

Gangaji Podcast  
Being Yourself  
Episode 23  
Host Barbara Denempont  
Meeting the Roots of Racism Within – Part Two  
Released July 23, 2020  
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[00:00] MUSIC

[00:03] GANGAJI: Because this is huge, to actually stop where you are and open to what in the depth of your emotional being is, is present—to open to that, without following the narrative of that. This requires the capacity to want freedom—to want ... o have recognized that the old way doesn't work. The conditioned way doesn't work.

[00:35] BARBARA DENEMPONT, HOST: Hello and welcome to *Being Yourself: Self-Inquiry with Gangaji*. My name is Barbara Denempont. On our last podcast, Gangaji and I began a conversation on racism, and today I'm going to bring you Part 2. We're going to just pick it up right where we left off, as we were diving into the conversation about not just the fear of death but also the fear of freedom, and the fear of others' freedom.

Let's take a listen.

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[01:06] BARBARA: Part of my experience after, you know, having this moment of reckoning was also the thrill of the possibility, the thrill of being able to welcome everything into my heart, that finally also includes my own failings and lack, and just to bring it all home.

GANGAJI: Yes. Yes. It's all your own self.

BARBARA: And there's such wonder in that; there's such aliveness in that. And that's what incredibly we're overlooking—that deepest truth: this is my own self—because we're scared to die, scared to lose.

GANGAJI: I don't even know if most people are interested in that, but I know that people who are tuned into this podcast or interested in spiritual matters are somehow attracted to this wonder that you speak of that's possible.

BARBARA: So there's another aspect—we're going to maybe refer to James Baldwin a few times, but I recently watched a film about him, *I Am Not Your Negro*. At the end of the film, he says, or he asks the question to white people: "Why did you invent the N word?" He goes, "Because I'm not that, but you invented that. Why did you invent that?" And I could not respond in that moment when I first heard it, but later I was listening to you have a conversation with somebody and you were speaking about the whip and punishment. And I thought, it's punishment; it's that there's some aspect of myself—and I mean this collectively—that requires

punishment, that's bad or wrong, and that that is the quintessential unnecessary suffering or self-hatred that appears to be running in the human species—that we need to be punished.

GANGAJI: Yeah.

BARBARA: Do you feel any of that or see any of that?

GANGAJI: Well, I know that that's what we have to deal with. It's not just external punishment; it's internal punishment and how we, how we hate ourselves and call ourselves the worst names we can think of to keep ourselves in line. Because we're afraid if we're free, we don't know what would happen. We don't know. We're afraid of ourselves. But then that gets projected out on Other; we're afraid of what they will do if they are free, because they might take my home or they might march in the streets.

And so there's this willingness to recognize the fear of that, and to not demonize the fear, but to not follow it—again, just to open to it, it's energy that's arising that is part of the hardwiring of our brains. We have that fear so that we survive. And we survive over others so that we survive and that our lineage survives. It's very basic. It's just—now it's obsolete and it's causing our own—certainly diminishment—and maybe death. Then it's planetary. It's, we do it to our biosphere, we do it to other creatures. But it's all about *me*. It's all about *my* survival or *my* lineage surviving. And that's, that's the ego. That's the suffering. Because you can never get enough. You can never get enough survival; there's always some threat. So to stop where you are and in this moment, not survive, not know what *they* will do, not know what *you* will do. Just open. And then you can't even find "they" or "you." "They" doesn't exist; that's a construct. We speak about race as a construct, as it is, based on a color of skin; "they" is a construct based on sensory information from one object, me, to another object, them.

BARBARA: The inquiry, then, into fear—what's required? What's possible for us in looking at our own conditioning and meeting it?

GANGAJI: Well, I really believe that first of all what's required is some desire to, to not be controlled by fear that arises. I don't know that that even appears for many people. And many people don't have the luxury of even inquiring into that, because fear is what gets them across the river or their next piece of bread. For those of us listening, who are really interested in a deeper experience of life and the freedom for all Being, that all Being may live in peace and happiness, what's required is first of all to recognize fear as this emotional energy that arises—and arises sometimes quite appropriately, where action is required, and sometimes arises quite inappropriately, where it's just a habitual triggering of fear that then the action that follows is usually a retreat or, as you were speaking about, denial. Some withdrawal or going blank.

The possibility is to recognize that fear and to recognize any thoughts that are associated with it, and just stop the thoughts for a moment and really fully experience this fear. Because as you also just said, it's ultimately a fear of death. A fear of "me" not surviving. And we just can't say, "Oh, well, I won't have that anymore," because it's a part of us and it's ultimately not wrong; it's a part of us. So it's not the fear. It's the unwillingness to really inquire into the fear so that the fear—whenever it appears—has ascendancy. If you recognize there's fear, that's appropriate

and there's just this habitual fear—what is that? Then your own curiosity can lead you into the depths of that without the narrative about what they might do or you might do. Just into the energetic experience of fear.

And fear is not by itself; there's another emotion underneath fear or another experience. And sometimes it leads to really just the existential dread of not being and being. And this is usually avoided in any number of ways in our lives. We are taught to avoid it and we go for avoidance. But in a moment of inquiry, you can actually meet that dread—the dread of death, the dread of living, the dread of knowing, the dread of not knowing—just the weight of that, the heaviness of that, the darkness of that. And in the willingness to meet that without the story, there is a discovery underneath that. And it's, it's good news. And it's always been good news. It just requires the maturity and the recognition of habit and the desire to be free, so that all may be free. The desire to live freely. It's a natural desire. May all people's desire to live freely be realized.

BARBARA: And the meeting of that fear, whatever aspect of the fear—whether it's the fear of being oppressed or the fear of not surviving—it really ... you're speaking of all-

GANGAJI: It's the same-

BARBARA: All the versions of fears that we have.

GANGAJI: Because the versions are our different narratives, and they're legitimate or illegitimate, but they're still narratives. Underneath that is the pure energy of fear. And that can be a savior or a tyrant, depending on the narrative. But in the willingness to give up both savior and tyrant—to just meet the pure experience of energy. And often it's fear to be. You, of course, already *are*; you're hearing this, you *are*. But it's fear to be fully That. Or fear in this, from this conversation today of allowing someone else to be fully who they are, because there's some perceived threat of being who you are, of allowing them to be who they are.

BARBARA: The other theme that came up in last month's podcast was “resolve”. And this will take resolve, this, you know to sit in your seat, to meet this.

GANGAJI: It's no small matter. It's huge. And when I said I don't know that everybody is ready for the hugeness, I mean that. I say that often when I meet with people. Because this is huge, to actually stop where you are and open to what in the depth of your emotional being is, is present—to open to that, without following the narrative of that. This requires the capacity to want freedom, to want ... to have recognized that the old way doesn't work. The conditioned way doesn't work. And maybe we don't know what does work. But in that meeting—that's a meeting of discovery. That's the discovery of life and intelligence. Potential. And then, of course, why would we ever want to keep that from ourselves? Or from anyone? It is, it's the beauty of life.

BARBARA: And that is the gift of disillusionment, or, as I've heard you once say, the jewel in disillusionment.

GANGAJI: I think that that's some requirement, actually, to recognize that the illusion is pretty banal, actually. That the depth of Being is so big, so huge, so inclusive, so celebratory, so filled with love and spaciousness.

BARBARA: Well, there was one last thing I wanted to bring up. I would love to continue this conversation; it feels like there's so much more. But there was something I wanted to ask you personally—when we moved into this office, put up photos, and you have photos of Papaji here at the office and photos of Ramana, and two really exquisite portraits—one of Nelson Mandela and one of Martin Luther King. And I just wanted to ask you about that and what they have meant to you in your journey toward freedom.

GANGAJI: Everything. They've meant everything. When I was just out of college and just married and actually had just had my baby, I was doing some teaching part-time and Martin Luther King came to Memphis where I was teaching, because the sanitation workers were having a strike. And their placard said "I am a man." "I am a man." Because they weren't treated as men; the wages were horrible and of course the work was horrible. So the marches grew really big and my husband—my then husband—and I joined the marchers. And he was my hero, you know? I saw him and then he was shot and killed. As part of that same sanitation strike he came back to Memphis and was martyred. And it was heartbreaking, you know? It was a heartbreaking time.

So in that heartbreak—this is the disillusionment you're speaking of—I was not heartbroken as a white person; I was heartbroken as a person who saw unnecessary suffering and saw this beautiful being who spoke so eloquently about that suffering and about the possibility for all of us to join together to recognize suffering and to stop it. So it had a profound effect on me.

And then years later, the same thing with Nelson Mandela, you know, to follow his career somewhat in South Africa and the horrors that were going on in South Africa. I had grown up in the South, which was apartheid, and then here's a whole country that's apartheid. And his speaking out and going to prison and, and deepening his own realization while in prison, as great saints have done—St. John and different saints that we know, that when they're in the worst of situations they can deepen. And he did. And then to be released and made president of South Africa. And his, he generated the amnesty program, where people could come forth and just tell the truth about what they had done to one another and ask for forgiveness. To me that was so enlightened. Present-day enlightenment. And so he was a standard-bearer for that. Just beautiful.

I used to have one up of Malcolm X. I don't know ... I think maybe that's at the Leela office. Because even though Malcolm X was a polarizing figure, he was a beautiful figure and he was so strong in his speaking directly and calling out the white people for the harm they continued to do. So, yeah, these have been my heroes. And my hero of heroes that I don't have any pictures of but I've talked about a lot in *satsang* is Harriet Tubman, you know, who escapes slavery and goes back to, to help others escape. And what a strong woman she was, what a hero she is for all of our time.

BARBARA: Yes, to be free of the real prisons and the mental prisons completely.

GANGAJI: Yes. And the real prisons first.

BARBARA: Yes.

GANGAJI: So that you have the wherewithal and the luxury of discovering the deeper prisons.

When I was in college at Ole Miss in Mississippi, there were teachers that were coming down from Harvard and Yale just to teach a semester or two with the purpose of actually confronting young people like myself with our racism. And I had a history professor who—Dr. Hamer; I wish I knew how to get in touch with him and thank him—who really challenged all of us in this class, these Mississippians, on, what—in the name of what our fathers were holding together, what's the truth in that, what's the validity of that. This was an American history course. And I think without that challenge I would have just rolled along in it. He gave us, gave me, an intellectual challenge where I saw that it just makes no sense. It made no sense for the maid that we had to call me Miss Toni when I called her Florence, and she's a, she's a woman in her 40s. And so that shifted something for me.

And I went back home to Mississippi and told Florence that I'm not Miss Toni anymore; I'm Toni. And my father exploded, because he thought he sent me to the one safe school in the United States, and I'm coming home bringing Communism back. Because in his mind, the equality of the races was Communistic. So it was an interesting confrontation. And a really necessary confrontation. I love my father, you know; I never heard him say anything harmful to any Black person or about any Black person. But he was a confirmed racist, and that had to be confronted in my own body and in my own family. It set me on a certain ... it freed me. It freed me at a certain level that was so necessary for me to actually inquire into other freedoms—intellectual freedoms; physical, sexual freedoms; and finally, spiritual freedom. And I don't know that any of that could have happened without that one teacher challenging beliefs that I didn't even know I had that were just so a part of me. Separating the belief out, challenging it. And it just doesn't hold up. Doesn't make sense.

BARBARA: Well, that feels like an opportunity we have to be challenged, and to challenge ourselves not to become defensive but to truly challenge our ... How am I thinking? How am I acting? What am I protecting? There's some ... it's a rich inquiry.

GANGAJI: It's inquiry. That's right. It's true inquiry.

BARBARA: And it will be challenging. I feel in my own experience that this teaching, this invitation from you, from Papaji and Ramana, to discover the truth of yourself, who you truly are, the substance that you are, makes it absolutely possible to do hard things. And to do what perhaps you never could imagine would be possible, including loving yourself. Truly loving yourself. In all ways, in all form. And formlessness.

GANGAJI: Yeah. That's it.

BARBARA: Thank you, Gangaji. Thank you for this time.

GANGAJI: Oh, it was my great joy. May it serve.

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[20:28] BARBARA: As we dive into this conversation on racism, ultimately we do find ourselves at the root of it—the fear. And I absolutely know that what this invitation from Ramana, from Papaji, from Gangaji is to meet that fear, which—finally—is to meet your own death. I know that sounds dramatic in a way, but really that's it: to meet your own death. And when we look to these great civil rights leaders—we look to Harriet Tubman, Nelson Mandela—we see their courage. And what I believe is true about all of them is that they met their death. And they saw something more. So we can all be encouraged, all be supported, in this resolve ... to be free. And to serve the freedom of all. All beings, everywhere.

Before I sign off today, I just want to remind you that Gangaji's website, [gangaji.org](http://gangaji.org), that's [gangaji.org](http://gangaji.org), is there for you. You can learn more about Gangaji if you don't know much about her, and you can find lots of material to browse through. And if you have a topic suggestion for us, you can write to me, Barb, at [info@gangaji.org](mailto:info@gangaji.org).

Thanks for listening. Until next time.