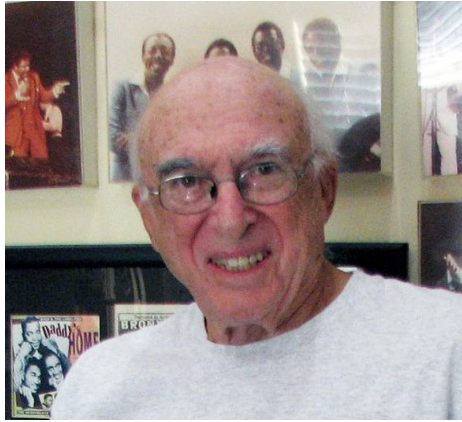


DELRAY SUN

The solution is at your feet | Opinion

By Steve West
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Steve West (Mort Mazor / Courtesy / South Florida Sun-Sentinel)

You are about to read an inspiring true story of incredible transformation. You'll marvel at how an utterly hopeless people transformed a strangling liability into a lifesaving advantage merely by rethinking their view of their unsolvable misfortune. Today's two-part account holds a key to understanding that the "inevitable" is only an illusion.

Several decades ago a development worker visited an impoverished village in India. The village was literally a basket case, bereft of water, food and all hope.

"What do you need?" he asked. The village head related their dire plight: "Our soil is crowded with large rocks so our food production is meager.

"The monsoon brings us plentiful water for half the year, but the dry season compels us to walk miles to find bad water, which makes our children sick and many die."

Another villager lamented out loud, "This is our lot. It has always been this way, and it will forever be. Our fathers and their fathers, and their fathers before them, lived in this condition, and so will we and our children and their children's children after we are gone."

The head man agreed that this was true. All those assembled sadly shook their heads from side to side in agreement. This was the way it was and the way it would always be.

The visitor contemplated the situation for a moment. Then he looked down at the ground. The villagers anxiously awaited his advice. "The solution lies at your feet," he said, simply. The villagers did not understand. So he explained.

He pointed to a nearby depression in the earth. "If everyone helps, you can remove the stones from the soil, which will then grow more food. You can line the depression with those very stones and create a reservoir to hold the water until the monsoon returns," he explained.

The people now understood. Hope was born with this new idea. Action was spawned from the hope. Every resident set to work immediately. Young and old, woman and man, Untouchables and Brahmins. Like a colony of ants, each did their part. Each enthusiastically did what they could.

Stone by stone, the work proceeded. The villagers immediately began to raise their expectations. Within a season, after the reservoir was completed, the village was self-sufficient and free of the struggle for survival. They now wanted more.

The inhabitants were freed to turn their talents and energies to endeavors other than fighting for life. As they were released from the shackles of poverty, they uncovered undreamed of personal and communal possibilities.

They kept working together to become one of the most prosperous villages in Kerala State. They were inspired to help their neighbors rise above their own "hopeless" circumstances.

To understand that the solution to transforming the lives and circumstances of our underserved neighbors lies at our feet right here in Palm Beach County, read [part two](#) at bit.ly/3OEmdBo.

Steve West is a social justice advocate and entrepreneur living in Delray Beach.