

FALLING IN LOVE WITH WHAT IS ALREADY ALWAYS HERE AND FREE:
An Interview With Nondual Teacher Gangaji

In conversation with Will Joel Friedman, Ph.D. – *Paradoxica: Journal of Nondual Psychology*,
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Summary

Two phone interviews of nondual teacher Gangaji were conducted on March 13, 2012 in Maui, Hawaii and on December 6, 2012 in Ashland, Oregon, where she lives with her husband Eli. Gangaji shares her life journey of seeking happiness and continually remaining unfulfilled until she travels to India and meets her spiritual teacher or guru Sri H. W. L. Poonja, better known affectionately as Papaji. In our spirited exchange punctuated by shared laughter, she is remarkably candid about the challenges she faced in her family, her awakening in India, and how she continues to linger in nondual awareness with the conflicts and challenges life brings. In sharing the emptiness of complete freedom in infinite limitless consciousness and still silent awareness, she elucidates the nuances of the real—in presence living in the dualistic world. At the same time, she passionately points to the really real—the changeless, ineffable, and unknowable eternal Absolute in the nondual realm, eternally available for glimpses in our direct experience right here and right now. She describes her awakening, and the awakening available for everyone in every moment, as falling in love with what is already always here and free.

Gangaji, an American-born, internationally renowned nondual teacher, shares her direct experience of the essential message she received in 1990 from her teacher Sri H. W. L. Poonja or Papaji. She shares a lineage of dedication through simple direct self-inquiry as taught by the sage Sri Ramana Maharshi of India and freely offers it to all who want to discover true lasting fulfillment. She is the author of *You Are That*, *The Diamond In Your Pocket* and most recently, *Hidden Treasures*. She travels the world holding gatherings, satsangs and retreats with spiritual aspirants of all faiths. Her warm graciousness and candor, open-heartedness and generosity, were clearly palpable, wonderfully welcoming and thoroughly embracing throughout our time together. Being with her was a sheer delight and joy.

Will Joel Friedman, Ph.D. is a journeyman psychologist in private practice, licensed since 1987 and in the field of Psychology since 1976, doing what works in standing in Awareness, honouring intuitive wisdom, dispelling illusions, truth-telling, and moving with the flow of Spirit. He practices Presence-centered therapy drawing upon nondual presence, witnessing, inquiry approaches (e.g., belief deconstruction), EMDR, building sustainable strong internal resources, taking in the good, and sensory experiencing. Inhabiting total naked vulnerability and depthless compassionate humility, with no concept to hang on to, are precisely where this author envisions coming from to traverse a pathless path and have all revealed here-and-now. This one knows nothing, welcomes, surrenders and celebrates everything, purely engaging in being and doing what is loved. He is on the editorial board for *Paradoxica*.

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Key

G – Gangaji

W – Will Joel Friedman

W: I so deeply appreciate the privilege of being with you and just opening up the time for this. Thank you again, very, very much.

G: Oh, well, it's my privilege.

W: So, as you know, we're in this research project with colleagues of mine and we're looking at how people who have dwelled in nondual awareness for a number of years, and certainly that includes spiritual teachers like yourself, came to be where they're at today, what process they went through, and how that really impacts or comes into your day-to-day life. So, how did this whole journey begin with you?

G: Umm, good question. The very beginning I would say was when I first recognized I was unhappy. And I was probably ten or twelve years old at that time, and I had been unhappy before that but I had recognized it. I became conscious of it. I started searching for ways to get happiness as I think most of us do. I wasn't unusual that way. And I searched. My particular way was trying to find and get other people to love me. I learned how to be successful at that, how to be friendly and nice and say the right thing. In truth, it did make me happier. [chuckling] It was a much better situation. Before that I was morose, probably angry, but then I was upbeat and pleased with myself. When I got to be eighteen or so and was used to being successful at being well liked, I realized that something else was missing. Given that I was brought up in Mississippi — I was born in 1942 — I was deeply conditioned to believe that if I found the right man, a good man, with a good job, then I would be happy. And of course, that picture of happiness including having children, tending a lovely home, having a stimulating social life, and being in all regards simply perfect.

W: Yes, yes. When you first recognizing that you were not happy and inside this unhappy or morose even angry space, at root, what were you so unhappy, morose, and angry over back then if you can recall that?

G: Maybe my basic constitution tended toward melancholy. It could all have been genetic. My parents were heavy drinkers, alcoholics I guess. And, I lived in a small town and so I was deeply

ashamed of their drinking and I felt unloved. I felt ugly, unloved, and stupid. I felt so, like, “Where am I?” I think most people have had this experience, at least most spiritual seekers, but I felt like I was in the wrong place or with the wrong family. I felt I had been just dropped down into my hometown as the result of a big mistake. And, really, it was just an existential moment. I didn’t know what specifically I was unhappy about. I was fed; I was sheltered. In the South at that time, we ran free as kids. It was pretty great when I look back on those aspects of it. Leave in the morning and come back at suppertime in the summer anyway. But, I was just uncomfortable in my skin, deeply uncomfortable.

W: It sounds like a very monumental shift from feeling unloved or unhappy, even unlovable, to feeling and knowing yourself as loved, as loveable and love itself. How would you characterize that fairly monumental shift?

G: Well, there were stages. I mean, after the pre-adolescent stage, I learned strategies for how to get pleasure. And, I felt happier, of course, as we do when we feel pleasure. I started making friends and I started doing well in school, and I just was able to segment and isolate the situation with my family to one side. At least enough that I could function. So, I had fun. I was having fun as a teenager, and then college, and then my first marriage and until my first marriage fell apart. I think my life was going along pretty well then, anybody else would have said so, although at the root there was unhappiness. But, I was functioning and I had a lot that was very pleasurable to me. I would say that one of the essential things that I discovered when I was in high school was that I actually like learning. There was pleasure in studying and learning and that was really huge for me. Homework wasn’t a task for me; it was really a pleasure.

W: Sure. So, you mentioned by age eighteen that you were very successful at being well liked. And, you mentioned realizing that something else was missing. And you thought the way through all this was to find a really good man with a really good job and this would make you happy. As you reflect back on it from your vantage point of this moment, what was actually missing, if anything at all?

G: Maturity was missing. I simply wasn’t mature. Maybe it was the undeveloped brain. I was a product of my conditioning and, in the world of my conditioning, I was actually considered a rebel and very free. This was 1959, 1960. Women, in the South anyway, looked for men to give their lives meaning. I had never heard of feminism.

W: That was the norm. That was expected.

G: Yeah. I just absorbed that and I was attracted to men and I liked them. And I really now think I was looking for protection as well as excitement, love, romance, and my idealization of what marriage would be with a baby. In looking for the right man, I think it was part protection, and maybe it just being a woman. Maybe women do that because we are physically weaker than men. Certainly that was true, women did that then. I had never heard of feminism.

W: You mentioned brain development. I have come across some fairly solid empirical scientific findings that the brain develops from the back forward and so the frontal cortex, the neocortex right behind the forehead, is the last to develop. And, the earliest good judgment, discernment and wisdom comes on line physiologically is about age twenty-six. And even then it's about what you develop of what you have been so blessed with. At age eighteen, how could any of us be operating on the basis of using good judgment? At best, we can use a certain amount of intelligence, common sense and street savvy.

G: Well, it's amazing any of us are still alive.

W: [laughs] It's amazing we all get through the day and put one foot in front of another and somehow get through this life, right?

G: Yeah. It must be grace.

W: Must be. So, after marrying a wonderful man and having a child, and feeling that this would be your road to happiness, and discovering that you are still really unhappy, and even disillusioned, did you have any idea what the true source of being unhappy was then? And, again, it may just be, as you were saying, a certain immaturity.

G: Well, I had banked on something outside of myself: this man and marriage and idealization about this man and marriage to save me from myself. The idealization wasn't real. And, nothing could save me from myself, so it was all illusion. And, I think it's important as we mature that we are humbled, and there was a humbling where I saw that it wasn't my husband's fault. He was still a really good man and a good father and good husband. It wasn't like I married a scoundrel; I married a very good man, and, so I couldn't blame him for my unhappiness. Seeing that was really important.

W: So, part of your maturity was really owning that unhappiness without projecting it or blaming anyone, including your husband?

G: Well, I did blame myself. I thought it was just a reflection of my miserable character that had surfaced, that I would leave this man, that he really was the right man in terms of society and my ideals, and that I wasn't satisfied with that seemed like a deep flaw to me. So, I wasn't happy about my leaving and I did make a judgment and it was based on my immature reflections of who I thought I should be, my idealization of myself as well as the man and the marriage.

W: I keep sort of circling back within my own life and with the clients I see. It's ever touching on that stone of self-forgiveness. Out of recognizing how unaware we were a moment before. And, in this moment, we now see something we didn't see. Can we really judge where we were yesterday on the basis of where we are today? And, that's a pattern a lot of people do. They want to say, you know, well, "I should have known this then, or I should have done..." but the truth is that we really didn't know any better then, even as we think we know better today.

G: That's right and it's a sobering truth because it brings us to this moment. Hopefully our brains have matured and are continuing to. I think we have to be aware that at any moment we can be subject to unrecognized immaturity. And, if we are willing to face that, then I believe we get to see more of what is going on. But, that doesn't mean we always see *all* that is going on.

W: Right. Would you share more about that beautiful metaphor you shared at the US SAND (Science of Nonduality) 3 conference of "falling off the tightrope" because it works on so many levels?

G: Oh, I'm glad. You know, it just was spontaneous in that moment because the person who had come up was speaking about feeling she was walking on a tightrope. I could see how she was very rigidly trying to hold it all together.

W: Yes.

G: And, in my experience, it's holding it all together—again by some idealization of what it all should be and how it should be held together—that keeps us rigid. She was miserable with that, so I found if you take a moment and be willing to just *fail*—if it's fear of failure. For her using the metaphor of the tightrope was expressing her fear of failure. Falling off the tightrope would be a failure. I invited her to experience the failure, experience the falling. Which is, of course, letting go. But we've already learned the phrase "letting go" so much that it's corrupted and polluted. I just try to use whatever the person brings, and she brought me that metaphor. Whatever standards you are trying to meet, as useful as they can be, in *this moment*, if you don't meet the standards, what is here? In her willingness to fall off the tightrope of her concepts, she lit up. She got it.

W: So, it's recognizing what we're grasping and holding tight to for dear life, and not even knowing we're doing that. In the moment of recognizing this and starting to accept and acknowledge it, in the very process it kind of loosens up, it sort of moves through us in a way and we move through it. Something totally opens up and that's the falling off, that surrendering, that freedom.

G: Yes, I would just add that trying to grasp something and in trying to grasp something, we are also trying to avoid something. In a vivid sense of falling off a tightrope, we're trying to avoid that fall, trying to avoid failure or trying to avoid death. And, that's natural, but if we counter-intuitively don't avoid that, then we discover something that is even more deeply natural. And so I started looking for the right man. And I did find a wonderful man. A really beautiful man by the time I was in college and we ended up marrying. And he became a doctor and we had a child. And so that took me to my mid-twenties. And this was maybe the reckoning for my agenda. Because I really had done everything that I knew to do, in getting a very nice man, and having a beautiful child. And I was really unhappy. So it chose me in a certain way. And concurrent with this was the explosion of the late sixties and early seventies and we ended up moving to San Francisco, where he could practice medicine and go to the Art Institute. And

within a year we were divorced and I had just leapt into the counterculture, including experimentation with LSD and Psilocybin and lots of marijuana and...it was wonderful. It was a realm I had never known before. And so at the very least it showed me that there was a world beyond what I could conceive. And it was great to be in San Francisco in 1972. It was fabulous. But, of course, it too couldn't give me lasting happiness. And after a few years of kind of frantically living the counterculture I realized that if I was searching for lasting fulfillment, maybe I couldn't even name what I was searching for then...

W: You just knew you didn't have it. [chuckling]

G: I knew I didn't have it. And, it shifted then into an approach to life: life, as a learning. There was curve and there was failure possible, but there was fun to it. So, I was going along pretty well, although, at the core still this root of unhappiness was still very much alive. And, my first marriage broke up, and, as you know, I went to California and really started experimenting pretty broadly with a pure pleasure lifestyle, a hedonistic lifestyle. I got free of my husband, I had many different lovers, I was experimenting with psychedelics and different spiritual teachers were coming through. And, we called ourselves spiritual, but we weren't, of course. Really, we were worshipping the pleasure god. And, after a while, a pretty short while actually, that was empty. I mean, the pleasure god can only take you so far and so that was a moment. I would say that was a moment that prepared me really for the truly monumental shift because I realized that seeking pleasure, while it could give me pleasure, it certainly couldn't give me lasting fulfillment.

W: That's true.

G: And, it finally didn't touch the core of what seemed like the core of miserableness in me so I did become an earnest spiritual seeker then. And, this was by the mid-1970's, late-1970's. I started to meditate and then I met Eli and he was very much on a spiritual path and we were together involved with Tibetan Buddhism. We ran a little Tibetan Buddhist centre in our house in Bolinas. So we were really into it and that went on for some years, almost twenty years, and had wonderful experiences. I had experiences of myself as love, or as perfection, or as in the right place. But, none these experiences lasted. See, what I would always return to was this identity of misery. Like the twelve-year-old, that was still there even though there were many layers on top of it. So, I was humbled by that.

W: Well, life can be a humbling experience if we actually engage in it.

G: That's right. We play God. I mean we have to be humbled.

W: That's right. And, be conscious on the journey, not just, the last moment before we die, but actually step-by-step be actually engaged, present and conscious of what we are experiencing in this direct moment.

G: That's right. That's really the key and before that I think that I was always about how am I going to escape this experience or stay in the blissful experience?

W: How do I get over there and how do I stay in this pleasurable joyous place?

G: Yeah, it seems very immature now, but I was engaged full out in that pursuit.

W: Well, you only have the company of about one hundred percent of humanity throughout all time. [laughs]

G: A lot of company. I don't know whether it's good company. [laughs]

W: You mentioned that out of all the experiences you had, you make no value judgment. Would you share a little bit about this because people are so caught up in all these value judgments and being so hard on other people and even harder on themselves. A lot of it is negative projection, of course. How do you get to a place of no value judgments when you see these activities in your life that you engage in or the attitudes you take on as being some form of self-defeating? How do you get to a place of no value judgment?

G: Well, that doesn't mean I have no regrets for certain things. I mean, I certainly regret the way my first divorce came about. It was unnecessarily hurtful to a good man. But, I can also see in terms of value judgments that I was immature. I didn't know how to be more kind in certain situations. But, in terms of substances like pills, I had to take a pill as a child until I was in college. Later when experimenting with different mind-altering substance, I was seeking expansion. In those times we didn't really know how to deal with the expansion we discovered. But I am convinced that we all had the best intentions.

W: I understand.

G: That's where I have no value judgments. I don't believe that *always* everybody has the best intentions. I really do believe that we all have certain times where we don't have the best intentions. And, I do make judgments. We have to be free to judge too, and I feel free to judge if I think something is wrong or evil.

W: So, that's discernment; that's the wisdom to see through and undress in the naked, honest, truthful way, the reality that's right here that you're intuiting, you're feeling, you're seeing?

G: Or, in retrospect, because sometimes I would say I, like everyone else, you know, can misjudge a moment.

W: Certainly.

G: At least we have the capacity as human beings to reflect and to continually learn and be open, and that's thrilling to me. And there was a spiritual component to the counterculture and there were gurus that were coming to town. I did the est training. So there were different things that

were pulling me into yet another realm. It really wasn't until I met my current husband, who is Eli, in 1976, while still looking for the right man and falling in love with him, and having him actually be more interested in the search for truth than he was in me.

W: Hm.

G: Yeah, that's what I said too! [laughter]. But it turned out to be a wonderful thing. And I realized that this was my introduction to truth, not just as a set of beliefs, but to a life that was lived out of service to what one has discovered. Then the search became for the ultimate discovery. We had lots of wonderful experiences. I got very involved in Buddhism, and we ran a Tibetan Buddhist center out of our house in Bolinas. We did different Vipassana trainings and delved into Zen Buddhism. I had had some wonderful experiences by then, and I could say that I knew the truth. I had had spiritual experiences of expansion, and no self, no me...and it was just rich and wonderful. But those experiences would end, of course, as all experiences end. And I was left with a familiar deep yearning.

W: How did this sit inside of you at the time, on a human level of everyday life and on that sort of deeper absolute level of truth?

G: Well, it was painful. I had been part of a whole group of people who were doing creative visualization and I had visualized settling down. So I visualized a strong man and I "saw" a new baby. And here I was with a man who wasn't interested in any kind of relationship like I was, or a baby and was actually in love with truth. So, initially it was painful. It was a learning process and a very painful one. As I recall, I would sort of half pray, half meditate and really question, "Am I in some relationship that's not good for me, or is this right where I should be?" And, I continually got confirmation that I could get through this and I could trust this love. The depth of connection that I found with him was bigger than his ideas, than what a relationship should be, bigger than my ideas. In itself, that trust was pointing me to truth. I did trust, and I went through some difficult times, but I was learning and I knew I was growing from it. I was maturing. I was having to face jealousy; I was having to face my sense of lack.

W: Yes. So, this is all a pretty humbling illusion-busting experience...

G: Yes.

W: ...but also at the same time a very transformative one.

G: It was, and we also were having a great time, too. We laughed so much. He's a very funny man and so we connected in ways that were really nourishing: humor and literature, and movies.

A true intellectual connection. We were becoming deep friends in the best sense and very romantically connected too, so it wasn't all hard. It's just that the hard parts were exactly what they needed to be, exactly what I needed to face. And somehow the grace was to recognize that.

W: Amidst the larger mystery of it all.

G: Exactly.

W: Yes, so you keep coming back to that you could trust this love. And that works on many levels: you could trust yourself to love; you could trust yourself broader than that. But, you could also trust in a deeper sense of who you truly are and what you are really meant to be.

G: That's right. I maybe wouldn't have been able to phrase it like that then, but that *is* it. I mean, that's what was revealed. Really, what is trusting? Love is trust in itself.

W: That's right.

G: I think for me it was trusting the unknown, but I knew that I couldn't trust what I assumed *was* known. I could look back at my life and say, "I knew what the right marriage would be. I knew what I needed to do to get fulfillment" and I saw that wasn't trustworthy. And, so, I had to trust what was in front of me in the deepest sense.

W: So to grow beyond or eclipse the level of beliefs and coming to a space of faith where you don't have beliefs or reasons to support or justify it, you just take that leap?

G: I think that's faith in the purest sense. It wasn't faith in any belief that I had, but it was a faith that was connected to an experience that I have to be here, that this is just right, even though at times, it is extremely uncomfortable.

Some years later I recognized I needed a teacher. Before that I had spent some important time with teachers. I had considered myself very independent and liberated as a woman. I did not like the guru scene. It looked to me like co-dependent behavior, so I negatively judged the whole teacher search. But finally I recognized that I needed something bigger than my mind and Eli recognized the same for myself. We prayed for a teacher. This was in 1989, thirteen years after beginning our life together.

That prayer led me to my teacher, my guru, Papaji. He was in India. I'd certainly never wanted to go to India. I had been certain I didn't want that. So that was a great humbling, because when I saw Papaji I recognized him as my teacher. He had such a light and power and grace. So I paid very close attention to what he had to say and what he said—*how* he said what he said—changed my life. He revealed to me what I had been searching for all my life and naming all different names. I discovered the fulfillment of my search to be here, the nature of myself, deeper even than my human nature.

W: Here you're going to India and finding your spiritual teacher, Papaji, there by the Ganges. What compelled you to go to India in the first place?

G: Well, there was a teacher who was in Marin who had known of Papaji. He was a Western teacher who exuded confidence, but even more than that, he was speaking the vernacular of our

times. He was speaking English but in a way that wasn't like a translated English from the sutras; it was immediate and intimate. So I heard of H.W. Poonja from him and then Eli was going to Sikkim to a conference of Tibetan Buddhists. In order to get to Sikkim, he had to get a visa, and he ended up in Lucknow, India, which is where Papaji lived. He ended up at his doorstep, and just spent five days in bliss. At that time Papaji had just gotten out of the hospital and he had his family around him but he didn't have any students there. So Eli got to spend all day with him, by himself. And –

W: - what a privilege.

G: It was wonderful. And he wrote letters back to me that were just...infused with bliss and saying, this is it! This is the right one! I found the real thing! Eli came back to the States, got me and took me to him. So that's how I ended up in India of all places.

W: Because you weren't intending to go there, you said. [chuckling]

G: The opposite, you know. I was intending not to go to India.

W: So how did you recognize him? Tell me more

G: I fell in love. So there was a romance there, but it didn't have anything to do with my hormones. It was not a sexual love. I was not physically attracted to him, although I saw him as exquisitely beautiful. I saw beauty and a huge welcome in his eyes. He said, "Welcome!" and he meant it. I saw him after that welcoming a number of people and he always really opened himself. He was available. He was not just available, he was also incredibly wise and he directed me into my own consciousness.

W: How beautiful. Revealing you to yourself in a way.

G: Yes. Exactly.

W: That's beautiful. Your realization was fairly immediate upon meeting him or did it kind of blossom in that experience of being in his presence.

G: I surrendered, knowing, very deeply that I was in the right place. I was with a real teacher. It was at the right time in my life. I didn't have any thoughts that I should be doing anything else, and I surrendered my attention to him fully. There were great moments then. But in a way those moments were very similar to the moments I'd experienced in altered states, either through meditation or substances. But he continued to say, "Find out what does not come and go." He would notice me or someone else going into a state of bliss, because it was so blissful to be with him, and would often say to stay out of those states. He'd say, "Now see what is still here. What was in that state, what is still here?" That took some time because we're all very attached to beautiful states.

[laughter]

W: That's true! Okay, beautiful. That's wonderful. I have to stop saying beautiful so much.
[laughs]

G: No, beautiful is a beautiful word! And I just had, as we all do I believe, a very deep wish that these wonderful states would stay and these more mundane or negative states would never come back. And that was my concept of enlightenment. He'd said to let go of any concept of enlightenment. I was old enough at that time to recognize that each time I had to let go of a concept over how things should be, there was a spaciousness of mind that was trustworthy. I finally was just willing to stop searching for a particular state or to stop fighting a particular state and to surrender, to stop.

We were there with him six weeks that first time. We came back to California and Eli was teaching at Esalen. One night we were sitting on the bed laughing at our great good fortune in having met Papaji and our wonderful experiences, and something just happened in less than a moment. Something that was out of time. It happened in time and yet it was out of time. I recognized, without a doubt, the reality of consciousness as being that which is always present. And I saw that consciousness was myself and not excluded from me. Not separate from the concept of myself, and yet free of that concept. So I was uprighted, I would say.

W: Well, all this you're sharing is very, very beautiful and it reminds me of many of my own experiences. And I know Papaji studied under Ramana Maharshi. I believe he was his spiritual teacher.

G: His guru, yes.

W: A statement that always went very deep in my reading of Ramana was, "Let what comes come, let what goes go, and see what remains."

G: That is the most potent statement. I use that all the time.

W: Oh really? I just love that statement because it is so simple you can say that to a five-year-old. [laughter] And a five-year-old would understand it.

G: Right. I have a friend who works with children in school and she's been directing them to that kind of simple inquiry. Find out what changes, find out what's always here. Find what comes and goes, find out what remains, and they get it.

W: Yes. And another way of saying that another colleague beautifully says, Dorothy Hunt, is what is already here?

G: Yes.

W: And that's another very powerful, very simple opening to this presence, this awareness, and this consciousness that does not come and go. It's actually who we are.

G: Yes. Exactly. I often say, what is always here?

W: That's a lovely way of saying it.

G: And so you have to find it in the worst circumstances and the best.

W: Because it knows nothing of circumstances or experiences.

G: That's right.

W: It cuts across all that.

G: Yes. Free of that and inseparable from any circumstance.

W: Right. So it's one, the other, neither and both, and beyond it all. [laughter] Because all this duality is nested in nonduality so it's all with us but the moment you want to name it and pigeonhole it and put it in some box, it kind of evaporates. You've lost it.

G: Because it's free. It won't be grasped.

W: It won't be grasped; it won't be conceptualized; it won't be labeled. It will not be tacked down as something that your mind can count on.

G: That's right. And that gets us to, of course, then how does this relate to this mind.

W: Exactly.

G: Because we have these minds and their function is to conceptualize and nail down and organize. The vigilance, for me, became recognizing the activity of mind, and the concurrent spaciousness of the field of consciousness. The difference between Papaji and Ramana is that Papaji was a householder. He wasn't a sadhu; he was a mining engineer. He had to support a family. He had to get a family out of the Punjab when the partition of India occurred. And he had to live a day-to-day life. Most people who came to Papaji were not monks and were not living secluded lives. His gift in living that day-to-day life showed each of us who were day-to-day people that you have to find the field of free consciousness in day-to-day life. You have to find it in the midst of your conceptualization of it, in the midst of all. He invited us to stop, stop searching, to take a moment and absolutely stop and discover what is always here. Discover what cannot be denied. His invitation was to discover, in a moment of mind activity or with no activity, what is always here. It doesn't require retreat to discover what is always here. Although for most of us, stopping and retreat are maybe essential for that initial essential experience. For Ramana, it occurred when he was sixteen and he lay on the floor and was able to experience death. He wasn't seeking a concept; he was *discovering*, and that's beautiful. Many people then use the profundity of Ramana's discovery to separate themselves from Ramana's teaching. And he was such an extraordinary being that he's worshipped as divine other. So it's wonderful to hear you speak of it as the teaching rather than the person.

W: Well, again, our minds just wrap around the tangible and about this person and their life and all that stuff. We can often miss the deeper teaching their whole life is pointing to.

G: That's right. Papaji told me once that the day Ramana was given to him by one of his students, what it means is that which is alive in the core of all being. Grace is that which is alive in the heart of all being.

W: Oh, how lovely. I didn't know that.

G: Yes.

W: And that's such a beautiful statement. And he was a living personification of this.

G: That's right. That's the transmission of Ramana.

W: Right. It is the teaching, the essence. Then how did that percolate after that first long time with Papaji?

G: Well, he asked me to come back and share my experience with people. And initially that actually frightened me, because I had not read Ramana at that time. He told me to just share from my own experience. This was before that time in California when the self-doubt was annihilated in a split second. He said, "You don't have to do anything. If people ask you a question, just respond. If people notice something's different from you, just share your experience and it'll be taken care of." So I trusted him. At the time after that lightning bolt back in California, people began to approach me and share that inside them there was a feeling of burning energy when they were next to me. They asked me what it meant and I said, "I can share my experience with you." It spread and by the time we left Esalen that time, there were maybe fifteen or twenty people who were coming and saying, "Well, what happened? How does that affect you?" And so...

W: ...so they were naturally drawn to you?

G: Yes. I realize now in reflection on this question you just asked, there was a moment when I was leaving Papaji that first time and I was so grateful, just profoundly grateful. And I said, "What can I do, what can I give you?" And he said, "You give your life to this. It's very simple."

W: That's all he was asking for. [laughter]

G: I had no idea what that meant, of course. I had to discover what it meant, what it *means*. I also didn't realize what a gift he was giving me. To give your life to this diminishes the power of the conceptual mind to take over. I could more easily recognize the habits of my particular mind and not buy into them. So it's been incredible. He gave me a different, fresh life.

My partner Eli also was in love with Papaji. That was so lucky, that we both had the same teacher and the same response to this teacher. We spent some years in just bliss of discovery. It was what we'd been searching for. Then there were shifts and I was aware of this "me" that reappeared in my consciousness. At first, I was like, oh no! What is that?! People don't reincarnate –

W: Do it all in this lifetime.

G: Yes, and here it was. I recognized that appearance as another challenge for inquiry. What is still here? What is always here?

W: What strikes me is you don't have to buy into the mind's shenanigans, games, concepts, labels, comparisons, judgments, all the rest. I've seen that for myself. It's not so much what you 'buy into,' because we all buy into a whole lot of stuff, if you will, all this mind fog, concepts and evaluations and what have you. It really boils down to what you 'buy out' of. There is the beautiful Hindu expression "Neti, Neti" – not this, and not this. Tell me how that came through in your life experience, the buying out?

G: My personality with its particular agenda [chuckling] was already sort of negative in a way, because it was coming from the experience of lack and need. So already, in a very deep sense, I was saying Neti Neti to the truth of myself, rather than Neti Neti to the passive illusions. What Papaji did was just flip that to a yes, yes to the truth of myself and no, no to the illusion. It's very apparent, as you know, once your attention is turned in that direction, what you are saying yes to and what you are saying no to. What you are supporting in your attention and beliefs and activity. When I spoke of this to people—this was 1990—I got a lot of flack.

W: Really?

G: It wasn't as if a lot of people were having satsang. There weren't a lot of people teaching who weren't associated with a particular dogma. I wasn't speaking Buddhism, and I'd never heard of Advaita. I wasn't speaking in terms of this is what is so. It was all an invitation to discover through your own inquiry. Plus I was speaking to people who had known me in a different context, and that's always a little tricky. They were certain they knew who I was and now I'm showing up in a different way. But it was all very good in the sense that it showed me how all our minds work.

W: It's amazing how remarkably similar all our crazy minds are. I call the ego-mind stark raving mad in a way, because it fits. We're insane, if you wish. And it's also incredible how alike the true self is. How alike Original Nature, I call it Original Sanity, is as well!

G: Yes. It's all reflections. A reflection in form, and a reflection in formlessness.

W: That's true. And what you're saying about yes and no is beautiful, because the mind only knows how to say no and all the universe knows how to say is yes.

G: That's it, isn't it? It's finally surrendering to the universe.

W: And even Christ said, let your yes be yes, and let your no be no. It doesn't matter which is which.

G: I didn't know that. I'll remember that. Thank you. That's good.

W: And so you were able to say yes to your True Self and say no to all of the craziness the mind dreams up. What was that like as you experienced that? He actually gave you permission and encouraged you to follow your own heart in finding what direction life wanted to unfold inside of you and around you.

G: I was very fulfilled. I was happy because I wasn't looking for things to be different than what they were.

W: Ahhhh, yes.

G: And then secondary to that, people began coming to hear me speak. I started teaching and transcribing my teaching, and writing. And there's a life that unfolded that was clearly out of my control. But I did have the capacity to say yes, and to surrender. Or as you say, to surrender the no.

W: Well, if you surrender the no, you open up space for living inside the yes.

G: Yes. That is the yes really. It's the surrender and the spaciousness and it's limitless.

W: Yes, that's a transparent way of saying it.

G: And it's a beautiful life. And it doesn't exclude the life of the mind. I mean, I have a mind that's active and I like active minds. I vote, I have opinions. It's all-inclusive, as is life.

W: So how does this all, this beautiful awakening and realization of who you truly are, who we all truly are, how did that come through just on a day-to-day basis, as you live in this empirical, relative world?

G: Well, the lynchpin of searching for this world to give me fulfillment, lasting fulfillment, was pulled. Of course I did and I do have different emotions and sometimes I'm happy with what the world presents and sometimes I'm not happy, but underneath that happy and unhappy, there's a profound fulfillment. So I would say the capacity for this particular mind-body, this form to respond to its true self as light, was just opened up. I actually began living a much more ordinary life since I wasn't searching for something extraordinary. I discovered that life itself is the most extraordinary, the most mysterious ongoing experience. My time was freed up and time was no longer my enemy. I was free to live fully, and to experience fully, to experience perhaps more fully than ever, through empathy with other people and the suffering in the world, and more fully with the bliss of consciousness. I'm an ordinary person.

I wouldn't say any great powers were developed; although I will say that much more clarity developed when I stopped searching for the world to give me myself, stopped searching for relationship, to be loved, to be accepted. There was just huge space and much more mental clarity. I could recognize how foggy I had been, even though I would have called myself a clear person. Relative to what was revealed, I was just running here and there, grasping for some approval, or feeling this pit of the monster coming after me and fighting that. All that stopped, I was at peace with myself.

W: So the monkey mind can do what it will, but you don't need to follow it and lock step with its dance.

G: That's right. There is a discovery of one's self that isn't the mind in lock step. That it is already free, already still. What a relief!

W: It came through in some deeper work over here. When something comes through that doesn't speak on a human level because it speaks on sort of an eternal level. What came through, and it sounds very consonant with what you're saying, is that without clarity, chaos reigns; with clarity, direction is obvious.

G: Well, yes, that's it. That's very clear.

[laughter]

W: The clarity that you had now was beyond all seeking or not seeking. It was just an irrelevant dimension just as all the polarities the mind dreams up.

G: Oh, I think that's really well said. Especially when you say beyond seeking and beyond not seeking.

W: Yes.

G: Because all of that is just activity of the mind. And my war with my mind or other's minds stopped. Even though there may be conflict, but the war, the basic war, stopped.

W: Right, the struggle, the seeking or not seeking, the thing that needs to be different than it is.

G: Will try it. Even though I may not like certain things as they are. [chuckling]

W: Well, you're human!

[laughter]

G: And I don't mind that, either.

W: Right.

G: I'm freed to feel whatever I'm feeling or experience what I'm experiencing.

W: There's no spiritually correct way or psychologically healthy way, or any sort of role-bound way to be, you can simply be as you are.

G: That's right. My habits of mind were more obvious. You run into a wall enough times, finally you stop running into the wall if there's clarity.

W: Right. That's not where the door is.

G: And the door's open.

W: Yes. The door is always open and we keep smashing into the wall and after a while we say, "What am I doing this for? Why don't we just go through the door?"

G: That's right. There you go.

W: Well, it strikes me that, and this phrase came forward and it resonates very deeply with what you're saying, that you are the one you seek to become.

G: That's it.

W: So what's the point of seeking who you already are?

G: Mysteriously, we are ignorant of who we truly are, until we discover ourselves. It's ultimately the mystery of Leela, which is the mystery of the play of...

W: ...the play of consciousness, yes. Right. Beautifully said. And if your life is your play, then you don't have to go to work a day in your life.

G: That's right. And then your work is like, wow! Then this distinction between work and play, and life and me, and life and you is just removed. Then as individual life forms we can support all life forms in ways that are discovered rather than dogmatized. That's thrilling and that's an adventure. Yeah, I would say my life became a real adventure, even though it became much more ordinary in its outward form.

W: Everything you speak of is of a very direct immediacy. You know and live life as fundamentally an experiment, an improvisation of discovery. And moment-by-moment, you show up and see how it unfolds and what directions you're drawn to, and where the energy needs to be and what kind of life, people, activities and environments beckons you.

G: Yes. I'd also add to that that it's very intimate.

W: Ah, yes.

G: An intimate adventure.

W: Um-hm. Now, you've taken this in meeting people who come to you through satsangs and through different trainings or retreats. How does this whole realization kind of bubble through in that setting?

G: Well, that's ...

W: I only ask the small questions.

[laughter]

G: That's part of the mystery.

W: That's true.

G: I really trusted Papaji that I didn't need to know the specific teachings of Advaita Vedanta, for instance. What happens is that maybe something will come to me in a period of meditation or on the way to a meeting and I'll give a talk around what appeared in a moment of stillness. But really the crux of my meeting with people is the recognition that we are in each other's consciousness. My role is to support people in inquiring what and where that consciousness is, where it always is. It's discovered through the synergy of either the group or the person speaking. I remember once, early on, I thought oh these are the points I want to cover, and I actually made some little notes. And I went to a meeting, still at Esalen, I think that first month, and I made my points and I looked out at the group and they were just dead. [chuckling]

I realized this is not a teaching confined to the points I may want to make. This is a meeting I'm offering. I am willing to meet you as you are in truth. And I'm willing to meet whatever you perceive as the obstacles to your self realization, of your self as that truth. And then there is a unique discovery, and we all benefit. I certainly benefit tremendously because, as you said earlier, our minds mirror and reflect each other, and our souls reflect each other. Consciousness is the spaciousness that somehow mysteriously reflects itself in all.

We're finally in this mystery with one Self and that's found in each one's self. It's thrilling to me when someone has a moment of awakening or a moment of clear seeing. I feel augmented and thrilled, maybe even more than my initial moment, because it's part of the discovering, as Papaji says, the limitlessness of true discovery. I'm heartbroken when I see someone turn from it or deny themselves. But I'm not heartbroken in the some kind of sentimental way as I used to be. I remember writing Papaji a letter. (We had a wonderful correspondence for a while.) I said, "Why is it that people turn from this? I don't get it. Here's the experience, it's very simple, it's here. Why then would you deny that, turn back to denying yourself and affirming your suffering?" And he wrote back, and using just very simple, idiosyncratic English, said, "Who knows what roles this infinite intelligence chooses each of us to play?" I heard that as even denial or affirmation is to be surrendered, because the truth is never as my mind can perceive it.

W: Yes, that's such a wonderful way of putting it. Just this whole notion of not knowing and staying inside the question, being in the question, staying inside the mystery and a continual surrender to that. It's a beautiful moment, all that I've come through with such remarkable teachers, such remarkable experiences. I've learned from everybody and particularly from my own clients so very much, but one thing that's really come through as a theme song, that levels the playing field so it takes it out of the realm of sort of moral evaluations and polarities and judgments and all the rest, a very simple awareness that everyone has the experiences he or she are here to have to make the growth in evolution they're here to make. And whatever form that takes, so be it.

G: Yeah. I also sense that there's also a wild card in there. [chuckling] So while that is true, there's also the possibility, what I don't want to exclude with myself or with others, is the possibility to intervene. That way then, it's true that clearly what is meant to be is being, and even that is not as we think it to be.

W: This being so leaves room for divine grace and serendipity and synchronicity and all the rest, along with the mystery, along with room for surprises, the unexpected. It's like we have this meeting, this welcoming in this moment and we have no idea what's going to come out of this.

G: That's right, including the possibility to respond.

W: Yes, the possibility to respond, something we hadn't felt before, and things open up in a marvelous way.

G: And that's a true meeting, isn't it? I love that. Yes. Through life itself.

W: Life itself being the great teacher. "Life and life only," as Bob Dylan calls it.

G: Well, that's the truth, isn't it. That's the satguru right there.

W: Yes, yes. Life itself is the satguru exactly. So, you mentioned taking some notes before a group teaching and maybe that was the one in Esalen where you're laying down your points and then you observe the group and they were just dead.

G: That was so great for me because I'd always been a good student and had taken good notes, and I assumed that's how to be a good teacher: take your notes and go in. It doesn't mean I might not jot something down I want to be sure and cover in a meeting. But, I surrendered to have faith, the word you used earlier, in this truth to express itself and use me. And, I didn't need to have an agenda. I don't need to have an agenda for how that is expressed or what points get made or not made. I'm always interested in skillful means and I often, in my mind, replay a meeting and say, "I could have said such and such." But the replay is just part of the learning process, it seems to me, the intelligence working through the mind. But the thrill of the meeting is the not knowing. For me, that's what's most alive.

W: Yes. Then you shifted to trusting in the spontaneous intimacy with people you meet. This fundamental faith emerged that this truth, this awareness, will find the words, will find the way to communicate this with this person or that person over whatever question they ask.

G: That's it.

W: Just be right here in this moment and it will show itself.

G: That's right. Again, not in my control.

W: Right, right. This would all appear to be a disillusioning, humbling experience that is at the same time liberating and thoroughly elevating. You've shared through your writing and our talking of these disillusioning and humbling experiences. I've always considered that people talk about disillusionment as sort of a negative thing, but I see it fundamentally, other than maybe with extreme situations like 9/11 and possibly even there to some degree, that you are seeing through an illusion. So, of course it is going to be disillusioning. But, look at how much more is revealed and how much greater breath and awareness comes out of that, and how transformative and transcendent the invitation really is.

G: Absolutely. Disillusionment often brings pain, the pain of losing our idealizations. We don't want to feel the pain so we assume the event was bad. But there's pain with growth and disillusionment is essential.

W: This is true. Without disillusionment, will there be any growth?

G: That's right. None. No.

W: That's true. Which leads directly to what is really that indefinable, indescribable essence of who we truly are. Some people call it the True Self or pure energy or perfection or Original Nature or still pure silent awareness. It goes by all these different terms. How do you point at it or signal what that is in your experience?

G: Well, when I am speaking to anyone ever, if possible, I evoke what the word "mystery" points to. So much bigger than concepts, and yet not separate from our concepts, it remains this living mystery, this hugeness that is all-inclusive. I have to use words like *self* and I think last year I was using *life itself* too. Of course, these words can be corrupted too and made to seem like some kind of magic show. Because that's what our minds do. Thinking a thing tries to manage what cannot be managed.

W: And define what's indefinable, and describe what's indescribable.

G: Well, that's the assignment my teacher gave me. I said, "It *can't* be described" and he said, "...nevertheless, you must describe it."

W: The best we have is these words, and let's use these words and somehow connect with each other.

G: That's right. He also had this wonderful phrase where he would say: "You have to look inside the word; you have to undress the word." We can surrender to that naked wonder, and then we are in love and we are conscious of ourselves as *being* this mystery, not being separate from it. What a thrill.

W: This word *transparency* gets used a great deal and *naked* and *pure* and I think what it is getting at is an undressing, to use your term and Papaji's, of the filters, of the conceptual frameworks. It's like how people talk about peeling an onion. It's like shedding layer upon layer upon layer as we evermore approach being what's real, invite what really is right here. And that's a whole process.

G: It is a process and it's also immediate. It's both in time and instantaneous. The process is the unraveling, it seems to me, but there are moments in that unraveling when a knot is simply cut. Or a moment when we realize there was never really a knot even here. It is all only imagination. Those are brain development moments, or for me, a moment of being in love and surrendering to that. There are these moments where the whole paradigm is different. We're not where we were, and yet—mysteriously—we are the same.

W: So when people talk about things being sudden and instantaneous, and other people talk about this gradual opening and flowing, they're both correct?

G: All is here.

W: That's right. It's all here. So, when you came back in 1990 from your pilgrimage to Papaji in India, you mentioned how you got a lot of flack when you began teaching. Was it that your waking was still stabilizing, which is often the case for just about all of us, or was it just not a good fit with those people and the zeitgeist at the time, or something else entirely?

G: I think it's what happens when people know you one way and then you come back and you no longer fit the definition. It seemed like I was getting "Who do you think you are?" -- that kind of thing. It was very useful for me because it would continually throw me back into, "Who *do* I think I am?" I had to keep falling off the tightrope really. I'm glad there was this discovery that it's not really about *me* teaching anybody anything; people aren't here to get that from me. They're actually here to discover where we meet or how truth is using us. There are so many ways of phrasing it. I love *meeting* in the sense that we get to meet and in that meeting more than we were aware of is revealed.

Of course there was stabilizing and further deepening happening too. Papaji would say that all the gods and demons of your past (your mind) come to attack when you choose freedom. That is the testing ground.

W: Yes. It kind of reminds me of that phrase: “A prophet is never recognized in his homeland.” They still remember you as that snotty kid, or that annoying whatever, and you’ve gone on your journey and you’re like a wholly different person now in many respects.

G: That’s right. It was wonderful, actually. Again, not so comfortable all the time, but I could see how important it was and how it forced me to be in complete integrity with what I had experienced: to not deny it or exaggerate it, but to simply tell the truth of it. And, in that, then the realization could naturally deepen. I did lose people who called themselves my friends, and my family thought I had just gone totally nuts, but they sort of always suspected that once I moved to California.

W: [laughs] Most of us suspect our family is completely nuts.

G: Exactly, that’s all right.

W: And there are times we get verification: “Well, that’s exactly what I firmly suspected all these years.” [laughs]

G: That’s true.

W: So, people have you in a box. They put you in a category and they can’t really see you anymore. It’s like you can’t really see the tree you’ve been climbing as a child the moment you see it’s a red oak tree. Well, you don’t see that tree or experience that tree ever the same way again.

G: Yes, that really ties back into what you were saying about the nakedness and the willingness to see that none of us can possibly be who we all think we are, because those thoughts are illusions.

W: These categories get imposed through our conditioning. Judgments and beliefs get imposed from our programming and the people around our environment where we were living. We believe them and we even make up a good number of our own and we are ever defining ourselves and limiting ourselves by those notions.

G: That’s it. That’s samsara, isn’t it?

W: That’s samsara, or illusion, or what we think is true, but it isn’t.

G: That’s right. It’s all made up; it’s all a fabrication.

W: I couldn’t agree more. Once you began your new life as a spiritual teacher, you noted how true happiness had a much more enduring and lasting quality and it brought you into a place of fulfillment. It pulled you, in your encounters with Papaji, into just being naturally happy and at other times of being unhappy. But, you didn’t give undue weight or get caught up in it, it didn’t seem.

G: That's the monumental shift because previously I had really identified myself, defined myself, based on my emotions or my thoughts about those emotions. The emotions and the thoughts were crucial to my definition of myself. After meeting Papaji, I'd recognized that those were pretty superficial. In the depths of oneself, there is consciousness that is already free of emotions and thoughts. I was free to feel unhappy, and in the freedom to feel unhappy, again like falling off the tightrope, I was able then to naturally experience the fulfillment of being.

W: You mentioned several times that you were able to see through thoughts and beliefs and all other conceptual, made-up stuff the mind fabricates as insubstantial. And, in it's insubstantiality, you were drawn to, "Well, what's underneath this. What's the substratum?" Would you share a little more about that?

G: Papaji uses the word substratum. And, I love that word because it really points to the difference, the essential difference, in what comes and goes and what is always present, what everything is always coming into and going out of. That, again, takes us back to this indefinable consciousness or life or mystery that we, as form, have appeared in and exist in and—as form—we leave, but *it* remains. I love reading the paper and just seeing briefly the science section, the latest news from either the Hubble telescope or some other satellite about how the universe is actually much bigger, billions of light years more than we thought. Then, the whole understanding of dark matter and anti-matter and matter, coming from emptiness. It's thrilling to me because it's humbling in the sense of this substratum that we try to name with our words like consciousness or life as if we even can define life. But reality remains free of any definition. And this is essential to real happiness, it seems to me.

W: Similarly I find in all these different discoveries, every time it's an expansion, it's not a constriction, and that the universe is actually far older and far larger than we ever even can begin to imagine. It just keeps pointing to the vastness of this mystery, of life itself and the universe that the mind wants to keep constraining and putting into a box and "now we know" and that self-righteous arrogance that comes with that.

G: It's funny isn't it?

W: It's this great cosmic joke, right. We already are what we are seeking to become and we don't think we are that. It's out there somewhere.

G: That's right. Yeah, thank God it's a joke.

W: And so, this remarkable vastness, it is always stunning and it just stops you. You get to a full stop, a complete stop. And, you are in a space of awe and amazement. Some would say a certain terror of the unknown, but a very inviting one.

G: Yes.

W: I mean, it sort of cuts across the whole spectrum, doesn't it?

G: It's beautiful.

W: With the basic wars stopped within your mind, and, with other minds in a way, you shared how conflict still arose for you. And, I imagine it still does, as it does in all our lives. How was conflict present before this transformation and transcendence with your teacher, and how has it been present since, afterwards, since we're all dealing with conflict and change?

G: Well for me it's not the conflict that has changed. I could have a digestive conflict or I could have a disagreement with a neighbor or with my husband or with an opinion I read in the paper. That has remained the way it always was. There are things—opinions or imperatives—that this organism has that remain different from other organisms. But, my relationship to those conflicts is deeply modified. What was *behind* having to win the conflict was a fear of death or a fear of falling off. That fear no longer rules my life. The freedom is to actually experience the individuality of opinions or preferences or imperatives without defining oneself by that. The neighbor's dog may continue to bark, and my nervous system may continue to react. There is room for it all in the vast space of consciousness.

W: Or be obnoxious or whatever way they are.

G: I can disagree with them and I'm free to disagree with them. The irritation doesn't *define* my happiness. And the same goes with my past. My parents' alcoholism may have affected aspects of my personality or my physical being, but it no longer *defines* my happiness. Things are the way they are. The particular opinions and reactions that appear in this mind-body called Gangaji—Toni—me—are just part of the phenomena of the universe. The substratum remains free and pure and radiant, not diminished by phenomena appearing or disappearing.

W: In any way.

G: In any way.

W: Thus, the conflicts come, they arise, they leave and, again, it doesn't have to define you. It sounds like you've gone through a healthy process of disidentifying and detaching, that is, not really investing in the identity any longer or even losing interest in that being somehow who you are.

G: Well, there was a transcendental period, where there really was no sense of a me. Then, after some time, a couple of years, I started to experience the sense of a personal somebody reappearing, reincarnating. And, at first it frightened me. I thought I was losing something, but by then, I knew very well what to do with that fear. I knew to open to it and to lose, to lose everything. And, I recognized that both the experience of transcendental reality and the more mundane reality are still limited by being experiences. And so, I could welcome a transcendental experience, but I could also welcome a mundane experience in a way that I had never been able to welcome before. Speaking about my earlier search in meditation or with substances, I could

have transcendental experiences, but they were short lived. I thought they should last, so there was unnecessary suffering that was attached to losing what is bound to come and go. What Papaji just so brilliantly taught was to find out what comes and goes, and find out what is always here.

W: Yes. Yes.

G: There it is.

W: Yes, beautifully said. You spoke of your particular mind's habits as becoming more obvious and being able to say "yes" to them. Just saying "yes" is essentially it's own surrender since that simple, elegant act releases all stress, all resistance and the war is finally over. And you have the freedom to not act out the mind's habits that you see and acknowledge, like witnessing, in a way. Anything that you can say "yes" to, you are free from. Maybe you've already answered this, but of the habits of mind, of your particular mind, which ones did your mind dream up until you saw through them all?

G: I saw that this particular mind body is tilted a certain way. As I was just saying, there are certain preferences that go with this body mind. I don't have to fight that. I remember years ago reading about Nisargadatta and being so impressed with his book *I am That*, and then reading that he had emphysema and he was a heavy smoker. And I was shocked because at that time I was a healthcare worker and I was very much believed in purifying the body. I remember someone questioning him and saying, "How can you smoke?" He said, "Let the body do what it wants to do. It wants to smoke."

W: [laughs] He had a very gruff personality, I mean he would snap at people apparently and as soon as he did that it was already over. It's like he held onto nothing.

G: I think in the West in particular we are conditioned by a psychological ideal of what it means to be free. And we hope that our personalities will be perfected in some way. And, when that's no longer the goal, the tilts or imperfections are no longer the issue.

W: People sometimes equate ego and personality or ego and mind and personality, and I really think they're really quite different. Personality is just kind of, "You're a bubbly person," or "You're a serious person." You know, it's kind of more your temperament. I don't really get that it's necessarily this ego mind.

G: Ego is part of the identification.

W: Yes, exactly.

G: That's right.

W: Yes. So, that's a nice distinction to have so don't get deluded and say, "Oh, they're still caught up in samsara or the illusions of the world" and it's just their particular personality being played out in that moment.

G: That's great. That's really, really good. I'll use that. That's really good. Thank you.

W: [laughs] The best conversations are where we mutually grow with each other and, if I've said anything that touches you, and you've said many things that have touched me, I feel totally gratified by it. Because that's what wonderful conversations are all about, right?

G: That's the truth. That's the truth. I'd say what touches me the most about you, although you say wonderful things, is there is an exuberance. I love your laugh. It's really great.

W: Thank you. You can't do anything about how you sneeze, or how you laugh or any of these things, you know? And, all you can do is say "thank you" even though it's God's grace. What else could it be, right?

G: That's right.

W: Thank you for that. You mentioned feeling heartbroken when you see someone who turns away or denies the discovery of awakening in all its depth and breadth and height and majesty. How do you bear this?

G: I have to let my heart break. When I let it break, it breaks open and it is a passing pain, a discomfort. It all finally remains a mystery. It's out of my control.

W: It's their path, their pathless path if you will, that they're on and all you can do is contribute as you can and they're going to do what they do.

G: Absolutely. That's it.

W: A number of speakers at the recent US SAND 3 conference were very concerned about climate change and just all that's going on in the world. Maybe it's never been any different; I don't think it really has. We're just much more informed and much more scientific in being able to describe things, measure things, and the media just goes crazy over all this stuff. Whether it's denying it or fear mongering over it, whatever they do. And, the phrase that's always touched me very deeply and, it's not one of these things you ever want to shake because it strikes such a deep chord, is the wonderful mythologist Joseph Campbell who made the statement and it was like a vision in a way, his words: to "joyously participate in the sorrows of the world."

G: Oh, he's so good. That's wonderful.

W: And, you can't shake that. You witness it, you're there in front of it, and you do your best to joyously participate with compassion, with kindness, with empathy and help, as you can. It just is what it is.

G: And sometimes they're tears, and that's just part of the joyous participation.

W: Well yes. You mention being healthier in a sentimental way I think, where you shifted in your letter-writing correspondence with Papaji and you shifted to a deeper acceptance. It's almost like your compassionate heart was breaking open. You spoke of a surrendering given it's being so new to your mind to begin perceiving.

G: It was like a meteorite hitting my world. It was a planetary shift and Papaji was the catalyst, and there also to support me in the revelations that kept occurring. So, yes, I am both the same person and not the same person. Recently an interviewer asked me what my experience of myself is. She elaborated on that a little bit: my body, my personality. I said, "Sometimes I really don't even know this person. Who is this?"

W: You're just continually getting introduced.

G: It's like, "Wow, what a strange person."

W: Different facets of yourself. Some people call it different personalities, ego states, self states, but we're such multi-faceted beings and, in a lifetime, will we be able to discover all those facets?

G: That's right. Probably not, because we're really all beings so every time we meet someone, we're meeting another facet of ourselves.

W: Exactly. Beautifully said. Holographic universe, you could say.

G: Yes, holographic universe.

W: So, and this is really the biggest mystery in science as far as I know, all is consciousness. What is this context of consciousness? And, what is that really actually all about? And, where do you see that all being at the present time? Because this shifts over time. I mean, you could look even at the Bible. The God of the Old Testament is not the God of the New Testament. Something's shifted with God or maybe it's our perception of God. Most likely.

G: Yeah, I think it's shifting all the time and I'm not as up on that as you are in terms of the scientific, philosophical literature, but it just seems to me that each generation attempts to manage the hugeness of the mystery. In that attempt, then I think that there are great discoveries that are uncovered. But, it's still up for grabs. I don't think anyone's really nailed it yet.

W: Maybe it's just un-nailable? It's too much in flow to tack down in that way or any way.

G: I support that mystic point of view. As science gets closer to the mystic revelations, we'll see. I can't imagine how it could be nailed down. Although I also love reading about the discoveries and I like reading discussions on how God has changed and this concept, and that people change to reflect discoveries. Then I see a fundamentalist or regressive movement arise in the midst of

what seems like progress, and I think, “Oh, well. Nothing has really changed at all.” It is still the same old warfare. So, we’ll see. A beautiful teaching from Papaji is, “Wait and see.”

W: Right. So, there’s really no way to predict where anything is going in terms of future forecasts. I call it future tripping. If I ask you, “Where do you see it all going from here? What’s the next phrase? How do you envision this unfolding? What direction do you see this dream, this life turning toward? Do you have any inclinations or intuitions or sense about that?”

G: I say I have no idea.

W: You linger in unknowing. [laughs]

G: I’m humbled into “I don’t know.” And I’m comfortable with that. I’d like to find out. I remember when Eli’s father was dying. He was in pain and it was his time to go. He was in his eighties and he was ready. He said, “The only thing is I want to see how it all turns out.” I love that.

W: Yes. I think a lot of people wake up every morning and the reason they wake up is to answer that very question: “Where is this all going. What’s next?”

G: Well that’s possible. That’s right.

W: The curiosity, you know.

G: That’s right. That’s a defining human characteristic.

W: You speak very lovingly and beautifully and joyously of all that your teacher, Papaji, has imparted. Have you found one or more limitations to his approach because it emphasizes the formless side of the equation? At the same time he was a householder too and was equally attuned to the needs and necessities living in this relative world. Have you found any limitations to his approach in your experience?

G: No, I haven’t because it’s all-inclusive. It’s not anti-anything and it’s not pro-anything and yet, it’s present with everything. So, I’m still discovering depths and, luckily, freshly discovering depths of being that I just would not have been turned toward without Papaji. And there are certainly limits in his teaching mode. He was a patriarchal guru who wasn’t interested in psychological understanding. I think psychological understanding is very valuable, especially in terms of meeting people and supporting people. But, it was also wonderful to be with a teacher who had no interest in that because I saw it wasn’t necessary. So, I don’t know. I still haven’t discovered the end.

W: Well, it makes both intuitive and even, strangely enough, logical sense. I mean, how would limits show up in the limitless? How would boundaries show up in the boundless?

G: Yes, as he was saying, just check and see.

W: Yes: Stop and look and see for yourself. That's right. And it's amazing, in my experience in this life, that people are continually yearning for these wonderful moments of oneness, transcendence and joy. And, at the same time, the greatest moments of real growth and development and evolution tend to come during the hardest times, during the most challenging times, the most painful times.

G: I think we get complacent with the peaceful times. They are beautiful and it's wonderful, but there's a shock to the system when the reversals happen. And those shocks can be useful if we're willing to surrender.

W: So, even the most evolved beings seem to have their reactive, difficult moments. You mentioned some moments of Papaji's, you mentioned moments of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj; even Jesus Christ had these moments with the moneylenders turning over their tables in his Father's house, right.

G: He probably had lot's more too. He was a young man.

W: That's right. I'm sure we don't know them, and I'm sure he had them. Do these moments show up for you still? Would you kindly give some illustrations? Because we are all just mere mortals and, there are times we feel very comforted and resonate with the flow of life, and other times when we get caught up in at least moments of reactivity in our utter humanness.

G: I mentioned the yapping dog next door, and we just came out of an election. I had a strong opinion about whom I wanted to win. I was happy it turned out the way it did. I could feel it in my body, both an irritation and a fear of what might happen to our country. I love our country. I love my home here. I love my body. You know, with love, there are attachments. It's just the recognition that those are attachments. I recognize where there are attachments and I recognize they are simply what they are.

W: Yes.

G: And, it's nothing to worry about.

W: It reminds me of Paul's letter in the New Testament where people misunderstand him to say "money is the root of all evil." And, that's not what he wrote. It was actually the "love" of money, which is, again, the attachment, the desire, the clinging.

G: That's right. That's good. I didn't know that.

W: Yes. Same point. This problematic nature of this ego-mind, yours, mine, all of ours, are far more alike than they are different in my experience. It's operating as this phantom, separate self seemingly running the show of our lives in one form or another. And people – and I think we've all fallen into this trap at times – want to demonize it, villainize it, and make it a sort of evil

entity, even though it neither exists nor not exists. How can the ego mind be most helpfully perceived?

G: The ego-mind is only a problem when it's leading the show. As a master, it is a tyrant and a dictator. As a servant, it's a beautiful, sublime servant. It knows very well how to serve. As we know from creative activity, great moments in philosophy or science or spiritual moments, the mind is the vehicle for insight and revelation and discovery. It's wonderful. It's equal to the whole mystery. It's just that we have tried to follow our minds and that doesn't work. It's a mess.

W: Is there anything else that you'd like to share that you feel really draws you about your experience and this whole journey of awakening?

G: It feels like you've drawn everything out. I will say that when I was referring to that moment at Esalen, that I've never been able to describe that and I would say I still haven't described it.

W: Well, it's indescribable. It's beyond words. It's ineffable.

G: And you know, Papaji also said, yes, it's indescribable, but still you have to turn your mind to try and describe it. We give our minds the assignment to describe the indescribable.

W: That's correct. Yes.

G: Speak the unspeakable and live what has never been lived. And what a life. Also though, I went on the website when you first invited me to have this conversation and looked at your clips you have there, and I was so impressed and just felt the exuberance of your surrender coming through. And I'm really happy that you've helped people in this particular way that you have.

W: Oh, thank you so very much. I relate to people as they come into this space of presence in many ways far deeper than I do my own colleagues. [giggling]

G: Yeah.

W: Strangely enough, but we're sharing that space which is timeless. So that space is who we truly are. I call it Original Sanity. You're probably familiar with Chögyam Trungpa's notion of the sanity we were born with. And to share that space, I mean, what's better than that? And what a joy and what a gift it is to be able to do that with people.

G: Yes. What a joy.

W: And it's so kind of you to notice that and share that with me. Thank you so very, very much. Again, it's just been my great love. So I can't imagine why anyone would retire from their great love.

G: [chuckling] No.

W: It makes no sense to me.

G: Right. No retirement in this business.

W: No retirement, that's right. In the truth business, you continue happening in the truth. And expressing it as best you can, right?

G: That's right.

W: And words are feeble instruments but the best we have, right?

G: That's right. And even our failure then is blissful.

W: Even that's blissful. I used to have a funny idea of being blissful – you know Snoopy, the Peanuts cartoon character? Bliss seemed like Snoopy doing his joyous carefree dance – bopping his head back and forth aiming at the sun, some sort of giddy happiness. But bliss isn't that at all.

G: That's right.

W: It's really the absence of the mind's constant chatter. And we get this very direct and immediate experience of life as itself. At least that's how I experience it. I don't know how you exactly experience it.

G: Yeah, I would say that that's a very clear reflection. Well, thank you.

W: You've been very, very generous with your time and I deeply appreciate it. You mentioned that the mind operates best as a servant and there's where we can actually observe it and witness it and realize that can't be who we are.

G: That's right. You can see it.

W: You can see it. You even mentioned about that inner dialoging, that the moment you are able to stand back and hear it and observe it as an inner dialogue of the mind, in a way, you are already outside of it and free of it.

G: That's right.

W: There was this beautiful statement of the mind being a servant with Carl Gustav Jung where he was reported to have said, "There comes a moment where the mind turns and bows to the Self."

G: Oh, how beautiful. I'm really happy you said that. Thank you. That's great. You've been wonderful. I really appreciate it.

W: It's been lovely—a delight and a joy—being with you. Thank you. Have a beautiful day.

G: Likewise. Thanks. You too.