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A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 46

THE COURAGE TO GIVE UP HOPE

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[00:05] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:10] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: At first glance, giving up hope, which is what we're going to talk about this month, might not seem like the best idea. Why on earth would we want to do that? Isn't hope what helps us make it through hard times? We hope for good health, for financial stability or fulfilling relationships. We hope for a life without suffering, a life where our most sincere wishes come true. Isn't that just part of being human? What would life be without hope?

[00:38] GANGAJI: We cannot imagine the freshness of living a life without hope because we imagine that to be a hopeless, deadened, miserable life where we've given up our magic power to make it a good life. It's very different. It's an expansive, mysterious, awesome life.

[01:00] HILLARY: How do we know when hope is serving us or when it's extending our suffering? If we dare to give up hope does that mean we will fall into some pit of hopelessness? In those moments when we are confronted by our greatest fears or are compelled by our greatest desires for a good life, what would happen if we had the courage to give up hope? I'm Hillary Larson and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

[01:27] HILLARY: For people that missed the episode last month it was called The Secret Life of Shame. And what we do for our recording schedule is that Gangaji, you and I, often we'll do two shows in a row. So we'll do, we'll record one show and then the next day we'll record the next show just because of your travel schedule. And so, in real time, we recorded The Secret Life of Shame just yesterday. And afterwards, I was thinking there were certain parts of that that felt very exposing for me. So, I was thinking, "Oh, I hope that people don't have a negative thought about me or something" And I was thinking, well, that's interesting because this topic is about hope, (Gangaji laughs) and the courage to give up hope. So I feel one led into the other in kind of an unexpected way. And I think that when I look at the title of this show, The Courage To Give Up Hope, most people that would initially hear that, the average person would go, "Oh, like, you don't want to give up hope!"

[02:36] GANGAJI: Yeah, and I understand that. I think it's what "hope" means to the average person which is some kind of possibility that everything will turn out really well. So that's positive thinking and it's very useful. It's much better than negative thinking, being hope-less. So when I'm speaking of or when I speak about being willing to give up hope, at least for a moment, I'm not suggesting to substitute it with its opposite, hopelessness, but to really recognize that after – well – let me phrase it this way: Hope is **very** good for children, because what a whirl, an assault, the world can be on children, their nervous systems. And it's very useful just to teach them, you know, about the future. "You're going to get through this. Tomorrow you'll wake up.

You'll feel better..." or whatever it may be. But we cling to it and that's really what I'm addressing. And when we cling to hope, in that kind of hoping that nobody thinks negatively of me, or hoping that I'll be a success next year, we keep ourselves childish. We avoid our maturity because we hope we don't have to go through anything else to get to maturity or what it may be and that's really our fear of maturity. It's our fear of growing up – and we live in a childish era. And it's maybe an adolescent era. And it's, it's through advertising and through schools and teaching it's like made to be the *best*, but there's so much *more* in maturity than just a kind of "Oh, I hope!" And I'm inviting everyone to really have a deeper, inner experience of what life can be. And that means, hey, most likely somebody *will* have a negative feeling about what you say and you don't need to waste your energy hoping that's not so. Then, if that *really* upsets you, you can actually meet what that's about. What are you trying to be for these people who might have a negative view of you and something you say? It's an exposure. And we want to be, I mean, we're here on this show so we want to be exposed, but we only want to get positive (laughs) exposure. And, it's just not possible. It's not the way our, our system works. Negative comes with positive and vice versa. So I hope that's communicating what I want to communicate about hope. I don't want to - I'm not suggesting a kind of nihilism. It's, it's a maturity and a spaciousness and a *willingness*, that *whatever* appears, not only can you bear it, but it can make you stronger and deeper, and more aware and wiser.

[05:58] HILLARY: So aside from the childhood hope, as adults – is there a good kind of hope?

[06:06] GANGAJI: Well, why even use the word "hope"? You know "open" would be to me, if you're open without an overlay of "I'm open (I hope it's good! I hope it's good!)" or "I'm open, (oh, I know it's going to be bad, it's going to be bad!)" Then both of those polarities are not relevant. You're open. You'll see and that means you're both willing to experience things that are less than good, and things that are great. And you discover you, you have a capacity, we all have a capacity that we deny in this addiction to hoping that it will all work out,

[06:46] HILLARY: There also seems to be childish adult hopes, like "I hope people think I'm okay" or "I hope I get this job" or "I hope I make more money" or "I hope my body doesn't age too fast." But there's also like these serious hopes I would say in that if somebody has a loved one that's going through chemotherapy "I hope this treatment works." Those seem like two different kinds of hope.

[07:15] GANGAJI: Yeah, I would agree with that. So maybe we could give that other one a different name. We don't have to call it "hope". We could call it intention. There's an intention or a prayer that my loved one gets through this or I get through this. But then we aren't skipping to the future. We're present and intending that things work out, but you know, things don't work out. Finally, the loved one does die some day or separates and you die. So to face that reality in a true way, then yes, we have desires, we want the best for people. But we aren't putting energy, psychic energy, into hoping. We have a prayer. We have an intention and then we see. We are - I think, opening is the mature response.

[08:20] HILLARY: When I am talking about the serious hope or the serious opening, I want to read this letter to you. And this is from somebody who didn't want their identity revealed. And it's a serious letter. She says, "My son has had depression on and off for most of his life. There have been times that I have been really scared. In March, after already a very long bout, it became really bad and he called me in the middle of the night after not continuing to walk into

the ocean.” So she flew to be with him and she said that seemed to help. And then she goes on to say, “I have tried in many ways to help him and some things help temporarily, but nothing permanently. So last month, again, I had to surrender to the fact that only he can know what’s best for him. And best could potentially be ending his life which is still so scary to write. In surrendering to that I had to give up all hope for a cure for him. And what’s left is unconditional love, just love for the beautiful man that he is. The interesting thing is that there is still hope. I have come to believe that it’s in our genes, in our human nature. But this hope has no expectation or despair attached to it. It is much sweeter than that. It seems to be part of this unconditional love.”

[09:47] GANGAJI: Beautiful. Beautiful. Beautiful.

[09:50] HILLARY: Seems to reflect exactly what you were just saying.

[09:54] GANGAJI: Mmmmm. Yeah. That’s what you want. You want him to get well, but something loosened in terms of, well, it’s a mature response, and a loving response.

[10:05] HILLARY: She also continued to write about the fact that, of course, over the years many people have jumped in and said, you know, it’s going to be okay – and I tried this. Of course, people are going to do this. It’s natural for people to say – and thank god, people do say, hey, you know what? I had something work for me and maybe it does work.

[10:26] GANGAJI: Yeah, but that’s different from people just wanting you to feel better so that they can feel better and let’s all go into some bubble of it all works out perfectly in the end. It does – if, if you recognize the end to be the endless expansion of nothingness.

[10:43] HILLARY: There’s a difference between giving up hope and giving up. And I know in the world of addiction there’s this thing called, you know, being sick and tired of being sick and tired where you finally just, you give up trying. And then for some people that might sound like a bad thing, but in reality it’s the doorway to a different life. And there is this moment of – it’s an interesting moment of giving up the hope of ever staying clean again. And that’s not hopelessness.

[11:23] GANGAJI: That’s right. What it is is stopping a certain conversation in your mind, a loop of conversation. And in that then you can actually can live your life freely and be humbled by what arises rather than hope that it doesn’t arise, hope that the desire doesn’t arise or the temptations don’t arise. Because that’s what we’re always speaking of, is when hope takes the form of another conversation, and “oh, I hope, I hope, I hope!” It’s a way of avoiding some abyss of terror or lostness or sickness - in whatever form it shows itself. That has its place, certainly. But as a mature, deepening adult, there’s the possibility to meet it as it is; not, as you hope it to be.

[12:23] HILLARY: I was thinking about the relationship between telling the truth and giving up hope. And I’m talking about really telling the truth. And I was, I’ve mentioned this before in our conversations, but in my lifetime, I’ve had really serious anxiety. And I was embarrassed about having anxiety to that degree; and I did everything I could to try and fix it. But I also did everything I could to try to hide it - and I would even try to hide it from myself. Because I think the idea of having that kind of anxiety felt so degrading to me. And it had shame attached to it. I

just didn't really want anybody to know about that world I lived in. So, it took a lot of work. You know, I had to make excuses why I couldn't do something – and so when I finally said, you know what? This is anxiety. It's nothing else. Because I'd look, I'd tell people, "you know I have a thyroid problem" or I had food allergies or something – and when I finally just said, this is anxiety. It was like giving up hope that it was ever going to be any different. And that's when things shifted. Things just started showing up. You know, I know there's a danger in going, "oh great, I'll give up hope!" but..

[13:42] GANGAJI: Why not? Yeah, it's worth investigating it. I mean you're, you're sharing what happened to you. That's like somebody sharing a cure. You know, this is, you faced your anxiety and stopped the conversation about anxiety, and the *war* with your anxiety. And yeah, then there's an opening. There's actually a possibility of discovery.

[14:06] HILLARY: Yeah, it's such just the opposite of what you think it would be.

[14:11] GANGAJI: Exactly. That's the thing: our thoughts. That's how our thoughts enslave us. We cannot imagine the freshness of living a life without hope because we imagine that to be a hopeless, deadened, miserable life where we've given up our magic power to make it a good life. It's very different. That's an expansive, mysterious, awesome life.

[14:41] HILLARY: I want to read just a little bit of this letter from Lia. She says, "For the first time in my life I've been living in a place of hopelessness, derived from a shattering of illusion and despair. Although this still sounds negative to my mind, it is actually a gift that has opened the door to true freedom. Something that I never experienced before."

[15:01] GANGAJI: That's it exactly, perfectly stated. It's a disillusionment. And so our willingness to not generate the illusion, requires a willingness to be disillusioned. And that's to move from childhood to adulthood. And when you're willing to be disillusioned, you discover what this word maturity is really pointing to.

[15:25] HILLARY: I'd like to tie in the subject of spiritual hope into this conversation.

[15:31] GANGAJI: Oh, yeah!

[15:32] HILLARY: Because I think there's a thing that is obvious of, you know if you go to the doctor, you hope you don't get some bad news. There's the hopes we have just discussed. But then there's this maybe a hidden hope, perhaps even, it could be called a hidden agenda in the world of the spiritual culture, because a lot of people come to see you and maybe in the back of their mind they go to retreat – I certainly have done this (chuckles) – go to retreat thinking you're going to say something that's going to be "the thing" that sets me free.

[18:06] GANGAJI: Yeah. Because it can happen, and the thing is, of course, we have that. That's the way our minds are generated. I mean, some people, I would say everyone comes in *wanting to get* something. And this is where I make the distinction between hope and desire. This desire to be free, this desire to recognize your wholeness, to live a full and rich and true life. There's no problem with that. That's not a childish desire. That's a deep and true desire. Where it gets to be a problem is when we try to direct that desire. So, I will go to this retreat and Gangaji will say something and *that* will awaken me. But that's all right. That's natural. That's

what we do. But once you get in the retreat, any retreat, with anybody, you're with yourself. And you're back to the beginning. That's the beauty of a retreat is that you are out of your distractions. So you, yeah, whatever your agenda is, it's not hidden to me or to you (laughs). You come in and that, if you are truly in retreat, will be shattered just by the fact that you're in retreat because you're retreating from your normal agenda. So I have no problem with people having "hope". It's just, that's why we're speaking about it – that it's limited. I have no problem with limitations. But we speak about particular limitations so you can discover there's something more than the limitation. Maybe we could talk of it in terms of something less, but, really, the byproduct is much more when you live a life that's free of childish hope, it's a bigger life.

[18:09] HILLARY: So in your life today, just regular day to day life, is there a role for you with hope? Does hope play a role for you at all?

[18:24] GANGAJI: Well, I have to ask you what you mean when you say hope?

[18:28] HILLARY: Do you hope that.

[18:31] GANGAJI: It will be a nice day? Oh yes, I love a nice day. I hope it will be a nice day. Do I spend energy on that hope? No. That's the desire. I'd like it to be a nice day. Do I **need** it to be a nice day? No. But when I think that the hope we're talking about becomes a need. My husband **has to** get well or this **has to** happen and my hope will make it so. And then, please, you hope for this too. So I understand, you know, it's a fine line and it may be very subtle, but it's worth investigating when your hope is control or it's simply a passing, a passing desire that doesn't have weight and doesn't control your life and won't make you miserable, endlessly miserable if it doesn't come about.

[19:28] HILLARY: You know this scenario so well when your husband had to go through chemotherapy, serious chemotherapy - and I wasn't with you at that time - but it looked like he perhaps wasn't going to make it.

[19:45] GANGAJI: Yeah. It seemed a foregone conclusion. And, it was really interesting being in this hospital setting, and seeing lots of other people who were very ill - and some close to death. And often, there was this *beautiful radiance of being*. I mean it was **striking**. You know, these places you sit around a lot waiting for the next procedure. And so I really got to observe a lot of people - and at death's door they would often just be absolutely exquisite and surrendered. And many of these people actually did not die. They got better! And it was so – startling to watch many of them as they got better, start to lose their radiance and their surrender. They were already now in the future – and planning and hoping for things to go a certain way – and such a direct reflection of the teaching.

[20:52] HILLARY: And what did you notice about the loved ones of the people that – let go?

[20:57] GANGAJI: Oh, it was the same, there was no difference, you know.

[21:00] HILLARY: And that was true for you?

[21:02] GANGAJI: You know, Eli was surrendered, though I definitely wanted him to get well. But I wasn't, I didn't stop being full and free and in love because he was sick. How about you with your father?

[21:20] HILLARY: Ummmm – yeah. I mean I think I just - he was so surrendered. So I was surrendered.

[21:28] GANGAJI: Makes it much easier.

[21:29] HILLARY: Oh, it was beautiful.

[21:30] GANGAJI: That's a role we have to play for each other.

[21:33] HILLARY: Yeah! I remember a few years ago I went to interview this woman. She was a doctor at a major hospital in Portland. And the reason why I went to interview her was because she had this incredible story. She was the head of this particular department in this major hospital, teaching hospital. Her son who was a teenager came home one day and he seemed like he had the flu – and it turned out, like within a week, he was dying! And he had, they discovered some terrible blood disorder with him. And they were doing steroids and transfusions and it was this runaway train. And here she was as a mother, she couldn't do a thing. Here she was as a doctor, and she couldn't do a thing. And this went on for some time, it went on for two or three weeks. And one day she was in the hospital looking over her son and when she walked out the door, she said she emotionally let go. And I know this doesn't happen with everybody, but the next day somebody just happened to come up to her with a – it was a fellow colleague – came up to her with an acupuncture case study about this particular blood disease. It was, and it sounded just like what her son had anyway. One of the Chinese doctors in the hospital made up an herb formula, and he survived. But that wasn't the point of the story for me.

[23:00] GANGAJI: That's right - the letting go. What she let go of in that moment was her role as doctor, her identity as doctor and her identity as mother. And she could actually be present. So beautifully, and often in that open presence, yes, there is a discovery unexpected – somebody shows up or you see somebody or you are willing to read something or not. Maybe the person dies, but there's that moment of direct discovery of what is closer and deeper than any designation of who we are to ourselves or to anyone else - maybe especially our most loved ones.

[23:48] HILLARY: And when I look at the times I have completely given up hope, I would refer to them as the most meaningful times of my life. And when I first heard about you, there was, I mentioned this in another show we did, I think it was the second show we did, and it was called The Courage to Give Up Hope and it was like a five minute piece. And I listened to it over and over and over again because it was, it was like music to my ears (Gangaji acknowledges this) that idea that I didn't have to try anymore. And yet, at the same time, I still do things to take care of myself, I do things to take care of my sensitive body and.

[24:23] GANGAJI: You know if you really return to this that's here, there's more clarity. It's not like you're being sent into a fog. You're actually invited to walk out of the fog, the fog of hope, we could call it or the fog of hopelessness, whichever it may be. Just to come home from that. And yes, and there's clarity. As you like Papaji used to say to people, "Wake up!" And then do as you

like. The “wake up” was first. You really can’t do as you like when you’re not awake, because you’re just following ideas in your mind that are generated from your parents or your schools or your culture or your habits or what you hope will work for you. But you wake up and then you see: what do I want? What’s this life for? Or what are my talents? What’s feasible? And it’s an intelligence that, that’s your rightful intelligence, that doesn’t need false hope or childish hope – and definitely can use all the prayers and intentions and true hope for there to be peace on the planet for everyone to wake up, hope for our species to grow up and stop destroying its own home.

clip

*[26:16] GANGAJI: In inquiring into the reality of what’s True – True being what’s always True, not just relatively true in this moment, but always True, then hope, change, of survival, of betterment, of escape, of happiness, of enlightenment, **all** hope must be put aside. Because hope itself is some projection of a me into a future – in order to avoid the catastrophe that is sensed in the present, whether it’s sensed through a newspaper or television or just the sensations in one’s body. So as I’ve said for years, it is not for the faint of heart, is not a mass teaching; it’s not a cult teaching. Mass teachings and cult teachings give you hope. It’s for this willingness to stand alone where you are and face what you are most afraid of facing: the annihilation of you without any hope of survival – to recognize the opportunity of facing it **now** as if it were happening right now – the end of your life as you know it - the end of you as you think yourself – the end of all that you have accumulated or gained or lost – the end of it, period – without any hope of it not really being the end, just on to something else. Then, this lion courage of the heart to investigate itself naturally awakens.*

(end clip)

[28:55] HILLARY: In the coming months, Gangaji will be addressing the subject of “help” – when it serves and when it sometimes doesn’t. We’re also going to look at what’s called “the spiritual bypass”. And then a little bit down the road we’re going to look at karma and fate, the role of control, life purpose – those are just a few. We’ve got lots on our list. In the meantime I hope, (laughter,) I use that term loosely now, I hope you enjoyed this one. If you’d like to help us here at Gangaji Radio, there’s an easy way to donate. We just created a donate button specifically for Gangaji Radio. You’ll find it by going to the website gangaji.org. We would love your support in keeping these important conversations coming. Helen Jane Long creates the most beautiful music and that’s what you’re listening to right now. We’re grateful to be able to use it this month. Thank you so much to such an incredible artist. I’m Hillary Larson. This has been *A Conversation With Gangaji*. Thanks for being with us. See you next time.