



Ibn Arabi

The Secrets of the Fast (X)

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Chapters 9

The Month of Ramadan

Futuhât, chap.71

Muslim relates the following Prophetic *hadîth*, transmitted by Abû Hurayra: “Upon the coming of Ramadan, the doors of Paradise are thrown wide open, those of the Fire are shut tight, and the demons are bound in chains.” In Nisâ’î’s collection is found this addition: “...and each night, a voice rings out: ‘O ye who seek the good, profit therefrom, and ye who seek the bad, refrain!’”. Nisâ’î received this *hadîth* from ‘Arjafa, who, for his part, received it from one of the Companions of the Prophet - upon whom be the Divine Grace and Peace! - this Companion having heard it from the latter.

Given that the arrival of “Ramadan” heralds the onset of fasting, Allâh thereupon opens the gates of Paradise (*al-janna*), for the latter implies veiling (*as-sitr*), and the fast, consisting, as it does, of relinquishment (*tark*), is one of the “veiled works” apparent to none but Allâh. In other words, since fasting is not an existent act, apparent, as such, to the senses and capable of being performed bodily, it is necessarily concealed from all but Allâh; He alone is aware of its presence in the faster. By “the faster,” we mean him who is designated as such by the Sacred Law, rather than someone who is merely hungry.

And Allâh “shuts tight the doors of the Fire,” whereupon it turns against itself and grows in heat such that its infernos devour one another. It is even so with the faster, for when he fasts he thereby closes the gateways to the fire of his natural modality (*tabî’a*) such that it, too, grows in heat due to the absence of any refreshment. Hence, the faster feels an inner suffering, which increases his desire for the food that he imagines will bring him comfort. Thus is the fire of his yearning intensified by the closing of the door through which he would fain procure sustenance.

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“And the demons are bound in fetters:” now, demons are synonymous with remoteness (from Allâh), whereas, on the contrary, the faster is near to Allâh by virtue of the “Samadânian” quality (that he assumes). In other words, it is by virtue of his betaking himself unto a devotion that “has no likeness” that he draws nigh unto Him who is described by the words “*there is naught like unto Him.*” Therefore, the demons are restrained from whoever is thus qualified. Indeed, it is traditionally said that “demons run 'like blood' in the son of Adam - so stem their flow by means of hunger and thirst,” for hunger and thirst help man to resist what the demons desire of him, namely, that he should do as he pleases and behave so excessively as to transgress the bounds of the Law.

Know also - may Allâh thus teach you a Science “from Himself” and grant you in all things wisdom and power (*hikmatan wa hukman*) - that Ramadân is one of the Names of Allâh, the Most-High, this Name being *as-Samad*. This fact is stated in a Prophetic *hadîth*, related by Ahmad b. 'Adiyyin al-Jurjânî on the authority of Abû Ma'shar. The latter received this sound (*najîh*) *hadîth* from Sa'îd al-Muqbirî, who heard from Abû Hurayra that the Messenger of Allâh - Grace and Peace be upon him! - said: “Do not say 'Ramadân,' for Ramadân is one of the Names of Allâh, the Most-High.” Despite the fact that this chain of transmission is somewhat undermined by the presence therein of Abû Ma'shar, the specialist scholars hold, nonetheless, that this *hadîth* is authentic and should therefore be taken into consideration - may Allâh be pleased with them! It is for this reason that Allâh, the Most-High, says *the month of Ramadân* (Qur.2,185), rather than simply “Ramadân,” and *One from among you who sights the month should fast it* (Qur.2,185), rather than “One...who sights Ramadân.” The *hadîth* of Abû Ma'shar is thereby confirmed, since the Quran clearly supports the judgement of the scholars who maintain that the *hadîth* should be retained despite its weakness.

Allâh has unconditionally enjoined fasting, “which has no likeness,” only in the month upon which He has conferred one of His Names - glory to His Transcendence! It therefore follows that this month must itself be without likeness, for, of all the months of the year, “Ramadân” is the only one to bear one of the Names by which Allâh, the Most-High, designates Himself. It is therefore a chosen Name, applied to a particular month. Such is not the case with Rajab, despite the fact that the Prophet - Grace and Peace be upon him - declared that Rajab is the “Sacred month of Allâh (*shahr Allâh al-muharram*),” for indeed, all the months are, in reality, Allâh's. Rajab's distinction stems exclusively from its being one of the Sacred months.

Finally, it was in this month, during the best of nights (“the Night of Worth”) that, as “Ramadân”, Allâh revealed the Quran *as a Guidance for men; (He also revealed) clear directions drawn from the Guidance and the Discriminatory Book*. As “the Night of Worth,” on the other hand, He revealed it as “a Manifest Book”; in other words, He made it manifestly clear that the Revelation is a Book. The three attributions “Book,” “Quran,” and “Discrimination” (*Furqân*) belong to three quite distinct degrees that are known to the Knowers through Allâh.

The Messenger of Allâh - Grace and Peace be upon him! - forbade people from saying “Ramadân” on account of His having said “there is naught like unto Him”; for, to refer to

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the (month of the fast) simply as “Ramadân” would be to imply that Allâh has a likeness in respect of this Name. The addition of the word “month” is therefore necessary in order that any similitude - specifically one pertaining to the “monthly cycle” - be thereby precluded. The Quality “there is naught like unto Him” thus remains, from this standpoint as from all others, situated at the degree that rightly befits it.

In addition to enjoining the fast, Allâh has recommended the keeping of nightly vigil during this month. Since the latter includes the nights as well as the days, it therefore comprises two states, the first being that of fasting (*sawm*) and the second the breaking thereof (*fitr*). Now, since the name “Ramadân,” as an designation of this month, applies equally to both these states, it thus remains distinct from “Ramadân” as a Name of Allâh, the Most-High; for unlike the fast of the servant, which ends at a temporal limit coinciding with the setting of the sun, the end of the day and the coming of night-time, the Fast which pertains to Allâh knows no breaking. Thus, the term “fasting” does not apply to God in the same way as it does to created beings.

He recommended that one should stand in vigil (*qiyâm*) during the nights of this month in view of His theophanic manifestation (*tajallî*) on the *Day when men will stand (yaqûmu) before the Lord of the worlds* (Qur.83,6). Whilst it is true that this manifestation of Allâh occurs every night of the year, the Theophany that takes place during Ramadân, when the fasters have broken their fast, is not the same as His manifestation to someone who eats without first having fasted. This is on account of the fact that, for those who have abstained, the breaking of the fast follows a “forgoing” that was prescribed by the Law and is described as “having no likeness.” Anyone who has not practised such abstention is thereby classified not as “breaking a fast” (*muftir*), but simply as “eating” (*âkil*); for the term “breaking” implies an “opening up” (*shaqq*), and, in effect, the faster's eventual partaking of food and drink causes the opening up of his digestive tract which had hitherto been closed by the fast in conformity with his advice - Grace and peace be upon him! -; “...stem their flow with hunger and thirst.”

The vigil takes place at night because it stems from a force that dwells in the faster and has its origin in food. This force is related to the non-manifest (*ghayb*) - and therefore to the night as well - for, being imperceptible to the senses, it is itself unseen. Thus does Ramadân include both the fast and the breaking thereof, and both the vigil and its opposite. For this reason Prophetic tradition pronounces: “Let none from among you say: ‘I have fasted the whole of Ramadân’ nor: ‘I have kept vigil throughout the whole of Kamdan.’” The reporter of this *hadîth* added: “I know not whether, by this behest, he meant to reprove all excess (*tazkiya*), or whether he simply meant that a certain amount of sleep or drowsiness is unavoidable,” in which case the dictate would apply solely to the night-time vigil, and not to the day-time fast. This *hadîth* was related by Abû Dawûd via Abû Bakr, who heard it from Allâh's Messenger - Grace and Peace be upon him!

Furthermore, the breaking of the fast (*fitr*) corresponds exclusively, in this instance, to the passing (of the day), the coming (of the night) and the setting (of the sun), regardless of whether or not the faster then partakes of food.