

CHAPTER

1

Sen Sib Prana in Thai Massage

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The Sen Sib Manuscript

King Rama III ordered that details of the theory and practice of Thai massage be inscribed on sixty marble tablets. The inscriptions were in the form of human drawings showing the flow of the life energy, known in Thai as Sen Sib, or the ten channels. They also showed the pressure points vital to combating physical ailments.

The doll-like inscriptions are shown in front and reverse postures, side-by-side with text in verse, explaining the energy lines and pressure points. The sixty marble tablets still remain

until today and can be seen along the eaves of the roof at the monastic building named *Sala Lai* in the grounds of Wat Pho.

More permanent text was inscribed on the marble tablets for Thai traditional medicinal prescriptions and placed alongside other buildings in the grounds of Wat Pho. Additionally, similar inscriptions were also made and kept at another temple called Wat Ratchaorot. The tablets gave instructions on how to use Thai traditional medicine to identify the causes of and give treatments for physical ailments.



Sala Lai, Wat Pho, Bangkok



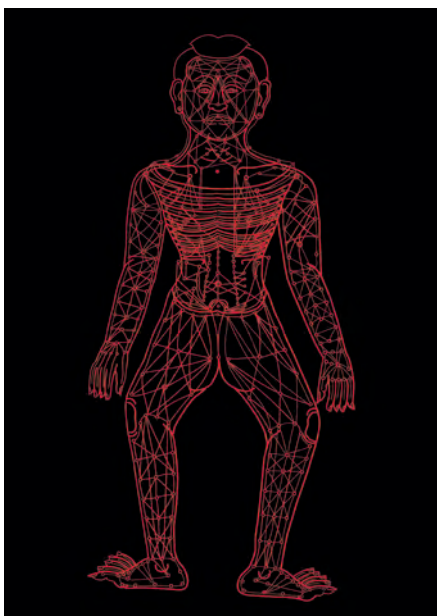
Mural Tablets at Sala Lai



Wat Ratchaorot, Bangkok

Theory of Sen Sib

The ancient Royal Thai Traditional Medicine Text indicates that there are 72,000 channels originating inside the abdominal cavity. All 72,000 channels spread from the abdominal cavity through the entire body via ten major life energy channels called “Sen Sib.”²

Life Energy Channels²

These ten life energy channels (lines) have been the heart of Thai massage and the basis of therapeutic Thai massage throughout the history of Thailand. Actual documentation confirming the existence of Sen Sib as shown here was recorded only in the past few hundred years. However, the Thai's belief on Sen Sib dated further in the past, prior to the Ayutthaya era.

Three ancient records formed the main text of the Sen Sib theory. The basic theories of each were the same. Some channels had more than one name and some minor differences could be seen in the names of each channel.

The three important sources of Sen Sib channels:

1. Royal Thai Traditional Medicine Ancient Text from the reign of **King Rama V** (1868-1910).² The major description of Sen Sib recorded and compiled at the command of the King in 1870.
2. Tamla Loke Nitani Ancient Text from the reign of **King Rama II** (1809-1824).³ Medicinal fables recorded by Phraya Wichaya-tibbodee (Klom), a former governor of Chantabun Province.
3. Marble Tablets inscribed with graphics at the **Wat Pho** temple, Bangkok. Recorded during the reign of King Rama III (1824-1851).⁴

The philosophical theory of Thai massage is similar to that of Ayurvedic massage which is based on the life energy channels and the belief that a person's health and wellbeing relies on the balance of life energy. Life energy in Thai massage is called “Prana”, which means “the wind of life”, and is known as “Lom Pran” in Thai. An obstruction in the flow of Prana can cause discomfort or illness to a person. As Sen Sib are the major energy channels throughout the



body, they need regular maintenance to avoid any blockage or stagnation.

Applied properly, Thai massage helps immensely in removing blockages that could obstruct the energy flow in the Sen Sib, and bring balance to body, mind and spirit. See “Energy Blockage Relief: Free Flow of *Prana*” in chapter 6. The ancient Thais applied pressure on points according to Sen Sib in combination with herbal medicine application to treat certain illnesses. Nowadays, some of these pressure points are being used in therapeutic massage to relieve common ailments.

Characteristics of Sen Sib³

1. There are ten major paths. “Sen” means path or line and “Sib” means ten.
2. All ten Sen originate approximately two inches below the abdominal surface in the vicinity of the navel.
3. Each Sen has a different gate throughout the body.
4. The paths are invisible. They are not blood vessels, nerve fibers, or ligaments as many may think. They are invisibly connected to send sensations when pressure is applied at the right point to the corresponding directions.
5. There is “wind” being the energy force that runs through the path. If the path is blocked, obstruction to the *wind* can cause illness. Some paths have more than one type of *wind*. Some have names for the *winds* and others do not. However, if there is no name of the *wind* for a path, it does not mean there is no *wind*. The ancients simply did not give names to some *winds*, but symptoms can still appear when there are blockages of *winds* in those particular Sen lines.
6. The paths have pressure point locations that affect the *wind* when pressed.

Relationship of Sen Sib to Ayurvedic and the Origin of Sen Sib

In addition to the two editions of *Thai Massage the Thai Way*, the authors have been able to obtain information showing a relationship between Sen Sib and Ayurvedic Channels. There is a strong tie between the two teachings.

The origins of the sacred Sen Sib in Thai massage were unknown but they were recorded in ancient texts compiled at the start of the Chakri dynasty era. Sen Sib contained the teachings given in Indian Vedic lore on the life force channels, or the 72,000 *Nadis*⁵, which run throughout the entire body to sustain life in the form of the energy path for the body. The ancient Thais mapped out the energy path in ten lines and named this mapping “Sen Sib”. Sen means line and Sib means ten.

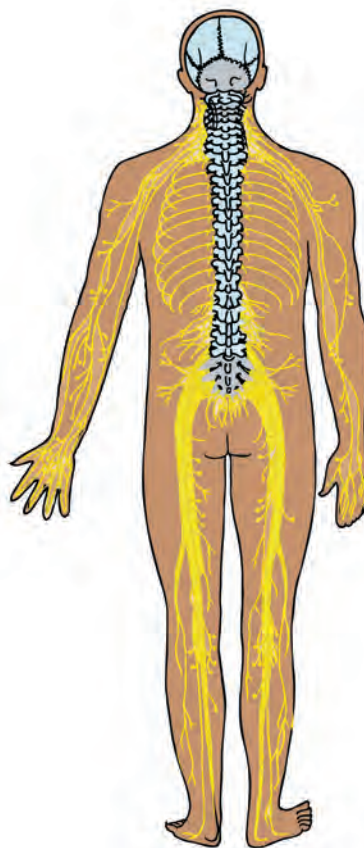


Figure 1-1. Nervous System Posterior

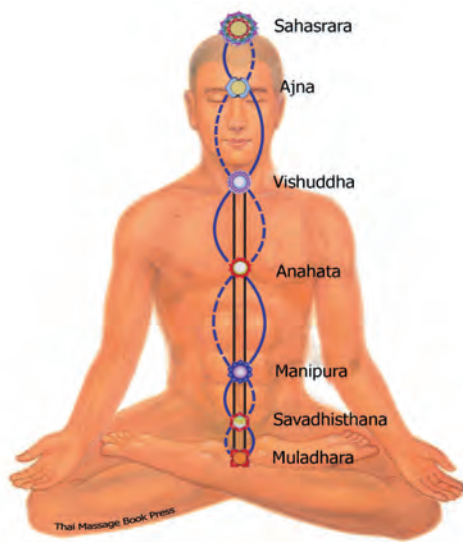


According to the Vedic teaching, man has a physical body and an astral body. The physical body has a brain with a spinal cord connected to it which carries thirty one pairs of spinal nerves. Consequently, the astral body is the source of power for the physical body. The astral nervous system carries the flow of the life force, or *Prana*, through its channels, or *Nadis*.⁵

Sushumna is the main astral spine of life. It controls the gross function of the elements of life that create and sustain the physical body. *Sushumna* extends from the *Muladhara* chakra at the coccygeal center to the brain.

Ida and *Pingala* are the two auxiliary channels to *Sushumna*. *Ida* runs along the left and *Pingala* on the right. *Ida* and *Pingala* are the most superior of the 72,000 *Nadis* that constitute the primary channels of the astral sympathetic nervous system. These nervous system controls the sympathetic nervous system of the physical body.

According to the Vedas, the two channels, *Ida* and *Pingala*, run crisscross at each chakra alternating their flow until they meet again at the third eye and *Ajna* chakra.⁶



Sushumna, Ida and Pingala according to the Vedic teaching⁶

Becoming Sen Sib

Since ancient times, Thais have acquired a wealth of knowledge and culture from India. A theoretical understanding of the Sen Sib is very much in accordance with the Ayurvedic principle in terms of the life force and life energy paths. However, ancient Thai massage teachers have incorporated Buddhists teaching in place of Hindu teachings to make it applicable to the Thais, such as the four elements of life instead of five in Hindu teachings, by excluding the ether element.

With regard to the names and energy paths, both theories have assigned the same principle. In Thai the energy line is Sen Sib and ten paths with ten energy gates. Ayurvedic Channels also have ten principal *Nadis* with ten bodily gates. Both theories have *winds* with names and related conditions. However, the *wind* names and the related conditions are not all the same.^{3,6}

The therapeutic pressure points recorded on the Sen Sib charts by the ancient teachers are similar to the *Marmas* points charting of the ancient Indian massage.

The purposes on some of the points are the same but many are different. This is another comprehensive subject that the interested learner is advised to seek further in depth study through a course on Ayurvedic healing and Indian massage. This chapter is merely to present the relationship between Sen Sib and Ayurvedic teachings, and the origin of Sen Sib.^{3, 6} To assume that the ancient Thai teachers purely followed Ayurvedic principles and applied them to the Sen Sib theory would be to neglect the fact that the two theories have many differences. Thais are skilled in adapting and revising good things so that they work best for Thais. Since the life style and culture of each nation is unique, it is reasonable to credit the people in



that region of developing certain knowledge for their people on their own accord.

From this perspective, it would be worthwhile acknowledging that the ancient Thai teachers have created the Sen Sib theory to use in Thai massage by way of combining the Ayurvedic knowledge with their own findings. Thus, it would be appropriate to honor the ancient Thai teachers for their findings, for creating, and applying the Sen Sib theory to Thai massage and Thai traditional medicine from the past to the present.

The Origins of the Names of the Sen Sib

The ancient teachers assumed six names from the Ayurvedic Channels and applied them to the Sen Sib paths but only four have the same bodily gates. Two names have different exits.

The following chart indicates the names and gates on both energy channels.

The English spelling for Sen Sib pronunciation is varied. In Thai, the names will have the same spelling but when transliterated to English, it is helpful to the learners to be able to read and pronounce them accurately. Thus the spelling may be different from the Ayurvedic Channels in English writing which are also transliterated from Sanskrit.

Sen Sib does not have the line with a separate exit for the brain, but three lines do have paths that cover the head region. The Ayurvedic Channel does not have a path that exits the fingers and toes like Sen Sib number 4 though they do have the same name “Gandhari” or “Kantaree.” The remaining eight paths have the same bodily exits or gates.

From this comparison we can assume that the ancient Thai teachers adopted the names and pathways for Sen Sib from the Ayurvedic Channels with slight changes to suit Thai culture and needs.



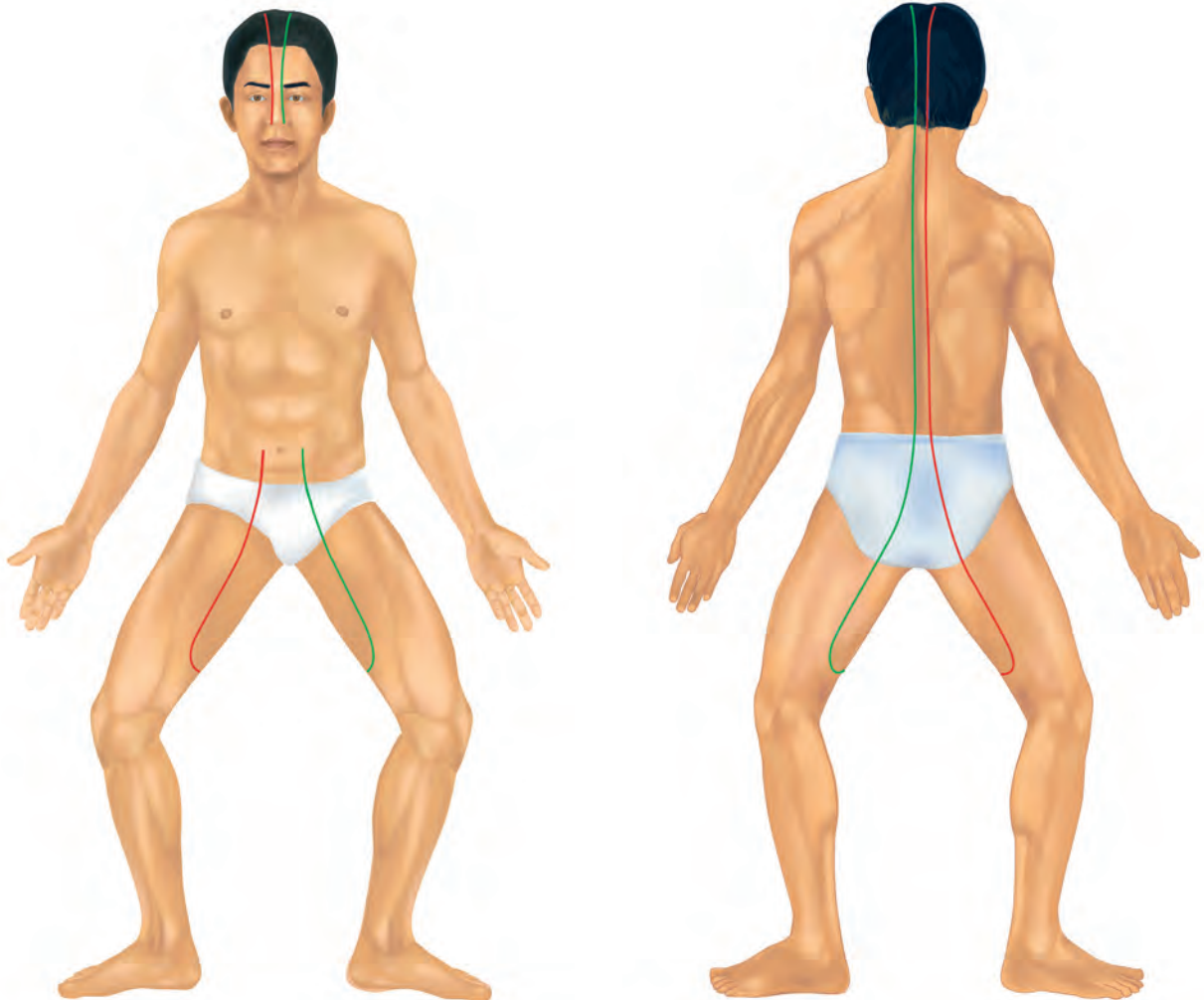
Sen Sib 1: Ida: Bodily gate – left nostril

On the left side of the body, start one thumb width on the left side of the navel and passes through pubic area to the inside of the left thigh toward the rear. It then runs upward past the left buttock and proceeds along the left side of the spine, continuing to the head and curving downward to the left side of the face and exits via the left nostril gate.

The line is colored in green.

Sen Sib 2: Pingala: Bodily gate – right nostril

Pingala follows the same path as Sen 1—Ida but on the right side of the body and exits via the right nostril gate. The line is colored in red.



Sen Sib 1 Ida and 2 Pingala