

ProjectsAbroad



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Washing One's Hands in Jamunapur

by *Anna Coleman - New Zealand*

Chitwan Medical Teaching College

After volunteering in the emergency department at the local hospital, it became very clear that hand washing was not a priority within the local community. From the medical and nursing staff failing to perform basic hygienic practices before attending to patient care, to the many patients presenting symptoms of Hepatitis A. Hepatitis A is a virus spread by contact with the feces of an infected person. It can be spread by poor personal hygiene, sharing personal things with an infected person (toothbrushes, facecloths, towels, etc.) and ingesting food contaminated by sewage.



Another nurse, Judy, and I, went to a local women's group in Jamunapur to teach about the importance of hand hygiene. There were many cultural barriers to deal with in planning our teaching; the main one being the fact that none of the women spoke English! We opted to stick to the basics. As Nepal has a very family orientated culture, we formulated our teaching around community health and the fact that you can make others in your family sick by not washing your hands. As many of the women are housewives, we included important moments to perform hand hygiene for day to day activities such as after tending to the buffalo and before preparing meals.

We traveled by local bus, tuk tuk and by foot to the village and were greeted with a cold glass of Coca Cola. Luckily, one of the local girls was able to translate for us as I'm sure our Nepali pronunciation was terrible. We were expecting around twenty women to turn up and had purchased twenty bars of soap to go through the practical demonstration with them. To our surprise, about forty women turned up and we ran out of soap! It was a very empowering experience to see the women getting involved and asking questions. They lathered the soap better than some of the doctors at the hospital scrubbing for surgery! What was even more significant was to see them understand, and some of them even removed their bracelets (which have important cultural significance) to ensure they performed the proper hand washing techniques in accordance with World Health Organization standards.



A Yoga Workshop with Yogi Premananda Shiva Basyal

by *Ian Sandler – United States*

Information Manager



I must preface this post with a simple disclaimer – I am a man of science. Although I have always enjoyed the physical benefits of such holistic practices as meditation (I never question a good nap), I really have not been convinced of their spiritual powers as of yet. This being so, I tried my best to keep an open mind when attending a Projects Abroad yoga workshop Wednesday. The instructional class was led by Premananda Shiva Basyal, the first certified yoga master and the only yoga psychologist in Nepal. Rather than illustrating the always trendy downward dog pose, Premananda lectured on the psychology of yoga and the science behind it. He explained how his teachings were

focused on the Psycho Yogic Approach, or working with the body using the mind, and working with the mind using the body. This was something I could certainly get behind, being a man of science and all.

Our gentle guru began with instructing on the many types of yoga there actually are. Although most people are aware of Astanga Yoga, which includes the body contortions and methods of relaxation often associated with the practice, there are a variety of schools that focus on the different connections between body and mind. For example, Hatha Yoga is about the pervasiveness of duality in life. From pain and pleasure, hot and cold, wrong and right, we are faced with a daily balance. Premananda asked us to perform a simple exercise to demonstrate his point, and had us take a moment and reflect on which nostril was presently more clogged. I tried my best to remain objective with my finger to my nose, but I have a feeling my dubious expression shone through. Our yogi instructed that when our left nostril is clogged, our right brain is more active, and when our right nostril is blocked, our left is more active. Although I had never before checked to see if my artistic side flourished when I had a stuffy nose, I liked his use of evidence to explain his point. Hatha Yoga is about realizing this duality, and how it is constantly in play in our daily lives.

After showing the class a few of the more alternative types of yoga, our miniscule teacher got down to business. He taught that Astanga Yoga, the most popular form, was created by Lord Buddha after he reached Enlightenment nearly 6,000 years ago. I firmly believe that there must be some truth behind any movement that lasts multiple millennia, but that's just me. Of the seven steps of this noble practice, Asana – body posture, and Pratyaha – relaxation, are the dominant three. A fun fact - there are over 8.4 million body postures in Astanga Yoga, but only 15-20 are regularly practiced. If touching your toes counts as one, I have full command of at least half of a body posture.

This is where things once again piqued my scientific curiosity. In his description of the theory of Asana, or body postures, Yogi Premananda taught that the gross form of the mind is the body, and the subtle form of the body is the mind. Like ice and water, each takes separate forms while remaining the same. Subsequently, every mental knot has a corresponding physical/muscular knot. This explains why every time I have ever felt stressed for an exam, I get jittery and light-headed (which could also be explained by the 15 coffees a day I consume – but hey, it's not an exact science). What I really enjoyed, and full-heartedly agree with, is that Asanas release mental tensions by dealing with them on the physical level. I may not practice yoga regularly, but every time I am stressed and I go play basketball, I always feel better.



By the end of the workshop, our wise guru and I were speaking the same language – albeit he has 30 years of experience and I a modest hour and a half. Premananda ended his lesson by telling us that if we practice yoga daily we will never have to visit the doctor again. I hate going to the doctor's, so I am going to assume this is true. After a workshop filled with information, I left with a better understanding of something I once considered mysticism, and a much looser definition of what I have come to call science.

A Foreign Place That Feels Like Home

*by Samantha Rafferty - Australia
Tri Ratna Cooperative School*

What originally brought me to Nepal (apart from the opportunity to help out by volunteering) was how foreign it was, the pull of being one of the foreigners to visit since it had been open to tourism for the West for only around 60 years. It absolutely did not disappoint. Nepal is an incredible country, where you can see the strange effects of recent western influence.

I did a Care project that had me working in Tri Ratna School, in the Lalitpur district below Kathmandu, helping to teach a Kindergarten level class of four and five year olds. The kids that I taught, I really fell in love with, even though I knew well that as much as they could be perfectly cute, they could also be perfectly mischievous. To keep them from being perfectly mischievous all the time, I was put with another Nepali teacher, Purnima, who luckily spoke fantastic English. My job in class was to help out with writing and reading drills, but also to make the classroom more creative. We taught them songs and games, and even cut out a hundred mango shaped pieces of paper for a book about fruits!

What really made my experience the best was being able to sit down and talk to Purnima about her life and teaching in Nepal, and comparing it with my own life. Purnima always had questions about Australia, and was eager to share with me her own opinions about her life in Nepal. I found it amazing how I was welcomed so quickly and so warmly – invited for tea at Purnima's house the first week I came - even though the teachers laughed at me for wearing mismatching coloured sandals. Hearing about how Purnima had to work at the school, and then spend the rest of her day working in her family's fields, or what she thought about the education system in Nepal, was such an amazing and unique thing, and something I would never experience as a tourist.



Life at the CSB Hostel was equally as brilliant. We had all these awesome little moments, like sipping multiple cups of black tea (kaalochiya!) on the roof of the hostel, while looking over the mountains and fields of Bungamati. Even though I wasn't living with a host family, I don't think I missed out. I still got to learn some Nepali with Gyanu, the woman who cooked for us and supplied me with the fifteen cups of tea I drank every day, as well as spending time with Suku, the manager of the hostel who I now call my Nepali mama! I met the best people in the hostel, and from other placements, who we would meet up with on the weekends. When you're experiencing something so different, so removed

from your own world, everything you do is adventurous and getting to share that with other people is like friendship boot camp. There are some awesome travel opportunities in Nepal, especially if you like adventure sports, and getting out there with your friends and working your way around Nepal is a really cool added bonus. Volunteering in Nepal was such a broadening experience for me, and since I decided to sponsor one of the kids from my class and his sister, who live at the Orphanage at the back of Tri Ratna, I plan to come back and visit every year!

A Teaching Volunteer Reflects

*by Marcin Komorowicz – Poland
Coventry English Boarding School*

Namaste! My name is Marcin and I am nineteen. I come from Poland however I currently live in London. At the beginning of my gap year I decided to spend two months in Nepal and so far my experience here has been truly rewarding.

I am doing a teaching placement in Coventry English Boarding School in Jorpati – an outer but still busy borough of Kathmandu where the famous Bouddanath is located. My first impression of the school was mixed as the main building differs a lot from western schools – the classrooms are quite small and poorly equipped and for most of the day there is no electricity. However, it did not seem to be a problem after I was warmly welcomed by the staff and children who were extremely enthusiastic and keen to learn new things.

The atmosphere there is amazing and very relaxed – I was given a free hand in choosing what I would like to do in class and I could easily take some days off for traveling.



My typical day at the placement starts at 9:30am until 3:00pm. Every morning pupils have an assembly in front of the school where they pray and sing the national anthem. I then conduct lessons with all grades from one to seven. At 1:00pm I usually have lunch in the dining hall with orphans that are boarding at the school. In general food in Nepal is a bit spicy as they always use chilies, but I enjoy it a lot. In class I usually teach English or sometimes help with other subjects such as geography or computing. From time to time Projects Abroad organized workshops for

teaching volunteers in a school outside Kathmandu which were really helpful. We were shown new games and exercises that I used at my placement.

My host family is totally awesome! I live with a young couple and their one year old child. They are very respectful and I am treated as a part of the family. The house is located just a fifteen minute walk from my placement. It is a traditional Nepali house, but after a couple of days I completely got used to having no western toilet or internet. I have never felt hungry there – they usually cook Dal Bhaat twice a day. I believe my experience in Nepal would be radically different if I did not stay with them, as it enabled me to be in the centre of Nepali culture.

I have visited amazing places here, made many friends, and felt as if it was my second home. I have even already made plans to return to Nepal in 2015. My advice for potential volunteers is the longer you stay here, the better experience you are going to get!

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