

What is Self-Knowledge?ⁱ

It Is Not Psychology!

True Meaning of Self-Knowledge

What Is Self-Knowledge, and What Role Does It Play in Our Lives?

Self-knowledge, as its name suggests, is the knowledge of one's 'self.'

But what is the 'self' which is the subject of study in self-knowledge? Which dimension of our existence is it? How does knowledge of the 'self' benefit us?

We all come up with many simple and challenging questions during our lifetime. Some of these questions are innate in our mind, and we are born with them. They were in the minds of early human beings and will be in the minds of the last generation of humans. These questions never leave us.

In fact, we came to this world to find the answers to these questions.

All people who become intellectually mature face these questions at least once in their lifetime, but not everyone reacts in the same way:

- Some people try to find an answer and will not give up until they find it.
- Some others ignore these questions and go on with their daily lives.

The process of finding the exact definition of **self-knowledge** begins with this difference. Those who look for the answer to these questions and find it will gain **self-knowledge**. In the following sections, we will address these questions and their relation to **self-knowledge**.

What Are the Most Important Questions in Life?

As humans, even when we are at the peak of beauty, success, fame, and fortune, we still do not feel peaceful at heart. It seems that there is a questioning **self**, deep within us, and it constantly asks us, “What is the point of all this?” This **self** asks questions which cannot be answered through gaining wealth and success. It has fundamental questions which need rational answers, such as:

- Who am I?
- Where did I come from?
- What is my mission in this vast world?
- How was this universe created?
- What is the purpose of creation?
- Does the world have a creator? If yes, what are His attributes?
- What is death?
- Does my life continue after death?

And so on...

It is only through **self-knowledge** that we can answer these questions. The questioning **self** within us calms down as soon as we know and reconcile with our ‘**true self.**’ⁱⁱ It becomes so calm that even the heaviest storms of life cannot disturb our inner peace. Then we will honor both the challenges and the pleasures of our lives. In fact, we can know the meaning of life only if we know the ‘**self.**’ It is absurd to claim that something other than **self-knowledge** would bring people peace and happiness.

The Difference between Self-Knowledge and Psychology

As we mentioned earlier, **self-knowledge** refers to the knowledge of one's **self**.

Now,

- What do we mean by the 'self'?
- What are its attributes?
- Is there any difference between the essence of **MY self** and **YOUR self**?
- Is **self-knowledge** the study of our personality traits, needs, interests and feelings?
- Does it refer to our goals, beliefs and values?
- Or does it go beyond all these concepts?

Unfortunately, the concept of **self-knowledge** has been distorted over time and lost its true meaning. Therefore, before discussing what **self-knowledge** is, we should first clarify what it is **NOT**.

These days, many websites, books, and magazines present their content as **self-knowledge**, but what they are really discussing is a part of psychology that has been mislabeled as **self-knowledge**. Psychology studies have nothing to do with knowing the 'self,' but rather they study moral and behavioral patterns.¹ Psychologists believe that different people have different interests, talents, beliefs, and desires:

- Some are introverts, while others are extroverts.
- Some are risk-takers, while others are more cautious.
- Some are perfectionists, others beg for love...

In psychology, when we talk about the 'self,' we actually refer to understanding

¹. <https://positivepsychology.com/self-knowledge>

and knowing people's individual characteristics. Therefore, since people have different behaviors, each person has a unique **self** which is different from that of others. However, **true self-knowledge** does not accept this idea because the 'self' is an unchangeable entity. In other words, it is the same for all humans, and there is no difference between them in that respect.

Self-Knowledge, a Concept Revisited

It is reasonable to claim that knowing what we are and what we are not is the most important thing to do in life. Each of us has a 'true self' or 'true me,' which was with us before we were born. It has been with us since our birth and will stay with us forever. My **self** is not different from yours or from that of any other person since we all share the same origin.

This **true self** has the following unique characteristics:

- It does not change over time.
- It has nothing to do with being male or female.
- It is not affected by education, financial ability, or social status.
- Health or sickness does not change it.
- It is not influenced by religion and beliefs.

Therefore, our **self** is not a man or woman, a student or employee, a father or mother. It is not ugly or beautiful, Muslim or Christian. It is only our 'self.' The truth of our existence is not dependent on any of these things. Beauty, intelligence, career, social status, health or physical disability, wealth or poverty has nothing to do with the 'self.' So the presence or lack of any of these qualities does not increase

or decrease our worth because all of these belong to the lower dimensions of our existence. We are higher and more valuable than all these qualities.

We have already discussed what the '**true self**' is NOT. However, the main question has been left unanswered: "**What is self-knowledge**"?

And other questions have arisen too:

- Knowing about which dimension of our being is considered **self-knowledge**?
- What are the different dimensions of our **being**?
- Which dimension of our being is the '**true self**'?
- Why is it necessary to know the '**true self**'?
- How does knowing or not knowing this '**true self**' affect the quality of our lives?

Before you continue to read the next articles, please take a moment to reflect on these questions, and let us know your thoughts.

ⁱ. In these articles, we have used the term **self-knowledge** repeatedly. However, there is a difference in perspective on self-knowledge between Western psychologists and philosophers and the theory presented in our blog articles. From the perspective of Western theorists, self-knowledge includes several domains such as the physical world, social comparisons, reflected appraisals, introspection, CBT-style approaches, mindfulness techniques, etc. However, in our articles, it deals with knowing the true self; it is a prerequisite for other kinds of knowledge.

ⁱⁱ. The theory of the true self and the false self was advanced by British psychoanalyst "Dr. Donald Winnicott"ⁱⁱ in a series of papers in the 1960s. Winnicott contends that everyone is divided into these two selves, and that people develop a false self to protect their inner, more vulnerable true self. The true self refers to a sense of self based on authentic experience, and the feeling of being truly present and alive. The false self is a defensive façade, behind which the person can feel empty, its behaviors being learnt and controlled rather than spontaneous and genuine. (<https://theweekenduniversity.com/true-or-false-winnicotts-notions-of-self/#:~:text=The%20theory%20of%20a%20true,inner%2C%20more%20vulnerable%20true%20self>)

However, in our articles, the true self refers to a self that has a correct perspective on one's self and the universe, seeing its truth as a spiritual aspect rather than a natural or material one. Morteza Motahari states, "This is where man finds that his real self, his true self, his true will, which is under the command of reason...But the authority that gives me the command of sensuality is foreign and alien. He is not true 'me'."

The true self is a fixed reality which is the same in all human beings. It has been with us since before birth, and it will be with us forever. Your self is not different from my 'self,' or from that of any other person. That is because all human beings share the same origin.

The true self has the following unique characteristics:

- It does not change over time.
- It has nothing to do with our being male or female.
- Education and socioeconomic status does not affect it.
- Our health condition does not change it.
- It is not related to our religion and beliefs.