

# Phra Vichien Panjawood Tho

Phra Vichien Panjawood Tho was born Vichien Sittirast in Chiang Mai, Thailand on August 15<sup>th</sup> 1930. At the age of eight he met Phra Kru Ba Sri Wi Chai (*Kru* is Thai for “teacher”) who lived and taught at a temple in nearby Lamphun (and who died ten years later). Phra Kru Ba Sri Wi Chai was a renowned spiritual teacher and would remain a guiding force in Phra Vichien’s life. Phra Kru Ba Sri Wi Chai was trained in the spiritual and medical tradition passed down from Phra Chee Woak Go Ma Ra Pat (Shavago Komarphaj, Buddha’s doctor).



Phra Vichien’s father was a policeman, and the family spent several of Phra Vichien’s early years in Laos and Vietnam. At twelve years of age his parents divorced and his mother returned to China with him, where she died soon after her arrival. Young Vichien was sent back to Chiang Mai to live with his father and new stepmother. Due to family conflicts, he left home at the age of thirteen and found



work in nearby Chulburee. After breaking his leg that same year, Phra Vichien was impressed by the Cambodian doctor who treated him with herbs and balm. He promised the doctor to become a monk (which

was a common short term commitment made by the majority of young teenage males) and he did so immediately upon recovering. Phra Vichien still uses the same prayer that he learned from this kind doctor to bless all the medicines he makes (see the Blessings and Spiritual Teachings section). He became a short time novice at Wat Rong Koom in Chaing Mai, under the instruction of Phra Kru Boonpun Thamapunyo (who passed away in 1999). Phra Kru Boonpun Thamapunyo is the person most responsible for the herbal and spiritual development of Phra Vichien. Phra Kru Boonpun Thamaunyo was so respected that his body laid in state at his Wat for over four years before cremation, due to the number of visitors paying respect to him.

As a young man Phra Vichien was busy in many occupations. These included: kick boxer, teacher, barber, tailor, cockfighting, and marathon runner. His interest in all aspects of medicine grew, and at the age of 17 he enlisted in the Thai Army as a medic, by claiming to be the required enlistment age of 21 (Badge # P-3334). He served in southeast Thailand and was also sent to Vietnam. He served for 11 years during which he acquired an understanding of Western medicine and he took the exam for “male nurse” upon his completion of service. When he returned to civilian life he again had numerous additional careers, including husband, father, gemologist, and a four-year job as a nurse in Saudi Arabia (1980 – 1984, Pool # 413931, where he received a safety award for zero case referrals from his area). Upon his return to Thailand, Phra Vichien studied with Phra Kru Sripayatyanurak (a student of Phra Kru Ba Sri Wi Chai) at Wat Suan Dok, and earned his keep as a cook. During this time he devoted himself to spiritual study and learning the wisdom of botanical medicine. He spent two years practicing *too dong* (a tradition of traveling and living alone in the forests) in order to meditate on Phra Kru

Sripayatyanurak's spiritual and botanical teachings. This allowed Phra Vichien to gain a deep spiritual knowledge, as well as insight into the herbs that surrounded him. Following this, Phra Vichien spent two years studying spiritual matters at Wat Pan Oont and then a year of very strict spiritual study at the Wat Santi Asok, near Bangkok. At Wat Santi Asok, Phra Poe Tee Rok instructed Phra Vichien.

Upon leaving Wat Santi Asok, Phra Vichien prayed about his future and had a vision that told him to travel west from the Hot Springs area until he reached the mountain that had been revealed to him in his meditations. He traveled for two days before arriving at the site of the present clinic and began construction of what would eventually become Wat Huay Pong.

At that time Phra Vichien was still not a monk, but lived in a nearby village and built the original structures and stairs of Wat Huay Pong. He found the surrounding mountains to have almost all of the herbs he would need as a healer and began to grow



most of them at the Wat.

The new and growing Wat Huay Pong needed a permanent monk to help the local people, so in 1992, with his wife's blessings, Phra Vichien

became a monk at nearby Wat Maej Edee (between Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai). He was very interested in supplying medical aid to those who were suffering from HIV and those who were trying to overcome alcohol or drug addiction. He immediately began treating

patients with his herbal knowledge.

He soon returned to Wat Huay Pong, and has been teaching and healing there ever since.

As of 2004, Phra Vichien knew of 23 other monks that were trained in herbal medicine and who also concentrate on addiction, HIV, and catastrophic illnesses. However, they are from different herbal heritages and use different techniques and herbal formulas than those passed down by Phra Vichien's teachers. Twenty years



ago there were seven herbal monks in Thailand that were trained in the same tradition as Phra Vichien, however, they have all passed away leaving no students.