

Marma Points of Ayurveda

**The Energy Pathways for Healing
Body, Mind and Consciousness
with a Comparison to Traditional
Chinese Medicine**

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Traditional Chinese Medicine Reviewer



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Table of Contents

List of Illustrations vii
Foreword ix
Preface xi
The Use of Sanskrit xiii
Introduction 1

INTRODUCTION TO PART ONE 5

1	Introduction to Āyurveda 7
	The Five Elements 9
	The Three Doshas 11
	<i>Vāta 11</i>
	<i>Pitta 12</i>
	<i>Kapha 13</i>
	The Seven Dhātus (Bodily Tissues) 14
	The Prakruti/Vikruti Paradigm in Āyurvedic Medicine 14
2	Introduction to Marmāni 17
	<i>The History of Marmāni 17</i>
	Mechanisms of Action 18
	Functions of Marmāni 19
	<i>Communication 19</i>
	<i>Diagnostic Indicators 19</i>
	<i>Therapeutic Influences 19</i>
	<i>Mechanism of Pain Relief 20</i>
	<i>Stimulation of Agni and Detoxification of Āma 20</i>
	<i>Calming the Mind and Balancing Emotions 20</i>
	<i>Enhancing Awareness 20</i>
	<i>Preventative Care and Rejuvenation 20</i>
	Classification of Marmāni 21
	<i>Location 21</i>
	<i>Elemental Associations 21</i>
	<i>Marmāni and Doshic Subtypes 21</i>
	<i>Corresponding Organs And Srotāmsi 22</i>
	<i>Degrees Of Vitality of Marmāni 22</i>
	<i>Sadyah Prānahara Marmāni 22</i>
	<i>Conclusion 22</i>
3	The Spiritual Dimension of Marmāni 25
	<i>The Spiritual Value of Touch 25</i>
	Mahad: Innate Intelligence of the Body – and the Universe 25
	<i>Universal Mind and Particular Mind: Opening to Infinity 26</i>
	<i>Marmāni and Mind/Body Medicine 26</i>
	Chakra System 28

	Emotions: Origin, Expression and Healing 29
	Go With the Flow: Marmāni and the Art of Calming the Mind 31
4	Āyurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine 33
	The Creation Model in Traditional Chinese Medicine 33
	<i>Yin and Yang</i> 33
	<i>The Five Principles of Yin and Yang</i> 34
	<i>The Five Elements in TCM</i> 36
	Comparing the Philosophies of TCM and Sāṅkhya 37
	<i>Unity</i> 37
	<i>Duality</i> 37
	<i>Qualities</i> 37
	<i>Qì and Prāṇa</i> 38
	<i>The Five Elements</i> 38
	<i>Individual Constitution</i> 39
	Health and Disease in Āyurveda and TCM 40
	<i>Etiology and Pathogenesis in Āyurveda</i> 40
	<i>TCM Etiology</i> 40
	<i>TCM Pathology and Diagnosis</i> 41
	<i>Diagnosis in Āyurveda</i> 41
	<i>Diagnosis in Āyurveda and TCM</i> 42
	Models of Pain 42
	<i>Pain in TCM</i> 42
	<i>Pain in Āyurveda</i> 43
5	Channels, Energy Points and Measurements in Āyurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine 45
	Channels 45
	<i>Channels in TCM</i> 46
	<i>Channels in Āyurveda: Srotāmsi and Nāḍī</i> 50
	<i>Nāḍīs</i> 50
	<i>Srotas</i> 51
	<i>Functions of Srotāmsi and Nāḍīs</i> 52
	<i>Comparison</i> 52
	Energy Points 52
	<i>Classification of Acupuncture Points</i> 52
	<i>Classification of Marmāni</i> 53
	Measurements 53
6	Samprāpti: Pathogenesis and Disturbance of Marmāni 57
	<i>Etiological Factors</i> 57
	Samprāpti (Pathogenesis) 58
	<i>Vyadhi Mārga, the Three Pathways of Disease</i> 60
	Vikruti, the Present Imbalance 61
	<i>Role of Marmāni in Relation to Samprāpti and Pathways of Disease</i> 61
	<i>Marmāni as Khavaigunya</i> 62
	<i>Marmāni in Relation to Āma and Agni</i> 62
7	Introduction to Chikitsā, Āyurvedic Therapy 65
	Types of Chikitsā and the Role of Marmāni 65
	<i>Shodhana, Cleansing through Marmāni</i> 65
	<i>Shamana, Palliation of Doshas via Marmāni</i> 66
	<i>Rasāyana, Rejuvenation via Marmāni</i> 66

Apunarbhava Chikitsā, Preventive Therapy through Marmāni 66
Sadyah Phaladai Chikitsā, Marmāni as First Aid Therapy 67
Tanmātrā, Five Element Chikitsā 67
Shabda (Sound) 67
Sparsha (Touch) 68
Rūpa (Vision) 68
Rasa (Taste) 68
Gandha (Smell) 69
Context of Marma Chikitsā within Āyurvedic Therapy 69

8 Techniques of Marma Stimulation – Guidelines for the Practitioner 71

Techniques of Marma Chikitsā – 10 Methods of Stimulating Marma Points 71
Snehana (Oleation) 71
Svedana (Sudation) 72
Mardana (Deep Connective Tissue Massage) 72
Pīdana (Deep, Dry Pressure) 72
Veshtana (Binding or Holding) 72
Lepana (Application of Paste) 72
Agni Karma (Application of Heat) 73
Sūchi Bharana (Puncturing with Needles) 73
Trasana (Irritation) 73
Rakta Moksha (Bloodletting) 74
Guidelines for Practitioners of Marma Chikitsā 74
Clinical Knowledge 74
Meditation and Breath Awareness 74
Guidelines for Touch and Pressure 75

INTRODUCTION TO PART TWO 77

9 Mukha (Face) and Shiro (Head) Marmāni 81

Mūrdhni or Adhipati 82
Brahmarandhra 84
Shivarandhra 86
Kapāla 88
Ājñā or Sthapanī 89
Shankha 91
Bhrūh Antara / Bhrūh Madhya / Bhrūh Agra 92
Ashrū Antara / Ashrū Madhya / Ashrū Agra 94
Kanīnaka 95
Apānga 96
Antara Vartma / Madhya Vartma / Bāhya Vartma 97
Nāsā Mūla 99
Nāsā Madhya 100
Nāsā Agra 101
Nāsā Puta 102
Ūrdhva Ganda 103
Adhah Ganda 104
Kapola Nāsā 105
Kapola Madhya 106
Oshtha 107
Hanu 108

	Chibuka	110
	Marma Head and Facial Massage	111
10	Shiro (Head), Grīvā (Neck) and Karna (Ear) Marmāni	115
	Manyāmūla	116
	Vidhuram	118
	Krikātikā	120
	Grīvā (4)	121
	Manyāmani	122
	Kantha	123
	Kanthanādī	124
	Mantha	125
	Sirāmantha	126
	Akshaka	127
	Jatru	128
	Karnapālī	130
	Karnapāla or Karna Ūrdhva	131
	Karnamūla (2)	132
	Marma Massage for Back of the Head and Neck	133
11	Antaradhi (Chest and Trunk) Marmāni	135
	Kakshadhara or Skandadhara	136
	Apastambha	137
	Hrid Marmāni (3)	138
	Hridayam	140
	Agra Patra	141
	Stanya Mūla	142
	Stanya or Chuchuka	143
	Stanya Pārshva	144
	Pārshva Sandhi	145
	Vankri	146
	Yakrut	147
	Plīhā	148
	Sūrya or Āmāshaya	149
	Nābhi Marmāni (5)	150
	Basti	152
	Bhaga	153
	Vankshana	154
	Lohita	155
	Marma Massage for the Trunk	156
12	Prushtha (Back) Marmāni	159
	Amsa Phalaka	160
	Prushtha or Antar Amsa (3)	161
	Bruhatī	162
	Vrukka	163
	Kukundara	164
	Kati	165
	Trik	166
	Marma Massage for the Back	167
13	Ūrdhva Shakhah (Upper Extremities) Marmāni	169
	Ūrdhva Skandha	170

Amsa	171
Adhah Skandha	172
Kaksha	173
Bāhu Ūrvī	174
Ānī	175
Bāhū Indrabasta	176
Kūrpara	178
Bāhya Kūrpara	179
Angushtha Mūla	180
Bāhya Manibandha	181
Manibandha	182
Kūrcha Shira	183
Tala Hrida	184
Kūrcha	185
Hasta Kshipra	186
Tarjani	187
Kanīshthika	188
Marma Massage for the Arms and Hands	189

14 Adha Shakha (Lower Extremities) Marmāni 191

Sphij	193
Ūrū (2)	194
Lohitāksha	195
Medhra and Yoni Jihvā	196
Vrushana and Yoni Oshtha	197
Sakthi Ūrvī (2)	198
Jānu (2)	199
Charana (2)	200
Indrabasta (2)	202
Gulpha (2)	203
Pāda Charana	204
Pāda Kshipra	205
Pārshni	206
Pāda Madhya	207
Marma Massage for the Legs And Feet	208

INTRODUCTION TO PART THREE 209

15 Aromatherapy, Essential Oils and Attars in Āyurveda 211

16 Marmāni that Treat Channel Disturbance 219

<i>Introduction to Srotāmsi</i>	219
<i>Disturbance and Treatment of Srotāmsi</i>	220
<i>Prāna Vaha Srotas</i>	220
<i>Ambu/Udaka Vaha Srotas</i>	221
<i>Anna Vaha Srotas</i>	221
<i>Rasa Vaha Srotas</i>	222
<i>Rakta Vaha Srotas</i>	223
<i>Māmsa Vaha Srotas</i>	224
<i>Meda Vaha Srotas</i>	224
<i>Asthi Vaha Srotas</i>	225
<i>Majjā Vaha Srotas</i>	225

Shukra/Ārtava Vaha Srotas 226

Purīsha Vaha Srotas 227

Mūtra Vaha Srotas 227

Sveda Vaha Srotas 228

Mano Vaha Srotas 228

17 Management of Specific Disorders with Marma Chikitsā 231

Sadyah Phaladai Chikitsā – Āyurvedic First Aid 231

18 Yoga Therapy and Marmāni 239

Āsana and Marmāni 241

Appendix A ~ Specialized Āyurvedic Information 251

Appendix B ~ Specialized TCM Information 263

Appendix C ~ Marma Illustrations 269

Appendix D ~ Marmāni and Acupoints: Correspondences, Locations and Lists 291

Glossaries: Āyurvedic, Chinese and Medical 299

Bibliography and References 315

Acknowledgments 316

Index 317

The Spiritual Dimension of Marmāni



Marma chikitsā is the precise art of touching an individual in exactly the right place at a critical moment in time, for the purpose of healing. Marmāni serve as points of access to the body's innate intelligence, opening the doorway to health and well-being. They are vehicles to reach the ultimate goal of Āyurveda: perfect health, firmly rooted in a vibrantly alive body and fully awakened mind.

In this chapter, we discuss the rich and significant spiritual dimensions of marmāni. Because marmāni are intimately connected to thoughts, perceptions and emotions as well as to the entire fabric of the physical body, marma chikitsā can be a powerful ally on the spiritual path, helping to settle the mind and enhance awareness in such practices as meditation, prānāyāma (breath control) and yogāsana, and to free the mind and body of the accumulated stresses and toxins that limit consciousness and burden the heart.

The Spiritual Value of Touch

Touch begins on the physical level, but it can go much deeper, traversing the media of thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Touch—the skilled touch of a sincere practitioner of the healing arts—can convey its message of love through prāna into the manas, buddhi, smṛuti. It can penetrate ahamkāra and speak its silent message through chitta into the soul.¹ Along the way, and especially at this deepest level, touch can engender radical change in the neurochemistry. The human body is a unique chemical laboratory; a touch through the energy points of marmāni can open new pathways that affect our inner pharmacy.

1. We have discussed these levels and facets of the mind in chapter 1, in outlining the Sāṅkhya philosophy. In brief, mind is generally referred to as manas, the mental faculty that regulates perception, thought and emotion. A subtler aspect of mind is buddhi, the individual intellect and faculty of discrimination and recognition. Buddhi in turn has three subdivisions: *dhi*—cognition, *dhruti*—retention, and *smṛuti*—memory. Ahamkāra is ego, the sense of “I.”

Certain marma therapies can not only enhance thinking, feeling, and perception, they also have the potential to evoke a state of choiceless, passive awareness and transform it into a transcendental state of samādhi. Thus, the total healing of body, mind and spirit can happen through marma chikitsā.

Mahad: Innate Intelligence of the Body – and the Universe

In Sāṅkhya philosophy, mahad or cosmic intelligence creates order in the universe. It permeates every aspect of creation from the gross to the subtle and from the macrocosm to the microcosm, from the order governing the vast galactic universe to the infinitesimal genetic code guiding the unfoldment of life within every living cell.

On the physical level, the body is shaped by mahad to reflect the perfect harmony of structure and function. The five elements govern structure, the three doshas rule function, and the seven dhātus (bodily tissues) influence both structure and function. This microcosmic mahad is evident in the precise locations of the marmāni mapped within the matrix of majjā dhātu, the nervous system.

On the mental level, cosmic intelligence manifests as individual consciousness, which expresses itself as the principal mental faculties: *manas* (sensory mind) and *buddhi* (intellect). The marmāni are intimately connected to the mind via majjā dhātu and mano vaha srotas (channels of the mind).

On the spiritual level mahad, which on the cosmic scale is the flow of consciousness or intelligence that facilitates harmony among all aspects of creation, is given voice in the body through the flow of prāna. Prāna is the breath that animates the organism and allows its spirit to reside in the body. The entry of consciousness into the marmāni allows communication within and

Chapter 3 ~ The Spiritual Dimension of Marmāni

between the body and mind via the flow of prāna. Marmāni are especially relevant to the development of spirituality because of their close association with the chakra system (see below). Thus, they support the integration of all three levels of being: body, mind and spirit.

Universal Mind and Particular Mind: Opening to Infinity

According to the Sāṅkhya philosophy of creation, there is universal mind, called *vibhu*, and individual mind, called *anu*. Universal mind is the ground mind, and individual mind is particular mind. Universal mind is vast, unbounded, infinitely creative and eternally pure, unclouded consciousness. Particular mind is conditioned mind, based upon its stockpile of thoughts, feelings, and emotions stored in memory. Memory is the background to all we think, feel and perceive, and imposes itself upon the foreground of pure, direct experience. The more the particular mind fails to apprehend the ground mind, the more life becomes suffering. The root cause of suffering is this division between the ground mind and the particular mind. Through marma therapy, new pathways are opened within the *mano vaha srotas*, which allow particular mind to transcend its conditioned state and expand into universal mind. This unity of individual mind and universal mind brings radical transformation and total healing in the life of the individual.

Ground mind belongs to all. It operates through the sun, the moon, rivers, mountains, oceans, the flowers and the trees. In our daily perception, particular mind creates division in which “you” become the observer and “that” becomes the object, the thing to be observed. When the observer is unaware of both the pure essence of ground mind and its all-permeating presence within all things, our powers of observation are very limited. This limited observation creates judgment, criticism, like and dislike and so on, based upon our particular background. The more our background dominates our experience, the more we lose the ground.

Particular mind freezes our perception. And because of our frozen perception, we see our world as we see it now. Marma therapy has the capacity to help us unfreeze this perception, via the media of *majjā dhātu* and *mano vaha srotas*. In this way marma *chikitsā* can improve the quality of perception. It brings clarity. Clarity of perception becomes compassion; and compassion is love.

Marmāni and Mind/Body Medicine

Within one month, we have totally new skin, as far as the atoms and cells are concerned. Our superficial self dies and a new one takes shape. In the space of four days, we have a completely new gastro-mucous lining. In a period of six months, all the atoms of the liver are replaced and we have an entirely new liver. Like these

constant changes in the body, everything in the universe is changing. There is nothing permanent in this world. Only change itself is permanent. These changes are happening on the vast screen of awareness, which is eternal, timeless existence, the unchanging ground upon which all change occurs.

At this time in history, important changes are taking place in the Western scientific understanding of mind and body, and of the nature of life itself. The old paradigm, which held that mind lives in the brain, is giving way to a new paradigm that says the brain lives in the mind. The old paradigm assumed that mind is within the body. The new paradigm asserts that the body is in the mind. According to the old paradigm, mind and body are separate and distinct, the concrete, solid, material body being “real” and the abstract, non-physical mind grudgingly accorded a shadowy sort of existence. The new paradigm says that we cannot separate body from mind. The body is crystallized mind, and mind is the energy aspect of the body. To speak of mind and body as two distinct entities is simply not true, and creates confusion and separation. That is why we speak today of mind-body medicine.

Āyurveda has always recognized this. From the Āyurvedic perspective, going back thousands of years, we really should speak of mind-body or bodymind, because they are one. Anything that happens in mind influences the body, and vice versa. Mind is a flow of thought, as a river is a flow of water. As the water, so the river. If the water is clear, the river is clear. If the water is polluted, the river is polluted. Likewise, as the thought, so the mind. If our thoughts breathe fear, mind becomes fearful. If angry thoughts flow or flood through the mind, the mind *becomes* anger. On the other hand, if thought is clear, mind is clear. As a change in the water is a change in the river, a change in the nature of our thoughts is a change in the mind. Moreover, every change in our mental state is instantaneously reflected in the chemistry and functioning of the body.

On the cutting edge of this newly emerging model, in which the ancient understanding is being corroborated by extensive research, mind and body are no longer considered two different vehicles of experience. Mind is not a localized entity, to be sought somewhere in the electrochemical activity of the brain, but rather it pervades the entire physical body from every cell to every fiber. Mind and body are not just interconnected, but are one cohesive entity with both physical and mental manifestations.

The term *mano vaha srotas* means “the pathway of the mind.” *Mano* means mind, *vaha* implies carrying, and *srotas* means pathway or channel. To describe the mind as a lively channel of energy captures its reality as fluid movement. *Mano vaha srotas* is not a “thing” but a continuous flow or stream of consciousness. It is one of

the fourteen principal channels described in more detail in chapter 16. Each channel is a network comprised of a root, a pathway and an opening.

Mano vaha srotas has its root in the heart, brain and chakra system. The mind originates through these three centers. The pathway of mano vaha srotas encompasses the entire person, through what the Vedanta school of Indian philosophy calls the five *koshas*—auric fields representing five planes or sheaths of existence of varying density. Ranging from subtle to gross, these are:

- ✽ *ānandamaya kosha* (bliss body)
- ✽ *vijñānamaya kosha* (wisdom body)
- ✽ *manomaya kosha* (mental body)
- ✽ *prānamaya kosha* (breath body)
- ✽ *annamaya kosha* (physical or food body)

The koshas are discussed extensively in Sanskrit texts but the subject is too vast for this presentation. (H.H. Adi Shankaracharya 1999)

The “opening” of mano vaha srotas is where the energy flourishes and can be accessed. There are three principal openings for the channel of the mind: the synaptic space between neurons, the sense organs and the marmāni. Thus, marmāni provide direct access to the mind, bridging it with the physical body.

Majjā dhātu, nervous tissue, is the medium through which the marmāni express themselves. It acts as an intermediary between prāna vāyu, which governs sensory stimuli, and apāna vāyu, which governs motor response. Each dhātu is associated with a channel system. *Majjā vaha srotas* is the channel of the nervous system. Its roots are the brain, spinal cord and bone marrow; its passage is the entire central nervous system, including the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems;

and its opening is the synaptic space and neuromuscular cleft. *Majjā vaha srotas* includes structures such as the cerebrum, cerebellum, spinal nerves, and sensory and motor nerves.

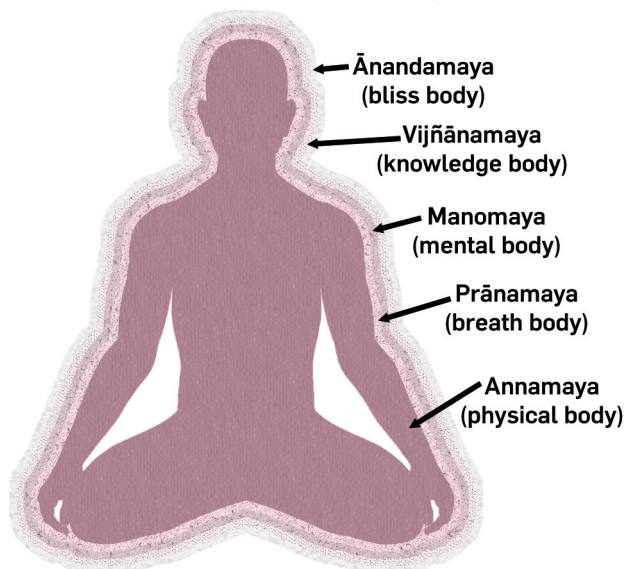
Majjā dhātu and majjā vaha srotas are intimately related, function together harmoniously, and are the substratum of mano vaha srotas. Majjā provides the structure, while mano vaha srotas is the function. Majjā dhātu forms the cable wires through which the electric current of mano vaha srotas passes. Together, they govern all the basic cognitive functions of the mind: comprehension, recognition, memory storage and communication. They facilitate the capacity to perceive clearly, concentrate and meditate. These mental functions operate based on three subdoshas: tarpaka kapha is responsible for memory, sādhaka pitta for cognition and prāna vāyu for sensory perception.

Deeper examination of the mind reveals its presence at the marma sites. Each energy point is related to manas, the sensory mind, and directly communicates perception, thought and emotion. Every marma is also related to buddhi, via cognition, retention and memory, because marmāni are doorways to the nervous system and related mental faculties. The subconscious memories mentioned above in our discussion of ground mind and particular mind are stored in the deep connective tissue of majjā dhātu. These memories can be directly accessed by stimulating the marmāni, as they are a part of majjā dhātu. Marmāni are intrinsically connected to the mind via the media of majjā dhātu and mano vaha srotas.

There is a dynamic interplay between the mind and the energy points, and understanding this relationship is essential for healing. In a healthy system, marmāni are sites of vitality where consciousness flourishes and flowers. Pure awareness flows gracefully through the doorways of marmāni and, as all rivers finally merge into the ocean, all pranic energy that courses through the marmāni finally merges in the ocean of awareness.

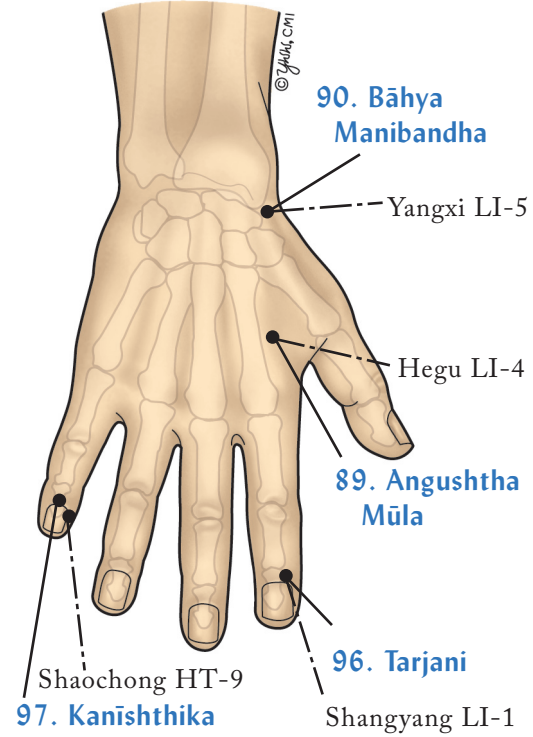
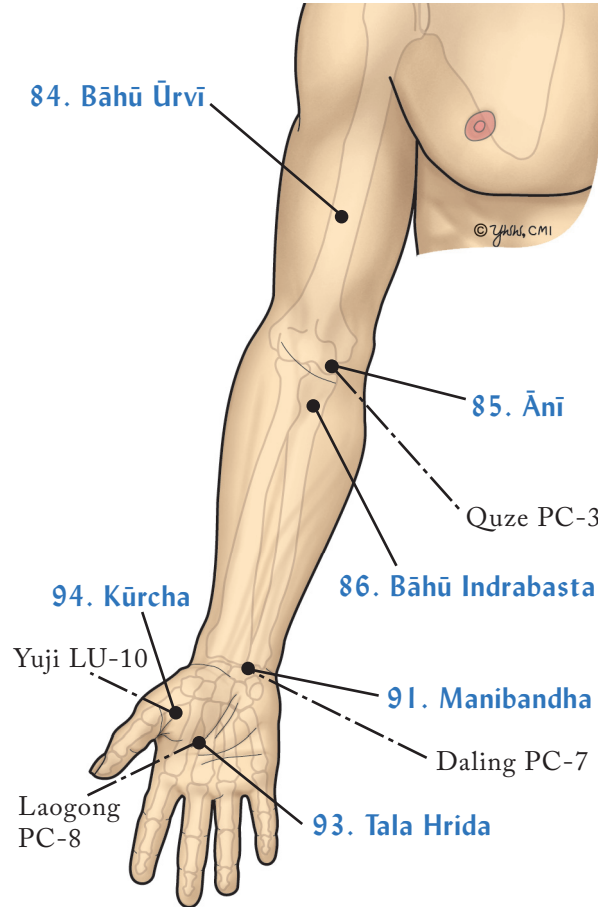
However, when the mind becomes stagnant or clogged, the flow of prāna is similarly obstructed, like a river that is stagnant or polluted, and the marmāni mirror this. Blockage at a marma is the obstructed flow of awareness. If the mind is overactive, the marmāni reflect this too, becoming painful, sensitive or tender. Likewise, disturbance at the level of a marma is reflected in the mind—revealing the inherent mind/body connection. This is why, for rapid spiritual evolution, a comprehensive mind-body program is so helpful;² a program that integrates meditation and breathing with purification procedures for the body and nervous system.

The Koshas of the Body



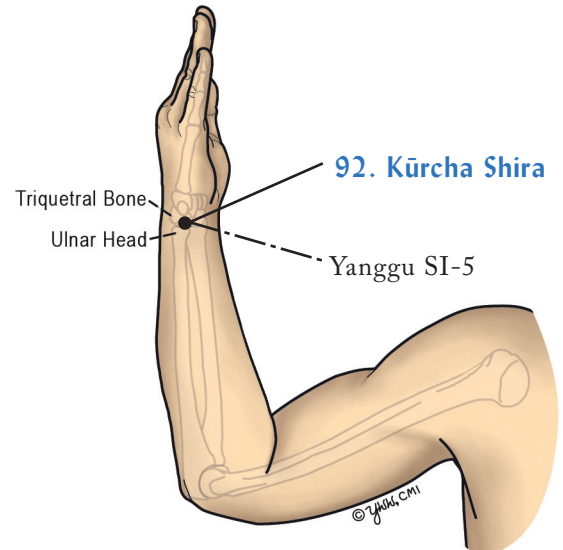
2. As explained in chapter 18, “Yoga Therapy and Marmāni.”

Ūrdhva Shakhah (Upper Extremities) Marmāni



Hasta (Hand) Marmāni (9)

#	Marma Points	Page	Acupoint
89	Angushtha Mūla	180	LI 4
90	Bāhya Manibandha	181	LI 5
91	Manibandha	182	PC 7
92	Kūrcha Shira	183	SI 5
93	Tala Hrida	184	PC 8
94	Kūrcha	185	LU 10
95	Hasta Kshipra	186	LU 11
96	Tarjani	187	LI 1
97	Kanīshthika	188	≈HT 9



Ūrdhva Skandha

Location

At the superior aspect of the trapezius muscle, midway between the tip of the spinous process of C7 and the tip of the acromion.

Action

- ◆ Relieves local pain
- ◆ Relieves stiffness in shoulder
- ◆ Facilitates flow of prāna into lungs and upper chest
- ◆ Relieves occipital headaches
- ◆ Relieves stress, calms the mind
- ◆ Releases stagnant, unexpressed emotions

Associated Doshic Subtypes

Prāna Vāyu, Udāna Vāyu, Vyāna Vāyu, Avalambaka Kapha, Shleshaka Kapha

Indications

- ◆ Pain, stiffness or tightness in neck and upper back
- ◆ Radiculopathy (pinched nerve)
- ◆ Interscapular pain due to muscle tightness
- ◆ Degenerative joint disease (DJD)
- ◆ Adhesive capsulitis (frozen shoulder), bursitis, shoulder pain
- ◆ Rotator cuff tendonitis, bicipital tendonitis
- ◆ Occipital headaches
- ◆ Shortness of breath, asthma, hiccups, bronchitis
- ◆ Stress, mental fatigue, insomnia

Treatment

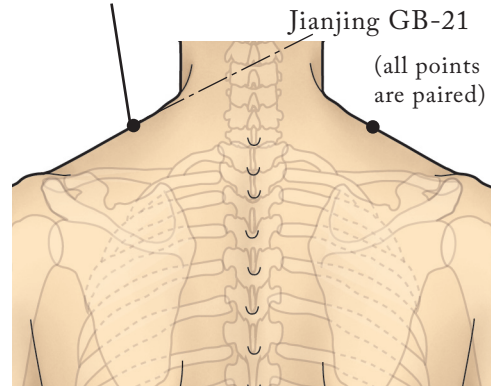
Skandha marmāni may be massaged with **vacha** or **camphor oil**, along with other marmāni on the upper limbs. Deep massage with **mahānārāyana oil** or **Tiger Balm®** relieves pain and stiffness locally and soothes tense muscles.

Corresponding Acupoint

GB 21, Jianjing (Shoulder Well)

GB 21 is a principal acupoint on the Gallbladder meridian. It is located midway between GV 14 (which corresponds to Manyāmani at the base of C7) and the tip of the acromion. It shares the same functions as Ūrdhva Skandha for aligning the shoulders and descending “rebellious Qi,” the equivalent of hyperactive udāna vāyu. Unlike Skandha marma, GB 21 is not indicated for insomnia, headaches in the occipital region, or any of the lung conditions mentioned. GB 21 also benefits the breasts for local pain, abscesses and difficulty with lacta-

80. Ūrdhva Skandha



tion. Classical texts mention its use for uterine bleeding and phlegm accumulation into nodules.

Commentary

Two principal marma points influence the shoulder. One is Ūrdhva Skandha on the upper aspect of the trapezius muscle, and the other is Adhah Skandha on the lateral aspect of the shoulder. They can be used in conjunction with each other to relieve disturbance of the shoulder joint. The marma on the right corresponds to the liver and on the left to the spleen.

Skandha may be poetically translated as shouldering responsibility. Ūrdhva Skandha is located at a part of the body associated with support. The Grīvā marmāni located on the back of the neck are also linked with responsibility. Many individuals in modern society carry the “weight of the world” on their shoulders. As a result, they develop pain and stiffness in the neck, shoulders and upper back; commonly, the neck’s range of motion also becomes limited. Pain may radiate to the occipital region of the head. Indeed, stress is one of the most common causes of occipital or tension headaches. Tension accruing in these areas also leads to mental fatigue and insomnia.

Stimulating Ūrdhva Skandha relieves these conditions and facilitates the flow of prāna to the lungs and upper chest. Hence, treatment here benefits many lung conditions and may relieve hiccups, a disturbance of udāna vāyu, the upward moving energy. Pressure on Ūrdhva Skandha stimulates the downward flow of energy.

Skandha is the name of one of the sons of Lord Shiva and his wife Pārvatī, two important deities in Hinduism. (The other son is Ganesha.) In South India, the deity Skandha is also known by the names Murga, Kārttikeya and Subramanyam. He is often portrayed as a warrior armed with bow and arrow who carries tremendous responsibility. His bow rests on his shoulder and touches Skandha marma.

Amsa

Location

At the top of the shoulder at the center of the acromion.

Action

- ◆ Gives freedom of movement to the shoulder
- ◆ Relieves pain and stiffness locally
- ◆ Enhances flow of prāna
- ◆ Benefits ears
- ◆ Stimulates pancreatic function
- ◆ Relieves stress

Associated Doshic Subtypes

Prāna Vāyu, Vyāna Vāyu, Udāna Vāyu, Avalambaka Kapha, Kledaka Kapha, Shleshaka Kapha

Indications

- ◆ Shoulder pain, bursitis
- ◆ Rotator cuff tendonitis, bicipital tendonitis
- ◆ Adhesive capsulitis (frozen shoulder)
- ◆ Asthma, bronchitis
- ◆ Palpitations
- ◆ Tinnitus (ringing in the ears), earache
- ◆ Pancreatic dysfunction
- ◆ Emotional tension, stress, fatigue

Treatment

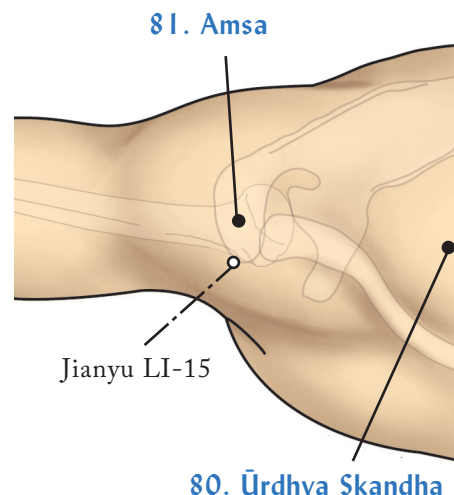
Refer to Ūrdhva Skandha Treatment section, page 170.

Corresponding Acupoint

None

Close to LI 15, Jianyu (Shoulder Bone)

LI 15 shares Amsa's ability to benefit the shoulder and arm. It dispels Wind according to TCM theory, an action similar to Amsa's ability to balance the vāyus, subtypes of vāta dosha. Unlike Amsa, LI 15 is also indicated for the treatment of goiter, seminal emission and hypertension.



Commentary

Amsa is translated as the top part of the shoulder or lung. Similar to Ūrdhva Skandha, *Amsa* can relieve shoulder pain and improve conditions where there is a limited range of movement. Both marmāni stimulate shleshaka kapha, which lubricates the joints and is affected whenever there are joint disorders. Both also enhance the flow of prāna to the lungs and treat asthma and bronchitis. Of the two, Ūrdhva Skandha is more effective.

Stimulating udāna vāyu via these marmāni promotes vitality and energy, thereby reducing stress, fatigue and emotional tension. *Amsa* calms down palpitations, a disturbance of vyāna vāyu. It also aids in balancing blood sugar and can be massaged if there is pancreatic dysfunction. The marma on the right is associated with the liver and on the left with the spleen, similar to Ūrdhva Skandha.

Adhah Skandha

Arms
Hands

Location

On the lateral side of the upper arm, in a depression between the insertion of the deltoid and brachialis muscle.

Action

- ◆ Benefits upper extremities and shoulders
- ◆ Influences lungs and stomach
- ◆ Relieves stress, stagnant emotions

Associated Doshic Subtypes

Prāna Vāyu, Vyāna Vāyu, Udāna Vāyu, Avalambaka Kapha, Kledaka Kapha, Shleshaka Kapha, Pāchaka Pitta

Indications

- ◆ Adhesive capsulitis (frozen shoulder), shoulder pain, bursitis
- ◆ Neuropathy of upper extremities, tremors
- ◆ Poor circulation, cold hands, forearm pain
- ◆ Lymphedema (swelling) of upper extremities
- ◆ Congestion in lungs, asthma, bronchitis
- ◆ High acidity, gastritis
- ◆ Emotional disturbance

Treatment

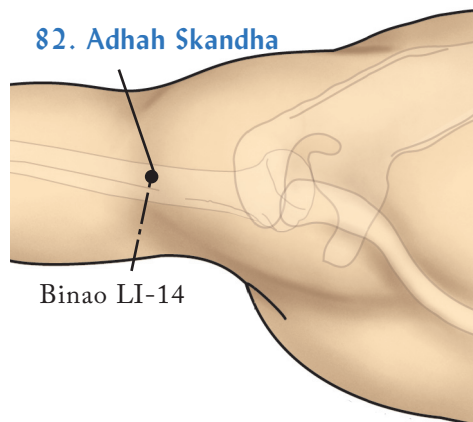
Refer to Ūrdhva Skandha Treatment section, page 170.

Corresponding Acupoint

LI 14, Binao (Upper Arm)

LI 14 benefits the shoulder, arm and neck as does Adhah Skandha. Unlike the marma, it is indicated for goiter, chest pain, and redness, swelling or pain of the eyes. It does not have the same influence on balancing emotions, or on the stomach and lungs, as the marma.

82. Adhah Skandha



Commentary

Adhah Skandha is translated as the downward aspect of the shoulder and also means support. Along with Ūrdhva Skandha, Adhah Skandha addresses many disturbances of the shoulder. Stimulating the marma enhances circulation of prāna and thereby reduces pain. Adhah Skandha may be stimulated for referred pain from C5 to C6 and for tingling and numbness in the arms.

The marma is functionally related to the neck, and to the upper lobes of the lungs. Tenderness on palpation of this marma may suggest lung disturbance. All congestion in the lungs is associated with avalambaka kapha and this marma helps to release any excess accumulation of kapha dosha.

Adhah Skandha is also functionally related to the stomach. It is indicated in hyperacidity, gastritis and upset stomach, which are all disturbances of pāchaka pitta. However, Shankha and Sūrya marmāni are more effective for the treatment of these disturbances; Adhah Skandha pacifies primarily vāta and kapha types of emotional imbalance.