



Ibn Arabi

The Secrets of the Fast (VIII)

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Chapters 5 & 6

The Fast and the Ritual Prayer

Assuredly, the *dhikr* of Allah is greater!

Whatever the devotion performed by the servant, the *dhikr* of Allâh that such worship embodies is necessarily the greatest aspect of its various elements, be they words or deeds. Thus has the Most-High said: **The ritual prayer preserves from baseness and that which is blameworthy, yet the *dhikr* of Allâh is greater** (Qur.29,45); in other words, the *dhikr* contained within the prayer is "greater" than the various acts of which the ritual prayer is composed. When you perform *dhikr* of Allâh during prayer, He is your companion (*jalîs*) therein, even as He has said that He is "the Companion of those who mention Him (*dhakara-Hu*)". If He is indeed your Companion, then either you must be possessed of Divine Sight wherewith you contemplate Him (directly), or you are not endowed with such a gift and so must contemplate Him through faith in the fact that "He seeth thee".

Now, even as Allâh speaks not to his creation save it be from behind a veil (Qur.45,51) - this veil being naught but His very words themselves! - so you, for your part, can neither mention yourself nor any other but that likewise it be from behind a veil. How, indeed, could it be otherwise, given that (direct) contemplation (of Allâh) implies utter amazement and speechlessness?

Thus, though God be his Companion, none may perform *dhikr* save he be blinded thereby; and indeed, the very thing which blinds him is his *dhikr*! The truth of the matter, therefore, is that for each and every remembrancer (*dhâkir*), God remains an "Invisible Companion" (*jalîsu ghaybin*). Contemplation and speech may be combined only by someone who is in the grip of an imaginary contemplation of his Lord, of the kind indicated by the phrase "as if thou sawest Him", which refers to a presence that manifests itself in the imagination.

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However, in such a state, the "companion" thus imagined is necessarily like yourself rather than Him "unto whom nothing is the like". Such was the state of Shihab b. Akhî an-Najîb - may Allâh show him mercy! -, for I have been reliably informed that he said: "man may combine contemplation and speech".

How, then, does such an initiatic taste stand in comparison with that of the "Realised Witness" (*muhaqqiq*) Abû-1-'Abbâs as-Sayyârî, one of the men mentioned in Qushayrî's *Risâla*, who said: "never has a being endowed with intellect gleaned the slightest enjoyment from contemplation, for the contemplation of God, being pure extinction, is utterly joyless".

How indeed does this initiatic taste compare with that of Shihâb! Understand, then! For concerning this matter, even the People of Allâh who have obtained the highest degrees of realisation have been known to be mistaken. What, then, of those beneath them?