

# Report on Green Kashmir visit September 2016

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## Introduction

Monday 19th to Friday 30th September

During this brief exploratory trip to Kashmir, where I was briefed to deliver an active listening element to our permaculture course, I was aware that communication and active listening skills may not immediately be seen as useful nor relevant to a people in crisis. Therefore, I was careful to observe with close attention the mood and style of the people to be able to reflect where listening, communication and empathic skills, may bring benefits to them all.

During our stay we had discussions with the following local personalities:

- Atar Parvez - environmental journalist
- Irfan - Veterinary surgeon
- Tahir – Lawyer
- Dr Bashir - Athrout - Emergency help for the victims of the crisis
- Victims of the pellet guns - in the SKIMS hospital
- Marif & Umar - 2 lakeside farmers
- Professor Shah - Retired dean of Agriculture
- Mr Wonderful - Dilawar - one of the shikara flower men
- A number of young students - male and female
- Boat owners and local visitors to the boat
- The president of the Dal Lake Boat association (?)

Each person we spoke to had a long story to tell us, some reaching back to the splitting of Kashmir at the end of British rule, and others much more aligned with the immediate horrors of the recent conflicts and the issues of destruction of the environment.

## Pervasive themes

The pervasive themes that came up repeatedly were:

- the pollution and degradation of Dal Lake.
- the injustice of the military 'occupation' of Kashmir by India
- the challenge by India of Kashmir's article 370 which protects Kashmiri lands for Kashmiri people
- the profoundly failing tourist industry
- the blinding of thousands of people with illegal pellet guns

However, by far, the most pervasive theme I perceived, was the helplessness of the people to be able to effect any change in the political and environmental situation and the devastating effect it has had on the people and the land.

Everyone I listened to told a similar story of helplessness, with a firm belief in the solution being 'out there' and not within the power nor control of the average person. And almost everyone I spoke to was too ready to jump to conclusions, assume they had understood questions, and then tell a story that sounded like they'd told a hundred times before, as though reliving and retraumatizing themselves with every telling.

## **My insight into the mind of the Kashmiris**

It feels from my perspective that the Kashmiri people have felt oppressed and powerless for many years. Military brutality, a lack of public accountability, the arbitrary law of the sovereign as opposed to the rule of law, the closing of communications and internet during times of unrest, the isolation of Kashmir by India from outside humanitarian aid, police provocation to violence - note the arresting of Athrout volunteers for non registration of their rescue vehicles - and countless human rights contraventions that receive almost no international attention and go unpunished and unredressed, alongside the brutal injunctions to not cooperate with the Indian authorities by angry young men who have nothing but stones to fight with, have all contributed over the years to the dampening and suppression of the Kashmiri spirit and their now growing, self belief, that nothing they do will make any difference. This was and will be our biggest challenge in the coming months and years.

To instil a sense of hope or possibility that permaculture principles and human to human engagement would be able to redress some of the issues experienced by local people will take dedication and some significant liaison with Green Kashmir members in Kashmir.

## **2 Hour Active Listening course - Friday 23rd September**

My first programmed contribution to our visit was to deliver a 2 hour active listening course for members of Green Kashmir's board. This took place at our home base on Friday, muslim holy day, when soldiers were present on the streets in greater than usual numbers to inhibit people gathering in any sizeable group around the mosques. As each day we were challenged with the realities of curfew and road blocks, we took the opportunity to offer the training on the Friday to those local enough to our home to be able to make it to us.

The listening exercises were designed to encourage a non judgemental, open and accepting space for people to be able to share, be witnessed and be seen for who they are.

I used Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to show how the people of Kashmir have been reduced to having to deal with the most immediate concerns of daily survival, producing a state of mind that does not engender the ability to think or respond to the situation from a calm, reasoned or creative perspective. The collective helplessness borne of a fear imposed from without has spread amongst the people such that there is a pervasive mood of vulnerability and fear even if there is still, gladly, a sense of dignity and integrity to everyday life.

## **The response**

Feedback given indicated that people felt much closer and more accepting of the other person after the listening exercises. What was highlighted was that, without the structure of the listening exercise, those present would have been interrupting and commenting on their partner's sharing, thus blocking an opportunity to really hear and understand the story of their partner.

As the exercise progressed, people started to realise, by doing, the relevance of this kind of exercise to be able to rebuild the morale and the spirit of the people of Kashmir.

## **My conclusion**

In times of crisis, people are often not really listening to another person. Their own troubles are foremost in their mind and despite the fact that everyone must be feeling similarly, there appears to be a lack of empathy and understanding of the pressures each individual are under. This 'survival' mentality breeds hopelessness and helplessness.

However, creating safe spaces and offering skills to be able to really hear and listen to another person's story, enriches relationships, deepens friendships, and creates an environment of tolerance, understanding and unity. With such connection between individuals, and ultimately, with projects that connect those individuals back to their land, the will and spirit of the people in Kashmir has the potential to improve, and from a phenomenological point of view, to spread and create the reality they wish to live.

## **2 Day Permaculture course Tuesday 27th & Wednesday 28th September 2016**

With an ever changing set of circumstances to have to deal with in the lead up to our course due to political and military developments in the hours and days before, we were very happy to be finally located in the large upstairs hall of a private house, sourced by our Secretary, Shahzad Badyari.

The two days created a physical and dynamic space for our students to play with ideas of permaculture, to experience the benefits of discussion and negotiation, and to be able to stand up and present to the group - something that one commentator said taught them more than years in conventional schooling.

The break from day to day concerns for the two days, and the ideas and experiences that were generated by our contributions were quite significant and the feedback was constructive and subsequent stories of those that attended reveal that some of those in attendance have already been inspired to make changes in their lives.

We are aware that one 2 day course is really just a seeding of an idea and that now the real work starts with setting up communities, relationships and projects that the local people can generate as much as involve themselves in.

From my own perspective, I can offer online training in interpersonal skills, negotiation and listening along with assertiveness and confidence building. (See Bio below)

## **Personal reflections on the future of Green Kashmir**

We received some very firm and clear advice from Professor Shah - Ex Dean of Agriculture - that whatever we create needs to have a measurable outcome so that we can evidence progress.

The problems that ultimately need resolving are beyond one project to achieve but I am aware that every successful project takes Kashmir one step closer to a resolution at least on issues of environment and wellbeing, which, hopefully, may impact on the political situation in time.

I feel we need to mobilise the youth of Kashmir in a peaceful way, finding valid outlets for some of the angry young men who are fighting military might with stones, and placing themselves in the way of injury, blindness (from military use of pellet guns) and as the last 3 months have demonstrated since the flare up of conflict, loss of life.

We also need to mobilise the young women and women of Kashmir who are an uncelebrated force to be reckoned with, encouraging them for example, to design and work on small scale community and private peace gardens, producing not just food but flowers and of course, spiritual and personal wellbeing from working closely with nature and the land. Learning how to regenerate the land involving principles of permaculture and by learning how to nurture themselves will inevitably lead to a more conscious way of being, even in a land where the potential for crisis is ever present.

Farmers of vegetables and lake inhabitants have become largely disenfranchised from the greater system of commerce in Srinagar. Their value has been diminished, their traditional ways threatened, and they report that they do not feel valued. And yet it is because of them, that Kashmir has not starved during 3 months of curfew and general strike. I feel we need to raise their profile and give them the credit for having been able to feed Kashmir through curfew when other towns and villages in India would have starved.

Dal lake, we learned, receives all of Srinagar's human waste, untreated, directly into this large water body. At the same time, we understand that inlets and outlets have been blocked leaving Dal lake a festering and fertile ground for choking weed, pond lillies and potential disease. There appears also, to be an inaccurate popular belief, that those responsible for the degradation of the lake, are the people who live on and around the lake. This is, as far as we can see, a popular misunderstanding and misalignment as to who is responsible for the pollution.

Ultimately, there needs to be a political solution found to breathe new life into the lake, but with Kashmir currently regarded as just a buffer zone between two hostile powers, there is little investment from the Indian authorities in the life and livelihoods of the people of Srinagar. In light of this, a grass roots movement to divert human waste into compostable systems would be a huge achievement but it needs a large scale education of the problems of Kashmir's environmental crisis and the solutions that each individual could potentially put in place.

We put to some of those that shared with us, that it would be a great flagship achievement, if despite neglect from the authorities, the people could demonstrate themselves robust enough to beautify and green their own country, holding up an example of what is possible from a self empowered people who appear to have no human rights.

## Jenny Lynn Bio

Jenny Lynn is an Integrative and Transpersonal Therapist, Trainer, Author, International Speaker, Supervisor, Coach, Mentor, Tantric Practitioner, and Buddhist of 30 plus years embracing the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual aspects of health and wellbeing. Her style is insightful, intuitive, authentic and challenging and she is an authority in her field of integrative psychotherapy and hypnotherapy. She has worked in partnership with her local NHS and is a Fellow of the National Council of Psychotherapists. She also offers leadership to her therapist colleagues helping them to become authentic leaders of consciousness for their clients.

She has guest lectured in the UK and Internationally on subjects as diverse as *'Buddhism and Psychotherapy'*, *'Unlocking the Mysteries of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome'*, *'Integrating Counselling Skills into Hypnotherapy Practice'*, *'The Psycho-Spiritual Causes of Disease, Clearing the Fear of Intimacy'*, *'How to Raise Self Esteem in Disadvantaged Parents'*, *'Authenticity in Therapeutic Practice'*, *'Isolation and Stigma in the Mental Health Service'*, the *'Psycho-Spiritual Aspects of Family Healing'*, and *'Healing the Masculine and the Feminine'* among others. She has also designed and lead workshops in many of these areas of specialism.

Jenny is also a renewable energy aficionado and vegetable grower and produces a lot of her own food with a passionate interest in self sufficiency. One of the core beliefs of buddhism underpins her outlook on life which is, as within, so without. This philosophy therefore believes that our environment can be directly affected by our own personal intra-psychic and spiritual transformation. This spirit of empowerment permeates all her work and areas of activity.

Jenny is also a teacher of dance understanding that our body is the house of the spirit and that movement is part of our human expression and also important for our mental, emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing.