

[Gangaji Radio](#)

A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 41

SEARCHING FOR A TEACHER

Released on February 17, 2016

[00:02] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:08] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: If you enter the word 'spirituality' as a Google Search, you'll come up with around a hundred and forty-five million results. It's like an endless buffet of choices of teachers and teachings, articles, blogs, and YouTubes. Lucky for us, we have all of these choices. But if you find one person that really impacts you, someone that profoundly changes the way you see your life, do you keep searching, or does finding that teacher actually once and for all end your search?

[00:41] GANGAJI: If you're in a committed relationship with a teacher, you will go through some hellish moments. But you won't escape. And in that non-escaping, you will discover yourself more deeply.

[00:53] HILLARY: Are we overindulging in of all these choices that we have access to, or are we just taking advantage of a plethora of beautiful offerings? When it comes to finding a teacher, are you in an open or a committed relationship? I'm Hillary Larson, and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

[01:18] HILLARY: We just recently wrapped up a series in October, November, December, it was on relationships and it was so well received and, what was interesting to me is that, a lot of other topics kind of came up in the midst of looking at abandonment and self-betrayal and being alone, and so on, and, one of the things I was looking at was these parallels between intimate relationships – what we call intimate relationships – and student-teacher relationships. And, my question was, is there a difference – well obviously, there's a difference – between a committed relationship, and an open relationship, when it comes to student-teacher. And, and then what spurred that even further was I was overhearing a conversation with a couple people and one of them was talking about these profound experiences they had with this particular teacher, just, really just life-changing. And it wasn't, it wasn't just one, it was many experiences, and I was just in awe listening to this story. And then a couple minutes later, this person said, 'oh, so-and-so's coming to town' – it was a different teacher – 'I'm gonna go see that person.' And I just, was thinking, the image that came up in my mind – and I could never tell what was going on in their universe – but I think it's a, it can be a phenomenon. So what the image that came up in my mind was having the best Thanksgiving dinner ever, that you're so fulfilled and satiated, and then five minutes later saying, 'I wonder if the neighbors have a good dessert down the street'. So I wanna look at it from that direction first, because I'm not saying it's negative all the time, but I *wanna look at it*.

[03:09] GANGAJI: *Oh, it's, yeah, it's a very tricky thing. I think it's a kind of promiscuity that happens*, because you get a taste of, really an intimacy with yourself, that a particular teacher is supporting and, and if it's not a deep enough taste for you then I recommend that you actually check out other teachers and find somebody that supports you so fully in

surrendering to yourself. Because what will inevitably, what must happen, is your own internal denial of that surrender, and your internal turning away from yourself. And if you're in a committed relationship with a teacher, you will go through some hellish moments. But you won't escape. And in that non-escaping, you will discover yourself more deeply. So what I've seen, in our culture, in our sub-culture, is that there are some incredible teachers around. And they're available. And so we have a smorgasbord of teachings and teachers and so we take a bite of this, we take a bite of that, we take a bite of this. And that is good at a beginning stage, to find out what really resonates with you. But with maturity, and with the recognition perhaps if you are doing that, then there comes a time for a commitment. And, I can only speak from my experience, of course, that I had many teachers before I had Papaji, as a smorgasbord. And it may be a couple years I would stay with them, or, or teachings, like the Tibetan Buddhism, and Zen Buddhism and new age kind of teachings. And I benefitted from every one of them. And yet, something was still calling out. And, and from that something, I actually prayed for a teacher. And I ended up at Papaji's doorstep, and there was a recognition I stop here. And in that, there was, that's already surrender. It didn't mean that I didn't feel, 'oh I gotta get out of here' at certain times, or 'uh oh, he doesn't love me' or 'oh, what does this mean?' I mean, all of, there's room for all of that to come up, like in any relationship. But I knew I wasn't moving, because that was the teaching, to stop; it is the teaching, stop. So I committed to that. And I can just say from my own experience that that commitment revealed itself to be a commitment to love and to truth, not necessarily to pleasure, not necessarily to new truth. I, I'll just tell a brief thing. I, I had come back from Papaji, I was having meetings around, and it was the second wave of that, I was actually in Maui, and somebody came up to speak and started telling me about this fantastic teacher in India who could confer immortality on you. And she could tell I wasn't interested. And she said, 'I'm so shocked Gangaji, you used to be so open. I thought you would be open to this.' And I really just had to say in my heart of hearts, I am not looking for anything else, I'm not even looking for immortality. I'm happy if this teacher serves you, but if you're telling me so that I will go join up, it's just not there. And I realized when I was telling her that that *is* the teaching that, that Papaji offered, and that I'm extending to people. To stop right where you are, to stop your search. Now you shouldn't stop your search until you've had a taste of what is here, but once you've had a taste, if you stop, then you are consumed by that taste. And that's intimacy, and that's commitment.

[07:12] HILLARY: Well so many people I've heard describe these amazing moments of stopping with you. And then if there is an inclination of, like 'oh, I'm gonna go see so-and-so', or 'I'm gonna watch this YouTube', if that impulse is there, I wonder if there's just a doubt in the original stopping that just starts to arise.

[07:33] GANGAJI: Mmm... maybe.

[07:34] HILLARY: I mean that's, that takes a very specific kind of inquiry to tell the truth about that. Because it's quite easy, and sometimes it can be true, to go, 'no, I'm just really drawn by this particular person, or 'it like came up on my Facebook feed', or whatever.

[07:50] GANGAJI: You know you can't make the judgement for anybody else, but you can tell the truth for yourself. That's why I share that story with myself, I didn't, I went to multiple teachers until I found my true teacher. And I also had many relationships, until I found my true relationship. So it's a, it's something only you can know for yourself. But it's also the willingness to tell the truth to yourself. Are you escaping something, or are you in fact really being augmented by different voices? And maybe you're not into a committed relationship

with a teacher, maybe it's, that's not for everybody. I, I know for myself it was necessary, but that doesn't mean it's necessary for everyone. Maybe you don't need a teacher at all. There's no formula for it. But if you are, if there's some mysterious force that draws you to someone – a teacher, a lover, a mate, a friend – to be true to that, and to go all the way with that. That's really the thing. And if, if skirting off to other relationships, other lovers, other teachers, is a way of avoiding going all the way, then tell the truth. And then you have the choice to, to stop.

[09:14] HILLARY: I wanted to say a couple things in response to that. One is I was talking to somebody three or four months ago and, we were talking about this thing of searching for a teacher. And, and she's had the same teacher for thirty years. And what that teacher said is, there's a root guru, your root guru. And then, you can go and see other teachers but you always come back to your root guru. And that made some sense to me, and also this whole thing about commitment. Because I know, you know, on, in intimate relationships the idea of commitment can be terrifying and, I wanted to play a clip that was actually sent to me by a woman in Australia, her name's Marion and you know Marion well. And there was a moment where she, she had a dream, and she wanted to write you a letter, she wrote you a letter about, 'oh, you know what, you are my teacher', and then when she got up to sit with you in retreat, that was her purpose, was to sit with you and say you are my teacher. And, and then you made some joke about the fact that being with a living teacher rather than a dead teacher is (laughs), is a little more dangerous. But part of this conversation, I wanna play it for everybody, because it's about this fear of commitment. So, it's like a minute-and-a-half long, so let me play this.

(clip)

[10:37] GANGAJI: *I am just an ordinary person. Really! (laughs) Really! I don't have extraordinary powers. That's really the good news for you (laughs) but for some people, they, you know, I am their teacher. And for many people who say that, that then scares them so badly that I never see them again.*

[11:00] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBERS: *(laughter)*

[11:02] GANGAJI: *And the last person who said that to me, actually before Marion, came to me and said, 'I had a teacher before, but that teacher is dead, now you are my teacher, I'm saying that'. And I said this very thing to him, I said, 'I want to tell you that the biggest danger in this is that I will never see you again.'*

[11:18] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBERS: *(laughter)*

[11:19] GANGAJI: *And he said, 'I know that, I understand that'. And, I've never seen him again.*

[11:22] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBERS: *(laughter)*

[11:25] GANGAJI: *And he lives in California. So it's not like we're continents away. Because something gets generated when you, you find your teacher, whether it's a mountain or a person, or, living or dead. Something gets generated that is a threat to the construction, a threat to the fabricated, built identity. And we find reasons why, well, this is not my teacher anymore. Oh, well, I thought you were all-powerful, I see you really are just a human being,*

so you couldn't be my teacher. And in truth I'm not your teacher. We are all at the feet of the satguru. And we all play different roles for each other in that.

(end clip)

[12:14] HILLARY: There's another section, later on in that clip, that struck me as part of this terror, is the, the surrender to the teacher you were talking about is in, you're not really surrendering to the teacher, you're surrendering your concept of yourself, letting that go, and letting that go can be terrifying.

[12:32] GANGAJI: Yes! Let's say it is terrifying, because we know that in relationships like that, where the, the power seems to be imbalanced and the teacher has the power and you don't, there's often been abuse, misuse. I mean that's what cults are about, and brainwashing. And so it's very intelligent to recognize what is meant by surrender to the teacher. And then you're, you're aware of, of the person in front of you is playing the role of teacher and, and what that person wants. Because if the so-called teacher wants, wants your personality to disappear, or wants your, all your funds to go to them (chuckles), then it's intelligent to be alerted and to back off. So, I, I support that questioning. What I think we're getting at here is that there is that questioning that's legitimate, and stepping back that's legitimate, and then there is something that, that the mechanism of just staying away, that's not legitimate in terms of self-discovery. That there is a moment, like with a lover, where you just let go. Where you really go all the way, and that's what's meant by surrender. And then if the next morning, or the next day, when you're not in a, a state of bliss, or you feel very unenlightened, or you, you look at your lover and you go, 'who is this? I don't, don't know if I like this person', that you still stay. You don't run out the door. You don't bolt. And our tendency is to bolt, and then go find another teacher or lover. And that's why I use the word promiscuity with it, because we understand that we are not bound by the rules, by monogamy or by the need to stay with one teacher. This is a different age, there are plenty of teachers. But we sell ourselves short when we, we don't go all the way. And so that's the point and then yes, you, there really is no formula. Yes, maybe you go see lots of people but your, your heart, your commitment – and that commitment is really the test of, of when things get bad with you, when, when old habits arise with you, when the self-doubt comes in, when the, the madness, the latent madness comes back. Then if you are actually committed to support, you, you don't move, you can face anything. That's what, the way I understand teacher, or, for me it was guru, my, my guru, and so sensei was Indian. That, that meant a lot in India, I mean we did bend down and kiss his feet. And we, whatever he wanted he could have. But it was all really based on recognizing that he was, he was not just an ordinary relationship in our lives that we would play with trivially and we would come and we would go. He was something very special. And in that we honored him and, and when you honor somebody, you pay close attention. That's respect, and then that respect is bounced back to you. So you have true self-respect. Then you are free. And you can, in that freedom you can smell a cult. You can see what's happening, 'cause you aren't looking to be saved. You, you're looking to be who you are.

[16:26] HILLARY: I had a teacher, who was a Sufi teacher, he was from Jerusalem. And I didn't understand what he said very well. First of all, he didn't speak that much English, and some people were really struck by his transmission. But I was mostly struck by some of the things he said, and one of the things he said is there's a point in the path where you can't look left or right, it's like going through the eye of a needle, and that's where you need your guide. And I have experienced that for sure, even in the last year, just moments where I, I'm

facing something that feels so uncomfortable, and I wanna look left to blame, or I wanna look right to fear, and to just keep focused on looking straight ahead, and not looking left and right, has taken the resolve of committing myself to you as your student and you as my teacher. It's the resolve that helps me walk through those times where if I look left or right I'm in huge suffering.

[17:36] GANGAJI: That's right, well, it's, it's really a strengthening of your mind to have the capacity to be still, to bear what has to be borne. And that's the role that any true friend or teacher or guru really can play for you, or partner. Whatever it may be. Whether it's a mountain or a person, dead or alive. Because it's, it is a reflection of a capacity that you do have. But that our society in general doesn't reinforce. In general we are taught, go left or go right, you're free. So go left or right. You, don't feel bad. And so this willingness to feel what you're feeling, without moving, a strength is released, a capacity for life – to live.

[18:31] HILLARY: And I think that when you're with a teacher long enough, that's in your system. It not like the teacher has to be there. Or even that you have to like, 'oh, I'm gonna, I'm gonna watch a Gangaji YouTube right now, or listen to an episode of the radio show'. It's like, 'oh, that's in me.'

[18:46] GANGAJI: That's right, it's not separate from you.

[18:47] HILLARY: Like I, I got that. Right.

[18:49] GANGAJI: Yes, that's the, that's the meeting. That's why I, I use the, you know, terms of lover, commitment, and the tendency to promiscuity because there is a, a meeting that where you really recognize it's oneself, and it's in this experience split into something called me and you. But it's oneself, discovering itself. That's, that's the teaching and the teacher. And in that, we're all students.

[19:26] HILLARY: I wonder, if we could look at the other side of that. If there's the thing of like, oh, skirting around a, a true commitment, and then there's a, I know I kind of maybe I beat this to death in the other, the three shows that we did on relationships, but in this particular instance I think it's really important to look at the subject of dependency. Because certainly many of us that, we even got on a spiritual path because we've been walking around wounded in some way and trying different ways of resolving that. So, dependency in a way is natural. And you told a story at Fallen Leaf last year, that moved me deeply, and I can't repeat the story so I was gonna ask you to, is about Papaji talking about the teacher being the big tree and then the students are like the acorns that fall from the tree, and then he'd kick 'em out into the sun, and they'd kind of run back again, and then he'd kick 'em back out again. Do you know which story I'm talking about?

[20:24] GANGAJI: I know, I don't know if (chuckles) I could, could tell it because really specifically that was a story about students who become teachers in their own right. They, they can't grow in the, in the shade of the parent. But this issue of dependency I think is really important because in many ways we are dependent on the teacher, because the, the teacher knows something we don't know. And we want it, we feel it, and the only way to get it is to depend on the teacher to give it to you. That's not finally true, of course, but that's experience. Because we recognize, I want this. And I don't have it, or I don't know how to access it, or I don't know where it is, or it doesn't last, however we experience it. And we recognize it in the presence of a teacher, of any form, that that's reinforced. That we

discover, 'oh, oh, it's right here, it's right here', or... And so I'd say there's nothing wrong with dependency, it's only when the dependency becomes some kind of neurotic game, which is, we are back to cults, and we're back to, to relationships that don't serve, awakening relationships, student-teacher that don't serve either the student or the teacher, that they have to do with some kind of playing out the normal relationships in life. And really a teacher is, is not a normal relationship. It's a, I mean we have parents, but we need to individuate away from our parents. And with a teacher, there, it's an absorption, it's actually going the different, a different direction from our parents, we're going *into*. And in a true teacher there, there are no strings to that, there's no way you have to, nothing you have to pay back to that, it's offered freely. Ramana is a great example of that, Papaji. And you can be who you are, you can live the life you're living and nothing has to change but this surrender to, to being absorbed, and to absorbing. And so, you know I know we do this occasionally, is turn around the meaning of words. But I think we're very afraid of dependence. I, I know when I was with Papaji I had an attack of fear of dependence and, I didn't know him, I'd only been with him a couple of weeks, and I thought, how do I know what kind of person he is? Maybe he's one of these gurus and this is gonna be a brainwashing thing. And all of my doubts started coming up and there was a moment where I had to, just take a breath, and recognize that am I gonna trust my experience here, or am I gonna trust all of these doubts about what could happen? And I knew in that moment that I was surrendering, and I knew it could be a mistake, that it could be, he could've been somebody who was untrustworthy. But that's part of the adventure of life, there are, there are no guarantees that it's gonna work, normally and easily. And, and so I chose to trust my experience of him, and I'm thrilled for that. But I also knew in that moment that trusting my experience, I could've ended up in hell. So I was also trusting something that was deeper than experience, that if I ended up in hell, I could deal with that too. That I didn't have to protect myself, because it's a sense of, it's really a false independence of protecting ourselves from any harm or anything we don't understand, or anything that may not be what we think we should get, that keeps us away from this surrender into dependence. Does that make sense?

[24:41] HILLARY: Yeah I think my follow-up question to that would be, if you're talking about a true teacher, is there such a thing as too much devotion?

[24:52] GANGAJI: Well, depends on what you mean by devotion. You know, if it's pure, devotion is just love. And it's being yourself. If it's an imitation of that, you're still trying to extract something from somebody. And if there's too much of that, you just end up with your head in the sand.

[25:16] HILLARY: When I look at my life now, and I look at it back when I was sixteen, when I'm on Facebook I have some friends that know me from back then. And I think, sometimes I'll, you know, I'll post something about the radio show or something, and, and I'll be thinking, I am certain that some of them are going, 'oh my God, what happened to Hill?' (laughs). Like, that she's got this spiritual teacher, and, so the question that came up for me is like, are we in some way the freaks and the desperate ones and then everybody else who doesn't have a teacher, you know, they're just living their lives.

[25:55] GANGAJI: Well, they're more normal, let's say. So we are the freaks! We're different, you know, you can imagine what people I grew up with say about me. They're just dumbstruck. It's like I'm in a carnival act or something. I mean, they have, not all of them but many of them have no, certainly no respect for it, no comprehension of, of what's occurring.

That's is as it is. You know if you're gonna live your life freely, you can expect those people who saw you in a certain way to not understand the way you're living your life freely.

[26:35] HILLARY: So when we look at this whole subject of teachers, and commitment to a teacher, and promiscuity, and so on... when you see somebody that's been with you for years, and then you find out they're with another teacher, does that ever hurt your feelings?

[26:53] GANGAJI: Oh yeah, it's a heartbreaking business we're all in. You know (chuckles), you know, there's a, commitment goes both ways. I, I'm a human being. It's, it's my task to, to not have it be my business what that person does, because certainly I don't know finally what they need to do. But there's an involvement, there's a, a, usually some kind of personal involvement. And, I would say, especially if there's been no communication. Sometimes there's a communication, and it, it's understandable, it makes sense, like in any other major relationship where you, you speak to each other honestly and say, 'I've gone as far as I can go, I, I really need to leave'. Then it's a different matter. It may be, 'oh, I'm sorry to see you go'. But it's, it's not a, you know, we're in, we're involved with each other. Yeah, I'm attached to my students, that's what you're asking, I think. Yes I'm attached to 'em. And, and that's my satnoy, you know, is to recognize that attachment, to, to not fight it, and to let it be as it is. I'm not in control of it. I'm not in control of my students, and I, I'm a student. That's my, that's my role.

[28:16] HILLARY: Juan Carlos, who lives in New York, sent me this little exchange between you and a student, and I think that I would love to end off this conversation with this. And what he sent me was, the student says, this is a question that the student is asking you, 'How do you know when you've found your teacher?' and your response was, 'How do you know when you've found love?'

[28:41] GANGAJI: Mmm... yes.

[29:03] HILLARY: If you're finding these conversations helpful, and you'd like to help us out over here, there's a couple ways to do that. One is to leave a comment or a rating on iTunes. And the other is to become a supporter of Gangaji Radio. You can find out more about donating or becoming a sponsor by writing gangajiradio@gangaji.org. You can also drop Gangaji a note via that email address. One of the best ways to connect with Gangaji directly is by joining her live monthly webcast, it's called With Gangaji. And there's this great forum for people to post on, post their reports, their questions, their thoughts, and that goes with the program. Gangaji reads that at least twice a day, so that's a great way of connecting with her. You can sign up for that by going to the website, gangaji.org. Next month on *A Conversation With Gangaji* we're gonna be talking about grief and loss, and what it means to say goodbye. I'm Hillary Larson. Be well till next time.