



AL-ITQĀN: Journal of Islamic Sciences and Comparative Studies
Vol. 10, Issue No. 2, (October 2025) 39-56
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eISSN 2600-8432

HAPPINESS, PURPOSE, AND WELL-BEING: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF IKIGAI AND AL-SA'ĀDAH

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Abstract: This paper presents a critical comparative analysis of the Japanese concept of *Ikigai* through the lens of the Islamic concept of *al-Sa'ādah* (happiness), exploring how both frameworks address happiness, purpose, and personal well-being. *Ikigai*, influenced by Shintoism, Zen Buddhism, and Confucianism, focuses on aligning one's passion, mission, vocation, and profession to create a balanced and meaningful life. However, its emphasis remains on worldly satisfaction and emotional well-being. In contrast, *al-Sa'ādah*, rooted in *al-Qur'ān*, *Sunnah*, and the views of scholars such as al-Ghazālī, offers a more holistic approach, grounded in proximity to the Divine, spiritual purification, ethical living, divine knowledge (*Ma'rifat Allāh*), and preparation for eternal happiness in the hereafter. This study reveals that while both concepts guide individuals toward intentional living, *Ikigai* lacks metaphysical and eschatological dimensions. By evaluating *Ikigai* through the framework of *al-Sa'ādah*, the research bridges cultural and religious understandings of well-being, offering practical insights for addressing modern existential concerns. It concludes that *al-Sa'ādah* presents a spiritually complete and enduring vision of human flourishing that integrates both this life and the next.

Keywords: *Ikigai*, *al-Sa'ādah*, Happiness, Purpose, Fulfillment, Well-being.

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Received Date: OCTOBER 7, 2025
Accepted Date: OCTOBER 22, 2025
Published Date: OCTOBER 31, 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31436/alitqan.v10i2.348>

Introduction

Happiness is a lifelong pursuit grounded in constructive attitudes, purposeful endeavours, and spiritual connection. As emotional beings, humans require emotional wholeness, for its neglect disrupts overall well-being. The Japanese concept of *Ikigai*, which translates to “the reason for being”, has garnered global interest for its practical approach to discovering purpose and achieving fulfillment.¹ It integrates passion, mission, vocation, and profession, offering a framework for balance and satisfaction in daily life. However, most studies focus on its practical or cultural dimensions, with limited exploration of its philosophical and spiritual depth, particularly in comparison with religious perspectives such as the Islamic concept of *al-Sa‘ādah*. This gap highlights the need for a comparative analysis that examines how these concepts align or diverge in their approaches to purpose and well-being, providing a richer perspective that integrates cultural and spiritual dimensions.

In Islam, the concept of *al-Sa‘ādah*, often translated as happiness or ultimate bliss, offers a spiritual and moral vision of well-being. Rooted in Islamic teachings, *al-Sa‘ādah* centers on attaining true happiness through a balance of knowledge and action, as described by the well-known Muslim scholar Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d.1111), includes four essential forms of knowledge: knowledge of the self, knowledge of Allah (ﷻ), knowledge of the world, and knowledge of the Hereafter, alongside four key practices: engaging in permissible music, self-reflection and remembrance (*Dhikr*), marriage, and cultivating love for Allah (ﷻ).² By analysing these concepts through a comparative lens, this study seeks to uncover how *Ikigai* can be evaluated or enriched within the Islamic paradigm of *al-Sa‘ādah*. This exploration contributes to a broader understanding of happiness, purpose, and well-being, bridging cultural and philosophical perspectives for a comprehensive view of what it means to live a happy and fulfilled life.

In this context, the pursuit of happiness and the purpose of life are universal human endeavours. Yet, how individuals conceptualize and achieve these ideals varies across religions and traditions. *Ikigai*, influenced by Shintoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, is a harmonious integration of passion, mission, vocation, and profession, serving as a framework for finding purpose and satisfaction in daily life. On the other hand, *al-Sa‘ādah* offers a God-centered model that aligns personal well-being with divine purpose, emphasising both worldly and

¹ Yuvraj Deshmukh, “*IKIGAI* — Japanese Way of Living the Life,” *Medium*, July 31, 2023, accessed January 17, 2025. <https://medium.com/@yuvrajdeshmukh4/ikigai-japanese-way-of-living-the-life-8246535ca341>.

² Mustaffa, Nurul Hidayawatie, and Noor Shakirah Mat Akhir. “The Clash of Thoughts: How Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī and Bertrand Russell Define Happiness.” *Hamdard Islamicus* 46, No. 4 (2023), p. 23.

eternal dimensions. While both concepts address the foundational questions of purpose, meaning, and fulfillment, they emerge from distinct philosophical and theological foundations.

Hence, this research seeks to analyse *Ikigai* through the lens of *al-Sa'ādah*, exploring their similarities and differences within a broader religio-cultural framework. It examines how both concepts define purpose and happiness, assessing their potential for dialogue and integration. By comparing these paradigms, the research aims to develop a framework that bridges cultural and religious perspectives, enriching contemporary discussions on well-being and fulfillment.

This study aims to answer the following questions in discovering the intersection and divergences of the two concepts. The first question that arises is what are the religious and spiritual frameworks of the concepts of *Ikigai* and *al-Sa'ādah*? Second, the study examines the definitions and core principles underlying the concepts of *Ikigai* and *al-Sa'ādah*. Lastly, the study examines how the concepts of *Ikigai* and *al-Sa'ādah* contribute to personal development and well-being, ultimately facilitating happiness in life.

This research aims to uncover the fundamental principles underlying the concepts of *Ikigai* and *al-Sa'ādah*. Academically, it contributes to comparative ethics and philosophy by offering cross-cultural insights into well-being. Philosophically, it highlights the universal human pursuits of happiness. Practically, it provides guidance for those seeking purpose and balance in life, especially in today's context of growing existential concerns. This research aims to support personal development and mental well-being by drawing on both perspectives. It serves as a resource for scholars, students, and practitioners in philosophy, psychology, religious studies, and self-help.

This research study is qualitative and fundamental in nature, employing library research methods to conduct a comprehensive analysis of primary and secondary sources. The data would be collected using philosophical treatises, academic journal articles, case study research, and scholarly commentaries in both fields. To analyse the data, the researcher adopted comparative, thematic, and semantic analysis to examine the underlying ideas and theoretical frameworks of both concepts.

Religious and Spiritual Foundations of *Ikigai* and *al-Sa'ādah*

The concepts of *Ikigai* and *al-Sa'ādah* represent significant religious and spiritual frameworks within the Japanese intellectual tradition and the Islamic intellectual Heritage, respectively, each addressing fundamental questions concerning human purpose, fulfillment, and the nature of happiness. To examine *Ikigai* in relation to *al-Sa'ādah*, it is essential to understand both

concepts in depth. This section will critically investigate the religious, spiritual, and philosophical underpinnings of both concepts. It will situate *Ikigai* within the broader context of Japanese thought influenced by Buddhism, Shintoism, and Confucian ethics, and *al-Sa'ādah* within the Islamic religious and ethical tradition, particularly through the lens of classical scholars such as al-Ghazālī.

Concept of Ikigai: Japanese Traditions as Foundation

The concept of *Ikigai*, which can be translated as “a reason for being,” reflects a rich synthesis of Japan’s religious and philosophical heritage. Although it cannot be certainly proven that *Ikigai* is rooted in any single religious doctrine, it has been profoundly influenced by Buddhism, Shintoism, and also Confucianism, which are the religious traditions that shape the Japanese perception of purpose, self-realisation, and happiness.³ These influences contribute to a worldview in which spiritual practices and ethical orientations guide individuals toward a meaningful life. From Buddhism, especially Zen Buddhism, *Ikigai* inherits an emphasis on mindfulness, self-awareness, and the impermanence of life. These principles encourage individuals to live authentically and meaningfully in the present moment.⁴

Moreover, the Zen practices of *Zazen* (seated meditation) in Zen Buddhism teach people to remain present and accept the impermanence of life. This awareness helps individuals find meaning in daily life, a core part of *Ikigai*. Furthermore, the Zen concept of *Mushi* (no-mind) encourages acting naturally, without overthinking or attachment to results. Even Zen aesthetics, such as *Wabi* (simple beauty), *Sabi* (the value in imperfection), and *Yugen* (profound subtlety), further express *Ikigai* in daily life and art. Practice like *Kintsugi* (repairing broken pottery with gold) symbolises finding beauty and purpose in imperfection,⁵ grounding *Ikigai* as a spiritual discipline that values the ordinary.

Simultaneously, Shintoism, Japan’s indigenous spiritual tradition, adds another essential layer by promoting reverence for nature, community, and the sacredness of daily life.⁶ Through rituals such as shrine visits, ancestral worship, and seasonal festivals, Shintoism fosters gratitude, harmony, and a sense of interconnectedness, all of which reinforce the

³ The Modern Ikigai, “Ikigai: The Influence of Buddhism and Shintoism,” December 27, 2024, accessed January 17, 2025, <https://www.modernikigai.com/the-influence-of-buddhism-and-shintoism/>.

⁴ Ikigai.

⁵ Hiroko Oe, “Understanding *Ikigai* and Educational Practice: Bridging the Wisdom of Japanese Culture with Contemporary Society,” *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development* 14, no. 1 (March 30, 2025): Pages 2517-2530, <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v14-i1/25066>, p. 2521.

⁶ The Modern Ikigai, “Ikigai: The Influence of Buddhism and Shintoism,” December 27, 2024, accessed January 17, 2025. <https://www.modernikigai.com/the-influence-of-buddhism-and-shintoism/>.

relational and communal dimensions of *Ikigai*.⁷ As a result, *Ikigai* becomes more than a personal pursuit of happiness; it is a culturally embedded, spiritually inspired framework that harmonises the individual with society, nature, and the transcendent.

The religious foundation of *Ikigai* is also influenced by Confucianism, which has played a significant role in shaping Japanese social values. Confucian ethics emphasises social harmony, filial piety, and moral responsibility, all of which contribute to the social side of *Ikigai*.⁸ This means that finding purpose in life often involves helping one's family, community, or society. The Confucian idea of *Ren* (benevolence) highlights that a meaningful life requires duty to others, explaining why many Japanese elders find *Ikigai* in caregiving or mentoring roles rooted in moral fulfillment rather than prestige. Concepts like *Sekentei* (social appearance) further reflect the balance between community expectations and personal meaning,⁹ distinguishing *Ikigai* as a harmony between individual purpose and social responsibility.

Ikigai represents a culturally grounded understanding of life's purpose shaped by Japan's spiritual and philosophical traditions. More than a tool for happiness, it reflects a synthesis of Zen awareness, Shintoism harmony, and Confucian ethics. Unlike Western models centred on individualism, *Ikigai* emphasises impermanence, moral responsibility, and finding meaning in ordinary life, integrating the self, society, and the sacred.

Concept of *Ikigai*: Historical Roots and Development

Historically, the concept of *Ikigai* can be traced back to the Heian period (794-1185), a culturally rich era in Japanese history.¹⁰ Rooted in the traditional values of harmony, purpose, and well-being, *Ikigai* gradually evolved as a guiding principle for living a meaningful life. It gained cultural prominence in the Okinawa Islands¹¹ where it has been closely associated with longevity and life satisfaction among the elderly population. In these communities, purpose was often derived from small yet meaningful roles. This reflects a relational and duty-oriented understanding of life's meaning, closely tied to communal well-being and one's social role within the family or village.¹²

⁷ "Shintoism in Practice: Rituals and Festivals • Philosophy Institute," December 26, 2023, accessed February 27, 2025. <https://philosophy.institute/religions-of-the-world/shintoism-rituals-festivals/>.

⁸ Hiroko Oe, "Understanding *Ikigai* and Educational Practice: Bridging the Wisdom of Japanese Culture with Contemporary Society," *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (March 30, 2025): Pages 2517-2530, <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v14-i1/25066>, p. 2522.

⁹ Oe, p. 2522. "Understanding *Ikigai* and Educational Practice".

¹⁰ "*Ikigai* (A Japanese Concept to Lead a Happy Life)," Japan Up Close, accessed May 3, 2025, https://japanupclose.web-japan.org/techculture/c20230609_1.html.

¹¹ "*Ikigai*", Japan, n.d.

¹² Héctor García and Francesc Miralles, *Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life*, trans. Heather Cleary (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2017), pp. 15-16.

In pre-modern Japan, where social interdependence was central, *Ikigai* was lived rather than theorised. However, in the late 20th century, as Japan faced demographic shifts such as an aging population, *Ikigai* began to attract academic attention, particularly in the context of gerontology and public health. Researchers have started to study the positive impact of *Ikigai* on health, longevity, and psychological well-being. In 1978, Japan's Ministry of Health and Welfare introduced the National Health Promotion Measures, which implicitly encouraged the pursuit of *Ikigai* as part of a healthy lifestyle.¹³ This governmental support contributed to *Ikigai*'s visibility and formalization as part of public policy and social development, especially among the elderly.¹⁴ This marked the beginning of *Ikigai*'s recognition as a valuable component of public well-being, setting the stage for its modern institutionalisation and eventual global interest.

As *Ikigai* gained visibility beyond Japan, particularly in Western cultures, it underwent a significant transformation. Western authors and self-help thinkers reinterpreted *Ikigai* using a four-circle Venn diagram that merged the concepts of passion, mission, vocation, and profession.¹⁵ This model framed *Ikigai* around career success and financial stability, diverging from its subtle and relational meaning in Japanese culture. Critics argue that the Western adaptation commercialises and oversimplifies the deeply treasured cultural concept, whereas Japanese interpretations emphasize modest, everyday activities that foster personal joy and community value.¹⁶

Today, *Ikigai* has evolved into both a personal and social concept, increasingly promoted in Japan through community programs and public initiatives. Its institutionalisation marks a shift from individual pursuit to a shared social value that supports communal well-being. Rooted in everyday life and social harmony, *Ikigai* emphasises simple, meaningful engagement over external success. While global interpretations often stress individual achievement, preserving its traditional context is essential to maintain its cultural depth and relevance.

¹³ Sazali, Noor Syahirah, and Rohayati Paidi. "Ikigai Among Japanese." *WILAYAH: The International Journal of East Asian Studies* 13, no. 1 (2024): 189-203, p.189.

¹⁴ Chen, Ping, Xinjia Yu, Su Fang Lim, and Zhiqi Shen. "Enhancing the well-being of seniors: A teachable agent for *Ikigai*." *International Journal of Crowd Science* 8, no. 2 (2024): 71-76, p.71.

¹⁵ "Rethinking *Ikigai*: How to Find Work You Love and Make a Difference – Lauchlan Mackinnon," accessed May 5, 2025, <https://lauchlanmackinnon.com/rethinking-ikigai-how-to-find-work-you-love-and-make-a-difference/>.

¹⁶ Iza Kavedžija, "The Japanese Concept of *Ikigai*: Why Purpose Might Be a Better Goal than Happiness," *The Conversation*, December 14, 2017, accessed May 7, 2025. <http://theconversation.com/the-japanese-concept-of-ikigai-why-purpose-might-be-a-better-goal-than-happiness-88709>.

Concept of *al-Sa'ādah*: *al-Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* as Its Foundation

The concept of *al-Sa'ādah* in Islam represents a holistic vision of true and ultimate happiness that transcends mere material comfort and emotional pleasure. Rooted in *al-Qur'ān* and *as-Sunnah*, *al-Sa'ādah* is achieved through the pursuit of knowledge, the cultivation of virtuous character, and the performance of righteous deeds.¹⁷ It involves aligning one's life with divine guidance, maintaining a sound heart, engaging in constant remembrance of Allāh (ﷻ), and fulfilling both spiritual and worldly responsibilities. Ultimately, *al-Sa'ādah* leads to true contentment in this world and eternal happiness in the Hereafter.

This understanding of *al-Sa'ādah* is further reinforced in *al-Qur'ān*, where true happiness is intimately connected to the remembrance of Allāh (ﷻ) and inner tranquility. As stated in *Sūrat al-Ra'd* (13:28), “Those who believe and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allāh. Indeed, in the remembrance of Allāh do hearts find rest”. This verse highlights that inner peace (*Tuma'nīnah*) is not found through material success, but through spiritual closeness to Allāh (ﷻ).¹⁸ In contrast to the anxiety and emptiness often observed in modern, fast-paced, and materially driven societies, Islamic teachings emphasise that *al-Sa'ādah* lies in the balance between faith, noble character, and emotional and spiritual stability. *Al-Qur'ān* serves not only as a legal and devotional guide but also as a comprehensive manual for achieving enduring happiness, both in this world and in the hereafter (*al-Ākhirah*). Verses that speak of success (*al-Falāḥ*), victory (*al-Fawz*), and happiness (*al-Sa'ādah*), along with terms like serenity (*Tuma'nīnah*), all reinforce that happiness in Islam is founded on a stable inner state, nourished by belief, righteous action, and reliance on divine guidance.¹⁹

Above all, it is essential to recognise that the foundation of *al-Sa'ādah* in Islam begins with *at-Tawḥīd* (the absolute Oneness of Allāh (ﷻ)), which forms the central axis around which the entire concept of happiness revolves.²⁰ True well-being in Islam arises from recognizing and submitting to the sovereignty of the Creator. Happiness is thus divinely oriented, not self-defined. Guided by *al-Qur'ān* and *as-Sunnah*, Islam offers a holistic framework that unites

¹⁷ Nurul Hidayawatie Mustaffa and Noor Shakirah Mat Akhir, “The Concept of *Sa'ādah* according to Islamic, Western, and Greek Views,” *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, October 12, 2020, 81–91, <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2020.10.02.8>, pp. 84-85.

¹⁸ Miftakhul Khoiriyah Mifta, Miftarah Ainul Mufid, and Wiwin Ainis Rohtih, “The Concept of Happiness in the Perspective of the Qur'an and Its Relevance to Modern Muslim Life,” *Jurnal Semiotika-Q: Kajian Ilmu Al-Quran Dan Tafsir* 5, no. 1 (April 21, 2025): 17–33, <https://doi.org/10.19109/jsq.v5i1.27493>, pp. 20-21.

¹⁹ Miftakhul et al. “The Concept of Happiness in the Perspective of the Qur'an and Its Relevance to Modern Muslim Life.”

²⁰ Ranti Wiliasih et al., “Happiness in Islam and Influencing Factors (SLR Approach),” *Al-Muzara'ah* 12, no. 1 (June 27, 2024): 137–57, <https://doi.org/10.29244/jam.12.1.137-157>, p. 152.

faith, morality, and action. The pursuit of *al-Sa'ādah* is therefore a spiritual journey rooted in revelation, leading to both worldly contentment and eternal happiness.

Another critical foundation of *al-Sa'ādah* is the belief in the Hereafter. Islam teaches that the pleasures and hardships of this world are temporary, and that ultimate happiness lies in eternal life with Allāh (ﷻ). *Al-Qur'ān* refers to paradise as the true home of joy and peace, where the righteous will dwell forever in Divine pleasure.²¹ This eschatological vision shapes the believer's orientation toward life, reminding them that real happiness is not fully realised in the worldly realm but awaits those who live righteously in the afterlife (*al-Ākhirah*). The Islamic path to happiness also included the purification of the soul and remembrance of Allāh (ﷻ).²² Through this process, the soul becomes more receptive to divine guidance and inner tranquillity, which is a profound form of spiritual happiness.

In essence, *al-Sa'ādah* in Islam is a holistic state of well-being grounded in spiritual awareness, ethical conduct, and sincere submission to divine guidance. It centers on a God-conscious life oriented toward the Hereafter and nurtured through remembrance, self-discipline, and moral virtue. Far from a temporary emotion, *al-Sa'ādah* signifies lasting fulfillment and ultimate joy in the presence of Allāh (ﷻ), reflecting an Islamic vision of happiness that transcends worldly pursuits.

Concept of *al-Sa'ādah*: Al-Ghazālī's Spiritual Views

To deepen the understanding of the concept of *al-Sa'ādah* in Islam, it is essential to explore the insights of classical Muslim scholars who examined the concept extensively. Thinkers such as Miskawayh, Ibn Sīnā, and al-Fārābī made valuable contributions to the discourse on happiness. However, this section will only focus on the concept of *al-Sa'ādah*, particularly from al-Ghazālī's perspective. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, a prominent figure in Islamic intellectual tradition, emphasised that the ultimate form of happiness lies in the purification of the soul (*Tazkiyat al-Nafs*), moral refinement (*Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*), and the proximity to the Divine (*Qurb Ilā Allāh*).²³ Unlike secular definitions of happiness, Islam views *al-Sa'ādah* as a journey that balances the needs of this world with the eternal rewards of the Hereafter.

²¹ Yasien Mohamed, "The Idea of Happiness in the Qur'an," Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research (Yaqeen Institute, September 12, 2019), accessed May 17, 2025. <https://yaqeeninstitute.org.my/read/paper/the-idea-of-happiness-in-the-quran>.

²² Al-Ifta, "Excellence Is All about 'Self-Purification,'" Egypt's Dar Al-Ifta, 2025, accessed June 30, 2025. <https://dar-alifta.org/en/article/details/1859/excellence-is-all-about-%E2%80%9Cself-purification%E2%80%9D>.

²³ Ismail, Hidayah Wan, and Abdelaziz Berghout. "Rethinking the Concept of Al-Saadah (Happiness) in Light of the Qur'ānic Istikhlaf Framework." *Journal of Islam in Asia (E-ISSN 2289-8077)* 21, no. 1 (2024): 277-305, p. 289.

For al-Ghazālī, happiness is not found in material wealth or power, but in the inner transformation that aligns the soul with its ultimate purpose, *Ma'rifat Allāh*, which means knowledge of God.²⁴ Al-Ghazālī emphasised that knowledge is the foundation of true happiness. He identifies four essential forms: knowledge of the self (*Ma'rifat al-Nafs*), knowledge of God (*Ma'rifat Allāh*), knowledge of the world (*Ma'rifat al-Dunyā*), and knowledge of the hereafter (*Ma'rifat al-Ākhirah*). Self-knowledge leads to awareness of one's purpose and limitations, while knowledge of God (*Ma'rifat Allāh*) is the highest aim, bringing the soul closer to its Creator. Knowledge of the world helps one navigate it without becoming attached, and knowledge of the hereafter orients the believer toward eternal goals.²⁵ Together, these forms of knowledge purify the soul and guide it toward spiritual fulfillment and eternal bliss.

Furthermore, al-Ghazālī asserts that human beings consist of both body and soul, and while the body requires physical sustenance, the soul requires spiritual nourishment.²⁶ True happiness, *al-Sa'ādah* comes when the soul is disciplined, the heart is purified from vices like pride and greed, and the intellect is guided by divine revelation. This path requires self-knowledge, which leads to knowledge of Allāh (ﷻ), as recorded in a *Ḥadīth*: “He who knows himself, knows his Lord.”²⁷ Through sincere worship, ethical living, and constant remembrance of God, which is *Dhikr*, the individual detaches from worldly distractions and ascends toward a higher, more eternal joy.²⁸ Therefore, in his framework, the pursuit of happiness is inseparable from the spiritual journey of the heart, guided by prophetic teachings and divine wisdom.

In addition, al-Ghazālī outlines two foundational principles in his concept of *al-Sa'ādah*. *First*, happiness must be actively pursued through effort and discipline, as it does not come passively. He urges individuals to undertake *Mujāhadah*, which is the struggle against one's base desires, and to seek guidance from a spiritual mentor or *Murshid*, stressing that without such effort and guidance, true happiness cannot be attained. *Second*, happiness is a hierarchical concept. It manifests at different levels, depending on the nature of the pleasure.

²⁴ Arroisi, Jarman, Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, Iwan Aminur Rokhman, and Fahrudin Mukhlis. “Pursuit of Spiritual Happiness: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali on The Theory of Human Nature.” *Progresiva: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Pendidikan Islam* 12, no. 02 (2023): 291-302, p. 293.

²⁵ Iskandar, Halim. “Understanding Al-Ghazali's Idea of Bliss in the Book of Kimiya'As-Sa'adah in Its Importance to Modern Humans.” *International Journal of Contemporary Sciences (IJCS)* 1, no. 5 (2024): 173-182, p. 178.

²⁶ Saari, Che Zarrina. “Al-Ghazali's Views on the Heart, the Spirit and the Soul: A Comparison Between Ihya' Ulum Al-Din and Al-Risalah Al-Laduniyyah.” *Jurnal Usuluddin* 7 (1998): 193-208, p. 204.

²⁷ Claude Field, *Al-Ghazali Kimiya-e Saadat: The Alchemy of Happiness* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2007), p. 3.

²⁸ Mohd Haidhar Kamarzaman et al., “The Role of Dhikr in Attaining Ma'rifah and Tawhid: A Hermeneutical Approach to Islamic Spirituality,” *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* IX, no. I (2025): 2754–64, <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRIS.2025.9010223>, p. 2754.

Sensory pleasures are the lowest, followed by intellectual delights, and the highest is the joy of witnessing the majesty of God with a pure heart. This eternal pleasure, according to al-Ghazālī, continues beyond death and is the ultimate form of happiness.²⁹

Furthermore, al-Ghazālī also identifies four essential aspects of happiness. The first is appetite or *Nafs*, which includes desires and impulses. Although it often leads to disobedience, al-Ghazālī does not suggest eradicating it; instead, he advocates for controlling and guiding it in a balanced way. The second aspect is reason, *‘Aql*, a Divine gift that allows humans to gain knowledge, distinguish right from wrong, and make meaningful decisions. Reason plays a vital role in elevating a person’s conduct and directing the soul toward goodness. The third aspect is the heart or *Qalb*, which al-Ghazālī sees as the core of human spirituality. The heart can perceive Divine Truth and experience nearness to God. Without a purified heart, one cannot achieve enduring happiness. The final and most critical aspect is love for Allāh (ﷻ). Al-Ghazālī explains that humans naturally yearn for perfection and support, both of which are fulfilled only by God.³⁰

Additionally, al-Ghazālī outlines the three stages necessary to attain true happiness. The *first stage* is knowing oneself. He insists that self-knowledge, which is recognizing one’s nature, character, and inner potentials, is the gateway to knowing God.³¹ Every individual possesses four traits: *first*, the animalistic (*Ḥayawānīyah*), which focuses on physical pleasures; and *second*, the ferocious or beastly (*Sab’īyah*), associated with aggression. *Third*, the demonical (*Shayṭānīyah*), which deceives and misleads, and the angelic, which is inclined to knowledge and virtue. True human identity lies in the angelic (*Malakīyah*) nature, which must be nurtured.³² The *second stage* is establishing the heart as ruler over the soul, where desires act as servants, reason as an advisor, and the heart as the sovereign. It must govern with wisdom and purity, free from worldly attachment. The final stage is directing the heart wholly to Allāh(ﷻ), the ultimate source of truth and goodness, through love, remembrance, and sincerity, marking the peak of spiritual fulfillment and true happiness.³³

²⁹ Achmad Khudori Soleh, “Al-Ghazali’s Concept of Happiness in The Alchemy of Happiness,” *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 12, no. 2 (December 13, 2022): 196–211, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.122.14>, p. 203.

³⁰ Achmad Khudori Soleh, “Al-Ghazali’s Concept of Happiness in The Alchemy of Happiness,” *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 12, no. 2 (December 13, 2022): 196–211, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.122.14>, pp. 203–204.

³¹ Achmad Khudori Soleh, “Al-Ghazali’s Concept of Happiness in The Alchemy of Happiness,” *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 12, no. 2 (December 13, 2022): 196–211, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.122.14>, p. 204.

³² Arroisi, Jarman, Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, Iwan Aminur Rokhman, and Fahrudin Mukhlis. “Pursuit of Spiritual Happiness: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali on The Theory of Human Nature.” *Progresiva: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Pendidikan Islam* 12, no. 02 (2023): 291–302, p. 294.

³³ Achmad Khudori Soleh, “Al-Ghazali’s Concept of Happiness in The Alchemy of Happiness,” *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 12, no. 2 (December 13, 2022): 196–211, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.122.14>, pp. 205–206.

In conclusion, al-Ghazālī's concept of *al-Sa'ādah* presents happiness as the fulfillment of the soul's purpose through self-awareness, discipline, and spiritual orientation. True happiness, he argues, lies not in worldly pleasures but in nurturing the soul's angelic nature inclined toward knowledge and virtue. By governing the self through reason and a purified heart, guided by divine remembrance, one attains an ordered soul oriented entirely toward Allāh(ﷻ), achieving peace in this life and joy in the Hereafter.

Definition and Core Principles of *Ikigai*

An in-depth investigation into the topic requires a clear understanding of the definitions and core principles of both concepts. The Japanese concept of *Ikigai* combines the words *iki*, meaning “life” or “alive”, and *gai*, meaning “worth” or “benefit”, signifying a sense of purpose or that which gives life meaning and value. It originates from traditional Japanese medicine and reflects the idea that physical health is intricately connected to mental and emotional well-being, as well as a sense of purpose in life.³⁴ It distinguishes *Ikigai* from fleeting pleasure, often referred to as *hedonia* in ancient Greek philosophy, and aligns it more closely with *eudaimonia*, a concept representing a life of meaning, virtue, and lasting happiness. Additionally, *Ikigai* is characterized as “the happiness of always being busy,” suggesting a more profound sense of purpose, which is similar to logotherapy but extends beyond it.³⁵ It is also referred to as one's reason for being or “reason to get up in the morning”, emphasising its role as a guiding force in daily life.³⁶

Additionally, *Ikigai* also aligns with principles of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), emphasising engagement in enjoyable and purposeful activities that promote emotional well-being and reduce depression.³⁷ Despite extensive study within Japanese culture and psychology, limited research compares *Ikigai* with religious or spiritual concepts like the Islamic notion of *al-Sa'ādah*. Most literature focuses on its secular and cultural aspects, overlooking its potential connection to spiritually grounded frameworks of happiness and purpose.

To analyse the features underlying the concept of *Ikigai*, it is noted that the framework encompasses two main aspects: *Ikigai Kan* and *Ikigai Taishō*. *Ikigai Kan* refers to the emotional and mental state of satisfaction and well-being, symbolising a life worth living. It embodies the

³⁴ Jeffrey Gaines, “The Philosophy of *Ikigai*: 3 Examples About Finding Purpose,” PositivePsychology.com, November 17, 2020, accessed April 19, 2025. <https://positivepsychology.com/ikigai/>.

³⁵ Héctor García and Francesc Miralles, *Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life*, trans. Heather Cleary (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2017), pp. 35-42.

³⁶ Michaéla Schippers, *Ikigai: Reflection on Life Goals Optimizes Performance and Happiness* (Rotterdam: Erasmus Research Institute of Management, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2017), p. 9.

³⁷ Gaines, “The Philosophy of *Ikigai*: 3 Examples About Finding Purpose,” PositivePsychology.com

subjective, internal experience of contentment. Conversely, *Ikigai Taishō* refers to the external factors, such as activities, experiences, and circumstances that foster these feelings. It emphasises the process through which individuals achieve their sense of purpose, often involving family life, hobbies, professions, or social engagements, particularly those that benefit others. Japanese culture emphasises reflective practices to identify a personal *Ikigai Taishō*, which then leads to the cultivation of *Ikigai Kan*.³⁸ Thus, *Ikigai* is characterised by its practical orientation and integration of personal joy with communal contributions, spanning from everyday rituals to ambitious, long-term goals.

Hence, while *Ikigai* offers a framework for well-being through meaningful activity and balance, it remains centered on practical and individual concerns. It emphasises satisfaction and purpose but lacks focus on the metaphysical dimension, often focusing on productivity over transcendence. This contrast highlights the gap between *Ikigai* and the concept of *al-Sa'ādah*, where purpose is rooted in the divine. A comparative view, such as this study, can thus enrich our understanding of human fulfillment by integrating cultural and spiritual perspectives.

Definition and Core Principles of *al-Sa'ādah*

On the other hand, the concept of *al-Sa'ādah* carries a distinct meaning, even though both concepts are related to happiness. *Al-Sa'ādah* is derived from the *Qur'ānic* word, “*Su'idu*” which means those who are blessed or made happy, and “*Sa'id*” which means the happy one. It is distinct from the Aristotelian idea of eudaimonia, as its foundation lies in divine revelation rather than philosophical reasoning.³⁹ In Islamic ethical and philosophical discourse, the pursuit of happiness holds a central place, with the *Qur'ān* offering a foundational view of *al-Sa'ādah* as eternal joy accessible to all, as reflected in verses such as *Sūrah Hūd* (11:105 and 11:108). The existing literature reveals that the concept of *al-Sa'ādah* has been the subject of extensive scholarly inquiry, with thinkers employing multiple methodologies to unravel its origins and implications.

For instance, classical Muslim scholars such as al-Ghazali and Miskawayh have offered nuanced interpretations, linking *al-Sa'ādah* to spiritual purification, intellectual and ethical development, and the alignment of the soul with divine guidance. Their views emphasise that

³⁸ Soenke Ziesche and Roman Yampolskiy, “Introducing the Concept of *Ikigai* to the Ethics of AI and of Human Enhancements,” in *2020 IEEE International Conference on Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality (AIVR)*, 2020, p. 138, <https://doi.org/10.1109/AIVR50618.2020.00032>

³⁹ Omar, Mohd Nasir, Ahmad Sunawari Long, Abdull Rahman Mahmood, and Zaizul Ab Rahman. “Islamic notion of happiness (*Al-Sa'ada*): An analysis of Miskawayh's thought.” *International Journal of Islamic Thought (IJIT)* 19, no. 1 (2021), p. 51.

true happiness arises not from material gain, but from self-knowledge, moral excellence, remembrance of God, and the cultivation of virtues such as wisdom, justice, and temperance, all of which lead the human being toward inner tranquility and closeness to the Ultimate Reality.⁴⁰ These perspectives highlight the multifaceted nature of *al-Sa'ādah* as a holistic ideal that transcends worldly pleasures, emphasizing the integration of material, moral, and spiritual dimensions to achieve ultimate happiness. Despite the richness of scholarship on *al-Sa'ādah*, the literature lacks a comprehensive comparative analysis of this concept alongside non-Islamic frameworks of happiness, such as the Japanese philosophy of *Ikigai*. These gaps underscore the need to contribute to a deeper understanding of how different cultural and spiritual traditions conceptualise and pursue happiness.

The features of *al-Sa'ādah* are fundamentally rooted in spiritual and moral fulfillment. Al-Ghazali distinguishes between general joy, derived from faith, and true happiness, achieved through attaining the pleasure of Allāh (ﷻ).⁴¹ Unlike *Ikigai*, which focuses on external activities as pathways to happiness, *al-Sa'ādah* critiques materialism and the prioritisation of worldly pursuits. Al-Ghazali posits that true happiness arises from the purification of the soul, moral excellence, and alignment with divine will, rather than mere physical pleasure or societal validation.⁴² He highlights that human happiness is deeply spiritual, transcending worldly attachments and emphasising eternal fulfillment through faith and devotion. Furthermore, in its literal sense, *Sa'ādah* means happiness and blessedness, encompassing both this life and the next. Its opposite, *Shaqāwah*, refers to misfortune and extreme suffering. In the context of the hereafter, *al-Sa'ādah* refers to the ultimate state of joy and happiness.⁴³

In conclusion, *al-Sa'ādah* offers a holistic view of happiness that unites spiritual, moral, and eternal dimensions. Rooted in divine purpose, it emphasises purification of the soul and alignment with God's will as the path to lasting fulfillment. Unlike secular models focused on emotional or material success, *al-Sa'ādah* aspires to eternal well-being. Comparing it with

⁴⁰ Ismail, Hidayah Wan, and Abdelaziz Berghout, "Rethinking the Concept of Al-Saadah (Happiness) in Light of the Qur'ānic Istikhlaf Framework," *Journal of Islam in Asia (E-ISSN 2289-8077)*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2024), pp. 277-305.

⁴¹ Halim Iskandar, "Understanding Al-Ghazali's Idea of Bliss in the Book of Kimiya' As-Sa'adah in Its Importance to Modern Humans," *International Journal of Contemporary Sciences (IJCS)* Vol. 1, No. 5 (March 28, 2024), p. 176. <https://doi.org/10.55927/ijcs.v2i3.8603>

⁴² Ismail Jalili and Fadillah Ulfa, "An Analysis of Al-Ghazali's Thought on Happiness Through His Book: The Alchemy Of Happiness," *Psikis : Jurnal Psikologi Islami*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (May 10, 2023), pp. 35-36. <https://doi.org/10.19109/psikis.v9i1.16263>

⁴³ Nurul Hidayawatie Mustaffa and Noor Shakirah Mat Akhir, "The Concept of Sa'Ādah According to Islamic, Western, and Greek Views," *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences Innovation and Transformation in Humanities for a Sustainable Tomorrow* (December 10, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2020.10.02.8>, p. 85.

cultural frameworks like *Ikigai* can reveal shared values while highlighting how spiritual aims shape the deeper meaning of true happiness.

***Ikigai* and *al-Sa'ādah* in the Contemporary Pursuit of a Meaningful Life**

Amid modern existential challenges, both *Ikigai* and *al-Sa'ādah* offer practical guidance for living a purposeful life. Each promotes self-understanding and meaningful engagement with the world: *Ikigai* through balance between passion, talent, and responsibility, and *al-Sa'ādah* through spiritual discipline and ethical refinement. Together, they foster self-awareness, emotional stability, and fulfillment, providing reflective models for intentional and meaningful living.

However, while *Ikigai* and *al-Sa'ādah* both offer pathways to happiness and purpose, they are grounded in fundamentally different worldviews. *Ikigai*, shaped by Japan's cultural and philosophical traditions, focuses on the inner self, interpersonal relationships, and social connections.⁴⁴ In contrast, *al-Sa'ādah*, rooted in Islamic teachings, is centred on the Divine and rooted in one's relationship with God. It is not just an emotional state, but a spiritual condition based on the Islamic view of humans as composed of both body and soul.⁴⁵ True happiness, therefore, cannot be achieved by fulfilling bodily desires alone but must involve the soul's alignment with divine guidance and preparation for eternal life to come. *Al-Qur'ān* frequently contrasts the everlasting joy of paradise (*Sa'ādah al-Ākhirah*) with the fleeting and temporary pleasures of worldly life, referred to as *Mut'ā*.⁴⁶ This highlights that ultimate happiness in Islam is eschatological in nature, oriented toward the Hereafter, and grounded in moral, spiritual, and metaphysical realities. These differing foundations lead to distinct understandings of happiness.

While *Ikigai* incorporates elements of spirituality, such as meditation and appreciation of beauty, these practices are primarily directed at enhancing present-moment well-being and achieving personal balance.⁴⁷ The spiritual elements in *Ikigai* function more as therapeutic or reflective practices rather than components of a metaphysical journey.⁴⁸ They are not concerned with the soul's eternal destiny, divine judgment, or nearness to a transcendent Being. As such,

⁴⁴ Yamamoto-Mitani, Noriko, and Margaret I. Wallhagen, "Pursuit of psychological well-being (ikigai) and the evolution of self-understanding in the context of caregiving in Japan," *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, Vol. 26, (2002), p. 401.

⁴⁵ Abdullah Akgül, "Human Being in the Ontology of Al-Ghazali," *Social Sciences Studies Journal* 4, no. 22 (January 1, 2018), p. 3718. <https://doi.org/10.26449/sss.j.795>

⁴⁶ "Delights of Paradise vs. Pleasures of This World," IslamOnline, February 14, 2023, accessed June 19, 2025, <https://islamonline.net/en/delights-of-paradise-vs-pleasures-of-this-world/>.

⁴⁷ "The Purpose of Meditation Practice," accessed July 6, 2025, <https://oneminddharma.com/purpose-of-meditation/>.

⁴⁸ "Ikigai: What It Is and How to Use Ikigai to Find Your Purpose," Calm Blog, accessed July 6, 2025, <https://blog.calm.com/blog/ikigai>.

Ikigai lacks an eschatological perspective as it does not address the afterlife, divine accountability or any eschatological element in general. This reveals profound limitations when *Ikigai* is viewed through the lens of *al-Sa'ādah*. However, both aim for well-being, *al-Sa'ādah* offers a more comprehensive and profound vision of happiness that transcends the temporal world and situates human fulfillment within a divine and eternal context.

Furthermore, in assessing *Ikigai* through the lens of *al-Sa'ādah*, it not only lacks an ontological reality and eschatological perspective but also fails to engage with the concept of knowing the Divine, which is central to ultimate happiness in Islam.⁴⁹ In the framework of *al-Sa'ādah*, true fulfillment is inseparable from the soul's recognition and realisation of its Creator, a spiritual knowledge that directs one's entire being toward God.⁵⁰ *Ikigai* focuses on worldly knowledge linked to personal and social purpose but does not address metaphysical or divine realities. While it promotes a meaningful life, it remains confined to temporal well-being and neglects the soul's ultimate purpose. From the perspective of *al-Sa'ādah*, this reveals a significant ethical and spiritual shortcoming. In Islam, happiness is not merely emotional, but a holistic state rooted in remembrance of God, moral discipline, and preparation for the Hereafter. Ethics are defined by nearness to Allāh (*al-Qurb Ilā Allāh*), not by social utility or self-improvement alone. This contrast highlights a deeper philosophical divergence. *Ikigai* seeks harmony within the material world, whereas *al-Sa'ādah* unites worldly success with spiritual transcendence. Rooted in a God-centred vision, it fulfills intellectual, moral, and spiritual needs, guiding the soul toward eternal happiness in both this world and the next.

Conclusion

This study critically examined the Japanese concept of *Ikigai* through the Islamic framework of *al-Sa'ādah*, comparing two distinct paradigms of happiness and human well-being. Both promote purposeful living, ethical conduct, and inner contentment, reflecting the universal search for a meaningful life. However, *Ikigai* remains limited to worldly concerns, emphasising passion, social roles, and personal satisfaction, while *al-Sa'ādah* offers a holistic vision rooted in divine purpose and the soul's eternal journey. This comparison bridges cultural and religious perspectives on happiness, highlighting how Islamic thought provides a comprehensive response to modern challenges such as existential anxiety and loss of purpose. Practically, both

⁴⁹ Khoirin, Taufiq, and Kasori Mujahid. "Islamic Worldview: The Meaning of Happiness from the Qur'anic Perspective." *NIZAM: International Journal of Islamic Studies (E-ISSN 3026-0671)*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2024), p. 101.

⁵⁰ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. "Happiness and the attainment of happiness: An Islamic perspective." *Journal of Law and Religion*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2014), p. 85.

models guide individuals toward balance and self-cultivation. Yet, *al-Sa'ādah* surpasses *Ikigai* by grounding well-being in spiritual and divine consciousness and preparation for the Hereafter, making it a comprehensive and more enduring framework for human flourishing.

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