

Rick Archer: Welcome to Buddha at the Gas Pump. My name is Rick Archer and my guest this week is Gangaji. Welcome, Gangaji.

Gangaji: Thank you.

Rick: I don't know if you had a chance to look at my site, but the subtitle of it is: *Interviews with Ordinary Spiritually Awakened People*. And from what I've been listening of your interviews and satsangs and all, I've even heard you refer to yourself that way, so, sometimes when people become well known in spiritual circles they begin to attract a lot of adulation and people kind of forget that they are really ordinary people when you get right down to it. Listening to you and Eli, I was kind of charmed and refreshed by your sort of down to earth-ness and honesty and courage in some of the things you said, and good humor and all that, I think it puts people very much at ease.

Gangaji: That's good

Rick: Now, you have just written a book. You've written a number of books and you have been teaching for a long time, this one is called, *Hidden Treasure: Uncovering the Truth in Your Life Story*. And I thought I'd start by telling you a little quick hidden treasure story that I just came across. Here in Iowa, in Des Moines about six months ago somebody bought a lottery ticket, and they won, they won about \$16.5 million, but they never cashed it in. That person could very well be working in some dead end job, or having their house foreclosed, or going through all sorts of difficulties. They are a multi-millionaire and they don't even know it.

Gangaji: There it is. There it is, really. That is essentially my message that you have already won the lottery and just don't know where to look. And I'm just here to point out where to look.

Rick: And you've been pointing that out for a long time, over 20 years now. One of the things I heard you say, in listening to you recently, is that when you first, when Papaji first asked you to start teaching, you felt it was a little premature or something, he just kind of threw you out there. Threw you out of the nest and said, "Here, fly."

Gangaji: Yes.

Rick: Looking back now, do you still feel it was premature, or was that just sort of butterflies that you had when you started teaching?

Gangaji: Well, it was such a shock. And I did have a concept of what that meant, to teach, and I also knew I hadn't even read Ramana's books. Really, I was aware of Ramana, and I didn't even know what the teaching was. I knew what my experience was, and so when he said teach, it just brought forth an agenda, and I knew I couldn't meet that agenda with what I had, and as you probably know, he was fine with that. He said, "Good, then you will just speak from your experience." And he really assured me that the people who are drawn to what I have to say don't need to learn anything. That they are really ready to just stop and recognize that they've learned enough and that they can now return to the Source of their being. And so I trusted that. I knew, I mean I had just had this initial experience within and really when he told me to teach I hadn't had this huge shift that came later, but I trusted that I could just meet with people and share my experience, so I didn't have to elevate myself, as you were speaking earlier, I could meet them as regular people and that's what he wanted. He wanted me to be able to

speaking in plain English and speaking in the vernacular of our times and speaking of the person who is of the times. And he was like that too, even though, since he was an Indian patriarch there was an aura of glamor around him, but he was, you know, he was also a human being with moods and opinions and all the rest.

Rick: Yeah. I've known some pretty famous teachers, Maharishi and Amaji and so on, and when you sort of get in the inner circle just a little bit, get a piece of it, Ama liked to watch Indian soap operas, and Maharishi had all of his human foibles.

Gangaji: Yeah, even Ramana, who was supposed to be a total saint, got cranky and angry with people.

Rick: Read the newspaper and

Gangaji: Yeah. Had lots of clocks.

Rick: (Laughter) So we're all human beings. So - I'm sorry go ahead. You were going to say something.

Gangaji: No, I was just going to say, you know, what you were saying about people and the sort of adulation it can attract, that's often a phase that we go through, because I know when I met Papaji, it was as if he was parenting me in a way that my parents weren't equipped to, and I did look up to him. I mean, I still do. I did revere him, and I recognized that what he was offering was precious. So that is present, but it doesn't mean that I saw him as having to be infallible in some kind of idealistic way. I recognized that he could be a full human being and yet what he offered me was so huge that I was at his feet. I don't allow people to be at my feet – we're in a different culture – but I think the respect that comes from receiving a true teaching or a true

transmission is valid and important, so that you don't trivialize it. You don't just see it, like this is like reading Time Magazine or something, because it's something that is extraordinary.

Rick: I'm reminded of the Gita, when you said that, where Krishna referred to Arjuna as my devotee and friend. You know, and they were very much on a friendship basis, but then at a certain point, Krishna revealed his full form, you know, what he really was, and Arjuna couldn't handle it for very long. He said, "Take it away. I just want to see the ordinary guise that you use."

Gangaji: That's right. I think what happens is that we get it in flashes, and it is so vast, whether it's a form of the guru or a form of life itself, it's so huge, that it penetrates our construction of reality, but because we are human beings, and because we are human beings and we have minds we reconstruct reality at a safe distance, but once it has been penetrated, we also know that at a deeper place.

Rick: So when you first started teaching, and you hadn't really had your big thunder-lap moment, were you just saying to people, "Hey, you know, I haven't had a big major shift, but Papaji asked me to teach, so here I am and this is what I want to tell you." Is that kind of how you presented it?

Gangaji: Well, I had had major experiences, I didn't know that I hadn't had the major shift. I was totally happy and maybe that was the ground that allowed the major shift. I wasn't looking for anything else. He had stopped my mind. I had recognized that all of my search was trying to reach this place that was here, and I was in a bliss state.

Rick: Perpetually, more or less?

Gangaji: Well, a lot, anyway, and certain people could feel it, and so really, he had said to me earlier, you just share yourself, and if they ask a question you answer it, so I didn't come in saying. "This is what you do." It started by someone saying, "I'm feeling something, I'm feeling kind of burning, what's happening?" And I said, "Well, let me tell you what happened to me." And it rolled from that. But I think that this is really important the fact that I wasn't looking for anything. I felt fulfilled. I felt I had met my teacher and I felt he had pointed me toward this ocean of fulfillment and I was just overflowing and in that, I wasn't seeking, and so my mind wasn't measuring, how enlightened am I? How deep am I? It was spacious, and the shift was natural then.

Rick: So, we'll backtrack a little bit, but I'm tempted to ask you about that thunderclap moment that you mentioned, on one of your recordings, you were at Esalen, I believe, with Eli, doing something, and all of a sudden out of the blue, kaboom!

Gangaji: Yeah. We were sitting on the bed laughing, and just reveling in our good fortune at meeting Papaji and just speaking of the dharma and one of the wonderful conversations, but really just overflowing in love and recognition of good fortune and then there was just a, I couldn't, it was not in time awareness, it was less than an instant, and there was just, I didn't even know it was there, but there was a removal of self-doubt, there was something that, to even say that it fell away, puts it in time, like there was some progression. It was just, pop! And all of a sudden I really recognized without a doubt that it is impossible for me to be separate from anything that I am aware of, anything that I am experiencing. And it just was an incredible moment and the reverberations of that moment are still present.

Rick: Yeah. Usually doubt has a kind of a mental connotation, I doubt whether there is a heaven or reincarnation, or whatever, we use that word to refer to our ideas and a lot of those things are hard to resolve, but in your case it is clear that sudden removal of doubt, it didn't take place through an intellectual process, you are not trying to work something out, ok, I've got it now, there is no longer a doubt. And also, it had a profound impact experientially. It wasn't just changing your mind, but your whole ground of being, your whole experience shifted in conjunction with that. Would you care to elaborate on that observation.

Gangaji: Yes, I would say it was global. I mean that it was the mind, the thinking mind, was without doubt, but also in maybe subconscious fixated regions, that was gone, a habit of seeing myself as less than inadequate, or deficient. I mean the only way I knew it was removed was because I was right-side up. It's as if you spend your life with your head in the sand, and you don't realize it, because that is the way you've always lived your life, but then all of a sudden I was right-side up, and everything was in place. So, I can't say that after that moment I never had any more small doubt or I never had a sense of inadequacy, but something had been penetrated to such a degree that if some old vasana arose, some old habit of mine arose, it didn't have the same power, there was no place that it could stick to. So that's what I mean when I say it was global, it was like a sweep, and even these words aren't adequate, you know. Really, I felt that it was Papaji's transmission and it just took a while for it to penetrate. It happened in my meeting Papaji, it couldn't have happened without that, and I was already feeling fulfilled, as I said, in meeting him, so my mind was at ease. I wasn't trying to figure anything out. I didn't feel a need to know

anything in that moment. And we were laughing, I think that was important, so there was already the

Rick: conducive to it.

Gangaji: Yes!

Rick: Was there even a shift –you say it was global - was there any kind of a marked shift in your physiology, was there like a sudden settling, or increased smoothness, or any such thing in physiology? Maybe in that moment. I would say, my physiology has been slower to shift, I think the body is denser, my nervous system is still the nervous system I came in with, but you know, when I reflect on the way I was then, or really prior to meeting Papaji, and the way I am now, yeah, I am much more at ease, naturally, and much more, yeah, things have lined up, but it took the body longer. But I wasn't looking to the body as a reference point, I wasn't looking to my emotions as a reference point, so they, in time, just settled. Settled is a good work for it.

Rick: You used the word transmission, do you feel that – and we perhaps could define that a bit more – but do you feel that transmission is the most critical element in bringing about people's awakening, as opposed to the words the teacher says or any other such thing.

Gangaji: Well, I believe it is critical. I mean, words are important but we can get words and teachings from any number of sources and they may even be transmitting, but if we aren't receiving that transmission, we can have an intellectual understanding and that can support us, because it can resonate with something deep, but when I use the word transmission I am speaking really a bit more generally, well, maybe in

this instant I was speaking specifically, but we are always transmitting to each other.

Rick: Everyone.

Gangaji: Yeah. We're limbic brained creatures, so there is a transmission that either comes from our body language or maybe more mysterious than that, more subtle, but just as being humans we pick up – or we get it from a book or photograph - so there is some mystery, and usually what we are picking up from each other is suffering or misery or if somebody is happy and laughing we pick that up, possibly, but with Papaji, his transmission was congruent with his teaching, with his words, and so there was an alignment with that that made his words as powerful as the transmission, and yet he could be totally silent and there was a transmission. But to me the words were very important, because I'm a mental creature and

Rick: An English teacher, at one point.

Gangaji: Yeah, and I like the workings of the mind, and his words were so beautiful. He really used the language very exquisitely.

Rick: Yeah. I've had the opportunity to be in the presence of a couple of great teachers, as I mentioned, and in my experience the darshan, the being in their proximity, you can cut it with a knife, there's just this sort of thick spirituality, or whatever you want to call it, that just profoundly shifts you if you are in that atmosphere. And that must have been your experience around Papaji.

Gangaji: Well, he definitely had a lot of Shakti, a lot of energy. Yeah. You know and I've also been in the presence of other teachers who had a lot of Shakti or people who weren't even teachers, just people who have charisma, or Shakti, but I think when you are with someone who is, as you were referring to, a teacher or master, someone who has the Shakti, maybe naturally, or charisma, we could call it, and they have the wisdom of a sage to go with that, then it is like arrows hitting home.

Rick: And you are also attuning yourself to them, I mean, you could be thick as a brick and it might not have any influence, but you are receptive, you are open, you are focusing on what they are doing, or who they are, whatever, so there is like this resonance that allows their transmission to facilitate your awakening.

Gangaji: You know, I paid very close attention to Papaji, but he often spoke of different kinds of people. He said there were camphor people, there are people who feel the transmission, or hear one word, and they just ignite. And then there are people who are like paper, it takes putting the flame to them and then they ignite. There are people like wood, where you have to fan it a little bit, and wet wood, where you have fan it a lot, and he said there are some rock people or stone people, but still the heat from the Shakti, the energy, the transmission will finally penetrate.

Rick: I think that is good for people to hear, because I think some people get discouraged sometimes. They feel like I'm one of the stone people, it's never going to happen in me. I've seen people who have meditated for decades, were on a spiritual path, and then just giving up and going back to drugs, or alcoholism. A friend of mine died about a year ago from drugs and alcohol whom I had been on long

meditation courses with back in the 70's, and, I don't know, it's good to keep the inspiration alive and to realize that it may be a lot closer than you think.

Gangaji: Oh, it is so much closer than you think. And this is the thing, and it's part of how sangha can be supportive. And also we can recognize how we are educated to measure and to judge and mostly the way we've been brought up, if not by our families, by our system, the judgment is harsh, and we set some kind of idealistic standard, which really is not real, it too is just an idea, but I've seen people so attached to an idealistic standard that they are simply overlooking their own overflowingness, that's already happening even as a rock person, that they are already molten and other people can see it, but they are still attuned to where they are not that, rather than where they are.

Rick: Beautiful. I really think that is important. In fact that was one of my motivation for starting this show. I started it initially with the intention of just interviewing people here in Fairfield, because I was encountering a lot of people that I thought were having genuine spiritual awakenings, but then I was encountering others that say, "Oh, it's not happening to anyone and anyone who says it is on some kind of ego trip. And you have to be able to levitate if you are enlightened," and so on. But I thought, "all right, let's have a show and let's get some of our friends and neighbors out there and have them tell their story." And that's how this whole thing started, and I've had any number of people say to me, "Wow, I never realized that people are actually waking up." So it's been so inspiring for them.

Gangaji: I'm so glad. I'm so glad. That's real sangha then. I love the Buddhists, with the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha, and they are

all equal. So there is the awakened mind, there is the truth that is revealed and there is the sangha, and it's like satchitananda, they all go together.

Rick: Maybe you could define sangha in case someone is not familiar with that word.

Gangaji: The sangha is a community of like-minded people and those who are supporting you on the path of your awakening, the path of your realization.

Rick: Now, you said a while back that Papaji stopped your mind, and I've heard you say it a number of times, in almost every talk, that at a certain point he said to you, "just stop ." And as I listened to you last week or so my understanding of what he meant by that kind of evolved as I heard you explain it in different ways, so maybe you could explain it for the sake of those listening, what he said and what you understood it to mean and the effect it had on you and so on.

Gangaji: Well, my understanding continues to evolve with that. When you said that, because I said so, "How do I get freedom?" And I really was expecting him to give me some teaching or some mantra or some special practices, I didn't know what he said to people. And he said, "Stop." And at first I took that in pretty superficially. I thought he meant like a vipassana retreat, or something – just don't move. And then it was clear it was something deeper than that, and finally that very word just stopped, turned my attention to the activity of my mind and I saw, I recognized, and more deeply over time, that my mind – my thinking mind – was going, which is the nature of the thinking mind.

Rick: Like a mouse on a wheel, just kept going around.

Gangaji: Yeah. It was trying to grasp something or trying to keep something away, or fighting something, those were its basic movements. And when I finally was able to let that 'stop' in, I mean this isn't happening all the time for any of us, but there are periods where there is just spaciousness. But because we are conditioned to the grasping or the fighting or the hiding or escaping we overlook these periods, moments in the day of just spacious openness, and really what the 'stop' was turning me to was the spaciousness that's always here. So now again I recognize that all of my grasping, or my attempts to grasp, and all of my fighting or attempts to fight, or hiding, withdrawing, was all search, and finally when I distill that even more, it was really a search for 'who am I?' I believe that we are born searching for this and we take on identities based on our parents, based on our culture, genetics, whatever, so this was an invitation to stop trying to grasp an identity. Or trying to fight an identity or hide from an identity, so my mind could open and I could recognize what has always been here; that all of this activity of searching, it's funny, all of this searching was trying to get what is already here. And maybe we have to do this search to make the circle, I mean we do. That's part of our individuation and then our recognition of the limitation of individuation, but in an instant, when I say my mind stopped, that activity of searching stopped, and when I say my mind stopped, I'm really speaking of my thinking mind. My thoughts stopped. A consciousness was fully here, and that was the beginning, because from that I could recognize that a thought could appear and consciousness is still fully here. Consciousness is never absent.

Rick: Did your thoughts stop right then and there when Papaji said that, or are you saying over a period of days or weeks or something the momentum settled down.

Gangaji: Well, actually Eli had come to see me when I was in California after he had initially been with Papaji, and when I met with him, he had this transmission, the silent mind. His mind

Rick: He had already imbibed it and transmitted it to you.

Gangaji: Absolutely, he had received it from Papaji and he was transmitting it. And so, I was already struck with that, but Eli is my husband, and so, we were already in this relationship where he was not my teacher. And there is a way I sabotaged that, or trivialized it, or diminished it. But I had this initial experience from Eli and when I went to talk to Papaji, there it was, and I was able to surrender to it.

Rick: That's great. And of course, just to clarify, you are not saying that your mind never thought thoughts any more after that. That's not what you mean by stopped. Because you wouldn't have been able to function if you couldn't think thoughts, you are saying the overshadowing nature of thought – thought to the exclusion of consciousness was no longer the situation, or did I get that wrong?

Gangaji: I'd say it's partially right, that's true. But there was a moment when there was no thought, and there was a recognition that actually often functioning doesn't need thought.

Rick: Right.

Gangaji: And often we don't think in simple functioning. I mean, the example I love to give, is if you are kissing somebody, if you are

thinking, you are not really kissing. And when you are really kissing, you don't need to think. And that's true with life. If you are embracing and being embraced by life, you don't need to think. Thought clearly has a place, but in our Western culture we've given thought primacy, and as a result we are trying to think our way to enlightenment. Think our way to peace. Think our way to freedom. And with that we are just accumulating more knowledge and fighting ideas of ourselves that conflict with that knowledge. And so really Papaji was inviting me in transmitting this possibility to throw away the measuring stick, throw away the knowledge and recognize who you are.

Rick: The reason I laughed so much over that kissy example, was that a Far Side cartoon popped into my mind, these two insects were out on a date and time to say goodnight, and he was standing there at her doorstep, and he says, "Well, I guess I should kiss her goodnight, but where are her lips? I wonder if those doohickeys are her lips." Just thinking about that. (Laughter)

Gangaji: Just close your eyes and allow the kiss.

Rick: So another thing I heard you say about this stop instruction was that – and maybe this wasn't the whole of it – but I heard you refer to it as being a relinquishment of the tendency to put everything in conceptual cubbyholes. You know what I mean? To sort of somehow let go of ones tendency to be gripped by ones opinions and to define everything according to ones opinions, but to be in more of a not-knowing state. Yeah.

Gangaji: Well, the initial experience of Papaji and experiencing my mind stopping and realizing in that the fulfillment and the joy that I was trying to get through thinking was already here, then I could more

easily- and this is part of the vigilance – more easily be aware when thinking did reoccur, as either functional thinking or thinking that was perhaps triggered by some emotion or something, it was obvious, it had weight, it had noise, so I could take responsibility for my thoughts. And clearly some thoughts are no problem at all, and some thoughts are these habitual replays, and that's what I mean, there are categories that we have formulated about who we are, and who the other is, and we know this in terms of cultural or religious, and of course we know the extremes of this, too – are war. And so it's really – you mentioned earlier, this doesn't mean no thought, what it really - the opportunity is in recognizing no need for thought, then there is a greater capacity to take responsibility for thought and to recognize that it is not the whole of it and it's a point of view, it's a version of reality, and there may be some legitimacy to it, but it's not reality.

Rick: So when you said no need for thought, am I correct in understanding you to mean no need for thought where it's really not thought's role to be involved. Trying to grasp something that can't be grasped by thought. I mean, you need thought to book an airline flight, but you don't need it to realize the Self or to – yeah.

Gangaji: Yes. You don't need it, in fact, it's in the way about who you are. And most of us have learned to think who we are. We have images, we have the cubbyholes of characterization and we have multiple versions, some versions we like, some we don't like, but they are all composed of thought, and they are insubstantial and unreal.

Rick: Yeah. Well, this segues nicely into the theme of your book, your most recent book which is *Uncovering the Truth in Your Life Story*, and I thought that was kind of bold of you, because, I mean you are who you

are and you teach what you teach, but there are a lot of teachers these days to whom the word story is kind of a dirty word. Oh, that is just your story, and why would you want to talk about that, because if there is really no person, and therefore you are only reinforcing the notion of a person by talking about your story, and so on, and even in terms of your teaching, I heard you used to throw a bean bag at people who were too caught up in their stories, or something, and yet, here in this book, you are suggesting that one can use one's story as a doorway into the truth.

Gangaji: Well, I really feel like I contributed to the spiritual view that the story is the obstacle, and so this is a

Rick: You're making amends now (laughter).

Gangaji: Yeah, and I do still throw beanbags at someone who is too involved in their story, but anytime we make something as some obstacle, whether it is a story or vasana, our physiology, our biochemistry, our nervous system, there is this separation, and we have to somehow overcome that obstacle, and that in itself, of course, is a story, and this book is really a support to first of all recognize perhaps what story you are telling yourself about your story, so that you can see that as human beings, just as you were saying, thought has a function, certainly story telling has a function. We are story tellers, and it is beautiful, and we benefit from stories of all kinds, and always reading stories, but the stories that are dysfunctional are the ones we tell about who we are, and the most dysfunctional ones are the ones we tell about who we are, and the most dysfunctional ones are the ones we don't know we are telling about who we are. So, the book is rally designed to support the reader in more deeply discovering the story

and how we are being victimized by the story, or how we just think it's not the story, it's reality. So there is no obstacle, it's all a possibility; it's an inquiry.

Rick: I just received the book a few days ago and I have a lot on my plate, so unfortunately I have only had a chance to read about half of it so far, but I am really enjoying it. So I won't give away the punch line, but for the sake of those who haven't even looked at it yet, well, if you feel like doing more of a synopsis of the book, great, but perhaps it can come out in the course of our conversation. For instance what – oh, go ahead.

Gangaji: You started, at first, it was a hidden treasure. This was a teaching story that my teacher often related, under the floorboards of this woman's house was a huge treasure, and she had no idea about that, she was in great suffering because she thought she was in poverty, she thought she had nothing left, and yet all the time she did, so it's not like all of a sudden, she made something there, she just finally surrendered to the pointing of a stranger who said, "Just lift the floorboards of your kitchen and discover what is there." And that is really what I am attempting to do in this book. I tell that story, and I also tell my story, in part, and deconstruct it in a way that the reader can discover how to tell and deconstruct their own story, to lift the floorboards, to look under the foundation, not as an analysis of the story, but to recognize what the themes are and to discover what's deeper, always deeper.

Rick: One image that came to mind as I was reading the book and starting to think about this whole idea of stories as pointers to the truth, is the Russian dolls, you know, where you have egg shape, and

you have a doll, within a doll, within a doll. And you can peel away a story and find there is a deeper story there, and then you peel away that one and there is another.

Gangaji: And then you get to something that doesn't have maybe the familiarity of a story, it's a feeling, we could call it an emotion or a sensation, it doesn't matter, it's an energy, but usually our story is where there's the inner sanctum story or proficient story, some attempt to make sense of that or to control that or escape that, and so the invitation to inquiry is to actually open to that, because that is the life force, it's consciousness discovering itself as being and in that direct discovery there is an abundance of joy.

Rick: So, practically speaking, though, a person hears us talking, hears you saying this, or even if they read your book, what actual concrete steps, if any, can a person make to do this, to relinquish the grip of their story, or however you would like to phrase it, so that it doesn't just become sort of an intellectualized exercise, oh, that was interesting, yeah stories, and then they just go on with their busy life and nothing comes of it.

Gangaji: Well, yes. This is my aim, I want to be as concrete as possible and as relevant to the daily life as anyone who reads this or is in any conversation with me at all, that's my aim, because as I said earlier, we have enough teachings, we understand enough, how does it relate concretely in this lifeform? So you may know that in the book, at the end of several chapters there are questions that really support the turning of the attention back in to the story, first of all to realize what is being told, but also under that, what is fueling that, and it can either be some search for release from the story or a better story, or keeping the

good story that one has, and what's under that? And in general, as human beings, as human animals, there is fear underneath all of our attempts to get something or to fight something, or keep something away. Under all mind activity and that fear is linked to survival of the form, and there is nothing wrong with that fear, it is just part of our animal nature, but as conscious human beings we have the capacity to recognize that fear and for a moment put aside the story that will save us from that fear, save us from death, really, or override that story with our consciousness that actually made fear, and under fear, quite often, Rick, and usually, finally, there is well it's really the fear of nonexistence, and there is the sense of nonexistence and a sense of nothingness, and this gets translated emotionally, in most systems, as a kind of despair, or nothingness, or deep abyss. So this is the point of being willing to actually open to that, to remain conscious and open to that, and in that, mysteriously, a conscious human being has the capacity to discover who it is, who it truly is as consciousness, as life, at that moment of inquiry, survival is not at the forefront, and for most animals, of course, survival is always at the forefront, so this is a retreat into what is here even when this survival is not being handled. And you know if you are able to read that book, or tune in to this conversation you already have a life privilege and there are many people who really have to be thinking about survival at all moments, food or shelter, or dodging bullets or bombs, but in this moment you don't have to, and you don't if you can hear this, there is a spaciousness that actually takes consciousness of this life form to a deeper level, to realize where we come from, what is the source, what is always here?

Rick: And hopefully as more and more people do realize that, there will be less people in the world dodging bullets and bombs.

Gangaji: Yes

Rick: There'll be a contagion of it.

Gangaji: Yes, well it is contagious, and I know the difference now in speaking to people for twenty years, it's very different to speak to people, there is a loosening and a willingness to actually allow it in and the adventure of it, and yes, and I not a prophet, so I don't know what the outcome will be, but I know that it's a very good way to spend one's life.

Rick: Yeah. Beats working in an office, I guess.

Gangaji: It beats being miserable wherever you are.

Rick: Do you feel that fear is sort of the ultimate gatekeeper in everyone and inevitably just about anyone is going to encounter that threshold that they have to cross that is characterized by fear?

Gangaji: Yes, I do. I know that there are other emotions, but it gets down to fear, and it gets down to fear of death, because that is so ingrained, it is in our cells, and generally when we get spiritual we make it wrong, we always want to be loving, but it's not wrong. And if we open to it, there can be fear there, it just doesn't have to tyrannize us. We don't have to obey it. We don't have to deny it. We don't have to fight it. We can open to it.

Rick: As Woody Allen put it, "I'm not afraid to die, I just don't want to be there when it happens."

Gangaji: (Laughter) That's great.

Rick: There is a verse in the Upanishads, I don't know the Sanskrit, but the English is, "Certainly all fear is born of duality."

Gangaji: Yes. Yes, because that's where survival is made and there's other, and other is either ally or threat.

Rick: So did you yourself go through a fairly intense fear phase at a certain point?

Gangaji: Well, I had been aware of fear in different ways before I met Papaji and had been aware of a certain kind of dramatization that was a way of acting out fear, but not really meeting fear. And there is a question that I asked Papaji, that is actually on tape, where I say to him, you know, here I am with you and Papaganga and my life seems really good now, and it did, it was so sweet, and I was afraid of losing that. I thought I was hearing that I would have to give up everything, he wasn't saying that, and he laughed at me, from the tape, and he laughed and said it's because you see yourself as separate from that. And so as long as there is this fear, nothing wrong with it being there, but as long as it's there, it's then a chronic inquiry, so when I recognized that, I realized I could stop dramatizing that, or I could stop running away from that, or I could stop obeying that, lock-stepping obeying that, and I could be afraid, let the fear be here, feel the sensation of fear and being afraid, but not fighting or obeying it. It's not separate from life force and it's actually not even fear then. It's a great burst of energy - it's Shakti itself.

Rick: I guess almost everybody does all sorts of things to distract themselves from that which is uncomfortable, you know, whether it's drugs or sex or alcohol, or just goes with flashing strobe lights or whatever, there is a set of tendencies to do that, and what you are

saying , you just sort of turned it around 180 degrees and said, alright, let's just sit with this discomfort as see where it takes me.

Gangaji: That's right. That to me really is what all meditation is finally about. I'm sure you know more about meditation than I do, but there are different practices and they all are training the mind to actually have the capacity to return to its Source. The wild bull, or whatever the metaphor you choose, to actually come back in.

Rick: Yeah. As you said, there are different types of meditation, but in my experience, it's almost like a sort of CAT scan. Alright, where is there some discomfort? Where is there something that needs some attending to? And usually by the end of a sitting it's dissipated.

Gangaji: Yeah. Yes. That's so beautiful. It's an opportunity then. It's not like, oh, this shouldn't be arising, or, oh, this means I'm not something, and in that you can even say it's your ancestral karma, you know, or the humanness arising and that you are willing to be consciousness itself meeting your human, and all your relations meeting here.

Rick: I came across an intriguing quote from Ramana Maharshi recently that I would like to have you comment on. You now there are a lot of people in spiritual circles who say, well there really are no levels of awareness, because awareness is just one whole, and to refer to levels is to stratify it, but Ramana's quote was , "Yes, there are no levels of awareness, but there are levels of experience."

Gangaji: Mm hmm. He's so good.

Rick: I mean if you think about it, you and I and a cockroach are all sort of basically rooted in the same awareness, but our experiences are

different. And it seems to me the whole game is about shifting one's level of experience.

Gangaji: Yes, and this is the great benefit of a human, developed, evolved mind and nervous system, so we actually have the capacity to reflect and I know things like primates have the capacity to reflect, and probably whales and elephants, and maybe other species that we don't, maybe even a cockroach, I don't know. We don't know, but we know that humans have that, and what a gift that we actually have an opportunity to turn the mind back to its Source, and when I say "in" I don't exactly mean introspection, although it begins as introspection, but it is so deep that then there is a dissolution of inside and outside, that we are looking in when we are looking at each other. We're looking out when we're discovering, as you said with this CAT scan, also there is the habits of residue or whatever.

Rick: And, would you concur with that thought that not only as human beings are we endowed with this marvelous capacity to reflect, but that we're not necessarily stuck with whatever capacity we are born with. We can refine that capacity and there appears to be no end to the refinement.

Gangaji: Yes. I think – you know it can atrophy, and really it's this willingness to be uncomfortable and train our willingness to actually stop and discover what is here, what is pulling on me, and my telling, what is this story that is avoiding something that is here when we are not looking, that naturally strengthens the resilience, or at least reveals more of a resilience and reveals more capacity whether we define that as brain function or soul, it doesn't even really matter, it's an experience of life lived fully and endlessly and without a net. And so

there can be great discomfort in that – that is a part of life, there can be pain, but there is always the willingness to discover more, endlessness.

Rick: I think it might have been John Klein that used the phrase, “Free fall forever.”

Gangaji: Yeah. He was beautiful. I got to meet him once and we just cried together. He was so tender.

Rick: The reason I bring up that point, I bring it up in almost every interview, is that while some people seem to say, and I can't dispute them, I mean if somebody says, “No, this is the way it is,” fine. Who am I to say it isn't? But the way I'm wired, it seems to me that there is very probably no end to the refinement. I mean we referred to John Klein just now. It's probably silly to compare yourself with others, but I would probably not be wrong to say that compared to Jean Klein's level of refinement, I'm kind of a clod. And maybe I'll grow in that direction. I don't know. But,

Gangaji: All you can know is for your own self, and you know that you have grown.

Rick: Absolutely, and continue to.

Gangaji: That's right. I heard a wonderful story from Jean Dunn, who was one of Nisargadatta's students and translators and she said at his death he was saying, “Forget ‘I am that,’ I have realized so much more since then. It is so much deeper.” And that is the really good news. The good news is that this shift is possible, this awakening is possible, but the extraordinary driven good news is that it's endless.

Rick: Beautiful. It's almost like you get started at that point.

Gangaji: Yes. That's the beginning. Absolutely.

Rick: So this, how would you say that the last 20 years since your thunder-clap moment, you had that major shift, how would you characterize the growth or the refinement that has taken place?

Gangaji: Well, when you brought up the whole physicality, I realized that there has been a penetration in the density, where the more dense physical, but certainly more emotional areas, too, and a willingness for revelation, and also, people often ask me about integration and embodiment. That's really big in spiritual circles right now, and it seems to me that that happens quite naturally and that part of the embodiment is like a resolution of the paradox of ordinary and extraordinary.

Rick: Beautiful. I love that. One of my favorite words is paradox.

Gangaji: Yes. Me, too.

Rick: That's beautiful, and I suppose you could also throw the word integration in there, because it's sort of like the extraordinary is being integrated into the ordinary, you know.

Gangaji: And they've never really been separate, but in our minds the barriers that we have constructed, since we have been constructing, some 10,000 years, whatever that's been, just get more and more porous, more and more obviously insubstantial.

Rick: Yeah. Huh. Beautiful. Now, you and Eli are very frank about the various travails that you go through as a couple, and in fact you use that as a teaching point, a teaching example, and I think that is very healthy because it's honest and also because everybody goes through these

things, so people can say well, if they are going through it maybe I'm not such a schmuck after all.

Gangaji: That's right.

Rick: I'm curious, you know. No one wants to go through things like that, you don't try to, but they happen, but when you look back in retrospect, do you feel, all is well and wisely put and that was actually a process of growth that I am blessed to have gone through it.

Gangaji: Well, I would say it was a process of growth that was forced because

Rick: Circumstances

Gangaji: Yes, because there was some blindness there. There was something that was not being seen, and so, since the commitment here is to see everything, to experience more fully, that is an invitation. However it's not seen to make itself seen, so I wouldn't say that events had to happen the way they happened, but they did happen that way, and that's true for all of us, whether it's internal events or external events. Then the question is, what is our relationship to them, and that's where we can use it all. It's all here. So

Rick: Yeah, and if we can see the universe as divinely orchestrated, then we can see events as they confront us as blessings or lessons, potential lessons for us.

Gangaji: Well, certainly we can see our reactions to events as revealing where we are still fighting something or where we are avoiding something, or where we are trying to grasp something. And in that we have the invitation to open, always more deeply.

Rick: So in terms of your own reaction to, I mean, when you think of the worst of the worst of things that you have been through, since your awakening, in those darkest moments, if you want to use that adjective, did you feel overshadowed or lost? Did you feel that you lost your awakening, or was there always sort of some foundation despite the chaos that you were going through.

Gangaji: There was never a lack of love and there was never an absence of stillness, even though emotions got very strong. Voices got very loud. I experienced a lot of anger and a lot of deep sadness, but always I was not separate from myself. And that's why I can say, from that moment, that revelation that we started the conversation with at Esalen, and then over the 20 years of somehow the mysterious, effortless integration of that, this was a very important aspect of that because it actually stirred up really deep resentments from the past, and not just in my relationship, but in relationships, beginning with my parents, with the world, out of whatever, and in that they had their place because they weren't separate from this silent aware love, so I am this human being and I am this consciousness and they are not separate and that was revealed more deeply.

Rick: So no matter how angry you were or no matter how hurt you felt, the love counterbalanced that, the love was there, it wasn't shaken by those

Gangaji: I wasn't necessarily feeling love, the way we think of a feeling of love. I was feeling anger, or feeling sadness, but I wasn't searching for love, because I didn't need anything to be different because the fulfillment didn't need a feeling of fulfillment for its reference point.

Rick: That's interesting. Do you also feel that that's an advantage for a relationship in general, I mean if your fulfillment is primarily derived from something that does not depend upon what the other person is doing, then the relationship doesn't have to be in "gimme" mode, it can sort of be independent of the waves of, sometimes it's better, sometimes it's worse.

Gangaji: Absolutely. Well, you can at least be clear, because relationship means that you are usually relating to somebody, whether you are living with them or not, so that means that there are certain agreements that have to be reached. You know, it is not like you are just in a cave, relating with yourself. And yet, if you are trying to idealize what that person should give you, as you were just mentioning, there is no way that can be clarity there. When you have realized you are already that, you can still have some issue of relationship, but they're not the issues of your identity, of your fulfillment.

Rick: I was on a monastic program in the TM movement for many years and you can become very idiosyncratic there, because you didn't have to be face to face with one person. If somebody got on your nerves, you could just sort of gravitate off in some other direction, but boy, when I got married, which was quite an abrupt transition from being there to being married, it was quite challenging, the adjustments that had to be undergone, and

Gangaji: Totally

Rick: Yeah, very much so.

Gangaji: And we have to be humbled. The mind has – and it is. Life takes care of that. Thank God.

Gangaji: Yes.

Rick: Well, I know that you talk a lot in the course of your life, and it does take a toll on the voice, so I don't want to keep you

Gangaji: It's winding down. I can feel that.

Rick: Yeah, so I don't want to overdo it. So, maybe we should wrap it up. This has been really delightful. Is there anything you'd like to say in conclusion, anything that you generally do like to say that we haven't thought to bring up or anything like that?

Gangaji: You know, I often speak of Papaji telling me, "Stop" and how important that is and really what I feel I am here to say to people is that you can trust yourself. And when I say yourself, I am not thinking of your thoughts, which aren't trustworthy, or your emotions, which aren't trustworthy, and they also aren't the problem, but your Self. The truth of who you are from the initial arising of this either recognition or desire for a bigger life, a freer life, an enlightened life, however defined, this is trustworthy. It is your own Self calling you home.

Rick: So when you say you can trust yourself, you mean that you can trust that impulse; if you feel a pull toward this, honor it.

Gangaji: This is, yes, honor this, listen to this. Put your full attention on this and it delivers everything that is necessary.

Rick: Seek and you shall find. Very good. Well, thank you, Gangaji.

Gangaji: Thank you, Rick, this has been really fun.

Rick: Yeah, for me, too. Very much. So let me just make a couple of concluding points. I have been speaking with Gangaji, who is a much

beloved and well known teacher and I will be, if you haven't heard of her you must have been living under a rock, but I will put a link to her website on mine when I post this interview and you can go there and find out about courses she teaches and retreats and seminars and books and what not. Also you'll find at my site, which is BATGAP.com, all the other interviews that I've done and will yet do, and if you sign up for the email newsletter, you will get an email about once a week when I post a new interview, notifying you that I've done so There is also a podcast if you like to listen to this while you are commuting, and there's a little discussion group that pops up around every single interview where people can go in and start chatting about what was discussed, so you are welcome to participate in that if you'd like. So thank you, everyone, for listening or watching. Thank you, Gangaji, and we'll see you next week.

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