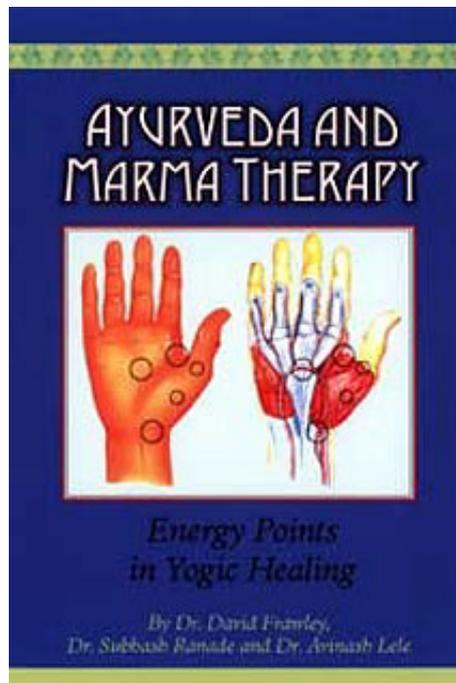


Lele, A./ Ranade, S./ Frawley, D. Ayurveda and Marma Therapy

Reading excerpt
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Marmas: Energy Points of Yoga and Ayurveda

The use of pressure points for massage and acupuncture has become a popular topic in natural healing today. In Ayurveda, the traditional medicine of India, these pressure points are called *mamas*, meaning 'vulnerable' or 'sensitive' zones. Such points can be used specifically for the diagnosis and treatment of disease or generally for promoting health and longevity. Marmas are integral to all Ayurvedic therapies from simple self-treatments to complex clinical procedures. They form one of the main pillars of Ayurvedic thought and practice.

Marmas are also an important aspect of the science of Yoga, with which Ayurveda is closely connected. Yoga not only has a sophisticated system of physical postures, it also recognizes the power of Prana or the life-force, which is reflected through the marma points on the surface of the body. An understanding of marmas can add greater efficacy to any level or type of yoga practice whether using the body, the breath or the mind.

Just as acupuncture points are used in both Chinese medicine and in Chinese martial arts, marma points are also used in the martial arts of India, like the Kalari tradition of South India. Martial arts emphasize how to strike these vulnerable points with force and precision in order to counter attackers. The existence of such vital regions demonstrates that the body is not simply a physical mass but an intricate energy field with points of power through which we can control both physiological and psychological processes.

Marmas are part of a greater 'sacred physiology' that maps out the body according to subtle energy currents and power points. The body has its own special sacred points just as the Earth has its sacred sites and energy currents according to sacred geography. We must learn this sacred geography of our own body in order to attune ourselves both to the Earth and to the greater cosmos.

4 Introduction to Marmas

Without knowing these lines of force on our own bodies we cannot really understand ourselves or our interaction with our environment, nor can we create lasting balance and harmony in our lives. Yet though marmas are a key component to India's traditional sciences, not many people in the West know about them, including many who have studied Yoga or even Ayurveda. A study of marmas adds a new dimension of insight to both systems, helping us tap into the currents of vitality and creativity within and around us.

As a first step to understanding marmas, let us examine how they fit into the greater scheme of Yoga, Ayurveda and other Vedic sciences.

Ayurvedic Medicine and Marma Therapy

Ayurveda is India's traditional healing system, its profound system of mind-body medicine, natural living and yogic health. Ayurveda, which means 'the science of life', has become recognized today for its wonderful dietary, herbal, life-style and yogic therapies that help us live longer, happier, wiser and more in harmony with the greater universe of life and consciousness. Ayurveda was the dominant medical paradigm in the Indian subcontinent until modern times and is still widely practiced throughout the region as a complete medical system. Its roots go back deep both in time and in consciousness. Ayurveda is part of the older spiritual heritage of humanity that contains much secret knowledge and profound wisdom. It interfaces closely with the spiritual science of Yoga, and developed parallel to it both historically and in terms of its prime concepts.

The science of marma or *Marma Vidya* is another extraordinary and dynamic Ayurvedic therapy that has tremendous value in health, disease, everyday living and in spiritual practice. Marma therapy or *Marma Chikitsa* is an important method of Ayurvedic treatment for the entire spectrum of health complaints major and minor. Many different marma regions are described in Ayurvedic texts along with their specific effects on both body and mind. Marmas range in size from very small to very large, from special points along the hands and feet to significant regions on the trunk of the body like the heart or the navel. When manipulated, marmas can alter both the organic function and structural condition of the body. Through the right use of marmas our entire physical and mental energy can be consciously increased, decreased or redirected in a transformative manner.

Marmas resemble the acupuncture points of Traditional Chinese Medicine but extend to larger areas of the body. They include vital organs like the heart and bladder as well as bones and joints and points along the

surface of the body. Marmas are centers for the vital-force or *Prana*, the master power behind both physical and psychological processes. Marmas serve like pranic switches that can be used to turn Prana up or down, on or off at various places on the body. Through manipulation of marmas, Prana can be directed to remove blockages, improve energy flow or tap hidden energy reserves and make connections with the greater powers of life and nature. This makes marma therapy an important tool of 'energetic' or 'pranic healing'.

The condition of marmas is an important diagnostic tool in Ayurveda. At marma sites toxins, stress and negative emotions get lodged and are held, sometimes for years. Disease is reflected in pain, blockage or swelling in these areas even before it may manifest outwardly in the full range of disease symptoms. Ayurvedic doctors palpate marmas as an integral part of patient examination and gain much information from them. Relieving pain, blockage or swelling at marma sites is an important therapeutic aid and one of the first stages of many Ayurvedic treatments.

Marmas are key locations for Ayurvedic bodywork and massage. The Ayurvedic massage therapist will focus on marma regions that are in need of stimulation or of release and use the appropriate methods to adjust their energy flow. Ayurveda treats marmas with pressure, heat, needles, massage oils, herbs or aromatic oils, providing many tools for working with our internal energies through them.

Marmas are a common topic in the three great Ayurveda classics of *Charaka*, *Sushruta* and *Vagbhatta*, which provide a wealth of information on their location, function and application. Marma therapy can be used along with all Ayurvedic therapies from detoxification to tonification and rejuvenation, from self-care to intricate clinical procedures like Pancha Karma.

Marmas and the System of Yoga

Marmas are key energy centers for the practice of yoga on all levels from yoga postures (Asanas) to deep meditation (Dhyana). Yoga postures affect the energy held in the limbs, joints and spine, which all contain important marmas. Asanas can be used to stimulate and balance marmas in various ways. Similarly, certain marmas can be manipulated while a person is performing various asanas in order to augment their effects.

Marmas connect to the *nadis* (subtle nerves) and *chakras* (energy centers) of the subtle body and the mind. They govern the interface between the physical and subtle (pranic) bodies and the interchange of energy and information between them. This means that marmas are important for

healing the subtle body as well as the physical body. Through using marmas we can restore the proper connection between the subtle body (our internal energy, moods and emotions) and the physical body (our material condition), resulting in increased health and vitality on both levels.

As the important bodily sites in which Prana is located, marmas can be used along with yogic breathing practices (Pranayama). Through yogic breathing, we can direct Prana through different marmas for healing purposes, improving their energy flow from within. Marmas are key places where stress and attachment accumulate, blocking the free flow of energy and awareness. They can be treated through relaxation techniques and the yogic practice of *Pratyahara* (yogic internalization methods and sensory therapies) to release such blockages.

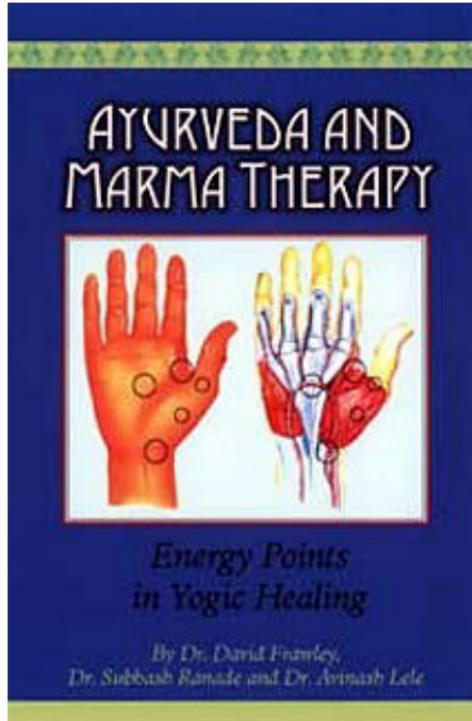
Marmas similarly have a place in higher Yoga practices of concentration, mantra and meditation. Special mantras can be used with particular marmas in order to increase physical or psychological strength, adaptability and immunity. Those who meditate regularly become sensitive to the condition of marmas and aware of the flow of energy through them, which they can learn to modify through thought and will power alone. Through developing mental concentration, meditators can learn to energize or clear marma points, without requiring any external aids.

Therefore, a good Yoga teacher should possess a good knowledge of marmas and how they relate to various Yoga practices. A serious Yoga student should not overlook the location or function of marmas in developing an effective practice.

Marinas and Vedic Sciences

The science of marma (Marma Vidya) is an integral part of all the 'Vedic' or 'yogic' sciences that emerged in India in ancient times. The *Rig Veda*, the oldest Vedic text, is a collection of *mantras*, which are words of power or primal sounds that mirror the workings of the universe on all levels. These Vedic mantras—the essence of which is the Divine word OM—reflect the 'cosmic marmas', the sensitive energy points that govern the greater universe and its processes. Just as mantras are the seed-powers that underlie speech and language, so marmas are the seed-sites that underlie the body and its movement.

The Vedic vision regards the entire universe or macrocosm as the cosmic person or *Purusha*, with the human body as a replica or miniature, a microcosm. This means that the mapping of the energy fields in the human body reflects that of the universe as a whole. The science of marma



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