

“A Refugee, A Vision, A Movement”



Q & A with Avoda CEO Sripchai Homberg

November 15th, 2024

Question: "Sripchai, people see you as a leader of incredible resilience, someone who has overcome so much and turned it into a mission that impacts thousands. Can you start by **telling us a little about where your journey** began and how it led to founding Avoda?"

Sripchai: Thank you for the kind words. You know, when I look back, my journey started in a very different place from where I am now. I was born in Thailand, but my family comes from the Lu Mien people, a small ethnic group with roots that go back to the mountains of Mongolia, China and Laos. **We were refugees, escaping communism, persecution and hardship**, trying to find a new beginning in a country that, although it provided us safety, never really felt like home. I grew up feeling that displacement, feeling the burden of being an outsider. I was the "refugee girl"—that label shaped my early life in more ways than I can count.

Growing up, I faced a lot of rejection and judgment. Imagine being a young girl who doesn't speak the language fluently, who dresses differently, and who is viewed as "other" by society. I felt invisible, like my worth was determined by factors beyond my control. I saw my parents working hard to build a life from nothing, but I also saw the struggles that came with being part of a marginalized community. These early experiences made me question a lot about life, faith, and purpose. They instilled in me the determination to one day help people who, like me, were overlooked by society

Question: "That sounds like an incredibly challenging beginning. Was there a specific moment or experience that changed your perspective and helped you **turn your challenges into a calling?**"

Sriphai: Yes, there was one moment that completely changed my life. Growing up, my family practiced spirit worship, which was part of our cultural heritage. In school, I was taught about Buddhism, and then in our village, a Christian missionary couple shared stories about God. So I grew up in this world with a mixture of beliefs, all of which seemed confusing at the time.

But then, something happened within my own family that forced me to confront these different beliefs. My father decided to take a second wife, a practice accepted in our culture but something that brought tension into our home. My mother didn't agree, and this led to nearly daily arguments. As a young girl, I was heartbroken by the conflict. I turned to praying to God, although I didn't fully understand it at the time. I remember kneeling, feeling so small and helpless, and asking for peace.

And in that moment, something incredible happened. **I felt a profound sense of calm, a peace that was completely beyond my understanding.** It was as if God was saying, "*It will be all right.*" This experience of peace in the midst of chaos gave me a sense of direction, a feeling that there was a purpose for me. **From that day on, faith became the anchor that grounded me through every hardship.** I began to see that my life was meant for something bigger, and that belief is what eventually led me to found Avoda.

Question: "So from those early struggles, you began to shape your vision for Avoda. But how did you go from **the idea of helping others to actually building an organization?**"

Sriphai: Building Avoda wasn't a simple decision; it was a series of small steps that grew out of that calling. In my twenties, I moved to Bangkok to study mass communication, and I started working alongside my husband, Raimund, who also had a deep passion for serving those in need. Together, we shared a vision of creating an organization that would provide support to marginalized communities, especially refugees and ethnic minorities in Thailand.

But this vision wasn't just about providing temporary help. **From the beginning, we wanted Avoda to address deeper, systemic issues. We didn't want to just offer a quick fix; we wanted to create a foundation of support that could help people break out of the cycles of poverty and dependency.** We knew that if we could address fundamental needs—nutrition, education, legal rights, and skills training—we could empower people to transform their own lives.

Question: "Many people face challenges but don't always turn those into opportunities to help others. What do you think drove you to make that leap and actually **take on the leadership role?**"

Sriphai: I think it was a **combination of empathy and a sense of responsibility.** Growing up, I had always felt overlooked and underestimated. I knew what it was like to feel invisible, and I didn't want anyone else to go through that alone. When Raimund and I co-founded Avoda, I realized that my own experiences could actually be a strength. I understood what people on the margins were facing because I had lived it. **I knew what it felt like to be judged** for circumstances beyond your control and to feel like you have to prove your worth to society.

Leading Avoda didn't feel like a choice; **it felt like a calling.** I saw it as a way to use my story to uplift others, to turn my pain into purpose. I wasn't leading from a place of privilege; I was leading from a place of shared experience. And that connection allowed me to lead with empathy, to understand what people needed beyond just material help.

They needed to feel valued, seen, and believed in. That's the core of Avoda's mission.

Question: "Can you tell us more about Avoda's mission and how it's structured? How did you decide on the **specific areas you focus on?**"

Sriphai: **We built Avoda on four core pillars**, each of which addresses a fundamental need that I felt could truly change lives. These pillars are Emergency Nutrition, Education, Legal Support, and Vocational Training. Each one is essential to creating a sustainable foundation for individuals and families to thrive.

- 1. Emergency Nutrition:** This is the first step, meeting people at their most immediate point of need. For families living in poverty or on the edge of survival, food security is a constant worry. We serve over 2,500 people each month, providing meals that aren't just about filling bellies but about restoring health and hope. When people don't have to worry about where their next meal is coming from, they can start to focus on other aspects of their lives—education, work, and long-term goals.
- 2. Education:** Education is something I hold close to my heart because I've seen firsthand how transformative it can be. Growing up, I faced language barriers and discrimination in school, but education became my pathway to a better future. At Avoda, we provide schooling for over 200 children, most of whom are refugees. For these children, education isn't just about academics; it's about empowerment, about giving them the tools to break cycles of poverty and dependence.
- 3. Legal Support:** Many of the communities we serve face legal challenges that prevent them from fully participating in society. Refugees and marginalized groups often face discrimination, lack of access to justice, and barriers to securing basic rights. Our legal support program provides them with representation and guidance, helping them navigate complex legal systems. It's about restoring dignity and ensuring that everyone is treated fairly and with respect.
- 4. Vocational Training:** This pillar is about building pathways to independence. For many, work isn't just a job; it's a source of dignity and self-worth. Through our vocational training programs, we help people develop practical skills that lead to sustainable careers. It's not just about teaching trades; it's about empowering individuals to create stable, fulfilling lives for themselves and their families.

Each of these pillars represents a different facet of Avoda's mission, but **together, they create a holistic approach to transformation**. By addressing these four areas, we're not just meeting immediate needs; we're building a foundation that allows people to rise, to become self-sufficient, and to live with dignity.

Question: "Let's talk more about the lives Avoda touches. I know people are often curious to hear personal stories from the communities you serve. Could you share some **examples of individuals or families whose lives have been transformed through Avoda?**"

Sriphai: I would be honored to share. These stories are truly the heart of Avoda, and they remind me every day why we do this work. Each person who walks through our doors has their own unique story, their own journey of hardship and resilience. And it's our privilege to be part of that journey.

One story that comes to mind is that of a young mother who came to Avoda for help with food. She was carrying her child, and I could see the worry in her eyes—the worry of a mother who doesn't know how she'll feed her family. We provided her with emergency nutrition, but we also connected her with a support group of other mothers. Through that community, she found more than just food; she found friendships, encouragement, and the confidence to pursue her own goals. She later enrolled her children in our education programs and even joined a Bible study group. Today, she's one of our most active volunteers, helping other mothers who are in the same position she once was.

Question: "That's such a powerful example of how Avoda provides more than just immediate help—it offers community and ongoing support. How does that **principle of longterm empowerment** shape the way you approach your work?"

Sriphai: Long-term empowerment is central to everything we do. We want to go beyond meeting immediate needs; **we want to provide people with the tools and support they need to thrive.** I believe that true transformation happens when people feel seen, valued, and capable of building a future for themselves. When we offer food, education, legal support, or job training, we're not just providing services; we're saying, *"We believe in you. We believe in your potential."*

One of our guiding principles is that we don't want people to rely on Avoda forever. We want them to become self-sufficient, to find their own strengths, and to be able to stand on their own. That's why **our programs are designed to offer both short-term relief and long-term growth.** We want people to leave Avoda with a renewed sense of purpose and the tools to make their own way in the world.

Question: "The story of the young mother you shared is deeply inspiring. Do you have **other examples** of how Avoda has changed lives through your four pillars: nutrition, education, legal support, and vocational training?"

Sriphai: Yes, of course. Each pillar represents a different way we can make a meaningful impact in someone's life. Each story is unique, but together, they illustrate the power of these pillars.

In our **Emergency Nutrition** program, there was a family with three children who came to us. The parents were working hard but still couldn't afford enough food to keep their children healthy. They came to Avoda desperate for help, feeling like they had failed their children. We provided them with regular, nutritious meals, and within weeks, I saw a visible difference in their children's health and energy. This simple act of providing food didn't just nourish their bodies—it gave their parents hope, a renewed strength to keep going.

Through our **Education** program, I think of a young boy named Somchai, who had never attended school before he came to Avoda. His family had fled violence and found themselves displaced and impoverished. He was shy, withdrawn, and unsure of himself. But with time, encouragement, and a safe space to learn, he started to open up. Now, he's thriving academically, and he even dreams of becoming a teacher one day so he can help other children. Education didn't just give him skills; it gave him confidence and a sense of purpose.

Our **Legal Support** program has helped countless people, but one story that stands out is that of a man who was facing unjust treatment because of his refugee status. He had been denied fair wages for his work and was dealing with ongoing discrimination. Through Avoda's legal support, we helped him secure his rights and gain fair treatment. Legal support isn't just about laws—it's about dignity, about helping people feel valued and respected in society.

In **Vocational Training**, there was a young woman who felt hopeless after dropping out of school. She didn't believe she had any skills that could lead to a job. But through our vocational training program, she discovered a talent for sewing. We provided her with the training and support to start her own small tailoring business. Today, she's earning enough to support herself and her family, and she's proud of what she's achieved. Vocational training gave her more than a skill—it gave her the confidence to believe in herself.

Question: "It's incredible to see how each pillar of Avoda's mission offers people more than just a service—it provides a new perspective, hope, and a path forward. But as a leader, I imagine this work can also feel overwhelming. **How do you stay motivated and inspired to keep going?"**

Sriphai: Staying motivated is definitely a challenge, especially on days when the needs feel so vast and the resources seem so limited. **But I stay grounded by reminding myself of the purpose behind each action.** I pray for guidance, for strength, and for the ability to lead with compassion and humility. My faith is my anchor, and it's what gives me the courage to keep moving forward, even when things are difficult.

What keeps me inspired is the people we serve. Every story, every smile, every moment of progress reminds me why we're here. When I see a child flourishing in school, a family relieved of the burden of hunger, or an individual finding work and independence, I know that all the effort is worth it. This isn't just work; it's a calling. And I feel blessed every day to be part of something so meaningful

Question: "It's clear that your faith is a huge part of what drives you. **How does faith play a role in Avoda's work,** and how do you share that faith with the people you serve?"

Sriphai: Faith is at the heart of Avoda's mission. For me, this work is an expression of God's love, a way to serve others with compassion and humility. I don't see it as just meeting physical needs; it's about meeting people where they are, about being a source of hope and light in their lives.

We don't force faith on anyone, but we lead by example. When people come to Avoda, we serve them with kindness and respect, showing them that they are valued, that they are loved, and that they are not alone. We offer Bible studies and spiritual support to those who are interested, but we never pressure anyone. Faith, when shared gently and sincerely, has the power to heal, to inspire, and to bring peace to even the hardest situations.

Question: "Thank you, Sriphai. It's moving to hear how faith permeates everything you do. You've shared many stories and examples of Avoda's impact. But let's get more personal —**what are some of the biggest lessons you've learned from the challenges you've faced?**"

Sriphai: I think one of the most profound lessons I've learned **is the importance of resilience.** Growing up as a refugee, resilience was something I had to learn early. We were constantly reminded that life could change in an instant. Moving from Laos to Thailand, adapting to a new culture, and facing prejudice taught me that challenges are a part of life. What matters is how we respond to them.

Another lesson I hold close is the **power of small steps.** There were times when I felt completely overwhelmed by what lay ahead. But I learned that even the smallest action, when done with intention, can lead to incredible transformation. Starting Avoda was overwhelming. There were so many needs, so many people to reach. But by focusing on one need at a time—one family, one child, one person—I found that we could make a real difference. I've carried that mindset into all aspects of Avoda's work. We don't have to solve every problem all at once. Small steps add up, and over time, they create lasting change.

Question: "That approach of focusing on **small steps** is so practical and empowering. You also talked about resilience. Can you give an example of how resilience has helped you lead Avoda?"

Sriphai: Resilience has been essential. One example that stands out was when we faced a significant funding shortfall a few years ago. We were just getting Avoda off the ground, and the budget was stretched thin. The financial stress was intense, and I remember lying awake at night wondering how we would continue.

But I realized that resilience meant focusing on what we could control. We reached out to our community, explained the situation, and asked for their help. Our team also found creative ways to make our resources go further. I was reminded that resilience isn't about avoiding challenges; **it's about finding strength in the midst of them.** It's about trusting that, with faith and hard work, we can make it through even the toughest times. We got through that season, and it only strengthened our commitment to creating a sustainable foundation for Avoda.

Question: "It's powerful to hear how resilience carried you through. Let's shift gears a bit. Avoda has grown so much, and you've helped so many people. **What would you say to others who feel called to start their own missions or projects**, but might be hesitant or afraid?"

Sriphai: My advice would be to **start with what you have and where you are**. It's easy to get caught up in the idea that you need to have everything figured out, or that you need resources, connections, or even a perfect plan before you begin. But the truth is, when I started Avoda, I didn't have everything figured out. I didn't have endless resources or a grand plan. **I just had a vision and a willingness to take the first step.**

If you feel called to serve, take that first step, no matter how small. Focus on the people you can help right now, with what you have right now. Don't worry about whether your impact will be big or small—just start. When you take that first step, doors start to open. People come into your life to support you, and resources appear in ways you didn't expect. But you have to be willing to begin.

Question: "That's excellent advice. **Starting with what you have and taking one step at a time is practical and inspiring.** In your journey, what's one thing you wish more people understood about serving others?"

Sriphai: **I wish more people understood that serving others isn't just about giving—it's about building relationships and walking alongside people.** Sometimes, when people think about service, they picture themselves as the helper and others as the recipients. But real service is about partnership. It's about understanding the needs, dreams, and strengths of those you serve and seeing them as equals.

At Avoda, we don't see ourselves as just providing aid. **We see ourselves as walking together with the people in our communities.** They have so much to teach us, too. We learn from their resilience, their courage, and their determination. Serving others with humility, with an open heart, transforms us as much as it transforms those we serve. It reminds us that we are all connected, that each of us has a role to play in making this world better.

My dreams for Avoda are big, but I believe they're possible. In the future, I envision Avoda expanding its reach across Thailand, providing consistent, sustainable support to more communities. **I want to see our Emergency Nutrition program grow to serve 5,000 people each month.** I envision a future where no child goes to bed hungry, where families feel secure knowing they have enough to eat.

I also dream of expanding our education program to reach 500 children. I see classrooms full of bright, hopeful children who believe in their futures. Education is such a powerful tool, and I want every child who comes to Avoda to feel empowered, capable, and ready to dream big.

For our legal support and vocational training programs, my vision is to open more centers that make these services accessible to even the most remote communities. Everyone deserves justice, and everyone deserves the chance to build a stable, fulfilling life. My ultimate hope is that Avoda becomes a lasting institution, one that serves as a pillar of hope and resilience for generations to come.

Question: "It's impressive how you've structured Avoda to tackle these fundamental areas. But I imagine there were challenges along the way. **What were some of the biggest obstacles you faced**, and how did you overcome them?"

Sriphai: Oh, there were many challenges—more than I can count! Avoda developed from evangelistic outreach projects to include holistic aide ministries. Like now, the Avoda Migrant Learning Center caters to 200 refugee students. For each student the education is a springboard to freedom, but for the Avoda team it is a great burden. **We have payments to do.** Teachers salaries, office workers salaries, building maintenance, car maintenance, gasoline for the cars to pick up students from their hiding places along the border. Avoda gives out much needed supplement Emergency Nutritions.

There are over 2000 hungry souls desperately awaiting the next meals. You see, with the growth of an organization its responsibilities grow as well. **These responsibilities include financial obligations.**

Avoda is very thankful for every donation and grants it receives. Without these helps we could not work well.

But there are times when donations not pour but just cripple in. We had supporters who suddenly changed their aid policies, without giving us proper notice. So we calculate with these promised budgets, and suddenly we receive a note the supporter changed its project targets. Of course, every organization is free to follow their own policies - but for me, I see the vulnerable slum children, I see the malnutrition people

hiding along the border. I cannot tell them that donor's changed their policies: they just want learning in school and receive the Emergency Nutritions. **The show must go on,** as goes the saying.

We just recently had a case like this. After this incident - when promised funds were not sent, the Avoda board decided we cannot do this work alone.

We pray the Jabez prayer (1 Chronicles 4:10) and we include that we want to only grow if God is with us, i.e. also we want only to grow if enough members support this mission.

We cannot rely solely on donations and grants, **we now invite supporters to shoulder the burden by contributing just USD 10.- per month.** That equals about 2 cups of coffee per month. With enough supporters we can grow and achieve even much more.

My task as the CEO is to lead our team to invite supporters - everyone who has the same burden - please join. No matter how small the contribution, in the end it makes a real difference. **Together, we can make Avoda sustainable, ensuring that our programs continue for years to come.**

Question: "It's inspiring to think of so many people joining together to create a foundation of support. But what would you say to those who wonder **if \$10 really makes that much of a difference?**"

Sriphai: I understand why some might question the impact of \$10, but I've seen firsthand how each contribution, no matter how small, makes a huge difference **when it's part of a larger effort.** That's the beauty of a network like this—each person's contribution combines with others to create a powerful force for change. **Ten dollars might seem small on its own, but when many people give consistently, it becomes transformative.**

Think of it this way: with \$10, we can provide nutritious meals for a family for several days, we can purchase school supplies for a child, or cover basic legal fees for someone who needs assistance. Every dollar we receive is used with intention and care, and each one multiplies its impact when it's part of something larger. Plus, joining this support network is more than just giving money; it's becoming part of a family, a movement of people who believe in creating change. Together, we're able to do things that none of us could accomplish alone.

Question: "It's clear that you're focused not just on providing aid, but on building a legacy. **How do you hope this legacy impacts future generations?"**

Sriphai: My hope is that Avoda's legacy becomes a source of pride and empowerment for future generations. **I want young people, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, to look at Avoda and see what's possible.** I hope they see that with faith, resilience, and support, they can rise above any circumstance.

More than anything, **I want Avoda to be a place where people feel valued.** A place where people know they are seen, loved, and supported. My dream is for Avoda to inspire a ripple effect of compassion, where the people we help today go on to help others in the future. We're not just building programs; we're building a movement, a community of people who believe in the power of kindness, faith, and resilience.

Question: "What a beautiful vision, Sriphai. Your story and your journey with Avoda are inspiring on so many levels. As we wrap up, what would you say to those who feel touched by Avoda's mission and **want to get involved but may not know where to start?"**

Sriphai: To anyone who feels called to be part of Avoda's mission, **I would say, thank you.** There are so many ways to be involved, and every bit of support makes a difference. **If you're able to join our support network as a monthly donor, that's one of the most impactful ways to help.** Just \$10 a month might seem small, but when it's combined with others, it becomes a foundation of hope.

Another way to get involved is by sharing our story, by spreading the word about Avoda and the work we're doing. Every person who learns about our mission brings us closer to our vision. And if you feel called to give your time or talents, we're always grateful for volunteers, for those who want to lend their skills to help us grow.

Being part of Avoda isn't just about giving; it's about joining a family, a movement of people who believe that change is possible. Together, we can create a legacy of hope, resilience, and love that will last for generations.

Question: "Thank you so much, Srip hai, for sharing your heart, your wisdom, and your journey with us. It's been an honor to hear your story and to learn more about Avoda's mission. Your dedication to transforming lives is truly inspiring, and I know that many people will be moved to support and join you."

Srip hai: Thank you. It's been a privilege to share Avoda's story with you. I am grateful for every person who has been part of this journey and for every person who will join us in the future. Together, we are Avoda. And together, we can continue to make a difference, one life at a time.

Conclusion:

Together, We Are Avoda – A Legacy of Resilience and Hope.



As we bring this story to a close, I want to take a moment to reflect on what it means to be part of Avoda.

This journey, from a refugee's uncertain childhood to a mission of compassion and empowerment, is one that has been shaped by countless people—each one contributing their own piece of strength, courage, and hope.

Avoda is more than just an organization; it's a testament to the power of resilience and the strength that comes from standing together.

This work is my worship; it is my way of honoring God, my community, and the people who once helped me. Avoda is about transforming hardship into opportunity, creating hope where there was despair, and building a foundation where people can stand tall with dignity. Each person who has walked this path with us—every supporter, every volunteer, every staff member—is part of a larger legacy of love, resilience, and faith.

A Movement of Compassion and Faith

Avoda's journey isn't just my story; it's a story that belongs to everyone who believes in the power of compassion to change lives. Each time we serve a meal, open a classroom, or provide legal counsel, we're creating a ripple effect of hope. It's a movement rooted in the belief that every person deserves a chance to thrive, to be valued, and to be loved. We're not just meeting immediate needs; we're building a future where everyone has the opportunity to flourish.

This legacy of compassion is one that I hope will continue long after we're gone. I want Avoda to be a beacon of hope for generations to come, a place where people can find support, encouragement, and the strength to overcome their own challenges. Together, we are building a foundation that will lift up not only individuals and families but entire communities, creating a lasting impact that reaches beyond borders, cultures, and circumstances.



An Invitation to Join the Legacy

As we look to the future, I invite each of you to join us in building this legacy. There are countless ways to get involved, and every contribution—whether it's your time, your resources, or your prayers—makes a difference. If you feel called to become a part of Avoda's support network, know that you are not just giving; you are becoming part of a movement that believes in the power of love and resilience to change lives.

I want you to know that each act of kindness, each \$10 contribution, each moment spent sharing Avoda's story with others, is a piece of this foundation. Together, we're not just creating programs or services; we're building a world where every person has the chance to dream, to rise, and to live with dignity. This is our legacy, and it is one that I hope will inspire generations to come.



Together, We Are Avoda

Thank you for being part of this journey. Thank you for caring, for believing in the power of faith, and for standing with us as we continue to serve those who need it most. Together, we are Avoda. And together, we will carry this mission forward, creating a world where compassion, dignity, and resilience are at the heart of every community.

Appendix: How to Get Involved

If you feel inspired by Avoda's mission and want to make a difference, here's how you can join us:

1. Become a Monthly Supporter

By becoming a monthly supporter, you join a network of people who are creating lasting change. Your contribution, even just \$10 a month, ensures that Avoda's programs continue to serve those in need.

- **Visit www.avodafoundation.org** and click on "Join the Mission."
- Set up your monthly support and receive regular updates on how your contribution is making a difference.
- **Invite Sripchai to Speak**
If you're part of a church, conference, or organization that would like to hear more from Sripchai, invite her for a speaking engagement to share Avoda's story.
- **Email** us at sripchai@avodafoundation.org or fill out the contact form on our website.

Stay Connected

Follow Avoda on social media to stay updated on our work and impact. Share our story to help spread awareness.

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/avodatransformation>
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/avoda.karen>

Thank you for considering a role in this journey.

Together, we are Avoda.

A Personal Note from Sriphai



"Dear Friend,"

"If you've read through these pages, know that you have become part of my journey. Each word, each story, and each memory shared here is deeply personal to me, and sharing it with you is a way of welcoming you into the Avoda family."

"Whatever your own story, I hope it has inspired you to find meaning in your own path, to seek resilience through faith, and to embrace the call to help others. Every one of us has a role to play in this world. And when we come together in love and compassion, there's no limit to what we can accomplish."

"Thank you for being here, for believing in change, and for choosing to make a difference."

"With love and gratitude,"

Sriphai Homberg
(CEO of Avoda Foundation)

