



Ibn Arabi

The Secrets of the Fast

Chapter 2 (II)

When the Knower becomes aware of the extent to which his animal and vegetal soul is dependent upon such nourishment, and when he sees how generous he is in feeding it, that such is its due, and that Allah has entrusted him with obligation thereof, he fulfils this function by virtue of a Divine quality: he gives by the Hand of Allah, just as it is through the Eye of Allah that he sees God when he meets Him. This is why he rejoices in the Breaking of His Fast, even as, upon meeting his Lord, he rejoices in His Fast.

Initially, the fast is attributed to the servant, who thereby merits the name "faster." Despite this attestation, however, God then withdraws the fast from him and attributes it to Himself, saying: "... with the exception of the fast, for the fast is Mine." In other words: "the Attribute *as-Samad*, which implies transcendence with regard to food, pertains to Me alone. When I attribute it to you, it expresses no more than a conditioned aspect of transcendence, rather than absolute Transcendence, since the latter befits My Majesty alone." Therefore, it is Allâh Himself who is the faster's Recompense when, turning towards his Lord, he meets Him with the quality "there is naught like unto Him" - that is, with the fast. For, as Abû Tâlib, one of the masters from among the "People of initiatic Taste" (*ahl adh-Dhawq*) has explained, none but "he unto whom nothing is the like" may see "Him unto whom nothing is the like." The verse: **He in whose bag He is found will serve Himself the Recompense** is compellingly apt in this instance!

The *hadîth* continues with the words: "and the fast is a shield (*junna*)", i.e. a safeguard (*wiqâya*) of the kind implied by the Divine Exhortation: "guard yourselves piously with regard to Allâh" (*iva-ttaqqu-Llah: ittaqû* and *wiqâya* being of the same root), in other words, take Him as a safeguard, and likewise be a safeguard for Him! He has conferred this same protective function, that of "there is naught like unto Him" upon the fast, for the fast has no likeness among all the acts of worship. Even so, we do not say of the fast: "nothing is like unto it" (literally: "there is not, as its likeness, any thing"), since a "thing" is an archetypal (*thubûtî*) or actual (*wujûdî*) reality, whereas the fast, being relinquishment, is a purely negative attribute and, as such, a notion bereft of reality (*adamî*). We therefore say that "it has no likeness", and not that "no thing is the like of it". Such is the subtle difference between the "non-similitude" that pertains to an attribute of the fast and the "non-similitude" of a Divine characteristic.

The Secrets of the Fast (III)

Next, the Legislator lays down a prohibition for the faster to observe, namely "that he should abstain from unruly behaviour and raucousness". Now, prohibition, like the fast, necessarily implies relinquishment and is therefore a negative attribute even as fasting is a negative attribute. The fact that he forbade, rather than enjoining, certain acts is thus in perfect keeping with the nature of the fast itself.

Then, the faster is ordered to say to anyone who insults or sets about him: "I am an abstainer!", or in other words: "My state is such that I forsake the act that you commit, O you who set about and insult me!". By order of his Lord, he rises above riposte, declaring that he has forsaken it and that within him there is will neither to offend nor to fight.

He goes on to say: "By Him in Whose Hand is the soul of Muhammad..." (the formula of his oath - may the Grace and Peace of Allâh be upon him!) "...verily, the breath from the mouth of the faster...", that is, the change in the odour that emanates from the mouth of the faster and is perceptible only upon exhalation (*tanaffus*) (in this case the very odour emitted upon the faster's utterance of the scented phrase that he has been commanded to say, namely: "I am a faster!"), "...will be, on the Day of Resurrection...", "the Day when men will stand before their Lord" (Qur., 83,6), "...more perfumed to Allâh..." (notice his use of the synthetic Name, the Name qualified by all the other Divine Names; this Name is without likeness, for none but Allâh - glory to His Transcendence! - may bear it; well does it correspond to the fast, therefore, since the latter has itself no likeness) "...than the perfume of musk." Now, the scent of musk, a reality perceptible to the senses, is enjoyed by all of sound and balanced nature. And yet, to Allâh, the faster's breath is more sweetly scented still, for He perceives aromas in a different way to those who perceive through the senses: what appears to us as unpleasant breath is to Allâh - Exalted is He! - a fragrance more sweetly scented than the perfume of musk, for it emanates from a being who is characterized by an incomparable attribute. In other words, (when perceived in this purely supra-natural mode), the odour of the faster's breath necessarily surpasses the scent of musk, since it arises from the respiration of the faster, whereas the scent of the musk does not result from its breathing!