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A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

LONGING TO BE GOOD

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[00:03] MUSIC

[00:11] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: There's no doubt that there are people on the planet who are bad to the core. But that's where – and it's probably pathological – without a doubt, the majority of human beings are innately good. Being in alignment with that goodness feels spacious, it feels great. What's not to love about being a good person? We can be greedy, cranky, critical, jealous, but being good? Now that seems like an infinitely better way to go. The problem is that being good could be a trap unto itself.

[00:42] GANGAJI: To be good is an ideal, and it's a beautiful ideal, but when it becomes an ism it becomes in itself a religion, and then it's subject to all the corruption of all the religions. And then it's bad, it becomes its opposite.

[00:57] HILLARY LARSON: There are people who have done terrible things, who have had white light experiences. So is the effort we put into being good and ethical people really relevant at all? Socially yes, of course it is. But as usual, Gangaji is talking about something deeper here. So stay tuned. We're glad you're with us. I'm Hillary Larson, and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

[01:21] MUSIC

[01:27] HILLARY: You know when you have something that you believe, and you believe it so strongly it's, it feels like it's part of you? Well, that's what I wanted to talk to you about this time (chuckles). Because it seems like there's a certain topic that kind of comes up and it weaves it's way into many of our topics, and I feel like there's a certain way I'm still holding on to it, or, I still believe what I think is true (laughs), so...

[01:59] GANGAJI: Mm-hmm... yes, it's really good to, to see that, to be willing to see that.

[02:05] HILLARY: So, what I wanna talk to you about is the subject of ethics.

[02:09] GANGAJI: Mm-hmm.

[02:10] HILLARY: And I have been thinking about doing that subject for some time. And I didn't know if people would be interested in it, and then you did a, a monologue at Santa Sabina this past year – and I wasn't there – but I got about four texts in a half hour from people saying, 'you won't believe this monologue', which I'm actually gonna try to put at the end of our conversation.

[02:33] GANGAJI: Great.

[02:34] HILLARY: So the root of it for me is, I still really deeply believe in being good.

[02:42] GANGAJI: What's wrong with that?

[02:44] HILLARY: Well I have it linked up with, I think that awakening and being good are synonymous.

[02:51] GANGAJI: Even though you must have plenty of examples where that's not true.

[02:56] HILLARY: Well...

[02:57] GANGAJI: Like, give me an example, of, of somebody that you believe to be awakened, some global world person.

[03:11] HILLARY: Well I don't wanna, I don't wanna mention any names.

[03:14] GANGAJI: Well the – big name, I mean like, let's talk Christ, Buddha...

[03:18] HILLARY: Okay.

[03:19] GANGAJI: ...Gandhi, Mandela, Martin Luther King.

[03:27] HILLARY: Well, I like all of them so (chuckles) let me just say that's it's like... wow, this, I wasn't really actually expecting you to ask me that question. There's somebody that I was thinking about in particular who actually speaks of being enlightened, but he also seems really egotistical to me.

[03:52] GANGAJI: Well, I, I don't know about that, that's why I suggested the global personalities, because I think in all of these people Ramana, whether we've made them saints, or whatever we've done to them, if we actually look into their lives, we see that there're incidences in their lives where the consensus would have been that they did something bad, that it, that it was unethical. And I'm not suggesting that it was right, I'm just saying that there's the capacity to make choices which are bad for *somebody*, no matter how awake you are. That it's, it's not the same conversation really, and when you equate enlightenment with always making the right choices, which are ethical choices – if we agree on that, that the right choice is the choice to be good, or to do no harm, to, to be helpful – but if, if you make it that way, nobody gets in. Nobody is there. God himself, is, is not – certainly God is not, I mean what horrible choices God has made. So, it, it's some, it's where, I have often spoken here, I'm sure, on this, on this platform, about where idealism, the ism comes in and takes the place of the ideal. So to be good is an ideal, and it's a beautiful ideal, but when it becomes an ism it becomes in itself a religion, and then it's subject to all the corruption of all the religions. And then it's bad, it becomes its opposite. So if you just are willing to, to recognize that there's this fallibility in human being, that you can awaken to the truth of yourself and still be subject to making mistakes, then there's a humbling without punishment, it's a humbling, of, of recognizing that you can tell the truth when you have made a mistake. And it doesn't, it *can't* mean anything about what is always here, and it *does* mean something about relationships and, and your place

in the world – about the goodness, the potential for goodness. So that, I just wanted to say all that just for some clarity, otherwise we get into some discussion about who's good, and is this, you know, person good, and who's judging? You know, if – Ramana's contemporaries judged him when he stole money from his – his brother's tuition money -- to run away from home, to go to this mountain so he could just sit and do nothing rather than taking care of the family. It would've been as bad, it's a bad kid to do that. When the Buddha get up, gets up in the middle of the night and leaves his wife and children to wander around gazing at his navel, you'd say it was, you know, inconsiderate at the least. Not thoughtful, not, not a good thing. And yet these beings are the pinnacle of, of what we think of as what it means to be awake and to spread goodness. So, yeah, I guess it depends on what you want. You'll never be a good girl, Hillary (laughs).

[07:26] HILLARY: (laughs) There would be people that would attest to that, for sure.

[07:32] GANGAJI: Yeah I'm sure. Anybody who knows any of us can attest to that.

[07:36] HILLARY: Well, you know, I'm actually gonna refer back to our show on trauma because the moment for me was not necessarily realizing self-hatred, because I certainly have inspected layers of that in my lifetime, it was the willingness to acknowledge just hatred itself.

[07:58] GANGAJI: Ah!

[08:00] HILLARY: Hatred against another person.

[08:03] GANGAJI: It's shocking, isn't it?

[08:04] HILLARY: Yeah. It's shocking and yet at the same time the relief in being able to tell the truth about that...

[08:12] GANGAJI: Yes. That's the liberating. It's shocking. The shock can actually liberate you. Normally we, we are shocked, and then we just cover that because it's so unbearable. But you were willing for it to be unbearable. I mean, how horrifying that we can know what we know and still this hate can arise. How human, how absolutely human.

[08:38] HILLARY: I wonder sometimes about the chicken and the egg, really, because (chuckles), for...

[08:46] GANGAJI: (chuckles) Which would you vote for?

[08:48] HILLARY: I'm voting for the egg.

[08:50] GANGAJI: Okay. I'll vote for the chicken, just for, if we're gonna have a discussion here, the chicken and the egg.

[08:55] HILLARY: Actually in, in this case, you would be the egg and I would be the chicken, because (laughs)...

[09:00] GANGAJI: (laughs) 'Cause you – okay.

[09:02] HILLARY: ... 'cause you're like, you're awakening was a, I would call it gradual, and then you met Papaji and it was a, a spontaneous series of moments of grace. And mine feels like, I certainly have had moments of amazing clarity in my life, but it feels like the deeper awarenesses were more mechanical. And I've spoken before on this radio show about, when I first got clean, I would sit and I would really inspect where I was wrong. And it wasn't in a way of beating myself up, it was like looking in all these areas of my life where I wasn't telling myself the truth. And who would wanna do that, you know, who would wanna sit in a room by themselves with a stack of paper and write, you know, the different specific incidences where I wasn't a good person. But every time I did that there was this unexpected depth of compassion that would arise in the most amazing way.

[10:05] GANGAJI: Mm, beautiful. It's beautiful. I think that most people listening to this have had some degree of that. So, in your question who would wanna do that, it's whoever wants to get at the truth of the matter, to get at the, the root of the suffering, or the root of the repetition of patterns that are destructive to yourself or to other people. So it's a way of self-reflection. And then there's a deeper self-reflection, the, the innocence in yourself: that no matter how many bad things you did, and let's agree, though, you did some bad things, some wretched things, some unthoughtful things, some mean things, hateful things (chuckles). But the innocence, this is the, it is paradoxical to the mind, but not to the realization, the innocence and the purity, and the, the goodness was never touched. The purity was never touched. So realization is realizing that, without denying the badness.

[11:13] HILLARY: So when you, all the things that you did before you met Papaji, I'm sure some of them included energy work and clearing chakras and, the list goes on and on – long periods of meditation – we can all do those things and it feels great. But then to me if you turn around and ignore your sense of ethics then I wonder what the point is. I think that's the point of this program, to this particular topic.

[11:49] GANGAJI: Well the point for me – and for Eli 'cause we were really doing this together – was in the, in nineteen-seventy-six we called it to be a righteous person. And that was just from the Confucian, the Daoist tradition about what it means to be a good person in, in your society, in your family, it was really all about that. I mean he had been a revolutionary, I had, I had been involved in anti-Vietnam, and civil rights, and so we had a strong social conscience, and we also recognized individually how deeply flawed we were as people. That, I mean I recognized that my social conscience was actually motivated by hate of other, and superiority to other and, and then when I recognized that I had to recognize the self-hate and the inferiority that I had toward myself. So but it was all around that, and that was, I, I salute that and I, I did a lot of work rest where I got, studied acupuncture, that's why I, you know I was involved in any number of things. And without taking away from any of that, there was still a certain point where I recognized that all of that, working on my flaws, and recognizing my flaws, and correcting my flaws so that I could be a contribution to others – Bodhisattva vows – wasn't really touching some very deep bed of suffering. That, the, the release I might feel or the pride I might feel when I did something good, or, or felt good because I hadn't done something bad, was limited. It was still conditional, it was still based on me as this separate thing and measurable thing. And it was still based on profound deep Christian conditioning of I'm, I'm born a sinner, I'm flawed, and I have to correct

that. And if I wasn't worshipping the god I was taught to worship, I was worshipping the new age god, or the Daoist god, or the – it was all about society, and me in society, and, and that's how I would know if I was good or bad. And this was totally different to me, Papaji, and to discover Ramana.

[14:29] HILLARY: Hmm. I hear from people frequently that they have appreciated this journey that you and I have been on – it's five years – because it, it's their journey too in different ways, and I so much appreciate the depth, I've realized, and the reports back I've heard from people, realizing, you know, deeper, deeper levels. And, and still there are times where I catch myself in conversation with you where – particularly on this topic – where I actually think in certain respects I'm still talking about the personality and you're talking about something else. Because the idea that one would have to purify in order to realize who they are is actually not at all what you're talking about.

[15:26] GANGAJI: That's exactly right. Not at all - that the truth of who you are is not subject to defilement, so yourself as you have defined yourself and as you experience yourself is of course subject to defilement because it is a personality or a character or the actions, or however you want to locate it, locate yourself. And not separate from that, but deeper than that is the field of pure, pure love, that finds no defilement in defilement, finds no flaw in flaws. It's a totality that's bigger than its parts.

[16:21] HILLARY: Yeah I look at the portal of that, and it's like, with this awareness, this stopping is, to me it feels like there's a natural compulsion to do good, like when we talk about the chicken and the egg, that it's a natural by-product to wanna do good.

[16:37] GANGAJI: Not necessarily. I mean, I mean, that's why I often bring up Nazar Gadala, and his guru, you know, didn't wanna see people, wouldn't meet with people, threw coconuts at people, despised people. And Nazar Gadala himself – smoked cigarettes, was doing harm to his body, *knew* he was doing harm to his body – and preferred the pleasure of the cigarettes. And died, you know, with compromised lungs because of it. But, so you couldn't call either one of those things doing good. Ramana also wasn't concerned with doing good. Just like he wasn't concerned with taking a vow of silence, he simply didn't speak, and a lot of people didn't think he was doing good. Gandhi and the followers of Gandhi didn't think he was doing good, he should have been out helping India. India was in profound suffering then, the country was torn apart, there was mass murder everywhere – and he just sat, still. So he was not concerned with that, he was, he didn't follow the Bodhisatva way. His good came because people were affected by his, his silence, not because of his intention, or his outcome, or his plan, or his desire.

[17:56] HILLARY: Different than sainthood (chuckles).

[17:58] GANGAJI: Although he *is* a saint. I, you know, I would say that Ramana is a saint. But he was a natural saint. He's not a saint who, who worked to be a saint.

[18:11] HILLARY: Hmm. Wow that's such a mind-bend for me. It is.

[18:15] GANGAJI: Yeah. Yeah. It's what, that's the radicalness of it. Because that's where we come right up against our lack of trust. If we don't wanna do good then we're, we're gonna wanna do bad, or we are gonna be bad and – that's why I bring up so often about Ramana stealing money, or Buddha abandoning his wife, or Christ, you know, saying 'leave your father', you know, 'let the dead bury', I mean... or Papaji, if you knew Papaji, telling dirty jokes in satsang, if he wanted to, you know. It's a way that the mold has to be broken up, the good little person. Because that's a childish view that we mostly get conditioned by our early religious conditioning, for the society's good. And I support that, I think we do need to be conditioned, because we can be wild animals. I don't know of anybody except the ones that I've mentioned, who have had a desire to do harm, but the desire to do harm is not necessarily counterbalanced by the desire to do good. That's a religious belief, that you can simply *be*, and some people will call that not being enough, or being bad, and some people would say, 'oh, you're a saint'.

[19:46] HILLARY: I don't wanna beat that to death because (laughs) I really, I really got what you said.

[19:50] GANGAJI: Great.

[19:51] HILLARY: Because I think, also what's so tied in to that is then you get the good ones, the good religions, 'we know the way', you know, 'to salvation'...

[20:01] GANGAJI: Oh my God. All of 'em.

[20:03] HILLARY: Yeah.

[20:04] GANGAJI: Look at, can you tell me any one of them that has not caused enormous harm out of their self-evaluation of how good their religion is. Every one of 'em. And then we can even see the Buddhists, you know, in, in Burma, in, or Myanmar, and, you know, I mean everywhere you can see there, religion is, like everything else, subject to corruption.

[20:30] HILLARY: Yeah. I'm gonna refer back to the monologue that you did at the retreat a few months' ago, a few week's ago. There was one thing that was just kind of a right, like a left turn, or a right turn, and it had to do with our own suffering and our responsibility for peace. And I would like to play a clip of that, if I could.

Begin clip

[20:56] GANGAJI: Whatever your moral life is, you still have the capacity to stop. As Papaji would say, call off the search, be still, and know yourself. And then from that, live freely. And free life does not necessarily mean doing whatever you want. It means freely, and then in that freedom, recognition of where you cause suffering unnecessarily, and where you continue your own suffering unnecessarily. Because it's also immoral to suffer unnecessarily, 'cause that spreads the vibration of suffering and your misery into the world. So really the willingness to take responsibility for your own intelligence, and to know that you can recognize your own

particular mistakes along the way, and make amends, or correct course, or be more still. Know yourself more deeply.

End clip

[22:09] HILLARY: Wow.

[22:10] GANGAJI: Good. I agree (laughs)

[22:11] HILLARY: (laughs) I agree too. I agree too. I just think, I mean that – talk about a reality check. If I'm in the midst of suffering, the consideration of the reverberations that puts out into the world is, that's a whole different way of taking it from me into...

[22:35] GANGAJI: Here's the trap here...

[22:36] HILLARY: ...okay.

[22:37] GANGAJI: as I see it, though: that the minute you reframe it that way, it's still about, are you being good to the world?

[22:45] HILLARY: Mm-hmm (laughs).

[22:47] GANGAJI: So... nothing wrong with that, but it feeds into then a, a suffering of replaying all the times you haven't been good, or your suffering, your vibe has gone out. So I, I'm not suggesting that you take what I said then and then make that some kind of whip. I, in a way I'm suggesting that you be absolutely selfish in that moment, and discover, are you're hurting? And if you're hurting, are you willing to stop hurting? Are you willing to stop the war, for yourself? And then it's quite natural that your vibration is one of, of joy rather than misery. And of course this can be so easily misinterpreted to become just an egotistical, I, I'm gonna feel good no matter what you're feeling. But that doesn't feel good (chuckles). So it's really the willingness to deeply tell the truth, but not to tell the truth to *get* something, even if the getting something is some medal from some religion class, forty-five years ago.

[24:05] HILLARY: I have this sense that you've always been a person where your ethics is important to you, because some people aren't that way. So I'm wondering how, did your sense of ethics shift after you met Papaji?

[24:26] GANGAJI: I'd say the weight of it shifted, the burden of it shifted. And as I have continually said (chuckles) I am a flawed human being, that doesn't mean that (chuckles) my actions are always good or right – I mean I just had to recently apologize to somebody for being rude to them, and, and it was the next day that I apologized to them rather than in the moment – so, it, I just don't want anyone to think I'm a saint, or to give me sainthood, because I'm just exactly like you are (chuckles), subject to mistakes. But the burden of that, the suffering of that, the suffering about my own fallibility, lifted. If I didn't expect myself to be infallible, then I could see all the ways that I'm making mistakes and, if possible, correct 'em. But if I'm, have this expectation that I will achieve infallibility with some enlightening experience, then I'm finding

proof always that I'm not there, I haven't gotten it, and I'm suffering. And that suffering is not just contributing to this one human unit suffering, but it's being spread out into the world. So just like the Buddhists say, may my enlightenment spread to the enlightenment of all being, that's really stating a natural occurrence, it's, your awakening does naturally spread to the awakening of all being. Because we are all connected, it has to, you're an aspect, you as you define yourself or experience yourself, are an aspect of all being. So you don't need all of the other things – maybe you did as a young person growing up, maybe we all did, we need, we were socially conditioned and, let's assume we needed it – but then it becomes a burden, it becomes the weight of the institution, of the family, or the church, or the, or the rebellion against the family or the church.

[26:51] HILLARY: If I bring this conversation full circle what I see is there is a natural goodness in people, in, in all things, that I can see. And then there's the desire to be good because it's better than being the other thing, which we talked about in the subject of hate, of just not wanting to be a bad person. So, I, I don't, I actually think (laughs), I actually think we've, we got it, I feel like I'm just gonna start to go in a loop.

[27:27] GANGAJI: Well I think what you were just saying brought up something for me that, this natural goodness is not based on fear, and this desire to be a good person has some fear under there: either the fear that you're not a good person, which is I think what most of us assume from our experiences, or the fear that you'll cause harm just, if you don't have something that's watching, telling you to be good. So this fear has to be met. It's a fear of, of being human or being lost or being bad or however it's phrased. We always get back to this existential fear.

[28:13] MUSIC

[28:24] HILLARY: If you'd like to hear that entire clip of Gangaji talking about the role of ethics, we're gonna post it on the Gangaji Facebook page, that's Gangaji Community, if you haven't found us yet. You can catch Gangaji live every month as she addresses all sorts of real life issues. It gives you an opportunity to call and speak to her directly. That happens every month, it's called *With Gangaji*. If you go to the home page, gangaji.org, you can find out how to sign up for that. So that's the webcast, it's Gangaji's monthly webcast. But for this podcast you can get new episodes automatically every month by subscribing to *iTunes*. Next month we're asking the question, 'What do you really want? What does your life stand for?' I'm Hillary Larson. This has been *A Conversation With Gangaji*. Thanks for being here.

[29:16] ENDING MUSIC