

## Education on Happiness between Positive Psychology and The Holy Quran

Farida KADRI<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Akli Mohand Oulhadj Bouira10000, Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, Department of Psychology and Education Sciences (Algeria)

The E-mail Author: [f.kadri@univ-bouira.dz](mailto:f.kadri@univ-bouira.dz)

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### Abstract:

This article explores the concept of authentic happiness, a pivotal theme in positive psychology, by juxtaposing its conceptualization of authentic happiness with the Quranic perspective on this construct. This comparison focuses on the essence, components, and operational mechanisms of happiness, aiming to explore the potential for education on this emotion. The study finds that although positive psychology's notion of authentic happiness originated in a markedly different intellectual and social context, it aligns with the Quranic perspective concerning the understanding of happiness and its attainment through virtue. Both perspectives are underpinned by specific foundational principles and mechanisms for achieving happiness, as well as the feasibility of educating individuals about it.

**Keywords:** Authentic Happiness, Education, The holy Quran, Positive Psychology.

### 1. Introduction:

The late twentieth century witnessed a significant evolution within the field of psychology with the emergence of positive psychology as a distinct discipline, pioneered by Seligman. Despite Seligman heralding this new branch of science, interest in its themes has been building for decades, if not centuries. Positive psychology endeavors to illuminate and enhance the positive dimensions of human life, aspects often overlooked by traditional, or what some might term, 'negative psychology.'

Happiness, particularly the concept of authentic happiness as emphasized by Seligman in his seminal work "Authentic Happiness" (translated by Al-Aisar and others in 2005 as "True Happiness"), has drawn considerable scholarly attention. Unlike fleeting or circumstantial happiness, authentic happiness involves satisfaction with the past, a positive engagement in the present, and optimism for the future (Seligman, M., 2002).

Analyzing these elements reveals that they contribute to a state of peace or psychological tranquility, which the Quran equates with authentic happiness within the framework of positive psychology. Moreover, the cognitive-behavioral strategies for attaining authentic happiness, detailed in Seligman's framework, mirror those outlined in the Quran, albeit with a clearer delineation of the rewards for adherents. This article aims to elucidate the intersections between positive psychology and the Quranic view on authentic happiness, examining its significance, conceptual underpinnings, and the potential for educational initiatives centered around its attainment mechanisms.

### 2. Research Importance:

To date, a plethora of studies have addressed the theme of happiness, particularly authentic happiness, from theoretical and empirical standpoints. Nonetheless, the endeavor to conduct a comparative analysis between the Western psychological interpretation of authentic happiness and the religious, Quranic perspective presents a formidable challenge.

This research seeks to identify and elaborate on the points of convergence and reinforcement between these two perspectives. Initially, this paper will examine positive psychology's interpretation of authentic happiness before exploring the Quranic viewpoint on the same, acknowledging that the intellectual framework for this research was similarly crystallized.

### **3. Research Objectives:**

This article aims to illuminate the foundational principles of authentic happiness as interpreted by positive psychology, particularly through the theories posited by Seligman. Additionally, it seeks to illustrate how these principles align with those presented in the Quran, thus exploring the concept of educating on authentic happiness.

### **4. Authentic Happiness from the Perspective of Positive Psychology:**

The question of whether happiness is a divinely distributed attribute among humans, contrasted by misery, or if it is achievable through individual pursuits, varying across different persons, societies, and schools of thought, has long been debated. The advent of positive psychology, spearheaded by Seligman, has brought significant attention to this debate. Seligman has deeply engaged with the concept of happiness, studying, analyzing, and even formulating what might be regarded in traditional psychology as a clinical diagnostic chart for happiness.

This framework allows for the assessment of happiness levels and the identification of factors that may impede or enhance happiness. Seligman's work has been instrumental in developing strategies to aid individuals in elevating their happiness to more profound, sustainable levels.

In his nuanced approach to happiness, Seligman delineates between authentic happiness and momentary happiness, the latter being transient joy derived from specific pleasurable experiences, whether natural or artificial, such as taking a trip, acquiring wealth, getting married, or using euphoria-inducing substances. This type of happiness tends to dissipate once the initial novelty of the experience wanes, a phenomenon referred to by Russel and Seligman as the "pleasure treadmill" (Russel, 1930; Seligman, M., 2002).

Contrarily, Seligman posits that authentic happiness is not subject to the whims of fate; it is learnable and can be cultivated, thus challenging the notion of predestined happiness or misery.

The proposition that happiness can be taught is not solely a product of the twenty-first century or Seligman's thoughts but was also a topic explored by Bertrand Russell in the early twentieth century. In his seminal work, "The Conquest of Happiness," Russell advocates that individuals of any age or background can be educated towards achieving happiness (Russell, B., 1930).

Building upon these insights, Seligman's perspective on authentic happiness suggests that genuine happiness does not arise merely from desire or request; it must be earned through dedicated effort. In the realm of positive psychology, Seligman emphasizes that our endeavors to attain happiness should be proportional to the efforts we invest.

This paradigm positions individuals as architects of their happiness, responsible for understanding the costs (duties) necessary to reap the rewards. Before one can assume this responsibility, they must first be educated or nurtured on the strategies and mechanisms that qualify them for such a role, thus earning whatever rewards come their way, irrespective of their nature or magnitude.

According to Seligman, the concept of authentic happiness can be distilled into several critical elements:

- The pursuit should be for authentic happiness, which is substantial and enduring, rather than ephemeral and fleeting.
- Authentic happiness is not merely received; it must be earned through continuous effort and dedication.
- Education on happiness is viable and can be effectively implemented by delineating its operational mechanisms, employing a diagnostic approach similar to that used for psychological disorders, which assesses various inputs and outputs.
- Authentic happiness is quantifiable and can be described using a mathematical formula. This formula acknowledges that while certain factors affecting happiness are beyond individual control, many fall within the realm of personal influence.

## 5. The Happiness Equation:

In his seminal work "Authentic Happiness," Martin Seligman introduces what he terms the "happiness equation." This concept posits that a segment of this equation encompasses factors that individuals can actively manage to attain a specific level of happiness. Essentially, it posits that individuals hold the reins in sculpting their own happiness. Although it may appear unconventional to apply a mathematical framework to analyze psychological, educational, or social phenomena, Seligman's pioneering approach has undeniably set the stage for a more analytical and pragmatic exploration of authentic happiness.

In the subsequent section, we will explore the factors deemed responsible for cultivating authentic happiness, which are within the realm of individual control, as identified by Seligman under the designation "factors under voluntary control." Before delving into these, it is imperative to consider the other two factors. This examination will allow readers to fully comprehend these elements and clearly demarcate the distinctions between them and the primary group of factors targeted in this discourse, known previously as "factors under individual control."

### 5.1.1. Genetic Factors:

These are represented in the happiness equation as the "set range of happiness" (Seligman, M., 2002), accounting for 50 percent of an individual's potential for happiness. Although the ability to alter genetic predispositions is limited, individuals can exercise some degree of control. By recognizing and understanding the sources of both positive and negative emotions, and through dedicated effort, it is possible to devise strategies that can effectively reduce the dominant influence of genetic factors on overall happiness (Kadri, F., 2024).

### 5.1.2. Life Circumstances:

This factor, depicted as "life's circumstances" in the happiness equation, encompasses conditions that individuals may influence, such as marital status and religiosity, as well as those dictated by external forces, including wars, political climates, environmental conditions, and health issues. Seligman provides several recommendations for enhancing happiness within these life circumstances based on empirical research (Seligman, M., 2002):

- Opting to reside in affluent, democratic settings rather than impoverished, authoritarian regimes.
- Engaging in and sustaining marital relationships.(marriage)
- Steering clear of adverse events and cultivating positive emotional states.
- Fostering a robust network of interpersonal relationships.
- Maintaining active religious or spiritual practices.

Life circumstances contribute approximately 10 percent to the overall happiness equation. While the ability to modify certain life conditions may not always yield the desired outcomes, particularly in challenging situations, individuals still have the potential to achieve authentic happiness by maximizing the factors within their control, as outlined by the happiness equation. This approach not only enhances individual well-being but also underscores the proactive role individuals can play in shaping their happiness.

## 5.2 Factors Under Individual Control:

These factors critically influence the attainment of authentic happiness, which individuals strive for independently of external circumstances and genetic or biological heritage. Accounting for 40 percent of the components in the happiness equation, these factors underscore the necessity of diligent effort, heightened awareness, and responsible action to truly merit authentic happiness. This brand of happiness is not simply handed out; it must be earnestly earned through sustained effort. Seligman delineates these factors as follows:

- Positive emotion regarding the past.
- Positive emotion in the present.
- Optimism towards the future.

This segment of the happiness equation (factors under individual control) is central when discussing authentic happiness within the framework of the Quran. This discussion will deliberately exclude the other two dimensions to focus on the responsibility and possibility of education on happiness as encapsulated within this model. In the ensuing analysis, these three pillars will be examined under the lens of positive psychology and subsequently revisited within the Quranic context, highlighting the educational strategies on happiness employed in this study.

### **5.2.1. Satisfaction with the Past:**

In the realm of positive psychology, satisfaction with one's past experiences stands as a fundamental pillar in achieving authentic happiness. Being content with the past does not entail ignoring or denying the negative or positive events that have unfolded. Life, by its very nature, encompasses a blend of both positive and negative experiences, a fundamental truth of existence. The way an individual perceives their past significantly influences their overall outlook and may occur subconsciously (Kadri, F., 2024).

The challenge lies in educating individuals to foster a positive view of their past, a task that requires considerable awareness, effort, and persistence. These efforts are essential for attaining the desired state of authentic happiness. Seligman proposes three key strategies to facilitate this process, each aimed at enhancing an individual's happiness levels:

- Liberating oneself from the belief that the past dictates the future. This approach involves a logical analysis of past mistakes and setbacks, enabling individuals to break free from the undue influence of past events on their future (Al-Aisar et al., 2005).
- Cultivating gratitude for the events of the past, both positive and challenging. This strategy fosters a balanced perspective on past experiences, recognizing the value and lessons each has offered.
- Embracing forgiveness, which includes forgiving others as well as oneself. This practice is pivotal in releasing pent-up emotions and moving forward with less emotional baggage.

Seligman emphasizes that awareness of these strategies, coupled with their integration into one's cognitive and emotional framework, necessitates a committed and continuous effort. Initially, these practices require conscious application and a strong will until they become ingrained habits that naturally contribute to enhanced feelings about the past and, by extension, elevate overall happiness levels.

Additionally, Seligman introduces the concept of "emotional osmosis" for managing emotions such as anger. This process involves containing such emotions within a metaphorical membrane, allowing them to weaken and dissipate over time, thereby preventing them from erupting destructively (Al-Aisar et al., 2005). This mechanism is part of the broader strategy of emotional regulation that contributes significantly to satisfaction with the past and the holistic achievement of authentic happiness.

**Practicing forgiveness, as elucidated by Worthington (2001), is an essential process that allows an individual to move beyond past grievances. It involves a structured approach known as the "REACH" model, consisting of five key steps:**

- **R: Recall the hurt** – The first step requires the individual to confront and acknowledge the pain inflicted upon them.
- **E: Empathize with the person who hurt you** – This step involves understanding the perspective and circumstances of the offender, which can facilitate emotional healing.
- **A: Altruistic gift of forgiveness** – Forgiveness is framed here as a generous act towards the offender, benefiting the forgiver by reducing their own burden of resentment.
- **C: Commit publicly to forgive** – Declaring one's forgiveness publicly can solidify the decision and help the individual stick to their resolution.
- **H: Hold onto forgiveness** – This final step emphasizes the importance of maintaining forgiveness, preventing relapse into resentment.

The implementation of these steps demands considerable awareness, effort, perseverance, and a steadfast commitment to the act of forgiveness. Forgiveness is characterized not as a spontaneous or innate virtue

but as a skill that can be developed through deliberate practice. This process not only yields benefits for the individual but also enhances interpersonal relationships and the overall social fabric.

Learning to practice gratitude is another critical strategy in elevating the level of authentic happiness. Seligman (2002) highlights that many aspects of life, including people, events, and circumstances, carry inherent benefits, even those initially perceived as negative. By recognizing and appreciating these elements with gratitude, one can significantly enhance their happiness. It is essential to understand that life's reality is a mixture of setbacks and negative experiences; however, these should not overshadow our capacity to acknowledge and celebrate the positive aspects.

In conclusion of the discussion on the first cornerstone for achieving authentic happiness, satisfaction with the past, it is evident that gratitude, forgiveness, and anger management serve as fundamental pillars. These elements work collectively to build a robust foundation for lasting contentment and well-being.

### **5.2.2. Living Positively in the Present:**

Living positively in the present forms the second pillar of achieving authentic happiness and requires a nuanced understanding of the interplay between two key concepts: pleasures and gratifications, as detailed by Seligman (2002).

The concept of pleasures pertains to sensory experiences that provide immediate but transient happiness. This type of happiness is often fleeting, disappearing as soon as the pleasurable sensation ceases or becomes too familiar, a phenomenon Bertrand Russell (1930) refers to as the "pleasure treadmill."

This term describes the diminishing returns of constant exposure to sensory pleasures, which lose their impact due to continual availability or through the habituation process. Moreover, the pursuit of such pleasures can lead to addiction, further complicating the quest for happiness.

However, Seligman posits that maximizing these sensory pleasures, when approached mindfully and savored, can play a role in enhancing the overall level of authentic happiness. This perspective aligns with the appreciation of life's blessings, an aspect also emphasized in the Quran, suggesting that true happiness is not merely the absence of discomfort but the appreciation and enhancement of positive experiences in the present moment. This approach underscores the distinction between short-lived pleasures and deeper, more sustained gratifications that contribute to a fulfilling and authentically happy life.

The matter differs when it comes to gratifications, which refer to a state of authentic happiness resulting from actions that transcend personal and physical boundaries to include deeds with a humanitarian dimension that do not expect a reward or achieve a specific sensory pleasure. Such actions usually involve charitable and scholarly activities for their own sake, often demanding extensive effort and the full commitment of the self to achieve the goal.

### **5.2.3. Optimism:**

Optimism is intrinsically linked to hope and a confident outlook towards the future, consistently associated with improved performance in work settings and across various aspects of life, particularly when navigating challenges (Al-Aisar et al., 2005).

Optimism is characterized by a positive anticipation of future outcomes, which, according to Seligman (2006), are largely within an individual's control and achievable through dedicated effort and continual perseverance. This notion of optimism intersects with the concept of hope, which also conveys a bright outlook on the future, yet does not explicitly tie it to significant personal exertion.

The potential for teaching optimism within the framework of positive psychology is robust. Seligman's "Authentic Happiness" elaborates on a systematic approach through which individuals can cultivate their capacity for optimism, especially under shocking or challenging circumstances. This approach is encapsulated in the "ABCDE" model, which outlines the sequential steps for fostering optimism:

- **Adversity:** This step acknowledges the event or situation that triggers shock or challenge, often leading to initial feelings of depression or pessimism.

- **Belief:** This pertains to the immediate beliefs that individuals form about themselves and the situation right after encountering adversity.
- **Consequences:** This relates to the outcomes that stem from these beliefs.
- **Disputation:** Here, the individual engages in challenging the negative beliefs that contribute to depressive states, replacing them with positive thoughts that bolster optimism. This step is crucial as it involves a proactive shift in one's thought processes and energy.
- **Energization:** The final stage follows successful disputation, where individuals feel revitalized and motivated to act on their newly strengthened optimistic outlook.

This model not only highlights the feasibility of educating people on optimism but also suggests the importance of integrating such teachings from an early age, as supported by Seligman's additional works, notably "Learned Optimism."

To this point, we have explored the three foundational principles that Seligman advocates for achieving authentic happiness, underscoring that happiness is not a mere happenstance but a deserved outcome of hard work, perseverance, commitment, and a comprehensive integration into the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of an individual's life. These principles have been detailed to provide clarity on the cognitive, emotional, and skill-based strategies that both adults and children can learn to enhance their potential for happiness.

While this discourse does not claim to provide an exhaustive exploration of the topic of authentic happiness, our primary aim has been to shed light on how positive psychology conceptualizes, diagnoses, and empowers individuals towards achieving authentic happiness.

This examination has been juxtaposed with the Quranic perspective on happiness, highlighting similarities and differences, which will be further elaborated in the subsequent section. This approach not only deepens the understanding of authentic happiness but also enriches the dialogue between different cultural and psychological perspectives on this universally valued state.

## **6. Happiness from a Quranic Perspective:**

In exploring happiness from a Quranic perspective, it is essential to acknowledge that the Quran states that the ultimate form of true happiness is attained in the hereafter. However, it also recognizes the existence of happiness within the earthly life, albeit framed in different terminologies.

This discussion will not engage in the complexities of worldly versus otherworldly happiness but will instead focus on the strategies outlined in the Quran for achieving individual happiness in this life, exploring the synergy between these strategies and those of positive psychology, despite their variations in detail and scope.

## **7. Mention of Happiness in the Quran:**

The concept of "happiness" is explicitly mentioned in the Quran through derivations, specifically in Surah Hud in verses 105 and 108, which refer to individuals as "the wretched and the fortunate" and state that "those who are fortunate will be in Paradise," linking happiness ultimately to the afterlife. Scholars, such as Ibrahim Rahifa Kadoura(2009), interpret this to emphasize that the most profound happiness one should strive for is that of the hereafter, a happiness that is deserved and attainable through diligent effort and perseverance.

Thus, the Quranic mention of happiness, while oriented towards the hereafter, requires individual effort and is seen as a deserved outcome, a perspective that aligns with the principles of positive psychology.

## **8. Terms Indicating Authentic Happiness in the Quran:**

Although the term "happiness" appears directly only twice in the Quran, other terms are used that imply its presence, suggesting the concept of authentic happiness within this worldly life. These terms include contentment, pleasure, joy, glad tidings, bliss, tranquility, peace of mind, and the good life (Ibrahim Rahifa Kadoura, 2009).

This exploration will further examine the factors under individual control for achieving authentic happiness according to the Quran and compare these with the views of positive psychology, particularly focusing on the educational potential of these concepts.

#### **9. Contentment:**

In Islamic thought, contentment (*rida*) is defined as a serene acceptance of what comes one's way, be it gain or loss, without discontent (Al-Jalad, 2010). This profound, faith-based concept is integral to Islam, pervading all life aspects and fostering what is termed "the good life." If individuals forsake contentment, they experience misery and wretchedness, as noted by Al-Jalad (2010). The importance of contentment is also highlighted in prophetic traditions, where Prophet Muhammad emphasized: "Part of the happiness of the son of Adam is his pleasure with what Allah has decreed for him."

The Quranic concept of contentment transcends the understanding of contentment in positive psychology, which typically relates to coming to terms with past events. In contrast, the Quranic perspective encompasses a timeless contentment with all of Allah's decrees, past, present, and future, regardless of their immediate nature, grounded in the belief in divine wisdom. Achieving such contentment requires rigorous self-discipline and patience training, thus attaining a form of worldly happiness characterized by psychological tranquility and peace of mind. Educating on contentment, therefore, is not merely beneficial but essential, laying the foundations for a fulfilled and contented life.

#### **10. Happiness in the Present:**

Within the framework of positive psychology, as discussed by Seligman, achieving happiness in the present involves engaging deeply with life through mechanisms like savoring and experiencing flow. These concepts find their counterparts within the Quranic framework, where happiness is achieved through appreciating blessings and giving thanks, as well as mastering one's work and excelling in it.

The Quranic approach to happiness emphasizes the importance of recognizing and counting blessings, which helps prevent falling into the "pleasure treadmill" or what can be described within the Quranic context as "habituation to blessings." This is a state where individuals may begin to take blessings for granted until they are no longer present.

The Quran frequently commands Muslims to be thankful, to count their blessings, and to reflect on them. Although the specific verses are too numerous to list here, it is crucial to understand that in the Quran, gratitude is directly linked to the increase and preservation of those blessings. Moreover, gratitude in the Quran is associated with contentment, which forms a cornerstone of authentic happiness and peace of mind, resonating with the principles found in positive psychology.

The Quranic text encourages mastery in work, intertwining it with the concept of "Ihsan." While mastery refers to the skill and proficiency acquired to perform work at a high level, "Ihsan" represents a deeper, more comprehensive internal force that permeates an individual's conscience and manifests as superior manual skill (Kawthar Abdallah Ahmed Ali, 2019).

This concept aligns closely with the 'flow' experience in positive psychology, where individuals are fully immersed and deeply involved in their activities, deriving enjoyment and satisfaction from their engagement. Both flow and "Ihsan" reflect a psychological depth that drives individuals to perform work with effort, conscience, enjoyment, and selflessness.

Thus, the concept of flow in positive psychology and the Quranic concept of "Ihsan" share common psychological roots, both emphasizing excellence and quality in actions, and both are rewarded in their respective frameworks.

#### **11. Optimism in the Quran:**

Optimism is a fundamental trait encouraged by the Quran, which, while not using the term explicitly, promotes a positive outlook through faith in Allah and discourages despair. Similar to positive psychology, which views optimism as anticipating a bright future with actionable means to achieve it, the Quran

provides a broader perspective. It not only encourages optimism about future outcomes but also emphasizes the importance of belief in Divine providence, which posits that optimistic attitudes can influence events in one's favor.

The Quran advocates for a proactive form of optimism. It is insufficient for a person to simply hope for the best; they must also engage in actions that embody their optimism. This includes taking proactive steps, relying on divine support, and engaging in sincere prayer, forming a comprehensive approach to achieving and sustaining optimism (Al-Chimi, undated).

These Quranic teachings highlight that true optimism is not a passive state but an active engagement with faith and practical efforts, illustrating a profound integration of belief and action that can lead to the desired outcomes of optimism. This approach ensures that optimism, as understood and practiced within the Quranic framework, is not only about expecting positive outcomes but also about actively contributing to the realization of these outcomes (Al-Chimi, undated).

Taking proactive steps and believing that one has the power and ability to work and strive to achieve goals is referred to in the Quranic framework as determination. This concept is significant in positive psychology's discussion of optimism and its role in achieving authentic happiness. However, reliance on Allah after making a determination or taking proactive steps, considering that everything is in Allah's hands, is not reflected in the positive psychology framework, which believes in the principle "If you want, you can achieve."

The sincerity of praying to Allah for success in the tasks one is determined to perform marks a clear distinction between the perspective of positive psychology on the paths to achieving optimism and the Quranic reality of optimism.

## 12. Conclusion:

Achieving happiness, particularly authentic happiness, represents a natural and logical endeavor for every individual. The pursuit of happiness varies across different individuals, societies, and philosophical frameworks, reflecting the diverse understandings and methodologies associated with the concept of happiness. This study has explored the nature, diagnosis, and mechanisms of achieving authentic happiness through a comparative analysis between the Quranic perspective and the framework presented by Seligman's positive psychology.

The research has highlighted that both the Quranic perspective and positive psychology underscore that the most desirable form of happiness is authentic happiness, which transcends momentary, materialistic pleasures. The Quran emphasizes that the ultimate happiness should be sought in the hereafter, positioning the happiness sought in this life as a means to achieve tranquility and peace of mind. Conversely, positive psychology focuses on achieving a state of well-being that enhances one's life experience and capacity to thrive.

Both perspectives agree that authentic happiness is not merely handed to individuals but must be earned through consistent hard work, perseverance, and a deep internalization of its fundamental principles into one's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral systems. This involves a rigorous process of education or self-education, emphasizing the transformative power of understanding and applying the core pillars of happiness.

Furthermore, the study delineated how both the Quran and positive psychology recognize that happiness is built on a set of foundational pillars. An individual's comprehension and engagement with these pillars, whether positively or negatively, significantly influence their overall happiness.

In summary, while positive psychology approaches happiness with a scientific methodology that includes dissecting its nature and exploring mechanisms for its attainment, the Quranic view aligns closely with these insights but under different terminologies and with a spiritual dimension. This synthesis suggests that the essence of authentic happiness, as discussed in both the Quran and positive psychology, although arising from distinct cultural and intellectual contexts, converges on the principles of hard work, moral and spiritual education, and the pursuit of an elevated existence, whether in this life or the hereafter.



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