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A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 44

WHERE IS ENOUGH? AUTHOR GENEEN ROTH AND GANGAJI TALK FOOD, BODY  
IMAGE, AND SELF-ACCEPTANCE

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[00:03] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:10] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: Have you ever looked in the mirror, and thought you were too fat? or too thin? or just didn't like the way you looked? Has the way you felt inside your body every seemed frustrating, even intolerable? Well, you're not alone. This month, *A Conversation With Gangaji* is all about bodies, and food. And joining us this time around is author Geneen Roth. Her New York Times #1 bestseller, *Women, Food and God*, is just one of her pioneering books on our relationship with food. Millions have been impacted by her work; and you'll soon see why.

[00:45] GENEEN ROTH: It's not about how do I feel, physically, it's about what somebody just said to me, or how I feel about myself, and how can I comfort myself and, so – I feel sad, lonely, depressed, enraged – therefore I will use food as the antidote for that. And there's where it starts getting complicated.

[01:06] HILLARY: Two well-known teachers, getting at the root of this sometimes painful relationship we have between our self-worth, what we look like, and how we eat. It's candid, it's funny, it's clarifying, it's liberating, and it just might change the way you see yourself, and food. I'm Hillary Larson and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

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[01:35] HILLARY: Well this is a, a little bit different for us, Gangaji, because we, first of all, are so happy to have you, Geneen, as our guest on *A Conversation With Gangaji*. And we actually are sitting in your home to do this, so it feels a little extra-comfy this time around.

[01:53] GANGAJI: And thank you for that.

[01:55] GENEEN: It is a pleasure to have you here.

[01:58] HILLARY: I really wanted to, make this conversation accessible to as many people as possible. So, I know that some people have, maybe a chronic, like a persistent attention, on body image and food, and there are some people that have an obsession – which might be termed as an eating disorder and (chuckles) I know that you don't like the term eating disorder – but, where it's a life and death situation. And I think also, there are people that might focus on body image but they don't necessarily focus on food. However, I wanted to start with food as an entry point for us today and, I think that this inward obsession with how we look and what we're taking in has to do with a deeper hunger. And I wanted to start and ask you both about your experience in that area of food, body image, and this insatiable hunger.

[03:03] GANGAJI: I have a lot of experience.

[03:04] GENEEN: (laughter) As do I!

[03:08] GANGAJI: You know, I know when I was younger, really young – before puberty – I didn't think of my body much, and I wasn't hungry much, I, they couldn't even get me to eat enough. It was that kind of thing; I didn't like food, so I wouldn't eat it. But once I hit puberty, that's all I could think about. First of all, I was furious that my body was changing, and I wouldn't be able to pass as a boy anymore, it – as my breasts grew. Because I somehow, without formulating it, knew that there was more freedom in my life if I could live it as a boy. I was a tomboy. So that was twelve, say, until this morning (laughter), say. Food, and, and the sense of, or the insecurity around body image – at this point, not so much as an attracting thing but as a, am I taking care of my body correctly, and eating what maybe I think I shouldn't be eating or, too much or too little, whatever it may be. So I'm very happy to be here and get your wise counsel on this for millions of people, as well as myself, just as a regular person.

[04:28] GENEEN: Well, I won't start out with the wise counsel part, but I will start out with my experience with my body and food, which I would say was a hell-round for me, for a very long time. Because, from the time I was eleven which was, when I went into puberty, to the time I was twenty-eight I *loathed* my body. And believed that all the unhappiness that I was feeling was because of the shape of my body. Was because I was too fat. My mother was a fat kid; she didn't want me to be fat. The legacy of dieting started then, and my parents were miserable together and, somehow, I believed that if I were thinner, then everything would be better. The way ALL kids do. They take it upon themselves. When I was twenty-eight, after losing and gaining a thousand pounds in that period, and being anorexic, and being addicted to diet pills, and throwing up and spitting up and, all of that, and consistently believing that my suffering was because of the size of my body. I think that was the main thing. If I could change my body, the suffering would go away. And then I stopped dieting. Because I realized, okay: I have been eighty-two pounds and the suffering didn't go away. I have been a hundred and sixty pounds, and the suffering didn't go away. So maybe it's not that. Maybe it's not the size of my body. That was the point at which I stopped dieting and started on sort of a version, or the very beginning of what I'm doing now, which is learning to trust myself and my body and what it wants with food. That doesn't mean it's particularly easy, though. Because of what you just said. That, am I eating the right thing? I don't usually go through 'am I eating the right thing, am I eating the wrong thing? is this what my body actually wants?' My version of what you just said has to do with – and this just struck me a couple weeks ago – how I've used my body, how I haven't actually been inside my body in a particular way. Treated it sweetly, I would say. That I've used it more as, as a, an instrument of my mind. Well, if I work out, if I eat this, if I exercise this much – and added to that, I feel like my body's been the way I've somatized. Having a sore throat: 'do I have throat cancer?' Now this is a little different.

[07:27] GANGAJI: I, I understand.

[07:28] GENEEN: That, this is different than what we're talking about, but that's also a piece of the body.

[07:35] GANGAJI: Yes.

[07:36] GENEEN: There's been a lot of attention on this body. And it's been a challenge, both in myself, to get a balance for it – I, I feel pretty much balanced a lot of the time –

except when I hurt my back, when I have a sore throat, when something's really wrong. On that level, not so much the food level for me anymore.

[08:00] GANGAJI: It's, it sounds like – and the way I, I hear it from my own experience is just different forms of self-hatred. I think most of us can relate to that in some way, and thinking that if we can make changes, we will feel better because they're happier or they'll like us more. But when you were speaking I also really felt that there's a way, when we take the mind and the body and separate them, we make with our minds the body a slave.

[08:31] GENEEN: Yes.

[08:32] GANGAJI: And of course the slave is in revolt.

[08:34] GENEEN: Yes.

[08:35] GANGAJI: All the time. And so, we try everything, as you did in these horrific experiences, to beat the slave back.

[08:43] GENEEN: Yes

[08:44] GANGAJI: And it still comes back, with its own desires, its own needs.

[08:49] GENEEN: Yes

[08:50] GANGAJI: So there's some war, that – of course with self-hatred there's a big war that's going on –

[08:58] GENEEN: Yes

[08:59] GANGAJI: -- and I, I don't know that it's just located then in our bodies. I know I was always looking to everybody else to tell me how my body was.

[9:08] GENEEN: Yes

[09:09] GANGAJI: I grew up in the fifties, and the, THE body of the time was Marilyn Monroe. A luscious, big-breasted, big-hipped, luscious body, and I was a string bean. And so, then the corollary of that is then I started developing breasts and I hated it, so...

[09:29] GENEEN: Right.

[09:30] GANGAJI: ...it's this, you can't get no satisfaction.

[09:33] GENEEN: Never, no – no, no you can't (laughter)! Because I grew up when Twiggy was the, the model of the day. And I did not look like Twiggy. My body, as a friend of mine said, was made of circles. And...

[09:48] GANGAJI: Beautiful.

[09:49] GENEEN: and, and so, so there was no way that I was every gonna look like Twiggy.

[09:54] GANGAJI: So what's wrong with you?

[09:56] GENEEN: And so what's wrong with me? And as I worked inside myself with this – because at some point I was just a couple days away from killing myself – I didn't want to live anymore with this kind of hatred that I felt. And, and it was being expressed through food. And I didn't know what else to do. By the time I was twenty-eight, I realized I hadn't spent a day in which I wasn't either on a diet – depriving, shaming, and judging myself – or on a binge. Revolting from depriving, shaming, and punishing myself.

[10:33] GANGAJI: That's it.

[10:34] GENEEN: So, I went back and forth, back and forth, and that's all I did. And I didn't wanna live like that anymore. And that was the point where I thought, okay, there has to be some other way to live here, that isn't this. And if I'm fat for the rest of my life, okay then.

[10:52] GANGAJI: Mmm, what a moment.

[10:53] GENEEN: It was a moment, it really was a satori, sitting on the floor of the book depo in Mill Valley, and realizing, there's gotta be another way to live. Yeah, I had been to India, and already saw, okay, there's a world beyond appearances here, but I hadn't connected that with food. It, they seemed like they were two different worlds; okay, there's that, there's meditating, there's, there's that, but then there's eating every day....

[11:24] GANGAJI: There's me (laughter).

[11:26] GENEEN: ...the, and, and how are those two connected? And I didn't get it. And in that moment, I got something, and decided I was never gonna diet again, ever. And I never really have since then. But finding the place where they *do* meet, where okay well what's true *now*, and not being run by my mind, and having my body be it's slave, as you said...

[11:55] GANGAJI: It's liberation, then, isn't it?

[11:57] GENEEN: ...it's liberation.

[11:59] HILLARY: I wonder, too, it seems like there's a, an important point that you're both talking about. And that is this subject of self-hatred. And when I think of self-hatred there's a way that the remedy of, well, it's to come in to with a remedy of like 'no, you're beautiful', and that's, I think that's one therapeutic model but I think what you both would agree on is, it's actually the opposite, the cure is in the opposite direction. And that is to acknowledge the self-hatred, to really face the self-hatred, and not try to fix the self-hatred.

[12:38] GANGAJI: You know I, I wouldn't give a formula for it because I know it, for different people and at different stages there are different, different modes that are needed and are appropriate. I, it's just, to me it's this, I, I don't know Geneen if I am understanding you right: were you getting this information from the outside? Like is that where it originated: from your mother, from your family, 'you should not be this shape; you should not be this weight; you should look like Twiggy'. Were you aware of it coming from the outside? Because I am such an image point, if, in fixation, so, it, that's how I found reality, was from the outside. So, how interesting, that really the war that has to stop, or the self-hatred that has to be unplugged is, is somehow not having a reference point.

[12:36] GENEEN: Yes.

[12:37] GANGAJI: And that's what I hear, when you said 'if I am to be fat', and I've experienced that myself in another way of: 'if I am to go to hell'. Once I was with Papaji and I heard this, oh, Christian conditioning come up, about the fact that he was a Hindu, and many gods, and there's only one god, and I was shocked that it would even come up because I was much more sophisticated than that but I realize that was an opportunity for a choice. Like when you were twenty-eight, where you say regardless of the consequences, I'm, I'm stopping this war.

[14:12] GENEEN: Yes.

[14:13] GANGAJI: I'm stopping this self-betrayal.

[14:15] GENEEN: And, you know, you're just reminding me of something that I was feeling just last week, or the week before, when I have, ah, when I hurt my back, and I did not feel like being present. And I, I'd wake up every day, and I'd say, 'okay sweetheart, what's it like to be in your body?' 'It feels like hell!'

[14:41] GANGAJI: (laughter)

[14:42] GENEEN: Okay, but you know you're not actually your pain, honey. So, can you notice what's bigger than your pain? Because if it, if it feels like hell, then there's something that's noticing that it feels like hell, so you are what's noticing, not what's being noticed. 'I don't care!' is what comes the answer.

[15:49] GANGAJI: Yeah.

[15:00] GENEEN: I don't actually care. And then, even though I'm not Christian....

[15:05] GANGAJI: (laughter)

[15:06] GENEEN: I'm Jewish, and we did not grow up with hell, I still thought: 'I'm going to hell'. All these years (laughter) of presence, whatever, and I don't care right now. And I wanna watch television. And get myself distracted from this pain. And so I realized in that moment, the war stopped. Because there was a war going on of, I should be, it's not right to be, you can't, even with drugs, taking regular old pain drugs. You really shouldn't, you should be able to breathe, and, and it's like, you know what? Okay. I'm willing to go to hell.

[15:50] GANGAJI: That's beautiful.

[15:51] GENEEN: If, If this is, if this is what this means, okay. If it meant being fat for the rest of my life? Okay then. If watching a Spanish T.V. series that my husband downloaded that I'm totally into, to get myself distracted means I'm not paying attention in this moment to what is paying attention, okay.

[16:12] GANGAJI: You're allowed.

[16:14] GENEEN: Alright!

[16:15] GANGAJI: I think we substitute external references....

[16:18) GENEEN: Yes!

[16:19] GANGAJI: ...different religions, different dogmas, and our spiritual dogma is very tight and, yes, kick it out!

[16:29) GENEEN: Yes! So right!

[16:30] GANGAJI: Watch the Spanish T.V! Have a good time! That's gotta be better for your body....

[16:35) GENEEN: Exactly! Right!

[16:36] GANGAJI: ...than telling you what you should and shouldn't do.

[16:37) GENEEN: But I think what happens and I, so I've always seen how we are in our bodies, and with food, as an expression of how we are.

[16:46] GANGAJI: Uh-huh.

[16:47) GENEEN: So I don't actually see there's much difference. I'm always fascinated with food, and the obsession with food, because so many people have it, and it's, therefore it's a beautiful doorway. Because most people I work with feel like, that's it! And once they fix that, then the rest will fall into place, and of course, it doesn't. But because they do believe that – and I did too – it's a beautiful place to start, so why not start right there.

[17:15] GANGAJI: Yes.

[17:16] GENEEN: But, the way that I was with food, and the way that I was last week with the T.V. series, those are continuums. It's what you just said about the dogma, it's so easy to 'I should eat this'. What if I want a bowl of ice cream right now? 'Oh, the acupuncturist said I should have a hot cup of ginger tea if I have ice cream'.

[17:40] GANGAJI: (laughter)

[17:42] GENEEN: The second I eat that bowl, I should follow that up with a hot ginger – (gasps)... I don't really actually have ginger tea. Uh oh! So it's the, to not have the external reference points.

[17:53] GANGAJI: Yes, because we experience those external reference points as some kind of lifeline.

[17:59) GENEEN: Yes.

[18:00] GANGAJI: I think that there is great fear that if we don't obey something, even if we wouldn't put it in those terms since we're all much more sophisticated than that, but this willingness to be, to experience being adrift, and maybe that's what you mean by the self-hatred. Experience that, or experience this. I'm zoning out.

[18:20] GENEEN: Yes.

[18:21] GANGAJI: Whatever it means, whoever judges it, including the internal...

[18:26] GENEEN: Yes.

[18:27] GANGAJI: ...references reflecting the external. That to me is really the beginning of true, spiritual inquiry.

[18:35] GENEEN: Me too.

[18:36] GANGAJI: Great.

[18:38] GENEEN: Me too. That's where it starts, yes. To see that I'm at war, and to let go of the war. To have that moment of, okay, fine, I'll go to hell.

[18:47] GANGAJI: Yeah, I'll go to hell, I'll be fat, I'll be wrong,

[18:51] GENEEN: I'll be fine. Or I'll – this is what I say to myself in those moments like last week.... (gasps) but you're in pain now but what if you were dying right now? Wouldn't you want a conscious death? And you know I said to myself, forget that!

[19:05] GANGAJI: Yeah (laughter)....

[19:06] GENEEN: You know, who cares?! And, you know, that's where I have to get inside myself to drop the war.

[19:12] GANGAJI: Yes.

[19:14] GENEEN: Because it's dropping the war that, as you just said, is the beginning.

[19:20] GANGAJI: Give yourself a break.

[19:21] GENEEN: Yeah.

[19:22] HILLARY: I think there is an expectation – and, Geneen you and I spoke about this a little bit in our pre-interview – was, there's an expectation of, you're such a well-known author, and you've touched so many people over the years. And Gangaji, you've touched thousands of people all over the world with your message of stopping, that, you suddenly, in present time, like, you don't have those issues anymore. And I was wondering, let me just start with you Gangaji: that you had a profound experience with Papaji twenty-three years ago now. And, in that, there was a recognition of ego. 'Oh, I am not this set of thoughts and beliefs'. And I assume, not my body either. Was there a way then that your perception of your body shifted in an instant or did it happen over a period of time like the rest of us?

[20:16] GANGAJI: Well, there was this incredible, whatever we would name it, but I would say it had nothing to do with my body. In fact, what I did with my body and that is I just flipped. And I went from somebody who was constantly monitoring everything she was eating – and I would make a list and, judging if my weight went up and, working out and dancing and everything to keep it a certain way, because by then I had a body that actually

matched the cultural norm. And to, I thought, I'd – what does my body want? Whatever it wants, I'm giving it. And what it wanted was cinnamon toast.

[20:55] (laughter)

[20:56] GANGAJI: Toast, butter, honey, and cinnamon. And it wanted it all the time (laughter). So, I was giving it to my body all the time. And I wasn't working out, and I started to gain weight. And it's like, 'well, okay, I'm gaining weight'. And it, that still was no problem. And then, I started to feel really bad. And I recognized the connection (chuckles)... it seems so absurd now but I recognized the connection in health, and well-being, and the body. And I couldn't say I got that from Papaji, because Papaji didn't care. And he, he was a diabetic, and he still ate sugar. So he didn't have a wisdom there, that wasn't what he was transmitting, but it was part of what I got, just you know, do what you wanna do. But I wanted to actually feel good.

[21:46] GENEEN: Yes.

[21:47] GANGAJI: As well as, as the freedom that I experienced I wanted to, I wanted to be embodied.

[21:51] GENEEN: Yes.

[21:52] GANGAJI: I think you really said it, so correctly, that when I look at it now, that's been the challenge of being born.

[22:00] GENEEN: Yes.

[22:01] GANGAJI: Is to actually fully be embodied.

[22:03] GENEEN: Yes.

[22:04] GANGAJI: To have this body be beautiful, from the inside....

[22:08] GENEEN: Yes.

[22:09] GANGAJI: ...not from the outside. It may be or it may not be. But, to love my body.

[22:14] GENEEN: Yes, I know. And that's where, that's the challenge really. Because life here on the Earth plane is in this body.

[22:22] GANGAJI: Yes.

[22:23] GENEEN: And so we have this...

[22:24] GANGAJI: Here it is!

[22:25] GENEEN: ...here it is! And it's the only way to be on the Earth plane unless we're a flower, or a cloud, or a dog, I mean, but they have bodies too. And so I think that is the challenge. And I think what you just said Gangaji is really where for me, what the objective part of this comes down to. You know, because when I started this, and started teaching



about this, I also did the same thing you did. For me, it wasn't cinnamon toast, it was raw chocolate chip cookie dough.

[22:57] GANGAJI: (laughter)

[22:58] GENEEN: That's all I wanted. And, that's all I ate. Because I had spent so many years (chuckles) following a prescription of a thousand calories a day, or, you know, so many rigid programs. After which I'd go on insane binges. So when I told myself I could eat what I wanted to, then it was, okay, well...

[23:20] GANGAJI: (laughter)

[23:21] GENEEN: ...I want raw chocolate chip cookie dough. And so I ate that for days. And then, I wasn't feeling so good.

[23:28] GANGAJI: (laughter)

[23:29] GENEEN: And I started realizing that, oh, this isn't actually about the chocolate chip cookie dough. It was about how do I want to feel.

[23:38] GANGAJI: Mmm.. that's right.

[23:40] GENEEN: When you eat sugar and when you eat junk a lot of the time then you don't feel so good.

[23:44] GANGAJI: It's plain and simple there, isn't it.

[23:46] GENEEN: That's plain and simple. That's really what it gets down to, on that level. It's just that so many people use food for other reasons...

[23:55] GANGAJI: Yes.

[23:56] GENEEN: ... that it's not about, how do I feel? Physically? It's about what somebody just said to me, or how I feel about myself. And how can I comfort myself and, so I feel sad and lonely, depressed, enraged, therefore I will use food as the antidote for that. And that's where it starts getting complicated. And that's where inquiry comes in.

[24:21] HILLARY: When I was speaking of hunger at the very beginning I was thinking, when I describe my childhood to people I notice that I often will relay experiences with my mom, when we were eating something. It was almost like, for me, food was a great 'mom'. It was like a big, warm, fuzzy hug, and then the hug would be over, and then I needed another hug. And it was either in the form of food, or it was in the form of drugs, or whatever, but obviously there's something that's, it's that constant lack of fulfillment. And when you talk about being in a place where you can say, 'what does feel good in my body?', there's a place where that in itself can turn into a neurosis.

[25:08] GANGAJI: Absolutely.

[25:08] HILLARY: Because, I mean, I live in Portland, and I swear...

[25:10] GANGAJI: (laughter)

[25:12] HILLARY: You could, you could be a vegetarian, a vegetarian, a, I mean, you can eat whatever you want in Portland. And I, and I actually see it as, as it's flipped over to the other side of being, a bit of a neurosis. In the name of 'I'm taking care of myself'.

[25:29] GANGAJI: Yeah, that's the thing (laughter) it's... it's a moving target.

[25:34] GENEEN: (laughter) It is!

[26:35] GANGAJI: And, you know, I mean I would say food for me, the way I have to watch it is, is the pleasure, the joy of it, the – I love the taste of it. And then I have to pay the piper, I have to, to really see, does that work? But that doesn't mean that I always obey that, in any means. And I don't have any answers for this. I know that it's a, there's an equilibrium that you were speaking of where you're not indulging, crazily, and you're not withholding crazily. There's some spaciousness of being and, that to me is a reflection perhaps of the peace you've made with yourself, with, with who you are, with what your life is. And that's, you know, I mean, we have a biochemical factory here that, that we're not in charge of, to a great degree. And we are aging, and we're not in charge of that, so there are these impulses, and they are stressors that come into our lives and demand being fixed. And, where's the pleasure? And I know where it is in a really easy way, you know, it's in this big, juicy, chocolate bar (laughter).

[26:55] GENEEN: (laughter) You know, the thing, the thing about food is, and I've said this for a long time: it doesn't talk back, it doesn't go away...

[27:04] GANGAJI: (laughter)

[27:05] GENEEN: ...it's always available, it doesn't get drunk, it doesn't abuse...

[27:09] GANGAJI: (laughter)

[27:10] GENEEN: ...it doesn't have arms and legs...it, you know...

[27:13] GANGAJI: (laughter) It loves you!

[27:14] GENEEN: It loves you! (laughter) It's there when nobody else is, there it is! And, it tastes good! So, do you know a person like that? No. And so, food becomes a MAJOR comfort. So, I can understand, certainly from having directly experienced it myself for so long, why it becomes what it becomes. But the beautiful thing about food, about using it as a portal, as an entry portal, is that people – we all have to eat a couple times a day. And for those of us – and this doesn't include you, because you were a skinny kid and you didn't have this going on for yourself when you were younger, it didn't start out as they say in Yiddish like a shtick – and for those of us who have had that for many years, there comes a point when we stop. And this isn't about pleasure, this is about what I call the last bite, or – I wrote a piece about it the other day, I called it 'the world between bites', and, or 'a good meal to die', is the other name. Because when you get to that last bite, and you know your body has had enough, but you also know there's, that, you don't know what to do. After that last bite. People feel lost. 'What do I do now?' There's an emptiness here and it feels like the ending of everything you've never wanted to end. Of every relationship you never wanted to

end. Of the fact that everything ends, no matter what, everything on this earth plane ends: forms, and, and there's emptiness here. And there's ending here. And that's the juncture at which it really becomes 'am I willing to hang out in the emptiness?'

[29:16] GANGAJI: So profound, Geneen.

[29:17] GENEEN: Yeah, it's a, it's, it's really where that, where that happens. Right there. And so it's a beautiful, beautiful portal to that.

[29:30] GANGAJI: It does require that you be willing to tell the truth.

[29:33] GENEEN: It really, really does. Yes.

[29:38] GANGAJI: And to, you know, not then immediately go into rationalizations. 'Cause when you were saying that I, I was putting myself in that place of, of overeating – and for me it would be with sweets – and knowing that I've actually gotten satisfied.

[29:53] GENEEN: Yes.

[29:54] GANGAJI: I've gotten what this could give me. And still doing it until I feel bad.

[29:59] GENEEN: Yes, that's right! So it's the most, so, so then it's, you know, I call it the moment when you're body has had enough but you haven't.

[30:08] GANGAJI: Ah, that's it.

[30:09] GENEEN: Yes.

[30:10] GANGAJI: I love this, it's so great.

[30:11] GENEEN: Yes.

[30:12] GANGAJI: Because then, of course, food is the great example because we have to have food, but then you can see it everywhere.

[30:18] GENEEN: Everywhere. Everywhere.

[30:21] GANGAJI: So food is the teacher then...

[30:22] GENEEN: Yes.

[30:24] GANGAJI:...for everything.

[30:25] GENEEN: It is! That's why I love working with it so much, because it, it's sort of the doorway to everything.

[30:32] GANGAJI: That's right.

[30:33] GENEEN: But so is everything else....

[30:34] GANGAJI: Yes... yes...

[30:36] GENEEN: ...it's not just food. But because we have to do it every day....

[30:37] GANGAJI: Yes... it's here.

[30:38] GENEEN: And it's so concrete.

[30:41] GANGAJI: And so pleasurable.

[30:42] GENEEN: And so pleasurable (laughter)

[30:44] GANGAJI: And, so miserable.

[30:45] GENEEN: And so – exactly. So, and so that's often what I work with in myself, and then with my students, which is, okay: suffering... stopping. Suffering...emptiness. You know, what are you going to choose here? Can you hang out in this lostness of not knowing what to do next? There's – and in that moment, it doesn't seem like there's anything as good as food.

[31:17] GANGAJI: Because that's addiction, then, you, you're really talking about how we, get addicted to whatever food is giving us.

[31:23] GENEEN: Yes.

[31:24] GANGAJI: And we have to burn in some...

[31:27] GENEEN: Yes.

[31:28] GANGAJI: ... choosing to stop when it's time to stop....

[31:31] GENEEN: Yes.

[30:32] GANGAJI: ... without being supported by the cravings that we have built up, because the cravings are still raging.

[31:38] GENEEN: They're still raging, but what's really raging is the mind.

[31:41] GANGAJI: Ah...that's right.

[31:42] GENEEN: That it's not – so that's the distinction I make. You know, people often say to me, 'but I'm addicted to this, and I'm addicted to sugar, and I'm addicted to that', and my response to that is: 'I do know'. And I'm not gonna refute, that certain – and I'm a sweets person too (laughter) its, you know, I, that's...

[32:00] GANGAJI: Cookie dough, yeah.

[32:01] GENEEN: Yeah, cookie dough! Ice cream, chocolate, things like that. So, but 'sugar does this to your body', and, yes it does, but, and – there's a 'but' and an 'and' right there – which is, it's not so much the sugar as the thoughts that precede the 'I want another bite

because nothing is as good as this'. And because I don't know what to do now; or because I feel lost. I don't want this experience to end.

[32:35] GANGAJI: That's, I think that that's, that's really it. And it ends so quickly.

[32:40] GENEEN: (gasp) It ends.

[32:41] GANGAJI: (laughter)

[32:42] GENEEN: And you know, when I do eating meditations at my retreats – 'cause we all sit and eat together – and, it is, it is really something, to have people, to stop people in the middle. So we'll sit for a couple of minutes in silence, at a meal, and then I'll say, 'okay, you know, let's eat for' – and then, after a couple of bites, 'okay, everybody put their forks down'. And (chuckles) you know, it's like stopping a locomotive while it's rushing down the tracks. And the hatred, and the fury, and the rage of, 'I don't want to stop'. But then stopping, and being with 'okay, what's here?' and realizing that so many people have already gotten caught in the hand-to-mouth momentum. And they've lost, they're lost already, they've left their bodies. It's just about the next 'more'. It's not about 'this bite in my mouth, how does this bite taste?' It's about looking at the plate while *this* bite is in the mouth. So, it's about the next one and the next one, but not this moment. Not what's here. Always, what's next. And so, that's no different than what you talk about.

[33:58] GANGAJI: That's right.

[33:59] GENEEN: It's, it's no different. It's just in action, with food.

[34:03] GANGAJI: Yeah. How perfect.

[34:07] GENEEN: Yeah. Beautiful!

[34:09] GANGAJI: Beautiful! So humbling, in such a beautiful way.

[34:11] GENEEN: It's so humbling.

[34:12] GANGAJI: The potential... because there is a way we can use words like 'addiction' or understandings about addiction as some kind of excuse...

[34:21] GENEEN: Yes

[34:22] GANGAJI: ... rather than as, as, part of the rigor of...

[34:26] GENEEN: Right.

[34:27] GANGAJI: ...of actually choosing to be free.

[34:28] GENEEN: Yeah. I think the word 'eating disorder' or 'addiction' makes us feel like we know what we're talking about. And...

[34:38] GANGAJI: Yeah, it's scarier without the words, actually.

[34:40] GENEEN: ...it, it is, it's scarier. Then it's, 'okay, what's going on? What's happening here, now, in this bite?' In this very second. Okay, I don't wanna stop – and you know, sometimes people will say the most shocking things to me at a meal. Actually not so shocking... have, they don't have anything to do with food. It's 'I don't wanna stop, my mother died six months ago, and if I stop eating I'll never stop crying'. And it's one sentence, and the next sentence, just... So it doesn't have to do with food...

[35:17] GANGAJI: Yeah. That's right.

[35:18] GENEEN: ...it has to do with grief. And it has to do with if I let myself feel it, underneath that is the belief that these feelings will never end. I'll get destroyed in this, in the grief itself'. And so, if we work with it at meals and so there's a lot of crying that goes on at meals – and then the crying starts... and then the crying ends. Because just like a meal, feelings come and they go.

[35:48] HILLARY: Isn't it kind of come down to, being alone.

[35:54] GANGAJI: Yes.

[35:55] HILLARY: Because within our thoughts about body image and what we've eaten or what we haven't eaten, I think it's what you were saying Geneen, is nobody will ever know what that experience is, nobody will ever know how many thoughts come up in the course of a minute, or an hour, that have to do with body image, and you know I've recovered from a serious eating disorder and I don't really think about it that much anymore, but I was trying a dress on the other day, and it was a sleeveless dress. And I glanced over in the mirror and I swear it was that, that, that mental twist. I looked at my arm and I was like 'whoa, my arm looks tubular' or some (chuckles), like there was something wrong with my arm, the way it *was shaped or something. And I was like: 'That's it! That's it!'*

[36:39] GANGAJI: *Oh, you caught it.*

[36:41] HILLARY: *In my own private world, nobody would ever know that was happening to me. But I think that we walk around in these bodies, in these worlds, and really what's called for is just that ability to stop.*

[36:55] GANGAJI: *It's to come out of the trance.*

[36:56] GENEEN: Yes.

[36:58] GANGAJI: *Because when we are saying those things we're putting ourselves in a deeper trance.*

[36:59] GENEEN: Yes, yes.

[37:01] GANGAJI: *And then we are supported that way, in whatever the cultural ideal may be...*

[37:06] GENEEN: Yes.

[37:07] GANGAJI: ...and, and, and so though, recognition that we are entrancing ourselves, and that we can stop and maybe at some time that means substituting positive words for negative words, it's totally fine, but finally just to stop and be open.

[37:23] GENEEN: Yes.

[37:25] GANGAJI: To end the meal.

[37:26] GENEEN: Yes, to end the meal. Right, to end the meal. Yes.

[37:35] GANGAJI: So beautiful.

[37:37] GENEEN: (laughter)

[37:38] HILLARY: No, it's... I have to admit I was prepared for this conversation to be very deep, very – not that it wasn't deep – but serious, because I have seen, you have, horrible, horrible eating disorders, just terrible and so many people die from eating disorders, and so many people live a life that's exhausting because of the attention that's put on bodies, and food, and so on. And you guys seem so, you know, evolved.

[38:07] (laughter)

[38:09] GENEEN: But you know Hillary, I wanna say something, I work with people who have according to the culture, horrible in quotes 'eating disorders'. A lot of the people that come to my workshops and or come to retreats have been sexually abused for years at a time, locked in closets by their grandfather, gained and lost thousands and thousands of pounds, as serious as something may be, it still gets down to this: it doesn't matter how serious it is. Yes, if you're on the verge of life and death, and you must get a feeding tube to put into your mouth. Or you are starving yourself or you can't move, because you're so big. And something has to be done that moment, that week, that month, to save your life. Okay. So that's a category. But, when that emergency is handled, it will get down to what Gangaji and I are talking about. Because the truth is the truth really. And why somebody picks up a piece of food when they're not hungry, or doesn't want to stop after they've had enough, is the same reason all the way through. It doesn't matter what you call it. It doesn't matter what you label it. It gets down to the same thing. What we as human sort-of creatures in these bodies who want to be comfortable, who are here on this physical plane, having the tools that we have, but also knowing that we're not just this. I mean you could say that it's really serious, it is serious! But stopping the war is a serious thing. But it's also, there also can be lightness to it. From what I've heard about Papaji, he laughed a lot!

[40:10] GANGAJI: A lot!

[40:11] GENEEN: A lot!

[40:12] GANGAJI: A lot! And he could be like a sword.

[40:13] GENEEN: Yes!

[40:14] GANGAJI: So it's, it's...yes.

[40:15] GENEEN: Right! So it's that, it's that juncture of laughter, and knowing that there's, that what this is, and using the sword when it's necessary. And not hesitating to do either.

[40:31] GANGAJI: That's it.

[40:32] GENEEN: When it's appropriate, you know, when it's appropriate to use a sword, yes, and when laughter is, is present because you suddenly realize, oh, the last bite is the last bite!

[40:46] (laughter)

[40:48] GENEEN: Then you laugh.

[40:50] GANGAJI: That's liberation.

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[41:07] HILLARY: There's a particular point that Gangaji and Geneen made during this conversation about addiction and I wanna get back to that. It has to do with cravings and the willingness to stop. How exactly do we do that? So we're not done yet. But first, if you'd like to see Gangaji in person, her website is [gangaji.org](http://gangaji.org). There you can find out about Gangaji's ongoing, live monthly webcast. There are retreats, videos, audios and you'll also find the home of Gangaji Radio right there. Our time with Geneen, it could not have been more fun, and as you can see, she is pure joy, we loved every minute of it. Let me send you to her website, that's [geneenroth.com](http://geneenroth.com) You'll find out everything great about Geneen over there, and more. This last clip I'm gonna play, is from a retreat with Gangaji where she's talking about the momentum of addiction. How on earth do you stop, when everything else tells you to go? As we listen to the incredible sounds of Jami Sieber here in the background, I'm Hillary Larson. Thank you again Geneen. Thanks to all of you. This has been *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

(clip)

[42:26] GANGAJI: *The invitation is the invitation to experience as impulse of the addiction, which is primarily an addiction of pleasure but is also, wrapped up into that, is the addiction of suffering. So it's the, to experience both the desire for this pleasure object, which even though you may know intellectually very well will lead you down this same old path, there is a kind of infatuation and attachment to it. So there's energy there, there's power there. So the invitation is to experience all that -- I'm shaking because it's, it can be like a shaking 'cause everything is saying 'just do it!' -- so the willingness to not go numb or dissociative in that, 'cause that's also another power and it can be learned. But to experience it as this burning, if it's this pleasure, suffering, desire, there is a possibility to stop. And what's required in that stopping is this willingness to burn in this impulse that says go, go now. With all of the very sophisticated justifications of why it's perfectly okay, this time, again, one more time..*

[43:53] (laughter)

[43:54] GANGAJI: *...the last time. To go. Yeah. So go. But watch, tell the truth. Consciously go this time, consciously choose it, so you can tell the truth. So you at least don't have that level of justification to fall back on, so you bust yourself. And this is, you know, a lot of people*



*say, whoa, well I don't wanna do that. Because you wanna have this little out. If it gets too intense, I'll go. I'll just do it. But if you don't give yourself that out, if you don't give yourself that exit, it's a kind of crucifixion. I am not moving. And in that, there is the discovery of the resurrection. The redemption. The peace that is inherent.*