

THE DAY OF DEATH – 31 JAN, 2004. **- MEMORIAL FOR CHAIYUTH –**



By Bence Ganti, Budapest

On 31 January 2004, Chaiyuth died around 3 P.M at a traditional Thai healer dance gathering, in a little village in northern Thailand near Chiang Mai. Since by that afternoon I had spent more than two weeks with him as a massage student, and I also saw his death, I felt as if I were thrown into the natural and unbelievable flow of events that occurred there. After all of this, I feel somehow a duty to write a memorial about his death and the preceding events. A memorial for someone who has touched the heart of many of us.

A few days before, we asked from him what does Chaiyuth mean. He said: „Chai-winner, Yuth-Strategy”.

The issue of death had already been in the air in a gentle manner during the previous days. On one hand, there was the bird-flu topic in the air, not threatening Chiang Mai, but constantly being reported in the newspapers.

Chaiyuth also mentioned his possible death to us during the class. I had been taking class with him since the 14th of January. One day he said, "if I die, I will not be reborn again. I will be a healer spirit, like my teacher, and I can be in many places to heal, not just one". I thought he might have meant he would die in a few years or decades—after all he was only sixty-something (nobody knew exactly). He seemed to be healthy, with elastic skin, much younger than his age. In his movements he was also young, sometimes moving like he was in his teens or twenties. An American woman called Terry had been living with Chaiyuth during these days, and she was concerned about his health. She said sometimes his heart has rhythm problems, and he should rest, do less massage, and take care of his health. Since he seemed alright, we didn't pay much attention to her warnings, we thought it may be true, or that her concern might be exaggerated.

We just simply let him do as much massage and teaching (including also massaging us) as he wanted. He gave usually one or two massages a day (each lasting two to four hours), and he gave us each morning two to three hours [of massage? teaching?]. On top of this, we went almost every day to „The Dance”, as we called it, where he danced intensively for about two hours. He also had some local spirits and smoked cigars during the dances, as did all other healer dancers in that subculture. Chaiyuth loved the dances, as he seemed to love doing massage and teaching. There was one common denominator in these three activities: his devotion to his spirit teacher, the father doctor of Thai massage, Jivaka Kumar Bhacca, or „Dr. Zhivago” in his western name. The tradition says that Dr. Zhivago was a personal friend of the Buddha and a healer of monks. He is mentioned also in the Theravada Buddhist scriptures, the Pali Canon. Traditional Thai masseurs pray for him to ask guidance and healing for the client. Chaiyuth said he had personal contact with Dr. Zhivago and he channeled Dr. Zhivago during massage. Chaiyuth referred to him simply as „my teacher”. He said that he dances for his teacher as an offering. He brought us to the dance to show us to his teacher, and because „the dance opens your mind”. The way he spoke about Dr. Zhivago, the way he did the massage, the way he put up his dress for the dance, and how he danced were all permeated by a special kind of respect, sacredness, faith, prayer, and humility.



Chaiyuth never fell out of this mood; it was not a pose or a role. This was a teaching beyond words, on the level of being and feeling. It didn't matter how people behaved around him, he carried on his private sacredness, with a peaceful, equanimous, and easy mood, often humorous. I am not exaggerating if I say that he was one of the most sacred person on the dances. Not sacred in the sense of wearing some spiritual pose, but sacred in this sense of the inner attitude, gently and silently oozing out of him. I am convinced that people can't have such an inner attitude without having the corresponding inner experience of some greater power. That is why I believed in him, and this belief transformed my way of giving Thai massage in the direction of more respect and responsibility towards the client.

I remember when Chaiyuth demonstrated a movement on John, another American friend was in the class, Like many Asians, Chaiyuth was a small man compared to

Westerners. John is a tall guy, with a strong, healthy body. Chaiyuth lifted John up smoothly. Then when I had to repeat and practice the movement on John, with my standard Western body size, I could hardly lift him up, groaning. That was the moment when I realised how physically stressful it was for Chaiyuth to massage us, the big-body Westerners, who popped up almost every day at his door.

These were the physical conditions before he passed away. Interestingly, some kind of recording-preserving instinct started working in us during his last days. John made a video recording during one of the dances that we attended with Chaiyuth. He quickly edited it and handed it over to Chaiyuth just one or two days before he died. Chaiyuth was very happy to see it, laughing loudly. I also made photos, thinking the dance was wonderful, and it was such a unique opportunity to take part in it. I thought the world should know about this culture that silently surrounds the Thai masseur healer. Terry and Kaori, a Japanese classmate, also started recording the prayers that Chaiyuth taught us. John and Terry said, „who knows how long he is gonna be with us”. There was a consensus between us that we should inform the world that here is a healer whose name is in the „big three” of the famous traditional Thai masters in Chiang Mai—a spiritual healer, a master who was teaching many elder and younger teachers, who are the most popular teachers of Thai massage in Northern Thailand today.

John started constructing a website for Chaiyuth that was going to give some basic information about him and directions for how to find him. One day on the second course, John came over to discuss the content and layout of the website. After chatting a bit about the content, John asked Chaiyuth, „What else would you like to say about yourself on the website?” He said „My teacher, he is healing, people should respect him, not me”.

I was a bit concerned that the website, the video, and all the rest could with time make him a hugely popular teacher. I thought he could slip into the money-making machinery, like many other teachers do who have now big and famous schools, teaching 50 people every week, losing the living spirit and keeping only the technique. My concerns were slowly settled when Chaiyuth expressed that he didn't want to teach large groups, even if more people would come. He liked to teach 3-4 people at a time. He often criticized the way people do massage today, and the money-oriented massage schools: „Everywhere relax, relax, just relax. No healing. This is healing massage”. „When I was young only old people do massage. Few, few. Only few. Now every corner massage, relax, no healing”.

He also encouraged us not to take notes and pictures but to memorize the movements by heart, according to the traditional way. I didn't fully agree, and took some notes, after the third day, when everything was just too much to memorize. However, practicing on each other between classes helped memorization a lot. The most effective learning took place on those occasions when we did all three steps. First Chaiyuth demonstrated a movement on us so we could feel it from inside. Then we practiced on each other and he observed, so he could correct us from the outside. Finally we practised on him, and he felt from the inside whether we did it correctly.

On 31 January, we started class at 6 a.m.. Usually we started at 7, but since we planned to go to the dance around 10 a.m., we started earlier. It was an important period of the year, with more dances, than usual. During the first week we went dancing every day. It happened always the same: arriving at the class at 7, having tea and cookies, starting class between 8 and 9, finishing between 10 and 11, and taking a break. Then going to the dance by motorbikes, on the way having a vegetarian meal for 10-20 baht (less than a half \$), and buying flowers for offering on the market.



Usually we arrived at the dance around noon, and stayed till 4 p.m. For some days there was a break with no dances for awhile. We knew that this Saturday would be the next dance, so there was some excited anticipation in the air, and some talk that more *farang* (foreigners) might come with us, which meant in my imagination maybe five or six, instead of the usual three or four.

On that morning we learned a belly massage and a full leg massage with feet, chinbone, and knee, one of the most difficult and improvisational moves. I practiced on Chaiyuth until he said, „ok, that’s good”. Sometimes he fell asleep a bit while receiving. At some point a farang came, a Greek woman. She said she has a girlfriend who is sick with a bladder inflammation. She asked if the girlfriend could come, and when. Chaiyuth said, „OK, come now”. So she went to pick up her friend. At 9:30 we finished the class. Usually Chaiyuth would take a one-hour break and prepare for the dance, packing the dance robes, etc. So I said, „I’ll come back in half an hour”. „Okay,” he replied.

I went back to Rama II Guest House, to pick up my stuff and go to the Internet shop. Rama II was right in the neighborhood, just two doors down. I saw a large group of foreigners chatting in the garden, and my friend Tim, who knew Chaiyuth and who sometimes came with us dancing. I thought these guys had just arrived from a trekking trip in the mountains and were waiting for accommodations, or were ready to leave for trekking and waiting for the vans. I asked Tim, „who are these guys—are they going trekking?” He replied, to my astonishment, „no, they are coming for the dance!” During my staying I had never seen so many foreigners coming to the dance, there were 12 people! I went back to Chaiyuth, giving up my internet plans, and told him in the simplified Asian English we used to use, „15 farang! Car OK?” He said with round eyes „fifteen??” and laughed. „Car OK, no problem”.

In the meantime the Greek woman arrived with her ill girlfriend, and Chaiyuth was in the kitchen. I asked him, „can I participate in the healing”? Throughout the days we never saw a full massage, and I was longing to see what we had learned in one sequence. He said „yes, you can see, good for you”.

So I went to see it. The Greek girl was thin and pale, seeming ill. I was wondering how Chaiyuth expects people to heal such physical problems like a bladder infection that are not typically the subject of massage healing. It seemed that he feels, he, or better to say his teacher through him, can heal any kind of problem, going beyond the limits of massage.

First he said to the lady, that his teacher is conducting the healing session, and asked her if she believed in this and the cure. She said yes. Then he started with a belly massage, just what we had learned on that morning. This natural coincidence and karmic flow of events were common there. It was a long-lasting, thorough belly massage. I thought he would finish the belly and it would be done. But then he went to the arms, the back, the legs, the head, finally he ended up in a full massage treatment in his usual closed eyes, flow-like—Chaiyuth-style massage.



We didn't know that this would be his last healing in this body. It took 1.5 hours. Tim and the others were patiently waiting, in the meantime coming over to Chaiyuth's garden. When we left the healing hut, the garden was full of foreigners from France, America, South America, Canada, Japan, Sweden, and Eastern Europe. They were chatting quietly, below the lush trees, the shades playing with the sunlight, shedding dancing lights on the ground, the chairs, and the small fountains in the garden. The whole atmosphere was peaceful, respectful, silent and gentle, but still charged with curiosity about the new experience we were going to go through. Many people were meeting Chaiyuth for the first time, and some had just arrived to Thailand, having heard from friends about this dance as an interesting cultural thing to see. Some weren't familiar with Thai massage, and with what was going on here.

Soon we left the garden and someone arranged a songtheaw-like two-seated pickup truck for us, with a driver. We packed ourselves into the white truck sitting on the seat and floor and hanging on the back. Kaori and Terry took Kaori's rented yellow motorbike, and Chaiyuth took his vespa, with a *farang* on the backseat. First we stopped as usual, on Intha Wararot Road, at the cheap Thai vegetarian restaurant,

close to Gate Suan Dok. Only few foreigners knew this place, as it was more for local people.



Then we continued to the flower market at Warorot market. As always we bought a lot of flowers, at least four for each person: three garlands to put around the neck, and yellow flowers to put on the big drum. It was a very bright and sunny day. We were heading out of Chiang Mai, in the southeastern direction. Soon I realised that I was in a loop of time. The first day when I arrived, we went on the same route, through the same villages, and we didn't find the dance. We were roaming with the bikes for around two hours in the countryside. Now we were in the same countryside, easily finding the place.



The dance was always held at different places, always at a private house of someone from this dancer community who organised the party and invited who he or she wished. Not only was an invitation card given with the address, but well ahead on the road red flags marked the way. The village was about a 30-minute drive from CM. We arrived at a car park full with cars and bikes. Seemingly this was a big party, bigger than we had visited before. We jumped out of the car and started to gather ourselves in a loose line and march onto the scene in a long entrance path. Chaiyuth was still busy with parking his bike at the back. This unusual „crowd” of us gave an enhanced feeling of positive excitement.

First we met the offering plate on our way to the dance floor. At the entrance of the whole garden there was always someone who welcomed the arrivals by handing over a huge plate with water and flowers inside. We had to take it into our hands, lift it up, and say a prayer. It was such a wonderful way to greet and enter the dance garden: a gentle touch for the consciousness to soften its everyday rigidity. The art of the eastern people is how to create a spiritual atmosphere with the help of such small ritual acts.

It took some minutes before all of us had said our little prayers and we gathered again at the entrance of the garden. While waiting for them, I had a chance to look around and explore the site.

The place and the people seemed to be more enhanced and elevated than usual. First, it was a wonderful, natural eastern village setting, with tropical, lush vegetation. Trees and bushes leaned close to the ground, giving a play of lights and cool shade under the hot sun. Bright midday sunlight, happily played with the leaves of the trees and bushes, surrounding the house and the dance floor. The dancers were dressed in vivid, colorful traditional dresses and headdresses, mostly made of silk. They were already dancing under a tent roof, put up in the garden of the peaceful village home.



The ground on which they danced was pure grass under the canvas. Usually it was concrete, or some artificial cover. Later on, when we started to dance, I realised that this feeling of natural grass and ground under our bare feet was another bit of joy. The dance floor was already packed with dancers, with more people than usual. The band was also bigger, and had kind of a jamsession feeling, including not only the usual instruments but simple folk instruments as well. I felt that it was a distinguished party.

The dancers were in all colours, red, blue, purple, green, and white, wearing silk, scarfs, headresses, and necklaces. Men and women alike wore skirts.

Outside the dance floor were many tables and chairs, and non-dancers—mostly village people, family, or friends—were sitting there. They were nibbling peanuts and crackers, sipping local sweet wine, homemade Thai whisky, or coconut milk from the freshly cut nut. There were also water and soft drinks.

The dancers were all healers of some kind. Chaiyuth said they all had guiding spirits, healing spirits. Some of them might be masseurs. All had his or her own way to heal and work; some were village „shamans” or intuitive readers. The common link was the guidance of spirits. They offered the whole party and dance to these spirits. The family that hosted the dance party, always had a huge altar abundantly packed with flowers, incense, candles, foods of different kinds, and drinks.



Sometimes they invited Chaiyuth and us to sit with the family for some minutes in front of the altar inside the house. Not only the altar but the floor where we sat was also packed with gods, and we politely sat there having some drink, beer, and snacks, not understanding Thai. Chaiyuth was chanting with the family and we politely listened and smiled.

The non-healer, ordinary people never danced; they were spectators. The dance was a sacred act for them. Many fell into trance, or were possessed by their spirit guide either before entering the dance floor or during the dance. Sometimes I saw people writhing and rattling at the tables when preparing for the dance or after finishing it. I asked once Chaiyuth what was going on with them, and he said „they spirit”. Not all dancers were in this state; the same people were sometimes possessed or sometimes not.

So we stood there at the entrance. I didn't see free tables for 15 people, so I waited until Chaiyuth came and I told him, „please show us where to sit”. He was chatting and laughing with some local friends, and he replied to me by asking some other

Thais to show us the way. Some of them jumped there smilingly, and quickly arranged some tables for us.

We put down our packs, and those who had bought some clothes for the dance put them on. We took out the flowers and put them around our necks, and held some in our hands to bring to the dance floor and offer to the band. We oozed onto the dance floor in a loose line, slaloming among the people to the band. We put the yellow flowers on the big drum, greeting the band, some also saying good wishes and prayers.

Then we started dancing. Chaiyuth was still not there; he might arrive to the table by this time, slowly starting to dress, drink something, and prepare himself inside for the dance. I knew it took him sometimes more than an hour until he appears on the dance floor. Nevertheless he always insisted that we would start to dance immediately. „I come later, no problem, you go dance. Yes, go, go!” The general atmosphere was rather an easygoing strange party.



Some faces were smiling, some faces serious. Some dancers were making contact with us, encouraging our dance, showing some movements, while others observed us from the background with a more inquisitive kind of look. I felt that some dancers were happy that we danced there, some didn't care, and some didn't like it very much. I saw dancers acting from a more egoistic and greedy stance, and others acting from a more equanimous, compassionate, spiritual one. Like everywhere else, there were all kinds of people and reactions.

The vivid colours, the moving crowd, the loud and extraordinary music gave a splendid flavour to the whole event. More dancers came to greet us than usual, some showed some movements, other gave us invitation cards for the next parties. There way of invitation was this: The one who intended to hold a party, printed some nice invitation cards, and while dancing he approached personally those who he or she wanted to invite. Others brought local cigar and whisky to share with us during the dance.

I was dancing, and at the same time I was aware of what was happening around and inside me. Some of us Westerners danced more easily, after having visited other dances, and some danced with a bit of culture shock, trying to find the style and copy some basic movements that gave the basis of Thai dance.

Chaiyuth was putting on his dress at the back, at the tables. He did it always in a unique and extraordinary way. Every movement of the act was a prayer—slowly pulling out the pieces of cloth from the small suitcase, putting on each of them one after the other in a slow manner, murmuring prayers for his spirit teacher, sometimes blowing the prayer onto the cloth. Once he said to me that he sees his spirit teacher, Shivago. „Big body, very big. White beard, like this, and long white hair”.



Even after having dressed up, he didn't start dancing immediately, and kept sitting at the table with closed eyes, starting to tune into the music, being absorbed in the music.

There was a specific atmosphere that surrounded him at the dance and also at home, when he was teaching, massaging, or just chatting with us in the garden. It was humility and prayer, mixed with easyness, relaxation, and humor. It had also calmness, equanimity, simplicity, and warm-heartedness. I felt sometimes as if he was praying to his spirit teacher, Dr. Zhivago, many times not in words, but in the atmosphere. He lived in his own space, or aura of this kind, and he carried it wherever he went. It was not a spectacular, quick-enlightening guru-radiation; rather, it was a silent, modest prayer atmosphere, reserved to reveal for those who cared to pay attention to this subtler level of being. He never talked about it, and didn't care if people acted in harsh ways around him; he just simply lived this way.

After some time I saw him coming onto the dance floor. I remember his face. He came slowly, very contented by us. He was happy to see how many farangs were there, and that we liked dancing. He looked at me, gently smiling, seeming proud of the whole situation. This seemed to be fulfillment in his life. He greeted the band also, put the flower on the drum, and started to dance with us. Like always, he danced rapidly, with free, sometime wild spiraling and rotating movements. He was the most free person of all Thais. He didn't dance the „compulsory” basic movements—the typical play with hands and legs—that everybody else danced, but he had his absolutely own unique style, what he and the others called the „snake dance”.



He also danced more strongly and vividly than the others, which sometimes made him be the center of attention. I saw at another party some Thais who were upset about his strong dance, while others—usually most people—were attracted to this power, and smiled and followed this vivid mood. The band liked it; they were in very good friendship, especially with the drummer.



We were dancing together for about twenty minutes, half an hour. One round was usually around 40 minutes, followed by a 20-minute break when everybody would return to the tables, drink, snack, rest, and chat.

This is what happened to us also: we went back to the tables to have a break, and here started this extraordinary and strange chain of events that came instantly and took our mind and heart out of the usual track.

When I reached the table, I saw from the corner of my eyes that Chaiyuth was coming too. At the same time I turned away to pour water into my glass from a plastic water bottle. I felt him sit down next to me. It was less than half a minute when I turned back with my cup full of water, and my mind stopped seeing what I saw. Suddenly I saw Chaiyuth lying on the ground, in the dirt, beside his seat. Later, when I discussed with friends what they saw, Monica, a Canadian bodyartist girl said she was watching his face when all this happened. She said Chaiyuth had a peaceful, easy expression on his face, and he closed slowly his eyes, lost the tone of the body, and simply turned down from the chair to the ground.

I saw then that he was lying paralyzed on his stomach—stiff, not moving at all, face down in the dirt. Time stopped. Then he was rattling, as if he wanted to cough up something and spit it out. He was snorting, blowing the dry dirt with his nose like a cow who rests in the dirt and sneezes. It was so degrading to see him in this pose. This happened all in seconds; we couldn't even comprehend what was happening, we just stood there and gazed. It's not that the brain suddenly understands what is going on, and instantly some logical, rational, proper „best solution” starts. No. We were stunned, and didn't know what was going on at all, and what to do, or if we should do anything at all. He gave a very strange sound, rattling from the deepest part of his body, kind of a shocking sound as if he were trying to regurgitate something. I knew this sound already, when I saw other dancers in previous dances suddenly being possessed by spirits. Exactly the same sound! I had seen a woman a few days before, in red dancer dress, sitting at the table after a round of dance, during the break, surrounded by family members, and making this same rattling sound. It seemed as if she wanted to cough up something. That time I asked Chaiyuth „what is going on? what is this sound?”. He said „Spirit! Say goodbye to the spirit”. I assumed that the lady was possessed, and the spirit was just leaving her after the dance. Now Chaiyuth

was doing the same, and it clicked in my mind. He was absolutely not present, I say his half-face, he was absorbed in what was happening, his face was not of this world, it was transcendental, being in deep trance, or maybe already at the gate of death. Nevertheless, I didn't think at all, that now he is agonising, or dying. I was calmly watching him, as if he was just doing his „possession routine”. Others weren't doing anything either, all of us foreigners, and the Thais were just sitting, standing, and some calmly watching, some not even taking care. For them this might have been familiar. The only strange thing to me was that I had never seen Chaiyuth before possessed in this way. So after some more seconds of watching this happen, something started to echo in the back part of my mind. Just a passing thought, not even worth taking seriously. It said, „what if he is dying?...what if he is going to die now?...no, no... it is impossible....I shouldn't think like this...just wait, and he recovers...it's just a quick possession”.

Suddenly Terry appeared and for some minutes she was also watching with worried eyes, than she started to act what she could, with growing worry, still keeping her balance and soberity inside. Terry squatted down and lifted Chaiyuth up a little bit. His face was grey with dirt, and completely stiff, expressionless, and lifeless. At this moment I was shocked. A deep, raw fear arose naturally, with the instant realisation that the spirits have the power to take our life in one second if it so happens, and that working with the spirits is not a game. Somehow I sensed at that moment the enormous supernatural power of the spirits, reflected in what I saw here happening, and I felt how weak and fragile we humans are. I felt a rapid flash of intense fear and a mild disgust. One minute ago he was a nice man, and now he was a body, looking like a corpse just excavated. It was incredible, how quick a big change can happen. I still didn't believe, that he could die now, but that part became stronger...”what if he dies... no, he can't die now”...

Then as if a magic stick had touched him, suddenly the life came back into his face. It was as if a switch of life would have been switched on for a second again. He tried to open his eyes, then after a few seconds he collapsed again, and the switch of life was obviously off again.

Terry lifted him up. She was the only one until this point trying to make something, all of us were just gazing. At this point everyone started to realize what is going on, and that this might be more serious than just an possession. Slowly and gently an air of repressed and controlled panic started to sneak into us. Terry wiped Chaiyuth's face with some wet cloth, and then started to shout „help! help him up!”, and Tim and some of us jumped there, and helped to put Chaiyuth on a chair. The body was completely out of tone. We had to hold it to prevent it from falling down off the chair. Some of our group members burst into tears, others felt frightened or empty, still not knowing what was really going on and what to do, if to do something at all. We might have thought the Thais would know what to do now, because it is their land, people, friends, customs. The Thais might have thought we would take care of Chaiyuth, because we came with him.

The Thai had no reactions at all, which was another shock for me to discover. They were calm, as if just a leaf had fallen from a tree. No anxiety, no panic, no fear, no emotions, no action. Some were watching us, some not even watching, but talking, drinking beer, or waiting on the dance floor for the next round. They didn't seem to care that someone was dying here.

I felt partly calm, empty and sober, partly anxious, waiting to get a clue about what was happening, ready to jump and act if I would know what to do. My brain was in kind of a cognitive short, when it didn't know anymore how to relate to what was happening.

Terry and Tim, and maybe some others who stood there by this time, tried to detect if Chaiyuth had a pulse. They were holding his wrist, others trying to open eyes and check if there is life, or a pupil reflex. The eyes were rotated upwards, with no life in them. Now we started to feel the plain reality of him dying, but still not believing it. „Maybe it's just a passing phase, surely he comes back". The heart understands first, the mind comes after it, only slowly.

Suddenly a large Thai lady stood there, a friend of Chaiyuth who we met at every dance. She stood there now, and removed the stuffed grape leaves from Chaiyuth's mouth that he had been chewing (similar to betelnut) to make the air passages free. The lady was calm, natural, and equanimous, as if she was just dusting a boy's cloth.

There was total chaos. Nobody led the events, nobody told what to do, everybody just did what he or she thought would be the best, without any coordination. We asked: „is there a pulse?", and the guys detecting the pulse were not answering, just being silently in themselves... it was so strange, so chaotic. I was wonderstruck, that for these minutes the control over the flow of events was completely lifted up from our hands, and handed over to the sheer karma and Jama. In a way it was an initiation for us too. I was wonderstruck that we weren't taught how to save life, how to detect death, how to perform first-aid actions, etc... Maybe he would have survived if we had known how to act in time? I thought it would be essential to make it compulsory, to teach first-aid action in schools.

Finally somehow someone said there is no pulse. I thought, a Thai seeing the events must surely have already called the ambulance. Slowly it dawned on me, that nobody had called any doctor, and we were at the end of a small, sleepy village. I saw the cell phone of my Japanese classmate, Kaori. I jumped to her and asked for the phone, and then I realised we didn't have a clue whom to call. So I held the phone up in the air in my hands, showing it to the Thai, saying „please call the doctor!... doctor!...hospital!..." They didn't pay attention, or didn't understand—I don't know, because the chaos was big, since everybody did what he thought good, there was no cooperation, so nothing moved forward, and there was no focus to pay attention to.

At the same time a well-dressed businesswoman who seemed to have just arrived, started to look at us a little angry, and pointed to the car park, saying something strongly in Thai. She must have said, that we should take immediately Chaiyuth to the hospital by cars. At the same time some of us were already shouting „the driver!... where is the driver?...driver!". We were looking for the man, who had brought us here on his van. After a few minutes the driver appeared, and we picked up the body

and started to run to the car, through the long entrance passage, that had welcomed us so nicely only one or two hours ago. The Thais didn't get involved, remained indifferent, as if it were only our business. It seemed that we should „clean the place from the body”, and they would continue the party. I was not angry at them because it was obvious that they had no bad intention—it is just simply how they relate to death. Nothing special. No emotions. Let's move on. From a western viewpoint this may be tough, but from the view of the inner path, yoga and Buddhism, it is actually an advanced stance, to be equanimous and make no redundant show of emotion around something that is happening, that is natural, that just simply is, as it is.

We reached the cars, and put the body up on the plateau of the pick-up van. Terry asked the group to stay there, saying only the minimum necessary people should go with them. So Terry, Tim, a guy called Steve, and an Israeli girl, Oda, jumped onto the van. The large Thai lady friend took the first seat, next to the driver. Kaori and I jumped onto her rented bike. I offered to drive, since she felt weakened by the events. By this time a new sentence started to flash in my mind „no, it is impossible... it is impossible...” We left the others behind in the car park, and left the place. The van went in the front, and we followed on the bike. Since no Thais spoke English there and none of us spoke Thai, we didn't discuss where to go, and we didn't know where the driver and the lady was heading to, we just hoped, that he was going to the nearest hospital. Slowly we left the village, and started to ride the winding roads of the countryside, among rice fields and small villages, under the early afternoon sunshine. Tim and Terry with Steve were trying constantly to reanimate Chaiyuth by artificial breath and first aid heart pumps. Almost all of us were crying in several attacks. I saw their face on the van filled with tears, red eyes, praying, trying, giving love, energy, all that they could do.

Inside, I went through all kinds of emotions and states of mind. All were intense and changed quickly. Sometimes pain of loss and crying, other times deep silence and calmness, with kind of a transcendent elevation. I think my soul understood that he had passed away, and rested in this after-death transcendental peace, of being released. As if angels would have touched me, giving calmness and even joy of release. At the same time my mind was still in the previous state, hoping that we would reach the hospital soon, and they might save his life. We were driving at 80 km/h. I looked at Oda, with questioning eyes: „is he alive, did you succeed?”, and he replied by shaking his head „no”.

We reached the highway, and the driver turned into the opposite direction from Chiang Mai. After a few hundred meters we reached the local hospital in some small town, directly off the highway. We ran inside, and they got a wheelchair and brought Chaiyuth in. On the left, the first room was an emergency room, they brought him in. Now we felt relieved a bit that he was in the hands of doctors. Interestingly we could go in, and see everything; no doctors said „please wait outside”. They tried to reanimate him according to the medical way, first breathing equipment and heart massage, then injections. After about fifteen minutes of trial, they gave up, and looked up shaking heads. We understood through body language, that it was over. All of us went there, and said goodbye to Chaiyuth. These were very sad moments. We held his hands, and everybody in his own way said goodbye. With this act we finally acknowledged his death to ourselves too. And it was also a release, release from this uncertainty and struggle. He was white, his skin started to discolour, having specks on

it. His body was stiff. It was striking how an elastic body becomes stiff so quickly at death. I contemplated afterwards on the fact, how many people in the name of yoga, focusing just on their body, work to have a more and more flexible body, and by the end, they will lose it at one blink of an eye, and became stiffer than ever.

The doctors then pushed him out to the corridor on the wheelbed, and covered him with a white cloth. They said it was a heart attack.

I think we had assumed that he died naturally, without struggling with death, without pain or any redundancy of reactions and emotions. I am not the only one among those who saw him dying, who thinks that he was possessed by a spirit, and died in trance. Maybe his spirit teacher came for him.

From the hospital, we walked out to the streets of nowhere. We didn't know what would happen next. Would someone call his family? What would happen to the body? Would we just walk out, and go home now? It was so weird. Finally, Tery and Tim stayed there, to wait for the family. Kaori and Steve left on the bike, and Oda and me went by the van with the driver and the Thai lady. I felt that my road ended here, and the time had stopped. I came to Thailand to learn from Chaiyuth. Now that aim was gone, the effort and the run was gone, and I remained in a vast openness, in the present, where nothing matters and everything matters more than before. We didn't know where the Thais take us. The van went on a winding countryside road, instead of the highway going to Chiang Mai.

Finally I realised where we were—it is where the Thai lady brought us to sell her house a week before. It is near Bo Sang village. We stopped at her house, and she picked up something. Then we went on and stopped at Bo Sang. She came to me and said: money! pointing at her phone. I didn't care too much, just obeyed what she wanted. She brought me into a cell phone shop, and asked for money to buy a new card. All right, I gave her money, and then they brought us back to Chaiyuth's house. We had the pack of Chaiyuth in our hands to bring to his house. It was very embarrassing approaching his house. I was afraid, that I would meet her family, and I have to say „sorry, Chaiyuth has died”. Finally the Thai lady entered the house, and we put down the package on the garden table. Nobody had returned yet from the dance, nor from the hospital. The young boy came out of the house, someone who I've never figured out who he was. I knew that his sister's daughter lived there, someone from that family. The Thai lady told him the situation, and they both were still so equanimous as if nothing has happened. The girl also appeared, and she also didn't seem excited or sad. The first thing she asked was: „did he smoke?”, „did he drink?”. He smoked some cigarettes like almost everyone there, and had some beer, like almost everyone there. He belonged to that culture. By this time I slowly understood that this emotionlessness, equanimity, and calmness belongs to Thais in general at the case of death too.

We politely said goodbye and left the place. Later I went back, almost every hour to see if the others had come back, and to see how things had gone further. Slowly they also came back, and a bigger and bigger crowd appeared in Chaiyuth's garden too. The neighbours, and maybe family members. Later I heard that he has a sister and daughter in Bangkok, who arrived the next day.

By six p.m. Terry and Tim also came back from the hospital, sitting in the garden. Also two Greek girls sat there, gazing at the massage room. I introduced myself and asked who they are. They said, that they had just arrived from Greece to learn from Chaiyuth, and they had an appointment now, at six. They walked in, and heard that the master has died. They just sat there, and couldn't believe it.

We were informed that the body would be transferred the next day to the neighbouring buddhist temple, Wat Mahawan, and would be there for three days. On the fourth day there would be the cremation. I decided to stay there until the end.

Next day I went to the Wat (temple), and saw the coffin there, ornamented with flowers, his pictures, and incense. There was a ceremony conducted by the monks of that temple-monastery at morning and evening, and at early noon a lunch offering for the monks.



This was a traditional way. This repeated for three days. We met each other there all students or non-student farangs who took part in the events. Also the massage teacher Asokananda arrived upon hearing the sad news, with other assistant teachers of him, and Thais who we didn't know. Chaiyuth's sister and daughter also arrived.

On the third day I suddenly felt, that was is not Chaiyuth anymore. Before, I felt, he is there, in the coffin. Now I felt, no, it is just his body, he is not here anymore in the coffin. Whether it was my inner process of mourning, or some extrasensory perception I don't know; anyway, it gave some easiness to the whole thing. I think it is a very good idea to keep the coffin for three days at the public, in that way we have time to get used to the fact of death and let him go. On the fourth day the cremation process started. The first surprise in the morning was that the band arrived to the Wat, and set up the tent, and the whole equipment, and started to play music as if we were at the dance. It was very, very touching.



They played quite long, and meanwhile the participants were offered a free lunch. A donation box was placed to the side, to help funding the funeral. Many people came for the final celebration, including other well-known Chiang Mai masseurs like Poo. Finally they removed the coffin from its stand, and put it in the car. There were three funeral cars, one bringing the coffin, and the first one bringing his picture. The third one carried the core members of the band. Suddenly a black-dressed Thai organiser jumped there, and put me up to the coffin carrier car next to the coffin. He asked me to hold Chaiyuth's name on a flag, and also the incense ball packed with many incense sticks in a burning coconut, placed in a ceramic pot. He grabbed Tim, and placed on the other side of the coffin to carry another flag. Some other farangs were put in the first car to hold the picture. Behind us came to core of the band in an open car, playing traditional funeral music during the procession.

We slowly rolled out to Tha Pae Road, while Poo came there and said that the incense ball should be kept firmly, because this calls Chaiyuth's spirit back here to follow the funeral. We started to roll slowly on the main roads of Chiang Mai. It was very touching, all of us in silence, the band playing live in the car, the streets echoing the funeral music played by the band on the car. I saw the whole procession from the coffin's perspective – as he marched through the streets of his hometown for the last time, saying farewell. Some people on the streets slowed down, and sensed what was going on, while others just passed on hurrying, without noticing what was going on. Slowly we arrived to the cremation place, where after a spectacular unexpected colorful firework around the coffin, his body was cremated in the coffin.

The chanting monks besides the coffin recited again and again, day by day, one of the key verses of the Buddha that I keep on hearing chanted by my vipassana teacher at every end of the meditation sittings:

*Aniccavata sankhara
uppadavaya dhammino
uppa jjhitva nirujjhanti
tesam upasamo sukho*

„All things (sankharas) are impermanent.
Arising and passing away is their inherent nature.
When they arise and get vanished,
the tranquility attained is the real happiness, Nibbana.”

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