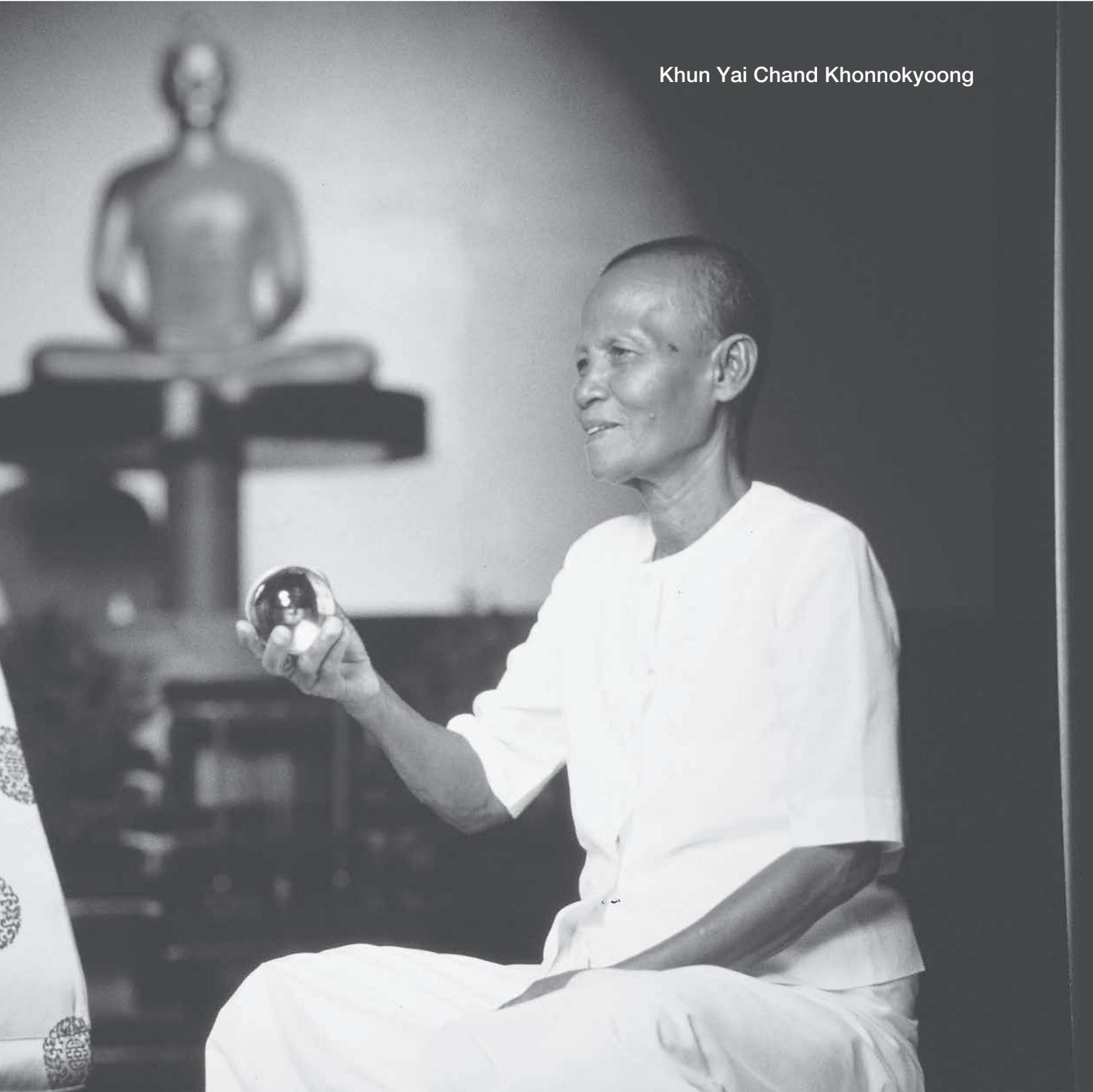


**KHUN YAI CHAND
KHONNOKYOONG**

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Founder of Wat Phra Dhammakaya

“Khun Yai” Chand Khonnokyoong was born on January 20, 1909, in Nakorn Chaisri, a rural municipality of Thailand. She was the fifth of nine children in the family. Her father, Ploy, and mother, Pan, were rice farmers. The word “Khun Yai” means “grandmother” in Thai. It is a respectful way to call a woman of advancing age. Khun Yai’s given name was Chand, which means “moon”. Her last name was Khonnokyoong, which means “peacock-feather”. In those times, Thai families seldom send their daughters to school. Because of this, Chand never learned how to read or write.

Chand’s father was a good family man but he was addicted to alcohol. One day, he became so drunk that he fell asleep under the house while the family slept inside (a village house is usually built on stilts to protect from wild animals and flooding). He was mumbling and snoring so loudly that it bothered the family. In disgust, her mother called him a “sparrow” (a Thai expression for a worthless person) that leached off of her. This remark wounded his pride. He angrily asked all the children if they heard their mother insult him. The children stayed quiet. Innocently, Chand said that she did not

think her mother had insulted him. This infuriated her father, thinking she was taking her mother's side. In anger, he cursed Chand to deafness for 500 lifetimes.

Many Thai folks believe that the parents' words are sacred and potent. Chand worried that her father's curse would come true for her. She wished to ask for her father's forgiveness so the curse could be lifted. Unfortunately, she never had the opportunity to do so until he died.

On the day her father passed away, Chand was out working in the rice field. When she came home after a long day, she saw everybody crying for her father. It is a Thai tradition to ask a dying person for forgiveness for any wrongs done to the person. Everybody had already asked for his forgiveness, except for Chand.

His death profoundly affected Chand's life. Most Thai people believe in rebirth. She worried that she would be reborn deaf as a result of her father's curse. Now that her father had passed away, the only place to find him was in the afterlife realm.

Chand left home in 1935 when she was 26 years old to look for the Great Abbot at Wat Paknam Bhasicharoen in Thonburi, a legendary monk known for supernatural meditative powers. While working in the household of Mrs. Liab, a benefactor of Wat Paknam, Chand met a meditation master, Thongsuk Samdaengpan, a leading disciple of the Great Abbot. Chand practiced meditation with Thongsuk Samdaengpan for two years. She eventually attained the Dhammakaya, a high state of absorption

in meditation.

Having achieved this high level of meditative attainment, Chand asked Thongsuk to show her how to traverse to the afterlife realms so that she could find her father. With Thongsuk's help, Chand finally located her deceased father who, due to his bad drinking habits, had fallen into one of the hell realms. Through her Dhammakaya Body, Chand was able to communicate with her father and asked for his forgiveness, which he granted. And through the power of the Dhammakaya, Chand helped him to recall the merits from his good deeds in earlier lifetimes so these merits could relieve him from this retribution. Her father's retribution was indeed neutralized by the power of his past merit and he was freed from the hell realm.

Upon attaining the Dhammakaya, Chand decided to renounce the worldly life to become a nun. She finally met the Great Abbot in 1938 who ordained her as a nun and accepted her as his disciple. Chand devoted herself entirely to meditation without concerns for anything else. She meditated twelve hours each day, six uninterrupted hours in the morning and six uninterrupted hours in the evening. Her meditation skills became so profound that she soon became the Great Abbot's most outstanding disciples. The Great Abbot called her "Second to None".

The Great Abbot passed away on February 3, 1959. After his passing Chand continued to teach meditation at her residence at Wat Paknam. Among these students were two promising young men, Chaiyaboon Suddhipol and Padej Pongsawat, who later became two great Buddhist monks who led the Dhammakaya Temple to its

pinnacle of success as we know today. Chaiyaboon and Padej were the driving force behind many of Khun Yai's success.

After the ordination of Luang Por Dhammajayo, Khun Yai felt the time was right for them to build a Buddhist temple where true monks could be developed and the Dhammakaya Knowledge could be propagated to benefit mankind. To fulfill this vision, a great deal of financial resources would be needed. Unfortunately, all that Khun Yai had was her own savings of a mere 3,200 Baht (US\$160 in 1970).

But Khun Yai was a perpetual optimist who believed in the power of merit. The day that Khun Yai's team met with Lady Prayad, owner of the vast piece of land that the team aimed at acquiring, happened to coincide with Lady Prayad's birthday. It was a lucky day for Khun Yai and the team. Not only was Lady Prayad willing to part with the land, but she was in fact willing to donate the entire 78.4 acres of her land to the future temple as her birthday merit-making. This was nothing less than a miracle—or, more appropriately, a 'merit power'.

The Dhammakaya Temple was formally established on Magha Puja Day, February 20, 1970. The Main Chapel was completed in 1982. The property was later expanded to 1,000 acres in 1985. The Great Dhammakaya Cetiya, the world's largest Buddhist monument where 300,000 Buddha images are enshrined on the exterior dome, was completed in the year 2000. The Grand Opening Ceremony of the Cetiya took place

on Saturday, April 22, 2000. Khun Yai was 91 years old when the great Cetiya was completed. She lived to see that big day. The Great Dhammakaya Cetiya is indeed a gift to mankind. The compounds surrounding the Cetiya are now the gathering ground for Buddhists around the world. Over one million Buddhists gather at the Cetiya during important Buddhist events. The Dhammakaya Temple, Khun Yai's brain-child, is now the center of Buddhism for all Buddhists around the world.

Khun Yai passed away on the morning of Sunday, September 10, 2000. At her Cremation Ceremony in 2002, 100,000 Buddhist monks from 30,000 temples all over Thailand, many senior monks from twenty different countries, and hundreds of thousands of others from around the world came to pay their final respect to Khun Yai. This is the biggest gathering of Buddhists in history.

Like the story in a fairy tale:

A tiny little farmer girl, completely illiterate, took a journey on a spiritual quest, found a Great Master, learned the great Knowledge from the Master, went on to build a great temple, produced many true monks and virtuous people, and brought goodness to mankind.

Khun Yai's legacy lives on.

