

# Training The Untouchables in Touch Therapy

What are we doing to grow our industry? What resources are we not utilizing? What are we doing to “give back” to others in our “giving” nature of spa and wellness?

Spa business owners realize there is a growing demand to learn more, develop more, and broaden business minds.

One organization, The Himalayan Healers, has provided an ideal and unique opportunity for spa professionals to address some of these issues.

Set in Kathmandu, Nepal, The Himalayan Healers, a not-for-profit organization is a Healing Arts School, Community Clinic, and Eco-Friendly Cultural Retreat. It is working to preserve the rich heritage of Himalayan healing and energy work. It was formed for the benefit of students primarily from the Nepalese Dalit “Untouchable” castes and other students of diverse backgrounds of profound needs such as the victims of human trafficking; those who have been internally displaced due to the ongoing conflict, and freed Kamaiyas (servants and bonded labourers).

In a society enslaved by centuries of prejudice, the Dalits or ‘Untouchables’ are shunned to the bottom of the pile. To touch or be touched by them is taboo. Decades after this shameful practice was banned, some still have to live with the indignity like having separate water supplies and separate temples. Living at the bottom of the rigid social hierarchy, and considered as existing outside of the actual caste structure, they make up over 20% of Nepal’s population. Enduring unhygienic and laborious jobs, they earn a pittance of just about 20 cents per day. Due to the general lack of education and awareness of the society at large, they continue to be ostracized.

For this reason, to train untouchables in the field of touch therapies resonates with many spa professionals - colleges, Human Resource departments, Spa Directors and Managers across the globe. In a way, the society’s rigid mental trap on the subject of untouchability is being directly challenged, in a healing, peaceful manner. It’s about returning the power of their touch, on both a personal level; and on a general level, within the society.

The project was initiated as a result of the foresight of two visionaries, Robert Buckley and Sharmila Mali. Combining their strengths and passions, they hope to ‘make a difference’ in the lives of these people as well as the spa and wellness industry at large. The main goals of the project are to restore personal growth, create a social statement, and provide to financial and social empowerment both within Nepal and in the global Spa market.

Former Ojai residents, Robert and Sharmila’s goals to redefine social standings, and produce capable massage therapist for international spas and resorts via the Dalits continues with much success and dedication.1 Sharmila has a varied background in stress therapy, somatic and energy healing modalities, journalism and photography. Born and raised in Kathmandu, Nepal, imparts a higher level of motivation and self-realization for Sharmila to combine her knowledge to help facilitate the students. Robert served three years in the Nepalese Peace Corps, founded the Nepal Direct Effects a volunteer-based non-profit side organization and represents the Laughing Buddha Tibetan Carpets in Kathmandu, a community-based Fair Trade workshop.

Sacrifice, dedication, and vision, centre the lives of Robert and Sharmila. They currently reside in the distant hillside of Nepal. Set on seeing through their unique mission, they have turned down career opportunities, invested personal funds, and for 12 months, have been working on a voluntary basis, all in good faith to make the Himalayan Healers a financial and social success.

## TRAINING PROGRAMS

Students are trained in various wellness therapies such as: Ayurvedic, Tibetan, Indigenous-Nepali, Swedish, Sports, Relaxation, Rejuvenation, Reflexology massage techniques, Yoga, Meditation, and Reiki, Counseling, Self expression, head and shoulder massage, Facial therapy, manicure, pedicures, hair removal and make up.

Theory components cover: Ethics, Basic Medicine, Contra-

indications, Sanitation and Hygiene, Anatomy and Physiology, treatment rooms/beds layout, thorough knowledge of treatments, technical procedures of treatments, telephone handling, standard phrases & welcome rituals, handling guests in various situations, culture, customer service, business / financial management, resume writing and orientation to work abroad. All units are completed with an exam. It is a 550-hour, full-time 6-day week course over 14 weeks. The training programme is affiliated to accredited massage therapy training courses throughout the West.

Once job offers are secured an orientation sessions with the students in preparing them for overseas employment will be provided.

## SPACAREERS SUPPORT OF THE HILAMAYAN HEALERS

Robert and Sharmila’s tremendous efforts in following their hearts and creating something wonderful for the “untouchables” meet the human resource needs of high-end Spas globally. It is highly appreciated and a commendable.

Erica Yeats and Vanessa Gay, directors of Spacareers, a leading Australian recruitment agency serving the spa and wellness industry, have pledged 10% of Spacareers annual pre-tax profits to this Project as part of the world’s first Social Enterprise Accreditation Programme.

Both Erica and Vanessa are excited; and are planning a visit to the Himalayan Healers Training Facility in Nepal to meet with the students and assist in posting them to different parts of the world, upon graduation. “I can’t wait to see the day that I walk into a high end Australasian Spa to experience the touch of a Nepalese Untouchables! Then we know we are making a difference at all levels,” says Yeats. It is their hope The Untouchables, will defy social stratifications through their ‘healing hands’, through the ancient healing energies they have mastered.

“the time and space away from the working environment is an essential component of any treatment strategy”

## How Can Spa Professionals Help?

Long-term relationships with spas and resorts will be cultivated to provide quality, professional, committed, skilled therapists sponsored by the Himalayan Healers project. One of the most effective methods to support this project is to provide, or to help find, quality employment opportunities for the graduate massage students at spas and resorts outside of Nepal, or by simply donating at a financial level.

By helping to provide financially and socially empowering employment opportunities outside of Nepal these students will be able to dramatically improve their lives for the better; pursue a healthy, positive, life-affirming career; and support their families and community in Nepal.

Please visit [www.spacareers.com.au](http://www.spacareers.com.au) Charity Cause page, or [www.himalayanhealers.org](http://www.himalayanhealers.org) to support this wonderful wellness-training project.