

Question 5: Being Allah's Servant

Question: Who is a “slave” and what is slavery? How can we become the slaves of Allah (awj)?

A true servant of Allah (awj) is he for whom obedience to Allah (awj) is sweet and Allah's (awj) love is delight; he is intimate with Allah (awj) and relies on Him for all his needs.

Servitude can be summed up in three things. First is that the servant doesn't consider himself to own any of what has been bestowed upon him, for slaves own no property. They see all property as Allah's (awj) and when He commands, they spend it; second, a servant doesn't plan for himself; and third, a servant is preoccupied only with Allah's (awj) prescriptions and proscriptions.

With the aforementioned definition, we can understand the essence of servitude and how to achieve it. Servitude is the key to sanctity and “servant” is the best of names. A perfected human is a servant of Allah (awj) and is effaced in the Divine Identity and the Divine Names.

Worship (*‘ibadah*), has been defined by lexicographers as utmost of modesty and humility. They say since “*‘ibadah*” (worship) is the highest level of humility; it wouldn't be fitting except towards the highest being, possessing the greatest perfections and the highest level of generosity. This is why worshipping other than Allah (awj) is false worship tantamount to polytheism, especially since sincerity in worship hasn't materialized.

As Imam Ja'far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (ع) has explained, the word ‘abd is composed of three letters: ‘ayn, ba’, and dal. “‘Ayn” indicates *‘ilm*, knowledge and certainty that a servant has of Allah. The “ba” indicates *bu’d*, the separation and distance he has from other than Allah. And the letter “dal” points to *dunuw*, his closeness to Allah. ¹

The slave is indebted to Allah (awj) for not only all of his perfections, but indeed for his very existence. It is because of this that he submits to Him. By not looking at himself and his own desires, he takes on the colour of his Master and His perfections to the extent that according to the saying of the Noble Prophet (ص), “The true slave of Allah Almighty is he for whom the obedience and love of Allah becomes sweet. He presents his needs to his Lord and becomes intimate with Him. He puts all his trust in Him and has

hope in no one else.”²

According to the saying of Imam Ja’far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (ع), the reality of slavery is in three things, the first is the fact that “The slave does not think that he owns anything that Allah has given him. This is because slaves do not own anything for themselves. They consider all their wealth to belong to Allah. They place whatever they have wherever Allah tells them to. The second is the fact that the slave of Allah does not weigh what is good and bad for himself. Thirdly, he spends all his activity in that which Allah had commanded him to do, and does not do what He has forbidden him from. Because he does not consider himself to own what Allah (awj) has given him, giving it away is easy for Him.

Since the slave of Allah (awj) has relegated his affairs to Allah (awj), the problems of the world become easy for him. And since he spends all his time doing what Allah (awj) has told him to do or staying away from what he has been prohibited from; he has no time left to be ostentatious. Thus, Allah (awj) honours His slave by means of these three things and by means of this, his response to Satan’s challenges and his interaction with the other creatures of Allah (awj) becomes easy. He does not go after the world in order to hoard wealth or show off in front of people. He does not seek any wealth and power that he sees in the hands of others, nor does he spend his days in vain pursuits.”³

Slavery is the key to sanctity. The title “slave” is the best of titles and it is because of this that the name of the Prophet (ص) was ‘Abdullah and on the night of ascension he asked Allah (awj) to grant him servanthood.

The perfect man is the servant of Allah. He has all the manifestations of Divine Names. He is effaced in the Divine Essence.

The lexicographers have defined worship as the pinnacle of humility. They have said that since worship is the highest level of humility, it does not befit anyone other than one who holds the highest levels of existence, perfection, grace, and generosity. Because of this, the worship of other than Allah (awj) is false worship that is tantamount to polytheism.

Worship has three levels: Some people worship Allah (awj) with the hope of getting other worldly rewards or because they fear His punishment⁴ – these are the ordinary believers; some worship Allah in order to gain the honour of servanthood and so that Allah (awj) calls them His slave; some however, worship Allah (awj) because they are in awe of His Might and because they love Him.

It has been related in a sacred tradition that Allah (awj) said, “Oh my slave! Worship me so that I make you like Myself. I say to something, ‘Be,’ and it is, you will also say to something ‘be’ and it will become so.”⁵

Therefore, according to a saying of Imam Ja’far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (ع), “Servanthood is a substance, the kernel of which is Lordship.”⁶

By means of worship, man's soul becomes like a polished mirror in which the Divine lights are reflected. The more it is polished the more will it reflect the flashes of Divine illumination; until such a time that his potential for sanctity will change to actuality and he will become the vicegerent of Allah (awj) in the whole realm of existence. You should know that this is not lordship but it is a vicegerency and a representation in which the effects of lordship become manifested.

The vicegerent of Allah (awj) does not do the work Allah (awj) does. Allah (awj) rather accomplishes his work at the hands of His vicegerent. Through the lattice of the soul of this person, He manifests Himself and reveals His Names and Attributes. Because of this the divine Gnostic is the perfect mirror for the power and grace of Allah (awj).

In all the types and degrees of the miracles of the prophets and the Imams (ع), in reality, it is Allah (awj) who is the absolute agent while the soul of the saint has been effaced in His will. This is the station of servanthood – a station that can be obtained by means of obeying Allah (awj).

The spiritual wayfarer considers himself to be the name of Allah (awj) in this station, to be effaced in Allah (awj) as he recognizes other beings to be the same. If he be a perfect saint, he will become the perfect name of Allah (awj) and apply in himself perfect and absolute servanthood.

In the Noble Qur`an, Allah (awj) says,

“Glory be to He who took his servant on the night journey.”⁷

This indicates the fact that travelling the path to Allah's (awj) nearness can only be achieved by means of servitude. One must forego the pride and haughtiness that comes with presumptions of independence.

In the *tashahhud* first we give witness to the Prophet's servanthood, then to his prophethood. This is because servanthood is the ladder by means of which he ascended to the station of prophethood. In the Salat, which is the night ascension of the believer, we start with the “bismillah” that is the reality of servanthood.

Intention, according to the general public, means the desire to obey Allah (awj) whether that be out of greed or fear. “They call on their Lord, greedily and out of fear.” According to those with wisdom it is the desire to worship Allah (awj) out of respect and in order to acknowledge his greatness. “Worship Allah as if you were seeing Him. If you are not seeing Him, verily, He sees you.”

According to those with the love of Allah (awj), it is the desire to obey Allah (awj) out of love for His essence. Finally, near the Friends of Allah (awj) it means to intend to obey Him and worship Him as an effect of witnessing the beauty of the Beloved, independently and essentially, and to be annihilated in the Lord, essentially, in His attributes and in His actions. One of the most important conditions of intention is sincerity.

Sincerity of intention, in the general public's worship, is purifying one's intention of both patent and hidden polytheism, which include such traits as ostentation, self-conceit, and pride.

“Now, surely, sincere obedience is due to Allah.”⁸

In the worship of The High-ranking, however, it is to purify one's intention from any trace of greed or fear which in their mode of wayfaring is considered polytheism. In the worship of The Possessors of Heart (*ashab al-qulub*), it is to purify one's intentions from egoism which is the greatest polytheism and disbelief in their mode. In the worship of The Most Perfect, it is purifying one's intention of noticing the station of servitude and the act of worship, and further yet noticing the existence. As Imam Khomeini said, “The healthy heart is the one which meets The Truth, without anything else disturbing their intimacy.”⁹

Brief Answer

Detailed Answer

1. Misbah al-Shari'ah, chapter 2:

وَحُرُوفُ الْعَبْدِ ثَلَاثَةٌ (ع ب د) فَالْعَيْنُ عِلْمُهُ بِاللَّهِ وَالنَّهَاءُ بَوْنُهُ عَمَّنْ سِوَاهُ وَالذَّالُّ دُنُوهُ لِلَّهِ تَعَالَى بِأَدَاةٍ كَيْفٍ وَلَا حِجَابٍ

2. Arba'in

3. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 1, pg. 224, no. 17:

أَنَّ لَا يَرَى الْعَبْدُ لِنَفْسِهِ فِيمَا حَوْلَهُ اللَّهُ مَلِكًا لِأَنَّ الْعَبِيدَ لَا يَكُونُ لَهُمْ مَلِكٌ يَرُونَ الْمَالَ مَالَ اللَّهِ يَضَعُونَهُ حَيْثُ أَمَرَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِهِ وَلَا يُدْبِرُ الْعَبْدُ لِنَفْسِهِ تَدْبِيرًا وَجُمْلَةً اشْتِغَالَهُ فِيمَا أَمَرَهُ تَعَالَى بِهِ وَنَهَاهُ عَنْهُ فَإِذَا لَمْ يَرَ الْعَبْدُ لِنَفْسِهِ فِيمَا حَوْلَهُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى مَلِكًا هَانَ عَلَيْهِ الْإِنْفَاقُ فِيمَا أَمَرَهُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى أَنْ يُنْفِقَ فِيهِ وَإِذَا فَوَّضَ الْعَبْدُ تَدْبِيرَ نَفْسِهِ عَلَى مُدَبِّرِهِ هَانَ عَلَيْهِ مَصَائِبُ الدُّنْيَا وَإِذَا اشْتَغَلَ الْعَبْدُ بِمَا أَمَرَهُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى وَنَهَاهُ لَا يَتَفَرَّغُ مِنْهُمَا إِلَى الْمِرَاءِ وَالْمُبَاهَاةِ مَعَ النَّاسِ فَإِذَا أَكْرَمَ اللَّهُ الْعَبْدَ بِهَذِهِ الثَّلَاثَةِ هَانَ عَلَيْهِ الدُّنْيَا وَإِبْلِيسُ وَالْخَلْقُ وَلَا يَطْلُبُ الدُّنْيَا تَكَاثُرًا وَتَفَاخُرًا وَلَا يَطْلُبُ مَا عِنْدَ النَّاسِ عِزًّا وَعُلُوًّا وَلَا يَدْعُ أَيَّامَهُ بِاطِّلًا

4. Nahjul Balaghah, Short saying 237; al-Kafi, vol. 2, pg. 84, no. 5:

عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) قَالَ: الْعِبَادُ ثَلَاثَةٌ قَوْمٌ عَبَدُوا اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ خَوْفًا فَتَلَّكَ عِبَادَةُ الْعَبِيدِ وَقَوْمٌ عَبَدُوا اللَّهَ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى طَلَبَ النَّوَابِ فَتَلَّكَ عِبَادَةُ الْأَجْرَاءِ وَقَوْمٌ عَبَدُوا اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ حُبًّا لَهُ فَتَلَّكَ عِبَادَةُ الْأَحْرَارِ وَهِيَ أَفْضَلُ الْعِبَادَةِ

5. Kalimatollah, pg. 140, no. 154:

عَبْدِي أُطْعِمِي حَتَّى أَجْعَلَكَ مِثْلِي أَقُولُ لِلشَّيْءِ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ تَقُولُ لِلشَّيْءِ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

6. Misbah al-Shari'ah, chapter 2:

...الْعِبَادَةُ جَوْهَرَةٌ كُنْهَهَا الرُّبُوبِيَّةُ

7. Surat al-Isra' (17), Verse 1:

﴿...سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي أَسْرَى بِعَبْدِهِ﴾

8. Surat al-Zumar (39), Verse 3:

﴿أَلَا لِلَّهِ الدِّينُ الْخَالِصُ﴾

9. SIRR al-Salat, pg. 75 (Farsi Version)

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