



Ma'arifat As The Peak Of Spirituality In Tasawuf

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Abstract

Ma'rifatullah, or knowledge of God, is a deep concept that focuses on human efforts to recognize and understand the Creator through signs of His greatness. Ma'rifatullah is not just knowledge, but an inner awareness born from a spiritual effort in understanding the existence of God through self-reflection, study of His creation, and interaction between humans and the universe. The main purpose of ma'rifatullah is to achieve closeness to God through a deeper understanding of his attributes and will, as well as strengthen the spiritual bond in daily worship. In the study of ma'rifatullah, a person is required to develop a sense of admiration, gratitude, and submission to God which will form a more obedient and humble character. This understanding brings a person to the realization that everything in this world is evidence of God's greatness and love. By understanding ma'rifatullah, it is hoped that individuals are able to live a balanced life between worldly responsibilities and spiritual closeness, so that it not only fulfills the external aspect of worship, but also achieves a deeper inner dimension. This type of research is library research (library research), which is a series of research related to library data collection methods, or research whose research object is explored through various library information. The results of the analysis provide a deeper understanding of knowledge about Allah, His attributes and His will, so that we are always grateful and know that everything in this world is a sign of His greatness.

INTRODUCTION

In Islam, it is obligatory for every ummah to know Allah as the Creator and Ruler of all nature and creatures. Allah SWT. Has given signs and invited His servants to know Him. Through His verses in the Qur'an and the signs of His power in the universe, God gives man to understand His greatness.

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By thinking about His creation, people are expected to be able to strengthen their faith, be aware of His existence, and live their lives according to the guidance He has given, as His word in the Qur'an, which is translated as:

Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day there are (signs) for people who have understanding. (QS. Ali 'Imran: 190).

And there is also in another verse:

Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day, as well as the ark that runs in the sea that is beneficial for humans, and what God has sent down from the sky in the form of water, then with that water He gives life to the earth after its death (dryness) and He spreads on the earth all kinds of animals, and the grinding of winds and clouds that are controlled between the heavens and the earth; indeed (there are) signs (of God's oneness and greatness) for people who think (QS. Al-Baqarah: 164).

God provides a way for His servants to know Him through two ways: first, by observing God's actions, second, by contemplating and understanding the signs of His greatness spread throughout the universe. Through this reflection, people are invited to get to know, understand, and draw closer to Him, so that faith becomes stronger in life.

On the other hand, in the Sufi perspective, there is an approach to knowing God known as ma'rifatullah. In this perspective, knowing God does not mean understanding the essence of His Essence, because that is beyond the limits of human capabilities. According to Ibn Al Qayyim (in Muhammad Sholikhin, 2009), *ma'rifatullah* What is meant by ahlul ma'rifah (people who know Allah) is the understanding that encourages someone to carry out his obligations and follow the consequences of this knowledge. *Ma'rifatullah* not just a literal understanding, but a deep understanding of the path that brings humans closer to God, as well as an understanding of the obstacles and temptations that can hinder the journey of getting closer to God.

Therefore, the author attempts to highlight the theory of ma'rifah, or the concept of knowing God in Sufism, as the focus of this article. This discussion of ma'rifah will focus on four aspects. First, it will discuss the meaning, purpose, and status of ma'rifah. Second, it will outline the tools or means used to achieve ma'rifah. Third, it will introduce the figures who developed the concept of ma'rifah and their views. Fourth, it will outline the perspective of ma'rifah according to the Qur'an and Hadith. The explanations are as follows.

METHODS

This type of research is library research (*library research*) is a series of studies related to library data collection methods, or research whose research objects are explored through various library information (Mahanum, 2021). Library research or literature review (*literature review, literature research*) is also research that critically examines or reviews knowledge, ideas, or findings contained in the body of academically oriented literature (*academic-oriented literature*), as well as formulating theoretical and methodological contributions to specific topics (Hadi & Afandi, 2021).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Understanding Ma'rifatullah

Ma'rifah, or ma'rifat, is often seen as the pinnacle of spirituality in the Islamic tradition, particularly in Sufism. In the view of Sufis, ma'rifat is the highest level of a servant's spiritual journey, because it is here that one goes beyond simply knowing God through texts or reason, but truly experiences His presence in inner consciousness. Linguistically, ma'rifah comes from the word *arafa*, *ya'rifu*, *irfan*, *ma'rifah* which means knowledge or experience (Kholid, 2018). This term indicates

that ma'rifah is not merely the result of logical thought, but rather a direct experience stemming from deep contemplation. It can also mean knowledge of the secret essence of religion, a knowledge that is higher than the knowledge commonly acquired by people in general. Thus, ma'rifah is placed in a very noble position, because it provides an understanding that not everyone can achieve, except those who truly take the path of self-purification. Ma'rifah is knowledge whose object is not on external matters, but rather goes deeper into the inner self by knowing its secrets. This knowledge does not stop at the outer layer, but rather uncovers the veil of the deepest meaning of religious teachings, so that a wise person is able to perceive the hidden core of truth. This is based on the view that human reason is capable of knowing the essence of Divinity, and that essence is one, and all that exists comes from one (Hidayat et al., 2025). In other words, ma'rifah brings a servant to the awareness that all reality in this world stems from the One God, and through this recognition, he can feel calm, certainty, and unshakable spiritual closeness.

According to Harun Nasution, the term ma'rifah refers to one level of Sufism (Nasrudin et al., 2023). In a Sufi context, ma'rifah is understood as knowledge of God obtained through inner feelings. This knowledge is so profound and clear that one feels one with the God they know. Harun Nasution further explains that ma'rifah describes a very close relationship. Gnosis, which is an important part of the concept of ma'rifah, describes knowledge that is directly connected to one's heart and mind.

Thus, ma'rifah is not merely knowledge acquired through reason or theory, but also a profound spiritual experience, which allows individuals to feel God's presence in every aspect of their lives. Harun Nasution also emphasized that such knowledge cannot be understood solely through external study or exploration, but must be achieved through purification of the heart and deep spiritual experience. The process of achieving ma'rifah involves an inner journey that brings one closer to God, eliminating all forms of separation between self and God. This is the essence of Sufism, where true knowledge is achieved through the purification of the soul.

In Sufism, enlightenment is considered to be the highest stage in a person's spiritual journey, after passing through other stages such as Shariat (external law), Thariqat (spiritual path), and Hakit (inner truth). Sharia is understood as the initial foundation in the form of religious rules that regulate outward worship and muamalah. Thariqat then became an inner path taken with the guidance of a murshid to cleanse the soul of reprehensible traits. The truth is the level of recognition of the deeper truth, where a salik realizes the secret behind every act of worship and the hidden meaning of God's commands. After going through all these stages, only then can a servant achieve enlightenment.

Ma'rifat is the pinnacle, where a servant attains a profound awareness and knowledge of God. At this stage, a wise person no longer sees anything except in relation to God, so that every step is filled with awareness of His presence. Ma'rifat makes a servant feel close to God without barriers, realizing that all creation is a sign of God's greatness. Thus, ma'rifat is not merely knowledge, but an inner experience that leads a servant to total surrender, peace of mind, and a profound belief in the oneness of God.

The Goal of Knowing Allah

The purpose of knowing Allah is to serve as a guide that can guide the direction of a Muslim's life. Through this understanding, humans will realize that the purpose of their lives is solely for Allah SWT (Murni, 2015). Likewise, all activities, including work, should be directed solely to Allah SWT. When someone lives by the

principles of knowing Allah, God willing, the universe will submit to and support them in all things. With these conveniences, humans will find ease in every matter they face. Therefore, blessed are those who continually strive to know Allah, for their closeness to Him will become increasingly real, without any distance hindering them.

People who have reached closeness to God will find the light of guidance that guides their every step. In his life, he will be more sensitive to all good and bad, and able to choose the best in every decision. Ma'rifatullah, as a deep understanding of Allah, not only provides inner peace, but also guides a person to always try to live life with noble morals. Morality that is formed from a good introduction to God will encourage him to do good, both to others and to himself.

Thus, someone who continually strives to know God and applies the values of knowledge of God in their daily lives will receive extraordinary blessings. These blessings come not only in the form of an easier life, but also in peace of mind, because life is always filled with the awareness that everything in this world is a trust that must be safeguarded, and that all is for God alone. Therefore, the stronger the knowledge of God, the clearer the direction.

The position of Ma'rifatullah

Among Sufis, there are differing views regarding gnosis (knowledge of God), whether it is a state or a spiritual level. This view arises because the inner experiences of Sufis differ in interpreting the deepest meaning of humanity's relationship with God. Al-Ghazali, for example, argued that gnosis does not make a person one with God (Mukhlis, 2018). He rejected the notion that gnosis is synonymous with the union of human nature with God, but rather viewed it as knowledge born of purity of heart. For him, gnosis means knowing with the eye of the heart. In this perspective, a pure heart illuminated by divine light is able to see the truth more clearly than mere intellectual knowledge. Because this knowledge is so clear, he expressed it with the phrase "nazhoru ila waj Allah," which means looking at or seeing the face of God (Rivay, 2002).

This expression does not mean physical seeing, but rather refers to a spiritual experience so profound that one can feel God's presence very clearly within one's heart. One sees God with the eyes of the heart, not with one's physical senses. This is what distinguishes makrifat from ordinary sight, because what is meant is spiritual vision that is beyond the reach of the five senses. Therefore, according to Al-Ghazali, a wise person, or someone who has achieved makrifat, no longer calls God "O Allah," because this word indicates that God is still behind a veil, whereas for a wise person, that veil no longer exists. In other words, for a wise person, the relationship with God is no longer hindered by symbolic barriers, but is open directly in one's deepest inner consciousness.

Thus, for Al-Ghazali, gnosis (makrifat) can be understood as the highest level in the human spiritual journey. It is not merely a cognitive activity limited to the mind, but rather a profound form of awareness that unites the mind and heart. The process of achieving gnosis requires purification of the soul, control of the passions, and perseverance in worship, so that the knowledge gained is no longer merely the result of rational study, but rather the fruit of direct experience in drawing closer to God. Thus, gnosis becomes a doorway to authentic spiritual closeness, enabling a servant to experience oneness with their Lord.

According to al-Ghazali, this is the highest station a Sufi can reach. However, according to several Sufis, such as Abu Yazid al-Busthomi, al-Hallaj, al-Faridh, and others of his school, this level can still be surpassed by humans, namely to the level of fana fi'l Allah. Since the development of ma'rifat and hakkat among Sufis, this concept has become one of the main teachings in Sufism. Even a person's ability to

reach this level becomes a benchmark for whether someone has the right to be called a Sufi or not. In other words, a zahid or salik is called a Sufi when he has achieved closeness and intimacy with God without veils, the higher the class of a salik, the higher his ma'rifat.

A person's journey towards knowledge begins with one's belief, which then, through difficult efforts, leads to a positive development journey within one's internal state in the form of a maqam (Mukhlis, 2018). In relation to knowledge, there are two terms frequently mentioned by al-Ghazali, namely knowledge of the essence and knowledge of the nature. The definition of knowledge of the nature is the knowledge that Allah is a being, a single being (*fard*), one (*wahid*), and something great that stands on its own and is not similar to anything else. Meanwhile, knowledge of the nature means the knowledge that Allah is a living being (*dzat.hey*), omniscient (*'scientist*), almighty (*qadir*), omniscient (monk), omniscient (*bashir*) and so on with other attributes.

Enlightenment in the true sense, according to al-Ghazali, cannot be achieved through the senses or intellect, but through the light inspired by God into the heart. Through this kind of Sufistic experience, enlightenment in the Sufi tradition is obtained through *kusyf* (intuition) after a sensory, rational, philosophical intellectual process, which works simultaneously and systematically." In other words, enlightenment is not knowledge produced through reading, researching, or meditating, but it is what God conveys to a person (*sufi*) in a direct sufistic experience of sufistic experience.

Although Sufis believe that knowledge gained through experience is superior and convincing, it cannot be used as legal evidence. This seems to be the consensus of Sufis. There is a consensus among Sufis that the only way to know whether something is permissible or forbidden, or whether an act is right or wrong, is through the Qur'an, the Sunnah, the *ijtihad* of the *mujtahids*, and the consensus (*ijma'*) of the *ulama*.

Ways to Achieve Knowledge of Allah

Exploring and understanding oneself is a fundamental step in the quest to know God Almighty. Humans are created with the potential of reason, heart, and soul, which serve as a means to imagine their true nature and to recognize the Creator. Awareness of human weakness, limitations, and dependence on the Almighty will lead to the understanding that God alone is the source of all strength and life. By embodying His creation, both within oneself and in the universe, humans are led to realize that their very existence is tangible evidence of God's greatness and power. Therefore, knowing one's true self becomes the path to true monotheism.

The first step to understanding ourselves is realizing that we consist of a physical form called the body and an inner aspect known as the heart. The body is the external aspect that can be seen, touched, and changes over time, while the heart is the innermost aspect that determines the direction of human life. In this context, the heart is not a piece of flesh located on the left side of the body, but rather a subtle and invisible spiritual essence. It holds a very important position, because from the heart is born a person's intention, awareness, and ability to draw closer to God. The heart is present in this world to carry out a noble task, namely as the controller of the inner life and as a link between humans and the divine dimension. Its presence is not limited to the physical realm, but transcends visible physical boundaries, thus the heart is seen as the center of human spirituality. One day, this heart will return to its place of origin (Al-Ghazali, 2020), namely, back to God who created it, after fulfilling the mandate of life in this world.

A heart is the primary tool for uncovering various secrets in the unseen realm and achieving the pinnacle of understanding and ma'rifat (knowledge) of Allah SWT. More clearly, the heart or qalb is an essential instrument in "mystical physiology" to attain ma'rifat, because through this heart one can know, connect, and dialogue with the unseen, especially in knowing and communicating with Allah SWT. However, the heart must be truly alive and clean from bad traits and after performing mujahadah (Solihin & Anwar, 2008).

Knowledge, according to Sufis, is not attained instantly, but rather the result of a long process filled with spiritual struggle. This process requires a devotee to undergo *riyadah*, a continuous practice of self-control in both the physical and spiritual aspects. This *riyadah* focuses not only on formal worship but also on cleansing the heart of all forms of spiritual illness that can obstruct the divine light. Thus, achieving knowledge necessitates the integration of sincere worship, deep self-reflection, and consistent spiritual discipline.

One crucial aspect of the journey toward knowledge is the human ability to subdue the ego (*nafs*), which often serves as a major obstacle to achieving closeness to Allah SWT. The ego, filled with a penchant for worldly pleasures, must be subdued through self-awareness and control of desires. In this context, freeing oneself from various forms of dependence on creatures, avoiding physical greed, and limiting oneself from things that enslave the soul are absolute requirements for treading the path of knowledge. This demonstrates that the spiritual journey does not stop at the outward aspects of worship alone, but also encompasses the improvement of one's inner dimension.

Likewise, the culmination of these efforts is the attainment of the state of *tagarrub ilallah*, namely the state when a servant truly feels existential closeness with his Lord. In this state, the human soul is guided to leave behind worldly barriers and enter a higher transcendental consciousness. This process requires sincerity to abandon reprehensible traits and replace them with noble morals that reflect the divine attributes. Thus, ma'rifat is not only understood as inner knowledge, but also as a comprehensive spiritual transformation, in which a servant discovers the true meaning of servitude to Allah SWT. Undergoing a process of self-purification and spiritual practice, both physically and mentally. In this process, the heart is only filled with love and complete sincerity for Allah SWT, without giving room for anything else. The heart's efforts to achieve the true truth about Allah SWT are closely related to the stages *Takballiy*, namely cleansing oneself of bad traits; *Ethical*, charm oneself with good nature; and *It's boring*, the disappearance of human traits which are replaced by divine traits.

Sufistic concepts in achieving enlightenment remain within the limits of sharia, because sharia is the most complete and perfect program of Allah SWT. Shariat is divine, not the result of human thought, and is set by Allah SWT, with the main purpose of creating true human beings, Shariat is Allah SWT's guidance for humans, so that humans always walk straight towards Allah SWT.

A Sufi's perfection can only be achieved when the aspects of sharia and tarekat are fully integrated. Sharia serves to attain a certain status, while tarekat serves to draw closer to Allah SWT. With this integration, one will attain knowledge. Sharia encompasses the outward aspects of worship, while tarekat encompasses the inner aspects.

However, it's important to note that not everyone who follows a tarekat is guaranteed to attain knowledge of the divine. This is due to differences in individual talents, interests, and intentions. Some people can progress rapidly from one station to another in a short time. However, others must undertake a long, winding, and

time-consuming journey to reach a higher station. Furthermore, it's not impossible for some to fail due to inability to persevere and ultimately leave the tarekat.

However, it is important to realize that the instillation of Divine light into a servant's heart is not something that can be entirely achieved by humans. The human task is simply to prepare oneself (isti'dad) by cleansing oneself of all sins, heart disease, and reprehensible morals. Ultimately, this achievement depends entirely on the mercy of Allah SWT.

CONCLUSION

Ma'rifatullah, from the perspective of Sufism, is the highest stage of knowing God achieved by a Sufi after undergoing various spiritual processes. This term refers to a profound knowledge of God, not only limited to scientific knowledge, but also knowledge gained through pure inner experience. In Sufism, ma'rifatullah is crucial because it is the final achievement of the spiritual journey, leading to an awareness of the essence of life and closeness to the Creator. Marifatullah is not merely knowing God through the mind, but also with the heart.

For al-Ghazali, *ma'rifatullah* is an understanding that encompasses all aspects of a Muslim's life, not only the intellectual aspect, but also the moral and spiritual aspects. In short, knowing God is not only achieved through theoretical knowledge, but more through the application of noble moral values exemplified by the Prophet. Good morals, according to al-Ghazali, are a reflection of a deep understanding of the essence of divinity. For al-Ghazali, knowing God is not only limited to intellectual knowledge, but must also be reflected in the behavior and actions of a servant. Noble morals, such as honesty, patience, and humility, are true signs of someone who truly knows God. Al-Ghazali emphasized that good morals are a manifestation of ma'rifatullah, which leads to closeness to God. He argued that someone who has achieved ma'rifatullah will find it easier to live with high moral values, because a deeper knowledge of God will direct all his actions in accordance with the principles of true religion.

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