't know that love has anything to do with clarity, I think it's a mystery. It's out of our control. We can't say, 'well, I'm just gonna love these people' and 'I'm not gonna love these people'. You open your heart and you love. And some are difficult relationships, and some are very easy. Some are worthwhile relationships, and some are destructive, useless. But you open your heart. There's a wonderful saying, that 'the master trusts those who are trustworthy, and the master trusts those who are untrustworthy.' We could say the master loves those who are lovable, and the master loves those who are unlovable. It's finally, the source of the love is its own reward. Not how that's responded to, or what the course of the relationship is that follows. If we begin with what is the core, rather than trying to get there, then, it's all a mystery, it's all a reflection of love. Even the worst moments. And I never wanna deny that there are, there are pathologies, there are bad moments. And, and yet this self-love, 'cause that's really what it is, and we are afraid to surrender to that, to be able, to have permission to love yourself. And to recognize in loving yourself, you can really inquire: well, who am I? what is love? where is it? And can open to discover.

[25:31] HILLARY: You know we've all had different forms of relationships, and we've all experienced beauty in our relationships, and we've all experienced difficulty in our relationships. And you've gone through your own difficult time in relationships. What have you learned about yourself and about love in all that?

[25:51] GANGAJI: (chuckles) You can bear anything. I think relationships in general are difficult. Because in that initial phase of, it is a phase of deep attachment, the difficulties are overlooked, because there's such joy in meeting, and being together. But you know, we're difficult people, we, they're complicated, they're complex, but at the core is this simplicity of love. And it bears it all. I've left relationships, relationships where I was deeply bonded. But the relationship itself had reached its end. So I'm, I'm not proposing some formula for you, 'always stay in relationship'. But I am proposing, and inviting everyone to recognize that when the relationship is over, don't say the love is over. It's not true. Love is always here.

[26:54] HILLARY: I would have to say, of all the conversations we have done so far that this one, this topic, and what you have said to me has been one of the biggest invitations to welcome everything. And I thank you for that.

[27:10] GANGAJI: Mmmm... so glad.

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(clip)

[27:20] GANGAJI: This is the answer! Are you willing to trust the love, and not your mind's control of that? Really, are you?

[27:32] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes.

[27:33] GANGAJI: Good!

[27:34] (laughter)

[27:36] GANGAJI: Good! Good! Then whatever mind stuff comes up is slain quickly, quickly, quicker, more quickly, and you see it and the possibility of living in love. Not in control of loved one, but living in love. This is a true possibility, this is possible for everyone, everyone. And love is the satguru. Love is the teacher. Love, finally, if you are willing to surrender to it, rather than to try to control it, love teaches you who you are.

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[28:40] HILLARY: That's part one of our three-part series on relationships. I just wanna say thank you to Sylvan for sending in your question several weeks ago. Your letter inspired this conversation. Gangaji has received several letters asking her to address relationships. So now we get to do a whole series on it. If you have thoughts about the subject of relationships you can write [gangajiradio@gangaji.org](mailto:gangajiradio@gangaji.org). And on a related note, this is a little short notice, but coming up on October eighteenth, on With Gangaji, Gangaji's live monthly webcast, Gangaji's gonna be addressing the subject of intimate relationships as well, but in a little bit of a different way. So if you're not a member of With Gangaji, you can visit the website, [gangaji.org](http://gangaji.org), and it'll show you how you can sign up. And next month, back here on Gangaji Radio, we're gonna be continuing our series on relationships by talking about abandonment and self-betrayal. How do we not stray from this place we call home? Later we'll talk about being alone. Maybe we like it, maybe we don't. I'm Hillary Larson. Thank you as always for being here. Be well, until next time.