# 8 Bodies in translation

## Esoteric conceptions of the Muslim body in early-modern South Asia[1]

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### Introduction

> First, that the entire human body is held together with veins.
>
> It is necessary that one of these veins has information (*khabar*).
>
> Second, namely that the veins of the body are the source of the human breath, which appears from those veins.
>
> Third, one should know that each breath (*nafas*) individually goes by three paths.
>
> The first is from the right side, they say it is of the sun.
>
> The second is from the left side, they say it is of the moon.
>
> The third is in the middle of two nostrils, they say it is heavenly (*asmani*).
>
> Every breath (*dam*) has a special quality.[2]
>
> Sayyid al-Din Bukhari, *Miz al-nafas*

When does a body *become* Hindu or Muslim? Indian or Persian? Esoteric or exoteric? Mystical or mundane? In pre- and early-modern South Asia there were numerous translations and interpretations of a set of divination techniques known in Sanskrit as *svarodaya* ("the attainment of the toned breath"). As early as the fourteenth century CE, these techniques were translated into Persian as *`ilm-i dam* ("the science of the breath"). Classified at different times as astrology, medicine, and mysticism, the science of the breath has attracted sustained interest through the twenty-first century in both India and Iran.

Given that interest in these practices crosses the boundaries between modern nation-states, what then is the relationship between the science of the breath and other ways of knowing such as yoga and Ayurveda? Are there places where one could say that a body is deemed "yogic" or "ayurvedic"? These are all manifestations of the ways in which examining corporeal boundaries yields a study in how those limits are perpetually shifting and refusing to be fixed in material realms. As Judith Butler notes in *Bodies that Matter*, it is no small feat to hem in and bind the body:

> …but I found I could not *fix* bodies as simple objects of thought. Not only did bodies tend to indicate a world beyond themselves, but this

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> movement beyond their own boundaries, a movement of boundary itself, appeared to be quite central to what bodies 'are.'[3]

This chapter situates the science of the breath within systems of bodily knowledge that are typically seen as distinct from one another. Ayurveda and yoga are usually associated with "traditional" Indian religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. However, the science of the breath offers a window into an example where Persianate Muslim communities in the pre- and early-modern periods actively engaged with practices that demonstrate a conception of the body that is closely linked to that of Ayurveda and yoga (implicit in the former, and explicit in the latter). While there is substantial literature on the ways that people of many different religious communities collectively patronize Sufi shrines and festivals, there is less work on how this type of permeable membrane manifests in conceptions of the body.[4] This chapter asks questions as to what can be learned by foregrounding esoteric or "subtle" conceptions of the body, and using that to support an understanding of the exoteric or "gross" bodies bound up in these boundary-defying conceptions. Citing examples from Persian manuscripts written in India and Iran dating to the sixteenth to nineteenth CE, and with particular references to the *Bahr al-hayat* ("Ocean of Life") of famed Shattari Sufi master Muhammad Ghawth (d. 1563 CE) and Sufi yoga texts from Bengal, this chapter argues for a broader conception of "the Islamic body." Ghawth discusses differences between teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and the yogis regarding the body's need for the spirit, but he does not dismiss the yogis, instead asking his readers to take advice from both sides in order to realize the shared link between them that is only available through esoteric contemplation.[5] As I discuss in more detail below, contemporaneous texts from Bengal map the yogic *cakra*s ("subtle centers") onto the *maqam*s ("stations") and *manzil*s ("abodes") that known from Sufi discourses on the spiritual path.[6] How does one make sense of these searches for equivalence? Recognizing that there are different visions of the physical body leads to the notion that there are more visions that usually acknowledged in terms of bodies of knowledge. Studying the science of the breath facilitates connections with approaches to reconciling cosmological differences in Islam and yoga that confound the modern-day imposition of boundaries between these ways of knowing.

These primary sources include instructions on using knowledge of the breath for divination purposes, as well as manipulating other people, specifically other people's bodies. Practitioners of this science must learn to discern the quality of the breath. At any given moment, is the breath connected to the sun or the moon? The left side or the right side of the body? Which of the five elements (earth, air, fire, water, and ether) is strongest at the moment of contemplation? An added layer of complication involves combining knowledge of the breath with time of day, day of the week, and position of celestial bodies such as planets and the stars. Properly harnessing the power of all these bodies and their myriad forms holds the promise

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of incredible power, all made possible by a conceptualization of the breath is the simultaneously concrete and ephemeral. Concrete, because one can use knowledge of it to destroy others as well as navigate the struggles of daily life, including success with one's rulers, purchasing livestock, getting dressed, and discerning the health and gender of unborn children. Ephemeral, because the breath is constantly in motion, forcing a practitioner of this science to learn to chart its transitions in order to best take care of oneself and others. The science of the breath demonstrates how esoteric knowledge holds highly practical information, aiding practitioners in dealing with daily struggles.

By drawing on work by Judith Butler and Gilles Deleuze for theoretical resources on materializing the body and rhizomatic models for exchange, respectively, and scholarship by Joseph Alter, Shahzad Bashir, Carl Ernst, and Shaman Hatley on South Asia and the study of Islam, this chapter articulates a model of the body that is equally Islamicate and Indic, raising the question of how precisely scholars working on Islam in South Asia can develop theoretical frameworks for belief and practice in the pre- and early-modern period that are grounded in solid textual evidence.[7] These frameworks invite scholars to further develop an Islamic imaging of the body in a pluralistic religious environment. This is an equally relevant inquiry whether situated in South Asia or other regions around the world.

## Ayurveda

Moving to non-Islamic perspectives, one important system to take into consideration is Ayurveda, an ancient set of knowledge and techniques for maintaining bodily health that has enjoyed a great deal of popularity in recent times, spreading beyond India to Europe and North America. Of key importance for this project are the two visions of the body found in ayurvedic treatises. First, there is the "material body," corresponding to the notion of the body as static or fixed in nature, as it might appear in illustrated form on the pages of a medical textbook. Second, there is the "embodied self," which is of an entirely different conception. Where the first may be treated as an object that stands apart from any context, the second "presents a modal case of being-in-the-world; it presents a portrait of an active patient whose experience of health or illness cannot be fully knowable apart from her or his relationships with other people and the natural world."[8] This distinction in the ayurvedic traditions could be one example of developing a new approach to theorizing the vision of the body in the science of the breath texts. There is no discussion of homologous categories such as "embodied self" or "material body." Even in the *svarodaya* texts, one does not find these categories; thus, it is unsurprising that they do not appear in the *`ilm-i dam* texts. Yet, the body in this context is certainly potent, and one is able to generate great powers through attuning an awareness of the breath. But who precisely is permitted to practice this science, and dispense

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the wisdom gained through its mastery? There are no stipulations listed as to bodily purity (anatomical, physiological, or ritually construed).

The clearest indication regarding the practice for learning these skills comes in generalities:

> This should be paid attention to with experience (*tajriba*), so that one is able to understand: one should make known from which side one inhales.[9]
>
> When its knowledge (*ma`rifat*) is apprehended, after every practice, I will say which breath was good in correspondence to these actions, and which was not good.[10]

The context for the first excerpt here is that the practitioner must learn to discern on which side the breath is flowing. However, in the second excerpt, the author speaks in the first person—a rare occurrence even within the corpus as a whole, where most of the references are oblique third-person plurals such as "they say"—telling the reader what to expect in the passages that follow, where the author lays out a series of situations, identifying which type of breath is preferable.

## Yoga

Another system identified very closely with India is that of yoga, which has seen exponentially more growth in India as well as its export to Europe, North America, and all over the world in the past century. Yoga is a term that has come to encompass a great many sets of philosophies and practices. At present, the goals of those practicing yoga include everything from increased bodily flexibility to the attainment of union with the divine, with a great many stages in between. Just as the ends diverge, so too do the means. Control of one's breathing, mastery of the body, increased physical (and spiritual?) strength; all of these become considerations. One of the other names of *svarodaya* is *svara-yoga*, as shown in the twentieth-century English translation from Sanskrit by Swami Muktibodhananda entitled *Swara Yoga*: *The Tantric Science of Brain Breathing*.[11] One challenge with invoking a term like yoga is that its definition is decidedly heterogeneous in nature. As David Gordon White outlines in the introduction to *Yoga in Practice*, yoga can refer to things ranging from the literal yoking of one's animals, to an astral conjunction, to a type of recipe, incantation, combination, application, contact, "…and the Work of alchemists. But this is by no means an exhaustive list."[12] In so far as it is possible to determine a fixed list of priorities or aims from such a vast discursive tradition, White stipulates that yoga encompasses four main principles: first, "an analysis of perception and cognition"; second, "the raising and expansion of consciousness"; third, "a path to omniscience"; and fourth, "a technique for entering into other bodies, generating multiple bodies, and the attainment

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of other supernatural accomplishments."[13] *Svarodaya* and *`ilm-i dam* could fit quite easily within the first three of these, while the fourth would be a bit of a stretch. For my purposes, the fact that the arts and sciences of understanding one's *svara* has already been construed as a type of yoga makes the connection worth exploring in greater detail.

Even in cases that would typically not be classified as philosophical or religious, there are still connections to the notion of the body as an organism whose most effective functioning is rooted in knowledge of the breath. As Alter writes about wrestling in north India, *pranayama* (controlled breathing) is recognized as an important technique that wrestlers must master in order to improve their bodily powers. Breathing just to breathe is insufficient, because it "only satisfies the needs of the gross body. To breathe properly harmonizes the body with the mind: the spiritual with the physical."[14] That the practice is understood to streamline the mind-body connection is clear, but the details are key: a wrestler must breathe through his nose while expanding his diaphragm. A great deal of emphasis is placed on this point. If one gasps for air with an open mouth and heaving chest, it is likened to the agency of an inanimate bellows. Breathing in this fashion performs the function of putting air into the body and taking it out, but as such it is purely mechanical.[15] Here, the body is seen as being animated by the breath in very powerful ways. Beyond simple inhalation and exhalation, all breathers—that is to say, all human beings—are advised to pay attention to their breath in such a way as to transcend the "purely mechanical" experience of the world, and move into a more empowered state. In the case of wrestling, this has very clear applications to physical combat with one's opponent. In the *`ilm-i dam* texts, there is little to no explicit references to this type of one-on-one fighting. Instead, the contexts in which combat takes place at larger-scale military ventures (i.e., one army fighting another), or more political or courtly intrigue (i.e., using knowledge of the breath to defeat one's adversary while enjoying an audience before one's ruler).

> By comparison, for example, to the role of *brahmacarya* (celibate) that Joseph Alter describes playing a prominent role in northern Indian notions of masculinity and bodily control, in which practices such as semen retention could have important consequences, in the *`ilm-i dam* texts, one does not get the impression that practitioners would have understood the consequences of the breath in quite the same manner. The breath is vital, a potentially powerful aspect through which the universal power is literally taken into the body, but the body conceived here is a more passive entity than the wrestlers that Alter mentions.[16] In the cases of Ayurveda and yoga, there are very rich philosophical contexts explicitly linked to these practices. As Cerulli describes, the conceptualization of the "embodied self" is rooted in specific notions of *atman*, "a nonmaterial self," which in turn is tied to the idea that caring for the body "is the foundational *dharma* to which all people must attend

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> before everything else in their lives to ensure optimal performance of the complex array of all the other *dharma*s in the social and religious arenas."[17] In the case of yoga, one finds so many references and descriptions of the term that it is almost impossible to speak of the term in the singular. Instead, there are many different yogas, with each varying depending on specific context. I agree with Alter's statement: It is problematic to think of knowledge, ideas, and forms of embodied practice in terms of the same categories that define either trade and travel or the bounded geopolitical units between which these things are conducted. Although one can construct a history of ideas that outlines the ultimate development of a tradition as encompassing as Yoga, and locate the development of those ideas in a particular place, there is no need to think of this tradition *as it developed through time as an essentially bounded entity.*[18]

Part of the challenge in triangulating *`ilm-i dam*'s historical context is dealing with the porous nature of its boundaries. Deciding which analytic(s) to use in differentiating between the various potential classifications is no simple matter. Like so many others with yoga, I am attempting here to "construct a history of ideas" encompassing *`ilm-i dam*, but I find that each of the qualifiers (Islamic, Hindu, Indic, Persian(-ate), mystical, magical, religious, scientific, medical, etc.) leaves out important material.

It is helpful here to situate *`ilm-i dam* within the broader framework of *svarodaya*. The Sanskrit and Hindi texts include significant astrological material, with specific information on the role played by the position of the planets and other celestial bodies alongside assessing the nature of one's breath in determining the auspicious or inauspicious nature of particular actions.[19] Known in India as *jyotisha*, practitioners of this knowledge have at times enjoyed prominent roles in courtly settings. Even today, there has been a resurgence in the active promulgation of this knowledge in Indian universities.[20] By linking *`ilm-i dam* explicitly to South Asian astrological traditions, I aim to contextualize these breathing practices in a cosmopolitan milieu where knowledge passed fluidly back and forth across religious, ethnic, and linguistic boundaries.

I want to exercise caution here in drawing a direct equivalence between those practicing *`ilm-i dam* and those who see themselves as astrologers. This is because while the Sanskrit *svarodaya* texts contain astrological content, in most cases the Persian and Arabic *`ilm-i dam* texts do not. Still, because the *`ilm-i dam* material consistently contains not only directives for understanding one's own fortunes, but also the fortunes of others, it stands to reason that there is much to be gained from taking scholarly insights on astrologers and apply them to those practicing *`ilm-i dam*. This is an extension of the methodology employed for this chapter, that there are important connections between systems of knowledge that we as scholars might ordinarily divide up due to differences in terminology, religion, language, or

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geography. While respecting differences is important, so too is cultivating an understanding of when we can break down some of these barriers. At the end of the day, my concern is analyzing how these bodies function in the world—both physically and figuratively.

## Islamicate views of the body

In exploring these various contexts, I have made recourse to different knowledge systems that circulated in India alongside *svarodaya* and *`ilm-i dam*. Examining each system—even briefly—helps to triangulate the boundaries of the science of the breath. Given that I am primarily concerned with *`ilm-i dam* as an expression of Muslim interest in Indian esotericism, and that many of the Muslim interlocutors in this process are explicitly affiliated with Sufi organizations, I will begin with a brief sketch of Islamic conceptions of the body with an emphasis on Sufi expressions thereof. In *Sufis and Saints' Bodies*, Scott Kugle argues that Sufis' affirming of God's immanent nature leads them "to value the body in ways fuller and deeper than other Muslim authorities."[21] This casts the interest in the body as part of a broader articulation and experience of God's love for creation, and puts Sufis in the position of seeing the body differently than non-Sufis due to a type of theological position that is more than doctrine. Kugle makes recourse to a text by Chishti Sufi Diya' al-Din Nakhshabi (d. 1350) entitled *Juz'-yat o Kulliyat* ("The Parts and the Wholes") as a guiding frame for his broader inquiry into Sufi conceptions of the body. "Sufis came to see the body not as the enemy to be opposed by strenuous ascetic effort…but, more subtly, as a sign of the creator, or rather as a whole constellation of signs."[22] As one might understand the universe through studying the stars, so too can one understand divine purpose and plan through studying the signs in the body. Most pertinent for connecting to *`ilm-i dam* is the Qur'anic account of Adam's creation, which reads "I molded him and breathed into him of My spirit."[23] Kugle's interpretation of this scripture is key because it establishes an anchor point for one of the many understandings of the body in this essay:

> This magisterial image of the material body being enlivened with the breath of the spirit that blows into it and through it from beyond is the central paradox of the human body from an Islamic point of view. It is material, therefore ephemeral, limited in space, fragile, even brittle; however, it is material infused with spirit and is therefore eternal, unbounded in space, opening into the infinite beyond waking consciousness and participating in durable cosmic being beyond personal weakness.[24]

The vision that Kugle conveys here maps nicely onto the conception of the body found in Ayurveda and yoga. The particular cosmology cited may

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differ, but there is a shared sense of the body as inspired (literally) with a type of breath that is cosmic and divine in nature.

Shahzad Bashir's work reevaluating the historiography of Persianate Central Asia is focused more on the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, specifically on the way that Sufi texts from this period carry with them a sense of the body inscribed "not out of explicit intention but as a reflection of a socioreligious habitus that was integral to [the authors] way of seeing the world."[25] I would not argue that there is an explicit theory of the body in the *`ilm-i dam* corpus. Instead, the normative standards, expectations, and potentialities incumbent on the practitioners is implicit. While Bashir examines textual and visual depictions of dream narratives involving the body, the *`ilm-i dam* corpus does not offer the same type of data. Still, Bashir's insights are helpful for giving a fuller form to a sense of the body rooted in Islamicate contexts that are roughly contemporaneous to some of the *`ilm-i dam* texts. Both Kugle and Bashir work to integrate the study of Islam and Muslims within the broader—and rapidly growing—framework of modern-day scholarship on religion and embodiment. In the work that follows on *`ilm-i dam*, I seek to emphasize systems of understanding the body that are more contemporaneous with the pre- and early-modern periods in South Asia. Accordingly, Shaman Hatley's work on yoga and Sufism in Bengal provides perspective that is more grounded in the cultural milieu that I associate with many of the *`ilm-i dam* texts.

In examining the process through which Bengali Muslims translated yogic categories of the body into Islamic ones, Hatley identifies the Nātha yogis as a starting point, specifically the sixteenth century, with links to Śaiva Tantra dating to the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[26] Hatley points out that since Tantric yoga was integrated with Śaivism, Buddhism, Vaiṣṇavism, and Jainism, it should not be surprising that it made its way into Islam, most notably Sufism.[27] This translation process was not patronized by a singular authority, but instead is polycentric in nature, with authors emphasizing or dealing with aspects of the translation process in a different way. For example, sometimes the references to Nātha practice would be retained, while other times they were left out. Islamic categories would usually be translated into Bengali or Sanskrit equivalents, and both Persian and Arabic would be used as a type of technical vocabulary.[28] This delineation between using one language as for technical terms, while another is used for the vernacular, or applied register, is also found in the *`ilm-i dam* corpus. For the key terms of sun and moon, authors frequently use the Arabic terms *shams* and *qamar* when referring to the esoteric solar and lunar breaths, while the Persian terms *aftab* and *mehtab* are used when discussing the physical celestial objects. While Hatley finds differences between "classical Sufism" and the Sufi yoga texts over issues such as the immortality of the body, or the latter genre's lack of discussion of divine love, he nonetheless identifies a sustained interest concerning the organization of the subtle body, namely the homology between Tantric

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*cakra*s (centers) and Sufi *maqam*s ("stations"). Additionally, the body is mapped onto the system of *manzil*s ("abodes"), all of which undergirds the Sufi spiritual life:

> *Shari`ah*, Islamic orthopraxis, *tariqah*, the path of Sufi discipline; *haqiqah*, the experience of truth or reality; and *ma`rifah*, ultimate gnosis. This homology of the *cakra*s with Sufi *maqam*s and the stages of the religious path seamlessly integrates Islamic orthopraxy within the framework of Islamic yoga and relegates it, as in many forms of Sufism, to a low but foundational station.[29]

I would urge caution in evaluating these homologies. There is no unitive moment of exchange between Sufis and yogis. As the review of texts demonstrate, this is a dynamic series of exchanges, with individual actors expressing creative agency along the way. Adapting Judith Butler's invocation from above, to study the esoteric body is to see the myriad ways that the definitions of that body move with each attempt to capture an essence.

## Nadis: channels mediating the connection between macro- and microcosms

With Hatley's work on Bengali Sufi translations of yogic works in mind, I want to introduce another way of following the breath's path across religious and linguistic boundaries, all the while staying within the same vision of the body. The concept of the *nadi* is central for understanding the visioning of how and where astral power flows through the body. These *nadi*s are channels that map onto both the micro- and macrocosmic realms. Some renditions count millions of such channels labeled as such in Yogic and Tantric renderings of human physiology, in which they serve as conduits for the energy that drives the human body. Within the Sanskrit *svarodaya* corpus, there are references to three principle channels, flowing through the left side (*ida*), right side (*pingala*), and central axis (*susumna*) of the body. For example, one *svarodaya* text informs readers that

> [t]here are numerous *nadis* of different sizes in the body and they should be known by the erudites for the knowledge about their own bodies. Originating like sprouts from the root situated a little above the navel, there are 72,000 *nadis* in the body.[30]

In his work on *nadi* divination and astrology, Martin Gangsten outlines a history of the different practices typically subsumed under this heading.[31] In the course of his investigation, Gangsten comments that there are several different derivations for the term. He notes that the Sanskrit term means "tube, hollow stalk," and dates back to the time of the Upanishads, and

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> is thought to pulsate through the body; hence, a derived meaning of *nadi* is 'pulse.' Some writers would connect the word in this sense with the divinatory art, while others again focus on *nadi* as a particular measure of time (synonymous with *ghati*), related to the rising of minute divisions of the zodiac over the horizon.[32]

For a comparison from the *`ilm-i dam* corpus, in Abu'l Fazl ibn Mubarak's text from the *A'in-i akbari*, he specifically references the three principle *nadis*, connecting *Ida* (vital spirit), or *Chandra-nadi*, with the left nostril, while *Pingala* (sun or fire), otherwise known as *Surya-nadi*, connects with the right nostril. The third type of breath is called *Sushumna* or *Sambhu-nadi*, and is "attributed to the influence of *Mahadeva*" (*nam-zad-i maha-dev namand*).[33]

The discussion of the correspondence between the macro- and microcosmic worlds is by no means limited to the *`ilm-i dam* corpus, or even the broader genre of astrology. The *nadis* are key, but equally important is the role played by the person who understands themselves as the nexus point at which the micro- and macrocosms meet. Lyssenko argues that "one common point characteristic of the micro-mascrocosmic speculations in India" is that

> …it is not the universe that is its starting point and basis, but the individual, the human being and more precisely his/hers sense capacities to grasp some properties (stimuli) of the surrounding world and to communicate with it in different manners proper to the human psychosomatic structure.[34]

This emphasis on the individual, thus the individual's body, is important because it highlights individual agency. However, at the same time, none of these individual bodies exist without some type of collective society that shapes and molds them. The next sections introduce a series of examples of different types of individuals and views on the role that the body plays mediating the relationship between the individual and their social context.

### Risalah-i dam az [hawz?] al-hayat

Second, the *Risalah-i dam az [hawz?] al-hayat*[35] ("Treatise on the Breath from the [Sea] of Life") is from the library of an important Indian Muslim court: Tipu Sultan, who died in battle against the British in 1799 at Seringapatam. The preface contains no information about the provenance of the knowledge contained in the text, but does include explicit references to correspondences between macro- and microcosms: *aftab va mahtab har che ta'sir-i dam dar `alam-i kabir darand va dar `alam-i saghir hami aftab va mahtab ast* ("the sun and moon each have an influence on the breath on the macrocosm, and they are also present in the microcosm").[36] This

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is the same conceptual language found in Sanskrit texts expounding upon the existence of the *nadis*, the channels running throughout the microcosm of the human body that then directly correspond to channels in the macrocosmic universe. Similar to other texts described in this section, the author of this particular text invokes Arabic terminology for technical terms such as *`alam-i kabir* and *`alam-i saghir*, literally meaning "large world" and "small world," respectively. Different from other texts, this author retains the Persian terms *aftab* and *mahtab* for sun and moon throughout the text, rather than the Arabic terms *shams* and *qamar*.

While this author eschews Arabic in some contexts, he invokes in others. The text includes instructions on using some Arabic phrases to enable success, such as *bi-tawfiq allah ta`ala* in a section on obtaining victory in warfare, or *qul huwa Allah ahad* ("say: he is Allah, the One").[37] At one point during the text, the author appears to switch from the Persian *dam* to the Arabic *nafas*, a combination that raises questions about how we might differentiate the valence of each term when (unlike as raised above) the Arabic is not being introduced as a technical term. At the conclusion, the author stitches together an assortment of amazing references. He writes that "most scholars of India" (*aksar `ulama'-i hind*) undertake these practices, and that "some of the people of Islam" (*ba`zi ahl-i islam*) undertake "the above-mentioned action" (*`amal-i mastur*) as they "draw near knowledge" (*nazd-i ma`rifat*).[38] The final passage contains several lines that help draw out the distinctions between this manuscript and the other members of the corpus:

> This practice should be done repeatedly in other work. Most of the scholars of India (*'ulama'-yi hind*) carry out this work (*'amal*) have reached their essence, [and] some of the people of Islam (*ahl-i islam*) carried out the above-mentioned work [for] knowledge (*ma`arifat*), as it should be in order to obtain in practice (*shughl*) is not negligence (*ihmal nist*), whether it happens or not. After that the forty-day retreat will be recorded, according to which the master (*pir*) and disciple (*murshid*) have ordered that work be done.[39]

What emerges from this passage is the explicit links to other aspects of Sufi practices, specifically the reference to the forty-day retreat, the "scholars of India" as an identified class of individuals, as well as the aforementioned master/disciple relationship, and, last but not least, the "people of Islam." This is not so much a normative statement about what particular groups of Muslims believe, but invoking these terms makes the "Islamic" nature of the text much harder to debate.

### *Sufi treatise on macro- and microcosms*

As a third example, there is an untitled and anonymous Sufi treatise from the Delhi Persian collection at the British Library that speaks of the

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connections between the macrocosm (*`alam-i kabir*) and the microcosm (*`alam-i saghir*), but in this case the connection is one in which the latter is a reflection of the former, and there is no mention of channels such as the *nadi*s serving as channels mediating the flow of power or correspondence from one realm to the other.[40] While the manuscript is untitled and anonymous, the final page contains a Kubrawi, followed by a Naqshbandi *silsila*, thus establishing affiliations with two important Sufi *tariqa*s in India. The text contains repeated mentions of the prophets Jesus, Moses, Noah, and Muhammad. It also tells the reader that the world is made up of ten things: five of which are the five elements of earth, water, air, fire, and "breath" (*nafas*).[41] These brief examples demonstrates that discussion of the correspondences between the gross and subtle realms was by no means the exclusive domain of authors writing in Sanskrit, Hindi, or other Indian languages.

My goal in this brief overview of the *nadis* and other approaches to micro- and macrocosmic correspondences has been to demonstrate that within pre- and early-modern India there were indeed different models for approaching and discussing this issue. The *nadis* may literally operate as channels through which the *svara* or *dam* flows to great effect; however, I see further theoretical implications for them. Through understanding the vocabulary that authors use for discussing the interaction of the subtle and gross realms, I argue that we can analyze those authors' vision of the body as an entity inter-woven with the world around it.

## *Miz al-nafas* and bodily control of self and others

In this section, I move the discussion from comparing across *`ilm-i dam* texts to focusing on a single example. In this brief case study, I demonstrate how one *`ilm-i dam* text from early-modern India provides scholars with important insight into the powers available to those who are able to use the breath. The quote opening this chapter provides the clearest vision of the relationship between the body, the breath, and the information (*khabar*) conveyed from the latter to the former. This vision of the body and the breath comes from *Miz al-nafas*, which details the circumstances surrounding the translation of an *`ilm-i dam* text from Hindavi into Persian at a shrine known as Piranpatan in Gujarat. This text would come to be collected with ten others, all on different topics, but including medicine, physiognomy, interpretation of pulses, meaning of sneezes, and sexology, which were edited together in the sixteenth century in a volume that was included in the royal Mughal library held at the Red Fort in Delhi. There are no other known copies of this text, so there is no way to determine with any accuracy how much earlier the reported translation took place, or if this manuscript itself is the original product of the exchange between the patron, Shaykh Jalal al-Din al-Bengali, and the translator, Sayyid Burhan al-Din Bukhari. The excerpt from the epigraph above, taken from the very

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beginning of the text, points to a very specific understanding of the relationship between the body and the breath. The fact that this breath comes *from* the veins (*rig-ha*), and not from some other source, indicates that in these practices, the body produces this breath all on its own. This would appear to be the very definition of mutually constitutive. Additionally, one of these veins "has information" (*khabar darad*). While the precise scope of this *khabar* is left unspecified in this passage, reading through the rest of the text helps a great deal in narrowing it down. The *khabar* referenced here is the information that comes with the awareness of the breath, which of the five elements is dominant, and the link to the sun or moon. This stands in important distinction to other terms of "ways of knowing" that are included in the text, such as *`ilm* or *ma`rifat*. The term for vein, *rig*, could be one translation of the Sanskrit term *nadi*, referring to the channels through which the breath flows, and in turn through which the macro- and microcosms are connected. Another possibility is that the term *tariq*, here rendered as "path," would be the Persian gloss of *nadi*. Given that the three principle *nadis* (*ida*, *pingala*, and *sushumna*) are often listed in *svarodaya* and *`ilm-i dam* texts, if not by name than according to their associations with the moon and the sun, then I am persuaded by the latter over the former. As explained earlier in this chapter, the concept of *nadi* is rather expansive, so both *rig* and *tariq* would be operable translations into Persian.

### *The complete and empty breaths*

Consider this brief example of one application of this knowledge of the breath:

> If somebody wants to go on a short journey, let him go with the solar breath, but on the condition that the breath should be complete. Every breath that should be empty, let him ignore it. In the breath of fullness, let him expel it. If there is fullness in the lunar breath, go out with the left foot. If there is fullness in the solar breath, go out with the right foot.[42]

This is another layer beyond ascertaining the lunar or solar affiliation, for here the practitioner has to understand when the breath is either complete (*kamuliyyat*) or empty (*khali*). Later on, the text introduces another element, which is determining when the breath is full (*purri*). These technical terms carry with them a distinct sense of the breath that is in turn linked to the body. A body holding a "complete" breath is capable of different things than one holding an "empty" breath, which in actuality is no longer holding a breath at all, or perhaps the very potential for creating the breath constitutes a type of breath unto itself. As the excerpt above demonstrates, when the solar breath courses through the body, this has consequences for how one controls that body (i.e., starting travel with the right foot), compared to the lunar breath and the left food. This begs the question, what

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would happen to someone who did the opposite of the prescribed order of operations, and knowingly started their travels with the left foot even with the solar breath was present? Such a person would be flying in the face of the very cosmic order of things, and as such would most likely bring doom and destruction upon themselves and possibly those around them.

### *Three-dimensional breathing and envisioning of the body*

> Know that of the six aspects [*jihat*], three aspects are related to the sun breath. Three aspects are related to the moon breath, whereby if it is before, above, and to the right, it is related to the sun breath. In front of, to the left, and under is related to the moon breath.[43]

In this passage, the author presents even more layers for understanding and visioning the way that the breath relates to the human body. In 360 degrees, three dimensions, the practitioner can develop a sense of the breath where it envelops them, flowing in and out not just of their body but also the space immediately around them. In so doing, the body extends outside of its physical limits, powers generated solely through attuning one's knowledge of the breath to the cosmic rhythms that—like the ocean's tide—operate whether one notices them or not. In the same section, the author provides a detailed exposition in which the practitioner is faced with a question from someone "asking which army was victorious":

> If asking with the sun breath about an army distant from the person, there will be victory. If asking with the moon breath about an army that is nearby him, he will be victorious. If asking with the full breath, the friend will be victorious. If asking with the empty breath, the enemy will be victorious.[44]

Note the different elements that the practitioner must determine in order to ascertain the result of the battle: sun and moon, far and near, full and empty, friend and foe. There are associations drawn between the full breath and the friend's victory, and then the empty breath and the enemy's victory, but these associations are not consistently applied throughout the text.

> If someone is asking with the moon breath: If the letters of the name of lord of the army are even, he will be victorious because even letters are related to the moon breath. If someone is asking with the sun breath: If the letters of the name of the lord of the army are odd, he will be victorious because odd letters are related to the sun breath.[45]

Here in this passage, immediately following the one cited above, the author introduces numerology in a manner consistent with other *`ilm-i dam* texts.

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A numerical value is determined by using the *abjad* system, in which each letter of the army leader's name has a specific value, and then the total is either an odd or even number. But note here the added wrinkle: the outcome is dependent on both the sum total determined by the *abjad* system, and whether the solar or lunar breath is dominant in the body *of the person asking the question*. The implication here is that the practitioner is able to assess not only the status of their own breath, but also the status of another person's breath. This sets up a scenario in which practitioners of *`ilm-i dam* are able to see (or sense?) inside other human beings, understanding how they relate to the cosmic order of things. This (literal) insight is a powerful ability with great ethical responsibilities.

## Conclusion

Future research is necessary to firm up the theoretical framework for understanding how to isolate the "ayurvedic" body from the "yogic" body and the "*`ilm-i dam*" body. In particular, I would like to closely examine this notion that each of these bodies is commensurable with one another. It is worth pointing out that in arguing for the ease with which notions of the body travel across permeable boundaries, scholars should keep in mind that the differences are just as important as the similarities. Treating *svarodaya* and *`ilm-i dam* as simultaneously distinct *and* unified creates exciting analytical possibilities, while also raising some problems. The boundaries I speak of in this context are not just the texts themselves (i.e., the languages, time periods, and places in which they were composed), but also the ways that modern-day scholarly approaches to these texts are defined so much by arbitrary constructions of disciplines and departments, particularly in the Euro-American academy. While this type of isolation is inimical to the general approach I endorse, I can also acknowledge the utility of pulling back for a broader view when attempts at the granular level microscopic view yield an image with too much overlap and permeability to make for useful description and analysis.

Importantly, while this chapter is rooted in the early-modern period, it sets the stage for work pursuing these lines of inquiry into the modern period. In the late twentieth century, Hindu teachers in India have translated texts on the science of the breath into English, while as recently as April 2013, Ayatollah Hassan Zadeh Amali of Iran posted a related text in Persian on his personal website.[46] Taken together, these anecdotes suggest that studying the science of the breath enables scholars to study esoteric knowledge in order to understand the porous nature of boundaries between religious traditions.

In his work on dance and performance, Benjamin Spatz asks:

> How can we understand the depths at which technique changes us through practice, over time and sometimes radically? What is the

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> relationship between knowledge and power, in the practice of embodied technique? Do we sing the song, or does the song sing us?[47]

If I substitute the word "breath" for "song," then I am left with a number of startling implications. In examining the different perspectives on the power of the breath in the above materials, there is little question for me that practitioners of *`ilm-i dam* saw the breath as a powerful force, and that learning to control that force could yield equally powerful results. What is less clear is whether or not these authors saw this detailed observance of the breath as a way of bringing their bodies, and thus the actions that they undertook with those bodies, into concert with any type of balance, or perhaps I would say, "in-tune" with the rhythm of the universe. This would be one area for future research related to these practices, especially if brought into conversation with other breath-centered divination practices in different cultural and historical settings. If the breath is fully commensurable between bodies—no matter how human communities mark those bodies—then questions arise as to how scholars might ascertain and evaluate the degree of overlap and difference between the conceptions of the breath itself.

## Notes

1 An abridged form of this chapter was presented at the "Material Islam Seminar" at the 2018 American Academy of Religion conference in Denver, CO. I would like to thank the Material Islam's conveners, Anna Bigelow and Kambiz Ghanea Bassiri, for their invitation to present this work as part of their seminar, as well as Katherine Zubko for the subsequent invitation to contribute to the present edited volume.
2 *Miz al-Nafas*, British Library Delhi Persian 796d (London), folio 57b-58a.
3 Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), *ix*.
4 There is substantial literature on this subject, but two examples would be Joyce Flueckiger, *In Amma's Healing Room: Gender and Vernacular Islam in South India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), and Anna Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred: Practicing Pluralism in Muslim North India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
5 Muhammad Ghawth, *Bahr al-hayat*, trans, Carl W. Ernst, cited in "Sufism and Yoga According to Muhammad Ghawth," in *Refractions of Islam in India* (Delhi: Sage Publications, 2016), 157.
6 Shaman Hatley, "Mapping the Esoteric Body in the Islamic Yoga of Bengal," *History of Religions* 46, no. 4 (2007): 362–363.
7 I would like to thank Danielle Wideman Abraham for pointing out to me that in India, at least, there is no real questioning of the degree to which these different bodies (Hindu and Muslim, for example) are *commensurable*. That is to say, our bodies as fundamentally the same, regardless of how we mark them in terms of religious identity or communal membership. An area for further thought and research would be to analyze the limits of this commensurability. In what ways do powers leveraged by state (and other) actors work to place firm boundaries on the body that conflict with the type of commensurability seen in corporeal visions witnessed across yoga, Ayurveda, and *`ilm-i dam*?

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8 Anthony Cerulli, "Body, Self, and Embodiment in the Sanskrit Classics of Ayurveda," in *Refiguring the Body: Embodiment in South Asian Religions*, ed. Barbara Holdredge and Karen Pechilis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 61.
9 *Kamaru Panchashika abridgment* (Browne recension), folio 59b.
10 *Kamaru Panchashika abridgment* (Browne recension), folio 60a.
11 Swami Muktibodhananda, *Swara Yoga*: *The Tantric Science of Brain Breathing* (Yoga Publications Trust: Munger, Bihar, India, 1984), 72.
12 David Gordon White, "Introduction," in *Yoga in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 2.
13 White, *Yoga in Practice*, 6–10.
14 Joseph Alter, *The Wrestler's Body: Identity and Ideology in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 95–96.
15 Joseph Alter, *The Wrestler's Body,* 96.
16 Joseph Alter, "Celibacy, Sexuality, and Nationalism in North India" in *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History*, eds. Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 310–322.
17 Cerulli, "Body, Self and Embodiment," 61.
18 Joseph Alter, "Yoga in Asia—Mimetic History: Problems in the Location of Secret Knowledge," *Comparative Studies South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 29, no. 2 (2009): 217, emphasis added. I differ from Alter in rendering yoga in lower-case letters, which in my view helps emphasize its unbounded nature. By contrast, my readings of Ayurveda lead me the opposite direction, and so I follow Cerulli in capitalizing Ayurveda.
19 For representative examples of this material, see Ram Kumar Rai's translation and commentary, *Śivasvarodaya*. Tantra Granthamala No. 1 (Varanasi: Prachya Prakashan, 1980), as well as Yogi Ramacharaka, *The Hindu-Yogi Science of Breath: A Complete Manual of the Oriental Breathing Philosophy of Physical, Mental, Psychic and Spiritual Development* (Chicago: Yogi Publication Society, c. 1905).
20 Caterina Guenzi, "Faculté de prévoir. L'astrologie dans les universités indiennes," *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 35 (2013): 141–170.
21 Scott Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 4.
22 Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies*, 29.
23 Qur'an 13:29, my translation.
24 Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies*, 30.
25 Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 13.
26 Hatley, "Mapping the Esoteric Body," 362–363.
27 Ibid., 352.
28 Ibid., 354.
29 Ibid., 355.
30 Rai, *Śivasvarodaya*, 6.
31 Martin Gangsten, *Patterns of Destiny: Hindu Nāḍī Astrology* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2003).
32 Ibid., 9–10.
33 Abu'l Fazl ibn Mubarak ibn 'Allami, *A'īn-i Akbari*, ed. H. Blochmann (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1869), 125.
34 Viktoria Lyssenko, "The Human Body Composition in Statics and Dynamics: Āyurveda and the Philosophical Schools of Vaśesika and Sāmkhya," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32 (2004): 31–32.

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35 *Risalah-i dam az khavass al-hayat*. London, British Library IO Islamic 464, ff. 1b-5b. The copyist is likely referring to the *Hawd al-hayat*, which is why I have labeled this text as *Risalah-i dam az [hawd?] al-hayat*.
36 *Risalah-i dam az khavass al-hayat*, folio 1b.
37 *Risalah-i dam az khavass al-hayat*, ff. 3a and 5a (Qur'an 112:1), respectively.
38 *Risalah-i dam az khavass al-hayat*, folio 5b.
39 Ibid.
40 Delhi Persian 1030b, London, British Library, ff. 97b-102a. While little information is available to aid in dating the manuscript, the text's presence within the Delhi Persian collection would put it at mid-nineteenth century at the absolute latest, since the collection is taken from the royal Mughal library in 1857.
41 Delhi Persian 1030b, 97b. *Nafas* could possibly be translated here as "ether," but the author's use of one of the possible Persian terms for "breath," in a place where the five-fold typologies of the breath to follow in this discussion all mention these same four elements *plus* the additional "ether" or "heavenly" element (*dam-i asmani*), stands out as another example of ways in which these cosmological references do not quite fit with another.
42 *Miz al-Nafas*, folio 58a.
43 *Miz al-Nafas*, folio 59a. The anonymous author of the *Kamaru Panchashika abridgment* (Browne recension) employs a similar typology, but using only four aspects instead of six, leaving out the aspects of above and under.
44 *Miz al-Nafas*, folio 59a.
45 Ibid.
46 Amuli, Hassan Zadeh Hassan. *Ma`arifat-i `ilm-i dam-i hazarat-i `allamat ayatollah al-`azima Hassan Zadeh Amuli (raz va ramz-i `ulūm-i ghariba `ilm-i anfas)*, accessed January 9, 2017, http://ansarolmahdiirdemousa.mihanblog.com/post/432.
47 Ben Spatz, *What a Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 8.

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