

The Thai Massage Wai Khru

Every serious practitioner of traditional Thai massage should be familiar with the *wai khru*. This mantra begins "Om namo Shivago." and it invokes Jivaka, the Ayurvedic doctor who is revered in Thailand as an ancestral teacher of medicine. Thai massage practitioners may recite the *wai khru* silently or chant it aloud in a group before beginning their lessons, but the meaning of this prayer is often misrepresented, confused, and translated incorrectly.



The mantra known today in Chiang Mai was spread mostly as a result of the opening of the Old Medicine Hospital by Ajahn Sintorn Chaichakan, pictured above at his Jivaka altar in the year 2003. Sintorn used words from a *wai khru* that he learned while studying at Wat Pho in Bangkok, but he added a second section. That section contains words of supplication, and a type of magic spell. Chongkol Setthakorn, when he first established ITM, provided a translation of Old Medicine Hospital's *wai khru* to his students, but the original Pali text was not translated accurately, and the second section was not translated at all. Unfortunately, because of this, the meaning of the northern style *wai khru* as it is commonly presented in classrooms, in print, and even on the internet, is almost entirely incorrect.

There are also many myths surrounding Jivaka himself. Some claim that he invented or practiced Thai massage. Others claim that he brought Thai massage to Thailand, or that he taught Buddhist monks how to practice Thai massage. These are all untrue. Nevertheless, Jivaka Komarabhaccha is considered the ancestor spirit of traditional Thai medicine, and he is believed by many to guide treatments of Thai healing arts. For detailed information on the history and meaning of the Thai massage *wai khru*, see this article in the THAI online library: [Om Namō... What?](#)