

## **Relationship Between Knowledge and Desire | How Does Knowledge Shape Our Desires?**

### **What Is the Relationship Between Knowledge and Desire? On What Basis Should We Set Our Concerns?**

You may have wondered what truly lies at the root of our desires and inclinations. What is the relationship between knowledge and desire? Do we have a longing for everything around us? Are we drawn to every kind of activity? Do we enjoy the company of every person, or does everything bring us joy? In life, you have likely met people whose concerns differ greatly. Some place material gains and social status at the top of their priorities, while others pursue learning and education. Some are fully absorbed in their own work and personal lives, whereas others are preoccupied with probing into the affairs of others. This raises an important question: what determines the direction of our desires and inclinations? What do our longings reveal about us? And Have we chosen the right foundation to guide our concerns?

In previous lessons, we mentioned that the degree of our knowledge and *ma'rifa* sets the measure of our desire and enthusiasm. Our desires are directly tied to the depth of our knowledge and insight. But how exactly is this relationship between knowledge and desire defined? Whom and what should we strive to understand? And how can we discern whether our knowledge is guiding us along the right path?

### **Our Most Important Task in the World**

As we have discussed in earlier lessons, the purpose of our creation is none other

than to become similar to Allah and to acquire His Divine Names and Attributes. Yet this similarity, and the acquisition of those attributes, can only be achieved through knowing God. How can we become similar to something, or attain it, if we do not truly know it? Thus, we may say that the most important task in this world is to attain knowledge about God, for it is the essential prerequisite to fulfilling the very purpose for which we were created. However, true knowledge about God is inseparable from self-knowledge—recognizing our status as God’s deputy on earth, endowed with all of His Names and Attributes in potential form. In reality, our foremost duty in life is to acquire knowledge of both God and ourselves. This knowledge is not significant merely because it increases what we possess or grants us power; rather, its importance lies in transforming the origin of our desires and inclinations, and in laying the groundwork for a healthy birth into the Hereafter. A correct understanding of the relationship between knowledge and desire manifests itself in the way we choose our way of life, directing the course of our aspirations towards the goal of reaching Allah.

### **The Impact of *Ma’rifah* on Lifestyle**

The more knowledge and *ma’rifah* we acquire, the more we become concerned with what is important to Allah as our Lord and Mentor. —just as an exemplary student always strives to align their vision with that of their teacher, knowing that success lies only in faithfully following the teacher’s guidance in every detail. However, as mentioned before, knowledge and *ma’rifah* are not the same. Our task is to acquire *ma’rifah*, for it is this that grants us true power and assets. Mere knowledge does not bring this about; in fact, when knowledge exceeds its proper

bounds or is misapplied, it can corrupt the soul and obstruct our journey. Therefore, in light of the relationship between knowledge and desire, we must shape our lifestyle, planning, and activities in such a way that they lead to deeper understanding—both of ourselves and of Allah. This knowledge ultimately influences our life, concerns, and desires, guiding us toward the right path.

Having extensive religious knowledge without true faith and conviction is of no benefit. Only knowledge that has been transformed into belief and inward certainty can truly influence us. This brings us to a crucial question: what are the signs of authentic understanding and true *ma'rifa*? How can we know when our information has passed beyond the realm of mere data and has become our assets?

### **Signs of Genuine *Ma'rifa***

It may seem puzzling that worldly attainments do not bring the same degree of joy and satisfaction to everyone. Not all people are equally delighted by purchasing a house or a car, nor do all share the same eagerness for earning a doctoral degree or securing a prestigious position. Why is it that some devote their entire energy to acquiring a particular worldly achievement, while others regard such attainments merely as instruments for advancing their greater goals?

The answer is found in a person's level of *ma'rifa* and in the relationship between knowledge and desire. One who has attained a true understanding of Allah and defines the purpose of creation as reaching the Absolute and Infinite perfection is far less captivated by the limited and fleeting perfections of this world. Because such a person seeks the infinite, they do not allow themselves to be distracted by what is temporary. Instead, they pursue those perfections that draw them closer to

their ultimate purpose—attaining similarity to Allah. And since they are not attached to the lower, limited perfections of this worldly life, they are prepared to part with them whenever necessary. Thus, one of the key effects and signs of true *ma'rifa* is that it transforms the very nature of our concerns, shifting the substance of our desires from finite and passing aims to those that are boundless and everlasting—desires that befit the dignity of the human being and are in harmony with our true self.

### **Not Becoming Attached to Worldly Perfections**

The signs of genuine *ma'rifa* extend beyond what has been mentioned. When one attains a correct understanding of Allah and of the truth of their infinite self, they are able to distinguish between their true, higher self and the lower, non-human dimensions of their being. As a result, they do not become excessively absorbed in worldly achievements or material pursuits. In other words, they recognize that these aspects serve merely as tools and means, rather than as the ultimate goals of their journey.

To illustrate, consider this example: imagine you are traveling to a new home in another city and must spend a night at a guesthouse along the way. No matter how appealing the guesthouse may be, you would not begin decorating it or bringing in furniture, for you understand that your stay is temporary and that the place exists solely to provide rest and facilitate your journey. In the same way, all lower dimensions of our existence—such as possessions, family, or social status—are intended merely as instruments to help us achieve our true purpose. Our ultimate goal in this world is clear: if any of these pursuits hinder our connection with Allah

or impede our healthy birth into the Hereafter, then we have failed to fulfill our true purpose.

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