



CHAPTER

12

Prayer: It's Meaning and Ethics in Thai Massage

*"Prayer is the key of the morning and the bolt
of the evening."*⁸⁸

—Mahatma Gandhi

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Prayer in Thai Massage

*A*s is the custom in most Buddhist societies, Thai Buddhists believe in paying homage to their teachers, to Lord Buddha and to the Great Ones that they respect. They believe that by performing rituals and saying prayers prior to performing an important task, such as Thai massage, Thai dance, Thai boxing, and other ancient practices, the task they are performing will be blessed. Thais normally pray at the start of each day or silently prior to performing the art. For example, Thai boxers perform a dance to live music as a way of showing respect and paying homage to their teachers before they commence fighting. In Thai massage, however, the massage practitioner may just offer a silent prayer prior to giving a massage.

With regard to Thai massage, Thai students must honor their teachers from the moment they start learning the art. A student must pay respect to the teacher and humbly request that he/she be accepted as a student. Afterward, they participate in the annual ceremony to honor their teachers. The ceremony to pay homage to the teacher is an age old custom that is

performed on a selected Thursday of each year. The date is not fixed, but is decided astrologically, usually by a monk, but it always falls on Thursday. All students, former and present, will come to honor and pay respect to their teachers, no matter how far they have to travel. The ceremony includes prayers to Lord Buddha, to Doctor Jivaka Kumar Bhaccha, to their line of teachers, and may include prayers to King Rama V. We revere King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V) as the deity to protect and bless those who pray to him. Thai peasants honor him as “The Great Father King Rama V”.

The altar, which is adorned with a statue of Lord Buddha, Doctor Jivaka Kumar Bhaccha, and other Great Ones may contain flower bouquets (called Bai Sri) in a traditional arrangement, candles, incense, text books, boiled eggs, fruits such as coconuts, bananas, oranges, and other items depending on the strictness of the particular ceremony.⁸⁹

The prayers, which are recited in the ancient language, Pali, vary depending on the presiding master.