

Vasant Lad

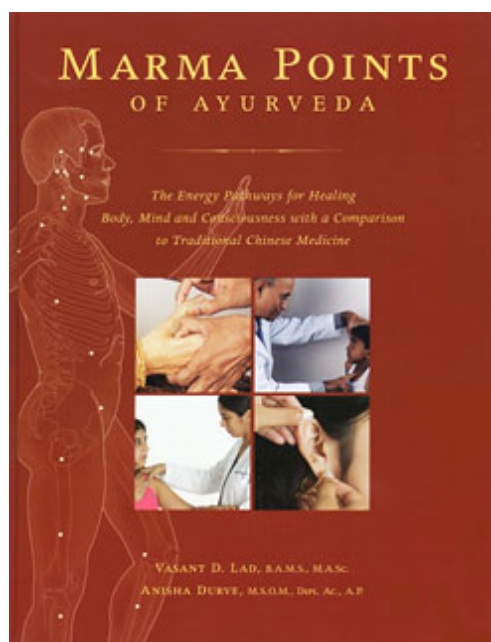
Marma Points of Ayurveda

Extrait du livre

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Éditeur : The Ayurvedic Press



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Marma Points of Ayurveda

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

by Vasant D. Lad, B.A.M.S., M.A.Sc.
and Anisha Durve, M.S.O.M., Dipl. Ac., A.P.

Sonam Targee
Traditional Chinese Medicine Reviewer



The
Ayurvedic
Press

Albuquerque, New Mexico

The Ayurvedic Press, Albuquerque 87112

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Edited by Jack Forem.

Cover design by Michael Quanci.

Illustrations by Yvonne Wylie Walston, CMI, of Creative Imagery, Inc.

Layout design by Laura Humphreys.

Project manager: Laura Humphreys.

Printed in the Canada.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lad, Vasant, 1943-

Marma points of Ayurveda : the energy pathways for healing body, mind, and consciousness with a comparison to traditional Chinese medicine / by Vasant D. Lad and Anisha Durve.

p. cm.

Summary: "Presents healing energetics of Ayurvedic marma points and compares them with Chinese system of acupuncture. Based on traditional medicine system from India, provides commentaries of diagnostic and therapeutic scope for each marma point including techniques for massage, detoxification, acupuncture, aromatherapy, yoga and meditation"--Provided by publisher.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-1-883725-08-2 (alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 1-883725-08-9 (alk. paper)

1. Acupuncture points. 2. Medicine, Ayurvedic. I. Durve, Anisha. II. Title.

RM184.5.L32 2008

615.5'38--dc22

2005032880

For more information on Ayurveda contact: The Ayurvedic Institute, P.O. Box 23445, Albuquerque, N.M. 87192-1445. Phone (505) 291-9698 or www.ayurveda.com.

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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,

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, *dhṛuti*—retention, and *smṛuti*—memory. Ahamkāra is ego, the sense of “I.”

touch can engender radical change in the neuro-chemistry. The human body is a unique chemical laboratory; a touch through the energy points of marmani can open new pathways that affect our inner pharmacy.

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 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 body-mind, 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)

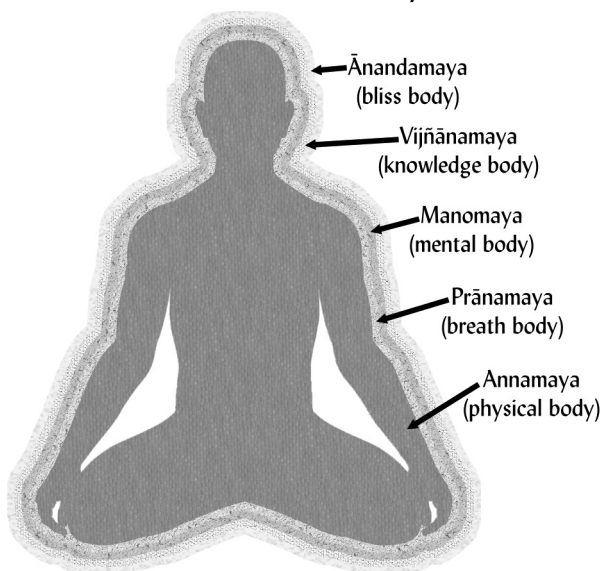
The *koshas* are discussed extensively in Sanskrit texts but the subject is too vast for this presentation. (H.H. Adi Shankaracharya 1999)

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 Koshas of the Body



the capacity to perceive clearly, concentrate and meditate. These mental functions operate based on three subdoshas: tarpaka kapha is responsible for memory, sādha 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.



Chakra System

The nature of the mind-body model can also be analyzed and understood in terms of the chakra system.

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

“Chakra” means a vortex of energy. The chakra system comprises seven principal energy centers aligned along the spinal column, from the crown of the head to the tip of the tailbone. Chakras are non-physical in nature, but correspond to major nerve plexuses that relate to the endocrine centers. The chakra system is one of the pathways of mano vaha srotas in Āyurveda. Thus, each chakra is deeply connected to the mind and reflects a specific quality or level of consciousness. For example, survival is associated with the root chakra and enlightenment with the crown chakra. Table 48 on page 282 in appendix A outlines the properties of each chakra and table 49 on page 282 elucidates various subtle therapies based on the chakras.

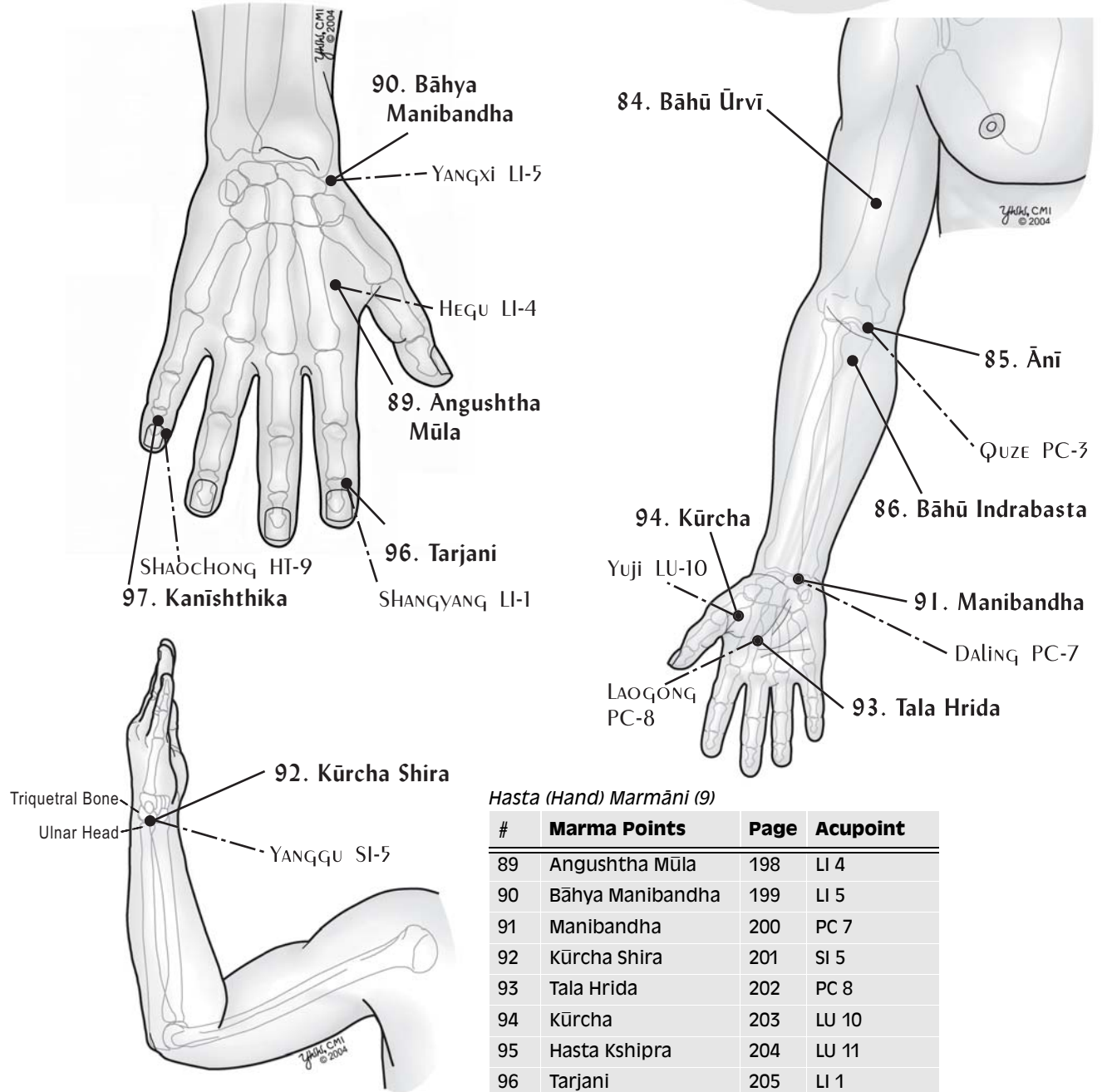
A brief description of each chakra and its relationship to the elements and koshas follows.

Mūlādhāra. This is the root chakra of survival and groundedness. Related to the earth element, it is where matter meets with matter, environmental matter with bodily matter. Mūlādhāra is connected to the annamaya kosha, the physical or “food body” and is governed by apāna vāyu.

Svādhishthāna. The basic survival needs that drive a person dominated by Mūlādhāra chakra are food, shelter and clothing. Once a person has these, he or she thinks about sex and procreation, where the male energy meets the female energy. Svādhishthāna is the chakra of self-esteem, and procreation. This chakra is associated with the water element. Without water, there is no sexual pleasure; dry sex is painful. Both the Cowper’s gland in men and the corresponding Bartholin’s gland in women secrete a lubricating fluid during sexual intercourse. This gives joy and ecstasy to both partners. Thus, this chakra is the meeting point of male and female energy.

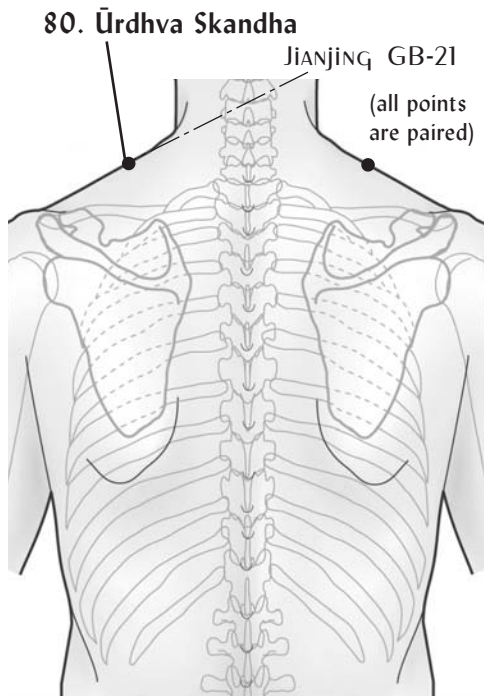
Manipūra. This chakra, literally “the city of gems,” is the chakra of power, prestige, and position in society, of ambition, competitiveness and aggressiveness. It is the fire element chakra, and is related to pitta dosha. Once people have food to eat, shelter and a sexual partner, they think about power and politics. Here, leader meets with the led. Like Mūlādhāra and Svādhishthāna, Manipūra belongs to our animal nature. Every animal needs food, shelter, sex and power. Birds have their “pecking order,” monkeys have an alpha monkey, a “king,” bees have a queen who controls millions of other bees. Most creatures, driven by the need to survive and thrive, vie with each other for dominance in their group.

Ūrdhva Shakhab (Upper Extremities) Marmāni



Hasta (Hand) Marmāni (9)

#	Marma Points	Page	Acupoint
89	Angushtha Mūla	198	LI 4
90	Bāhya Manibandha	199	LI 5
91	Manibandha	200	PC 7
92	Kūrcha Shira	201	SI 5
93	Tala Hrida	202	PC 8
94	Kūrcha	203	LU 10
95	Hasta Kshipra	204	LU 11
96	Tarjani	205	LI 1
97	Kanīshthika	206	≈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.

Associated Doshic Subtypes. Prāna Vāyu, Udāna Vāyu, Vyāna Vāyu, Avalambaka Kapha, Shleshaka Kapha

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

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

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.

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



Amsa

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

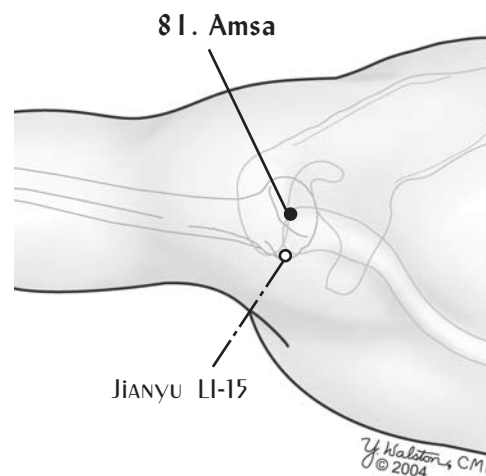
Associated Doshic Subtypes. Prāna Vāyu, Vyāna Vāyu, Udāna Vāyu, Avalambaka Kapha, Kledaka Kapha, Shleshaka Kapha

Action

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

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



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.

Treatment

Refer to Ūrdhva Skandha Treatment section, page 189.

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.

**Adhah Skandha**

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

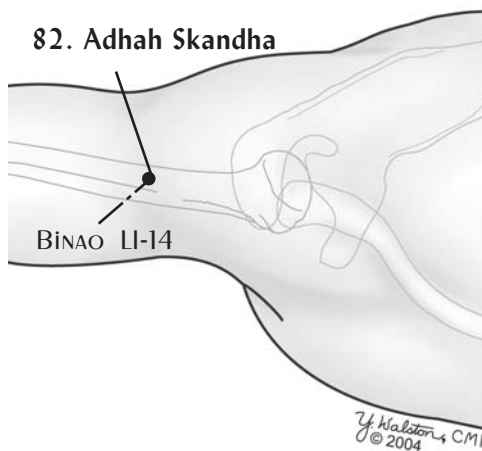
Associated Doshic Subtypes. Prāna Vāyu, Vyāna Vāyu, Udāna Vāyu, Avalambaka Kapha, Kledaka Kapha, Shleshaka Kapha, Pāchaka Pitta

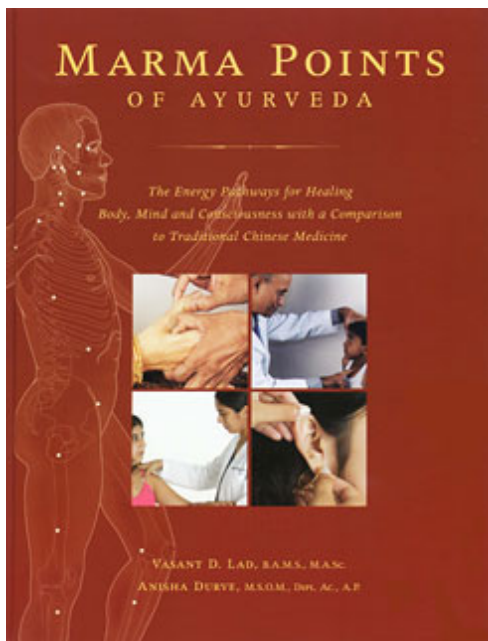
Action

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

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





Vasant Lad

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