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Thursday

Title: [The Necessity to Choose Servanthood](#)

DVD title: Waking up to The Rank and Honor of Servanthood
Draw Away From what is Incompatible with Your Servanthood
Tafsir on Ibn At'ala Askandari

Bismillah. Asalaamu aleikum. Well, my dears, it is hard to believe that Allah Swt ennobled the children of Adam with honor, to be amongst the best of His creation. It doesn't say much about the rest of creation. Then, among the children of Hazrat Adam (as), He chose the most beloved of Allah to bring as a mercy to the world, the Prophet Mohammed (sal), and raised him above even Jibreel (as). He took him through experiences no one has ever had, and traveled through time and space beyond where even Jibreel could go, and beyond where Buraq could go. And He brought him to His Own presence in perhaps the most intimate setting one could imagine between man and his Creator. The Prophet Mohammed (sal) had a very unique and private discourse with Allah.

He says in Qur'an, **“Glory be to Allah who did take his servant on a journey by night.”** Allah did not call Prophet Mohammed (sal) by his name or any other title. He elevated him to the highest heights and honored him by calling him Abdullah, His servant. In doing that, He told us that servanthood of Allah is the highest rank, beyond name. He didn't say, “O Mohammed, you are a servant.” He just called him, “My servant.” In this framework, perhaps we can look at the world and see that those who are servants and those who are to be served. You could say there are those who deserve to be served, and those who don't deserve to be served. Anyway, you need to have a servant. The strange irony of it all is that even in the worst circumstances we are seeing this week, in the last 13

days in Gaza, there are still among us people whose calling is to serve: doctors in hospitals that don't have any medical supplies; ambulance drivers in the midst of war; people out there burying other people; people scrounging for food for others; people giving shelter to others. There are all kinds of servitude. That's in the name of necessity, life and death.

Maybe some are saying, "I'm a Muslim, I have to do this," but mostly they are just doing it because they are human beings. Allah Swt is talking to the Prophet Mohammed by speaking to the core of his servitude, in the core of his being. He created us to serve, and He created us also to be served, because only in our willingness to be served can we learn what is a servant. This whole topic of servitude, or servanthood, because it is highest ranked in the eyes of Allah Swt, is chosen by Ibn At'ala Askandari in the 34th Aphorism in his Hikam. He says, "*Amongst the attributes of your human nature...*" Allah created us with this attribute. It is not something that is learned. It is something that is evoked from our *fitrah*. This is not something that some people have and some people don't have. Everyone has it, but some people have it buried so deep it would never be brought forward.

"Among the attributes of your human nature, draw away from everyone who is incompatible with your servanthood." I haven't finished the aphorism. I should say, all of the adults over the age of 40 who are in this room (I'm being generous. We have adults in this room who are under the age of 40) made some kind of a choice to draw away to some degree from those incompatible with their servanthood, because you chose to walk the path of Tasawwuf, and live in this kind of a circumstance, and to be among the believers as your primary place. Among those of you who did that, there are some of you who find yourself working very much in the world. Some work somewhat in the world, and some don't work very much in the world. We all live in the world, so we all do some work in the world. Somehow that part of your nature to draw away from everyone who is incompatible with your servanthood, some quality or sense of that is operating when you

really seek the protection and comfort of Allah.

Some of you under the age of 40, or 30, or 25 are still making choices. That's fine. Shaykh Nooruddeen likes to say, "If you are going to sup with the devil, make sure you use a long spoon." We don't think that's really the truth, when we are at the younger part of that spectrum. We think we are protected; everything's fine; no problem. "I know who I am; I know what I am. I know what I believe. Everything's okay." Believe me – I know that mentality. There may be something to say with that strong of a *niyyat* that you have some kind of rain gear on, or at least an umbrella. But when it's raining real hard like it was the other day, and you have your umbrella and walk to the car, when you close your umbrella, you get wet. You get in the car, and hold the umbrella over your head over the door of the car, and you close it while you are in the car, and as you bring it into the car, you get wet. There is very little chance of being out in the rain and not getting wet, even when you have rain gear on. When you take it off, guess what happens? YOU GET WET. It's ignorance, stupidity and arrogance that makes us think we are not going to be touched by it. By Allah, it's a blessing.

You can look at Askandari's aphorism and say that he's also saying that sin can bring you to Allah: Therefore O man, go out and sin? I don't think that's the point. There are certain things you learn as you get older in life that are irrevocable and irreversible. There are certain things you can't reverse. Some of those things set you on a path you don't even see—very subtly, subtle ways you think and act, the ways you speak, the way people relate to you, or don't, which then determines the kind of people you meet, and [determines] the parameters for the selections of your friends, husbands, wives, or business partners, or employers, or fellow employees. Those things become irrevocable, because they start to determine who you are. They are your identity. You are known to be a great doctor, great civil servant, an expert in this or that. It keeps going like this, focusing you and focusing you, making it is harder and harder to break away from those pre-determined attributes.

If by chance somewhere along the line you wake up and realize, “Ah! That’s what Islam was all about.” “That’s what I’ve been studying for the last 30 years.” “That’s what I was brought up with.” “That’s the environment of my community,” wherever it is, Adams Center or whatever. One day, you say, “Wow. That’s what it’s all about.” Three kids later, four jobs later, a few hundred thousand dollars in debt, some bad habits, some things you can never realize that you wanted to realize from way back when—all of a sudden you realize that the things that were said to you were true. You wake up to the idea of servanthood, and you find out that the way back is through all these doors that only open one way. I don’t say this; Ibn Atala Iskandari doesn’t say this; and Allah doesn’t say this *only* to scare us (or you, or me), but certainly to scare us to some degree. The idea that being scared is some kind of really bad thing is ridiculous. You try to scare your kids all the time when they are little so they don’t hurt themselves. We are not trying to scare, but to warn them.

Warners are just that, people who see what the danger is. For the most part, they are not listened to, because most people say, “I want to find out for myself.” They should say, “I want to find out by myself or with myself,” and then realize it is the *nafs*. Then he says, “...so that you may be responsive to the call of Allah and be near His presence.” If you don’t withdraw from those who are incompatible with your servanthood – and I don’t mean service to the country, or to humanity. I mean your service to Allah. He is reminding us that only when you are *not* in that kind of company, only when you *are* in the company of the servants, people who have made those same kinds of choices, can you even *hope* to be able to respond to the call of Allah. He doesn’t say that you may hear the call of Allah; but to be responsive to the call of Allah and near (or aware of) His presence.

We know Allah is the Lord of the Worlds and nothing is greater than He or similar to Him.

We know Allah Swt is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, Eternal, without a beginning or end, and self-sufficient, and everything we need is in Allah. We know that because it's in Qur'an. But we don't *know* it. We know it's in Qur'an. We know it's told to us in Hadith. But we don't *know* that until we need to know it. Assume that's true, that over us is something so much greater than us that it is indescribable, and that it has set all these things in motion, and has given us the potential to be aware of that creator, and aware of our place and our role; and not limited us in any way in what we can do, how we can serve. But [it gives] just some warning: like serve with the right people in the right circumstances for the right reasons. It's not about doing what you want to do, but doing what needs to be done with those who have the capability to do it.

I don't think there are an awful lot of people who want to be in Gaza right now. Let alone running around in the streets picking up bodies or wounded people. I don't believe there's any person in the world who really feels that is their calling. But there are people who, out of necessity, are doing that, and are willing themselves to do that, and willing to do that, because it's needed. Then you look around you and say, "What is really needed?" We need universal health care. We need infrastructure rebuilding. We need enforcement of rules and regulations so the economy won't go through this again. Of course, those are all the things that are needed. What are the blocks to that? Political posturing, political ideology, power. After all, all those decisions are in the hands of people, 90% of whom are in the positions they are in because they want power, name, or fame. It's not like it's all up for a vote. Of course, those things are needed; but what's really needed? What would make all those things passé? What would make poverty passé? What would make lack of food or the desire for war passé? What would make us truly the healthiest nation in the world (which we are not)? Do you know the answer to that?

Do you think it's just a simple answer, like "faith in God," or "trust in Allah"? What will actually make us that way? If you really think about it, you'll find out. And you can find

some of it within the core of the new President's philosophy, though he'll be able to articulate that for 1 hour and 33 minutes, and then all the political realities will strike. If people really were servants (not just out of necessity, but in their hearts); and if they were really satisfied with where Allah Swt placed them; and if there were those servants who would undo the wrongs of society to the degree that people could co-exist... okay, that's philosophy. When Allah says to us to make Allah Swt our lord, and to worship Him and submit ourselves to Him, and become His servant, the subtext of that narrative is "Embody the characteristics, the attributes of Allah Swt in your own life." Embody in your own self the qualities of a servant, and leave the attributes of lordship to Allah Swt. Don't try to be the lord over anyone. We say that in English, "Don't lord it over people."

What are the attributes of a servant? Is a Muslim servant someone who prays 5 times a day and puts their head on a mat? Does that make them a servant? It sure makes them not a servant if they don't do it. But things are not so black and white. What does it mean to be a servant? It means to be obedient to your Lord. Obedience means what? Sit? Walk? Stand? Fetch? Do we think in terms of canine obedience? What is obedience to your Lord, to obey Allah Swt? You have to have knowledge to obey Allah. You cannot just obey Allah without knowledge. You have to have knowledge of Shar'iah. You have to have knowledge of what Allah Swt has given us. If you are a Jew or Christian, you at least have to have knowledge of the Ten Commandments—guidelines. You have to have knowledge of the Shar'iah.

Then you have to realize how little power you really have, even if you have almost an unchallenged eight years of it. Even if you had an 80% approval rating for those eight years; you still had a limit to your power as a very successful President of the US might have. One of the other qualities is to have humility. How do you have humility? You have humility when you realize the vastness and the complexity of all this and say, "Ya Allah, show me some small aspect of all this that I can truly do with my heart and my soul

– not just my desires, likes and dislikes – that is really needed, that’s really reflective of who I am, where I come from, what You have made me, and what good I can do.”

Then you will begin to have humility, because you will begin to understand not only your identity, but your place. That’s what happens to us. With that comes submissiveness, Islam, submitting. When we go on a trip for our organization, we are told to keep your receipts and then submit them. You will get paid back - that kind of submission.

Then, there is the difference between privilege and entitlement, and permission. We are not entitled to a lot, though most people act as if they are. The way one overcomes entitlement is to find loyalty within themselves, to realize the tremendous energy, power (good power), capability, that lies in loyalty. Each one of these words I am using, each one of these characteristics are mines that can be mined for tremendous wealth. Loyalty isn’t just some kind of ego-social characteristic, but it runs very, very deep. One of the ideas I had was we should find the money to give scholarships to young people to get educated from high school to a graduate degree, if that’s what they want. Then we would have a modicum of their loyalty.

If we are sincere in what we are guiding them to look at, for example, serving humanity in x number of ways (economics or commerce, science or technology, government or non-government), and our goal is really to create a more balanced, peaceful humanity (to rid it of poverty and food insecurity); and we can really help people educate themselves to that mentality, then it is good to have loyalty. You can guide them in a good way. That’s one example in *dunya*. I remember all those years when I was practicing yoga, I had a wonderful guru who I had tremendous love and affection for. Even though he had passed on, I felt his presence very strongly. Yet, I knew that there was more I had to learn. The institution he had left behind had limited the availability of his teachings. But when I moved away from that and found Hazrat, I struggled with loyalty issues, *alhamdulillah*. Then I got certain indications and permissions; only because I struggled with those issues.

Had I not, I would have just been another eclectic yogi-Sufi-whatever. But a number of people in this room know that I struggled with that. Only because I did, and because I found the correlation, in his turning me over to Hazrat, there was no conflict. I was able to remain loyal to the path, to the goal—loyalty.

Then of course, being sincere as a servant means holding your service to a very high level of importance. Realizing how unique and how important, how necessary servanthood is, one could not allow themselves to be anything but be sincere in their service, and couldn't do it half-heartedly, couldn't do it habitually. One would really have to come to realize what an honor it is to be a servant of Allah. After all, what did he say? "*He holds the servant in the highest rank.*" Once you realize these things, and you allow yourself to realize them – they are not difficult, if you have the courage to look at them. If you have the courage to turn your life over to Allah Swt; if you have the courage to realize that Allah is your Rabb, then naturally other things come. Like, I guess I have to say it: It's awesome.

You are in awe of Allah. You are in awe of the whole system. You are in awe of all the nuances of the system. Because of that, you listen very attentively to the *amr*, the command. You listen very attentively to what is said in Qur'an, in Hadith, by the *shuyukh*, because your ego, your desires, and your wants will all try to filter it, to twist it, to bend it and make it fit your pattern. Once you respect the command, once you respect what you are in awe of, and you have a humble obedience, and you realize that the highest rank is to be a servant of that, then you will be content with His decree, and your state and your place. You can arrive at that at any moment: at 15, 20, 25, 35, or 40 or 50. You can arrive at this at any age, and you will be content with His decree. That's why Ibn At'ala tells us you should withdraw from people who are incompatible with your servanthood, and anything that will not allow you to taste that or experience that, or get near to understanding what servanthood is.

You should detest whatever keeps you from it, like arrogance, ego, conceit, and showing off, especially your good works. That doesn't mean not telling people about it. In the world we live in today, we have to tell people about our good works so they can ask you to do more good works. Or, you can be independently wealthy and just do them for your own good. That would be wonderful. If we could ever get ourselves together to make one product that would sell, or if we could just get an endowment, we could just go do our good works without anybody knowing. As soon as we find any resentment in us, any envy; as soon as we find any prejudice or bias in us, desire for recognition and prestige; or as soon as we sense any disloyalty in us, or even plain old rebellion, then we know that we are supping with the devil with a short spoon.

We have to see who we are and recognize who we are. If we recognize all of our good attributes, Ibn At'ala Askandari says in the 178th Aphorism, "*Realize your attributes, and He, Allah, will help you with His attributes. Realize your lowliness, and He will help you with His sublimity. Realize your impotence, and He will help you with His power. Realize your weakness, and He will help you with His might and power.*" You notice that every one but the first one were opposites: weakness and power, etc. So we have to go back to the first one that says, "*Realize your attributes, and Allah will help you with His attributes.*" It means to realize those attributes in you that keep you in the wrong company, pursuing the things that take you away from your servanthood. It is not that you realize your patience, and He'll give you more patience; or realize your power, and He'll give you more power; realize your love and He'll come at you with more love. That's not what is meant here. What is meant here is the opposite. Be courageous enough to see your weaknesses, and Allah Swt will help you with His attribute.

When we realize our attributes, we will find that we are created from weakness, lowliness, that we are living at the lower levels of our lives. We might be rich, famous, smart,

creative, powerful, and loved by many people; but you realize you are living at a very low level of capability. That's why we become tired out by our jobs, by our responsibilities, by our worries, by our desires, by our fears. That's why we become tired, and why we are never satisfied, why we are needy. Because we don't have any real power, except if we are in the right company, doing the right thing with our will and our service. Therefore, we should become humble before Allah, and Allah will help us with His generosity. From a systems approach, it makes perfect sense. In the system, we say, nature abhors a vacuum. In the system Allah created, if you put in His light something that is transformed by that light, the light will transform it. If you or I expose our weakness, then that Divine presence obliterates that weakness. If we expose that fear, that Divine presence obliterates that fear. Beyond that fear is the *fitrah*, the courage. Behind that weakness is strength. Behind that doubt is faith. Behind that lack of sincerity is sincerity.

Allah Swt is only positive. The force of the system designed by the Designer is only positive, so that when something is exposed that is contrary to what is positive, that positive nature overcomes it. What protects it from the rays of the goodness, if you will, what doesn't allow that change to take place is arrogance, disobedience, and desires. Those can become so strong that the goodness is almost impenetrable, until some tragedy happens, or some epiphany happens—if you are lucky enough. Nuradeen can tell us about people who can go cold turkey on drugs or alcohol. He doesn't see many of them, because they don't need his help. But there aren't very many. But there are some, and we have the arrogance to think that, "I am one of them." If we don't believe this is possible, just look at the Prophet (sal) who was one man against the whole of the tribes of Arabiyya. Allah was his supporter. In the short time of one generation, 23 years, he changed the whole course of history. He changed the face of this world, and he changed the beliefs of millions upon millions of people, and set in motion something that would create the largest group of supposed believers in the world.

Ibn At'ala says, "A goal which you seek by your Lord is not held back. A goal which you seek by yourself is not easy." We live at a time when we think that if it's not easy, and I accomplish it, see how great I am. It's just the ego. The reason we do that is because we don't want our goals filtered by what is *halal* versus *haram*, what is *ma'ruf* versus *munkar*, or by something that is encouraged as opposed to discouraged, or by something that is allowable versus disallowable. How many people started out their careers saying, "I'm going to do whatever I can to get in power so I can do good for the world?" and walk all over everyone and push their way to the top. How many of those people give a damn about the world by the time they get there? They may; they may just be misguided.

On the Internet today, they have an event planned. The event is called something like, "Is it really possible to end poverty?" There is a cocktail hour which goes along with it. Wouldn't it be really cool if they had a juice cocktail party? We are sitting with his father's discovery that can do an awful lot to end poverty, and probably end food security issues all over the world—that's what we are sitting with. The fact that you have to have an event, a seminar, a big discussion on is it possible or is it too late to end poverty, tells you that you are sitting with the wrong people. These people don't know the way to the answer.

If that applies on that macro level, do you think it does not apply in the most micro level of your own life and choices? That is why Allah Swt says, "**Be a servant.**" It's not that these people are not serviceful. They are. There were some wonderful people and programs there. But what you have to do to get the funding, the okay, the approval, can turn you into a *kafir*, virtually. If you want to get a bill passed in Congress, here's the cost of it. You want to do good and repair the infrastructure of the country? Here's the people you will have to work with. You want to fight a war? You can hire Halliburton or Blackwater, mercenaries. That's okay, because the goals are fine. You want to teach someone a lesson? Let's not educate them. Let's not sit down and talk to them. Let's not make it worth their while. Let's not talk about equity and balance. Let's not talk about harmony;

let's bomb the hell out of them, kill enough of their families, (or "grazing on the land..." which comes from the Torah, which means remove the people from the land because they are on your land.) You know you are with the wrong people. You know you are at the wrong situation. When you don't know that, that's when it is a problem.

I'm talking about us. How do we keep straight? What does it mean to be on the *sirāṭal mustaqīm*? What does it mean to be the *ummata wasita*? Do you think it's a bad philosophy because it's called Islam, or smacks of organized religion? Believe me, look around. There is no organized Islam. It's all disorganized. You never have to worry about being part of an organized religion. It's all disorganized. The good part of that is it has to be individual. How do you make it individualized and collectively effective? That's why you need values. If we rely on our self, and our means to seek the goal, through our own power, through our own capabilities and influence and efforts, it's very difficult to attain that goal. But if we use our capability, power, skills, influence, efforts and creativity *fī sabīlillah*, for the sake of Allah, and we honestly rely on Allah, and we do it as a servant, then Allah will facilitate for us the means and open the doors for us and help us to achieve the goal.

But you cannot say, "Look, see! I achieved the goal. I must have had Allah's help." There are a lot of goals out there that are being achieved that sure as heck don't seem to have Allah's help. Look at the people. Relying on Allah is not just having hope in Allah and doing nothing. Hope goes hand in hand with action. I met a man with the International Youth Fund who said, "Bottom line is, you have to give people hope." Hope goes hand in hand with real action. So you do your best with what Allah has provided, and you rely on Allah, but you don't compromise your history, your loyalty, your foundation, your practices—not one day. It always happens: you miss a prayer, or we forget we should be spending some time with the Qur'an. When we are in this environment, it's easier.

Ibn At'ala says, "*Hope goes hand in hand with deeds. Otherwise, it's not hope. It's a wish.*" We say we need to give the people in Gaza hope; there are no words that can give them hope, only deeds. And [it is] also [true] for us in our work and our community. Things are getting worse in this country. I said today that we need to have greenhouses and grow food year round, so at least we know there will be food on our table—necessity. When you can do something, and you know you can do it, then you have to do it, by Allah.