



Ibn Arabi

The Secrets of the Fast (IX)

Futuhāt, chap. 71, vol. 9, p.378-389 O. Yahya ed.

Chapters 7 & 8

On Hunger

Futuhāt, chap . 292

The Divine Name "the Rich" is a negative attribution denying that God has any need of the world; for someone who has need of something cannot, by very definition, be self-sufficient with regard to it. In your case, "self-sufficiency" can only ever be realized by secondary causes (*asbab*) envisaged as particular relationships (*nisab*); for any relative thing that negates for you its opposite, governs you by that very fact.

This being so, can you then say that it makes you "self-sufficient"? To answer this question, consider what is thereby truly imparted to you: if this relative thing enables you to forego all other particular attributions, then the answer is affirmative; otherwise, it is negative. Take, for instance, satiation (*shab*): you cannot say that satiation allows you to dispense with hunger, since, according to its true reality, hunger confers upon you a certain purity, delicateness and grace, and grants you an awareness of your dependence and your state of servitude.

Since this is so, you therefore have need of it and cannot do without it. If, on the other hand, satiation were to bestow upon you that which can be acquired through hunger, then you could indeed forego the latter, since it is necessary, not for its own sake, but solely for the advantages that it brings, namely, those we have just enumerated. If these advantages could be gleaned from its opposite, we would have no further need of hunger.

Natural hunger, on the other hand, can just as well keep us from these advantages as it can proffer them to us, which is why the Messenger of Allah - Grace and Peace be upon him! – took refuge (with Allah) from hunger, saying of it "What a wretched companion!" For whilst it remains true that hunger can confer upon us all that was listed above, there is still no guarantee that the dependence arising from it will be dependence upon Allah,

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since it could just as easily give rise to a dependence upon "other" Him. It is for this reason that he said: "What a wretched companion!" wretched, that is, for the generality of men, at least, since the Masters of the initiatory Way, for their part, have been known to declare: "Were hunger to be sold at the market, the aspirant would be required to buy it!"

Nonetheless, if they were to consider the matter from the same standpoint as the Prophet – Grace and Peace be upon him – they would doubtless rank these words among the sophisms of the Folk of the Way. This, in fact, is precisely the attitude adopted by Abu ar-Rahman as-Sulami, who devoted entire pages to the sophisms of the Sufis; and so we, for our part, will do the same.

It is necessary, therefore, to take into account the definition of hunger and the scope given to the word, and to distinguish between actual (*muhaqqaq*) and imagined (*mutakhayyal*) hunger. The Prophetic "taking of refuge" applies exclusively to the former, which, when induced deliberately, drives man to disobey the Law or to do himself harm. Herein lies the explanation as to why the Messenger of Allah - Grace and Peace be upon him - endured hunger only when constrained and forced to do so. In like manner behave those who Know through Allah, amongst whom balance (*‘adl*) is an essential quality.

I am hungry. I fast not.

*Verily, my soul does me battle to obtain
the reward attendant upon fasting.*

*Were to vanish away, this pathetic reward
then the fast we indeed would declare to be
and even the vigil, compulsory!*

*The servant remains the servant of Allah
So long as he harbours not in his soul
a target within range of an arciter (râmin).*