

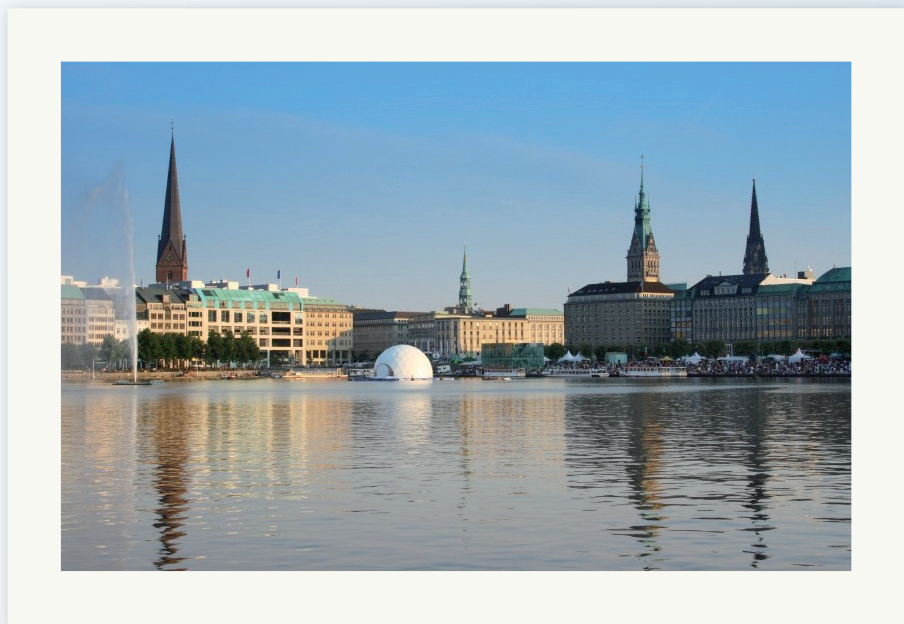
# True Listening in Hamburg

Author **Menna van Praag** writes about a transformative workshop taught in Hamburg that can create instantaneous transformation in your life

This spring I was sitting in a room with about 100 other people from across the world who had come to Hamburg, Germany, to try to achieve instantaneous transformation with Ariel and Shya Kane. The workshop was entitled *Excellence, Well-Being and Satisfaction, the Art of Being Yourself*, and a number of the participants have been working with the Kanes for years. I first came to one of their workshops six years ago with my husband, when we were on the brink of divorce. We'd married very quickly and very young but while we loved each other very much, we had little idea how to relate to each other honestly and without fighting. We seldom treated ourselves, or each other, with kindness and compassion. Our interactions were full of manipulation – both intended and unintended – criticisms and cruelties. And, after five years of that, we still loved but didn't trust each other very much any more. So, in a make or break bid to save our relationship, or at least ourselves, we hopped on a plane and went to meet the Kanes.

The first thing that struck me about Ariel and Shya was how incredibly loving their relationship clearly was. I'd never seen anything like it before. And, while I knew I wanted a happier relationship, the way they interacted together was entirely outside my reality. They were so *kind* to each other; thoughtful, sweet, considerate, so very loving. And it obviously wasn't an effort or affectation, indeed quite the opposite; their way of being was effortless and easy. I hardly dared believe it was possible for my husband and me to have such a marriage but, for a moment, I could hardly breathe with excitement as my heart was hit with such a force of hope. And I knew that, if I could ever learn to love like that, these were the people to teach me. I can't really remember what happened that first weekend but I do remember that the impact on our marriage was so incredible that, after a single day, we signed up to their upcoming week-long immersion course in transformation in Costa Rica. We were in love again, kind

74 **kindred** spirit



and intimate in a way we'd never been before. Five Costa Rican retreats, 12 workshops and numerous international calls later, we haven't looked back. Our marriage is now something I never dared to dream it could be. We're no longer two people fighting to get our needs met but a partnership, supporting and loving each other in all moments: both mundane and magical. And it wasn't just our relationship that transformed, it was our whole lives! This April my husband fulfilled his life-long dream of opening his own catering business and I've fulfilled my own life-long dream having published my first novel.

But I digress. My mind, as it is wont to do, skips back to the past or jumps forward to the future and each time I catch it I gently bring myself back to the moment and listen again. The Kanes talk a lot about listening. They say that enlightenment can occur simply through the act of listening itself. The first time I heard this, I couldn't really believe it. It seemed so *simple*. Nothing like all the efforts I'd endured in the past. Also, I thought I was a perfectly fine listener! But, I've since realised that, before their workshops, I really wasn't. As they say, *true* listening is hearing another person

from their point of view, not listening to your commentary on their words, not agreeing or disagreeing with what they say, but simply listening to them. It's letting go of what you have to say, letting go of what comes next, but simply being there with the other person and participating in their experience of life.

## No commentary

When I tried this I was absolutely stunned by what happened. That sunny Saturday afternoon I sat on a wall in Hamburg, in a lovely little park, sharing lunch with someone I had just met who was also attending the weekend seminar. I was chatting away, telling her about myself, and then asked her to tell me about herself. Well, when she began, I tried to listen. I tried to let go of my thoughts about what she was saying, about what I had just said, but I just kept thinking things like: 'perhaps I shouldn't have told her about that, she might think I'm an idiot, or what if she thinks I'm arrogant? I wish I had said something about else, so she thinks I'm a nice person, instead of just going on about all the films I love – I bet I bored her to tears...'

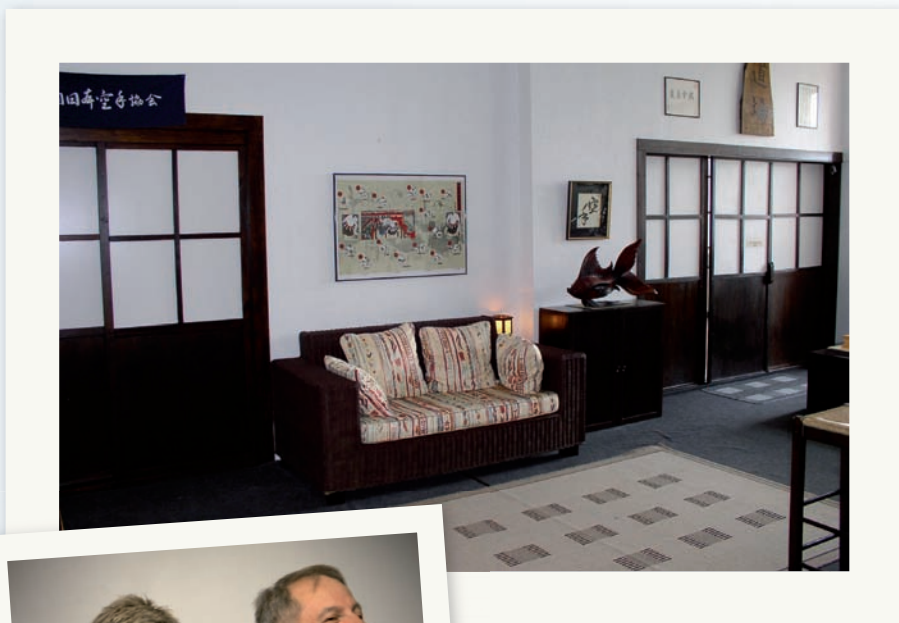
Of course, while this commentary was

going on I wasn't listening to the poor woman at all. And then, suddenly, what the Kanes had been talking about that morning clicked and I just began listening. Word by word, sentence by sentence. At first the commentary in my head was speeding like a freight train alongside everything she said. But gradually, as I kept bringing my attention to her words, my own words slowly subsided and soon the only words that existed in my world were hers and my own mind was completely empty. And then I was sitting on a wall in the sunshine with a stranger and feeling such levels of love and joy I was stunned. It was a whole new world, so elusive when I'd always been focusing on myself and musing on my own thoughts but so easy when I *really* listened to someone else. I burst out laughing, full of joy and relief. I'd thought the road to pure happiness was going to be a long and complex one, full of painful experiences of fixing myself, mending all that was broken in me. But in fact it had been mind-blowingly simple and absolutely pain free to achieve.

## It ain't broke

The Kanes had begun the weekend saying that they weren't going to try and fix or change any of us, that we were perfect just as we were, and so could experience instantaneous transformation at any moment, without working on ourselves to get 'good enough' to get there. And, oh boy, how right that was! Really listening to another person brought me into enlightenment. Suddenly my mind was blank and I no longer had that roll-call of personal defects, nothing needed fixing or changing; I felt absolutely, completely and utterly fantastic.

The other magical thing I experienced as a result of true listening is that I began to hear my own thoughts. Really hear them. As thoughts, products of a mechanical mind, rather than genuine truths that came from my heart. Usually I don't notice them. I have a thought: 'I'm shy' or 'I hate speaking in front of big groups' and I simply believe it, believe that it's expressing a truth I feel. Of course, why wouldn't I? I hear it in *my* head, speaking in *my* voice. So I think it accurately represents what I feel. I don't even question it. I don't have time. My thoughts are like hundreds of tiny electric shocks that I barely feel but that my body responds to. So I have the thought: 'I'm inadequate' and suddenly I feel sad. But I don't notice why. I don't notice that I had the thought *first*. I don't notice that the sadness isn't real but just triggered by that thought. And so, as I'm having dinner with my husband Artur, and other workshop participants on the Saturday night, listening to them and having an amazing time I suddenly hear a thought that says: 'I'm bored. I'm bored of this, I want to go home.' Now, by this point, my mind has quieted enough for me to really *hear* this thought, to notice it as clearly as you would an elephant on an empty beach. And I knew, in the same moment, that I wasn't at all bored, that I was having a wonderful time and certainly didn't want to leave. My thoughts were telling me one thing but I was having an entirely different experience.



Opposite: Plenty to do in between sessions in picturesque Hamburg. Above: The workshop space. Left: Ariel and Shya Kane show participants how to improve relationships.

## You are not your mind

That afternoon the Kanes had said: '*you have a mind, but you are not your mind.*' And by that evening I was experiencing the truth of it. They'd compared the mind to an independent soundtrack playing continuously alongside your life, mostly mechanical and meaningless, invariably critical and complaining, endlessly repeating itself, and rarely, if ever, kind. They'd said that the thoughts won't stop playing but the secret is whether or not we listen, engage, and give them meaning. If we just notice but don't judge these thoughts – and the actions and behaviour they might trigger – if we're compassionate, kind to ourselves and others, then we are free to really *live* our lives, fresh and new in each moment, to have bright and brilliant experiences, not dulled and destroyed by the filter of our mechanical thoughts, but real and pure and true.

The Kanes call themselves anthropologists, not psychologists, although, in my opinion, they are quite clearly as insightful as any therapist, if not more so. But their approach to life and enlightenment is not to analyse the heck out of it, not to worry about the 'hows' and 'whys'; instead their view is based in what they call a 'non-judgemental seeing', observing yourself with compassion and understanding, and simply noticing your behaviour.

For me, and for all of us trying to survive in societies that are as quick to judge as they are slow to forgive, spending time with these two people, who teach thousands of others how to live another life, one created and sustained by listening, compassion and non-judgement, is an experience of great joy and enormous relief. I feel soft and gentle.

My mind becomes quiet and still. It stops telling me how inadequate I am and I feel fantastic for it. Over and over again I find myself: who I truly am, not who I think I am.

And I learn to love myself with my whole heart. Each shift I've had truly has happened moment-by-moment, in an instant, and the effects are also cumulative. This is the magic of instantaneous transformation. ks

## More information

September workshop dates and information for Hamburg, Germany:

*The Freedom to Breathe*

Thursday, 17 September 2009

Time: 8:30am - 4:30pm

Fee: €200

*The Art of Relating*

Friday-Sunday, 18-20 September 2009

Time: Friday: 8pm-10.30pm

Saturday & Sunday: 10am-6pm

Fee: €400

Discount: €575 for both *The Freedom to Breathe* & *The Art of Relating*

NB: Flights and accommodation not included.

Contact Stefanie Ehrle for registration & location details:

011-49-4162-90 85 240.

If you can't make it to the workshop, there are international telephone seminars with the Kanes available.

They are held on Tuesdays, from 6.30-8.30pm, once a month (upcoming dates: 20 October, 1 December & 5 January) in Cambridge and cost €20. For more information contact:

mennadesabarreto@yahoo.co.uk

You can find out more about the Kanes' work at:

[www.transformationmadeeasy.com](http://www.transformationmadeeasy.com).