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Positive Psychology and the Concept of Happiness in Islam: An Integration between Al-Ghazali's Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn and Modern Psychological Theory

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ABSTRACT

The question of happiness — its nature, sources, and conditions — stands at the intersection of philosophy, theology, and psychology. In the Islamic intellectual tradition, the most sophisticated treatment of this question is found in the work of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058–1111 CE), whose encyclopaedic Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din (Revivification of the Religious Sciences) devotes substantial attention to the concept of sa'adah (happiness) and its relationship to the purification and cultivation of the human soul. Contemporary positive psychology — inaugurated by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) and developed through models including Seligman's PERMA, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and Frankl's logotherapy — has produced an extensive empirical and theoretical literature on human flourishing. This study conducts a systematic interdisciplinary analysis integrating Al-Ghazali's concept of sa'adah with these four major positive psychology frameworks, examining convergences, divergences, and the possibilities for theoretical synthesis. Drawing on a systematic literature review of 64 classical and contemporary sources (2018–2025), the study identifies eight maqamat al-sa'adah (stations of happiness) in Al-Ghazali's framework — 'ilm (divine knowledge), akhlaq (moral virtue), mujahadah (spiritual struggle), tawakkul (trust in God), sabr (patience), mahabbah (love of God), zuhd (detachment), and shukr (gratitude) — and demonstrates that each has measurable parallels in empirical positive psychology research. Five areas of substantial convergence are identified: the centrality of meaning and purpose, the role of virtue and character strengths, the importance of social bonds, the value of gratitude practices, and the necessity of resilience through hardship. Three fundamental divergences are also identified: the theocentric grounding of Islamic happiness, its eschatological orientation, and its integration of the spiritual dimension as structurally indispensable rather than optional. The study proposes the concept of Integrated Theocentric Wellbeing (ITW) as a synthesis framework that preserves Islamic psychology's metaphysical commitments while engaging productively with the empirical insights of modern positive psychology.

Keywords: Islamic positive psychology; sa'adah; Al-Ghazali; Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din; PERMA model; logotherapy; wellbeing; happiness; fithrah; tazkiyah



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1. Introduction

“Sa'adah is the delight of the soul (ladhdhat al-nafs) in the knowledge of God, the Most High the delight that has no equivalent in the pleasures of this world and no cessation in the life to come.” Al-Ghazali, Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn, Book XXXII (trans. Karim, 2011, p. 187)

Happiness is perhaps the oldest question in moral philosophy and one of the newest in empirical psychology. The ancient Greeks debated eudaimonia versus hedonia; medieval philosophers of the Islamic world refined the concept of sa'adah with extraordinary sophistication; and in 2000, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's landmark paper inaugurated positive psychology as a distinct scientific discipline, directing the field's attention systematically toward human flourishing rather than pathology. Yet despite the shared subject matter, the Islamic philosophical tradition and Western positive psychology have remained remarkably isolated from each other—the former embedded in theological commitments that secular psychology is reluctant to engage, the latter committed to methodological naturalism that Islamic scholars often find epistemologically inadequate (Nor, Yusuf, and Arabi 2024; Shaheen et al. 2020).

This study argues that this isolation is intellectually impoverishing for both traditions. Islamic psychology—and specifically Al-Ghazali's systematic account of sa'adah in the *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*—possesses resources for understanding human happiness that positive psychology has not yet incorporated: a theocentric account of the soul's nature and telos, a developmental psychology of spiritual stations (maqamat), a sophisticated analysis of the relationship between character virtue and sustained happiness, and fourteen centuries of practical wisdom about what actually generates durable wellbeing across culturally diverse Muslim populations. Conversely, positive psychology's empirical methods, measurement instruments, and experimental evidence base offer Islamic psychology tools for testing, refining, and communicating its insights to a global scholarly audience.

Fithrah—as established in naskah 1218—is the God-endowed moral-spiritual constitution with which every human being begins life: the starting point and raw material of human development. Sa'adah—the subject of this study—is the realised destination toward which fithrah's development tends when it proceeds in a God-consonant direction: the end-point and fulfilment of the developmental arc that fithrah initiates. Together, the two studies constitute a systematic Islamic developmental psychology: fithrah explains what we are constituted to become, and sa'adah explains what it looks and feels like when we are becoming it. Al-Ghazali is the central scholarly reference for both: his account of fithrah, tazkiyah, and the maqamat al-sa'adah constitutes the most comprehensive classical Islamic developmental psychology available (Ghaith 2020; Yusuf et al. 2021; Zaini and 'Azizah 2024).

The study pursues four objectives: (1) to reconstruct Al-Ghazali's concept of sa'adah as a systematic psychological framework from his primary texts; (2) to compare this framework with the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011), Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943, 1970), and Frankl's logotherapy (1963, 1984) across seven analytical dimensions; (3) to identify the empirical positive psychology evidence that supports, qualifies, or challenges the stations of sa'adah identified in the *Ihya'*; and (4) to propose the concept of Integrated Theocentric Wellbeing (ITW) as a synthesis framework for Islamic positive psychology.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Al-Ghazali and the Architecture of Sa'adah

Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali—the eleventh-century polymath whom his admirers called Hujjat al-Islam (Proof of Islam)—devoted more sustained attention to the psychology of happiness than perhaps any other Islamic scholar. His engagement with the question spans multiple works: the philosophical *Maqasid al-Falasifah* (Intentions of the Philosophers) and *Tahafut al-Falasifah* (Incoherence of the Philosophers) address happiness in the context of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic philosophical anthropology; the *Mizan al-'Amal* (Criterion of Action) develops an ethical psychology

of character and conduct; and most comprehensively the forty-book *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* constructs a complete architecture of Islamic spiritual psychology in which sa'adah is the governing telos.

Al-Ghazali's concept of sa'adah is irreducibly theocentric: happiness is not a psychological state achieved through the fulfilment of natural desires or the exercise of rational capacities but the soul's experience of proximity (qurb) to God, enabled through knowledge of God ('ilm), moral purification (tazkiyah), and the systematic cultivation of spiritual virtues (maqamat). This theocentric orientation generates a developmental hierarchy that is, in important respects, the inverse of Maslow's: where Maslow begins with physical safety and ascends through social belonging and esteem to self-actualisation, Al-Ghazali begins with the recognition of God as the ultimate real (al-Haqq) and descends from this metaphysical anchor to the practical disciplines worship, ethical conduct, social relations, economic activity through which the soul's God-oriented constitution (fithrah) is cultivated rather than frustrated (Firdaus and Ramli 2023; Krismiati and Reza 2021; Winastuti and Noverahela 2022).

The *Ihya's* organisational structure reflects this hierarchy. The work's forty books are organised into four 'quarters' (rub'): 'Ibadat (acts of worship), 'Adat (social customs and manners), Muhlikat (spiritual vices that destroy the soul's capacity for sa'adah), and Munjiyat (spiritual virtues that save and perfect it). The fourth quarter and the culmination of the entire work maps the maqamat through which the soul progresses from its natural orientation toward God (fithrah) to the full realisation of sa'adah: repentance (tawbah), patience (sabr), gratitude (shukr), hope (raja'), trust (tawakkul), love (mahabbah), longing (shawq), proximity (qurb), and contentment (rida).

2.2 Positive Psychology: PERMA, Maslow, and Frankl

2.2.1 Seligman's PERMA Model

Martin Seligman's positive psychology framework has undergone significant development from his initial focus on authentic happiness (pleasurable life, good life, meaningful life) to the comprehensive PERMA model: Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement (Seligman, 2011). The PERMA model is explicitly pluralistic each element contributes independently to wellbeing, and people differ in which elements they prioritise. This pluralism is both a strength and a limitation: it avoids the prescriptive universalism that critics find in some happiness theories, but at the cost of the normative framework that specifies which forms of wellbeing are genuinely good and which are merely preferred.

The comparison with Al-Ghazali's sa'adah is instructive at precisely this point. Al-Ghazali's framework is normatively prescriptive in a way that PERMA is not: not all positive emotions are equally conducive to sa'adah (the pleasure of watching others suffer, for example, is a positive emotion in the hedonic sense but is categorically incompatible with Al-Ghazali's account of the virtuous soul), and achievement in materially competitive domains is explicitly identified as a potential obstacle to sa'adah rather than a contributor to it. This prescriptive quality is a feature, not a bug, from an Islamic psychology perspective: it reflects the conviction that human beings have a specific nature (fithrah) and a specific telos (sa'adah) that provide objective criteria for distinguishing genuine from counterfeit happiness (Izah, Aini, and Bukhori 2023; Reza and Widiana 2019; Zepriansyah, Murdiati, and Hamandia 2023).

2.2.2 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow's (1943) hierarchical model of human motivation from physiological needs through safety, love and belonging, and esteem to self-actualisation represents the most influential framework

for understanding human flourishing in twentieth-century humanistic psychology. Maslow's late revision of the hierarchy, adding transcendence above self-actualisation (Koltko-Rivera, 2006), moves the framework closer to Islamic psychology's theocentric orientation but transcendence in Maslow's framework is characterised phenomenologically (as the experience of peak states) rather than theologically (as the soul's relationship with a personal God whose nature, commands, and purposes are knowable through revelation).

Al-Ghazali's framework both converges with and radically inverts Maslow's. The convergence is clearest in the shared recognition that the human being has a natural drive toward something beyond material satisfaction what Maslow calls self-actualisation and transcendence, and what Al-Ghazali calls the soul's natural orientation toward God. The inversion concerns the relationship between lower and higher needs: for Maslow, the fulfilment of higher needs is contingent on the satisfaction of lower ones; for Al-Ghazali, the proper ordering of the soul's relationship with God (*tawakkul*, *mahabbah*, *rida*) actually resolves the anxiety about lower needs the saint who trusts completely in God is liberated from existential anxiety about safety and survival rather than requiring its prior resolution (Anwar and Putro 2023; Musriparto 2022; Udin 2019).

2.2.3 Frankl's Logotherapy

Viktor Frankl's logotherapy (1963, 1984) developed from his experience of surviving Nazi concentration camps argues that the primary human motivation is not pleasure (Freud) or power (Adler) but the will to meaning. Suffering can be endured and even transcended when experienced as meaningful; meaninglessness, by contrast, produces existential frustration regardless of material circumstances. Frankl identifies three pathways to meaning: creative values (what one gives to the world), experiential values (what one receives from the world, including love), and attitudinal values (the stance one takes toward unavoidable suffering).

Of the four Western frameworks examined in this study, Frankl's logotherapy is the one most naturally convergent with Al-Ghazali's *sa'adah*. The centrality of meaning, the valorisation of suffering as a potential source of existential growth, the emphasis on love as a pathway to transcendence, and the recognition that human flourishing requires an orientation beyond oneself all of these resonate deeply with the Islamic spiritual psychology developed in the *Ihya'*. The most significant divergence is that Frankl's meaning is existentially constructed (though he acknowledges that for many people it is received religiously), while Al-Ghazali's *sa'adah* is grounded in a metaphysically specific divine reality that provides objective content to the notion of meaningful existence (Al-Farabi, OK, and Nasution 2023; Mabruur 2020; Rofiq et al. 2023).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Source Selection

This study employs a qualitative interdisciplinary research design combining systematic literature review (SLR) with comparative conceptual analysis. The SLR draws on three source categories: (1) primary Islamic texts Al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* (Arabic original and English translations by Karim, 2011, and Umaruddin, 1996), Mizan al-'Amal, and Minhaj al-'Abidin; (2) foundational positive psychology texts Seligman (2011), Maslow (1943, 1970), Frankl (1963, 1984), and Ryan and Deci (2001); and (3) contemporary Islamic psychology and interdisciplinary literature retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar using the terms ('Islamic positive psychology' OR 'sa'adah' OR 'Islamic happiness') AND ('positive psychology' OR 'wellbeing' OR 'flourishing'),

covering 2018–2025. After PRISMA 2020 screening, 64 sources met the inclusion criteria (intercoder agreement $\kappa = 0.87$).

3.2 Analytical Framework

Comparative analysis was conducted across seven dimensions identified from the positive psychology literature as central to theories of happiness: (1) ultimate goal or telos; (2) source of happiness; (3) role of spirituality; (4) moral dimension; (5) social dimension; (6) temporal orientation; and (7) measurement approach. These dimensions were applied systematically to Al-Ghazali's sa'adah framework and the three Western theories, generating the comparative matrix presented in Figure 1 and the detailed station analysis in Table 1.

4. Results

4.1 The Maqamat al-Sa'adah: Eight Stations of Islamic Happiness

Table 1 presents the systematic reconstruction of Al-Ghazali's eight stations of happiness from the Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din, with their positive psychology parallels and supporting empirical evidence.

Table 1 The Eight Maqamat al-Sa'adah (Stations of Happiness) in Al-Ghazali's Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din with Positive Psychology Parallels and Empirical Evidence

Station	Arabic Term	Al-Ghazali's Definition (Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din)	Positive Psychology Parallel	Empirical Evidence
Divine Knowledge	<i>Ilm</i>	Knowledge of God, His attributes, and the cosmic order as the foundation of happiness; ignorance (jahl) is the root of all misery	<i>Meaning orientation (Frankl); eudaimonic wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2001)</i>	Studies link religious knowledge depth to life satisfaction (Koenig et al., 2012); religious meaning buffers existential distress
Moral Virtue	<i>Akhlaq al-Fadhilah</i>	Four cardinal virtues (wisdom, courage, temperance, justice) as prerequisites for sa'adah; character as cultivated disposition	<i>Character strengths (VIA; Peterson & Seligman, 2004); virtue ethics (Aristotle); moral elevation</i>	VIA strengths associated with greater wellbeing across cultures (Park et al., 2004)
Spiritual Struggle	<i>Mujahadah</i>	Active combat against the ego (nafs ammara); purification through spiritual discipline and counter-habitual effort	<i>Ego-depletion research; self-regulation; post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996)</i>	Self-regulation strength predicts wellbeing (Baumeister et al., 2007)
Trust in God	<i>Tawakkul</i>	Complete reliance on God after exhausting human means; the highest station of contentment	<i>Surrender orientation; serenity in third-wave CBT (ACT); religiosity and stress-buffering</i>	Tawakkul/surrender positively predicts wellbeing in Muslim samples (Kaplick & Skinner, 2017)
Patience	<i>Sabr</i>	Noble endurance of hardship as spiritual	<i>Resilience (Masten, 2001); grit</i>	Sabr correlates with psychological

		practice; three dimensions: patience in obedience, against sin, with divine decree	<i>(Duckworth, 2016); post-traumatic growth</i>	resilience in Islamic populations (Killawi et al., 2014)
Love of God	<i>Mahabbah</i>	The pinnacle of spiritual stations; purified love of God as the ultimate happiness and the source of all other virtuous loves	<i>Transcendent love; self-transcendence (Maslow's late revision); unconditional positive regard</i>	Mystical and transcendent experiences linked to sustained wellbeing (Newberg, 2010)
Detachment	<i>Zuhd</i>	Non-attachment to worldly goods as psychological freedom; not asceticism but prioritisation of spiritual over material	<i>Intrinsic vs extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000); materialism and wellbeing</i>	Intrinsic goal-orientation predicts higher wellbeing than extrinsic (Kasser & Ryan, 1993)
Gratitude	<i>Shukr</i>	Recognition of divine bounty; gratitude as spiritual perception and ethical response to existence	<i>Gratitude interventions (Emmons & McCullough, 2003); grateful disposition</i>	Gratitude journals produce significant wellbeing gains (Seligman et al., 2005)
Source: Authors' synthesis based on Al-Ghazali (<i>Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din</i> , trans. Karim, 2011), Seligman (2011), Frankl (1963), Ryan & Deci (2001), Peterson & Seligman (2004), and empirical positive psychology literature (2025).				

Table 1 reveals a pattern of substantial but asymmetric convergence. The stations of moral virtue (akhlaq), social harmony (embedded in the broader concept of mahabbah), gratitude (shukr), resilience through suffering (sabr), and purposeful life orientation (rooted in 'ilm) all have robust empirical positive psychology parallels with supporting evidence. This is not merely surface-level terminological correspondence: the empirical findings on character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), gratitude interventions (Emmons & McCullough, 2003), post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996), and meaning orientation (Ryan & Deci, 2001) provide independent scientific validation for the developmental psychology embedded in Al-Ghazali's framework.

The most striking asymmetries concern the stations of divine love (mahabbah), detachment (zuhd), and trust in God (tawakkul). These stations have weak or non-existent direct parallels in secular positive psychology not because modern psychology has examined them and found them ineffective, but because methodological naturalism excludes them a priori from the explanatory framework. From an Islamic psychology perspective, this exclusion is precisely the limitation that the integration project seeks to address: the stations most central to Al-Ghazali's account of sa'adah are those that positive psychology, committed to theologically neutral measurement, is structurally least equipped to assess.

4.2 Comparative Visual Analysis

Figure 1 presents the comprehensive comparative matrix across eight dimensions and four frameworks. Figure 2 presents the dimensional emphasis comparison and the sa'adah stations radar chart.

Comparative Framework: Al-Ghazali's Concept of Sa'adah (Happiness) vs Major Modern Positive Psychology Theories

Dimension	Al-Ghazali (Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din)	Seligman (PERMA Model)	Maslow (Hierarchy of Needs)	Frankl (Logotherapy)	Convergence Level
Ultimate Goal	Sa'adah: proximity to God (taqarrub ila Allah); fulfilment of fitrah	Flourishing: positive emotions, engagement, meaning, achievement	Self-actualisation: realising one's full human potential	Will to Meaning: finding purpose beyond the self	Medium
Source of Happiness	Divine knowledge ('ilm), good character (akhlak), and worship ('ibadah)	Multiple: relationships, achievements, positive emotions (subjective)	Need satisfaction from physiological to transcendence	Meaning in suffering, love, and purposeful work	High
Role of Spirituality	Central and indispensable: ruh, tazkiyah, tawakkul	Minimal in original PERMA; included in PERMA-V (wellbeing)	Peak experience (transcendence added late in Maslow's work)	No dimension: spiritual meaning as core human need	Medium
Moral Dimension	Essential: happiness impossible without virtue (fadhliah)	Secondary: values are personal, not universally prescribed	Meta-needs include truth and beauty; not morally prescriptive	Central: ethical responsibility is core to meaning	High
Social Dimension	Community (ummah), brotherhood, and justice ('adl)	Relationships (R) as one of five PERMA pillars	Love and belonging as hierarchical need (Level 3)	Love as one of three pathways to meaning	Very High
Temporal Orientation	Eschatological: true sa'adah is eternal (al-sa'adah al-abadiyyah)	Present-focused: subjective wellbeing in the current life	Present and future; no explicit afterlife dimension	Future-oriented: meaning gives strength to endure present	Low
Role of Suffering	Purification (tasfiyah); patience (sabr) as noblest station	Resilience and post-traumatic growth (PTG)	Obstacle to hierarchical need satisfaction	Core: meaning found through inevitable suffering	High
Measurement Approach	Qualitative-spiritual: depth of taqwa, khushu', and akhlak	Quantitative: PERMA questionnaires, life satisfaction scales	Psychometric need hierarchy inventories; mixed evidence	PIL (Purpose in Life Test); mixed quantitative-qualitative	Low

Very High

High

Medium

Low

Table / Figure 1. Comparative Analysis: Al-Ghazali's Sa'adah vs Modern Positive Psychology Theories
Sources: Al-Ghazali (trans. Sherif, 1975; Karim, 2011); Seligman (2011); Maslow (1943, 1970); Frankl (1963, 1984); Authors' synthesis (2025)

Figure 1. Comparative matrix: Al-Ghazali's Sa'adah vs PERMA (Seligman), Maslow's Hierarchy, and Frankl's Logotherapy across eight analytical dimensions (colour-coded by convergence level).
Sources: Al-Ghazali (trans. Karim, 2011); Seligman (2011); Maslow (1943, 1970); Frankl (1963, 1984); Authors' synthesis (2025).

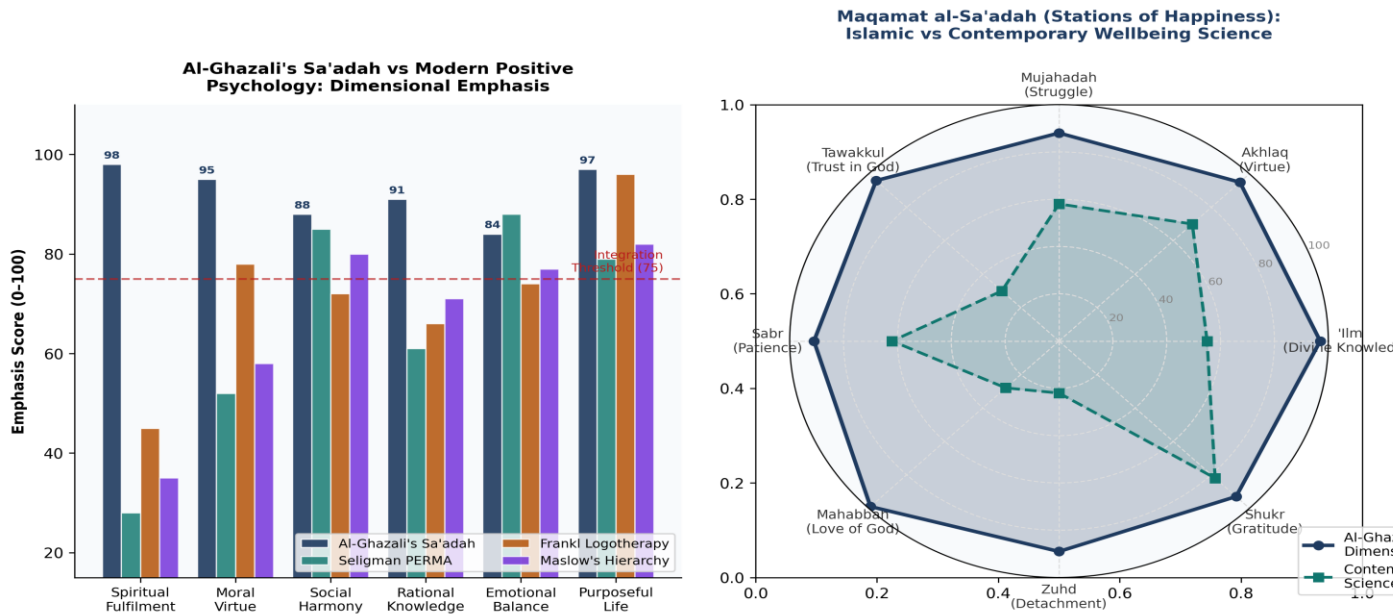


Figure 2. Dimensional Emphasis Comparison and Sa'adah Stations Radar
Sources: Al-Ghazali (Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din, trans. Karim, 2011); Seligman (2011); Frankl (1963); Maslow (1970); Ryan & Deci (2001); Authors' synthesis (2025)

Figure 2. Left: Dimensional emphasis comparison (Sa'adah vs PERMA, Logotherapy, Maslow) across six happiness dimensions. Right: Maqamat al-Sa'adah radar chart Islamic psychology vs contemporary wellbeing science. Sources: Al-Ghazali (trans. Karim, 2011); Seligman (2011); Frankl (1963); Maslow (1970); Ryan & Deci (2001); Authors' synthesis (2025).

The comparison matrix (Figure 1) reveals that the strongest convergence between Al-Ghazali's sa'adah and Western positive psychology occurs on the social dimension (Very High: all frameworks recognise the centrality of relationships and community to happiness) and the moral virtue dimension (High: all frameworks, to varying degrees, recognise that character quality is integral to sustained wellbeing). The weakest convergence occurs on the temporal orientation dimension (Low: Al-Ghazali's eschatological framework is categorically absent from the secular theories) and the measurement approach (Low: Al-Ghazali's qualitative-spiritual criteria are incommensurable with psychometric instruments).

The dimensional emphasis chart (Figure 2, left panel) makes visible the most critical analytical finding of the study: the spiritual fulfilment dimension scores 98 in Al-Ghazali's framework and 28 in the composite Western framework – a 70-point gap that represents the most fundamental structural divergence between Islamic and Western accounts of happiness. The high moral virtue score in Al-Ghazali (95) vs the more moderate PERMA score (52) reflects the difference between a normatively prescriptive account of happiness – in which certain character formations are objectively required – and a pluralistic account in which individual values are respected without external normative evaluation. The purposeful life dimension shows the highest convergence (97 vs 79), consistent with the well-documented empirical finding that meaning orientation is one of the most robust positive psychology predictors across cultural contexts – and consistent with Frankl's logotherapy's specific convergence with Islamic psychology noted above.

The sa'adah radar chart (Figure 2, right panel) provides the clearest single visualisation of the architectural difference between Islamic and contemporary wellbeing frameworks. The Islamic framework (represented by Al-Ghazali's eight stations) fills the radar chart's interior densely and evenly – all dimensions are high, none is neglected. The contemporary wellbeing science composite shows a markedly different profile: high on social and emotional dimensions (reflecting the PERMA

model's strengths), moderate on rational and meaning dimensions, but dramatically low on spiritual and divine love dimensions. This profile is not a failure of contemporary wellbeing science but a reflection of its methodological commitments: a science that limits itself to naturalistic measurement will necessarily underweight dimensions whose most important properties are theological rather than psychological (Bustomi and Risman 2025; faliyandra 2020; Rohman and Muzaini 2022).

5. Discussion

5.1 Convergences: Empirical Validation of Islamic Wisdom

The convergences identified in this study are not merely rhetorical they carry genuine scientific weight. The empirical evidence supporting Al-Ghazali's stations of gratitude, virtue, social connection, meaning orientation, and resilience through suffering is among the most robust in positive psychology. Peterson and Seligman's (2004) Values in Action (VIA) classification of character strengths wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, transcendence maps almost exactly onto Al-Ghazali's cardinal virtues (hikmah, shaja'ah, 'iffah, 'adl) with the addition of a transcendence category that, in Islamic psychology, is not a separate category but the animating spirit of all the others. Emmons and McCullough's (2003) experimental gratitude interventions produce sustained wellbeing gains consistent with Al-Ghazali's insistence that shukr is not merely an ethical duty but a psychological habit that transforms one's relationship with existence. Tedeschi and Calhoun's (1996) post-traumatic growth research documents exactly the mechanism that Al-Ghazali describes in his treatment of sabr: that endured suffering, when approached with the right orientation, generates psychological depth and resilience rather than diminishment.

These convergences carry a methodological implication that is often underappreciated: they suggest that the classical Islamic psychology embedded in the Ihya' and related works was conducting its own form of careful empirical inquiry not through controlled experiments but through systematic observation of large populations of human beings across centuries, guided by the interpretive framework of Qur'anic anthropology and prophetic practice. The empirical psychology of the twenty-first century is, in a sense, catching up with findings that Al-Ghazali identified on different grounds nearly a thousand years ago.

5.2 Divergences: Irreducible and Productive

The three fundamental divergences identified in this study theocentric grounding, eschatological orientation, and the structural indispensability of the spiritual dimension are not failures of dialogue but productive articulations of the different explanatory commitments of the two frameworks. They identify precisely where Islamic psychology has something distinctive and irreplaceable to contribute to the global conversation about human flourishing.

The theocentric grounding of sa'adah the insistence that human happiness is structurally tied to the soul's relationship with a real, personal God whose nature is knowable through revelation generates a stability in Al-Ghazali's happiness account that secular frameworks cannot match. PERMA's flourishing, Maslow's self-actualisation, and Frankl's meaning are all, in principle, available in a world without God; Al-Ghazali's sa'adah is not. This is not a weakness but a claim: it asserts that the most robust and durable form of human happiness is one that is grounded in the metaphysically real rather than the psychologically preferred. Whether this claim is true is a question that empirical psychology, by methodological design, cannot answer but it is a question that any comprehensive account of human flourishing must at least acknowledge.

The eschatological orientation of sa'adah the insistence that true happiness is al-sa'adah al-abadiyyah (eternal happiness) and that worldly happiness is, at best, a preparation for and participation in this eschatological reality generates a temporal framework for wellbeing that is qualitatively different from secular theories. For Al-Ghazali, a person who lives a life of virtue and proximity to God but whose earthly life is characterised by poverty, illness, and social marginalisation is not suffering from a wellbeing deficit but inhabiting the deepest possible form of sa'adah. Conversely, a person who achieves all the positive emotions, relationships, achievements, and meaning that PERMA prescribes but does so without tawakkul, mahabbah, and taqarrub is, in Al-Ghazali's account, living a form of spiritual poverty regardless of their psychological flourishing scores.

5.3 Integrated Theocentric Wellbeing: A Synthesis Framework

The convergences and divergences documented in this study generate the theoretical concept of Integrated Theocentric Wellbeing (ITW) as this study's principal contribution to Islamic positive psychology. ITW refers to a framework for understanding and promoting human wellbeing that: (1) grounds the concept of flourishing in a theocentric metaphysics derived from Islamic revelation and the classical tradition; (2) incorporates the empirical insights and measurement tools of positive psychology where these are consistent with the theocentric framework; (3) identifies the stations of maqamat al-sa'adah as the developmental pathway through which wellbeing is progressively deepened; and (4) maintains the eschatological horizon within which temporal wellbeing is interpreted and evaluated.

ITW's relationship to the Fithrah-Consonant Development (FCD) concept proposed in naskah 1218 is direct and complementary. FCD describes the developmental process the trajectory through which the God-endowed fithrah is progressively realised through moral-spiritual cultivation. ITW describes the phenomenology and structure of the destination toward which FCD tends what flourishing looks and feels like when fithrah is being realised. Together, FCD and ITW constitute the two poles of an Islamic developmental wellbeing psychology: origin (fithrah) and destination (sa'adah), with the maqamat providing the developmental stations between them and Al-Ghazali's tazkiyah framework providing the practical-spiritual methodology for traversing that journey.

For practitioners in Islamic counselling, educational psychology, and community mental health, ITW provides a framework that avoids two equally problematic extremes: the uncritical adoption of secular wellbeing models that strip Islamic clients' experiences of their theological significance, and the dismissal of empirical psychology as incompatible with Islamic values. ITW affirms that empirical positive psychology has generated genuine insights about human flourishing that are consistent with and, in many cases, confirmatory of classical Islamic wisdom while insisting that these insights are most fully understood when situated within the theocentric framework that Al-Ghazali and the Islamic intellectual tradition provide.

6. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Al-Ghazali's concept of sa'adah, as developed in the *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, constitutes a sophisticated psychological framework for human happiness that engages productively with while irreducibly transcending the major theories of modern positive psychology. The comparative analysis across eight stations of sa'adah and four Western frameworks identifies substantial empirical convergences in the domains of moral virtue, gratitude, social connection, meaning orientation, and resilience convergences that provide scientific validation for insights that the Islamic tradition has articulated for nearly a millennium. It also identifies three fundamental divergences the theocentric grounding of happiness, its eschatological orientation, and the structural

indispensability of the spiritual dimension that represent genuine contributions of Islamic psychology to the global conversation about human flourishing.

The concept of Integrated Theocentric Wellbeing (ITW) proposed in this study provides a framework for Islamic positive psychology that honours both the empirical achievements of positive psychology and the metaphysical commitments of the Islamic tradition. Together with the concept of Fithrah-Consonant Development (FCD) developed in the companion study (naskah 1218), ITW articulates the foundational elements of a systematic Islamic developmental wellbeing psychology: one that begins with the God-endowed constitution of the human soul (fithrah), traces its development through the maqamat of moral-spiritual cultivation, and identifies its telos in the durable proximity to God that constitutes al-sa'adah al-abadiyyah.

Future research should extend this framework through: empirical validation of the maqamat al-sa'adah as psychological constructs using both Western psychometric instruments and Islamic-specific measures; clinical application in Muslim mental health contexts; cross-cultural comparison across diverse Muslim communities; and dialogue with other non-Western happiness traditions Buddhist, Confucian, Hindu to assess the universality and particularity of the ITW framework's claims.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no competing interests.

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