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A Conversation With Gangaji Series
Host Hillary Larson
TAKING THE SPIRITUAL BYPASS
Released on July 16, 2018

[00:02] MUSIC

[00:12] GANGAJI: I'm really speaking, not exactly in opposition, but maybe a little in opposition to people who have an issue with taking the bypass. Take the bypass! You don't have to work on yourself to be free.

[00:27] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: The spiritual bypass, as Gangaji defines it, is about going directly home. But that doesn't mean as a way of avoiding uncomfortable feelings. That's where the spiritual overlay comes in. There are two very different things that could use some clarification. Gangaji and I started down that road, and then we took a very unexpected turn, as you soon will see. If we have discovered this place called 'home', then how does that translate to the rest of our lives? How do we treat those around us? Does this return home mean being more responsible, more ethical, more compassionate? Don't we want that in ourselves, don't we want that in a teacher? Or is even asking that question – those questions – missing the mark. I'm Hillary Larson, and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

[01:20] MUSIC

[01:26] HILLARY: I've been really wanting to do this conversation for a long time. And I put it down last, in the spring, I, I put down this title for our calendar and, this is about true surrender and the spiritual bypass. And it was funny 'cause I decided I really wanted to do this topic and the next week a friend of mine sent me an article about the spiritual bypass – and I'm gonna read part of this to you – but it seems to me that there are two different kinds of spiritual bypass. Once that's the one that you're referring to – take the spiritual bypass – and then there's one that's not so great. And that's the article that this one is referring to, so the name of this article is called *Spiritual Bypassing: How Spirituality Sabotaged My Growth*. The term spiritual bypassing came up in the – he's saying it came up in the nineteen-eighties – and he quotes Robert Masters, and he says that 'spiritual bypassing causes us to withdraw from ourselves and others, hiding behind a kind of spiritual veil of metaphysical beliefs and practices.' He says, 'It not only distances us from our pain and difficult personal issues, but also from our own authentic spirituality, stranding us in a metaphysical limbo, a zone of exaggerated gentleness, niceness, and superficiality.' So he came up with some patterns that he identified as being a result of this spiritual bypass, and he said, "Whenever I became anxious I would immediately reach for the nearest Eckhart Tolle or Ellen Watts text on my bookshelf instead of sitting with the anxiety and checking in to see if it was coming from an innocuous source. I would quickly find refuge in spiritual philosophy.' So I could go on and read this, but I think you get the point.

[03:31] GANGAJI: So here's my point about this. I think it's really an unfortunate name, the term 'bypass', because the name bypass – if we take it from, the way I think of it, in terms of highways, or even veins, or heart bypass – is making a more efficient use of getting from one place to the other. So when I hear the term 'bypass' and then it's referred to, what seems to me as a spiritual overlay, which in, is really an avoidance, which is really a slower way, I, I just have

to take issue with it because it doesn't compute with me, it doesn't make sense, it's not a good use of the language. That's the main thing that I address when I speak of the spiritual bypass, and then I recommend people to take the spiritual bypass it means immediately, go home, you don't have to go through all the junk. But this example that you just read I think is legitimate. I mean, people turn to prayer, people turn to scripture, people turn to music, people turn to art, when they're feeling anxious, or when they're feeling afraid. And it's a legitimate release, we don't have to dissect everything, unless our religion is psychotherapy, and our religion is process. If we are worshipping process, then yes, we should not, we should not escape ever from our anxiety into beauty, or into dance, or movement, or, or scripture. We should sit down and process it, get at it. But I don't think it's a, a true religion, I think it's a tyranny. And then the whole life becomes – not to say that it doesn't have its benefits, that there aren't of course enormous benefits from actually getting at what the root of something is, from processing – but when we start to worship it and when we start to see that oh, I shouldn't just pick up Eckhart Tolle or pick up some scripture, the Buddha's writings, or Christ's writings, or whatever it is – or Christ's apostles, rather, writings – and be moved by that, I should work on myself. I think it's a, it's a tyranny of the mind. What does that mean, 'work on yourself'? Papaji said that means digging through the graveyard, and you will always find more garbage, you will always find more graves. So just stop, stop digging! Go directly home. And that's what my teaching is, you know, I'm sure this man you're quoting has a different teaching. That's legitimate. But that doesn't mean that since he has a different teaching and he has legitimacy behind it that that's in fact what I'm saying. It's, not at all. I, I'm really speaking, not exactly in opposition, but maybe a little in opposition to people who have an issue with taking the bypass. Take the bypass! You're free. You don't have to work on yourself to be free, to have a deep and enriched life. I'm sure Ramana Maharshi never worked on himself a day in his life. Papaji certainly didn't. It's a western phenomenon. And since it's this western phenomenon and we're in it, we believe it to be the best. And it has the same weight as the, the Catholic Church did in the fourteenth century. It was the medium of expression, and, and so it was unquestioned. And when you had someone quoting the dogma of the church, then that was, 'oh, yes, that's what I should think, that's what I should feel, that's what I should do'. But I, I'm saying that this dogma itself, whether it's religious or psychotherapeutic, is an avoidance of going directly home. You're free to go directly home.

[07:55] HILLARY: Well first of all, I actually think when you define the spiritual overlay, I actually think that's what he's referring to, he's just using...

[08:03] GANGAJI: Except the example.

[08:05] HILLARY: ...okay, let me give you another example...

[08:06] GANGAJI: Okay.

[08:07] HILLARY: ...of that, okay? So this was the second example this writer gives, he says, 'I would strive to maintain the appearance of someone who was constantly at peace with oneself, even though inside I might feel like the weight of the world was crushing down on my soul. This kind of faux-spirituality had a complete stranglehold on my speech and behavior and caused intense cognitive dissonance. He also says, 'Whenever I had done something hurtful or wrong to another person I would rarely take responsibility for it.' And he would say to himself, 'Oh, it's just an illusion, anyway.' And that's what I wanted to address with you because that's the subject of spiritualizing. And I, I have strong opinions about spiritualizing.

[08:52] GANGAJI: Then let's talk about your opinions, let's don't do this third person thing about 'he said', and then I'm supposed to somehow address what *he* said. He's not here, he and I are not having a conversation. I have my opinions about what he said, I see certain limits in what he said but, but that's third hand, so I don't get the point of that really, if this is a conversation with each other.

[09:19] HILLARY: Okay. Some time ago when I was with somebody, a few years ago, and I found that through the course of our relationship, we tended to use a lot of spiritual terms. And I thought the fact that our relationship was rooted in spirituality was a beautiful thing. And then something started to show itself, and I was telling him at one point of some very difficult news I heard about, from a friend, that they were losing somebody close to them. And his immediate response was, 'But there's no such thing as death'. And it was like, well, there are layers of death. And it felt like, 'oh, I read that, so therefore I'm gonna say it.' And it, it completely invalidated the experience of life, frankly.

[10:16] GANGAJI: For you in that moment. But what does that, where are we now? I mean because, again, I wasn't there in that conversation. Certainly you can have example after example of people who misuse everything. Misuse the word love. Misuse friendship. Misuse parenting. Misuse brother and sister. Everything can be misused. But what is it that we're really getting at when we talk about spiritual overlay? And when I talk about the bypass, I'm saying 'take the bypass, go directly home'. If you spiritual overlay, you, you don't notice that you're wandering, that you're avoiding the direct way home. And that's, that can be anything, that could be an unwillingness in that conversation that you're reporting on your side to actually meet the possibility that death is meaningless. You know, it, it seems like in this conversation you're trying to enroll me on your side, so we can therefore talk about him and how he was wrong to do this. So let's say you both were wrong, and, and, you know, you were missing each other. You, you wanted something from him he didn't want to give, or couldn't give, or wasn't interested in giving, or didn't believe in giving, and now it gets incorporated into a spiritual or psychological understanding of what should've happened, rather than just this willingness to, in this moment, meet the real possibility that no two people can actually directly communicate. That nobody understands anybody, ever. Then what?

[12:24] HILLARY: I don't know! (laughs)

[12:25] GANGAJI: Yeah well that's the possibility. Then we, then we stop trying to gather evidence for our point of view, which is what I heard, you know, when, when you started. And it's what I'm speaking of when I say the spiritual bypass. But the crux of the matter is that in this teaching, in this invitation, when we recognize that we are spending so much of our internal or external time trying to gather alliances for our point of view, or support for our point of view, and it's all just more and more conversation, then we can actually have the opportunity to stop. If you are not understood, if you would, could never be understood by that relationship, or this writer and I will never meet in common ground, if someone listening right now doesn't have a clue of what's happening, still you can stop. You can be still. You can stop trying to accumulate alliance, or ammunition, or facts, or theories, or dogma, to support any point of view. You can just be still. And that's, that's the crux of really what every conversation that I'm having with you is an invitation to. And then where's the problem? Where's the graveyard? Where's enlightenment, or unenlightenment?

[14:09] HILLARY: Can I give you a, a more direct example then?

[14:13] GANGAJI: Yeah, let's see where it goes (laughs)

[14:15] HILLARY: (laughs) I'm sweating again. (laughs) So, I was sitting in satsang a few months ago and, and it had just started. It was the first evening of satsang. And I was feeling angry with somebody. So, satsang started, and, and I was listening to you speak. And there's just a certain resonance that's just so amazing and heart-opening for me. And I was asking myself, in a certain way it felt like, there seems to be a conflict between feeling this resonance and then having this over here that's this unresolved anger which at the root of was about just not telling the truth, just not telling myself the truth about my part in this situation. So that to me, when I, when I think of a spiritual – let's call it spiritual overlay now – when I think about that it's the oh, like I feel this most infinite love. But, like I'm mad at this person over here and I'm not gonna talk to them. Those, I can't seem to reconcile that kind of...

[15:32] GANGAJI: There's no space for both of them?

[15:34] HILLARY: ...There is space, but it feels like, when I look at you, for example, I look at – I'm gonna use this term, I think I just made it up – of being holistically awake. Meaning that, you talk about love, you talk about space, you talk about the grounded being. And in your life, what I have witnessed is that when you do something that you think has hurt somebody, you say, 'Oh, gosh, I'm sorry, I didn't, I didn't intend to do that', instead of just walking around like, 'I'm the grounded being.' Do you understand the, the, what I'm trying to point out here?

[16:14] GANGAJI: I, I, I think I do. You can correct me if I'm misunderstanding it, but it seems to me that what you're not seeing is this judgment of yourself, or of your emotions, or of your behavior, as if it somehow, there's no room for it. I mean I ask you, 'Is there room or space for that?' and you said, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah', but, but when you were saying it it was like, that shouldn't be here. If the, if I'm really feeling this resonance, if I'm really awake, I shouldn't have these other feelings. And that's dogma. And that's what I'm asking you to just stop and let go and, and really see, is there room for all of that? Is there room for your areas where you're less than idealistically perfect?

[17:17] HILLARY: You know, I don't think I'm talking about perfection. I guess when I'm listening to you...

[17:22] GANGAJI: Goodness, then.

[17:23] HILLARY: ...goodness. But I think even deeper than that, frankly, I'm talking about, where does responsibility – personal responsibility – lie within this awakening?

[17:36] GANGAJI: Not in the superego; in discovery instead. If you have an idealistic view of where responsibility is, then responsibility is some burden that you're carrying around, that you're not quite matching up to, or if you feel that you are, that you're preening with. But if it's a discovery it's, it's an opportunity to open, and see, 'How is my life being used? How am I being humbled?' In this example you just gave, you saw, you weren't telling the truth. And so that was, you were actually perpetuating some distress for yourself. Simply by not telling the truth, and keeping it a certain way. But in your recognizing that, that's taking responsibility.

[18:27] HILLARY: Yeah and I'm not talking about responsibility as in, the club of responsibility, I'm talking it, about it in the freedom of responsibility. So maybe deeper than this, what I'm talking about is the willingness to tell the truth.

[18:47] GANGAJI: Which is what you just said. And you had that. But somehow what I heard, is that you were, you had a dualistic, 'How is it possible that I can have this resonance, and still have this, this energy' – I can't remember how you described it, anger, hate, whatever it was – and, and then in telling that, you said, which was really 'I simply wasn't telling the truth, that I had had something to do with it.' But that *is* telling the truth, to me that was an example of a responsibility.

[19:24] HILLARY: I can't remember which show this was, but I was talking to you about somebody who does chanting all the time, and talks about Buddhism all the time. And then, and then he is, like, actually an incredibly rude person....

[19:38] GANGAJI: Stiffs the waitress, I think. (laughs)

[19:40] HILLARY: (laughs) Right! And then, you were talking to me about whatever that teacher was that would throw coconuts at people.

[19:47] GANGAJI: Mm-hmm. Nisargadatta.

[19:49] HILLARY: ...and I realized that...

[19:51] GANGAJI: Or his teacher, maybe.

[19:54] HILLARY: ...what I realized was that I would never want a teacher like that.

[19:57] GANGAJI: Well it could be the perfect one. It could be just, I should start throwing more coconuts at you because it breaks open your idea of *what I want* as being *what should therefore happen*. And that's what has to get shook, is our world view of *This is the right thing to happen, this is what I should have done, this is what I should be doing, since I, I had this feeling, that therefore means...* All of that has to just be blown out of the water. That in itself is a graveyard. That's the process that we, we get addicted to in our minds. And there is a psychotherapeutic religion that goes with that, that I, if I can just process that, if I can be a better person, if I can tell the truth more, and then we, we start to incorporate what any teacher has ever said into our own personal religion. And it's tyrannical. And the opportunity is, is just to let a coconut be thrown at you. Let a coconut burst. Big deal! You didn't want it. We don't want death and it's coming! And death is the major teacher. There's no life without it. We don't want pain and it comes. But pain, what pain teaches us. If we really got what we wanted, there'd be no life at all. It'd be like a blank wall. It's the very fact that we *don't* get what we want that we finally realize that perhaps it's not about what I want, it's about what's here. And in that example you used, it's the energy you were feeling, even though you were also feeling a, a resonance, there was something that was in your field of attention – and that's, that's valid, you can either drop it, you're free to drop it, you're free to process it, you're free to open to it, you're, you're free. You have choice. It doesn't mean anything inherently. It doesn't mean anything about who you are.

[22:24] HILLARY: I so have those two things linked up, the idea that when you're awake, that comes with that territory is being responsible and ethical and good and kind. And not with the, and not with the – you're, look, see, you're just, shaking your head at me – but not with the club.

[22:45] GANGAJI: But that *is* a club. That's your club, that's the good, little good miss girl club. Where nobody throws coconuts, where everybody has good manners, and it's, it's not life. And it's also of, reflective of a very deep mistrust of the innate goodness that is here, that may not look like goodness in the moment. It's what happens with religion and different world views that gets put on top of what our nature is because our, we see our nature is filled with original sin. And so we have to correct that. And then that becomes the life's process. And that's the religion that I'm talking about, this, certainly if you had bad behavior, correct your bad behavior. But don't identify yourself as that behavior. There's a deeper identity that's already free of that. It's not about even waking up in the way you think of waking up. The way you think of waking up is already polluted by the dogma that has been accepted by the brainwashing, by the indoctrination. So, think of what's never asleep. It's not about you waking up. Who you are is already awake. This 'you' that will wake up is some made-up object in your mind, of *the Hillary person*, or the person who's good some of the time, but not enough of the time, and should have been nicer to that waitress, or should have spoken better to that person. And that's all the indoctrination of suffering. What's already awake? Are you willing to stop practicing whatever your religion is for one moment to see what's always here, what's already pure? It doesn't need fixing, doesn't need bettering, doesn't need to take on more responsibility, or let go of responsibility. It's free of indoctrination. That's what the invitation is.

[25:25] HILLARY: The only thing I know is that when I, when I tell the truth, the relative truth, when I take responsibility, I feel space.

[25:38] GANGAJI: That's the deeper truth. So is that space ever really absent for, as a way of discovering that, don't tell the truth for a moment. Don't be concerned with telling the relative truth for a moment. And just ask yourself, where is that space? It's not relative.

[26:06] HILLARY: Hmm.

[26:09] GANGAJI: 'Cause if we get in deeper bondage by what anybody says to us – certainly by what I say or what Papaji said or Ramana said, or whoever the saints or sages that you've read have been moved for – if we take that, whatever is said, and incorporate that into our own personal indoctrination, then it's useless. Don't meet it, don't have responsibility, don't tell the truth. What's here? Who are you?

[26:49] HILLARY: I've said this before: when I first started a spiritual path, I pretty much was trying to save my life. And that was through telling the truth, asking myself, 'What's your motive in this moment?' And it was concrete, something that my mind can think with. And it's been beautiful for me. And it feels right for me, to really look and see where, like, and, and I'm, I'm just so not talking about punishing myself at all. It's the exact opposite of that, it's this liberation, when I really sit and look at, where am I just a little off here? And then I feel this space. But I realize as you're talking is that's a safe zone for me, because I understand it with my mind. And when you ask me to go deeper than that...

[27:42] GANGAJI: I'm asking you to give up your process, you know, as appropriate as it may have been. Certainly there is room for everything, and there's a time for everything. But what's already free of everything? That's really telling the truth.

[28:06] MUSIC BEGINS AND CONTINUES PLAYING IN THE BACKGROUND

[28:08] GANGAJI: That has nothing to do with what you feel or what you did or, finally even what you want. It's, let's tell the truth. That's all that's needed.

[28:19] MUSIC

[28:35] HILLARY: You can listen to more episodes of *A Conversation With Gangaji*, and *Epiphany* by searching iTunes or Spotify, or by going to the Gangaji website. And as always, I want to remind you that Gangaji has a live webcast every month. You can find out about that by going to gangaji.org. Thank you for taking the time to be here with us once again. I'm Hillary Larson. This has been *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

[29:03] ENDING MUSIC