

News



BODY PIERCINGS: Mr Choo (left) got Archan Numdit to insert 9 needles and 4 talismans in his arms, chest, tummy, back, throat and temples.

**Man gets 9 gold needles,
4 talismans inserted in him**

He has it done to control temper

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IF you have a fear of needles, you will not be keen to try what businessman Ricardo Choo did. He got nine gold needles inserted under his skin by a monk, for "spiritual" reasons.

He believes the needles can help him to concentrate more and to control his temper.

Never mind that doctors do not recommend this unusual practice. (See report on facing page.)

Or that his friend had a bad experience with such an insertion last year. (See report on Page 4.)

So enthusiastic was Mr Choo that he flew to Thailand to invite monk Archan Numdit, 46, to Singapore. The monk does needle and talisman insertions.

Archan Numdit claims the needles and talismans provide protection and can improve one's character. **But he cautioned: "It is not magic. People have to follow some (Buddhist) precepts and chant after the insertion."**

The monk, who was here from 31 Oct to 3 Nov, performed insertions at Mr Choo's shop in Golden Mile Complex for about 50 people, mostly Singaporeans.

Mr Choo, 34, who sells religious items, had the needles inserted on 1 Nov.

He said he thinks Archan Numdit has carried out such insertions for the past 10 years in Hong Kong, Malaysia and Thailand. This could not be verified.

Besides the finely wrought, 2cm-long needles, Mr Choo also had four talismans inserted during the same session.

Each tubular talisman with a 1mm diameter is made by rolling a thin, 1-sq-cm sheet of gold inscribed with "blessings" in the Khmer script.

Mr Choo had the needles and talismans inserted in his arms, chest, tummy, back, throat and near his temples.

Speaking through a translator, Archan Numdit said he makes the needles and talismans himself, before praying over them for "a few months".

This includes a ritual to prevent the needles from "attacking" a person's vital organs once they are inserted.

People who get the needles inserted are instructed to refrain from kicking dogs, scolding their parents or other people's parents, having a sexual relationship with another person's spouse and talking while moving their bowels or urinating.

This last injunction is because the person's saliva is



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– Archan Numdit

considered "holy" after the insertion of the needles, said Mr Choo.

And it would be disrespectful if any drop of it accidentally falls in the toilet.

The person also has to chant a word, which means Buddha, to himself whenever possible.

However, those who get talismans implanted are not required to follow these instructions. The needles, unlike the talismans, are considered to be "living", so the belief is that the body has to be made suitable to host them.

Mr Choo, who is also a member of the Society of Paranormal Investigators (SPI), said that needle and talisman insertion is a "folkloric practice – but it lets you practise Buddhism as well".

As head of the SPI's unresolved mysteries section, he is also letting other members study his experiences.

"I've been studying the various practices in Thai spiritualism, like needle insertion, for years," he said.

"I used myself as a test subject. SPI members took photos and videos of the insertion process so there will be material for study in future."

The insertion was not painful, he claimed. It was "just like an ant-bite".

The talismans are inserted in the throat, arms and abdomen area using a syringe.

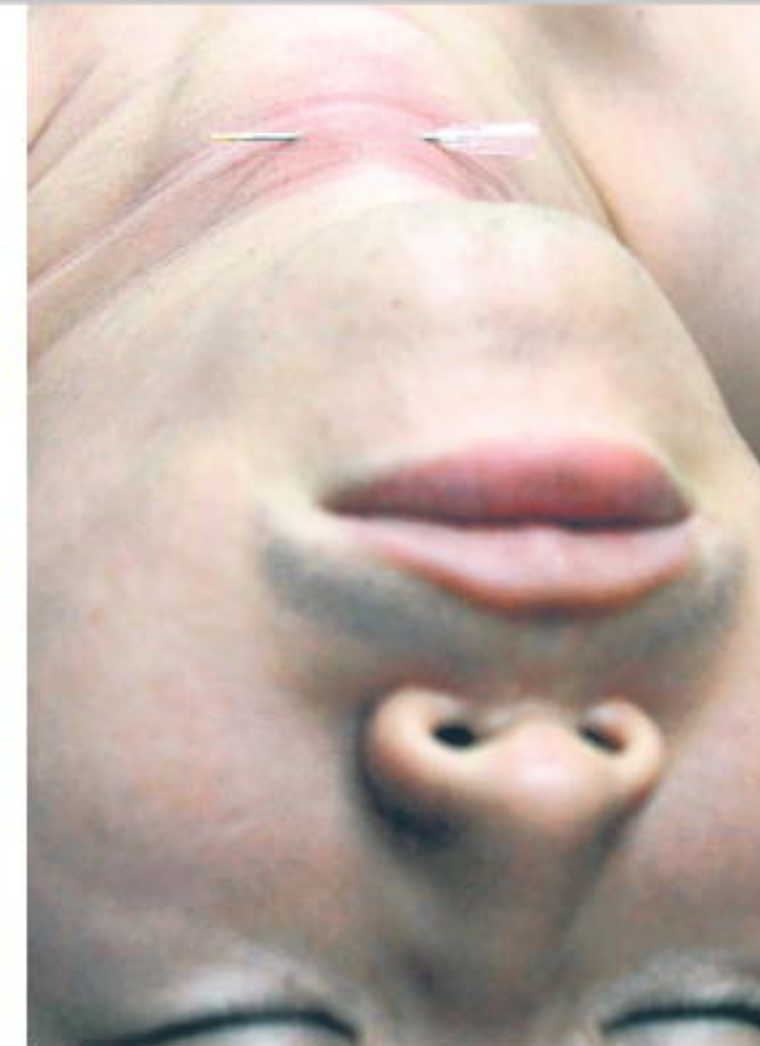
They are supposed to protect the owner from physical danger, like accidents.

"But only if the person's spiritual belief is there," added Mr Choo.

If inserted in the throat, the talisman is supposed to "enhance speech, singing and persuasive powers".

Using only the fingers, the needles can be inserted in the back of the arms, the chest, near the temples, the forehead, back and legs.

Archan Numdit said: "The needles forearm against danger by poking the person.



"If the person's 'mindfulness' is good, he will be warned about three days in advance. But most people will be warned about 10 to 15 minutes in advance."

According to Mr Choo, they can even warn against being sold a fake diamond or getting caught for a traffic violation. Once again, these claims are unverifiable.

Believers said they accept that the needles' "power" may all be in the mind.

Archan Numdit claimed: "The needle is like a middleman for Buddha's teachings."

"A lay person needs something to motivate and inspire them to follow the precepts, which will help calm thoughts and increase mindfulness."

Mindful of cost, one might ask: How much? Each needle or talisman costs \$60.

Part of the proceeds will go towards completing the construction of Wat Dongweewek, the temple near Hua Hin that Archan Numdit said he is from.

The monk added he reserved the right to turn some people away.

"I've rejected people who come in with many wants – a big house, a big car, a rich spouse. Or those who want to gamble and ask to prosper," he said.

"A person in yellow robes (a monk) is not supposed to give out lucky numbers.

"I'll advise the person to live within his means and to do more for charity. The person who strikes lottery is the one who has done lots of good deeds."

Disinfectant

The monk says a short prayer over each person before swabbing the area of insertion with disinfectant.

Salesman Charles Huang, 26, had two needles inserted near his temples and one in his chest on 3 Nov.

He gave it a try after hearing about the monk. He said: "I was worried about infections initially, but I saw the bottles of sterilising alcohol and felt better."

"I'm hoping for better judgment so customers will like my recommendations. I also want the ability to stay calm when people try to be 'funny'."

Archan Numdit said he himself has many needles in his body, but declined to give a figure, saying the number does not matter.

Smiling, Mr Choo said: "The metal detector at the airport was not triggered by Archan when he arrived here."

NEEDFUL OR NEEDLESS PAIN?
The talismans (top left) and needles (bottom left) are inserted using a syringe (above).

PICTURES: SHIN MIN DAILY NEWS, RICARDO CHOO

His nipple turned purple /PAGE 4

Risk of allergy, infection: docs

THE needles and talismans are not a form of medication to cure diseases, the Thai monk said.

Archan Numdit also insisted that they are made of gold, which is inert, unlike some alloys which might cause an adverse reaction.

But consultant dermatologist Eileen Tan pointed out that there is still the risk of gold allergy. "It is rare, but it has been reported," she said. "If it happens, the white blood cells will move to the area to wall it off."

And there might be rashes, swelling and skin inflammation.

Dr Tan said that if the needle is not properly sterilised, the person can get a bacterial or, more rarely, fungal infection too.

Another danger is that if the needle is inserted too deep, it may hit a blood vessel and cause further complications.

She said: "There are vital blood vessels in the neck though not as many in the arms and legs."

She said that anyone with a bad reaction to such insertions should see a doctor right away to get the item removed.

The doctor will also prescribe anti-inflammatory medicine and antibiotics.

Prominent plastic surgeon Waffles Wu, however, thinks that while such needle insertion is "superstition" it is "relatively harmless".

He said: "The natural tendency for the body is to extrude the needles outwards – to get rid of them – not inwards where the vital organs are."

"It has a low level of danger, like tattooing. The... danger increases if they are not sterile."

Dr Wu has removed needles from the faces of a few patients.

He said: "These needles are small, thin, flexible and relatively soft. They're placed in the skin or subcutaneous tissue, which is about 1cm to 2cm thick, away from the major blood vessels."

An Indonesian woman in her 20s once came to his clinic at the Camdem Medical Centre complaining of a pain in her cheek.

An X-ray showed about 50 tiny needles. "They were all over her face, but she claimed she didn't have them inserted and didn't know how they got there," he said.

He suggested surgically removing them, but she left to think it over, and did not return.

Another patient was a man who claimed to be a bomoh or black magic practitioner.

Dr Wu said: "He told me he had placed the needle in his eyelid by 'magic' but needed a doctor to remove it."

"So I operated on him and fished out a little gold needle and gave it back to him."

The needle had been inserted below the eyebrow but had moved to the eyelid, where it was causing the man pain.

"There was the danger that, if someone had pushed him, the needle could have pierced his eyeball and caused trauma, but I won't go so far as to say it would cause blindness," said Dr Wu.

The procedure was "a little complicated" and cost about \$1,000.

SORRY

Shutterbugs unite (TNP, 10 Nov): The cost of Safra Photo Club membership, for two years, is \$34.20 for Safra members and \$96.30 for guests.

Withdrawn China products to be released in phases (TNP, 12 Nov): The Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority said butter, ghee and non-dairy creamer from China would be released immediately.