

## Difference Between Knowledge and *Ma'rifa*

### Which One Matters More?

#### Are Knowledge and *Ma'rifa* the Same Concept?

We have all heard the terms knowledge and *ma'rifa* many times. But how much do we truly understand their exact meanings?

What is the relationship between knowledge and *ma'rifa*?

Which holds greater significance?

Some of us mistakenly consider knowledge and *ma'rifa* to be synonymous, and we tend to use them interchangeably. However, while knowledge and *ma'rifa* are related, they have fundamental differences. Knowledge refers to acquiring information and general understanding of various phenomena, while *ma'rifa* indicates detailed knowledge and heartfelt certainty (*yaqeen*). We acquire knowledge through intellect, but the heart is where we acquire certainty and *ma'rifa*. Someone who has acquired *ma'rifa* is not only knowledgeable but has also gained a valuable asset. Innately, we humans are passionate about gaining awareness and information across various fields, to the point that some of us even develop a lust for knowledge. We constantly participate in various classes or are always studying different books and gaining a great deal of information on various topics. It is important to note that acquiring knowledge is highly recommended by great men of God. However, the important question is: What is our goal in seeking knowledge? Do we solely tend to accumulate a mass of information in our minds, or is there a deeper objective? Is the information we gain also practical in reality

and useful to solve our spiritual and moral issues, or not? For instance, after reading multiple books on anger management and cultivating a pleasant disposition, has our behavior improved, or do we remain the same irritable, bad-tempered individual? As we go through this lesson, we will discuss the relationship between knowledge and *ma'rifa*, explore their differences, and discover the importance of each.

### **The Relationship Between Knowledge and *Ma'rifa***

Knowledge is a prerequisite for *ma'rifa* or asset. When we acquire knowledge, we gather information that makes us knowledgeable about something. However, knowledge alone does not bring us skill and power. Skill and power result from gaining *ma'rifa*. But what exactly is *ma'rifa*? *Ma'rifa* is the knowledge that transcends the intellect and reaches the heart. In other words, *ma'rifa* is the knowledge that has come to fruition as a result of repetition, practice, and mental imagery.

*Ma'rifa* brings power and capability and is the source of effect. For example, by studying the driver's manual handbook, one gains extensive information about driving etiquette and laws. However, merely knowing this information does not enable us to drive a car. Becoming a professional driver is a relatively long process that results from repetition and practice. To become a driver, we must sit behind the wheel and put our knowledge into practice, so that we gradually reach the asset of mastery in this field and become a professional driver. At this stage, no one can take this asset away from us because it has become united with our soul and has

become part of our existence, to the extent that we do not even need to think about actions like braking, honking, shifting gears, etc. Our soul performs these actions automatically without conscious thought. Thus, *ma'rifa* is the result of combining knowledge and action. A person who has reached *ma'rifa* has transformed his intellectual knowledge into an asset and heartfelt certainty. A striking illustration of this transformation can be seen in the fear of the dead. While most of us intellectually understand that a corpse poses no threat, we may still feel fear because this knowledge has not evolved into *ma'rifa* and certainty. On the other hand, a mortician handles the deceased without fear, fully assured that they cannot cause harm. In fact, the difference between us and the mortician is that while we know the dead cannot harm us, the mortician has experienced it and attained certainty.

### **The Importance of Acquiring Knowledge and *Ma'rifa***

No sound mind can deny the great importance and value of acquiring knowledge. Many great men of God have emphasized the importance of knowledge and encouraged its pursuit. However, it is crucial to understand that knowledge alone is not useful. Knowledge and acting on what we have learned should lead us to the main goal, which is *ma'rifa* and asset <sup>1</sup>. Therefore, if we fail to act on the knowledge we have acquired and ultimately do not gain *ma'rifa*, our knowledge is not only useless, but may also be harmful and a means by which Satan would make us arrogant and proud to deviate us from the right path. As previously mentioned,

---

<sup>1</sup>. Imam Ali: "Knowledge is the first guide and action is the final end."

Qadhi Nasih al-Deen Abu al-Fath 'Abd al-Wahid Ibn Muhammad Al-Tamimi al-Amudi, "*Ghurar Al-Hikam Wa Durar Al-Kalim*." Qom: Ansariyan Publications, pp.1904.

everything we engage with contains both fire and light; it can create both Heaven and Hell. Although knowledge is inherently light, if it does not lead to action and does not help the spiritual and divine part of our being, it offers nothing but fire.

Having understood the significance of knowledge and *ma'rifa*, as well as the necessity of acquiring *ma'rifa* and asset, the question arises: What is the most important asset that we must seek to acquire?

### **The Most Important Asset**

Certainly, we need to acquire assets across all dimensions of our existence. Lacking various assets, whether inanimate, vegetative, animalistic, or intellective, can affect aspects of our lives and we may face difficulties. However, since the impact of these assets is confined to this world, the challenges arising from their absence are also limited to this world and would end with death; therefore, their absence does not critically hinder our growth and development. There is only one asset that, if not acquired, will severely impact both our worldly and afterlife existence, and those are the assets related to the spiritual or supra-rational dimension <sup>2</sup> because, as previously noted, our essence as a human being is our supra-rational dimension or our heart. Thus, the only true asset that we greatly need in both this worldly life and the hereafter is a sound heart.

A sound heart is one that has acquired divine names and attributes such as being beneficent, kind, forgiving, grateful, patient, generous, etc., becoming similar in every aspect to its true Beloved, that is, Allah. We have been created to achieve

---

<sup>2</sup> The Holy Quran, 26:88-89

this goal, and we will also be evaluated based on these assets in the hereafter. In fact, the degree of happiness and bliss each person experiences in the hereafter depends on how many divine names they have acquired during their lifetime. Inanimate, vegetative, animalistic, and intellective assets will also be useful for us when they contribute to the supra-rational dimension, drawing us closer to God and helping us acquire divine names. For instance, someone who uses their wealth for charity and helping others acquires the name "Generous." There is no blessing or affliction, and no good or evil in life, except as a means for the manifestation of God's names and the acquisition of our assets and existential *ma'rifa*.

In this lesson, we explored the definitions of knowledge and *ma'rifa*, their relationship, and the importance of each. The information and awareness that we obtain by studying and participating in various classes are called knowledge. However, *ma'rifa* differs from knowledge. Whenever we act on our knowledge, we gradually attain asset or *ma'rifa*. This asset brings power and capability and is the source of effect. The reason behind our existence and the purpose of our creation is to acquire assets in the supra-rational dimension and to embody divine names. Ultimately, the knowledge that does not lead to acquiring *ma'rifa* will not be of any benefit to us, like someone who has learned ethics but remains, in practice, immoral, jealous, or resentful.