



LIVING TRADITIONS

Newsletter of the Thai Healing Alliance International - Volume 2, 2006

THAI is embraced in the motherland

Only four months after the Thai Healing Alliance International began operations, the organization was embraced by major Thai massage schools and teachers in Chiang Mai and Bangkok. In addition to these major schools becoming active members of THAI, a number of independent Thai nationals also joined the organization.

In March of 2006, Bob Haddad and Al Turner II visited schools in Chiang Mai and gave presentations about THAI to directors and owners of Thai massage schools, to "farang" students, and to native Thai practitioners.

Among those who pledged their enthusiasm and support of THAI were the Old Medicine Hospital, Sunshine Massage School, International Training Massage (ITM), Nerve Touch Massage School, Loi Kroh Massage School, and many others (a complete list appears online at www.thaihealingalliance.com).

Information printed in Thai language was distributed to the owners and operators of the schools to help them understand THAI's mission, and its basic standards of study and practice of traditional *nuad phaen boran* (traditional Thai massage). Without exception, each school accepted an honorary membership certificate, posted THAI decals and stickers on their premises, and agreed to promote THAI to their students.

A number of schools made verbal presentations about THAI to their students in session, and expressed interest in the THAI advertising incentive program. After two weeks in Chiang Mai, Bob traveled to Bangkok where he met with the directors of several other schools.

New Chiang Mai members

The following have become active members of THAI at the Institution or Instructor level. Study with these Approved Providers is valid for all levels of membership in THAI.

- **Nerve Touch Massage School**
- **ITM** (*International Training Massage*)
- **Old Medicine Hospital**
- **Loi Kroh Massage School**
- **Sunshine Massage School**
- **Therdchai Chumphoopong (Mae)**
- **Aum Health School**
(*Formerly School of Massage For Health*)
- **Lanna Thai Massage School**
- **Mama Nit Thai Massage**
- **School of Massage for Health, Sripoom**
- **TMC** (*Thai Massage School of Chiang Mai*)

IN THIS ISSUE:

Kruba Srivichai, Lanna saint	1
Lek Chaiya, Master Healer	3
Asokananda interview	4
Ergonomics of Thai Massage	5
Experiences with Pichet	8
Ruesri Dan Ton revival	10
Om Namó (what?)	11
Testimonials	12

Those involved in teaching traditional Thai massage in Chiang Mai seem to truly understand the need for an organization such as THAI. They believe that the study and practice of Thai massage should be ongoing, and they agree with the directors of THAI that students all too often begin to practice professionally while they are still under-qualified. It is our hope that together, as a worldwide alliance, we can cultivate an atmosphere of non-partisanship, diligent study, basic standards, serious practice, and professional ethics. Now that THAI is connected directly to major centers of learning in Thailand, these goals should become more easily attainable.

A partial list of schools and teachers who have recently become active members in the Thai Healing Alliance appears in the column to the left. Throughout this issue you will find photos and information that correspond to THAI's recent visit to the motherland.— Bob Haddad

Kruba Srivichai, Patron Saint of Chiang Mai

By Josh Scoggins

Visitors to Chiang Mai, especially Thai massage students of Pichet Boonthamme, would do well to know a little about Pra Kruba Srivichai (1878-1938). He is one of the the most revered monks of the Lanna Kingdom, a broad area of northern Thailand that was an independent Kingdom before it was incorporated into Siam in 1897. Today, when Thai people speak of 'Chiang Mai language,' it is a reference to the ancient Lanna language.

Phra Kruba Srivichai has been called the 'Engineer Monk' because he mounted and supervised over 100 construction projects in northern Thailand, including many Buddhist *wats* (temples). Of special note, he organized the building of the road leading to Wat Prathat Doi Suthep, the famous temple complex overlooking the city of Chiang Mai.

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Kruba Srivichai as an elder monk, circa 1938.

KRUBA SRIVICHAI - *continued from previous page*

At that time only the strong and devoted made the minimum five hour hike up the mountain to Doi Suthep through dense tropical forest. It has been said that because the government couldn't raise sufficient money to build the road, they called upon Kruba Srivichai. He sent word far and wide, and because of his great popularity, volunteers came from all over Thailand to help. On some days, as many as 3,000 to 4,000 people came to build the road, which was originally laid in stone. Because so many volunteers heeded his call, Kruba's original projection for each village group to complete 50 feet of road was decreased to 10-15 feet. Day by day, a massive volunteer workforce cleared the area and set stones on the roadway. The project was completed in only five months and twenty days. The famous monk presided over opening ceremonies on 30 April, 1935.

Kruba Srivichai was famous for his kind, pious and compassionate nature. He ate very little, and spent long hours in meditation. He was very bright and was always doing good works for Thai people. Even as a youth he was regarded as a person of great merit. He is known to have regularly released caged animals, and to have given away to others the food and alms

that were given to him on his daily rounds, an act that angered many of his patrons who feared that they would not be blessed if he gave away their offerings. Pichet considers Kruba a patron saint, and has prominent altars and photos of him in his classroom, alongside the Buddha, Shivaga Komarpaj (the father of Thai massage), and the Thai Earth Mother.

Kruba was ordained at Wat Ban Pang in Lampun, where he began studies at the age of 18. He was quickly recognized as a great and pious monk, even among the hill tribe people. He passed away on 20 February 1938 (BE 2481) at the age of 60. His bones remain in the stupa at Wat Chammadevi. He was given the title *Nak Bun Haeng Lanna*, which may be translated as Lanna saint.

A very important and often visited monument honoring Kruba Srivichai is located just past the Chiang Mai zoo, in front of Huay Kaew falls. If you visit Doi Suthep, you might consider stopping here, along with pilgrims from all over Thailand, to make offerings and send prayers on your way up or down the mountain.

**Acupuncture and Thai Massage — “Same Same, but Different”**

By Eric Spivack

Thai massage and acupuncture are ancient healing arts that have existed for thousands of years. Thai massage is based in Ayurvedic medicine, Buddhist spiritual practice, and yoga. Acupuncture is based on traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). While acupuncture and Thai massage are distinct modalities, they share some similarities, and could perhaps be described by the popular Thai expression ‘*Same Same but Different*’.

Acupuncture and Thai massage are individual elements of more complex systems of medicine. Both Chinese medicine and Traditional Thai medicine comprise herbal therapies, nutritional and food cures, spiritual practice and physical medicine. Neither acupuncture nor Thai massage is based on the Western system of anatomy. In many places in the East, dissection was forbidden until the introduction of Western medicine, so the earliest references to the human body were based on external observation.

As a result, both modalities are complete energy-based healing systems. In Thai massage, we use the term *sen* to describe the pathways along which energy travels, and the energy itself is referred to as *lom*. In acupuncture, the pathways are called *meridians* or *channels*, and the energy that moves throughout the body is called *qi* (pronounced ‘chee’). Other Eastern names for this energy force are *ki* (Japanese), and *prana* (Indian Ayurvedic medicine).

This energy powers all our physical, mental, and emotional processes. In both acupuncture and Thai massage, the practitioner's intent is to harmonize and clear energetic imbalances. Such imbalances may present

themselves physically in a number of ways such as body pain, muscle cramping and stiffness, insomnia, irritability, anxiety, constipation, or disease. When the system is working well, a person feels happy, relaxed, and free from pain, though according to Chinese medicine, being symptom-free does not necessarily mean a person is in complete balance. Whereas an acupuncturist inserts sterile, single-use, hair-thin pins at various points on the body, the Thai massage practitioner uses his/her fingers, palms, elbows, knees, and feet to correct for energetic blockages.

In the Ayurvedic tradition, it is believed that 72,000 *nadis* (channels) course through the human body. Of these channels, ten major *sen* lines are the focus for Thai massage practitioners. Acupuncturists address twelve major meridians and eight additional pathways called *extraordinary vessels*. While there is some overlap of Thai *sen* and Chinese meridians, they are not the same. For example, in Thai medicine, the ten *sen* begin and end at or near the navel, and energy travels in both directions along each *sen*. In acupuncture, the meridians either begin or end at the finger tips or toes, and when energy is flowing properly, it travels in only one direction.

As the energy pathways are different, so are the treatment points along them. For example, in Chinese medicine, the *ren* meridian originates in the uterus in women and in the lower abdomen in men. It emerges at the perineum, travels up the anterior midline of the body, and ends just below the lower lip, where it curves around the lips and terminates below the eyes, where it meets the

In Thai massage, this pathway may be similarly comprised of several lines:

- 1) *Sen Sumana*, which originates at the navel and travels to the tip of the tongue
- 2) *Sen Nanthakrawat*, which divides into two lines: *Sen Sukhumang* (which travels from the navel to the anus) and *Sen Sikhin* (which travels from the navel to the urethra)
- 3) *Sen Khitchann*, which also divides into two lines: *Sen Pitakun* (running from the navel to the penis in men) and *Sen Kitcha* (running from the navel to the vagina in women.)

Though strong differences exist between Chinese medicine and traditional Thai medicine, there is enough similarity for them to complement one another. In my experience, I have found that combining acupuncture and Thai massage in a session can be extremely beneficial.

I have noticed that my patients respond best when they are able to receive approximately 30 minutes of acupuncture followed by 60-120 minutes of Thai massage. Acupuncture helps clear a person's energetic blockages and enables them to benefit more from the Thai massage. People feel more relaxed, breathe more deeply, experience deeper stretches, and feel like they've received a holistic treatment.



Eric Spivack is a Thai massage practitioner and an acupuncturist. His integrative health clinic is based in Seattle, WA.

Lek Chaiya: Master Healer and Herbalist

By Janice Vitavec



“Mama” Lek Chaiya.

I met Lek Chaiya on my first sojourn to Thailand in 1997. At that time I had no idea what she would come to mean to me. Lek Chaiya, affectionately called “Mama Lek,” learned Thai massage and healing medicine from her father, a traditional Thai doctor, and her mother, a practitioner of midwifery and massage in the village of Jom Thong, Chiang Mai. Lek also studied herbalism and traditional massage in northern and southern Thailand, and eventually founded her own style of Thai massage, called “Nerve Touch” or *jap-sen* (meaning “to grab the sen lines”). *Jap sen* is a deep tissue approach that improves the mechanical functioning of the body by restructuring and aligning muscles, tendons and bones, and by stimulating pathways in the nervous system. This unique style of Thai massage works to stimulate the flow of energy or “*lom*” throughout the body by plucking and manipulating the intricate system of *sen* lines.

I first experienced Thai massage in Canada about ten years ago. By the end of the session I was hooked: I knew that I wanted to learn this ancient healing art. Following my intuition, I packed up my life, left Canada with a one-way ticket, and moved to Thailand to immerse myself in this work. I arrived in the Northern Thailand city of Chiang Mai the day before New Years Eve. For two months, I studied with Chongkol Setthakorn at the Institute of Thai Massage (ITM). Chongkol, or John as foreigners call him, spoke English very well and the school quickly attracted English speaking students. At that time, ITM had only been open for two years, so there was a sense of being involved in the pioneer stages of the spreading of Thai Massage to students from around the world. Through a chain of new acquaintances, I became close friends with a delightful Thai woman named Pong who invited me to live at her house. She owned a small natural products and clothing shop called *My Home* on the outskirts of the city. It was wonderful to be out of the tourist loop and to be more immersed in the cultural aspects of Thailand. I helped her design and make natural crafts that we sold out of her shop and at festivals throughout northern Thailand.

Through a very meaningful coincidence that Jungians call synchronicity, I discovered that a half a block away lived a woman in her 60s who was said to be a master in Thai Massage and an herbalist. “Mama Lek” was known to have helped many Thai people with minor to serious physical problems and medical conditions. For the next four months I alternated between working at the nature shop and studying with Mama Lek. I was fortunate to have private study with her, as she did not advertise to tourists at that time. I learned by working side by side with her in sessions that



Jack, Mama Lek’s son, works on a student in the Nerve Touch classroom. Photos by Bob Haddad.

treated conditions like persistent back and knee pain, or easing and facilitating a smooth pregnancy, and even more serious cases such as paralysis. With regular treatment, a man who was paralyzed and in a wheelchair was able to walk and even garden once again. I was fascinated and moved by Lek Chaiya’s knowledge, confidence and trust in her own abilities. As we continued to work together I came to appreciate the nearly miraculous therapeutic changes that took place in her clients, and I began to understand the potential of Thai massage to evoke deep healing on all levels; physical, mental, and spiritual. I observed one of her clients, an elderly man hunched over with pain and walking with a cane, become pain free and able to stand straight after only two sessions. In another case, a recent stroke victim who was almost completely paralyzed on one side was restored to 100% functioning after just a few months of weekly sessions.

Witnessing Lek Chaiya and working closely with her has given me a lifetime of inspiration for this work. For the past nine years I have returned to Thailand every year to study with her, as well as at other schools. To watch a master work in her element is both fascinating and emotionally moving. What is it that makes her a “Master?” A refined and polished sense of touch, lead by purity of heart and excellent intuition. An intention for healing with the focused guidance of an ancient foundation

and tradition. She begins and ends each day with prayer to the *Buddha*, the ancestors and the founder of Thai massage, *Shivaka Kumarabhacca*. To her, this healing art is an integral part of her everyday life.

One night when we were in San Francisco for a sightseeing weekend, I couldn’t sleep. She advised me to recite the traditional mantra “*Om Namoh*” until it calmed my mind. I realized that the spiritual foundation of this ancient healing art is available at each moment. These teachings are handed down through the generations from an early age. I hold dear to me the beautiful image of Lek in the mornings with my young daughter sitting at her side with hands in prayer, eyes closed and hearts open. Lek Chaiya has become a mentor, teacher and motherly figure in my life. Thai massage has become the avenue I was looking for in my growth and it nurtures all levels of my development. I am honored to host Lek Chaiya at my school, the Spirit Winds School of Thai Massage, and I consider her a living treasure. It is a blessing that Lek has graced the world through her loving stewardship of the tradition of Thai massage.



Janice Vitavec is a passionate practitioner and teacher of traditional Thai massage. Her school, Spirit Winds, is located in Nevada City, California.

Interview with Asokananda

by Bob Haddad

This is the second of three excerpts from the original transcription to appear in the THAI newsletter. The interview was carried out on Feb 12, 2004 at Asokananda's home in Chiang Mai.

What do you know about the Thai Massage Revival Project? Was it an effort to bring about standardization in the teaching and practice of traditional Thai Massage?

Initially it was a project to simply revive Thai Massage. People had begun to realize that Thailand had a serious tradition of profound therapeutic massage and of Ayurvedic medicine, whose revival was running parallel to that of Thai massage. So it was an attempt to bring back the knowledge and spread it more, and at the same time to make sure that it was somehow up to a certain standard of practice.

Do you think it was successful in achieving its goals?

It certainly did raise the awareness of Thai Massage within Thai society, and by now, Thai Massage has regained a certain level of status within Thai society that was lacking at that time. A few years back there was a government attempt to get every teacher registered in Bangkok, and teachers were supposed to have done some training there in order to get officially registered. One of my teachers had sent some materials at one point, but never received any answer. I remember when I asked my other teacher about it - he just looked at me smiling and said "do you really think I need that?" So *(he laughs)* the people I was working with were not very concerned about any sort of government affiliation.

How have the original elements of Indian Ayurveda been lost or changed in current day Thai practice?

Well for example, in the actual practice of Thai Ayurveda the *doshas* do not play a significant role. The major source of diagnosis and of treatment protocol in Thai Ayurveda is based on tastes, which is not the case in Indian Ayurveda where *dosha* analysis plays a much more significant role. In Indian Ayurvedic medicine there are eight tastes, but in Thai Ayurveda there are ten. So it's quite difficult for an outside observer to understand Thai Ayurveda because it's based on a theoretical background containing many Indian principles which are rarely used in actual practice. Thais are not particularly concerned with those elements. They pay respect to the source, but they work within their own tradition. That's the way it has developed over the past two thousand years.

Does Thai massage reflect any indigenous Southeast Asian healing practices?

Nobody has any idea about this. There must have been some native healing tradition in Thailand, but there are no known sources of information about this.

How do traditional Thai medicine practitioners work with their patients?

They will often perform a taste analysis on the patient, and prescribe medicinal herbs and sometimes minerals. They would possibly perform Thai massage, apply hot herbal compresses, etc. There is a wide range of practices that form the basis of traditional Thai medicine. To qualify as a Thai Ayurvedic practitioner you have to undergo rigorous training in Bangkok these days. One can study to become either a Thai Ayurvedic doctor or a Thai Ayurvedic pharmacist.

How do you feel about the commercialization of Thai Massage by relatively unqualified practitioners?

Well, I'm sure sad about it, but I'm not sure there's much we can do. One of the side effects of the increasing popularity of Thai Massage is that there are also quacks who try to ride the wave and wind up teaching things that are incorrect or non traditional. But as with most fads, I'm confident that those who wish to practice seriously will eventually prevail and that the quality teachers will eventually have the strongest impact. Even the sub-standard schools in Thailand and in the West are raising interest in traditional Thai Massage, and anyone who gets started and can see the great potential will ultimately look for a serious teacher if they're truly interested.

Can you speak about Jivaka Kumar Bhaccha (the father of Thai Ayurvedic medicine and traditional Thai Massage)?

Jivaka Kumar Bhaccha is a mythological figurehead. He never set foot on Thai soil because he lived a few hundred years before the first Buddhist travelers came to the region. Those who began to spread knowledge of Thai Massage, however, were practicing in his spirit. He is specifically revered because he is the famous doctor mentioned in ancient Buddhist scriptures. He was the Buddha's doctor - the physician of the Buddha's *sangha* - so anything medical that was associated with Buddhism became automatically associated with him. When Ayurvedic medicine was brought to this region, it was brought and transmitted in Jivaka's spirit and tradition.



*Asokananda, 2004.
Photo by Bob Haddad*

So the elements of mindfulness, metta and loving kindness inherent in Thai Massage have been transmitted over the years largely as a result of Jivaka Kumarbhaccha's personal relationship and interaction with the Buddha.

Yes, exactly. And to make one point clear that often appears as somewhat of a misunderstanding, Buddhist monks were not the ones responsible for teaching of massage in Thailand. It was the Ayurvedic doctors who arrived with the monks and in the same Buddhist spirit worked in the region to spread Ayurvedic medical knowledge. Buddhist monasteries were the first places where massage was carried out in Thailand, so there was a very close link between traditional Thai massage and Buddhist spirituality and principles. As far as is known, the first emigrations of Indian Ayurvedic practitioners and Buddhist monks began a few hundred years after the Buddha's death, around 300 BC.

How important is Thai Yoga massage to one's spirituality?

I don't think they can be separated, because Thai Massage was brought to Thailand in conjunction with Buddhism. Historically Thai Massage was taught alongside the teachings of the Buddha and remained closely connected to Buddhist tradition and also to meditation. The approach was that massage was an act of loving kindness and mindfulness applied to another person. The spirit of Thai Massage is essentially a Buddhist spirit and to take it out of that context is to remove the heart of the process. If a massage is not

practiced with loving kindness and mindfulness, a certain quality can be missing from the end result. For me it's essential that the teaching of Thai Massage also incorporate the teaching of meditation and yoga.



HOW ERGONOMICS ?

By James Peckham

Sustainable body mechanics (ergonomics) is extremely important in Thai massage to prevent injury to ourselves and to our clients, and to help us tune in more effectively to our clients. Injuries in massage are nearly always cumulative, instead of sudden. We may think our bodies are fine, and that we are not hurting ourselves now, but we may end up with sore thumbs and wrists, carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis or bursitis five years from now. I know people who were fulltime massage therapists for several years, and now are estheticians or realtors, because they hurt themselves gradually over the years.

In these guidelines, I am passing along what I have learned from being a full-time massage therapist since 1992, and a Thai massage therapist since 1996. I have also learned so much from my Thai massage teacher in Thailand, Mr. Pichet Boonthumme, who works very deeply, and yet so effortlessly and gracefully. When I first studied with him in 1999, for six weeks, "How ergonomics?" was his most frequent saying, to which he would add, "How best to use your body?" At that point, I had been practicing Thai massage for three years, and had tried to use good body mechanics. Other teachers had talked about it, but I learned much more of the practical details of truly good body mechanics from Pichet.

So far, I have never injured myself by doing massage, although I keep refining the way I work, to reduce risk and harm to my body, while still working as deeply as my clients need. I call these guidelines "sustainable body mechanics." My hope is that you will develop only good habits, which will become second nature, so that you may do as much massage as you want, effortlessly and relaxed, for the long-term good of yourself and your clients.

1. Work from your center (*hara, tantien*, or second chakra)

Initiate all movement from your center, which is your lower abdomen, two finger widths below your navel. You may need to engage your core muscles, and contract them enough in order to be more aware of your center. Keep your arms straight, but not rigid, and keep your shoulders relaxed, so that your hands become extensions of your *hara*. Every small movement in your *hara* translates into a larger movement in your hands. If we bend our elbows, or work from our shoulders downward, we break the connection with our *hara*. This is much less efficient, and causes our shoulders and arms to work harder than necessary, which may result in cumulative injury over time.

Tune in to your client's body from your *hara* as well, so that the connection between your *hara* and your client's body is a two-way street. Our bodies have intelligence which can sense what another body needs in terms of pressure, pacing our work, and where to give more attention. The idea is to bypass the brain, which often gets in the way of what our body senses. With arms straight and shoulders relaxed, our hands are properly connected to our *hara*. If we bend our elbows, or work from our shoulders downward, we break that connection, and are more likely to rely on our brain than on our body's knowledge. Allow yourself to be drawn in to your client's body, to the exact depth they need, and with the sensitivity they need, to work *with* them instead of doing Thai massage *on* them. Working from your center is the most important safeguard against working too deep and too fast, which is one of the most common mistakes made by many massage therapists.

2. Use your body weight

Thai massage allows us to work at the same level as that of our clients, and to use body weight and gravity efficiently as we apply downward pressure through our arms. This helps us to not rely on arm strength, and allows us to keep our shoulders relaxed.

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ERGONOMICS, continued from previous page

3. Protect your wrists

Keep your wrist angle comfortable and sustainable. We always want to have our body weight directly over our arms, and apply downward pressure. That doesn't mean 90 degrees exactly, but as close to it as is possible and sustainable. Anything beyond that angle may pinch nerves in our wrists, or overstretch ligaments. Always keep your arm rotation comfortable. This may mean that our fingers point straight out away from us, or externally rotated 45 degrees, or 60 degrees out to the side. Always guard against overstretching your ligaments, which could cause the bones in our joints to come out of alignment. Sometimes, we may need to shift the orientation of our bodies to keep our arms in a more comfortable position.

When you are palm pressing, direct the energy through your arms and into the heel of your hand, and then spread the pressure throughout the palm of your hand, to broaden and soften the pressure. If you direct the pressure through the heel of your hand, and do not broaden it through your palm, it may feel too sharp. If you focus the pressure through the center of the palm of your hand, it is easy to create too sharp of an angle at your wrist, which could pinch nerves or overstretch ligaments and cause injury.

4. Protect your thumbs

Use the pad of your thumb, close to the first joint, instead of your thumb tip. If you don't have "Thai thumbs," which bend back at the first joint, use less pressure on the tip of your thumb, because the pressure may feel too sharp or "pointy" for your clients.

Keep your thumb close to your other fingers, so that it is not isolated and vulnerable to injury. Keep the first joint of your thumb in line with your forearm, so that it is supported structurally and energetically by your arm.

5. Keep your spine straight

Keep your spine in alignment, neither rigid nor exaggerating the natural curves of your spine. If you engage your core muscles, you will protect your lower back, especially when you foot-press thighs in supine position or side position. Also, keep your head up, and your neck aligned with your spine.

Try to eliminate or modify any moves that require you to bend forward while rounding your spine, whether from a standing or a sitting position. If you do need to bend over, bend from your hips instead of from your waist. Always bend your knees and lift their body by straightening your legs in order to protect your lower back. For moves that require you to pick up your client's feet for a stretch, try kneeling first in order to grab their feet before you stand up.

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THAI welcomes the following new members

Don Bertram	Instructor	Auckland, New Zealand
David Bliss, RTT	Practitioner	Astoria, New York
Elyse Briggs, RTT	Instructor	Glendale, California
Naomi Brisman, RTT	Practitioner	Brooklyn, New York
British School of Thai Bodywork	Institution	Devon, England
Kim Cramer, RTT	Practitioner	Houston, Texas
Rene Deaver, RTT	Practitioner	New York, New York
Craig Dickson	Basic Member	Woods Hole, Massachusetts
Amy El, RTT	Practitioner	Houston, Texas
Richard Gold, RTT	Instructor	San Diego, California
Catherine Goodrum	Basic Member	Warrenton, Virginia
Chris Gordon, RTT	Practitioner	St. Paul, Minnesota
Steven Harank	Basic Member	Folsom, California
Tim Holt, RTT	Instructor	Sebastopol, California
Trish Juen	Basic Member	Buffalo, Minnesota
Ingrid Kullberg-Bendz	Basic Member	New York, New York
Jaycee La Bouche, RTT	Practitioner	London, England
Allison Longstreth, RTT	Adv. Practitioner	Portland, Oregon
Hans Luetz, RTT	Instructor	Bonn, Germany
Diana Makens	Basic Member	Sunfish Lake, Minn.
Cheryl Ann Martin	Basic Member	Cameron Park, California
Martin Misenhimer, RTT	Instructor	Canandaigua, NY
Junnon Merigoux, RTT	Practitioner	Perpignan, France
Cristina Muñoz-Gandara	Basic Member	San Juan, Puerto Rico
Gregory Oed, RTT	Practitioner	Baltimore, Maryland
Oregon School of Massage	Institution	Portland, Oregon
Kay Rynerson, RTT	Adv. Practitioner	Seattle, Washington
Pierce Salguero, RTT	Instructor	Baltimore, Maryland
Santitham Guest House	Assoc. Member	Chiang Mai, Thailand
Eric Spivack, RTT	Instructor	Seattle, Washington
Sunshine Massage School	Institution	Chiang Mai, Thailand
Sunshine Network New Zealand	Institution	Auckland, New Zealand
Spirit Winds School of Thai Massage	Institution	Nevada City, California
Joshua Scoggins, RTT	Adv. Practitioner	Austin, Texas
Niclaire Skye, RTT	Instructor	Devon, England
Tao Mountain	Institution	Baltimore, Maryland
Thai Massage Organisation	Institution	Edinburgh, Scotland
Anne Thrall-Nash, RTT	Practitioner	Belmont, California
Eric Twickler	Basic Member	Worcester, Massachusetts
David Weitzer, RTT	Instructor	Beaverton, Oregon
Kuru Winyan (Berm), RTT	Practitioner	Chiang Mai, Thailand

The above members joined THAI before April, 2006. Members who have joined since then will be featured in the next issue of the *Living Traditions* newsletter.

6. Keep your chest open

Focus on the space between your shoulder blades of your back, and keep your chest open whenever possible. This will help prevent kyphosis (curving of the spine), and will help avoid rotator cuff problems.

7. Keep your hips and shoulders facing the same way

Keep your hips and shoulders facing the same direction, to avoid torquing your spine. When palm pressing the leg lines, for example, have your knees wide apart to "frame" your work, so that your spine is aligned at each point along the line.

8. Maintain comfortable elbow rotations

When doing a butterfly palm press, keep the "eyes" (inner parts) of your elbows facing each other, and do not allow your arms to rotate externally.

9. Breathe

It may seem obvious, but we occasionally need to remind ourselves of the importance of breathing deeply throughout the treatment, for our sake and that of our clients. In order for a client to receive full benefit from compressions and stretches, they need to breathe deeply. We may need to remind them at times, and more importantly, our example of deep, relaxed breathing may enable them to breathe more deeply.

10. Support your own body weight

It is safest to support our weight on our own body. If we support our weight on our clients, there is a danger that we could slip and hurt them. Be aware of the risks involved, and modify your movement to be safe.

James Peckham is a Thai massage practitioner and teacher based in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The above information was originally written for use by his students .



Please help THAI grow
Even a few hours a month will help

- Membership Committee
Writers & Archives Coordinators
Graphic Designer
Public Relations & Publicity
Fund Raising Coordinators

If you have experience or interest in any of the above areas, please contact: info@thaihealingalliance.com

See a complete list of volunteer positions at www.thaihealingalliance.com/volunteer/htm



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JIVAKA'S CORNER



This issue's selection was compiled from ancient texts by Paul Carus in 1894. It relates a portion of the famous story of the garments made of precious cloth called siveyyaka.

The clothes were given to Jivaka after he cured a wealthy patient, and he wished to give them to the Buddha. The Buddha

accepted the robes, and as a result, he allowed his followers to wear lay robes from that point onward. — Editor

Now it happened that a disease befell the body of the Blessed One himself, and Ananda went to Jivaka, physician to Bimbisara, the king.

And Jivaka, a faithful believer in the Holy One, ministered unto the Blessed One with medicines and baths until the body of the Blessed One was completely restored.

At that time, Pajjota, king of Ujjeni, was suffering from jaundice, and Jivaka, the physician to king Bimbisara, was consulted. When king Pajjota had been restored to health, he sent to Jivaka a suit of the most excellent cloth. And Jivaka said to himself:

"This suit is made of the best cloth, and nobody is worthy to receive it but the Blessed One, the perfect and holy Buddha, or the Magadha king, Senija Bimbisara."

So Jivaka took that suit and went to the place where the Blessed One was; having approached him, and having respectfully saluted the Blessed One, he sat down near him and said: "Lord, I have a favor to ask of the Blessed One."

The Buddha replied: "The Tathagatas, Jivaka, do not grant favors before they know what they are."

Jivaka said: "Lord, it is a proper and unobjectionable request."

"Speak, Jivaka," said the Blessed One.

"Lord of the world, the Blessed One wears only robes made of rags taken from a dungheap or a cemetery, and so also does the brotherhood of bhikkhus. Now, Lord, this suit has been sent to me King Pajjota, which is the best and most excellent, and the finest and the most precious, and the noblest that can be found. Lord of the world, may the Blessed One accept from me this suit, and may he allow the brotherhood of bhikkhus to wear lay robes."

The Blessed One accepted the suit, and after having delivered a religious discourse, he addressed the bhikkhus thus:

"Henceforth ye shall be at liberty to wear either cast-off rags or lay robes. Whether ye are pleased with the one or with the other, I will approve of it."

When the people at Rajagaha heard, "The Blessed One has allowed the bhikkhus to wear lay robes," those who were willing to bestow gifts became glad. And in one day many thousands of robes were presented at Rajagaha to the bhikkhus.



Experiences with Pichet Boonthamme

By Josh Scoggins

My introduction to Pichet Boonthamme came in mysterious bits and pieces. While attending some of the main schools around Chiang Mai in 2002 and 2003, I heard references and rumors about an unorthodox master teacher of Thai massage in a nearby village. A woman who was teaching at ITM told me that he could actually see and read energy and auras. Another fellow I met on a bus to Myanmar told me that Pichet was 'the real thing'. But he also cautioned that if I weren't ready, it might not be a good way to spend my time. Pichet had a legacy of having influenced and taught many of the major teachers in Chiang Mai. Still, some dismissed him as an erratic eccentric who often did little teaching and offered no cohesive training format. Information about how to find him was vague. Most people knew how to get to his classroom but couldn't begin to explain the directions clearly.

Shortly after taking a course at the Old Medicine Hospital in 2003, I met a woman at my guesthouse who was then studying with Pichet and she offered to bring me along for a visit. Despite being quite sick with an infection I got as a result of a motorbike accident, I excitedly accepted. I had been taking intravenous antibiotics for a week, and I felt a little better that day. It was a Monday, so we went to Chiang Mai Gate market for flowers, incense, fruit and candles; the offerings given each Monday to Buddha and the spirits and ancient teachers of Thai massage. Then we crossed the street and caught a yellow *songthaew* toward Hang Dong. There was no real address to give the driver, so we had to watch for special landmarks. The big Sony sign on the right was first, about halfway from Chiang Mai. After a while we passed under two consecutive walkway overpasses, and that was when we started looking to the right for the American Standard billboard. At that point, we knew that Baan Chang Kham, Pichet's neighborhood, was nearby. We rang the bell, and got off just past a white four story building on the left. A bit further, beyond a small outdoor shop, a small lane made its way through a field to Pichet's home. We passed through his gates and entered his compound, comprised of a house, a teaching studio and a few rooms for rent.

Pichet greeted us as he intently arranged offerings from each student in red wooden bowls. I was really surprised how young he looked. After all the stories I'd heard, I'd imagined him to be much older! When all was ready, we began prayers; to God (Buddha), to the Father Doctor (Shivago Komarpaj), and to Kruba, a patron saint of Chiang Mai and one of Pichet's greatest inspirations. Lastly, there were prayers to the 'Earth Mother' as well as to "Mama and Papa." After prayers Pichet went through a ritual for each student, accepting his or her offering and presenting it before the altar. Using an inkless pen, he etched unseen figures on each person's forehead, evincing wincing and anxiety as he spoke prayers above them. That morning, after ceremonies, Pichet was in one of his 'low energy' phases and the students practiced among themselves. After lunch he began a demonstration. And that was when I got hooked! He exhibited amazing flow and performed effortlessly. He knew exactly where he had to work, and why, and it seemed like he simply melted on top of the receiver with all his weight and intention and compassion. It was not an old and tired routine; it was a dynamic and intuitive treatment. I saw right away that this man was a true healer. After his demonstration, he looked at the protrusion on my leg caused by the infection. I was very anxious and hoped he might offer some mystical solution or insight, but his advice was quite simple. He said "Oh, big problem... massage cannot helping. Go to the hospital". Two days later, in agonizing tears, a Thai friend brought me to the hospital. I succumbed to surgery, and lost my chance to return to see Pichet that year.

Now, two years after my first visit, I have spent a total of four and a half months studying with Pichet. He still seems as amazing and eccentric as when I first met him. He has an extraordinary psychic sense which enables him to read people very well, and to understand how they can be cured. Prayer and ritual are fundamental tools in his healing repertoire. He often sprays people with holy water and I have even seen him brandish swords and ancient farming implements over their bodies. One time he was working on a student with severely contracted shoulders, and what I witnessed seemed almost like an exorcism. The man was screaming and convulsing as Pichet worked on one side of his body, and then Pichet suddenly started hitting the student's opposite thigh with the back of his fist. The man was saying "I can feel the energy moving..." and Pichet warned people to not pass by his head because there was so much 'bad energy' coming out of him. Some days Pichet is active and sublime, and other days he is tired and passive, especially if someone in the

class is causing a big energy drain. At times he will have students do the teaching and sometimes he will leave the classroom for hours with hardly a word. Some people are especially put off by his repetitive sermon-like morning chats. But really most of us need constant reminding of how mind, energy and emotions affect our well being. Massage technique alone is not sufficient for rooting out peoples suffering. In particular, westerners have a hard time grasping his explanation of how spirits are hovering about us, manifesting physical problems in our bodies when we fail to listen to them. So he frequently admonishes the ignorance and indifference of *farang* (foreigners) with respect to prayer, ritual, and the Spirits. "Farang terrible" he says, "always don't know".

On a personal note I feel a very strong connection with Pichet and his teachings. I believe he understands the emotional and spiritual issues that humans face, and that he does have "answers". In this regard he is as much a counselor and spiritual advisor as he is a massage teacher. When I ask him how I can improve my massage skills, he doesn't talk to me about technique. "Go to the temple... for prayer and meditation" he says. Occasionally he will recommend lighting a candle and reading through the manual until the candle burns out. Then a little while later he will say, "burn the book". Instead of taking photos or drawing pictures, he tells his students to "keep in here," as he points to his stomach. More and more, he ignores the you cannot sense, and even the most subtle tension can transfer to the recipient. As he often says, "easy to look... but how to do? How sensing?" Pichet's emphasis is always on "relaxing" and "sensing." Technique becomes a spontaneous and natural adaptation as each moment unfolds. How to use each part of your body in order to achieve the best result in your client flows as much from intuition as from a routine.

...next page



Pichet performs a chest-opening stretch in seated position. Note the triangle formed between her back, his legs, and the floor, — and his "duck squat" position.



An upper back butterfly press in prone position. Notice the triangle formed between Pichet's straight back, his arms and the prone body of the receiver.

This is why meditation is so important. So much of our tension comes from emotional and psychic elements projected through our bodies, that we often are not aware that we are not relaxed. The more I study with him, the more I am aware of the subconscious tension that I carry with me at all times. He often reminds me to not think so much, to not worry so much. I have never met any other teacher who is so intent on pursuing quality and relaxation in his students.

Pichet's powers, ultimately, are very hard to duplicate. In order to harness his extraordinary psychic sense, he often shuts himself off from much of what we call civilization. He rarely ventures into the city — he can hardly stand being there for more than a few moments, and he always comes back exhausted. "Cannot relax... too much energy." Few of us really have the desire or discipline for this kind of life. In 2000, he even went through a period of "big energy" as he calls it, when he spent several weeks in a hospital because family members thought he was acting strangely. He explained that it was a time of "too much energy", that he was visited by spirits and even interacted with the natural elements, calling upon the wind and the rain.

Pichet is certainly controversial, and there will always be people that don't understand or embrace his quiriness and unorthodox teaching style. Those of us who return year after year learn something that is priceless. He is constantly changing, developing, improving. There is always so much to learn. And even when we are not feeling very productive in class, you might say that we are "relaxing." And if we are not, we should be, and that is a lesson in and of itself.

Josh Scoggins is an avid world traveler who has traveled to Thailand many times over the past several years. Whenever he has the chance, he returns to study with Pichet in Hang Dong. He currently lives in Austin, Texas.

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## THAI honors Mama Nit and ITM



**Mama Nit Chaimongkon**, a master of traditional Thai massage in Chiang Mai, poses with her daughter (left) upon accepting her THAI honorary member certificate at the Baan Nit School, which is located just north of Tha Pae gate.

**Chongkol Setthakorn**, of International Training Massage School (ITM) poses with his wife Atchara (left) and daughter Chulaluck (right). ITM recently opened *Spa Mantra* nearby the school, which is managed by Chulaluck. — photos by Bob Haddad

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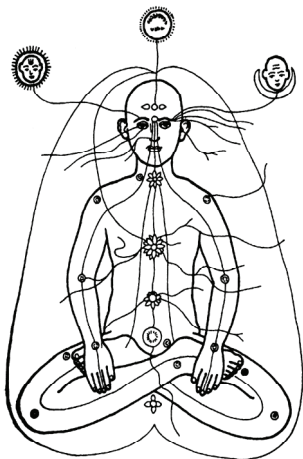
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For more details, contact Martin or Beth at  
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# THAI News from Near and Far



*“As he pressed energy points with his hands, feet and elbows, I sensed deep rivers stirring inside me. Fingertips and toes became alive and breath flowed through my body and mind.”*



## Ruesri Dat Ton courses are more popular

*Ruesri Dat Ton* is a type of traditional Thai physical exercise which has been practiced since ancient times. Visitors to Wat Pho in Bangkok have seen statues of men in strange anatomical poses, which some tour guides refer to as hermits engaged in self-massage.

But this is not exactly self massage. The words *ruesri dat ton* may be translated as “hermit’s stretching exercise.”

This ancient Thai practice comprises a basic series of stretches, physical exercises, and coordinated breathing and meditation.

This practice is believed to have been carried out by ascetic hermits who long ago lived in the forests and mountains of what is present day Thailand.

In most cases, the postures employed in *Ruesri Dat Ton* are less strenuous than those of traditional hatha yoga from the Indian subcontinent. There is no overwhelming proof that the ancient Thai practice evolved directly from yoga.

There are believed to be eighty positions in traditional *Ruesri Dat Ton*. Of these, the Thai Ministry of Public Health

has designated fifteen poses as important, and has put together a sequence of these poses for popular practice. The routine is an excellent warm-up to a traditional Thai massage session (both for the therapist and the receiver).

Traditional *Ruesri Dat Ton* seems to be enjoying a resurgence these days, and introductory courses are held at several Thai massage schools throughout Thailand including Phussapa Thai Massage School in Bangkok and Lanna Thai Massage School in Chiang Mai.

- Bob Haddad

## THAI HEALING IN ACTION

*The following Thai massage testimonials were compiled by James Peckham.*

A friend and patient of mine was scheduled to undergo oral surgery to remove his wisdom teeth. He is a student of therapy and pursues a natural lifestyle. Much to the dismay of his friends and family, he chose not to take antibiotics or pain-killers. He approached me to find an alternative therapy. Using Thai Medicine, I was able to prescribe him an oral rinse along with an antiseptic/anti-inflammatory herbal formula. When he returned to his dentist after a week’s time, the dentist remarked at how well his wounds were healing, and that his recovery process had been much shorter than usual. Of course he did not tell the dentist what he had done, as his dentist was adamant that he take and finish his antibiotics.

- David Bliss

Having received massage therapy for years, my first experience with Thai massage was a delightful surprise. The stretching of muscles and positioning allowed for much greater relaxation and relief of sore/aching muscles. I find this to be the preferred method of massage. - Barbara Coatney

My first experience with Thai massage was profound. Before the session began, the therapist knelt and offered a prayer for my welfare, and asked to be guided. At that moment, I felt the amazing effect of that small act of loving-kindness, the room became filled with peace. I felt weightless as he moved my body in various positions. He coached me to be aware of my breath and to be *open*. As he pressed energy points with his hands, feet and elbows, I sensed deep rivers stirring inside me.

Fingertips and toes became alive, and breath flowed through my body and mind. Now, years later, with each new session I discover new truths about myself. Thai massage not only awakens the deep physical body, it releases the spirit and enlivens the mind. - Della French

My mother, an R.N., was recently on her second round of antibiotics in order to get rid of pneumonia. Things had stalled and her mucus just stopped moving. A few hours after her Thai massage, she released more mucus than she had in days. Her lungs felt clearer after each Thai massage. In another case, a serious weight-trainer client had been getting sore two days after her workouts. But when she received a Thai session the day after her workout, her body felt absolutely no soreness, and she experienced increased mobility. - Jill Roberts

# OM NAMO ... (WHAT?)

Every serious practitioner of traditional Thai massage is familiar with the famous prayer to the founding Father of Thai massage. We may recite it silently before practicing, or aloud in a group before beginning our lessons. But what is that ancient Pali chant really saying?

Don't ask the average Thai person! Pali is an ancient language from India, and although some Thai people still chant in Pali, it's much like when Christians would recite prayers in Latin, without really knowing what they were saying.

In addition, many hundreds of years of transliteration have made it difficult to understand the meaning of the original Pali text. Compare these two translations which are quite different from one another. Which one do you like best?

*All homage to you Shivago,  
you who established the  
basic rules and precepts*

*I pray that everything may  
come through you; kind-  
ness, wealth, and medicine*

*I pray to you. You bring  
light to me, just like the sun  
and the moon*

*You have perfect wisdom  
and know many things.*

*We respect you.  
You are without  
defilement, and you are  
near to enlightenment*

*We all come to pray to you.  
I pray to you. I pray to the  
Buddha*

*I pray that with your help,  
all sickness and disease  
may be released from the  
one whom I touch.*

*We pray to you Shivago,  
you who led a saintly life*

*We pray that you bring us  
knowledge and that you  
allow our prayers to bring  
us the true medicine of  
the Universe*

*We pray that you will  
bring us health and  
all good things*

*The God of healing lives in  
the heavens, and we live in  
the world below*

*We pray to you so that  
heaven may be reflected in  
the world below, and that  
healing medicine may  
encircle the world*

*We pray for the one we  
touch, that he will be  
happy, and that all illness  
will be released from him.*

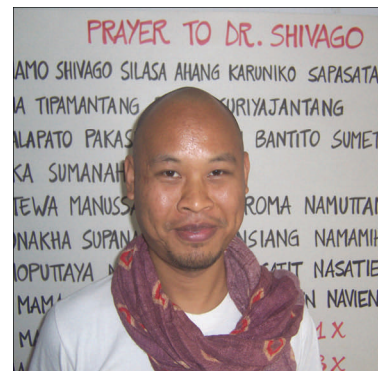
## Schools and teachers around the world join THAI

During the first half of 2006, the Thai Healing Alliance (THAI) has been encouraged by the quality and the variety of teachers and schools that have become active members of the organization. In Thailand, some of the most important centers for the teaching of traditional Thai massage have welcomed the formation of THAI. The vast majority of schools in Chiang Mai are now officially affiliated with our organization. In addition to the growing number of Approved Providers (teachers) around the world, THAI currently boasts members from the USA, England, Scotland, New Zealand, Japan, Germany, France, Puerto Rico and Thailand. Help us expand forward by recruiting new members.

## Spiritual Healing of Traditional Thailand

A new book by Pierce Salguero, *The Spiritual Healing of Traditional Thailand*, is slated for release this year, published by Findhorn Press. The book showcases the spiritual elements of healing traditions from Thailand. Both Buddhism and shamanism continue to play a role in the healing practices found throughout traditional Thai culture. Drawing from research and practice of these arts among monks, shamans, and other healers, the book provides an overview to the spiritual practices of Thailand, with particular emphasis on healing rituals and meditations. The book is illustrated with beautiful color photographs and helpful diagrams. Interspersed among the images are traditional meditations, prayers for healing, instructions for practice of traditional Thai ceremonies, and biographies of important Thai healers. The author also includes background information on the history and philosophy of Thai Buddhism, shamanism, and medical practices.

Pierce Salguero, a member of the Thai Healing Alliance, directs Tao Mountain, based in Baltimore, Maryland, USA.



Thai massage teacher Therdchai Chumphoopong (Mac) in front of the Om Namō in his classroom in Chiang Mai.



**Om Namō Shivago**

**Silasa Ahang**

**Karuniko Sapasatanang**

**Osata Tīpa Mantang**

**Gomalapato Paka Sesi**

**Wantami Bantito**

**Sumetaso Aroha**

**Sumana Homi**

**Piyo Tewa Manussanang**

**Piyo Proma Namutamō**

**Piyo Nakha Supananang**

**Pininsiang Namō Mihang**

**Namō Puttaya Navon Navien**

**Nasatit Nasatien Ehi Mama**

**Navien Nawe Napai Tanvien**

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#### Living Traditions, Vol. II

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Bob Haddad, Editor

## Letters & Commentary

I feel authentic Thai massage is very important work, and I want to support (THAI) because it defends this ancient practice. - *Cheryl Martin; California*

I would like to help preserve the art of traditional Thai massage... This is truly an art form... which requires in-depth hands-on instruction and practice. - *Hans Luetz, RTT; Bonn, Germany*

It's very important to be a member of a community both on a personal and professional level; to support each other by creating a world wide network. - *Ingrid Kullberg-Bendz; New York*

It is important as a practitioner that I belong to a professional organization that validates and maintains high standards and instills confidence in my clients. - *Jaycee LaBouche, RTT; London, UK*

I was referred to THAI by a good friend, and all the testimonials I have heard attest to the great work this new organization is already doing. - *Allison Longstreth, RTT; Oregon, USA*

I support the worthy objectives of THAI, and I support my students in their practice. They can also join, based on their studies with me and/or their other teachers. *Martin Misenhimer, RTT; New York*

It is difficult to locate a Thai massage practitioner who has been properly trained. This alliance connects healers to clients and clients to healers. - *Chris Gordon, RTT; Minnesota, USA*

In France there is absolutely no regulation for Thai massage. Now, the people that I teach (can be) recognized by an international organization. - *Junnon Merigoux, RTT; Perpignan, France*

I recognize the significance of involvement in an organization that furthers the interests of its members ...to enhance professionalism and promote (legitimacy). - *Catherine Goodrum, RTT; Virginia, USA*

THAI's goal of maintaining the tradition of Thai massage seems reason enough (to join). I wish to expand my knowledge and experience of this amazing gift. - *Cristina Muñoz-Gandara, San Juan, Puerto Rico*



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*Inside you'll find great information on traditional Thai massage*