



Ibn Arabi

The Secrets of the Fast (VII)

Futuhat, chap. 71, vol. 9, p.378-389

Chapters 5 & 6

The Fast and the Ritual Prayer

The Messenger of Allāh - Grace and Peace be upon him! - said: "The ritual prayer is a light (*nūrun*), alms-giving a proof, patience a shining brightness (*diyā'un*), and the Quran an argument for or against you"...

Allāh - the Glorious, the Mighty! - has said that He "converses" with the worshipper when he performs the ritual prayer. Now God is Light, and converses with him through His Name "the Light", to the exclusion of all the other Names; for, just as light banishes darkness, so does the prayer put an end to all profane preoccupations. In this respect, then, the prayer differs from every other act of worship, since, of them all, it is the only one to demand that everything but itself be forsaken. It is on this account that the prayer is a light.

Allāh makes it known to His servant that when, as "the Light", He speaks with him, they are alone together, all creation being effaced in the presence that accompanies this Discourse...

The sun, on the other hand, is a "shining brightness". As such, it enables the being endowed with the sense of sight to perceive all that its brightness shines upon. Now, this "exposure" (*kashf*) is due not to the light itself, but to its brightness; for the only effect of light is to banish darkness, whereas its brightness brings about unveiling and intuition. In truth, therefore, light is a veil even as darkness is a veil. Speaking of his Lord - Exalted is He! - the Envoy of Allāh - Grace and Peace be upon him! - said: "Light is His Veil", and also "Allāh hath seventy - or seventy thousand - veils of light and of darkness"; and when asked - Grace and Peace be upon him! -: "Hast thou seen thy Lord?", he replied: "Light! How wouldst I see Him?" Thus he declared that "patience" - which corresponds to both the fast and the pilgrimage - is a "shining brightness", for it clarifies for you that which was confused, even as the brightness of light enables you to perceive things.

The Secrets of the Fast (VII)

The Messenger of Allāh - Grace and Peace be upon him! - related that his Lord - Exalted is He! - has said: "Every act of the son of Adam belongs to him with the exception of the fast, for the fast is Mine, and it is I who bestow the recompense thereof". He also said to someone: "Betake thyself to fasting, for it has no likeness". Fasting can thus be described as a "Samadānian" quality expressing transcendence with regard to the created being's intrinsic need for nourishment. When, in conformity with the demands of the Sacred Law expressed by the Quranic injunction: **The fast has been prescribed unto you, even as it was prescribed unto those before you**, the servant desires to assume a characteristic that does not pertain to his true constitution, Allāh says unto him: "the fast is Mine": it is not yours. In other words: "I am He whom it befits not to eat or drink. Since it is in this (transcendence) that resides the essence of the fast, and since you enter therein on account of My having enjoined fasting upon you, then 'it is I who apportion the recompense thereby attained'". It is as though He had said: "And it is I who render the Reward unto one who fasts, for indeed, the quality of transcendence with regard to eating and drinking necessarily implies Me, whereas you, on the contrary, take this quality upon yourself even though it corresponds in no wise to your true being, nor yet belongs to you in any way. Thus do you adorn yourself with it in the state of fasting, and so does it bring you nigh unto Me. Patience resides in the containment of the soul, and, by My Command, you have contained yours with regard to that which your own particular reality implies concerning food and drink". It is for this reason that He further said: "Two joys are the faster's: one, when he breaks his fast...", this joy concerning solely his animal spirit, "...and the other, upon meeting his Lord", this latter joy brings the concern of his "speaking soul" (*naḥs nātiqa*) and his "seigniorial kernel" (*latīfa rabbāniyya*), for the fast leads to the meeting with Allāh; that is, it leads to contemplation (*mushāhada*).

Because the fast leads to the immediate contemplation of Allāh, it occupies a more perfect degree than the ritual prayer, which, for its part, constitutes an "intimate discourse" rather than a contemplation, and, as such, necessarily implies the presence of a veil. Allāh has indeed said: **"It is not for the human mortal that Allāh should speak to him, save by inspiration or from behind a veil"** (Qur.42,51). Thus did Allāh speak unto Moses, and for this reason did the latter ask to behold Him. Now, an "intimate discourse" is an exchange of words. (This is why) Allāh said: "I have shared the ritual prayer half-and-half between Myself and My servant, and that which My servant asks for is his. When he says: 'Praise unto Allāh, the Lord of the worlds', so does Allāh say: 'My servant has praised Me', etc.". The fast, on the other hand, is not shared, since it belongs entirely to Allāh and in no wise to the servant. Indeed, it is solely by virtue of the fast's belonging to Allāh that the servant actually receives his recompense.

Herein dwells a sublime secret. We have already said that "contemplation" and "discourse" are mutually incompatible, for whereas, on the one hand, contemplation gives rise to bewilderment and stupor, speech, on the other, is concerned with understanding, such that, when someone speaks to you, your attention is brought to bear on what is being said, rather than on the speaker himself. Understand the Quran, therefore, and you will understand *al-Furqan*! Such is the difference between the ritual prayer and the fast...

As for the fact that it is Allāh who pays the Reward of the fast, by way of the joy that the faster feels upon meeting his Lord, the corresponding secret is to be found in these Divine Words from the Surah *Yusuf*: **He in Whose bag It is found will be His own Reward** (Qur. 12,75).