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A talk with...

LOCH KELLY
at Watkins Books

Shifting into Freedom

Innovative meditation teacher Loch Kelly visited Watkins Books to talk about his discovery and methods of practicing open-hearted awareness

I began my spiritual search young, at 16 starting with TM and then doing some Zen meditation in college. I experienced some spontaneous shifts of awareness and consciousness as some kind of unintentional, positive experiences. And then when meeting with loss, when my father passed away of cancer, I had a tremendous amount of grief and I was holding it in and didn't know how to deal with it. Then one night when I walked out of my college library, I felt very burdened and looked up and thought "How am I going to deal with this?" and somehow by looking up - by opening my awareness up - I felt like something was lifting and I just followed the awareness out and then kind of stayed there in this openness. I felt this infinite sense of connection, I was aware of the infinite and kind of aware from the infinite and felt very embodied and this tremendous burden in me lifted. This experience helped me going through my experience of grief much more humanly and ordinarily. I also felt that I had accessed this inner dimension of consciousness that seemed just to be available in some way. And I started to play with that through meditation and other ways of shifting consciousness. I wanted to see if what had been talked about in all these spiritual books about your "true nature", your "ground of being" and this essential well-being is possibly closer than I imagined and accessed more easily than I had been told.

That led me to graduate school in psychology and comparative religion and then I went off to Sri Lanka, India and Nepal to study meditation and I found some very profound ways of shifting consciousness. I met teachers that seemed to have *woken up* from their small, contracted sense of self, but then had a *waking in* back to their bodies and then they had a kind of *waking out* to compassionate action. I was drawn to this kind of teacher and tried to learn how to do that. And when I started to find ways of intentional ways of shifting consciousness I became very curious and tried to make them very simple and practical. I checked out my methods with other teachers and found ways of describing how to do them and then introduced them to students to see if they worked as well with others. I kind of tried to make awakening possible, awakening meaning what I now believe is just the next natural stage of human development: the potential to access the dimension of consciousness that allows us to be fully human in a way that wasn't possible before.

DISCOVERING AWAKE AWARENESS

Awareness is the foundation of living a human life. We cannot know anything without it. Yet, although awareness is so essential we know very little about it. Mostly we take it for granted and focus on content: things we are aware of rather than awareness itself. Discovering this awake awareness is the key to the transformation of consciousness called *awakening* that leads to our ability to live from freedom, wellbeing and loving connection.

But why don't we know it? Well, four reasons given from Tibetan Buddhism are: this awake awareness is so close that you can't see it, it's so subtle that your mind can't understand it, it's so simple that you can't believe that it is the most important thing, and when you discover this awake awareness, it's so good that you can't accept it, that it really is for you.

Awakening is possible for you. It may sound like a big, esoteric thing – especially when you are having a bad day. We are all imperfect. That is not going to change, but neither is the fact that we can realize who we are is already unconditional love itself. Today there is a potential for a new stage of human development that combines awaking and growing up. It's clear you can only grow up to a certain level unless you awaken, and it's also important to mature psychologically while awakening. No matter how advanced we get spiritually, the goal is not to transcend being human.

Regardless of your belief system or your spiritual affiliation (or non-affiliation), you can begin awakening in the midst of your daily life. You don't even have to wait until you've gotten your life together. In fact, if you're looking from ego-identification, you'll never feel good enough or prepared enough. Most adults are ready. If you've had practice concentrating, completing tasks in school and at work, and forming relationships, you've grown up enough to wake up and learn to live from open-hearted awareness.

Awakening is available because this dimension of awake awareness - or what becomes open-hearted awareness - is equally available to each of us right now. It is not something that needs to be developed or created, but it is a dimension of consciousness that has been covered over by the faster moving thoughts and stronger moving emotions and by the way we create an identity through this looping pattern of thought that creates a kind of mini-me in our heads. And then from there we start to look in this dualistic way and look to

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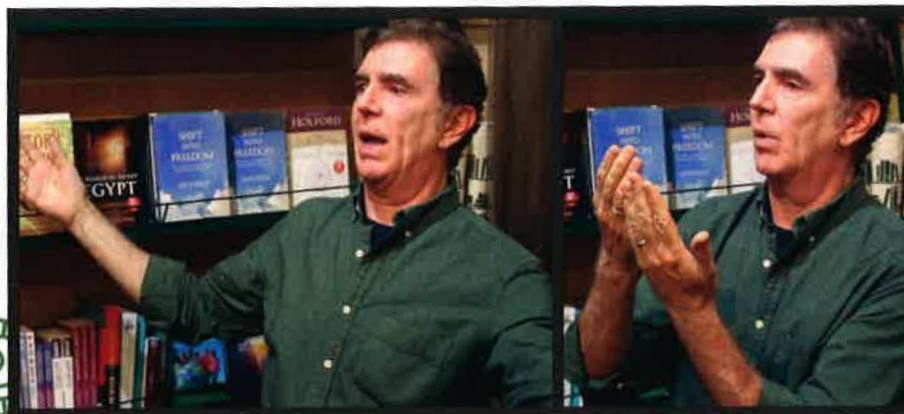
thought and from thought and create this kind of agitated, anxious, chattering sense of self. But we can learn how to unhook awareness and have it drop and open to this spacious awareness. From this spacious awareness then we feel embodied and aligned and open-hearted. These are dimensions of consciousness that are just waiting to be invited back into our lives.

So, that's the possibility and that's the hope and my book *Shift Into Freedom* is a kind of manual of how to do that and it goes through the traps and detours that you could get caught in along the way. It leads you through a series of practices with a unique kind of inquiry method: Rather than just asking yourself “Who am I? Who am I?” with thoughts and words or trying to work with your energies, you actually shift into having your awareness unhook from thinking and drop into this spacious awareness which then is experienced as embodied and open-hearted. So by doing that shift people can learn this fairly easily - as easily as you learn to do anything that takes a little effort and is new and unique. And once you have done this it just opens up this kind of storehouses of gratitude and love and interconnection.

WHAT'S HERE NOW WHEN THERE IS NO PROBLEM TO SOLVE?

As a demonstration of one of the methods of shifting out of ego identification into spacious awareness, let's try this simple inquiry and just look with awareness after you have asked yourself this simple question:

What's here now - what does awareness feel - when there is no problem to solve?





MEET THE AUTHOR

LOCH KELLY is an author, meditation teacher, psychotherapist, and founder of the Open-Hearted Awareness Institute. He has collaborated with neuroscientists at Yale, UPenn and NYU in the study of how awareness training can enhance compassion and wellbeing. As a licensed psychotherapist, Loch has been teaching seminars, supervising clinicians and practicing awareness psychotherapy in NYC for 30 years. Loch is a graduate of Columbia University and Union Theological. He was awarded a fellowship to study forms of non-dual meditation in Sri Lanka, India and Nepal from 1981-1982 and has studied with teachers from around the world. Loch teaches in a non-sectarian human being lineage using an adult education style based in the earliest non-dual wisdom traditions, modern science and psychotherapy. During his retreats, workshops, and individual tune-up sessions he helps people access awakening as the next natural stage of human development. He served on the New York Insight Teachers Council, studied extensively with Mingyur Rinpoche, and was invited to teach direct realization by Adyashanti. Loch currently lives in New York City with his wife Paige and their cat Duffy.

On the web
www.lochkelly.org

First understand it with your mind what's here when there is no problem that needs to be solved and then look with awareness, drop, open, don't look up to the mini-me, the ego, the problem solver: what is here now, what is aware, what is awareness like, just now, when there is no problem to be solved.

You feel the different kind of knowing from here? It's pretty remarkable. The amazing thing is how close it is. There is an experience of silence, of stillness. This stillness isn't about absence of sound.

It's a quality that doesn't require external quiet - as someone said: silence is not the absence of sound, it's the absence of self. In the absence of the small self, there is silence, there is stillness, there is peace of mind. Did you notice that?

It is a dimension of the human consciousness that is available, like breathing or digestion and hearing and seeing that is just available, already installed, but we are just not paying attention to it, we are not noticing it.

That we are capable of experiencing it, is really the amazing thing. It's actually invisible and intelligent, it's the absence of objects, so none of the senses are experiencing it. The experience of quiet, stillness and peace is an after-effect in your body. But this consciousness I'm talking about is prior to energy. There is a kind of openness, of space, that you are aware of and space that you are aware from. The space then is aware of an arising as your body, it's a curious sense of freedom, like being the sky. But it is self-aware, it can know itself and as soon as there is a shift into that spacious awareness, it can include everything else in a completely different way and the feeling is that there is no problem in the things that are arising, no matter whether they are pleasant or unpleasant.


A METHOD OF LETTING GO OF DOING THE METHOD

In answering a question about the methods in my book *Shift Into Freedom*, I would say that there are methods to access awake awareness, like the inquiry that we just did, whilst some of the methods are kind of more unlearning than learning, or untying of knots, than creating a state. Because it is a kind of stateless state that is already here, because it's natural. When we inquire: what's here now when there is no problem to solve, we're just saying: okay, let go of that constellation of consciousness that's about problem solving and then see your natural condition. So, there was a method and

the method leads to: one, two, three, let go - a letting-go of the one who is doing the method.

And we can feel the stillness and the silence and the space in the middle of sounds, [*loud noise from ambulance siren outside*] like just now, the siren is going right through the space of awareness and then some part probably contracts around that sound of the siren and simultaneously there is some other dimension that stays open. You noticed that? One part gets a little scared and contracts and another part stays open and non-reactive.

The interesting thing in this particular approach is the experience of being able to move through consciousness without creating a doer. We are actually moving awareness around, e.g. from head to heart, or from it being identified with thinking to another sense - like hearing - and have it open out to the space all around.

Even without knowing how to do that, you just feel how awareness is identified with thought and creates a sense of a little thinker, and then you just allow awareness to step back from thought. And in one method, you move to hearing, to the vibration in a small area of your ear, just hearing without a hearer, and then have awareness move from being focused on the sensation of vibration and open out to the space in the room in which sound is coming and going and then be curiously interested in the space. Then you might be even more curious: "Am I aware of the spacious awareness or what is it like if I am aware from spacious awareness?" You find that spacious awareness is aware both outside and within, a kind of spacious and pervasive feeling of a continuous field of awareness. It is aware by itself without your help, a field of awareness in which your body and sounds are arising. And you just don't have to go up to your mind to create a center, a doer or a manager when you have shifted into this spacious, embodied field. 

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