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A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 53

THE SPACE BETWEEN THOUGHT – AN EXPLORATION INTO SILENCE

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[00:04] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:09] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: Let me give you a few scenarios here: you are sitting in a deep meditation, or maybe you're just noticing in a moment a gorgeous sunset; you're feeling grateful for your children or your lover; there's a certain sense of peace in the background, like everything's gonna be okay. But then, an hour or so later, you get into an argument. Now, that depth of well-being seems like it's lost in a ball of thought and emotion. A teacher like Gangaji comes along and tells you that silence is here all the time. It's actually who you are. How is that possible if what you're feeling in that moment feels far from silence?

[00:50] GANGAJI: Every time I'm just furious, every time you're just furious, it's coming from silence. Where else could it come from? That's my point, it's not like sometimes if you're good, if you get it right, it will come from silence. Silence is the source. What can come from that?

[01:09] HILLARY LARSON: This month, we're going to talk about the difference between space and spaciousness, where intelligent thought comes from, lots of things. Why is knowing ourselves as silence important? Glad you're here with us, I'm Hillary Larson, and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

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[01:28] HILLARY: We did an episode called *In Thought We Trust*. That was a long time ago. And we've spoken about, in other episodes, we've talked a lot about thoughts, and identifying with thought. And I really wanted to focus this month on what holds thought, you know, what's deeper than thought, specifically. And of course in order to do that we have to talk about thought. But, and I was thinking about this radio show you and I have been doing now for four-and-a-half years, and we've had, you know, I think this is fifty-three topics, actually, I think it ends up being fifty-six with the specials we've done. And, and I think that we've covered really interesting topics. But there's a difference between interesting and deeper. And sometimes I even worry about my own conversation 'cause I like interesting things, and sometimes...

[02:25] GANGAJI: That's already deeper (chuckles) to realize that (laughs) because yes, we, we are entertained, and enriched, and enlightened by interesting things, but they are still things, they still come and go. And when somebody voices what's deeper, I want what's deeper, or let's speak about what's deeper, that's already deeper. In a way that's all you can do. Because otherwise you're doing something, then you're still thinking that you are doing something with the source of all thoughts. So there's a certain point where you put thought to rest. You're willing to, to not think it, to not measure it, so then in that moment even deeper loses its entertainment value, or its interest value, and we're back to not knowing, but consciously not knowing and witnessing.

[03:29] HILLARY: I wanted to start with a question and a clip. And ironically, I found this clip after this person sent in the question (chuckles) so it worked out really well. I wanna apologize ahead of time because as you probably know I'm very picky about the quality of the, this show, and the quality of the sound. And this clip, the sound quality isn't that great, but the content was so exquisite, I tried to fix it as much as I could, and I hope it doesn't distract from the, from the content, but it's just so beautiful. But let me start with the question, I'll go right into the clip. Susan has a question, and she says, 'When I think of space between thought, I feel a deepening, an opening into silence. What is this nothingness, the self? Just nothing?' So let me jump right in to this clip.

Clip

[04:23] UNNAMED PERSON: *You mentioned a, before the, that it was possible to turn off the mind. How would you do that?*

[04:31] GANGAJI: *Well in this moment, if you just open your mind. Is there any thought?*

[04:42] UNNAMED PERSON: *Yeah.*

[04:42] GANGAJI: *What is it?*

[04:47] UNNAMED PERSON: *Sitting here, feeling my body.*

[04:49] GANGAJI: *That's the thought? I'm sitting here, feeling my body?*

[04:51] UNNAMED PERSON: *Mmm-hmm.*

[04:52] GANGAJI: *Or that's after the fact? And the, and the, when I said 'just open'...*

[04:56] UNNAMED PERSON: *Okay.*

[04:57] GANGAJI: *Just open your mind. Just be here. You don't need to think to be here, you already are here.*

[05:07] UNNAMED PERSON: *Mmm-hmm.*

[05:08] GANGAJI: *Yes. So you just be. Maybe there's a thought that arises in that, and tell me is there? And maybe there's not, there's just, just spaciousness.*

[05:28] UNNAMED PERSON: *(laughs) Well it's easy when I'm looking at you.*

[05:31] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBERS: *(laughter)*

[05:33] GANGAJI: *It's easy 'cause I told you how easy it is. Many times in a day, there is no thought. For everyone! But we're so conditioned to think who we are that we link up thought with thought with thought totally overlooking the space between thoughts, or the space that's under any thought, or even the space that thought is made of. We just overlook it, because we, we are 'I think therefore I am', so thought is our reference point. Thought tells us who we are, thought tells us what we need, thought tells us 'I'm sitting here', thought tells us what we*

*should be doing. This can stop. This thought will come back, but when you recognize it comes back into silence, and then it disappears back into silence, there is a recognition of what is always here. And that silence is conscious. It's not a dead space, it's conscious, it's you, that's your direct presence. And in the recognition of it there's a recognition of refuge, of rest, of sanctuary.*

End clip

[06:51] HILLARY: Before I turned that recorder on I was telling you that this was the topic and we have covered some topics recently, you know, a couple about, dealt with the election, and, and the, and the first thing you said right before I turned the, hit the record button, was this 'oh this is, then this is the refuge'. And it is so much the refuge.

[07:14] GANGAJI: Yes. That's, it's the resting place, it's peace, it's home. And it's the truth, it's the truth, whatever is being thought or unthought, remembered or forgotten, it's here. So in the question that you read at the first, what I heard was some, some desire actually for thought to hold us this space. To me there's a difference in the way we perceive space and spaciousness. Spaciousness to me stands on its own as this field. When we talk about space we're usually talking about a particular space and maybe the questioner was talking about the particular space of how we feel when we experience spaciousness. And we want that space back, and we work to get that space back. And, but in working to get that space back, or even to deepen that space, we overlook the spaciousness that is beyond measure, that's always here. And it's not separate from any thought, I thought, I'm really happy that was on the clip, because often when people are aware of the tyranny of thought, or the, the way we're enslaved to our particular thoughts, or to other people's thoughts, then there becomes this dualistic thing: thought is therefore the enemy, or thought is bad, and spaciousness is what I want. And there's this old, Manichean battle of evil versus good. This is not that, it's non-dual recognition that every thought has as its substance the same spaciousness that it comes from, and that's the mystery, and the wonder, that we're actually freed from the tyranny of thought. And from that there is great creativity of thought, insightful thought, revelatory thought. So sometimes people think I am preaching 'no thought', and I, I always wanna clear that up.

[09:39] HILLARY: Funny you should say that. So this question is from Gerald in Australia, he says, 'When I hear you talk about being still, I automatically think that means not doing anything, sitting and meditating while being still. I think I'm missing something. I also think I mistake silence for not talking. Could you help me with that?'

[10:03] GANGAJI: Well it's, it is the same dualistic thinking, that that's the way our mind makes sense of things, being still is in opposition to activity. So maybe a better way of phrasing it is, 'discover what is always still'. It's not, 'you need to be still', you need to discover what is always present as stillness, regardless of what you're thinking or feeling or, or defining. And then it has nothing to do with meditating or not meditating or having an argument or not having an argument. You can still discover what is still. And in that then there is a possibility to – huh, I don't even know, I don't have the words for it, because I use the word surrender a lot - surrender your argument (chuckles) to stillness, to its source. It doesn't even mean you stop the argument. It means that actually the argument then takes a, a formless display, is creative, is fresh, is alive. That's the point. We get in these thought loops, and then we hear that meditation will take us out of the thought loops, and that's true and beautiful. But as long as we're seeing meditation or stillness as one thing and thought

loop as something else that we need to escape, we're still in the loop. We still are in the dualistic loop, so if you turn your attention to what is already still, right now, whatever you're thinking, whatever you're feeling, is there stillness, is there spaciousness that those thoughts and those feelings are appearing in? That's your own intelligence, your own consciousness. Even this 'your own' is appearing in that. It's consciousness, spaciousness.

[12:10] HILLARY: I think there is also that idea that a mood is associated with silence and stillness. So in the name of practicality (chuckles) can you think of a time when you were just furious but you were coming from silence?

[12:29] GANGAJI: Well, every time I'm just furious, every time you're just furious, it's coming from silence. Where else could it come from? That's my point, it's not like, sometimes if you're good, if you get it right, it will come from silence. Silence is the source. What couldn't come from that? What couldn't be made of that? It's our judgments about argument or anger or fear that then makes us fall into this dualistic understanding, 'oh, I've gotta escape that, and I will escape it into stillness'. That stillness doesn't exist, that's a concept in your mind. The stillness that is real, that, that no word of stillness can even touch is always present, not just in Gangaji, but in you and every, everything, animate and inanimate. Substance is spaciousness that is stillness that has within it and an aspect of it all movement, all movement of all kind, earthquakes, tsunamis, peaceful idyllic pastures. All of it.

[13:51] HILLARY: Let me ask you a question here from Brian then. He says, 'Why is it important to be aware of silence? Do people have to fully realize this silence in order to be free?'

[14:04] GANGAJI: (deep sigh) Well, if you want to know yourself, it's important. If you don't care about knowing yourself and you just wanna get on with filling your desires for a successful life, whatever that may be, maybe it's not, it's not important at all. It's only important if it is. If there's somehow some desire to know what is always here, then it's important. And if there's some desire to know what is absolutely true, then it's important. But that's, that's not a desire for everyone.

[14:45] HILLARY: I also think that the title of this episode's important, The Space Between Thought, because that's the part that gets overlooked.

[14:57] GANGAJI: The space between thought and the space that thought is. Because I wouldn't want the space between thought to become in opposition to thought. As, 'oh the space between the thought that's the real....

[15:10] HILLARY: Got it (laughs).

[15:10] GANGAJI: ...spaciousness (laughs)'. Because it, relative to thought, it is. But we are speaking of what's absolutely true.

[15:20] HILLARY: I was reading a, I was reading a quote from Viktor Frankl who – a lot of people listening to this know who Viktor Frankl is – but he is an Australian, a, an Austrian psychiatrist and neurologist who had survived the Holocaust. And he, his talks are so brilliant and his insights are so liberating. This one particular quote is, 'Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our

response lies our growth and our freedom.' And what I think he's talking about is more on a psychological level, although the depth of, of where he came from was extraordinary.

[16:08] GANGAJI: Yes, and what he's speaking of, and his works, are extraordinary. His life experience that informs those works is extraordinary. But he's speaking of relative space here. And that's very important, I, I don't wanna put that down. I just want it to be recognized that when I am inviting you into the stillness that's already here, it's a stillness that's before choice, after choice, regardless of choice. Choice is still an aspect of mind, and in that aspect of mind all the mind knows to do is to make things, objects, so choice itself becomes an object, stillness becomes an object, and those objects are not ultimately true. They're not ultimately even here. Those objects too are made of spaciousness. It's just our mind's way of conceiving, and communicating, of dealing with the happenings that are, that, that one is presented with. I mean, in his case being in a concentration camp. And how is it possible that some people in the concentration camp made it through it, and, and what was the mindset that allowed that? And I think that that's a really essential conversation. But it's really not my conversation. I would say my conversation is for you who have already made it through – your childhood, your illness, your losses – you've already made it through, so, you, you already have made choices, rightfully and wrongly. Now are you willing to choose what is choiceless, what has always been here?

[18:11] HILLARY: You know, to be honest the reason why I, part of the reason why I was interested in this topic is, you had said something to me years ago, I think it was like four years ago, it wasn't actually on this show, it was, I was putting on an event. And, and you know, I perhaps might've used poor judgement (chuckles) when I was doing the announcements and I said something kind of snarky, and you got, you got mad at me. And we talked about it the next day, and I remember one of the things that you said that just, is, kind of making its way through my system here is you said something like, 'You need to speak from silence'. And I remember I froze in that moment of like, 'How do you do that?'

[18:59] GANGAJI: You open your mind. So I, I remember that instant and what I felt like as representing the meeting and the people who were coming there. There was an entertainment value that had entered, which is natural for us, you like, you like entertaining people, I like entertaining people, there's nothing wrong with entertaining people. But in that particular moment, I was really inviting you (laughs), maybe strongly inviting you to, to give up the entertainment, just to be nothing, to have nothing going on, nothing that you were giving the people, nothing you were getting from the people, nothing you were gonna, you know, you're naturally a funny person and so people will, you'll make a joke, you'll crack a joke. But at the, sometimes when we start doing that, rather than that just being the expression of, of the moment, and that's what that was about, if that, I don't even know if this will be included but just for our clarity, 'cause I remember that. And, and I know that that's an edge, because I'm not speaking about being nothing from nowhere and nobody. It's the fullness of being and just, it's not like, 'Oops, where's silence now? Oh, did I come from silence?' Oh, you know, that's, it can be taken like that, and maybe I shouldn't have phrased it like that to you. It's just, maybe just, don't be you, is what I was saying, just be (laughs). Just, just be this space, don't, don't know how you're supposed to say it or... yeah.

[20:44] HILLARY: Well I, see I think this is important conversation in the context of, of this topic really 'cause it's so concrete, because I took that, what you said to me seriously. And I was in this very innocent place of, 'Huh.' Like, 'I wonder what that means?'

[21:02] GANGAJI: What'd you find out?

[21:06] HILLARY: I didn't (laughs), I think I'm finding out right now. Really, it's one of those things of spiritualizing something, you'll go, 'I wonder what speaking from silence means', just like it prompted the question to you of 'Have you ever been just so angry but aware that you're coming from silence?' Same thing.

[21:26] GANGAJI: Yeah, that's why I feel like maybe I shouldn't have said it that way because that makes it in opposition, so that was a relative silence that I was pointing to. Absolutely speaking, of course, it's all, it's all coming from silence. And that's what I'm inviting people to discover. 'Cause there are plenty of good teachers who can help us all speak from a more meditative mindful space, or recognize when we're caught up in, in entertaining. But hardly anybody is really pointing to the, the substance that is present everywhere, always, in snarky moments, or sublime moments. So that's the real crux of the matter, that's what Papaji pointed me to and revealed to me. And that's why I'm really interested in, in staying with it until we, we get the duality away. But we do speak in dualistic terms, that's, that's what we, that's how we speak. But we don't have to believe it that way.

[22:47] HILLARY: I think what you bring to this subject, one of the things that you bring to this subject, is just the sheer humanity of it.

[22:57] GANGAJI: Mmm. Because that humanity is not separate from its own source. And to me that's the hardest leap for a human being to take, that the leap is, actually the leap is a fall back into yourself. And, not something that is now newly there, but yourself, both as you have always known yourself, and the endless depth of yourself as what is known.

[23:36] HILLARY: Well as we, as we move through this subject, I wanna finish by talking about different types of thought, is, there's thought that's agitating, there's thought that's inspired, there's never-ending thought, there are so many categories of thought but I wanna talk to you about intelligent thought. And I have a clip that I wanna play for all of you that has to do with that, and it's, it just seems like it's such an incredible clarification of what this intelligence that operates in all of us is.

Clip

*[24:19] GANGAJI: You can't do 'not thinking'. But you can open. You can open. And then the thought comes. It's okay. At that moment then you have a choice. You wanna follow this one, again? Maybe it's a thought, a true creative thought, a Nobel Prize kind of thought.*

*[24:44] UNNAMAED AUDIENCE MEMBERS: (laughter)*

*[24:45] GANGAJI: Wonderful! That's what's been waiting. We've been so true to our ninety-nine percent regurgitative thought that we haven't allowed the space for true insight, for true creativity, for the, the thought that is the evolutionary leap of this, this form. So the mind, the thinking mind, surrendering to the space, the open mind and in that there is a, an intelligence that quickens.*

End clip

[25:23] GANGAJI: That's the point of our conversations.

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[25:32] HILLARY: I wanna read a poem to finish this conversation. We're gonna be doing an *Epiphany* episode about a woman named Kim Rosen and I think everybody's gonna really love her story. It's, she has a book called *Save by a Poem* and that's the name of our *Epiphany* episode. And it's just a, quite a reflection of what you speak of. Anyway I, I just interviewed her last week and I emailed her and said, 'here's the topic, is there a poem that matches this topic?' And she immediately wrote back and she gave me this Rumi poem, the poem says: (Hillary reads poem)

Inside this new love, die  
Your way begins on the other side  
Become the sky  
Take an ax to the prison wall  
Escape  
Walk out like somebody suddenly born into color  
Do it now  
You're covered with thick cloud  
Slide out the side  
Die and be quiet  
Quietness is the surest sign that you've died  
Your old life was a frantic running from silence  
The speechless full moon comes out now.

[26:51] MUSIC

[26:55] HILLARY: I guess that says it all.

[26:57] GANGAJI: Mmm.

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[27:13] HILLARY: We have a few more minutes at the end here for another clip, and I wanna remind you before we do that though, that you can find all episodes of *A Conversation With Gangaji* and *Epiphany* on iTunes. Also if you could take the time to leave a comment or give us a rating, we would love that. Speaking of silence, which is what we talked about this month, Gangaji does various silent retreats throughout the year. Some of you listening to this right now know exactly what I'm talking about when I say they are an extraordinary experience. So the question is, how do you find out about them? Well, well the answer to that is to go to [gangaji.org](http://gangaji.org) that has all of Gangaji's events plus a whole lot more on the home page. You can also find out how to sign up for Gangaji's live monthly webcast. Special thanks as always to the Gangaji Radio Team. Juan Carlos, you found our clips this month, thank you, they were so good. I'm Hillary Larson. This has been *A Conversation With Gangaji*. Take care everybody. We'll see you next time.

Clip

[28:20] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *So much fear, and sorrow, and anger still surrounds me when I'm not in my silence. And it, it doesn't stay with me when I'm not sitting with my eyes closed.*

[28:33] GANGAJI: *So right now it's here?*

[28:36] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *(sighs) Not so much, as I'm holding your hand (laughs).*

[28:40] GANGAJI: *(laughs)*

[28:40] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBERS: *(laughter)*

[28:42] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *But, just when I'm out in the world and...*

[28:45] GANGAJI: *That's, I'll tell you, it's very simple what you have done. You have made sitting in your silence a thing, a form, so that it has maybe something to do with a meditation posture, or a room, or as you said, closing your eyes. That is not sitting in silence. Silence is there, but you have to discover that silence is who you are. You check it out. And this is what is overlooked the most, this, already this assumption that it **has** gone, and then based on that assumption are all these strategies of mind appearing of how to recover it. Or how, I need to sit longer so that it'll last longer. Or I shouldn't be here, this shouldn't be happening. But all of that's based on a false assumption. The false assumption is that you are not stillness. Who you are is the stillness of being. Or if that's too conceptual, who God is, is the stillness of being. And if that's too hierarchical, what **is** finally in the core of every experience, every place, every circumstance, every body, every emotion, every thought, the stillness of being.*