Chapter 8

Dārā Shukoh and the Transmission of the Upaniṣads to Islam

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1.

Hospitality, says Kant in "Towards Perpetual Peace", is a cosmopolitan right, the right of a stranger to make use of that shared possession of the human race, the surface of the earth, to visit other places, the right "not to be treated with hostility because he has arrived on the land of another" as long as no violence is committed upon the host.[1] What might it mean to say that the stranger has a right to hospitality when the movement involved concerns texts and ideas? Viewed from the other side, what does it take for a tradition to have the ability to show hospitality to an intellectual stranger, in the form, most likely, of a migrating text?

In order to explore these questions, I will take up an example of textual migration that is of particular interest for many reasons. In the 17th century, India was under the political control of the Mughal Empire. The Mughals had brought with them a rich Persianate culture, with strong ties to the wider Islamic world, a culture that perpetuated and preserved itself in the course of many centuries of dominant rule in northern India. The migration I want to consider concerns the movement of a Hindu text *into* that tradition. It was in or around 1656 that the crown prince Dārā Shukoh, the eldest son of Shāh Jahān and the great grandson of Akbar, began to assemble a team of paṇḍit-translators to help him in his project of rendering into Persian three great Hindu texts: the Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*. This project would indeed prove to be of historic importance, for European scholars had Persian but not Sanskrit, and it was through Anquetil-Duperron's translation of the Persian into Latin that the

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1   Immanuel Kant, "Towards Perpetual Peace," in Practical Philosophy, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 357–359.

Upaniṣads would bear upon 19th-century European thought. This was the text that would be read by Schopenhauer, whose reading would in turn directly influence the early Wittgenstein; this was the text held by the poet William Blake, and which was read by Schelling. That further migration is not, however, my present interest. What I would like to explore is the character of the hospitality Dārā Shukoh showed towards these Hindu texts in inviting them to enter the world of courtly Persianate learning.

The nature of this project was, it should be immediately acknowledged, quite different in character from another large-scale translation project involving Sanskrit texts—the Tibetan reception of Indian Buddhism. One reason for being hospitable is prudential: one might welcome the stranger because one has something to gain from them. This was certainly the motive for the Tibetan interest in Sanskrit Buddhist texts, which were regarded as repositories of great, much welcomed, and hitherto unavailable knowledge. No such thought motivated Dārā Shukoh, however. As a devout Muslim and an adept Sufi practitioner, he was already firm in his convictions about the true nature of things. He had no expectation of learning something fundamentally new from the Upaniṣads and the other Hindu texts, nor indeed any real openness to the possibility of doing so. Dārā Shukoh's hospitality had its roots in a different idea altogether: that the stranger, if welcomed and understood, would turn out to be no stranger at all. Dārā Shukoh hoped to show that treating the Hindu as an alien and an Other was a fundamental mistake, that there existed between Hinduism and Islam a pre-existing affinity, even an identity. The cosmopolitan right to hospitality is, perhaps, the right to have one's common humanity affirmed. Dārā Shukoh repeats the famous verse of the Sufi poet Sanā'ī, in the misquoted version Akbar's biographer Abu'l Fazl had had engraved on a temple in Kashmir used by both Muslims and Hindus: "Infidelity (*kufr*) and islām (*īmām*) are both following your path, crying, 'He alone, he has no partner!'"—the two being, in his words, parallel locks of hair neither covering the face of the Incomparable One.[2]

2.

Carl Ernst has made the most thorough study of Persian translations from the Sanskrit to date. With regard to the translations made of metaphysical and mystical texts, he notes their unusual method of production.

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2   Dārā Shukoh, Majma-ul-Barhain, or The Mingling of the Two Oceans by Prince Muhammad Dārā Shikuh, trans. and ed. by M. Mahfuz-ul-Haq (New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2006), 37; Carl W. Ernst, "Muslim Studies of Hinduism? A Reconstruction of Arabic and Persian Translations from Indian Languages," Iranian Studies 36, no. 2 (2003), 187n54.

This type of translation typically mediated Vedāntic philosophical and mystical texts through a loose oral commentary provided by Indian pandits; this was rephrased in the Sufi technical vocabulary, presenting the texts as a kind of gnosis (Persian *ma ʿrifat*), and frequently amplifying their contents by the insertion of Persian mystical verses.[3]

While possibly true of many of the translations produced, the laxity implied by this description of the process could not be held against the translation of the Upaniṣads prepared under the auspices of Dārā Shukoh. If one compares that translation with the original, one finds it to be remarkably accurate; indeed, even the Latin text is a fairly close rendering. It was Dārā Shukoh's avowed intention to make "without any worldly motive, in a clear style, an exact and literal translation"; and he included in the translation a Sanskrit-Persian glossary. At the same time, it does display a 'rephrasing' of Indian philosophical terms and names of the Vedic gods in terms of Sufi parallels. For example, Mahādeva becomes Isrāfīl, Viṣṇu becomes Mikā'īl, Brahman Jibra'īl or Adam; and likewise *brahma-loka* is rendered *sadrat-ul-muntahā*, and *om* as *ism-i-A'zam*.[4] There are indeed also interpolations into the translated text, but they derive from Śaṅkara's commentary, which has clearly been used as a guide in preparing the translation of those Upaniṣads upon which such commentary is available.

Of Dārā Shukoh's translation of the Upaniṣads, Ernst says

What is most distinctive about Dara Shukuh's approach to Indian texts is that he treats them as scripture, in the same category as the Psalms of David, the Gospel, and the Qur'an. Sufis such as Mirza Mazhar Jan-i Janan (d. 1781) also made this theological concession, but typically with the stipulation that such ancient scriptures had been abrogated by the most recent revelation, the Qur'an. Dara Shukuh viewed the Upaniṣads as hermeneutically continuous with the Qur'an, providing an extended exposition of the divine unity that was only briefly indicated in the Arabic scripture.[5]

It is not the case that the Upaniṣads provide access to new truths; rather, they provide a more detailed description of truths already sketched but less than fully explained in the Qur'ān. How, though, can an imported text from an alien tradition be thought of as in this way "hermeneutically continuous" with Islamic scripture? For the answer, we will turn first to Dārā Shukoh's own preface to his translation.

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3   Ernst, "Muslim Studies of Hinduism," 183.
4   Bikrama Jit Hasrat, *Dārā Shikūh: Life and Works* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982), 259–260.
5   Ernst, "Muslim Studies of Hinduism," 185–186.

3.

Dārā Shukoh called his Persian translation of fifty-two Upaniṣads *Sirr-i Akbar*, "The Great Secret". What might that secret have been? In his remarkably informative preface to the translation, Dārā Shukoh reveals a great deal about his thinking. He was, first of all, thirsty for a resolution to a variety of "subtle doubts" about it that had occurred to him in the course of his studies. And

> whereas the holy Qur'ān is mostly allegorical, and at the present day persons thoroughly conversant with the subtleties thereof are very rare, he [Dārā] became desirous of bringing in view all the heavenly books, for the very words of God itself are their own commentary; and what might be in one book compendious, in another might be found diffusive, and from the detail of one, the conciseness of the other might be comprehensible. He had therefore cast his eyes on the Book of Moses, the Gospels, the Psalms and other scriptures, but the explanation of monotheism (*tauhīd*) in them also was compendious and enigmatical, and from the slovenly translation which selfish persons had made, their purport was not intelligible.[6]

Dārā Shukoh represents his quest as a kind of research work, looking to a variety of sources in order to find answers to his questions. Among any variety of sources, some will offer clearer and more comprehensible accounts of certain details than others; it is therefore only rational to consult all of them. The unspoken assumption, of course, is that all religious texts have a common subject matter, whatever their varying stylistic merits or drawbacks might be. In the background, then, is what might be termed a religious cosmopolitanism, a belief that there is a common spiritual heritage to all humanity. This is a manifestation of the Sufi doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* ('Unity of Being'), which, as Muzaffar Azam has shown, contributed to the shape of Hindu-Muslim relations in northern India throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, from Akbar to 'Abd al-Rahman Chishti.[7]

Suggesting that the Indians have tried to conceal their spiritual treasure from the Muslims, Dārā Shukoh then goes on to make a second legitimizing argument for the hospitality he shows towards the Upaniṣads in translating them into Persian.

> Then every difficulty and every sublime topic which he had desired or thought and had looked for and not found, he obtained from these essences of the most ancient

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6   Hasrat, Dārā Shikūh, 265.

7   Muzaffar Azam, The Languages of Political Islam: India 1200–1800 (London: Hurst & Company, 2004), 91–98.

books, and without doubt or suspicion, these books are first of all heavenly books in point of time, and the source and fountain-head of the ocean of Unity, in conformity with the holy Qur'ān and even a commentary thereon.[8]

That the Upaniṣads supply answers to the problems he had encountered in his Sufi studies is proof enough that they are genuine sources of spiritual insight, and they might even be said to provide a commentary upon the Qur'ān in so far as they explicate its puzzlingly allegorical statements. To a modern-minded religious pluralist, such a statement might seem almost unintelligible; but within Dārā Shukoh's religious cosmopolitanism, it makes perfect sense. Just as there is one astronomy or chemistry, which different peoples at different times have found out different things about, so too there is one spiritual adventure to which all the world is party. Dārā Shukoh does not think of himself as bringing two distinct religious traditions into conversation or dialogue but as drawing together different strands of a common resource. Seyyed Nasr rightly states that "the translations of Dārā Shukoh do not at all indicate a syncretism or eclecticism",[9] the reason being that he does not acknowledge the difference that a syncretic mission presupposes. His final legitimization of his project is, however, the most daring of all. He now claims that the Upaniṣads are actually mentioned in the Qur'ān, and designated as scriptural texts.

> And it becomes clearly manifest that this verse is literally applicable to these ancient books: "Most surely it is an honoured Qur'ān; in a book that is protected. None shall touch it save the purified ones. A revelation by the Lord of the worlds (Qur'ān lvi 77–80)." It is evident to any person that this sentence is not applicable to the Psalms or the Book of Moses or to the Gospel, and by the word "revelation", it is clear that it is not applicable to the Reserved Tablet; and whereas the Upanekhat, which are a secret to be concealed and are the essence of this book, and the verses of the holy Qur'ān are literally found therein, of a certainty, therefore, the hidden book is this most ancient book, and hereby things unknown became known and things incomprehensible became comprehensible to this *faqīr*.[10]

Dārā Shukoh concludes his preface with a final definitive statement of what I have been calling his religious cosmopolitanism. The words of God, of which the Upaniṣads are a part, are available to all who are free of prejudice and bias.

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8   Hasrat, Dārā Shikūh, 267.

9   Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Sufi Essays (Chicago: ABC International, 1999), 141.

10   Hasrat, Dārā Shikūh, 267.

> Happy is he who having abandoned the prejudices of vile selfishness, sincerely and with the grace of God, renouncing all partiality, shall study and comprehend this translation entitled the *Sirr-i-Akbar*, knowing it to be a translation of the words of God, shall become imperishable, fearless, unsolicitous and eternally liberated.[11]

The final sentiment sounds as if it has been inspired by the Upaniṣads themselves, and perhaps we can hear just a slight influence of his Indian source on his own thinking, overt denials that any such thing is possible notwithstanding. For although Dārā Shukoh has gone to extreme lengths to argue that there is no spiritual wisdom in the Upaniṣads that is not already contained in the Qur'ān, if only allegorically, it would not be surprising if their distinctive rhetoric of immortal freedom and release were to have infused itself into Dārā's own spiritual vision.

4.

The formal translation of the Upaniṣads did not precede but rather came after an extensive study of their contents. Two years before, in 1655, Dārā Shukoh finished the composition of his great comparative masterpiece, *The Meeting-Place of the Two Oceans* (*Majma-ul-Bahrain*). This is the work we must turn to if we are to understand in more detail what the migration of the Upaniṣads into Persian signified for him. A translation into Sanskrit, possibly made by Dārā Shukoh himself, is entitled *Samudra-sangama*. Divided into discussions of twenty-two metaphysical topics, this work too begins with a revealing preface. Dārā states,

> Now, thus sayeth this unafflicted, unsorrowing *fakīr*, Muhammad Dārā Shukoh, that, after knowing the truth of truths and ascertaining the secrets and subtleties of the true religion of the Sūfis and having been endowed with this great gift, he thirsted to know the tenets of the religion of the Indian monotheists; and, having had repeated intercourse and discussion with the doctors and perfect divines of this religion, who had attained the highest pitch of perfection in religious exercises, comprehension, intelligence and insight, he did not find any difference, except verbal, in the way in which they sought and comprehended Truth. Consequently, having collected the views of the two parties and having brought together the points—a knowledge of which is absolutely essential and useful for the seekers of Truth—he has compiled a tract and entitled it *Majma-ul-Bahrain*

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11   Hasrat, Dārā Shikūh, 267–268.

or "The Meeting-Point of the Two Oceans", as it is a collection of the truth and wisdom of two Truth-knowing groups.[12]

The extraordinary idea that Sufi and Hindu thought differ only termino-logically determines the structure of the whole work, which seeks to estab-lish notational isomorphisms in the philosophical vocabulary of the two systems. It is perhaps obvious that the execution of such an ambition will demand its author to be selective, and with bodies of literature as large and varied as these, careful selection will certainly be possible. With respect to the Upaniṣads, we must remember that this is itself a diverse, complex and diachronic collection of texts. Apart from the so-called major Upaniṣads, the ones upon which Śaṅkara would write extensive commentaries in his attempt to impose a monistic vision in the 7th century CE, there are a great number of 'minor' and 'sectarian' Upaniṣads, the latter specifically connected with the Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava and Śakta traditions. The fifty-two chosen for inclusion in Dārā Shukoh's translation are an eclectic mix of major and minor (with none from the Śakta tradition). While the very earliest Upaniṣads are prob-ably pre-Buddhist, many of the minor ones are much later, the bulk probably in existence by the 5th or 6th century CE, a few very much more recent. It is certainly possible, then, that even if the paṇḍits with whom Dārā Shukoh sat had not relied on Śaṅkara's monistic exegeses, there would have been plenty of material to choose from the later 'minor' and 'sectarian' Upaniṣads for him to draw upon in his search for substantial doctrinal affinities, these later Upaniṣads displaying significantly theistic elements. It is hardly surprising that from such a mass of spiritual writing, Dārā should be able to find termi-nological groupings that looked more or less isomorphic with those aspects of Sufi doctrine to which he wanted to give prominence. His paṇḍit guides would naturally have introduced him to the later Upaniṣads, both because of the greater doctrinal affinity and also because the Sanskrit of the later verse Upaniṣads is more likely to have been accessible to him than the more dif-ficult prose of the earlier texts.

5.

As a reasonably representative example of Dārā Shukoh's method of notational congruence, let us take the section dealing with the self or soul (*rūh*). Here it is in full.

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12   Dārā Shukoh, Majma-ul-Barhain, 38.

> The soul is of two kinds: (i) a (common) soul and (ii) the Soul of souls (*abul-arwāh*), which are called ātmā and *paramātmā*, respectively, in the phraseology of the Indian divines. When the 'pure self' (*dhāt-i-baht*) becomes determinate and fettered, either in respect of purity or impurity, He is known as *rūh* (soul), or ātmā, in His elegant aspect as *jasd* (body), or śarīr, in His inelegant aspect. And the self that was determined in Eternity Past is known as *rūh-i-a'zam* (or, the supreme soul) and is said to possess uniform identity with the Omniscient Being. Now, the Soul in which all the souls are included is known as *paramātmā* or *abul-arwāh*. The inter-relation between water and its waves is the same as that between body and soul or as that between śarīr and ātmā. The combination of waves, in their complete aspect, may be likened to *abul-arwāh* or *paramātmā*; while water only is like the August Existence, or *sudh* or *chitan*.[13]

Here we find a terminological triad. In addition to the individual soul (*rūh*), and its body, there is another soul (*abul-arwāh*, the 'soul of souls') in which all the individual souls are 'included'; and there is also a supreme soul (*rūh-i-a'zam*) that is the Omniscient Being and the August Existence. Neither the relationship between the individual souls and the soul of souls, nor that between the soul of souls and the supreme soul, is stated explicitly, other than to say that the first relationship is one of 'inclusion'. Rather, these two relationships are clarified with the help of a rather beautiful metaphor: the individual souls are like waves on the surface of the ocean; the soul of souls is the single pattern of waves that includes each of them; and the supreme soul is the mass of water upon which both the individual waves and the pattern supervene.

I cannot speak of the Sufi sources on which Dārā Shukoh will have drawn in presenting this structure. What, though, of his attempt to bring it into isomorphism with terms and concepts drawn from the Indian literature? The Persian *rūh* is mapped onto the Sanskrit ātmā, and the Persian *abul-arwāh* onto the Sanskrit *paramātmā*. Strangely, no mapping is provided for the third element of the triad, *rūh-i-a'zam*, the supreme soul, a lacuna, which is indicative, perhaps, of a difficulty. First, the term *paramātmā* ('highest self') is not in early Upaniṣadic discourse; it is of comparatively later use. Although one Upaniṣad says, "He brings together the self in the higher self",[14] the term is most often used as a synonym for *brahman*: "He, it is said, is indeed *brahman*, the highest self."[15] Yet *brahman* is also that which is defined as existing (*sat*), thinking (*cit*) and bliss

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13   Dārā Shukoh, Majma-ul-Barhain, 44–45.

14   Brahma 3.

15   Haṃsa 1.

(ānanda), and is clearly, therefore, the August Existence or Omniscient Being to which Dārā Shukoh also refers (his śudh is *sad* or *sat*, his *chitan* is *cetana* or *cit*). The metaphorical identification of this supreme self with the ocean is indeed a venerable Upaniṣadic one, where it functions as an image of that into which the individual rivers flow and in so doing lose their identity and individuality;[16] or, in Śaṅkara, of the metaphysical unity that the individual waves are strictly non-different from.[17]

It is not immediately clear how the provision of terminological mappings is meant to be explanatory of Qur'ānic doctrine. The idea, probably, is that these mappings will provide the Muslim reader with a tool with which to assimilate the Hindu texts once translated. The reader will now be able to appropriate the text as speaking about his or her own concepts, saints and doctrines. Just as the translated *Bhagavadgītā* would be read as an exposition of the Sufi doctrine of *mir'āt al'haqā'iq* ('All is He'),[18] so too Dārā Shukoh's *Meeting-Place* would furnish the essential prerequisite for a Sufi reading of the translated Upaniṣads. It is perhaps not by chance that he published this book *before* setting the translation project into motion.

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6.

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I would like to canvass, albeit briefly, a further explanation for the "hermeneutical continuity"[19] Dārā Shukoh finds between his own Sufi beliefs and the philosophy of the Upaniṣads, and for the "subterranean cultural bonds"[20] he and other Persian-speaking scholars were to explore throughout the period. The possibility I am interested in is that what Dārā has done, in effect, is to discover within Sufism the archaic remnants of another migration. For it is possible that the translation of the Upaniṣads into Persian in 1657 was not the first time that they journeyed on an easterly wind. Many scholars have noted interesting affinities between the philosophy of the Upaniṣads and the thought of Plotinus (204–270 CE), the founder of Neo-Platonism. Born in Lycopolis, Egypt, he studied philosophy in Alexandria under the enigmatic Ammonius. Wanting to study Indian philosophy in more depth, he joined the military expedition of Emperor Gordian III to Persia in 243. When Gordian was assassinated by his troops, Plotinus instead made his way to Rome, where he remained until his death. We do not know

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16   Chāndogya 6.10.1; Muṇḍaka 3.2.8; Praśna 6.5.

17   Brahmasūtrabhāṣya 2.1.13.

18   Azam, The Languages of Political Islam, 97.

19   Ernst, "Muslim Studies of Hinduism," 186.

20   Azam, The Languages of Political Islam, 96.

how much Indian philosophy Plotinus was able to learn, either in Alexandria or later, but similarities and parallels between his Neo-Platonic doctrine and ideas to be found in the Upaniṣads, especially the later ones, are certainly striking.[21] And it is, of course, the incorporation of Neo-Platonic thought into Islam that is one of the decisive ingredients in the formation of Sufism. Just possibly, then, what Dārā Shukoh has managed to perceive are the fragmentary remains of this much older journey of Upaniṣadic ideas, ideas that no doubt bear many signs of transformation and modification but which nevertheless contributed to the constitution of Dārā Shukoh's own religious world view. If, as there seems to be, there was in Dārā Shukoh's mind a hint of the thought that the Upaniṣads were the ur-text of both traditions, then how appropriate for him to name his comparative masterpiece after the place in Khartum where two tributaries of the Nile rejoin: *majma-ul-bahrain*, 'the meeting-place of the two waters'.

The triangular relationship between the individual souls, the soul of souls that includes them and the supreme soul upon which both supervene has its origins in Plotinus himself. Richard Sorabji summarizes Plotinus's rather complex overall position in *Enneads* 4.3 [27] 2 as follows:

That there is a plurality of souls is shown by the fact that Plotinus is keen to insist that our souls are not parts of the World Soul which makes the stars revolve, but that that is a sister soul derived, like ours, from the hypostasis soul. The human and world souls can be called 'parts' of the hypostasis soul only in the special sense in which theorems, though derived from a whole system, can also be called parts of it.[22]

Enneads 4.3 [27] 2 reads,

Is it not then a part in the way that a scientific theorem is said to be a part of a particular science? The science is in no way diminished, and each division is a sort of expression and actualization. In such a case each part potentially contains the whole science, which is thereby nonetheless a whole. To apply this analogy to the soul as a whole and parts: the whole whose parts are of this kind would not be the soul of something, but soul pure and simple; so it would not be the soul of the universe, but that too will be one of the partial souls. Therefore all souls are parts of a single soul and are uniform.

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21   Frits Staal, Advaita and Neoplatonism (Madras: University of Madras, 1961); Thomas McEvilley, The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies (New York: Allworth Press, 2002).

22   Richard Sorabji, The Philosophy of the Commentators 200–600 AD, vol. 3 (London: Duckworth, 2004), 343–345.

Each scientific theorem is a 'part' of the scientific theory as a whole, and both presuppose the mathematical system that permits their derivation. This analogy is similar to the one used by Dārā Shukoh, of waves and the single pattern they form, and the body of water on which they both supervene. He has taken an Upaniṣadic metaphor and given it a Neo-Platonic twist.

Another distinctively Neo-Platonic idea inherited by Dārā Shukoh is that of the ascent and descent of the soul. Once again, he seeks an isomorphism with the Indian theory.

> According to certain Sufis, the worlds, through which all created beings must needs pass, are four in number: *nāsūt* (the human world), *malakūt* (the invisible world), *jabarūt* (the highest world) and *lāhūt* (the divine world) . . . According to the Indian divines the *avashāt*, which term applies to these four worlds, consists of four, namely *jāgart*, *sapan*, *sakhūpat* and *turyā*. *Jāgart* is identical with *nāsūt*, which is the world of manifestation and wakefulness; *sapan*, which is identified with *malakūt*, is the world of souls and dreams; *sakhūpat* is identical with *jabarūt*, in which the traces of both the worlds disappear and the distinction between 'I' and 'thou' vanishes; . . . *turyā* is identical with *lāhūt*, which is Pure Existence, encircling, including and covering all the worlds. If a person journeys from the *nāsrūt* to the *malakūt* and from *malakūt* to *jabarūt* and from this last to the *lāhūt*, this will be considered as a progress on his part. But if the Truth of Truths, whom the Indian monotheists call *avasan*, descends from the stage of *lāhūt* to that of *malahūt* and thence to *jabarūt*, His journey terminates in *māsūt*. And the fact that certain Sufis have described the stages of descent as four, while others as five, is a reference to this fact.[23]

It is not difficult to identify the Upaniṣadic source for the doctrine Dārā Shukoh speaks about here; it is the Māṇḍūkya description of the constitution of the self.

Brahman is this self (ātman); that [brahman] is this self (ātman) consisting of four quarters.

> The first quarter is Vaiśvānara—the Universal One—situated in the waking state (*jāgarita-sthāna*), perceiving what is inside, possessing seven limbs and nineteen mouths, and enjoying gross things.

> The second quarter is Taijasa—the Brilliant One—situated in the state of dream,

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23   Dārā Shukoh, Majma-ul-Barhain, 45–47.

perceiving what is inside, possessing seven limbs and nineteen mouths, and enjoying refined things.

The third quarter is Prājña—the Intelligent One—situated in the state of deep sleep—deep sleep is when a sleeping man entertains no desires or sees no dreams—; become one, and thus being a single mass of perception; consisting of bliss, and thus enjoying bliss; and having thought as his mouth. He is the Lord of all; he is the knower of all; he is the inner controller; he is the womb of all—for he is the origin and the dissolution of beings.

They consider the fourth quarter as perceiving neither what is inside nor what is outside, nor even both together; not as a mass of perception, neither as perceiving nor as not perceiving; as unseen; as beyond the reach of ordinary transaction; as ungraspable; as without distinguishing marks; as unthinkable; as indescribable; as one whose essence is the perception of itself alone; as the cessation of the whole world; as tranquil; as auspicious; as without a second. That is the self (ātman), and it is that which should be perceived.[24]

A world made of ordinary experience, a world made of dreams, a world characterized by the absence of dreams or experience, and a world uncharacterizable in terms either of their presence or their absence—this elegant model of the mental spaces available for human habitation is brought into isomorphism with a Sufi account of four worlds the passage through which is a form of spiritual progress or descent. The ultimate source of Dārā Shukoh's account of the two-fold journey is again Plotinus, who describes the soul's descent in "emanation" from The One, through Nous ('intellect'), to Psyche ('soul') and down to the world of the senses, and back up in a process of "contemplation".[25]

The Upaniṣadic texts were welcomed by Dārā Shukoh as a stranger might be, not as someone with knowledge of their own to offer, but as offering external comment on one's own endeavour. The stranger is a means by which we see ourselves more clearly. For Dārā Shukoh, that is exactly how the importation of the Upaniṣads into Persianate Islam was justified: they enabled the Sufi seeker to find answers to his own questions. The migrating text performs an important service to the tradition that hosts it, but a service largely extrinsic to itself. Allowing itself to be so used is perhaps the way for the migrating text to retain its own secrets.

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24   Māṇḍūkya 1–7, in Patrick Olivelle, The Early Upaniṣads: An Annotated Text and Translation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

25   Enneads 4.8, 1.6.