

4. To Obtain True Knowledge

[His Discourses on Knowledge](#)

[Introduction](#)

Secular knowledge brings recognition and respect to a person and may lead to wealth. Spiritual knowledge helps bring one closer to God. In either case, if the knowledge is acquired and applied, it instills wisdom and refinement, and this is knowledge in the real sense. However, if knowledge does not bring a positive change, then it is merely information. In this chapter, Imam Ali (p) discusses true knowledge with insightful examples.

[An Ignorant Scholar](#)

A scholar who does not act according to his knowledge is like an ignorant person who does not derive any benefit from his ignorance. God will judge a scholar by a higher standard, and he will be held more blameworthy before God (for his/her shortcomings).

(Sermon 109)

[About the Duties of an Imam \(Leader\)](#)

Certainly there is no obligation on the Imam except fulfilling the responsibilities that have been assigned to him by God; namely, to convey warnings, to give good advice, to revive the true teachings of the Prophet, to enforce (religious) law, and to distribute charity to the deserving. Therefore, hasten to acquire knowledge while you are in the proximity of the people of knowledge.

(Sermon 104)

[Knowledge of Angels](#)

(O God) You made the angels reside in the Heavens, high above the earth. They have the most knowledge about You and Your creation.

(Sermon 108)

Knowledge about God

Praise be to God, Who is such that it is not possible to describe Him or ascertain true knowledge about Him. Since His greatness is beyond the (grasp of) intellect, therefore, intellect (alone) cannot lead to His realm.

(Sermon 154)

Faith Increases Knowledge

Faith guides towards virtuous deeds, while virtuous deeds help to achieve faith. Faith **increases knowledge**, and knowledge leads to the remembrance of death (i.e., the inevitable reality).

(Sermon 155)

Knowledge in the Qur'an

Know that the Qur'an contains knowledge of what is to come about, the stories of the past, the cure for your (moral and spiritual) ills, and regulations to help with whatever (difficulties) you face.

(Sermon 157)

More on Knowledge in the Qur'an

God, the Glorified, did not counsel anyone (in the past) with the likes of this Qur'an, for it is the strong rope of God and His trustworthy means. It has the blossoming of the hearts and springs of **knowledge**.

(Sermon 175)

The Qur'an Contains Oceans of Knowledge

The Qur'an is the gold mine of belief and the source of the oceans of **knowledge**. It bestows **knowledge** on him who listens (and pays attention) to it, has worthy parables for him who relates them (to others), and it contains conclusive verdicts for the jurist.

(Sermon 197)

Knowledge about the Rights of God

Any one of you who dies in his bed while he has **knowledge** of the rights of God (i.e., obligations to God) and the rights of His Prophet and members of the Prophet's house, his death will be as if he were a martyr. His reward is incumbent upon God.

(Sermon 189)

Satan Seduces the Learned

O people! Fear the evil consequences of vanity, because vanity is a trap of Satan, and it is his great trick and a poison that enters the hearts of the people. It seldom spares its victim.

(Sermon 191)

Knowledge of the (Chosen) Members of the Family of the Prophet (s)

Know that, certainly, those who are bestowed with God-given **knowledge** protect what God desires to be protected, and thereby make the springs (of His blessings) flow (for the benefit of humanity).

(Sermon 213)

More about Knowledge of the Family of the Prophet (s)

They are the lifeblood of **knowledge** and a death knell for ignorance.

They comprehended religion in a diligent manner, not acquired by mere hearsay or obtained from relaters, because the relaters of **knowledge** are many, but those who understand it are few.

(Sermon 237)

The Best Knowledge

The best **knowledge** is that which benefits (its possessor). The **knowledge** which does not benefit (the possessor) is useless and not worth learning.

(Letter 31)

We will be Tested According to Our Knowledge

Our existence does not end in this world, nor are we (primarily) created for this world. We should not use all our energies to acquire (earthly) pleasures, power, and pomp. We are sent (to this world) to be tested according to the degree of our **knowledge (i.e., understanding)**, our intentions, and actions.

(Letter 55)

Knowledge is a Sign of Distinction

Knowledge is the best mark of distinction.

(His saying)

Superficial Knowledge

That knowledge which remains only on your tongue is superficial. The true value of knowledge is realized when you act upon it.

(His Saying)

Advice to Ponder over Knowledge

Some people show their knowledge by merely talking, while some others ponder upon their knowledge and try to grasp the meaning behind it.

(His Saying)

Thinking Deeply

No exaltation is superior to knowledge; no knowledge is superior to deep reflection and prudence.

(His Saying)

Knowledge Commands Respect

Knowledge is power; it commands respect and obedience. A man of knowledge may make people obey and follow him, and after he dies, he is praised and venerated.

(His Saying)

People “Live” by Virtue of Their Knowledge after Death

Those who amass wealth, though alive, are dead to the realities of life, and those who achieve knowledge will remain alive by virtue of their knowledge and wisdom, even after they die. The knowledge that they have left behind will remain.

(His Saying)

Knowledge is Power

Your edge over others is in proportion to your knowledge and wisdom.

(His Saying)

Wisdom and Knowledge

One who takes lessons from the events of life acquires vision; one who acquires vision becomes wise; and one who attains wisdom achieves knowledge.

(His Saying)

Knowledge is Better than Wealth

Remember, knowledge is better than wealth, because it guards you, while you have to guard wealth. Wealth decreases if you spend it, but the more you make use of knowledge, the more it increases. What you get through wealth is gone when the wealth is gone, but what you achieve through knowledge will remain even after you are gone.

(His Saying)

About Knowledge (His Advice to a Companion)

Kumayl bin Ziyad says that once when Imam Ali (p) passed through a cemetery, he heaved a sigh and said:

Kumayl, these hearts (he pointed to himself) are containers of the secrets of knowledge¹ and wisdom, and the best container is the one that holds the most and preserves it (the best). Therefore, remember carefully what I am telling you.

- Remember, there are three kinds of people: the first kind is those learned people who are highly versed in the ethics of truth and philosophy of religion; the second kind is those who are in the process of acquiring knowledge; and the third kind is that class of people who are uneducated (and naive). They follow phony leaders, they believe in every slogan they hear, and they are devoid of rational basis for their convictions.
- Remember, knowledge is better than wealth, because knowledge protects you, while you have to guard wealth. Wealth decreases if you spend it, but the more you make use of knowledge, the more it increases. What you get through wealth is gone when wealth is gone, but what you achieve through knowledge will remain even after you are gone.
- Remember, knowledge is power and it commands obedience. A man of knowledge during his lifetime can make people obey and follow him, and he is praised and venerated after his death. Remember that knowledge is akin to a ruler, whereas wealth is its subject.
- O Kumayl! Those who amass wealth, though alive, are dead to the realities of life, and those who acquire knowledge will live, by virtue of their knowledge and wisdom, even after their death.

[Kumayl says that after this brief dissertation, Imam Ali (p) pointed towards his chest and said]:

Look, Kumayl! Here I hold treasures of knowledge. I wish I could find someone to share this. A person that I know would sell his salvation in exchange for worldly pleasures; he would make religion a pretense to gain power and wealth, and he would use the blessing of knowledge to control Godly people and exploit unsuspecting individuals. The other person I know had knowledge, but had not achieved the true light of religion, and at the slightest ambiguity or doubt, he would doubt the truth, mistrust the religion, and show skepticism. So, neither of them was capable of acquiring the higher knowledge that is with me.

There is another person who is a slave of his self (i.e., slave to base desires of his soul), and greed easily drags him away from the path of religion. The other person is a miser who will risk his life to grasp and hold on to wealth. Both of these individuals will not be of any use to the religion, nor humanity. They are like beasts, catering to their (biological) needs only.

If true trustees of knowledge and wisdom disappear altogether from human societies, then it may bring

irreparable harm to humanity. However, this earth will never be without those persons who will safeguard the truth as revealed by God. They may be known individuals who openly expound the knowledge divinely revealed to them, or they may remove themselves from the public gaze due to threat of violence against them. In the latter case, they carry on their mission secretly to preserve and preach the truth as taught by the Prophet of God.

I swear by God that these individuals are very few, but their worth and their rank before God is very high. They hand their knowledge and mission to someone like them before they die. Their knowledge allows them to see the (hidden) realities and the higher truth. Their mission brings excessive hardships on them. They live like ordinary persons, but their souls soar to the heights of Divine Eminence. They are representatives of God on this earth, and they invite people towards Him. How I love to meet them, O Kumayl!

(A Saying)

1. The knowledge referred to here is not particularly the secular knowledge of science, math, astronomy, etc. Rather, it is the knowledge about God Almighty, His commandments, His prohibitions, Prophets, His religion, etc.

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