



Ibn Arabi

The Secrets of the Fast

Chapter 2 (III)

In this connection, an incident of a spiritual order befell us. I and Mûsâ b. Muhammad al-Qabbâb, who was performing the call to prayer, were on the minaret at the al-Hazwara Gate in the Meccan *Haratn*. He had brought with him some food, the pungent odour of which was troubling all who smelt it. Now, I was aware of the *hadîth* according to which "the Angels are disturbed by that which disturbs the sons of Adam" such that mosques should be kept free from the smells of onion, leek and garlic. So, as I settled down to sleep that night, I resolved that, the following day, I should tell my companion to remove the food from the mosque for the sake of the Angels. In my sleep, I saw God, the Most-High, and He - the Glorious, the Mighty - said to me: "Do not speak him about this food, for its odour is not the same to Us as it is to you". In the morning, he came to me, as was his wont, and I told him of what had occurred. He began to weep, and prostrated before Allâh to show his gratitude. Then, he said to me: "Even so, Sidi, respect for proprieties is best where the Sacred Law is concerned!" And so he removed the food from the mosque, may Allâh show him mercy! The reason why all Angels and men of sound nature feel aversion towards unpleasant odours is that such smells are intrinsically at odds with their balance of temper. Allâh alone perceives the divine facet (*wajha-l-Haqq*) in these odours. If certain animals, and men of unsound nature, are not averse to them, it is simply because their temper is receptive to such odours (as distinct from implying that their perception thereof is the same as Allâh's). This is why he said (that the faster's breath is more fragrant) "to Allâh"; for inasmuch as the faster is necessarily of sound temper he dislikes the malodorous breath which results from fasting, in himself as much as in others.

By way of allusion, the Sacred Law attributes supreme perfection to the fast, stating that God has reserved a particular door for it, through which the fasters enter Paradise, and that He has conferred upon this door a distinguished name implying perfection, this name being "*ar-Rayyân*". Now, the idea of perfection implicit therein stems from the fact that the term *ar-rayy* evokes the notion of complete and utter saturation, be this with regard to individual beings or to the land that sustains them. The *hadîth* that tells of this attribution is related by Muslim, who received it from Sahl b. Sa'd according to whom the Messenger of Allâh - Grace and Peace be upon him! - said: "Verily, in Paradise there is a

The Secrets of the Fast (IV)

door called *ar-Rayyân*, and it is through this door that the fasters will enter on the Day of Resurrection. No-one else will enter with them, and it will be said: 'where are the fasters, that they may enter thereby?' When the last of them has entered, it will be closed, and no-one else will enter by that way". The fast is unique in this respect, since he said this of no other act, be it ordained or prohibited. He made it quite clear, by the mention of *ar-Rayyân*, that those who fast attain to perfection in the domain of acts of worship, for they are characterized by that which has no likeness, and that which has no likeness is, in reality, perfect. In this life, those of the Knowers who are "fasters" enter unseen through this door, yet in the life to come they will enter in a way that will be known to all creation.