



Ibn Arabi

The Secrets of the Fast (VI)

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

Chapter 4

Among the saints, there are men and women who fast - may Allâh be pleased with them! They are brought into His safe-keeping by means of an abstinence that endows them with an elevation unto Allâh, the Most-High, such that they are thereby raised above all those things from which the Divine Law has ordered them, either by recommendation or obligation, to distance their souls and limbs. Addressing Himself to such folk, the Most-High has said: *...thereafter, practice the fast until the coming of night-time* (Qur.2,187).

These words refer to the limits within which abstinence is contained - namely, those of the visible world, symbolized by the day. Now the night, for its part, is truly the symbol of mystery (*ghayb*), and upon reaching the degree that corresponds to it, all need for abstinence is left behind, since abstinence, whether it be of the soul or the body, applies solely to that which is forbidden in the visible world. The world of mystery (*‘âlam al-ghayb*), on the other hand, is one of purely (affirmative) Command (*Amr*), and therefore implies no prohibition whatsoever; which is why it is also known as the “world of the (Divine) Command” (*‘âlam al-Amr*).

Moreover, it is pure Intellect. Thus, free from all passion, the dwellers therein are no longer subject to the interdiction implied by constraint. In truth, they are even as Allâh describes them in His Incomparable Book (*‘âziz*), when He praises them, saying: *They oppose themselves not to that which Allâh commands, and they carry out that which they are ordered to do* (Qur.66,6). There is no word of prohibition in this verse, since such would gainsay their true nature.

When Man fasts and forsakes his individual condition (*basharriyya*) for the realm of pure Intellect (*‘aql*), his day, along with his need of both abstinence and interdiction, has come to an end; for, by virtue of his intellect, he has arrived at the world of Command, wherein, since it is pure Intellect, all passions are absent. In view of this, ponder his words - Grace and Peace be upon him! - : “When the night draws hither, the day goes yonder, and the sun is set, verily the faster hath broken his fast”. This *hadîth* should, in essence, be understood in the following way: “...and when the sun has gone from the visible world to breach the horizon of his intellect, then has the faster broken his fast”.

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In other words, it will no longer be necessary for him to practice abstinence, nor, henceforth, will prohibition have any bearing upon him, since his intellect is nourished by wholly other than things which Allâh ordered him to forsake, these being but the affair of his individual nature and the satisfaction thereof.

Know, therefore, that when man attains to this degree, the Divine exaltation (*rif'a*) delivers him from the sway of his individual nature, even as the Divine Theophany frees him from his faculty of reflection (*fikr*), since the latter is itself subject to his elementary and individual nature. It is on this account that Angels do not “reflect”.

That man, on the other hand, should possess a reflexive faculty is due to his being composed of an elementary nature as well as an intellect. Whilst the Intellect is, in itself, theophanic support that remains, as such, aloof (*irtafa'a*) from the baseness of natural reflection, the latter is accompanied by the imagination, a faculty whose nourishment derives from the world of the senses.

In the words of the poet: *When the servant abstains from all but He, the day “fasts” and lengthens*, that is, it rises to its zenith (*irtafa'a*). He who, in spite of his abstinence, fails to attain to this exaltation, is not the abstainer whom we refer, nor does he warrant the name “faster,” for the fast of which we speak is none other than the fast of the Knowers through Allâh, of they who are the Folk of Allâh.