

## AN ANALYSIS OF AL-GHAZALI'S THOUGHT ON HAPPINESS THROUGH HIS BOOK: THE ALCHEMY OF HAPPINESS

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### ABSTRACT

Scholars from many fields have written about happiness and how to achieve it. But this is still an exciting topic because happiness is one of the most important things people need. This article aimed to examine the significance of happiness for every Muslim from the point of view of Al-Ghazali's thoughts through his book *Alchemy of Happiness*. The article used the qualitative approach by using the content analysis method to explore the ideas of Al-Ghazali on happiness, its element, and its significance for Muslims' lives. The result showed that Ghazali's thoughts on happiness enlighten the Muslims to step on to live happily and be full of salvation. Furthermore, it becomes one of the psycho-spiritual methods that Muslim and global communities can utilize to live better in the world and hereafter.

**Keywords:** Psycho-spiritual, Calmness, Happiness, Alchemy of Happiness

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### INTRODUCTION

Happiness is one of the psycho-spiritual aspects of human life and a fascinating issue for scholars to examine, as many individuals suffer from emotional problems brought on by their misery (Yahya et al., 2020). Every human being is unavoidably confronted with various challenges, and they must be able to find solutions to these issues (Izharuddin, 2021).

The religion of Islam encompasses everything in its teachings. It includes all the correct instructions and several techniques for healing the soul. According to the findings of other scholars, a person's spiritual health is intrinsically related to the ideals instilled by their religious heritage, which is, in turn, molded and honed by their culture and the rituals they observe (Ott, 2020; Akbar, 2017). Because religion has the power to instill a

feeling of purpose and confidence in a person in its adherents, it is one of the variables that have the potential to bring about positive change in an individual who is struggling (Sukmawati et al., 2022).

How someone acts, talks, dresses, etc., reveals a lot about their inner state. A person's spirituality is sealed off from God's direction when he has allowed disobedience and rebellion against The Almighty God to immerse in his heart, mind, senses, and body (Wadud, 2021). As a result of disobedience, a person's true essence is restrained deep within his spirit. Both spirit and body grew unwell and unable to carry out their innate functions. There is a rise in human sadness because of this disease. It does not only harm an individual's emotional state but also their behavior (Yahya et al., 2020; Amiruddin et al., 2021).

All of us know that contemporary psychology is the scientific investigation of mental functions and behaviors, in addition to the comprehension of many human activities, such as challenges that are met in life and the treatment of problems of this nature (Al-Nuaimi & Qoronfleh, 2020). One item that can be taught in psychology is a spiritual topic, which relates to an aspect of human life that is more inward and soul-based (Esat et al., 2021).

For mental (cognitive) and emotional health issues, Muslims can turn to the concept and practice of psycho-spiritual healing (Kyranides et al., 2022). It is to achieve success in this life and the afterlife by practicing moral behavior based on Islamic resources and techniques obtained from the Quran, Al-Sunnah, the tradition of the righteous forefathers, and knowledge that does not contradict Islamic principles (Al-Ghazali, 2022). If achieving happiness is tough, it is nearly impossible for a person to be tranquil. Serenity is one of the most fundamental parts of emotion regulation, which is especially crucial when facing difficulties. Humans with restless souls, when observed, are so emotionally influenced that they frequently act without self-control (Tenhunen, 2020). This problem is also one of the factors that contribute to the stress that someone experiences in life. When an individual is experiencing a state of psychological irrationality or restlessness, they may be said to be under pressure (Ambrozy, 2021). Even when a person's heart becomes impure due to disobeying Allah's command, excessive desire is still one of the grounds for stress (Al-Nuaimi & Qoronfleh, 2020).

Every human being definitely wants to feel happy whether in the presence of family, husband, or wife, children, friends, neighbors, and society. People constantly strive to bring happiness to themselves, their children, their families, their neighbors, and others (Henwood et al., 2022). Since happiness is the primary

source of harmony in the house or family for a more excellent quality of life, which is also the primary source of happiness, it can be considered a pleasant mood or object that brings peace and contentment. This is particularly true when one's desires have been fulfilled (Amiruddin et al., 2021).

Additionally, emotional happiness can influence a person's positive behavior, as positivity is a byproduct of passion and pleasure. Positive activities and behaviors are possible when one is happy. Due to the numerous difficulties they face daily, however, not too many individuals live in happiness. Therefore, it is essential to analyze the path to joy and seek more effective solutions to problems that arise (Shahama et al., 2022; Deguchi et al., 2020).

Many ancient and contemporary Muslim philosophers, like Al-Imam Al-Ghazali, have recognized the importance of happiness in fostering social cohesion and inner peace. Al-Ghazali, a notable Muslim thinker who lived around 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, is renowned even now for his writings on the spirituality and behavior of Islam (Sahri, 2021).

As for contentment, Al-Ghazali considered the soul a spiritual component that must be continually tended to and cleansed for the individual's inner health (Saritoprak et al., 2020). On the other hand, human beings are intelligent, reasoning beings. Therefore, the intellect is linked to the spiritual dimension in this discussion. Humans' innate capacities for language, comprehension, accountability, and logical deliberation are often cited as examples of what it is to be a rational being (Yahya et al., 2020).

In addition to the soul and intellect, lust is a spiritual component of humans. Al-Ghazali emphasized the importance of the soul, intelligence, and lust in creating happiness. This entices the researcher to investigate these

factors, which can generate efficient treatments for the human soul.

The source of happiness is a profound appreciation of Islam through religion, piety, a comprehension of the creed, and the collection of knowledge. Happiness based on lust alone is fleeting, annoying, and damaging. It will be meaningless when a guy is only preoccupied with material belongings and worldly affairs (Jones-Ahmed, 2022). However, the ultimate satisfaction is achieved when a person attains spiritual purity.

Material belongings, physical health, social position, exceptional occupations, etc., are insufficient indicators of genuine happiness. Nonetheless, a person is happy when he knows his life's purpose, the Sunnah, and his life's adversities and he is able to deal with them appropriately (Akot, 2020).

This study aimed to investigate Al-Ghazali's views on the concept of happiness from an Islamic perspective and how they impacted the Muslim way of living. This study concentrated on his book *The Alchemy of Happiness*, which explained these concepts. It is anticipated that this study will provide Muslims with instructions on how to live happily and peacefully.

## RESEARCH METHODS

In this work, narrative research with a qualitative technique was carried out. An individual's life was the subject of investigation in narrative analysis, which centered on that topic. Reviewing the books, journals, and other publications about Imam Ghazali's creation, and thoughts, amongst other issues, was the method used to obtain the necessary material for this study. The way it is questioned was referred to as a narrative literature review. During the literature review process, the researcher analyzes, contrasts, and draws conclusions from various facts. The method of data analysis was utilized to analyze data about the biography, works, and ideas of

Al-Ghazali in the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of it, as well as the works of scholars or researchers studying Ghazali's thoughts in various matters and fields.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A Brief Biography of Imam Al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali, also known as Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Thusi al-Ghazali, was born in Tabaran, a suburb of the city of Tus in the Khurasan region which is now a part of Mashhad, Iraq, in 450 H/1058 AD and passed away in 505 H/1111 AD.

Al-Ghazali received his education under the tutelage of Imam ar-Razkhani al-Thusi. While he was at Jurjan, he also pursued his education in fiqh under the direction of Abu Nasr al-Isma'il. After that, he went to Nishapur to learn fiqh and kalam from Imam al-Haramain al-Juwaini (1028-1085 AD), an Ulama who taught at the Nizamiyyah Madrasa. He did this to become an authority in both areas (Islamic theology). After al-Juwaini passed away, al-Ghazali was appointed to fill the instructor role at the Nizamiyah Madrasa. Al-Juwaini was one of the most influential people in his life. Al-Ghazali belonged to the Shafi'i school of thought in terms of *fiqh* but followed Imam Ash'ari in terms of *aqidah* (873-936 AD) (Sahri, 2021).

Al-Ghazali was a scholar of the virtue of every Islamic discipline, including *tafsir* (the interpretation of religious texts), *fiqh*, *ushul fiqh*, *kalam*, and *tasawuf*. As a result, he is well known as a scholar with an extensive, all-encompassing knowledge base, and his extensive work on the above topics is still frequently used as a reference source. Because of his status, he was finally given the title of *hujjatul* Islam, and his master, -Juwaini, regarded him as a great ocean that needed to be covered (Hasballah et al., 2021).

Al-Ghazali lived when there was intellectual tension between philosophy and

*kalam*, political and religious tension between Sunnis and Shiites, and practical political tension during the Abbasid dynasty. All of these things had a significant impact on his life. The Islamic political scene was unstable because the caliph wasn't in charge of a centralized Muslim government. Instead, he was just a symbol or even a puppet. More specifically, the caliph is only a religious figure because the Bani Seljuk is in charge of politics and government. Also, being out of control of the Islamic World in Bani Seljuk, the Abbasid Caliphate broke into several small governments led by its rulers, even though they still recognized the caliph as head of state (Sahri, 2021)

### **Happiness Defined in Al-Ghazali's Alchemy of Happiness**

The Arabic word for happiness, *al-sa'ada*, is derived from the Qur'anic term *su'idû*, which refers to people who are blessed or made happy (al-Qur'an, (11): 108), and *sa'id* (the happy one) (al-Qur'an, (11): 105). It is a more expansive idea than happiness, encompassing all elements of life (Saritoprak et al., 2020; Abdul Azim, 2007).

That is why other Qur'anic terms which convey the significant meaning of *al-sa'ada*, such as *al-falah* (prosperity), *al-fawz* (success), *al-salâma* (safety), *al-najâh* (salvation), *al-ni'ma* (blessing), *al-rahma* (mercy) and their like are also used as synonyms of the term happiness. Yet the Qur'anic verse (32): 17 is frequently cited in this context to give the concept of happiness a more Qur'anic hue or verify its origin (Amiruddin et al., 2021).

Happiness is the most critical question in philosophical ethics. It is the highest good and does not depend on anything else. It is the thing that people want for its own sake and nothing else. It is the highest good, the pinnacle of virtue, and the limit of perfection (Ng, 2022). There is no higher good or higher

level of perfection. Ethics has always been a big part of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam because everyone agrees that happiness is life's ultimate goal and can only be reached by developing the human spirit or following ethics-based religious practices (Hidayatullah & Arif, 2022). On the other hand, politics and economics are often related to ethics in a supporting or background role (Hakim et al., 2020).

Happiness, the highest aim of ethics, for which ethics becomes the science par-excellence, has turned out to be the ideal of nearly all areas of science and is vital to many of these religious communities, particularly medieval ones. In politics, for instance, the king is responsible for the safety of his subjects' lives and possessions and their fulfillment (Omar et al., 2021).

Muslim scholars did not ignore how similar Aristotelian ethics and Qur'anic ethics are. However, most writers preferred Plato's ideological approach to Aristotle's empirical and practical one when writing about happiness. This reliance on Plato's definition of happiness often led Muslim theologians to create versions of happiness that were too idealized, limited, and exclusive for most people, including most Muslims (Marga, 2021). In the works of the famous Sunni theologian Ab Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1111), this approach is represented prominently. Al-Ghazali offered information regarding happiness in one of his most famous books, *The Alchemy of Happiness* (Mirsepassi & Fernée, 2019).

In the introduction, Al-Ghazali said that he called his book "Alchemy" because he wanted to transform human nature from its inherent depravity and animalism into the pure goodness and infinite worth of the heavenly realm to achieve eternal pleasure. From the onset, it is clear that from Al-Ghazali's perspective, human nature is pessimistic since we must displace ourselves as far as possible

from our average position to find contentment (Mirsepassi & Fernée, 2019).

Al-Ghazali continued his explanation by stating that the goal of his Alchemy is to purge the self of things that it should not be (i.e., flaws) and adorn it with something that it should be (i.e., the attributes of perfection). This reveals the Platonist underpinnings of his ethics, which is typical of Sufism.

According to his line of reasoning, the true character of a human being is said to be contained within one's heart or inner soul, which has an ideal and heavenly nature and is kept in the treasury of forms that God maintains (Ambrozy, 2021).

Like Plato's ethics, al-Ghazali's Alchemy of the Soul is idealistic and without defects. Heart, in his view, is the philosopher's stone since it represents the ideal of the perfect human being. He practiced spiritual alchemy to purge the copper of human nature and expose the precious gold of the heart. As a result of being exposed to the world and all its mud, we often mistake our true nature for a false one and present ourselves to the world as copper instead of gold (Yahya et al., 2020). In the latter part of the introduction to *The Alchemy of Happiness*, Al-Ghazali claimed that the significance of happiness lies in the otherworldly nature of this state. There is no limit to the varieties of pleasure, and nothing can detract from the experience of having them (Sukmawati et al., 2022). This remark also shows that, despite his rejection of the world as a mean of happiness, al-Ghazali still uses Plato's conceptions of happiness as pleasure and quantitative satisfaction from Protagoras (Usman et al., 2022).

The problem with Ghazali's idea of happiness is not that he gives us a model to follow but that he says the ideal is the only real thing. Because he focuses on a perfect kind of happiness that, in his words, only prophets, saints, God's true loves, and spiritual elites can reach, he puts less value on typical kinds of

happiness, which, as Aristotle pointed out, are also crucial for human progress (Omar et al., 2021).

Al-Ghazali said in *The Alchemy of Happiness* that a person is endowed with three qualities: the spirit or ego, the life or vital force, and the heart or inner soul. Even though the soul is connected to the body by its essence, Al-Ghazali said the soul is never fully embodied (Mirsepassi & Fernée, 2019).

Furthermore, he claimed, "The created soul is made for the afterlife. Its job is to seek happiness; its satisfaction is spiritual knowledge of the Almighty God. It learns about the Almighty God through studying His creation, which includes the entire universe. It discovers the wonders of the universe through its senses, which are embedded in the body." (Mirsepassi & Fernée, 2019).

In other words, the main purpose of the mind, body, and senses is to help the soul escape the material world, where it is trapped, and reach the spiritual goal it is made for. The late-ancient philosopher Plotinus (who died in 270) is usually linked to this Neoplatonic idea of a pneumatic soul that rises to join the Divine Soul from which it is separated (Popp, 2019; Connelly, 2021).

The macrocosm paradigm or microcosm paradigm presented by Plato in *The Republic* was essential to Al-Ghazali's understanding of the connection between the body and the spirit. Although Al-Ghazali adjusted this idea to fit the limits of the medieval Islamic state, it reflected the Republic's hierarchical view of society (Yahya et al., 2020).

In the second half of *The Alchemy of Happiness* (*Kimiyâ' al-Sa'âda*) and in *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* (*Ihyâ' Ulûm al-Dîn*), which *The Alchemy* was based on, Al-Ghazali admitted that material things have some value and can be used to find happiness. But he said that the purpose of material things

wouldn't help people find happiness (Mirsepassi & Fernée, 2019).

The principles of Ash'ari theology, which conceptualized God in a strongly voluntaristic manner, regarded all virtues leading to happiness as bestowed divine gifts as human-being possessed nothing inherently. This compelled Al-Ghazali to introduce an additional category of goods. Al-Ghazali referred to these benefits as divine guidance, direction, leadership, and support.

Furthermore, according to Al-Ghazali, one can only embark on the path to happiness through the blessing of Almighty God, utilizing physical, spiritual, and material elements. This is because Al-Ghazali perceived happiness as a gift from God (Amiruddin et al., 2021).

In the "Alchemy of Happiness", Al-Ghazali presented two perspectives on the perils of the world faced by human beings. Although some of his arguments are couched in the pragmatic language of Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, the reader senses that Ghazali viewed the choice between God and the world as a zero-sum game, wherein any submission to the world diminishes the stature of God and impedes spiritual growth. Al-Ghazali acknowledge the necessity of fulfilling physical and material needs, but he cautioned that even the lawful luxuries of life can lead to arrogance, carelessness, and various vices. (Connelly, 2021).

But this compromise is not compatible with the quest for pleasure. Ghazali's moral theology, which is based on the hierarchical social paradigm acquired by medieval Islamic civilization from late antiquity, is elitist in its broad strokes. This conceptual framework was adopted by medieval Islamic culture from the practices of late antiquity (Kulinich, 2022). As a result, his most fundamental contradiction is between the ignorant people who are ruled by their passions and the Sharia and an educated spiritual elite who are directed by reason and

divine inspiration. His idea of social stratification takes into account both financial and intellectual resources (Bensaid, 2021).

Following the example of the angels in The Alchemy, who found nourishment and delight in the presence of the Divine, Al-Ghazali defines happiness in The Alchemy as the knowledge of God. Only some people can walk his path to divine understanding (Mirsepassi & Fernée, 2019).

According to Al-Ghazali, three spiritual attributes are necessary to achieve true happiness: freedom from vice, closeness to God, and love of God. Divine intimacy and love, the two highest states, are where spiritual completeness can be found. The vast majority of Muslims, however, can never achieve such perfection and must settle for ridding their hearts and minds of vices following the teachings of the Sharia (Ibrahim et al., 2016). Ghazali's belief that salvation leads to eternal happiness is surprising. The superior spirits who can ponder God in paradise are the only ones who can experience *sa'adah*. According to Ghazali, insane people, the children of nonbelievers, and nonbelievers themselves are saved (*najiat*) since they will not be punished in the afterlife. However, they cannot receive paradise's compensation (Mirsepassi & Fernée, 2019; al-Attar, 2017).

Al-Ghazali doesn't have much to offer the average Muslim. He wasn't even writing for moderate Muslims. The only gold in Al-Ghazali's Alchemy is in the dregs of the lowest level of paradise unless you're a member of the spiritual elite. Even in the spiritual world, the average believer is in a lower position than they probably were in the physical world (Mirsepassi & Fernée, 2019).

Finally, Al-Ghazali highlights that for real happiness, mere knowledge is insufficient; happiness is inextricably tied to the knowledge of God. Understanding God is possible through God's creation, which is the world. It is not

specific information but rather the existential experience (Mirsepassi & Fernée, 2019).

## CONCLUSION

Al-Ghazali asserts that happiness is a synthesis of knowledge, actions, spirituality, and physical well-being. This harmonious integration is also evident in the human yearning to enhance their faith and dedication to their beliefs. It symbolizes that the manifestation of superior moral values and religious practices is the means by which these four attributes give rise to the Almighty God.

Similarly, individuals ought to continually strive to broaden their knowledge, while also recognizing the importance of purifying their hearts. This is because true expertise can only be acquired through the cultivation of a pure heart, which in turn leads to eternal happiness. If humans were to discover this profound pleasure, tranquility would naturally follow. Furthermore, aligning one's beliefs (aqidah), religious practices (Syariah), and moral character (akhlaq) can significantly deepen one's faith and purity.

In order to instill belief in God and encourage virtuous actions, individuals must possess unwavering faith and adhere to the divine laws prescribed by Allah SWT. By doing so, the soul strengthens its trust and becomes more purified, thereby discovering true happiness. Religion, law, and morality must align with divine revelation to attain genuine happiness and inner peace.

Consequently, happiness becomes the ultimate and supreme good for humanity, as it serves as an intrinsic purpose and sets humans apart from everything else in the universe. Other aspects such as wealth, virtue, health, and pleasure lack this transformative quality and remain subject to the influence of happiness. Al-Ghazali emphasizes that the individual who attains the highest and most profound fulfillment is one who possesses knowledge rather than an ordinary person.

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