



Ibn Arabi

The Secrets of the Fast

Chapter 2

Know - may Allâh assist thee - that fasting is abstinence (*imsâk*) and exaltation (*rifa'*). Now, the day is said to "fast" (*sâma*) when it reaches its culmination. Imru-l-Qays said: "when the day passes and fasts", meaning "when it reaches its peak". Thus does the fast (*as-sawm*) bear a name derived from the root *sâma*, because it rises to a degree that is loftier than that of any other act of worship. He has raised it - glory to His Transcendence! - by virtue of its being unlike any other act, as we will presently explain. Furthermore, He has withdrawn the fast from His servants, ascribing it instead solely to Himself. He has taken into His own Hand the reward of those qualified by the fast, and has made it His Own. He has bound the fast to Himself and proclaimed it peerless!

Fasting is not an act, but rather the relinquishing of certain acts. The preclusion of any resemblance is, in itself, a negative attribute, a fact that further emphasizes the analogy between the fast and Allâh, for the Most-High has said of Himself: "Nothing is like unto Him". In other words, He has denied that He could have any likeness; and indeed, both the created intellect and the Sacred Law affirm that this is so - glory to His Transcendence! Nisâ'i relates that Abû Umâma said: "I approached the Messenger of Allâh - Grace and Peace be upon him! - and said to him: 'Give me an order that I may take straight from thee!', to which he replied: 'Betake thyself to fasting, for it has no likeness'". Thus did he deny that the fast could be compared with any of the other acts that God has enjoined upon His servants.

Those who know that fasting is a negative attribute, consisting, as it does, in withholding from anything that could break it, are thereby certain that it has no likeness, because it has no essence capable of being described in terms of a reality (*wujûd*) intelligible to us. It is for this reason that Allâh, the Most-High, has said: "The fast pertains to Me alone". The truth of the matter is that the fast is neither an act of worship, nor, indeed, an act (*aml*) of any kind. The word "act", when applied to the notion of fasting, entails the same kind of impropriety as the term "existing" (*mawjûd*) when applied to God, since His Reality (*wujûdu-Hu*) is none other than His very Essence (*dhâtu-Hu*). Consequently, neither the terms *wujûd* nor *mawjûd* can be attributed to Him in the same way as they are to us.

The Secrets of the Fast (II)

Muslim's compendium (of verified *alâdîth*) relates, on the authority of Abû Hurayra, that the Prophet - Grace and Peace be upon him! – said: "Allâh, the Glorious, the Mighty, has said: 'Every deed of the Son of Adam belongs to him with the exception of the fast, for the fast is Mine, and it is I who apportion the recompense thereby obtained'. The fast is a shield. Therefore, whenever one of you is fasting, he should, that day, refrain from unruly behavior and raucousness. If anyone insults him or sets about him, he should say: 'I am a man fasting; I am an abstainer'. By Him in Whose Hand is the soul of Muhammad, verily, on the Day of Resurrection, the breath exhaled from the mouth of the faster will be, to Allâh, more sweetly perfumed than the scent of musk. Two joys belong to the faster: when he breaks his fast, he rejoices in its breaking, and when he meets his Lord - Glorified and Magnified is He! - he rejoices in his fast (*bi-sawmi-hi*)."

Know that the faster meets his Lord by virtue of the qualification "there is naught like unto Him", for, on the one hand, as Nisâ'î's hadîth relates, the Messenger proclaimed the fast's utter incomparability, and on the other, (according to what the Quran says of) God, **there is naught like unto Him**. The faster sees Him, therefore, by means of Himself, such that God is both the "Seer" and the "Seen". It is for this reason that he said - Grace and Peace be upon him! -: "he rejoices in his fast", rather than: "he rejoices in the meeting with his Lord", for joy does not rejoice of itself, being rather that by which one rejoices. He whose Object of vision is God, when he sees and contemplates Him, sees himself through His Sight alone. The joy of the faster stems from his being established at the degree of "non-similitude"!

In this world, on the other hand, he rejoices in the breaking of his fast on account of the fact that his animal soul - which, by its very constitution, requires nourishment - is thereby given its due.