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A Conversation With Gangaji Series

Host Hillary Larson

Episode 39

BEING ALONE (RELATIONSHIP SERIES PART 3 OF 3)

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[00:02] INTRODUCTION MUSIC

[00:11] GANGAJI: When we're saying 'what does it mean to be alone?' whether you're single or in relationship, it is the possibility and the capacity to open to that longing for true connection. For absolute connection. And that is the longing for home.

[00:29] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: If one can reach a point where they are certain of the love that lies within themselves – and I'm not talking about that in an egotistical way – the choice to be with or without a partner is free. It's no longer based on insecurity or identification. Some of us feel better when we're in a relationship, and that can be an absolutely beautiful thing. But it can also not serve us so well if it's rooted in dependency. Some of us are more accustomed to being single. But what if that's not by choice? What does that mean about us? So, is it better to be single, or in a relationship? And what do we do with the feeling of loneliness that can happen, no matter who we're with? We're wrapping up our three-part series on relationships this month, by talking about what it means to be alone. I'm Hillary Larson, and this is *A Conversation With Gangaji*.

[01:26] HILLARY: I actually had some trouble with this one, when I was preparing for this interview. And I always do, like I've said several times before, I always write some notes to myself because sometimes I can tend to go blank. But then often I don't use my notes, because we end up taking a right turn that I don't expect – which is great – but, my problem this time actually was that I had too many notes. And I had so many directions I felt like we could go in with this subject of being alone. And since this conversation is specifically about relationships, it seemed to me the obvious place to start was being in a relationship versus being single. And I wanted to see if I could kind of break that down into two categories. And one of the categories was people that tend to be in relationships and there's no break in-between. And when I was thinking about that, I was looking at that, that thing that you said on the show – I think it was about being vulnerable – where life can be like a radio show, where there's no space. Like there's no willingness just to be in the, the space of nothingness. And I definitely have seen people that are in a relationship – for whatever reason it doesn't work out – and then it's like, the search is immediate for the next relationship. So I wanted to talk about that, first, and then I'll move on to category number two, which would be people that really have a difficult time being in a relationship.

[02:59] GANGAJI: Yeah, well both (chuckles), both issues are about alone aren't they? The avoidance of aloneness is what I'm assuming this sequel relationship habit is about, is, oh, I know it well, actually. I, that was my experience of it, go from one relationship to the other because it was almost as if I was gasping for air when I was out of relationship. Is really, that, that's what told me who and how I was. So without a reference point of relationship, I was adrift. And I, at that time, didn't know anything about inquiry, or, or meditation, and, in fact that's one of the great benefits of meditation is that you are alone there on the cushion and so in that, a lot of fears and threats can arise and you don't move. And then you

recognize they dissipate. So, it was, I think it's only when someone recognizes that there's a movement going from relationship to relationship to relationship, that then you can perhaps question, what is this movement? And why do I have to define myself in relationship? I think often people who do that never even consider that they're doing that. It's, it's, feels so natural. So once you're ready to consider that, then you're ready to, to meet this utter vulnerability of being alone. I know I always – or at least often – bring up the fear of death, but I think it's really important that we as human animals always recognize that we are primarily bound by this instinct to live. And, it's a beautiful bondage, because it does work to keep us alive, and that's wonderful. But in order to really inquire, and in order to really reflect and tell the truth, there has to be at least a moment where that instinct is not followed. Where you are simply sitting on your cushion, or you are simply opening to the pain. And that's what being alone is, it's a threat to survival, 'cause none of us survives alone, and so the more we can have a relationship, the more we can prove to ourselves that we aren't alone. And that at least we have some hope of survival. When we are willing to meet 'no hope', to meet death, then that, I think quite naturally then this compulsion to be in relationship is cut. And that's when, then there's choice; before that, there's no choice, there's just a reaction to the impulse to, to get protection, to get security. To get definition.

[06:08] HILLARY: In our conversation, in the first series we did, part one of our relationship series, we were talking about attachment and dependency. And you went down a road I wasn't expecting, as in 'attachment is a beautiful thing'. And I'm, the direction I was, I thought we would go in would be that's it's not. And so I see what you're saying by that, the beauty of just fully connecting with somebody and wanting to be with somebody. But can I go into the negative side of that? Because I think it ties into this, 'I have to be in a relationship all the time', of, the issue of, being so dependent on a relationship, it keeps you from seeing what's underneath the dependency.

[06:56] GANGAJI: Oh yes, that's a different matter. That's when we're talking about 'relationship as a disease' rather than as an expression of, of love or connection. And so, yes, it has to be seen: the compulsion. I was saying the compulsion to be in relationship is like all compulsive actions, a disease, and it's a covering. It's an addiction, it's another addiction.

[07:24] HILLARY: There's a, identification to that too I think, of like, 'oh I'm in a relationship'. Identifying oneself as being 'a couple'.

[07:33] GANGAJI: Yeah.

[07:34] HILLARY: And I think there's also an identification of, somebody identifying themselves as being single, and while being single can be very good, it can also be its own form of protection, right?

[07:49] GANGAJI: Certainly. Certainly, yeah. So really that, then we see that there's no particular formula, that any form can either serve as, as support for the neurosis, or support for the suffering. Or it can simply be a, an exquisite expression and deeper discovery. It's, so then it has to be, if we just erase the formula – in relationship or out of relationship – then what we are left with really is alone. And it's, takes us back to our earlier conversation about self-betrayal. Are we really willing to be in relationship with ourselves? Be true to ourselves? Without even knowing or understanding what that means. Because I, it's a discovery. And if we don't have a formula for that, either, but just a willingness to actually discover, what does

it mean to be in relationship with myself? What does it mean to be really alone? To have no one who will save me, or ultimately protect me. Define me, prove my worth. Reinforce me, whatever it is, just to be in the desert, alone.

[09:11] HILLARY: I think there's a, kind of a, superficial or an outward layer to that, and then there's an inward awareness of that. And so the outward, to me, is the stigma of being alone, the stigma of being single. And then the inward experience of, maybe, just feeling lonely. And maybe people who are, you know, there've been times where I've been in relationship I've felt lonely, and there've been times I've been single and I felt lonely. But, a couple months ago, you know, it seems like when, when a topic comes up the right, I start seeing things that relate to that topic. And I happened to see this article in The New York Times, and it was called *Quirky Alone is Still Alone*, and I wanted to read a paragraph from it that stood out to me. And he says, 'at rare moments, thinking of all my friendships, flirtations, and flings, each with it's own mix of camaraderie, affection, and sexual tension, I feel privileged, as if my life is much richer than those of my friends, stuck in longtime marriages. But alone and awake in the hours after midnight, I can't help feel illegitimate, peripheral, as if I'm missing some crucial piece of human equipment.'

[10:33] GANGAJI: That's so interesting because I felt that way in relationship, when I was in a relationship that needed to end. I felt so lonely, and so – and maybe in particular after midnight when all the activities that can distract us from our aloneness were finished – and it was really the relationship itself that was making me feel illegitimate and, it was an expression of self-betrayal. So again I think it really shows that in both cases – and this person is a single person and myself, when I was not single – having to meet something that hasn't yet been met, that is deeper than the form. And that seems to me what we're in conversation about.

[11:21] HILLARY: Over the last three years, you've actually received quite a few letters from people wanting you to address the subject of being alone but, but their deeper question was this question of being lonely, and it sounded to me like in the majority of these letters, these were people that are single, not in a relationship, perhaps not seeing the potential of a relationship on the horizon, and feeling this really deep loneliness as a result of that. Of like, 'there's the rest of the world out there in their relationships, and then there's me'.

[11:59] GANGAJI: Yes, I, I know this yearning, this longing, it's a longing for connection. And it's legitimate (chuckles), and it's part of our animal nature, and that we are made to experience that so that we go get in, in at least some kind of group setting and, and perhaps pair-bonding. But if we're willing to not fix that longing, to actually allow that to be there and, to open to the pain of it, there is a discovery and that's really what, when we're saying 'what does it mean to be alone?' whether you're single or in relationship, it is the possibility and the capacity to open to that longing. For true connection, for absolute connection. And that is the longing for home. That's the longing for self, for the beloved, it's often called in Sufi terms or Eastern terms. And yes, we do long for that. And it's a beautiful longing. And if we're willing to not fill up that longing with form, or void that longing because of fear, to just open to it, it delivers. At the source of that longing, is the beloved.

[13:25] HILLARY: I always try to find ways to get other voices in here, in our conversations, and I, I found a clip of somebody who had an exchange with you and he, he just was so clear – in the problem, this is the thing that eats at me – and it had to do with the object of love. Meaning, *you* are the object of my love, a *relationship* is the object of my love, and I

love the way you walked him through the process, so... this is a, a little bit of a longer exchange but I think it's really worth hearing this whole thing.

(clip)

[13:59] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBER: *I have this, I think, idea that I need an 'other' in order to experience love.*

[14:09] GANGAJI: *But even this desire for this object to love, to experience love, where is that coming from?*

[14:16] AUDIENCE MEMBER: *(sighs) It's right in the solar plexus.*

[14:21] GANGAJI: *And what, how would you describe it by looking at it?*

[14:25] AUDIENCE MEMBER: *(sighs) It looks like a void.*

[14:28] GANGAJI: *A void? But it's not just a void, there must be some desire in there, a longing or something?*

[14:34] AUDIENCE MEMBER: *(sighs)*

[14:35] GANGAJI: *So if you enter that, you, you be that, fully,*

[14:41] AUDIENCE MEMBER: *(sighs)*

[14:43] GANGAJI: *And you recognize the tendency to, to judge that, or define that, or evaluate that and just suspend that for a moment and you just be there completely.*

[14:55] AUDIENCE MEMBER: *(sighs)*

[14:56] GANGAJI: *What do you find?*

[15:00] AUDIENCE MEMBER: *(sighs)*

[15:01] GANGAJI: *What are you experiencing?*

[15:03] AUDIENCE MEMBER: *It's this sense of being really alone.*

[15:04] GANGAJI: *Being alone. So this is what the desire for connection always come to. So if you are going backwards, though, rather than following that desire for true connection – it's not wrong, but we're discovering something deeper – in this moment, are you willing to be completely, absolutely, irrevocably, alone?*

[15:24] AUDIENCE MEMBER: *(sighs)*

[15:25] GANGAJI: *This is, goes against all of our survival instincts. We're just inquiring here. And you have to be alone to inquire. No one can inquire for you, or even with you. So...*

[15:41] AUDIENCE MEMBER: *I already am.*

[15:42] GANGAJI: *Yeah, and what's the experience?*

[15:46] AUDIENCE MEMBER: *It's, it's just, it's just what already is. No?*

[15:47] GANGAJI: *But, no, there's - but what is what already is? When you really are completely alone, what's the experience?*

[15:56] AUDIENCE MEMBER: *(sighs)*

[15:57] GANGAJI: *What does it mean to be alone? Fully? With no hope of other?*

[16:04] AUDIENCE MEMBER: *(sighs) That feels whole.*

[16:09] GANGAJI: *(laughs)*

[16:10] UNNAMED AUDIENCE MEMBERS: *(laughter)*

[16:13] GANGAJI: *That's, that you break the code of what 'alone' means. So in this moment, where we are meeting, and you are simply alone, am I separate from, from you? Am I not appearing, here....*

[16:32] AUDIENCE MEMBER: *It's like I can't make sense of that question, like, separate, not separate...*

[16:35] GANGAJI: *Yeah, that's right! Then, then separate is still not separate. Yeah, the appearance is of separation. That's it, because you dared to go in that moment where we are programmed not to go. Don't be alone. And even if you're not in partnership, you're not alone, 'cause we're that kind of species. We need each other for survival. And for connection. And we love each other, we actually love that. But once we start being encumbered by that, then it becomes objectified, and you can never get enough of it. But it's all already here when you recognize, yes.*

[17:20] AUDIENCE MEMBER: *That's it.*

[17:21] GANGAJI: *Good! Good!*

[17:22] AUDIENCE MEMBER: *Thank you.*

[17:23] GANGAJI: *Thank you (laughter).*

(end clip)

[17:25] HILLARY: *I have a question on that, the question of 'other' – because we wouldn't be having this conversation if there was no such thing as 'other', right? The sense of separation, because I'm sitting in this chair and you're sitting in that chair and I feel a deep connection with you, and I've felt a deep connection with many people in my life. I feel empathy, and I feel love, I feel all sorts of different emotions, but, but I still see you as separate from me.*

[17:56] GANGAJI: You see this form as separate from you.

[17:58] HILLARY: Yeah.

[17:59] GANGAJI: But if you don't identify yourself as a, any particular form, then you recognize that what this form that identifies itself as 'Hillary' is held in is the same that is holding this form that 'Hillary' identifies as 'Gangaji'. So it's really, it's not a separation from form, and it's not a merging of form, it's just a recognition of what includes all form. And that's what is really meant by non-duality, or no 'other'. That the sensation or the imagery or the definition of 'other' is included in oneself. And it is! Because we have that sensory information that informs us: me, and other. And that's the beginning point. But usually we take that as the ending point. And we took that as the ending point in order to have a conversation. Because you're right, we can't have a conversation about 'alone' if we don't have an 'other'. (chuckles) It's nonsensical. So we, we did that because that *is* the conversation that many people are having internally or externally. But it's finally a conversation that actually avoids the direct experience. And so even in this conversation of 'another' and 'aleness' we have to be willing to suspend the conversation. Suspend the sensory information. Suspend even the memories, or the hopes for the future. And, and just experience what is here. What is closer than that sensory information of me and another. And this is where most minds never look, because we are trained and we're reinforced to look outward. And that's where we find information about 'other' – and I'm not saying that's wrong, really. I'm just saying that when it reveals or leads to unnecessary suffering, then there's a possibility to inquire deeper: what is deeper than what we see? What's deeper than what we feel? What's deeper than what we know? What's deeper than our definitions of 'alone' or 'other'? Then there is this mystery, this wholeness, that has no beginning and no end. And that's what – when you say connection, you felt connection – in that connection, did that connection disappear when the forms change? Or when one form dies or when one form leaves the room? Isn't that connection alive? If it's true connection, or true meeting, truly the beloved, it's there regardless of formation. And it is there, it is here, where one is. And this yearning, or this loneliness, can be the beginning point for really shifting the outward thrust of mind to really, the beginning of that question, that, or the beginning of that desire, the beginning of the yearning. And there, wholeness is found.

[21:40] HILLARY: When you've talked about, that need to be in a relationship, chronically, when you were younger, was there a moment, maybe when you met Papaji, where you realized that that idea of separation was just an idea and that the, the reality of loneliness dissolved? Or what you perceived to be loneliness?

[22:04] GANGAJI: Well before I met Papaji I had had to come to terms with a compulsion to be in a relationship. And a lot of that came from the feminist movement. And paying attention to what was being talked about, and actually recognizing myself as a dependent personality, and how it didn't work. (laughter) I couldn't get enough from 'other' to actually feed my sense of insecurity, or my sense of worthlessness. So by the time I met Papaji, I, I was secure in myself as a person. And I had read enough spiritual literature and I'd hoped enough for enlightenment that I was hoping that all *sense* of separation would disappear. But that was, I, I can see now that was, it was still based on the senses, as if they were reality, and that reality would shift. It's a closer and more direct discovery. Nothing has to (chuckles) change in terms of experience of 'other' to realize the truth of one another. And so just in even phrasing it, that, that idea shift, it's – nothing happened to that idea. (Laughs) It's, nothing need happen to it. There is fulfillment here, in the midst of all the ideas. In the substance of

all the ideas. Not separate from the all, all the ideas. And yet infinitely more full than any idea.

[23:50] HILLARY: When it comes down to it....

[23:52] GANGAJI: Mm-hm... (chuckles)

[23:53] HILLARY:...(chuckles) when I think of the topics we've done – *Finding God, The Strategy of Being Nice*, the series on relationships – it seems like ultimately every single one of them comes down just to the sheer desire to be loved. And sometimes that can seem like a personal love, but when you talk about love being independent, or, not dependent on form, then, I guess really my deeper question was, was there a time when you realized that what you thought love was, actually wasn't what love was at all? That it was bigger than that?

[24:46] GANGAJI: Well what happened for me is the shift was not in the desire to be loved. The shift was in the desire to love. And nothing could stop me from that. And so it was simply the freedom to love. The permission to love. The capacity to love, regardless of form or regardless of being loved back. It's the loving itself that is its own fulfillment.

[25:21] HILLARY: Where does self-love come into that?

[25:25] GANGAJI: Self is love.

[25:30] HILLARY: And in the middle of the night, at four o'clock, clock in the morning, where what comes up sometimes is loneliness and self-love, or love seems far away....

[25:43] GANGAJI: Let it be far away. Be completely lonely. It's not a matter of 'now I will bring self-love back in'. Because then it's an object in your imagination. Be lonely, that's the, here, what a perfect time for inquiry. No distractions of work, or 'other', and here is this demon, loneliness, that's come to call. Are, are you, are you willing to open to it, without indulging it? without fighting it? without hiding from it, without dramatizing it? just to simply open to it, suspending any narrative about it and what it means, and what you will get if you open to it. Just for the pure intelligent curiosity to discover what is this when I turn my attention all the way into it? who am I? where is love? Where *is* love?

[27:13] HILLARY: This is the first time Gangaji and I have done a series on a particular topic and this one was on relationships. As kind of a crescendo to all of that I have a clip here of Gangaji I wanna play at the end, bring it all home, so to speak. And if you missed the first in this series, that was *Love and Attachment*, and then, *Abandonment and Self-Betrayal*, you can find them on the Gangaji website, gangaji.org. Also on iTunes. And speaking of topics, last month I mentioned some things that we're thinking about for two thousand sixteen: next month, Gangaji will address grace and manifestation. But later down the road we'll also be talking about sexuality and gender, scarcity and abundance, and life purpose. Please let us know if you have anything to say about any of those. We're at gangajiradio@gangaji.org. Well, over the last three months Gangaji has really brought these conversations about relationships back to what is at the core, and that is love. With the sound of Jami Sieber's cello in the background, I'm gonna leave you with this. We look forward to next time. Be well, everyone.

(clip)

[28:22] GANGAJI: Love is not a person. Love is your universal, individual, and collective soul. Love is God. Love is truth. Love is beauty. Love is peace. Love is self. And so to know yourself, to surrender to truth, is to surrender to love.