

Collective Healing

By Kosha Joubert and Stephen Busby - Interview by Robin Alfred

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Kosha, Stephen, and Robin all live in the Findhorn Community in Scotland (when not traveling the world for their work), and have been friends for many years. Robin and Kosha have taken this a step further and are now happily married. All three share a deep interest in the development of global consciousness and collective wisdom, and will be offering an experimental Collective Healing Space in Berlin, 14-15 January 2017. For more information on this, please write to: office@ecovillage.org or check Stephen's events page at: www.stephenbusby.com/next-events



Stephen, Kosha & Robin

ROBIN: What is the connection between GEN and collective healing?

KOSHA: At its core, GEN holds a high global vision of humanity coming home to the planet with the potential of healing our relationship to each other and the world around us. The vision is gradually being manifested through ecovillage projects in many different forms in different places, and through the global network where all of us come together.

Being in GEN becomes a journey towards global consciousness and global intercultural citizenship: we practice hosting global realities within our awareness through the intimate concern for the wellbeing of our friends and their communities around the world. As we work across continents, we meet the need for healing of the relationships that have gone before, many of which have disregarded respect for life

and the dignity of other people. We live in a world steeped in post-colonial and neo-colonial relationships, impacted by post-slavery and neo-slavery realities, a world where streams of refugees are migrating across the face of the planet seeking a safe haven from existential threats. Collectively, within the body of humanity, we hold so much pain, and it is so hard for us to give a home to the intensity of these feelings that we easily find ourselves recreating the trauma of the past. In GEN, we are beginning to welcome and make space for the pain as it comes up for healing.

ROBIN: Stephen, how do you see the relationship between intentional communities and this question of collective trauma and healing?

STEPHEN: I'm reflecting on my experience of intentional communities over the last 15 years, where the impression I have is that most people adhere to an intentional way of life because they're drawn to a collective healing movement, whether this is consciously realized or not. In the last two or three years, relatively recently, this purpose has become more conscious. The tools and approaches that people have been using and are further evolving in terms of healing and consciousness transformation are beginning to be formulated and applied more explicitly.

ROBIN: Thank you. It seems there are different levels of healing that we are talking about here. There is healing that happens on a personal and community level through intentional communities. You both speak to the power of community to heal. And then there is deeper systemic trauma that springs from colonialism, or from the current situation in different ecovillage communities.

KOSHA: In GEN, we speak about I, We, and World to distinguish three levels of our reality, which feels helpful. I think we have developed more experience and expertise within the community movement around collective healing on the 'I' and the 'We' levels. We have practiced hosting complex and diverse realities in our communities, and therefore, also within ourselves. Leading edge psychology has deeply influenced the community movement. The idea that, as individuals, we host different parts of our own personality, and, as communities, we host the diversity of human natures, has really arrived with us. We are integrating the insight that, as individuals, we are a fluid whole, that flows into and is ultimately inseparable from the larger whole. Once we work on deeper levels with our own trauma and our own pain, we start diving through a personality level into a more collective level where we experience ourselves as an expression of our heritage and culture. As we heal ourselves we are also inadvertently starting to heal the broader family and societal systems that we are a part of. The next level, the world level, where we dive into global consciousness, is more uncharted territory. There are not so many networks that are at the same time intimately personal and deeply global.

STEPHEN: My sense is that through all of us who are participating in intentional communities and inner exploration, we are tapping into layers of trauma at the level of society and culture. In this way, communities become powerful microcosms for trauma at the level of the wider society. They become spaces where the more hidden symptoms of our wider societies are concentrated and exposed. When this exploration becomes a conscious intention then these communities start manifesting resources that help to address some of these deeper layers of trauma, on behalf of the whole field of humankind. This capacity - to tap into the deeper layers of what next is ready to evolve in us through healing, on behalf of whole fields - seems to me very valuable and unique in the case of GEN.

ROBIN: So do I understand you both to say that it is not, in a way, necessary to separate the I and We levels of healing, that it is a continuum, with one reflecting the other?

STEPHEN: Yes, within the community dynamics that have been evolving in the last couple of years, what people are now becoming able to surface and presence between themselves is more acutely reflecting layers of societal trauma. It is important for those of us who are working with this to learn to depersonalize even more. We need to develop body-minds that are more attuned to dimensions of collective trauma, through our own continued healing. The traumatic imprinting that is inviting our presence now has a very particular way of showing up, with a particular vibration. We can become more skilled in attuning to this more consciously - we have the inner capacities and the outer tools to do this, to become this.

KOSHA: Can you give us a concrete example, Stephen?

STEPHEN: Yes. The two communities that I've had the most direct experience with over the last years in Europe – the Findhorn Foundation Community in Scotland and Schloss Glarisegg in Switzerland - both seem to be sharply impacted by what is labeled as 'the refugee crisis.' Dynamics that typically show up in community around issues of home, place and the 'right to belong' seem to me to be increasingly colored by an awareness of this recently escalating crisis – the dynamics mirror and reflect it. Just as we are touched personally and often painfully and reactively at an existential level by such core issues, we are also moved by the deeper systemic roots of what, on the surface, seems to be a social and political issue. Deep down we know that it is not just that, and that this 'it' isn't one issue but a complex multilayered reality that confounds mainstream thinking and attempts at resolution or containment. Deep down we know that we're touched or triggered by movements of human suffering that reflect older, shared wounding, and that there is guilt too waiting to be embraced here, as well as very old and complex victim-perpetrator dynamics that humanity has not been able, until now, to begin to feel.

ROBIN: I think it would be good to share more about how you both work in your different fields to help move trauma into more of a healing space. Kosha, what have you experienced in your work for GEN?

KOSHA: I have been working with GEN for over 7 years and for some of that time I was focusing on supporting the emergence of GEN Africa. I started by inviting wonderful people who are doing fantastic work on the ground in Africa to come to Ecovillage Design Education courses in an ecovillage in Germany (Sieben Linden), where I was living at the time. We worked with the method of the Forum, where people share authentically and intimately about what is alive in their lives. We all felt deeply honored to be present as witnesses and participants to these intercultural conversations and dialogues. It was a life changing experience.

One example that is quite stark in my memory is a situation in which women from various countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America were sharing their stories. The scale of abuse that was present in our circle was stunning for all of us. And whereas it felt that a certain level of work around women empowerment had been accomplished, when we heard about the horror of rapes, the domestic violence and the appalling stories of dead female babies found in wells, it was clear that there is so much more that still has not been seen and integrated. A deep sense of understanding and solidarity was born. At the core of what we practiced was listening, witnessing, and embracing. These can be powerful healing modalities.

Another example was around youth stepping into their power. Some young people in Europe are finding it hard to find their way. They can feel overwhelmed by the complexity of the world they are meeting, whereas many young people from the global South have a very clear commitment and direction. The existentiality of the situation in their countries is so strong that they have no questions about 'what should I do?' It is very clear. I have witnessed a mutual healing process taking place simply through this intercultural exchange. Participants from Africa could feel the power of community and clarity that they carry. Young Europeans were inspired and empowered to reconnect to their own roots and inner purpose. The longing for authentic connection across cultures is so strong, especially amongst youth.

As GEN Africa emerged, we worked with funding support from Europe. Funding which comes from Europe brings with it a European worldview and bureaucracy, which doesn't fit smoothly into African realities, on the contrary. This has created many tensions in our networks. On the one hand wanting to work with the opportunity, on the other hand how to deal with this tension. We have been challenged to heighten our awareness and holding capacity together, and in some instances we have, of course, also failed.

What I have found most important is to identify and work with people in all cultures who are space-holders or wisdom-keepers. We need people who can hold the awareness of the larger field, at least for a while, so that intense emotions or issues can be expressed safely, within a framework of trust and growing consciousness.

ROBIN: Can we say more about the quality of this holding space?

KOSHA: It has to do with qualities of wisdom and maturity, the ability to include expressions that are not normally acceptable and to slow things down when necessary, so that awareness can grow in the whole group. I have seen young people or older people hold this role, experienced facilitators and unexpected bystanders.

STEPHEN: What you are calling wisdom seems to me to be an ability to show up in an appropriate way so that we stay available and alert to what is going on behind what is being spoken and externalized. We are listening to the deeper movements within the collective that is gathered. And then, in a second step, we train the ability to bring and express this in appropriate ways so that it can be heard and received by the collective.

KOSHA: Yes. I feel we need to differentiate between situations, for instance in intentional communities, where members come from a similar cultural field, and in settings which are truly global, where we have Africans, Asians, Latin Americans, North Americans and Europeans meeting and stepping into dialogues. Different levels of complexity are present. For as long as we stay within our own cultural framework, we cannot see the cultural lenses and worldviews we are looking through. We can't see the intricacy. An African way of viewing Europeans might include the experience of centuries of oppression and disregard for African life and disrespect for African culture, and at the same time a wish for friendship. The European experience might include the longing for connection, hidden guilt feelings, a wish to give, and so much more. Working within the global networks requires a sensitivity and opening that builds on what we have learned in our intentional communities. We need to crack open our worldviews and our hearts to start seeing each other more fully. It is very cellular.

STEPHEN: This kind of skill set that we are referring to here becomes necessary at the intersection of cultures and societies. These meeting points are increasing and creating what you spoke about earlier: reciprocal healing because of the confrontation and mixing of different worldviews. But for a positive experience to emerge, I do think that requires these spaces to be facilitated in a particular way.

KOSHA: Thomas Hübl, a spiritual teacher to an increasing number of people in our movement, uses the image of the icebergs of cultures and the melting of the water in-between. He says that these melting waters between the cultural fields are where the highest creativity arises on the globe.

ROBIN: I hear you talking about the wisdom and value of being witnessed and simply sharing our stories. It reminds me of Thich Nhat Hanh's practice of compassionate listening circles. Just to witness and listen to each other is very healing in itself. I also know that you do systemic work. Maybe you could say something about this approach?

STEPHEN: Well, it's another form of witnessing. I would remove the word 'just' in 'just to witness' because I think it is one of the most profound and complex capacities that we can develop, especially as collectives. Witnessing some of these hidden historical, cultural traumatic strata that are hidden underneath the surface but are with us as much right now as they were historically is huge in what it requires us to begin to be able to presence. There are tools available which allow people to begin to sense, surface, witness, hold and express some of the collective pain in ways that are contained while not being suppressed.

Often these processes, like systemic constellation work, involve symbolic ways of representing different aspects of societal and cultural traumas in precise synthesized rituals, so that the witnessing quality in the room can be heightened. People can work with and respond to the mythical, archetypal, and symbolic aspects of what is being represented, rather than striving to understand it in the usual conditioned ways.

ROBIN: I wonder if you could each say something about the role of emotion and catharsis in this. Sometimes we hear stories of emotional release and discharge and it can feel that healing is happening. Others feel that witnessing and standing naked in front of the truth of an experience, in sobriety, is where healing happens.

KOSHA: I believe there is a cultural aspect to this. It feels presumptuous to speak for other cultures, but I can share some of what I've experienced. In Europe, a lot of personal therapy has taken place in the past decades. Many people in our networks have gone into personal release work and have experienced the privilege of peace over decades. In Africa and other places I have visited, there seems to be less privilege, and less access to such methods of healing. Many of those in our networks have gone through brutally raw and traumatic experiences. Having to witness your parents being forced into a hut and being burnt alive, or being raped multiple times... these experiences are of a very different intensity. I can just bow down to the intensity, in humility and awe at what people are able to hold. When someone is willing to share such a story we create sacred healing space together, by honoring, listening, respecting and holding in our hearts.

STEPHEN: The way that pain is received through a listening collective body would be immensely significant. Not simply how the story is told and shared, but how we're able to receive it, respond to it, and feel through it, through our own version of that trauma.

KOSHA: Yes. Often we contract and our listening is not yet as full as it could be. It's a process, yet I have found that these spaces, however imperfect they might have been, where people have been able to share at such a depth, have created experiences of complete transformation and deep empowerment.

STEPHEN: Not only in those that have shared but also in those who have witnessed and received.

KOSHA: There is such an intense yearning in the human soul to offer a home to each other, to witness each other. When spaces like this open up, people walk away from it with a sense that we have shared sacred space. People say things like 'I feel blessed to have been part of this.' So it becomes a process of restoration to host, to give space, and to honor the intensity and pain of what we have inflicted on each other as human beings.

STEPHEN: Yes, and to allow the related feelings and experiences of guilt that accompany that.

KOSHA: Exactly. So, beyond the witnessing, we come to the question of lasting and growing relationship, collaboration and manifestation. How can we come to lasting friendships between the "developing" and "developed" countries, the "colonized" and the "colonizers"? We can feel the charge that these words carry. The past has not been healed and many feelings are raw under the surface. We saw this tension playing out in the UN Climate Change negotiations in Paris, and the dialogues about who takes responsibility and who pays. The transfer of funds from the global North to the South is one way of attempting to take responsibility and heal the divide. I have witnessed instances within our network where people have gone to Africa with a vision of wanting to make up for the past in some way, wanting to help. And then, their wanting to help was sometimes perceived as arrogant. Or they ran into a local movement of empowerment, which welcomed what was brought and then said 'thank you, now we don't need you anymore.' It is not easy to manifest healing.

ROBIN: I am interested in that phrase 'wanting to help', because it feels qualitatively different from witnessing, hosting and being present to something. There is something about helping that may create a dynamic of 'I am the helper and you are being helped.' There is a natural kind of empathy and compassion that says "I want something to change", but if we go into a situation with an energy of wanting to fix things, that's very different to being present to and witnessing something. You both used the word 'hosting.' Can you dive deeper into what it really means to host another in my own being?

STEPHEN: Related to it is the kind of healing you were invoking earlier, Kosha, which is profoundly transformative and comes as an effect of the quality of the collective container that is being held. That is the distinction for me, between the so-called 'helping' intention and a 'healing' or 'transformative' effect. In one sense, this is a new science, and yet, in another way, it is one of the most ancient sciences or ways of human expression on the planet, which is simply being rediscovered by post-modern society. It seems there is a modern translation of it through recent higher consciousness work, which shows that we are being called to gather in ways that are honoring and respectful. We don't necessarily fully understand, yet we know when the qualities of honoring and respect are present. We know when we tap into those qualities within ourselves and within the collective space. I can potentially make myself available and receptive to the deepest possible pain and suffering that could be expressed, including any effects of overwhelm that may arise, when I can trust that will be held and witnessed in a respectful, safe space. This reconnects us in places where we were previously not able to stay connected. It therefore connects us to more of our wholeness, not just mine or yours, but Wholeness.

KOSHA: That's beautiful, thank you. I want to make the connection between this helper syndrome, which often grows from a sense of guilt, and a "saving the world" syndrome. It feels like in both cases, we step into activism, and thus also evade being fully with and hosting what is. So, instead, we need to slow down from 'doing' to 'being.' It is a healthy challenge to create spaces for both within GEN. GEN is an action-oriented, solution-based network. GEN is about walking our talk, about acting consciously now to create sustainable lifestyles. The conscious creation of more spaces for being and hosting is a necessary part of this, but it has always been more hidden. Now it is time to bring it to the surface.

STEPHEN: And is there a tension there?

KOSHA: Not necessarily a tension, but an evolutionary stretch. I think it's an awareness issue to create spaces of holding and witnessing more consciously in our lives. For example, we were just speaking about the intensity of trauma. As we dive deeper into the European collective we find an astonishing amount of unresolved trauma. We find that the effect of colonialism on the European psyche is profound, yet largely unconscious. The whole so-called refugee crisis that we are currently experiencing in Europe can be experienced as a surfacing of the European post-colonial trauma and guilt, and an opportunity for healing and for restoration. The past is breaking open in the present, something is coming home. And that, to me, is part of hosting. We are never separate from life as it expresses itself. We become aware that there is such a deep,

unspoken interconnection between all life on this planet that, whatever is being experienced wherever, in the end touches the same topics that are most sensitive within my own roots because it comes from those same roots.

STEPHEN: Which is very different from an understanding where I can remove myself from that which is being witnessed.

KOSHA: Exactly.

ROBIN: Se let's close by asking you, finally, about your own next steps and leading edge in this work. I imagine people might be reading this article and finding it very stimulating. Where could they go, and where could you go with these questions around collective healing?

KOSHA: For me it's been a dance throughout my life. The exploration of this topic seems to lie right at the core of my purpose. This is what I am here for, to help birth and heal global citizenship. Growing out of the South African reality into this global reality of GEN, this is what my heart beats for. One learning edge for me is to bring together hosting / being and the expression of care / acting. Learning how to truly take care of myself as I truly take care of the world, that this is not an either or, but both need to melt into one movement.

In the day-to-day work in GEN I meet this heart-wrenching, beautiful invitation to truly connect to the realities of the communities around the world. This means knowing about the villages in Bangladesh that are being flooded again, knowing about the villages in Southern Mauretania that are being engulfed by the Sahara, knowing about the villages in Zimbabwe and Colombia where the plants are withering because the rains did not come. It doesn't come as an abstract piece of information. These are my friends telling me how they are. Just to learn to host that and be with it is a practice. At the same time, not to lose my capacity to be a part of an organization that functions smoothly in order to bridge these realities.

There is a need to cultivate this hosting and witnessing ability in all our conversations in GEN and to create spaces that are specifically dedicated to global collective healing. So, we are consciously opening spaces for conscious exploration and experimentation where the wealth of experience that comes from the intentional community context can be lifted up to the next level. People in GEN work with so many different methods: Process Work, Systemic Constellation, Forum, Coaching, Co-Counseling, the Art of Hosting, the Work that Reconnects, Ritual and Initiation, to name a few. We need people from different cultures to facilitate these spaces. The First Nations carry enormous wisdom around transformative collective healing. We've started to open spaces at our events and conferences dedicated to collective healing and this is going to grow in the coming years. We are stepping into a stage of dedicated experimentation.

STEPHEN: I feel very touched to hear you speak of these spaces. I'm feeling called to convene and facilitate spaces with the tools that are emerging in ever more refined and accessible ways. We need to integrate the systemic dimension much more profoundly and will be invited and stretched in this, in terms of what we can hold and host. We'll also be supported in this too, I believe, through inner dimensions of consciousness that are increasingly available to us. All those who are being called to such spaces, or to dream into them and how they might appear through you and your own networks - I invite you to listen-within and join us.

Kosha Anja Joubert serves as Executive Director of GEN International, and sits on the Advisory Board of GEN Africa. She has many years of experience as an international facilitator, trainer, and consultant and has worked extensively in the fields of curriculum development, international collaboration, and sustainable development. Kosha grew up in South Africa under apartheid and has been dedicated to building bridges across all divides ever since. She has lived in ecovillages for the past 25 years and been a driving force in GEN for eight years. Kosha is also a cofounder of Gaia Education, which develops trainings at the cutting-edge of sustainability, and coauthor of the internationally applied Gaia Education curriculum for Ecovillage Design Education. You can see her TEDx Talk on ecovillages here: youtu.be/gGbuOBCGfmQ

Stephen Busby has a coaching, consulting and healing practice and has been serving higher human potential and purpose internationally for over thirty years. He is based at the Findhorn Foundation Community: a center for holistic education, organizational and cultural innovation in Scotland. Stephen has distilled new applications of phenomenological systemic methodologies to healing in collective fields, from which his higher consciousness practices have evolved. His several careers in education and consultancy have spanned the corporate world, transnational public service institutions and not-for-profit organizations in Europe, Africa, Asia and North America. Information on his work is at www.stephenbusby.com

Robin Alfred worked as a trainer, educator, and social work manager for 15 years in London prior to coming to the Findhorn ecovillage in Scotland in 1995. He is founding Director of the Findhorn Consultancy Service and was Chair of Trustees from 2009-2014. Robin has extensive experience leading and developing groups and individuals in a variety of settings including prisons, social work, police forces, communities, NGOs, multinationals, and other corporations. Robin was a faculty member of the Findhorn Foundation's Ecovillage Training for many years, and represented the Findhorn Foundation in EU programs. He has taught Ecovillage Design Education courses in the UK, Germany, India, and the Gambia and helped facilitate the GEN Europe Conferences in 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015.