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Introducing Yoga to Rural Villagers in Cambodia

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Rural village life in Cambodia can be quite difficult and challenging as it is for all villagers and farmers in any third world or developing country.

However, to blindly think that people who live such a life are somehow primitive or not intelligent in their thinking is not correct and in many respects they can be wiser and happier than their brethren who live in the cities and more developed countries of the west.

They certainly possess a number of skills regarding farming, fishing and living off and with the land that this writer does not have or would find difficult and challenging to make part of his life.

A recent thirty-day stay in Cambodia gave me greater insight into this as I made connections with more villagers in the area where I do my work in Cambodia and attempted to cultivate a constructive and mutually respectful and understanding relationship with them.

The Cambodian people can be very, very friendly and hospitable and if one is friendly and gives a warm and sincere smile and can also make an attempt to speak a degree of Cambodian then they will be treated with the utmost respect and hospitality.

In attempting to make villagers mindful about what Yoga is and why it is beneficial to learn and practice such a thing, this writer used a two - pronged approach.

The first was to have all of my material on Yoga that I think is useful for teaching translated into the Khmer language. The second was to hand it out and explain about how Yoga works to weaken and alleviate mental discomfort and pain.

What this resulted in was that villagers came to me in order to deal with and seek out some treatment that would weaken soreness and stiffness in their body. Though they showed some interest in what the Yoga teachings and postures were showing them and my explanations of them, I found myself instead giving body massages to a number of villagers using an analgesic balm as a cream.

It was not exactly what I had had in mind, but it did provide a starting point to build on in a number of ways.

One way that we were able to build on it was that we could introduce the villagers who were interested in this to some of the easier and more important postures and techniques of Yoga that could deal with their specific problem.

In other words, someone who had a chronic problem with backaches was introduced to the cobra and standing forward bend and spinal twist, while those who had problems with headaches were taught eye techniques and given some input and feedback about how they use their free and leisure time in a constructive and healthy way.

Along the way though, I started to be thought of as being a doctor instead of a teacher of Yoga, which could create its own kind of problems, misunderstandings, and disappointments.

Still, a foundation has been laid for future work in this field and activity, which will be built upon with success because of the assistance of a number of young and

dedicated Khmer assistants that I have who translate for me and also understand the benefits of Yoga.

Yoga is useful and beneficial for all people in all parts of the world, be it in Cambodia or Canada, in a village or a city, or for a farmer, fishermen, factory worker, firemen, freedom fighter or feudal lord.