

Marmas and Nadis

Marmas and nadis are related to the disciplines of yoga and Ayurveda. Yoga tradition tells us that our body consists of 3 parts. The first part is the physical body, the second part is the astral body, and the third part is the causal body. Marma points are said to be junctions between the physical, astral and causal bodies.

The Chinese and Ayurvedic doctors have known about the electromagnetic body for thousands of years. This is one of the most important components we can learn about, since our body derives energy from it. It is also called the yogic energy body. There are 3 important components of the yogic energy body. We've studied one of these in our earlier trainings: The Chakra System. Let us have a look at the other 2 components of the yogic energy body.

Nadis – The nadis are also known as energy meridians. There are a total of 72,000 nadis in the electro-magnetic body. The nadis are responsible for transferring energy from one point to the other. There are 14 main nadis and 3 of these are the most important: Sushumna, Ida and Pingala. We'll have a glimpse at these in a moment.

Marmas – Marmas are known as pressure and energy points (marma points). The number of marma points is debatable. Some texts document over 350 therapeutic marma points and over 100 lethal marma points. However, other texts document a total of 107 marmas, while the Tamils (Tamil is a state in southern India) believe that there are 108. A therapeutic point is one that is used to render aid or therapy to a person, while a lethal point is one that may be used to harm or kill a person if it is struck in the right way. Lethal points are taught in martial arts.

Marmas

Marmas are also known as the vital energy fields in the body. Marmas are the sensitive areas that are located under nerves, bones and muscles. They are the storehouse of pranic energy that relies on breathing exercises. A thrust or throbbing to any of these parts can cause serious injury (and also death), but providing the right amount of pressure and energy to these points in a therapeutic method, such as through yoga asanas and pranayama, and can result in improvement of health in all 3 bodies.. If we study Ayurveda more deeply, we will gain extensive knowledge of marmas.

Marma refers to particular vital areas of the body. The meaning of marma in Sanskrit is secret or hidden. We can think of a marma point as a juncture where two or more tissues meet on the body. It can be defined as the juncture where muscles, veins, ligaments, bones or joints intersect. Marma points are similar to acupuncture points. These marma points are like mini chakras that are located along the nadis. The nadis are like meridians that are hidden within the body. Irregularities at any of the points lying along these energy routes are registered in the corresponding chakra.

A professional therapist or Ayurvedic practitioner can segregate the marma points and cleans them by increasing the flow of blood to the affected part of the body. We can

accomplish the same thing with yoga if we know which postures are beneficial for each marma. Each point has its own consciousness and intelligence that coordinates with the body and mind.

Marma Massage

In Ayurveda, a therapist might prescribe specific yoga asanas and pranayama to activate a specific marma point. They may also include marma massage, which originated somewhere between 1500 and 1200 BC. This modality involves using the fingers to stimulate the marma points and promote mental and physical rehabilitation. The points correspond to the systems and internal organs in the body that react to stimulation. Marma massage has been used to treat several symptoms, some of which are light headedness, lack of energy, stress, general weakness, physical aches and pains, anxiety and nervousness.

The massage concentrates on putting pressure on the marma points to give benefits to the affected areas and to improve the overall functions of the connecting organs. A marma massage will usually last between 60 and 90 minutes. The duration depends on the points involved. The massage is followed by a warm shower or steam bath.

Marma Therapy

Ayurveda makes use of marma therapy for preventing and treating diseases. Marma treatment is also used to balance the doshas and to create digestive fire (also called agni), and is useful in promoting energy and for detoxification. There are 3 doshas in Ayurveda (vata, pitta and kapha) and an imbalance in any can cause mental, physical and emotional issues. Marma therapy is also used for the rejuvenation of the body and mind. It is also a vital part of the clinical methods (called Pancha Karma) and an important component of the daily health routine.

Some of marma points commonly massaged are on the head and points around the mouth, nostrils, eyes and ears. It is recommended to do the massages in the morning. These can be practiced by oneself, as part of a yoga practice, or may be performed by a therapist during a Thai yoga, Ayurveda treatment or yoga therapy session. Marma therapy is reported to be beneficial for various diseases and disorders, including structural problems and arthritis. In India, it is used to treat some types of paralysis or nerve pain.

Nadis and Yoga

Nadi refers to movement (as in energy flow, movement of life force) and in the Rig Veda it is defined as “stream” or “movement.” In yoga, a nadi refers to a channel that facilitates the flow of Kundalini energy. (We touched upon Kundalini yoga in our Level 1 training.) Nadis carry life force, known as prana in Sanskrit. Nadi channels are the channels of the mind. The channels of subtle energy are visible as tubes, vessels and cords. They also include muscles, arteries, veins, nerves and lymph. People aspiring practice Kundalini yoga can activate the Kundalini energy by performing the different types of pranayamas through which the nadi system is vitalized. This not only helps in promoting physical health but also spiritual understanding and growth.

Nadi is derived from the Sanskrit word *nad*, which means vibration or motion. From the energy point of view, an understanding of the relationship between chakras and nadis is imperative. Just as the physical body has physical channels, the subtle body also has channels that carry energy. The channels through which the energy flows are called nadis.

You can think of a nadi like an electrical wire that carries electricity along the circuitry to deliver energy to specific points. There are around 72,000 nadis, and 14 of these are considered significant. These 14 nadis directly correlate to the apertures or orifices that are the main sites for reception and transmission of energy. These energy sites are crown of the head, left nostril, right nostril, left and right eyes, left and right ears, mouth, urethra, anus, navel, feet, skin and hands. The acupuncture points represent the point of convergence of the 14 nadis in a physical-etheric interface. When 21 nadis converge, they represent a chakra. We will have a look at the 3 most important nadis.

Sushumna

This nadi passes through the spinal cord. It begins in the Muladhara Chakra (Root Chakra) and ends in the Sahasrara Chakra (Crown Chakra). It branches into a posterior and anterior branch. The anterior branch reaches the Ajna Chakra (third eye) and the posterior branch passes behind the skull. Sushumna generally remains inactive while the other nadis flow. It gets activated when the person breathes through both nostrils at the same time. It can also be activated through asanas and certain pranayama practices. It is most active at dusk or dawn and it calms the body systems.

Ida

The Ida nadi begins and ends to the left of the Sushumna. It is also connected to the left testicle in men. It ends in the left nostril and stimulates the right side of the brain. This nadi helps to nourish and purify the mind and body.

Pingala

The Pingala nadi begins and ends to the right of the Sushumna. It transfers solar and male energies and it helps to boost physical strength, efficiency and vitality. It purifies like the Ida nadi and also cleanses like fire. You can activate it by breathing through the right nostril and this stimulates the brain's left side.

The remaining 14 principal nadis are Gandhari, Hastajihva, Yashasvini, Pusha, Alambusha, Kuhu, Shankini, Sarasvati, Payasvini, Varuni and Vishvodara. Marmas and nadis are often studied in a 500-hour YTT, Ayurvedic Study or a Yoga Therapy Program, but we wanted to give you an introduction to this complex topic.

5 Koshas or Sheaths

In addition to the 3 bodies mentioned above, we also categorize our human state as having 5 koshas (also called sheaths). While the 3 bodies are associated with the 5 sheaths or koshas, they are not the same. Koshas are sheaths or layers that we use to describe different

aspects of ourselves. A kosha model is usually drawn as a map and shows our physical, energetic, emotional, mental and blissful aspects of being human. Each layer deals with some changing-aspect of our existence and can influence any human experience or situation.

The first, outermost sheath is the annamaya kosha. “Anna” means food, so the annamaya kosha is the physical layer that requires nutrition.

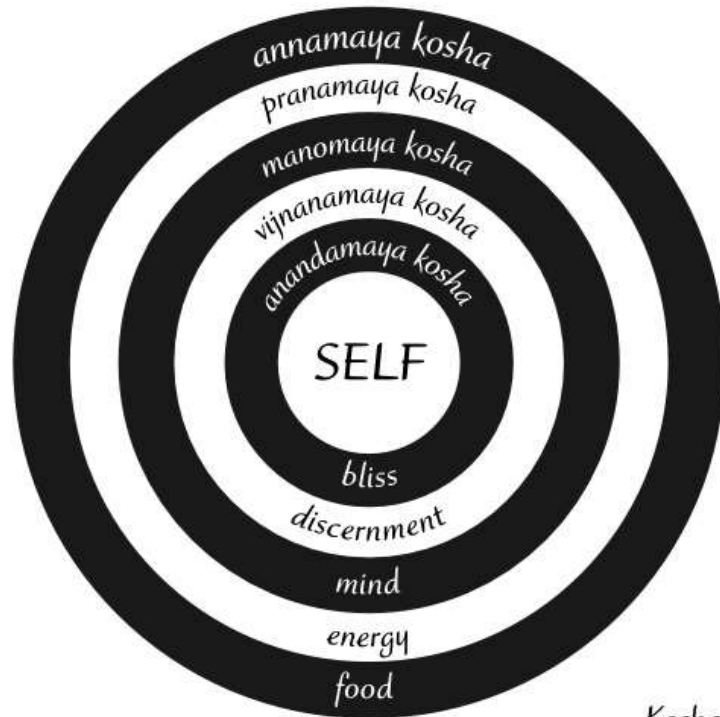
The second layer is the pranamaya kosha. We’ve studied prana or life-force in our earlier levels of training. The pranamaya kosha is said to be in the realm called the subtle body, but it is actually the bridge between the physical and the subtle bodies. We can influence this layer with our breath.

Sheath number three is the manomaya kosha. *Manas* is one of the words that Patanjali uses to describe the mind. This is a mind that is not directable, but is directed by the senses. For example, if you hear a loud noise, you naturally look in the direction of the noise. If you feel a pain in your body, your manas worries or complains about the pain. There is some disagreement among yoga scholars as to whether manomaya includes the senses (or only the mind). I tend to agree that the senses do belong in this category because of the mind/sense connection, but you may read another opinion elsewhere.

The vijnanamaya kosha, the fourth sheath, is the layer of intellect and wisdom. It is also where the ego resides. This layer can help us access deeper truths, but we can also become intoxicated by the ‘I am-ness’ of the ego.

The innermost (5th) sheath is the anandamaya kosha. “Ananda” means bliss and it is the most subtle or spiritual of the layers.

The Koshas



Kosha — sheath

References

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