

Redefining Happiness Through Faith and Purpose: A Comparative Study of Islamic Perspectives and The Japanese Concept of Ikigai

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Abstract

This study presents a comparative analysis of happiness through two distinct yet conceptually related traditions: the Islamic understanding of sa'adah and the Japanese philosophy of Ikigai. Drawing upon primary Islamic sources, including the Qur'an, authentic Hadith, and the writings of classical Muslim scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, and Al-Farabi, alongside contemporary scholarship on Ikigai, the study examines how both traditions conceptualize purpose, well-being, and human flourishing. Employing a qualitative interpretive methodology based on textual and comparative philosophical analysis, the research identifies areas of convergence and divergence between the two frameworks. The findings indicate that both perspectives emphasize purposeful living, ethical conduct, self-development, and contribution to society as essential dimensions of lasting happiness. However, they differ fundamentally in their philosophical foundations. While Ikigai primarily focuses on meaning and fulfillment within this-worldly life, the Islamic concept of sa'adah is grounded in divine revelation, spiritual purification, accountability before God, and ultimate success in the Hereafter. The study argues that these distinct foundations shape different understandings of happiness while offering complementary insights into contemporary discussions on well-being. By integrating religious studies, comparative philosophy, and positive psychology, this research contributes to the growing interdisciplinary literature on happiness and provides a broader framework for understanding the relationship between faith, purpose, and human flourishing.

Introduction

Happiness has long been regarded as one of humanity's most enduring aspirations and one of the most widely discussed concepts in philosophy, religion, and psychology. Across civilizations, scholars and thinkers have proposed different explanations of what constitutes a meaningful and fulfilling life. From Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia and the Buddhist pursuit of nirvana to the Qur'anic ideals of sa'adah and falah, diverse intellectual traditions have sought to explain the nature, purpose, and conditions of genuine human flourishing.

Despite unprecedented advances in science, technology, healthcare, and material prosperity, contemporary societies continue to experience increasing levels of depression, anxiety, loneliness, and existential dissatisfaction, particularly among younger generations (Twenge & Campbell, 2019). These developments have prompted scholars to question whether material success and subjective pleasure alone can provide lasting well-being. Consequently, growing attention has been directed toward meaning-centred approaches that emphasize purpose, virtue, relationships, and spiritual fulfilment as essential components of happiness (Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2002).

Within this broader discussion, two distinct yet conceptually related traditions have attracted increasing scholarly interest. The Islamic understanding of happiness, rooted in divine revelation and classical Islamic scholarship, presents sa'adah as a comprehensive state of spiritual, moral, and eternal well-being. In contrast, the Japanese philosophy of Ikigai emphasizes discovering meaning and purpose through everyday life, personal fulfilment, and contribution to society. Although these traditions emerged from different historical, cultural, and philosophical contexts, both challenge purely hedonic conceptions of happiness and instead emphasize purposeful living as the foundation of human flourishing.

The increasing global interest in well-being, mental health, and purpose-driven living makes a comparative examination of these traditions both timely and academically significant. Exploring their shared insights and distinctive foundations contributes to a deeper understanding of how different intellectual traditions conceptualize happiness beyond material or psychological satisfaction.

❖ Research Significance

Recent scholarship has demonstrated growing academic interest in comparing religious perspectives on well-being with contemporary theories of positive psychology. Studies examining the relationship between Islamic conceptions of sa'adah and the Japanese philosophy of Ikigai suggest that both frameworks encourage purposeful living, ethical conduct, and personal development while differing in their underlying metaphysical assumptions (Rifqiya & Hosseinieskandian, 2024). For example, recent comparative studies have argued that although Ikigai promotes meaning within worldly existence, Islamic happiness is fundamentally grounded in divine revelation, spiritual purification, and ultimate success in the Hereafter (Zaini & Moris, 2025).

Building upon these contributions, the present study offers a broader interdisciplinary analysis by integrating Qur'anic teachings, authentic Hadith, classical Islamic philosophy, and contemporary empirical research on Ikigai. Rather than merely identifying similarities and differences, the study critically examines the philosophical foundations, conceptual structures, and implications of both traditions for contemporary discussions on happiness and human flourishing.

❖ Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

- Examine the concept of happiness in Islamic thought and the philosophy of Ikigai.
- Explore the meanings of key concepts, including sa'adah, falah, al-salam, and Ikigai.
- Compare the philosophical foundations, ethical principles, and practical implications of both traditions.
- Identify areas of convergence and divergence between the two frameworks.
- Contribute to interdisciplinary discussions on faith, purpose, and human flourishing.

Review of the Literature

❖ Happiness as a Multidimensional Concept

The concept of happiness has occupied a central place in philosophical, religious, and psychological inquiry for centuries. Rather than viewing happiness solely as pleasure or emotional satisfaction, many intellectual traditions have interpreted it as a multidimensional process involving virtue, purpose, personal growth, and social responsibility. Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia, for example, describes happiness as human flourishing achieved through the cultivation of moral excellence and rational activity. This perspective has influenced contemporary psychological theories that distinguish between hedonic well-being, which emphasizes pleasure and life satisfaction, and eudaimonic well-being, which focuses on meaning, self-realization, and purposeful living (Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2002).

Recent developments in positive psychology have reinforced the argument that sustainable well-being cannot be adequately explained through material prosperity or positive emotions alone. Instead, long-term happiness is increasingly understood as the product of meaningful relationships, resilience, ethical behaviour, and a clearly defined sense of purpose. These developments have encouraged scholars to revisit religious and philosophical traditions that have historically emphasized the moral and spiritual dimensions of human flourishing.

❖ **Happiness in Islamic Scholarship**

Within Islamic intellectual history, happiness (sa'adah) is understood as a comprehensive condition encompassing spiritual, moral, psychological, and social well-being. Unlike secular models that frequently evaluate happiness through subjective emotional experience, Islamic scholarship situates human flourishing within a theological framework grounded in divine revelation. The Qur'an consistently associates *falah* (ultimate success), *dhikr* (remembrance of God), *shukr* (gratitude), *qana'ah* (contentment), and righteous conduct with genuine well-being, suggesting that happiness is inseparable from fulfilling humanity's divinely ordained purpose.

Classical Muslim scholars developed this framework in different but complementary ways. Al-Ghazali emphasized self-knowledge, purification of the soul, and intimate knowledge of God as essential stages leading to sa'adah. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah highlighted the spiritual diseases of the heart and argued that remembrance of God, repentance, and ethical self-discipline restore inner peace and psychological balance. Al-Farabi integrated Aristotelian philosophy with Islamic theology, presenting happiness as the perfection of intellectual and moral capacities within a virtuous society governed by revelation and reason. Although these scholars approached the subject from different perspectives, they collectively portray happiness as a lifelong process of spiritual and ethical development rather than a temporary emotional state.

Contemporary research has further expanded this discussion through the emerging field of Islamic psychology. Empirical studies consistently report positive associations between religiosity, spiritual practices, psychological resilience, and subjective well-being among Muslim populations (Isfara et al., 2025). Nevertheless, much of this literature concentrates on Islamic frameworks independently, with comparatively limited attention devoted to systematic comparisons with non-Islamic philosophical traditions.

❖ **Development of Ikigai Scholarship**

International academic interest in Ikigai has increased considerably over the past two decades. Commonly translated as "a reason for being," Ikigai refers to the values, relationships, and activities that give life meaning and encourage individuals to continue living with purpose. Although frequently associated with career fulfilment in popular literature, scholars have demonstrated that traditional Japanese understandings of Ikigai are considerably broader, emphasizing meaningful daily experiences, social connectedness, family responsibilities, and community participation.

Foundational work by Michiko Kamiya established Ikigai as a concept primarily concerned with meaning rather than pleasure (Kamiya, 1966), while later researchers such as Akihiro Hasegawa and Michiko Kumano further clarified its relationship with everyday life and psychological well-being (Kumano, 2017). Empirical investigations have linked a strong sense of Ikigai with improved mental health, greater resilience, enhanced quality of life, and increased longevity, particularly among older adults (Mori, 2017; Sone et al., 2008). However, researchers have also criticized the widespread four-circle Venn diagram for oversimplifying a culturally rich philosophical tradition and reducing it to a framework for career planning.

These debates illustrate that although Ikigai has become internationally popular, important questions remain regarding its philosophical foundations, cultural interpretation, and application outside the Japanese context.

❖ Comparative Scholarship on Islam and Ikigai

Comparative studies examining Islamic understandings of happiness alongside Ikigai remain relatively limited but have expanded in recent years. Existing research consistently identifies several conceptual similarities, including the importance of purpose, ethical conduct, self-discipline, social contribution, and the rejection of purely pleasure-based conceptions of happiness. These shared characteristics suggest that both traditions provide alternatives to narrowly hedonic models of well-being.

At the same time, recent scholarship emphasizes substantial philosophical differences. Comparative analyses by Rifqiya and Hosseinieskandian (2024) and the 2025 AL-ITQAN study argue that while Ikigai encourages meaningful engagement with worldly life, Islamic sa'adah ultimately derives from divine revelation, worship, accountability before God, and success in the Hereafter. Consequently, although both traditions encourage purposeful living, they rest upon fundamentally different metaphysical and epistemological assumptions.

Despite these valuable contributions, the existing literature remains fragmented. Most studies focus exclusively on Islamic happiness, positive psychology, or Ikigai without integrating classical Islamic philosophy, Qur'anic teachings, Prophetic traditions, and contemporary empirical research within a single comparative framework. Furthermore, relatively little attention has been given to examining how differences in philosophical foundations shape each tradition's understanding of happiness, purpose, and human flourishing.

❖ Research Gap

The foregoing review demonstrates that substantial scholarship exists on Islamic conceptions of happiness and on Ikigai as independent fields of study. However, relatively few studies have undertaken a comprehensive interdisciplinary comparison that combines primary Islamic sources, classical philosophical writings, and contemporary empirical research on Ikigai within a unified analytical framework. Existing studies have primarily emphasized conceptual similarities while giving relatively less attention to differences in epistemology, theology, teleology, and practical implications.

The present study seeks to address this gap through a qualitative comparative analysis of Islamic and Japanese perspectives on happiness. By integrating Qur'anic teachings, authentic Hadith, classical Islamic scholarship, and contemporary Ikigai research, the study contributes to broader discussions in Islamic studies, comparative philosophy, religious studies, and positive psychology while offering a more comprehensive understanding of faith, purpose, and human flourishing.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative interpretive research design to examine and compare the concepts of happiness in Islamic thought and the Japanese philosophy of Ikigai. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study seeks to analyze meanings, philosophical concepts, theological principles, and ethical frameworks rather than to measure variables statistically. The research is therefore conceptual and analytical in nature, drawing upon textual interpretation and comparative philosophical inquiry.

❖ Research Design

The study adopts a comparative philosophical approach, enabling the systematic examination of two distinct intellectual traditions that address the nature of happiness, purpose, and human flourishing. Rather than attempting to establish empirical relationships, the research explores how each tradition conceptualizes well-being, identifies points of convergence and divergence, and evaluates their implications for contemporary discussions on meaningful living.

❖ Data Sources

The study is based exclusively on documentary sources consisting of both primary and secondary materials.

Primary Islamic Sources

Primary sources include selected Qur'anic verses, authentic Hadith collections, and the writings of classical Muslim scholars. The principal texts examined include:

- The Holy Qur'an
- Sahih al-Bukhari
- Sunan Ibn Majah
- Al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* and Kimiya al-Sa'adah
- Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah's *Miftah Dar al-Sa'adah* and *Al-Wabil al-Sayyib*
- Al-Farabi's *Ara' Ahl al-Madinah al-Fadilah*

Classical tafsir works, including those of Ibn Kathir (2000), Al-Qurtubi (2006), and Abul A'la Maududi (1970), were consulted to ensure accurate contextual interpretation of the selected Qur'anic passages.

Secondary Sources

Secondary data consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and contemporary research on Ikigai, positive psychology, Islamic psychology, and comparative philosophy. Priority was given to scholarly publications that directly addressed happiness, purpose, well-being, spirituality, or human flourishing.

❖ Data Selection Criteria

Sources were selected according to the following criteria:

- direct relevance to the concepts of happiness, purpose, or human flourishing.
- scholarly credibility and academic recognition.
- preference for primary Islamic sources where theological interpretation was required.
- inclusion of contemporary peer-reviewed studies to represent current scholarship on Ikigai and well-being.

Popular self-help literature and non-scholarly online sources were excluded unless referenced for historical or conceptual clarification.

❖ Analytical Framework

The collected materials were analyzed using thematic textual analysis and comparative philosophical analysis.

The analysis proceeded through four stages:

- Identification of key concepts relating to happiness within each tradition.
- Examination of the philosophical, theological, and ethical foundations of those concepts.
- Comparative analysis to identify similarities, differences, and complementary insights.
- Interpretation of the findings within the broader context of contemporary well-being research and interdisciplinary scholarship.

This analytical framework enabled both traditions to be examined systematically while respecting their distinct historical, cultural, and epistemological contexts.

❖ Trustworthiness of the Study

To enhance the credibility of the research, evidence was drawn from multiple categories of sources, including primary religious texts, classical scholarly works, and contemporary academic publications. The triangulation of these sources reduced reliance on any single interpretation and strengthened the consistency of the comparative analysis. Throughout the study, interpretations were grounded in established scholarly literature rather than personal opinion.

❖ Scope of the Study

The study focuses on conceptual and philosophical understandings of happiness within Islamic thought and the Japanese philosophy of Ikigai. It does not seek to evaluate empirical psychological outcomes or conduct field-based investigations. Accordingly, the findings should be understood as contributions to comparative philosophy, religious studies, and interdisciplinary discussions on well-being rather than as statistically generalizable conclusions.

Knowledge Landscape: Mapping the Conceptual Foundations of Happiness

This section examines the principal concepts through which happiness is understood in Islamic thought and the Japanese philosophy of Ikigai. Rather than treating happiness as a single emotional experience, both traditions present it as a multidimensional process involving purpose, ethical living, personal development, and meaningful engagement with life. By analyzing these foundational concepts individually, the study establishes the conceptual basis for the comparative discussion that follows.

❖ The Islamic Conception of Happiness

Islamic scholarship presents happiness as an integrated state encompassing spiritual, moral, psychological, and social well-being. Unlike approaches that define happiness primarily through subjective emotional experience, the Islamic worldview understands genuine happiness as arising from a life lived in accordance with divine guidance. This perspective is expressed through several interconnected Qur'anic concepts, each highlighting a particular dimension of human flourishing (Mohamed, n.d.).

• Sa'adah (True Happiness or Felicity)

Among classical Muslim scholars, sa'adah represents the highest form of human flourishing. Derived from the Arabic root s-'-d, the term refers not merely to emotional satisfaction but to enduring felicity resulting from closeness to Allah and ultimate success in the Hereafter. Classical scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Qayyim consistently describe sa'adah as the culmination of spiritual purification (tazkiyat al-nafs), sincere worship, and moral excellence (Al-Ghazālī & Bilal, 2001; 1953, مؤلف).

The Qur'an associates this state with the eternal happiness of the righteous:

وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ سُعِدُوا فَفِي الْجَنَّةِ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا مَا دَامَتِ السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ رَبُّكَ

Wa amma alladhina su'idu fafi al-jannati khalidina fiha ma damat al-samawatu wal-ardu illa ma sha'a rabbuka

"And as for those who are happy, they will be in Paradise, abiding there so long as the heavens and the earth endure, unless your Lord wills."

- Surah Hud, 11:108

This understanding distinguishes Islamic happiness from purely psychological or material conceptions by locating its ultimate fulfillment beyond worldly existence while acknowledging that spiritual tranquility may also be experienced during earthly life.

- **Falah (Ultimate Success)**

Closely related to sa'adah is the concept of falah, which denotes comprehensive success in both this world and the Hereafter. Rather than measuring success through wealth or social status, the Qur'an associates falah with faith, righteous action, humility, generosity, and moral discipline (Shohib & Sa'diyah, 2023).

The opening verses of Surah al-Mu'minun identify believers as those who have attained falah, thereby presenting happiness as the outcome of ethical commitment and spiritual responsibility rather than external achievement alone. In this sense, falah complements sa'adah by emphasizing the practical manifestation of faith in everyday life.

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ

Qad aflaha al-mu'minun

"Certainly, the believers have succeeded/attained falah."

- Surah Al-Mu'minun, 23:1

- **Al-Salam (Peace and Inner Tranquility)**

The concept of al-salam expresses the inner peace that emerges through trust in Allah and remembrance of Him (Sulaiman, 2021). Unlike hedonic approaches that define happiness as the absence of discomfort, Islamic thought recognizes that genuine tranquility may coexist with hardship when individuals maintain spiritual confidence and reliance upon God.

The Qur'an states:

أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

Ala bi dhikri Allahi tatma'innu al-qulub

"Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest."

- Surah Al-Ra'd, 13:28

This verse highlights the intimate relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being, presenting remembrance of God not merely as a religious obligation but as a source of emotional stability and existential security.

- **Human Purpose in the Islamic Worldview**

Central to understanding Islamic happiness is the Quranic declaration of the purpose of human existence. Unlike most philosophical traditions that derive purpose from human reason, nature, or social contract, Islam ground's purpose in divine revelation:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِي

Wa ma khalaqtu al-jinna wal-insa illa liya'budun

"And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me."

- Surah Al-Dhariyat, 51:56

Classical tafsir scholars including Maududi and Ibn Kathir clarify that 'ibadah (worship) in this context is not restricted to ritual prayer but encompasses every act performed with God-consciousness and sincere intention - from earning a livelihood to raising children, from seeking knowledge to offering service (Kathir, 2000; Maududi, 1970). This totalizing conception of worship-as-purpose forms the backbone of the Islamic happiness framework: when one's entire existence is oriented toward God, every action becomes meaningful and every moment becomes an opportunity for spiritual elevation.

Furthermore, the Quran identifies humanity's unique role as khalifah (vicegerent/steward) on earth:

وَإِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِنَّا جَاعِلُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً

Wa idh qala rabbuka lil-mala'ikati inni ja'ilun fi al-ardi khalifah

"And [remember] when your Lord said to the angels: 'I am going to place a successive authority on earth.'"

- Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:30

This dual identity, as worshippers ('abid) and stewards (khalifah) it situates Islamic purpose as simultaneously personal (inner spiritual growth) and social (outward service to creation). This dual-directional quality finds a remarkable structural parallel in the Ikigai framework.

❖ The Japanese Concept of Ikigai

The Japanese concept of Ikigai, commonly translated as "a reason for being," has become an influential framework for understanding purpose and well-being. Although frequently interpreted through the popular four-circle diagram, academic scholarship demonstrates that traditional Ikigai is considerably broader and more culturally grounded.

Beginning with the pioneering work of Michiko Kamiya (1966) (Kono & Walker, 2020), Ikigai has been understood primarily as a source of meaning that motivates individuals to continue living despite life's challenges. Rather than emphasizing extraordinary achievement, traditional Japanese interpretations associate Ikigai with meaningful daily routines, family relationships, community participation, and appreciation of ordinary experiences.

Contemporary empirical research further indicates that a strong sense of Ikigai is positively associated with psychological resilience, life satisfaction, healthy aging, and longevity (Kodate, 2025; Kotera et al., 2021). These findings suggest that meaning and purpose contribute significantly to long-term well-being, even though the philosophical foundations of Ikigai differ substantially from those of Islamic thought.

• Contemporary Misinterpretations of Ikigai

A recurring theme in recent scholarship concerns the widespread misunderstanding of Ikigai outside Japan. The well-known four-circle Venn diagram has become popular in business and self-help literature; however, researchers generally agree that it represents a modern Western adaptation rather than a traditional Japanese model (Nasir et al., 2025; Sartore et al., 2023).

While the diagram may assist personal reflection, reducing Ikigai to career planning or professional fulfillment overlooks its broader cultural emphasis on relationships, community, gratitude, and everyday living. Recognizing this distinction is essential for any meaningful comparison with Islamic conceptions of happiness.

• Traditional Ikigai as Everyday Meaning

Traditional Japanese understandings of Ikigai emphasize that meaning is often discovered through ordinary activities rather than extraordinary accomplishments. Caring for family members, maintaining friendships,

cultivating gardens, preparing meals, and contributing to one's local community are commonly cited examples of Ikigai in practice (Kono & Walker, 2020; Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2023)

This everyday orientation provides an interesting point of comparison with Islamic teachings on intention (niyyah), where ordinary actions may acquire profound spiritual significance when performed sincerely for the sake of Allah. Although the philosophical foundations remain distinct, both traditions recognize that meaningful living is shaped through daily practice rather than isolated moments of achievement.

Deep Concept Exploration: Classical Islamic Scholarship on Happiness

Classical Islamic scholarship offers one of the most comprehensive intellectual traditions concerning the nature of happiness and human flourishing. Rather than treating happiness as an emotional state or psychological outcome, Muslim scholars consistently viewed it as the culmination of spiritual purification, ethical refinement, intellectual development, and nearness to Allah. Although Al-Ghazali, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, and Al-Farabi approached the subject from different disciplinary perspectives, their works collectively establish a coherent understanding of sa'adah that continues to influence contemporary Islamic thought.

❖ Al-Ghazali and the Spiritual Foundations of Happiness

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058–1111 CE) occupies a central position in Islamic ethical and spiritual philosophy. Through works such as *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* and *Kimiya al-Sa'adah*, he developed a comprehensive account of happiness that integrates theology, ethics, psychology, and spirituality (Al-Ghazālī & Bilal, 2001; الغزالي, n.d.)

According to Al-Ghazali, authentic happiness begins with self-knowledge (ma'rifat al-nafs). Understanding one's true nature enables individuals to recognize their dependence upon Allah and their ultimate purpose. This self-awareness leads naturally to ma'rifat Allah (knowledge of God), which Al-Ghazali regards as the highest form of human fulfilment. Happiness is therefore not achieved through external possessions or social recognition but through an inward transformation that aligns the human soul with its Creator.

Central to this transformation is *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul). Al-Ghazali argues that spiritual vices—including arrogance, envy, ostentation, and excessive attachment to worldly desires—obscure the heart's capacity to experience genuine happiness. Conversely, humility, gratitude, patience, sincerity, and remembrance of Allah cultivate a state of inner tranquillity that anticipates the eternal felicity promised in the Hereafter.

Although written centuries before the emergence of modern psychology, Al-Ghazali's analysis demonstrates remarkable conceptual parallels with contemporary discussions of character development, intrinsic motivation, and eudaimonic well-being. Nevertheless, his framework remains fundamentally distinct because its goal is not psychological satisfaction but nearness to Allah and eternal salvation.

❖ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah and the Psychology of the Heart

Building upon earlier Islamic scholarship, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (1292–1350 CE) developed a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between spiritual health and human happiness. His writings, particularly *Miftah Dar al-Sa'adah* and *Al-Wabil al-Sayyib*, emphasise the central role of the heart (qalb) in shaping human behaviour, perception, and well-being (Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, 1350; 1953 مؤلف)

According to Ibn Qayyim, many forms of human suffering originate not from external circumstances but from spiritual disorders such as heedlessness (ghaflah), excessive attachment to worldly life, uncontrolled desires (hawa), and ingratitude. These conditions distance individuals from Allah and prevent them from experiencing genuine peace.

The process of spiritual renewal involves two complementary stages: takhalli, the removal of destructive moral qualities, and tahalli, the cultivation of virtuous character through remembrance of Allah, repentance, gratitude, and righteous action. In this framework, happiness is understood as the natural consequence of a spiritually healthy heart rather than the pursuit of pleasure itself.

His well-known analogy comparing the heart to a polished mirror illustrates this perspective:

"The rust of the heart is polished with dhikr (remembrance of Allah)."

Rather than functioning merely as devotional advice, this metaphor expresses a comprehensive theory of spiritual psychology in which continuous remembrance restores clarity, moral perception, and emotional stability. Such insights continue to influence contemporary Islamic approaches to mental health and spiritual well-being.

❖ Al-Farabi and the Social Dimension of Happiness

While Al-Ghazali and Ibn Qayyim primarily examine the inner transformation of the individual, Al-Farabi (872–950 CE) expands the discussion by considering the relationship between personal happiness and society.

In *Ara' Ahl al-Madinah al-Fadilah* (The Virtuous City), Al-Farabi argues that genuine happiness cannot be separated from intellectual excellence, moral virtue, and participation in a just social order (Al-Fārābī, 2002). Human flourishing is achieved not only through personal perfection but also through cooperation within a community guided by wisdom, justice, and ethical leadership.

By integrating elements of Aristotelian philosophy with Islamic theology, Al-Farabi demonstrates that individual well-being and collective welfare are mutually reinforcing. This social orientation broadens Islamic conceptions of happiness beyond individual spirituality, highlighting the importance of justice, education, and responsible citizenship.

His perspective also provides an interesting point of comparison with contemporary discussions of social well-being and community-centred models of flourishing, while remaining firmly grounded in the Islamic worldview.

❖ Qur'anic and Prophetic Foundations of Happiness

The philosophical reflections of classical Muslim scholars are firmly rooted in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Islamic conceptions of happiness therefore derive not only from intellectual reasoning but also from revealed guidance.

• Gratitude (Shukr) as a Path to Happiness

The Qur'an repeatedly presents gratitude as a source of both spiritual growth and divine blessing:

وَاِذْ تَاَذِّنُ رَبِّكَ لَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْاِذْ ذِكْرًا
يَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ

Wa idh ta'adhdhana rabbukum la'in shakartum la-azidannakum

"And when your Lord proclaimed: 'If you are grateful, I will surely increase you in favor.'"

- Surah Ibrahim, 14:7

This verse illustrates that gratitude functions not merely as an ethical virtue but as a transformative spiritual practice. Contemporary psychological research similarly recognises gratitude as an important contributor to subjective well-being (Emmons & McCullough, 2003), although the Qur'anic perspective locates its ultimate significance within the believer's relationship with Allah.

- **Contentment (Qana'ah) as True Wealth**

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ redefined wealth in profoundly ethical terms:

لَيْسَ الْغِنَى عَنْ كَثْرَةِ الْعَرَضِ، وَلَكِنْ الْغِنَى عَنِ النَّفْسِ

"Wealth is not having many possessions, but rather true wealth is feeling sufficiency in the soul."

- Sahih al-Bukhari, 6446. Narrated by Abu Hurairah (r.a.)(Faisal & Tamrin, 2023)

This teaching shifts the measure of prosperity from material accumulation to inner sufficiency. Within Islamic ethics, qana'ah encourages active striving while cultivating satisfaction with Allah's decree, thereby protecting individuals from envy, greed, and perpetual dissatisfaction.

- **Security, Health, and Daily Provision**

Another Prophetic tradition states:

مَنْ أَصْبَحَ مَسْكُومًا آمِنًا فِي بَرٍّ، مُعَانًى فِي جَسَدِهِ، عِنْدَهُ قُوتٌ يَوْمَهُ، فَقَدْ تَمَّ حِرْثُ الدُّنْيَا

"Whoever among you wakes up physically healthy, feeling safe and secure within himself, with food for the day, it is as if he has acquired the whole world."

- Sunan Ibn Majah. Narrated by 'Ubaydullah ibn Mihsan al-Ansari

This Hadith presents happiness as gratitude for essential blessings rather than limitless acquisition. It highlights a holistic understanding of well-being that integrates physical health, psychological security, social stability, and spiritual appreciation.

- ❖ **Synthesis of Classical Islamic Perspectives**

Although Al-Ghazali, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, and Al-Farabi emphasise different dimensions of happiness, their perspectives are fundamentally complementary rather than contradictory.

Al-Ghazali focuses on spiritual purification and knowledge of Allah; Ibn Qayyim explains how the condition of the heart influences inner peace; and Al-Farabi demonstrates that genuine flourishing also requires moral participation within a virtuous society (Yahya et al., 2020; Сүлейменов, 2019). Together, these scholars present happiness as an integrated reality encompassing the individual soul, ethical character, social responsibility, and ultimate accountability before Allah.

This synthesis provides the conceptual foundation for the comparative analysis that follows, where Islamic understandings of sa'adah are examined alongside the Japanese philosophy of Ikigai. Rather than presenting happiness as a purely emotional experience, the classical Islamic tradition understands it as the lifelong pursuit of faith, virtue, purpose, and closeness to God.

Comparative Analysis: Islamic Sa'adah and the Japanese Philosophy of Ikigai

The preceding discussion demonstrates that both Islamic thought and the philosophy of Ikigai offer comprehensive responses to the universal human search for happiness. Although they arise from distinct religious, historical, and cultural contexts, both traditions reject purely material or pleasure-based understandings of well-being and instead emphasize purpose, ethical living, and meaningful engagement with life. At the same time, their philosophical foundations differ substantially, shaping different understandings of human nature, ultimate purpose, and the source of genuine happiness.

❖ **Areas of Convergence**

• **Purpose as the Foundation of Human Flourishing**

Perhaps the most significant point of convergence is the central role of purpose. Neither tradition understands happiness as a temporary emotional experience or the accumulation of material possessions. Instead, both maintain that human fulfillment arises when life is directed toward meaningful goals.

In Islam, this purpose is established through divine revelation, where worship ('ibadah) and stewardship (khilafah) define humanity's role (Kader, 2021). In contrast, Ikigai encourages individuals to discover purpose through meaningful activities, relationships, and contributions within everyday life (Tee et al., 2023). Although the sources of purpose differ, both traditions recognize purposelessness as a major obstacle to lasting well-being.

• **Ethical Living and Character Formation**

Both frameworks associate happiness with moral character rather than external success.

Islam emphasizes virtues such as sincerity, gratitude, patience, humility, justice, and compassion because these qualities strengthen one's relationship with Allah and with society (Gillani & Khan, 2025). Likewise, traditional Ikigai encourages responsibility, perseverance, respect for others, and commitment to one's community (Nasir et al., 2025).

This shared emphasis demonstrates that enduring happiness depends upon the cultivation of character rather than the pursuit of pleasure alone.

• **Contribution to Society**

A further point of convergence concerns social responsibility.

Islamic teachings repeatedly encourage service (khidmah), charity (sadaqah), and benefiting humanity (Qamar & Azher, 2024). Similarly, traditional Japanese understandings of Ikigai place considerable value upon contributing to family, neighborhood, and community life (Mathews, 1996).

In both traditions, personal happiness is inseparable from the well-being of others, suggesting that flourishing possesses both individual and social dimensions.

• **Everyday Meaning**

Another important similarity lies in the significance attached to ordinary daily life.

Traditional Ikigai teaches that meaning is often found through simple activities such as caring for family members, preparing meals, gardening, or maintaining friendships (Mathews, 1996). Islamic teachings similarly transform everyday activities into spiritually meaningful acts through sincere intention (niyyah) (Majid et al., 2018).

Although grounded in different philosophical assumptions, both perspectives reject the idea that happiness depends upon extraordinary achievements.

• **Beyond Hedonic Happiness**

Both traditions challenge purely hedonic conceptions of well-being.

Islamic scholarship consistently distinguishes between temporary worldly pleasures and lasting spiritual fulfillment (Furqani & Echchabi, 2022), while contemporary Ikigai research aligns more closely with eudaimonic theories of well-being that emphasize meaning, virtue, and personal growth (Yoshioka et al., 2023).

Consequently, both traditions contribute important alternatives to consumerist understandings of happiness centered primarily upon pleasure or material success.

❖ **Areas of Divergence**

• **Ontological Foundations**

The most fundamental difference concerns ontology—that is, the nature of reality upon which each understanding of happiness is built.

Islam views human existence as part of a divinely created moral universe in which life possesses objective meaning established by Allah. Human purpose is therefore discovered through revelation rather than personal preference (Önemli, 2025).

By contrast, Ikigai develops within a cultural and philosophical tradition that emphasizes lived experience, personal meaning, and social relationships without grounding these concepts in revealed theology (Oe, 2025).

This distinction shapes every subsequent difference between the two frameworks.

• **Epistemological Foundations**

The two traditions also differ in how knowledge concerning the good life is acquired.

Islam derives its understanding of happiness from the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the accumulated scholarship of the Islamic intellectual tradition. Revelation therefore functions as the ultimate criterion of truth (Tohirovna, 2026).

Conversely, Ikigai emerges from cultural practice, human reflection, and empirical observation rather than revealed scripture. Its authority rests upon lived experience and psychological usefulness rather than divine command (Tee et al., 2023).

• **Teleological Orientation**

A further distinction concerns ultimate purpose.

Within Islam, happiness extends beyond earthly existence toward eternal success in the Hereafter. Worldly life is understood as preparation for meeting Allah, and present happiness derives its deepest significance from this eternal perspective (Dastmalchian, 2022).

Traditional Ikigai, while encouraging meaningful living, remains primarily concerned with fulfilment during earthly life. It does not incorporate an equivalent doctrine of resurrection, divine judgement, or eternal reward (Oe, 2025).

• **Understanding of Suffering**

The two traditions also approach suffering differently.

Islam regards hardship as a test of faith, an opportunity for spiritual growth, and a means through which sins may be forgiven and character refined. Patience (sabr) therefore becomes an essential component of happiness (Bobyreva et al., 2021).

Although Ikigai acknowledges adversity and resilience, it does not present suffering within an overarching theological framework. Instead, difficulties are generally understood as experiences through which individuals continue to discover meaning and personal growth (Oe, 2025).

- **Ultimate Criterion of Happiness**

Perhaps the clearest distinction concerns the final measure of a successful life.

Within Islam, genuine happiness is ultimately evaluated according to one's relationship with Allah and success in the Hereafter. Material prosperity, social recognition, and emotional satisfaction remain secondary to spiritual fulfillment (Tohirovna, 2026).

Within Ikigai, happiness is generally assessed according to whether individuals experience meaning, fulfillment, and engagement within their daily lives (Schipper & Ziegler, 2019).

These differing standards illustrate that similar outward behaviors may rest upon profoundly different philosophical foundations.

- ❖ **Comparative Synthesis**

The comparison demonstrates that Islamic sa'adah and Ikigai should not be understood as competing theories but as distinct traditions addressing many of the same existential questions from different starting points.

Both reject superficial understandings of happiness based solely upon pleasure or material success. Both emphasize purposeful living, ethical conduct, meaningful relationships, and contribution to society (Rifqiya & Hosseinienskandian, 2024). However, the Islamic framework ultimately situates these values within a comprehensive theological vision centered upon divine revelation, worship, accountability, and eternal life (Buqa, 2024), whereas Ikigai locates meaning primarily within human experience and everyday living (Oe, 2025).

Rather than reducing one tradition to the categories of the other, this comparative approach highlights how diverse philosophical and religious traditions can enrich contemporary discussions on human flourishing. It suggests that meaningful dialogue between faith-based and culturally grounded approaches to well-being can broaden scholarly understanding while respecting the distinctive integrity of each tradition.

Conclusion

This study has examined the concepts of happiness in Islamic thought and the Japanese philosophy of Ikigai through a qualitative comparative analysis of primary Islamic sources, classical scholarly writings, and contemporary academic literature. Despite originating from different religious, cultural, and philosophical traditions, both frameworks present happiness as a multidimensional process rooted in purpose, ethical conduct, meaningful relationships, and personal development rather than in material success or temporary pleasure.

The analysis demonstrates that significant areas of convergence exist between the two traditions. Both emphasize purposeful living, moral character, contribution to society, and the importance of finding meaning in everyday life. These shared themes suggest that enduring well-being is closely connected to values that extend beyond individual satisfaction and material achievement.

At the same time, the comparison reveals fundamental philosophical differences. The Islamic concept of sa'adah is grounded in divine revelation, worship, spiritual purification, and ultimate success in the Hereafter. In contrast, Ikigai primarily emphasizes meaning and fulfillment within worldly existence through relationships, vocation, and community engagement. These differing metaphysical and epistemological foundations shape distinct understandings of the source, purpose, and goal of human happiness.

By bringing these traditions into dialogue, the study contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship in Islamic studies, comparative philosophy, religious studies, and positive psychology. Rather than treating faith-based and secular or cultural approaches as mutually exclusive, the analysis illustrates how diverse intellectual

traditions can enrich contemporary discussions on human flourishing while preserving their distinctive philosophical identities.

Practical Implications

The findings may be relevant for scholars and practitioners working in Islamic psychology, counseling, education, ethics, and well-being studies. The comparison highlights the value of integrating spiritual, moral, and existential dimensions into discussions of mental health and purposeful living, particularly in multicultural contexts where different understandings of happiness coexist.

Limitations of the Study

This research is conceptual and based primarily on textual and comparative philosophical analysis. It does not include empirical investigation, interviews, surveys, or cross-cultural field research. Consequently, the conclusions should be understood as interpretive rather than statistically generalizable.

Directions for Future Research

Future studies may extend this work by conducting empirical research on the relationship between Islamic spirituality, Ikigai, and psychological well-being among diverse populations. Comparative investigations involving additional religious and philosophical traditions, as well as interdisciplinary collaborations between theology, psychology, and sociology, may further deepen scholarly understanding of happiness and human flourishing.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that meaningful dialogue between Islamic conceptions of sa'adah and the Japanese philosophy of Ikigai provides valuable insights into one of humanity's oldest questions: how to live a meaningful and fulfilling life. While the two traditions differ in their ultimate foundations, both affirm that authentic happiness is inseparable from purpose, ethical responsibility, and the continual cultivation of the human person.

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