

THE CRITICAL ROLE OF ANTHROPOLOGY IN ATTAINING HAPPINESS: AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Happiness is widely regarded as the ultimate aim of human existence. This article adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, drawing upon the author’s interpretation of Qur’anic verses, to explore the significant influence of anthropology on the understanding and pursuit of happiness. It posits that human happiness is fundamentally tied to the attainment of true perfection. The article outlines that human perfection progresses through various stages: beginning with stages shared with inanimate objects, advancing to the level of plants, and further progressing through stages associated with animals. Although each stage of perfection is valuable, none can fully satisfy the deep human longing for completeness, fulfillment, and true happiness on its own. Instead, the attainment of each stage only intensifies the desire for higher forms of perfection. The ultimate and most distinctive form of human perfection is achieved through the attainment of divine love. Reaching this state of spiritual fulfillment brings about a form of happiness that transcends sorrow and grief, offering a unique state of pure joy in human existence.

Keywords: *happiness, human, anthropology, pleasure, perfection*

1. Introduction

A prevalent notion in many societies divides people into two categories: religious and non-religious. According to this perspective, non-religious individuals are perceived as free to seek and enjoy worldly pleasures, while religious individuals are thought to be deprived of these enjoyments, hoping for happiness in the afterlife. However, this article contends that such a view is

fundamentally flawed. The ultimate objective of all human beings, regardless of belief, is to avoid suffering, hardships, and sorrow, and to seek pleasure and happiness. While individuals may differ in their approaches to finding happiness, the pursuit itself is universal.

According to Islamic teachings, human beings are created by God to find happiness and to enjoy worldly pleasures while simultaneously preparing the soul for greater joys in the hereafter. *The Qur'an* states: "Except those on whom your Lord has mercy, and that is why He created them..." (*The Qur'an* 11: 119). This verse implies that humans are created to experience divine mercy, and that the role of religion is to guide life towards realizing that mercy and deriving joy from it.

From an Islamic standpoint, life is a journey, and those who learn to be happy and find joy in this world will also experience happiness in the next. The article argues that Islam aims to bring happiness and fulfillment to human life both in this world and in the hereafter. The pleasures experienced by religious people, according to the article, are of a deeper quality and last longer compared to those experienced by non-religious individuals. To illustrate this, consider the analogy of a journey to a place of ultimate pleasure. The journey can take three different forms. In the first scenario, the traveler drives rapidly without stopping, believing that enjoyment lies solely at the destination, thereby missing out on the pleasures along the way. This traveler does not enjoy the journey and makes it difficult for themselves by driving long hours without rest. In the second scenario, the traveler sets out for the destination but becomes distracted by minor pleasures along the way, forgetting to continue to the final goal of maximum happiness. In the third scenario, the traveler knows that the greatest pleasure and happiness awaits at the destination, but also takes time to enjoy the journey, stopping to rest and experience small joys along the way, ultimately reaching the destination. These three scenarios reflect different approaches to life. The ascetic (*zahid*) belongs to the first category, making life difficult by minimizing pleasures to secure happiness in the afterlife. However, just as a traveler who drives non-stop is likely to become exhausted or have an accident, an ascetic who deprives themselves of all material pleasures may struggle to sustain this path. In contrast, those who experience spiritual pleasures may find that material pleasures lose their appeal. The second group comprises atheists or materialists who focus solely on worldly pleasures, neglecting or denying the existence of an afterlife. The believers, however, manage to enjoy both the journey and the destination, balancing worldly pleasures with spiritual goals. They do not deny the joys of life, but instead, manage these pleasures wisely. Over time, their understanding of pleasure evolves, with spiritual fulfillment becoming far deeper and more profound than material enjoyment, leading them to a state of true

happiness. Thus, religious individuals do not avoid all worldly pleasures; they only refrain from those that have harmful consequences, even if those who engage in them acknowledge their harmful effects. The majority of worldly pleasures are permissible for the religious, provided they consider both short-term and long-term benefits. This article uses an analytical approach to examine the Islamic perspective on happiness, proposing the hypothesis that there is a direct link between the definition of human nature and the achievement of happiness. In Islam, the definition of human nature is such that it leads to the greatest possible happiness in life.

From an Islamic perspective, anthropology—the study of human nature and purpose—holds a fundamental significance in understanding and attaining true happiness. In Islamic thought, the notion of happiness is intrinsically connected to the comprehension of human identity, its inherent needs, and its ultimate purpose. This view suggests that achieving genuine happiness is contingent upon a profound understanding of the human self, its spiritual dimensions, and its divine objective. Islamic anthropology posits that humans are not solely material beings but also possess an essential spiritual dimension that defines their existence.

1. 1. Happiness and Pleasure

To distinguish between happiness and pleasure, it is crucial to understand their fundamental differences. The relationship between pleasures and happiness is complex and multifaceted, as pleasures can play a significant role in contributing to overall happiness, depending on how they are understood, pursued, and integrated into one's life. Pleasures are typically considered immediate, sensory experiences that bring satisfaction or enjoyment, such as enjoying a good meal, listening to music, or engaging in a favorite hobby. Happiness, however, is often understood as a deeper, more enduring state of well-being or contentment. While pleasures are momentary and fleeting, happiness represents a more sustained condition of mental and emotional fulfillment. According to Clawson (internet), happiness is physiologically mediated primarily by the neurotransmitter acetylcholine and the parasympathetic nervous system. It is often associated with high levels of serotonin (linked to connection) and gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA, related to relaxation). Notably, happiness can be present even in the absence of dopamine, which is associated with motivation, action, and seeking behavior. Happiness occurs exclusively in a state of safety, and terms like satisfaction and contentment better capture its essence than pleasure. In contrast, pleasure is primarily mediated by dopamine, a neurotransmitter that plays a central role in motivation, reward-seeking, and goal-oriented behavior. Dopamine is also a key signaler in the sympathetic nervous system, promoting action

and mobilization. In states of safety, dopamine fosters confidence and social connection; however, in states of threat, it can lead to conflict and aggression (ibid.).

Pleasure and suffering can be interconnected in paradoxical ways: some pleasures may lead to future suffering, while some forms of suffering may precede greater pleasures. The pursuit of certain pleasures can diminish or destroy the potential for more significant pleasures, while enduring some suffering may prevent greater suffering in the future. Thus, pleasures that lead to greater suffering or cause the loss of greater pleasures are still pleasures, and suffering that precedes or prevents further suffering remains suffering. However, these pleasures and sufferings do not equate to happiness or misery. According to the Shia thinker, Mutaharī, humans pursue pleasure instinctively but seek expediency and happiness through reason. Pleasure is considered instinctive, while happiness is intellectual; the recognition of pleasure is guided by nature and instinct, whereas the recognition of happiness is guided by intellect. Thus, distinguishing between happiness and its opposite is not straightforward and often involves philosophical inquiry, with each philosopher offering a unique perspective based on their worldview, anthropology, and cosmology. In contrast, pleasure and suffering have more specific and limited aspects, making them more accessible to psychological study. Consequently, the philosophical debate about happiness and misery—and the appropriate path to achieve happiness and avoid misery—depends heavily on the philosopher's worldview and understanding of humanity and the universe. While there is considerable variation in philosophical perspectives, opinions on pleasure and suffering are more uniform, as these concepts are not influenced by individual worldviews. This explains why scholars' views on happiness range widely: some equate it with the attainment of pleasures, while others find it in renunciation; some see it in material and sensory experiences, while others locate it in rational and intangible matters. Ultimately, perspectives on happiness depend on one's beliefs about human nature and the nature of the world (Mutaharī n. d.: VII/51–58).

However, pleasures can contribute to happiness in several ways:

- Enhancing well-being. Experiencing regular, healthy pleasures can improve one's overall sense of well-being and life satisfaction. Positive experiences trigger the release of neurotransmitters like dopamine and endorphins, which promote feelings of joy and reduce stress. When experienced in moderation, these pleasures can enhance one's mood and contribute to a more positive outlook on life, which is a component of happiness.
- Creating balance and resilience. Enjoying simple pleasures can provide balance and resilience in daily life. By taking time to engage in pleasurable activities, individuals can recover from stress and main-

tain emotional equilibrium. This balance can foster a sense of contentment and prevent feelings of burnout or dissatisfaction, thereby supporting long-term happiness (*Science Daily*, internet).

- Cultivating meaningful connections. Pleasurable activities, especially those shared with others, can help build and strengthen social bonds. Positive social interactions, like spending time with loved ones or engaging in community activities, often involve pleasurable experiences that foster a sense of belonging and connectedness—key components of happiness (Blackmore, internet).
- Promoting gratitude and mindfulness. The mindful appreciation of simple pleasures can cultivate gratitude, a powerful emotion linked to increased happiness. When individuals learn to savor and be fully present in pleasurable moments, they often experience a deeper sense of satisfaction and contentment, which contributes to an overall sense of happiness.

Thus, pleasures can lead to happiness when they are experienced in moderation, aligned with personal values, and integrated with a broader sense of purpose and meaning. By cultivating a mindful approach to pleasures, balancing them with deeper sources of fulfillment, and appreciating their role in overall well-being, individuals can harness pleasures as a valuable component in the journey toward lasting happiness.

1. 2. Goals (Happiness) and Pleasure

Muslim philosophers assert that happiness is inseparable from perfection, and perfection is inseparable from happiness; every form of perfection is a manifestation of happiness (Mutaharī n. d.: XII/508). Thus, a happy individual is one who has attained their desired state of perfection. Human happiness, therefore, is synonymous with achieving one's true perfection. Perfection represents the inherent effect or purpose of something. For example, a pen can serve various purposes, such as scratching one's back, being used as a fork to eat a slice of cake, or even as a weapon in a physical assault. However, none of these uses represents the pen's true perfection. The perfection of a pen lies in its use for writing, as this is its intended purpose.

Based on a particular understanding of anthropology, individuals define specific goals in their lives to pursue. If these goals are perceived as attractive and fulfilling, they can motivate individuals to endure hardships and challenges in their pursuit. In such cases, even the difficulties encountered along the way can become a source of satisfaction. For instance, a child aspiring to become a famous soccer player does not perceive running after a ball as a challenging

task. When a goal is perceived as appealing, merely thinking about it can bring joy. Pleasures that are aligned with one's values, personal growth, and purpose can have a more profound impact on happiness. For instance, the pleasure derived from meaningful work, creative pursuits, or helping others can enhance one's sense of purpose and contribute to a more enduring sense of happiness. In this context, pleasures are not merely transient moments of enjoyment but are interwoven with activities that provide a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment.

1. 3. The Superiority of the Spiritual Pleasures

To argue that spiritual pleasures are higher than material ones, one can explore the differences in their nature, depth, and impact on human well-being:

A. Permanence vs. Transience

Material pleasures, such as those derived from wealth, physical comfort, or sensory enjoyment, are often fleeting and temporary. They are tied to external circumstances and can easily dissipate with the loss of possessions, changes in circumstances, or the simple passage of time. In contrast, spiritual pleasures—like those arising from inner peace, fulfillment, love, and connection to a higher purpose or truth—tend to be more enduring. Spiritual fulfillment often provides a stable source of joy and contentment that persists even in the face of external hardships.

B. Depth and Meaning

Material pleasures often provide immediate gratification but are usually superficial. For instance, the pleasure derived from eating a delicious meal or buying a new gadget is momentary and often leaves one craving more once the novelty fades. Spiritual pleasures, such as those derived from acts of kindness, a sense of purpose, or deep meditative or contemplative experiences, provide a deeper sense of fulfillment. They tap into fundamental human needs for meaning, belonging, and self-actualization, which go beyond mere sensory satisfaction.

C. Impact on Personal Growth

Spiritual pleasures often promote personal growth and self-improvement. For example, the joy experienced through self-discipline, meditation, self-reflection, or serving others contributes to developing virtues like patience, compassion, wisdom, and humility. These virtues enhance one's character and

foster inner strength and resilience. In contrast, material pleasures can sometimes lead to habits of overindulgence, selfishness, or dependence on external factors, which may hinder personal growth and self-mastery.

D. Universal Accessibility

Spiritual pleasures are inherently more inclusive and accessible to everyone, regardless of their socioeconomic status or physical conditions. While material pleasures often depend on resources, circumstances, or physical ability, spiritual pleasures can be attained through inner cultivation, practices like meditation or prayer, or a sense of connection to others. This accessibility makes spiritual pleasures potentially available to all, irrespective of external factors, making them more universally valuable.

E. Satisfaction and Diminishing Returns

Material pleasures often suffer from the law of diminishing returns; the more one consumes, the less satisfaction each additional unit brings. For instance, after a certain point, additional wealth or possessions bring little to no additional happiness. Spiritual pleasures, on the other hand, tend not to diminish with repeated experience; in fact, they often grow. For example, the more one practices compassion or mindfulness, the deeper the joy and fulfillment one tends to experience. Spiritual pleasures can expand and enrich with continuous engagement, whereas material pleasures often peak and fade.

F. Relation to Human Fulfillment

Many philosophers, psychologists, and spiritual traditions argue that the ultimate goal of human life is not merely the accumulation of material wealth or comfort but the realization of deeper values like wisdom, love, and a sense of connection to a greater whole. Material pleasures are seen as means to an end, while spiritual pleasures are often viewed as ends in themselves, representing the highest state of human flourishing.

G. Reduced Risk of Negative Consequences

The pursuit of material pleasures can sometimes lead to negative consequences, such as greed, jealousy, addiction, or environmental degradation. In contrast, spiritual pleasures are less likely to have such harmful side effects. They often foster positive qualities like empathy, contentment, and inner peace, which benefit both the individual and society.

All in all, while material pleasures have their place and are part of the human experience, spiritual pleasures are arguably higher because they offer a deeper, more lasting, and more meaningful form of fulfillment. They contribute to personal growth, resilience, and a sense of universal connection that transcends the limitations of the material world. Therefore, spiritual pleasures represent a more profound and enduring path to true happiness and well-being.

2. Anthropology and Pleasures

In the context of pleasure and happiness, it is crucial to consider how human beings and their characteristics are defined. The way a person perceives themselves directly affects what brings them happiness or satisfaction. This understanding shapes specific expectations, which in turn influence feelings of happiness or grief. As Housel notes, happiness can be viewed as “results minus expectations”. Similarly, Oppong (internet) states: “True happiness is not derived from having everything we desire but rather from the alignment between what we expect and experience”. Many people feel unhappy because they are dissatisfied with their current life situation, whereas others may dream of the same circumstances. Those who are unhappy may have higher expectations, which contribute to their discontent. Conversely, expectations are influenced by knowledge. For example, if someone receives ten dollars every day, they may feel grateful. However, if they discover that the benefactor is a billionaire who gives away thousands to others, their expectations may change, leading to feelings of discomfort or dissatisfaction.

In his existential anthropology, Viktor Frankl emphasizes that what we truly need is not happiness itself, but the reasons behind it; when these reasons are present, happiness will naturally follow (Frankl 2012b: 20). Attempting to bypass the search for meaning and directly pursue happiness often leads to substance abuse or addiction (Frankl 2012c: 69). Meaning provides the foundation for happiness, and possessing it is essential for experiencing happiness and for enduring suffering (Frankl 2012a: 54). The fundamental meaning required for achieving happiness is an understanding of what it means to be human. The way one defines themselves shapes their expectations, which in turn affect their emotional state. Therefore, the question of pleasure is intrinsically linked to the question of human identity and expectations in life.

If a person perceives themselves as a mere animal, living a finite existence of up to one hundred years in the material world, with the opportunity to seek certain pleasures, specific expectations will arise. On the other hand, if an individual views themselves as a being transcending this material world and existing eternally, then both short-term and long-term expectations will differ. Thus, the study of anthropology is of paramount importance in this regard.

2. 1. *Different Stages of Perfection*

When categorizing beings by their perfection, they can be divided into four groups.

2. 1. 1. Inanimate Objects

Some entities, such as solids, liquids, and gases, are considered inanimate. These objects possess different characteristics that constitute their perfection, such as weight, volume, color, smell, and elemental properties. For example, gold has distinct qualities, copper has its own features, and silver has other unique aspects. They share some common attributes while also having specific qualities unique to each.

2. 1. 2. Plants

The second category includes plants. Plants grow, have sensations, reproduce, and gain strength through nourishment; a delicate sapling can become a robust tree. Plants encompass the perfections of inanimate objects, as they absorb elements like iron and incorporate them into their structure. In addition, plants possess unique characteristics like reproduction and respiration, which are not found in inanimate objects.

2. 1. 3. Animals

The third category comprises animals. Animals share the perfections of plants, such as growth, nourishment, and reproduction. However, they also possess additional attributes. Animals have instincts, a range of desires, and the ability to form social bonds and communities. Many animals, such as ants and bees, live in structured societies with division of labor, social classes, and distinct roles. They may even display democratic behaviors. For example, Eurasian red deer herds only move when 60 percent of the adults stand up, essentially voting with their feet (McLendon, internet). Animals can be trained, which means they can suppress their natural instincts for a set of learned values and morals. Some animals exhibit traits like trustworthiness; for example, a hunting dog learns not to consume its prey but to deliver it to its master, understanding that the prey is entrusted to it.

Up to this point, human qualities have not been distinctly highlighted, although all the aforementioned qualities are also present in humans. Humans, like animals, have bodies composed of natural elements like iron and calcium, grow, and gain strength. They also share the qualities of plants. For instance,

humans exercise to build physical strength, embodying the qualities of robust plants. However, these characteristics do not uniquely define humans; they merely place them at the level of plants or animals. Therefore, a physically strong person is not necessarily a better human being than a physically weaker one. Similarly, a sterile man or woman is not less human; they simply lack a particular biological perfection. A person who understands their true nature does not feel worthless or miserable due to such deficiencies, recognizing that these do not undermine their human essence or potential for happiness.

The perfections shared between humans and animals, such as social behavior and leadership, are considered animalistic perfections. These are not unique to humans; in fact, animals often exceed humans in these areas. For example, a dog that remains loyal to its owner exhibits greater trustworthiness than a human who betrays friends or compatriots. *The Qur'an* even describes some humans as being “like cattle; rather, they are more astray” (*The Qur'an* 7: 179; 25: 44).

Social structures, civic engagement, and political leadership are also animalistic perfections. Attaining a leadership position, such as mayor or president, does not necessarily reflect a uniquely human achievement, as animals also demonstrate leadership within their groups. While these roles can offer opportunities to serve the community, they are not exclusive to human perfection. Recognizing these truths helps individuals manage the anxieties and frustrations associated with failing to attain such positions, thereby reducing their pain and suffering.

2. 1. 4. The Human Being

The defining characteristic of a human being, in its truest sense, is the “heart”. In this context, the term “heart” represents the soul, the human capacity for will, desire, and an infinite longing (*The Qur'an* 22: 46; 25: 44; 67: 10). According to verse 24 of Chapter 9 of *the Qur'an*: “Say: If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your spouses, your relatives, the wealth you have acquired, the business you fear may decline, and the homes you cherish, are more beloved to you than Allah and His Messenger and striving in His cause, then wait until Allah executes His command; and Allah does not guide the transgressing people (*al-fasiqin*)”.

The term *al-fasiqin* is the plural of *al-fasiq*. This term derives from the root *al-fisq*, which literally refers to something becoming spoiled or corrupted after deviating from its normal state. Just as a peeled fruit is more susceptible to spoilage compared to an unpeeled one, the term *fasaqa* can be applied to it (Mustafawi 1989: IX/88). Thus, the meaning of the verse is that if a believer loves his family, relatives, job, and possessions more than God, His Messen-

ger, and striving in His path, that person is a *fasiq*—a person whose human form is impaired due to a sickness in the heart. Hence, a true human being is one whose heart is filled with love for God and His Messenger, as another verse suggests: “The day (Judgment Day) when neither wealth nor children will benefit, except for one who comes to Allah with a sound heart” (*The Qur’an* 26: 88–89). In the *Qur’anic* view of humanity, a genuine human being is defined by having a “sound heart”, one that loves God and His Messenger above all else.

On the one hand, human beings are driven by a quest for perfection; on the other, their longing is infinite, and nothing they achieve ever fully satisfies them. Therefore, humans inherently seek infinite perfection, and if they settle for anything less, they deviate from their true nature, filling their hearts with inferior desires. Consequently, the verse labels a person whose primary love is anything other than God as a *fasiq* or transgressor—someone who has strayed from their intrinsic human nature.

If a person reaches a state of faith where God is the supreme love in their heart, then nothing in the world can make this person unhappy. As *the Qur’an* narrates from Abraham, when he observed the various gods worshipped by people, such as the moon, stars, and sun, he declared: “I do not like those who set” (*The Qur’an* 6: 76–79). He proclaimed his love for a God who does not set, disappear, or abandon him. By loving God more than anything else, Abraham achieved the “sound heart” of a true human being, as *the Qur’an* states: “when he came to his Lord with a sound heart” (*The Qur’an* 37: 84). When such love fills the human heart, this infinite love leaves no room for sorrow. In this way, love for God leads to eternal peace and happiness, as *the Qur’an* repeatedly describes true believers: “And they will have no fear, nor will they grieve” (*The Qur’an* 2: 62, 112, 262, 274, 277; 7: 49; 10: 62; 43: 68). Considering such well-being for man, *the Qur’an* states: “I did not create the jinn and humans except to worship Me” (*The Qur’an* 51: 56). Worship, which is mentioned as the purpose of human creation, is an action. According to Muslim philosophers, an action cannot serve as the ultimate goal for a rational agent; actions are always performed to achieve a specific state or condition that serves as the ultimate goal (Misbah Yazdi 2011). For example, cooking is an action undertaken to enable eating, but eating itself is also an action and cannot be considered the ultimate goal. Thus, one may ask why we eat. The purpose of eating is to reach a state of satiety and to eliminate hunger, providing the body with energy. This state and the feeling experienced after eating represent the ultimate goal of cooking. It is essential to recognize that actions themselves cannot constitute the ultimate goal; rather, there is always an intended state behind every action a person decides to undertake. Therefore, worship is not the ultimate goal but rather a means for achieving the state

of being a servant of God. The term *Ibadah*, meaning worship, shares its root with the term *Abd*, meaning servant. Being a servant of Allah is metaphorical, as it draws upon a familiar concept from the time of revelation. However, being a servant of Allah does not involve serving God to fulfill any of His needs; instead, it is a state of adhering to divine guidance, which leads to human well-being and happiness: “O soul at peace! Return to your Lord, well-pleased and well-pleasing! Then enter among My servants! And enter My paradise!” (*The Qur’an* 89: 27–30)

2. 2. *Hardships as an Inherent Aspect of This World*

As Suttie (internet) notes, “we want to have realistic expectations because accurate expectations are useful for making good choices; plus, without them, it’s hard to learn from experience”. A fundamental truth about this world is that it is inherently filled with hardships; this is an inescapable part of its nature. As *the Qur’an* states: “Certainly We created man in travail” (*The Qur’an* 90: 4). Consequently, life in this world anthropologically entails a balance between pain and happiness. To avoid the discomfort of hunger or to experience the pleasure of eating, one must endure a series of hardships. Similarly, obtaining pleasures also requires effort and struggle. One of the greatest joys on earth is having a child. The experience of being a parent is deeply rewarding, yet it is accompanied by many responsibilities and hardships, both before and after birth.

In a world where hardships are an inevitable part of life, belief in human eternity and the existence of another realm can alleviate many psychological pressures that arise from life’s failures and shortcomings. Moreover, for religious individuals, life acquires a sense of meaning, and the fear of destruction and feelings of emptiness are diminished. Such a person envisions a bright, eternal future and, while maintaining peace of mind, also plans and manages life in this world. It is also important to note that people often derive pleasure from anticipating future events. Consider someone who looks forward to a journey; if told that the journey will occur in a month, they may enjoy the entire month in anticipation. Even if the actual journey does not meet their expectations, they have already derived enjoyment from looking forward to it. Thus, belief in a superior, transcendent realm makes life more bearable for the faithful. Consequently, it is rare for true believers to engage in self-destructive behaviors like suicide when facing hardships, whereas those without faith may succumb more easily (Agha-Mohammadi 2022: 19). As one spiritually matures, they learn to find happiness even in adversity. Difficulties remain, but the faithful perceive them differently. Recognizing the divine wisdom behind the challenges one faces brings peace of mind. If a person grows spiritually

even further, they will no longer see these difficulties at all; they only see God, the source of all existence, and perceive nothing but beauty. As the Prophet said: “The best of people are those who love worship and embrace it in their hearts, practice it with their bodies, and dedicate their time to it. Then they do not care if they begin their day in hardship or ease” (Kulaynī 1986: II/83).

2. 3. *Self-Control as a Prelude to Greater Pleasures*

Sins lead to human suffering and loss, which is why God has prohibited them. This underscores the significance of piety (*Taqwā*) in achieving true happiness and prosperity. Piety, or self-control, serves as the foundation for attaining happiness. A psychological experiment known as “Stanford Marshmallow Experiment” illustrates this concept. In this experiment, children are offered a treat like marshmallow and told they can eat it immediately or wait for fifteen minutes to receive two marshmallows instead. The test aims to teach children that delaying immediate gratification fosters personal growth and development, allowing for greater pleasures in the future. Another lesson from the experiment is that the anticipation of receiving two marshmallows can be more satisfying than consuming one immediately (Clear, internet).

Similarly, Allah permits people to enjoy material pleasures, such as eating and drinking, with a few exceptions, and commands certain practices, like prayer and fasting. The command to fast teaches us to resist immediate gratification, much like refraining from eating the marshmallow, to cultivate our spiritual and imaginative capacities. This is known as the Greater Jihad (*Jihad Akbar*), which is the struggle against one’s own desires. Those who resist temptations in this life will ultimately be rewarded abundantly in the hereafter as well as this world.

2. 4. *The Relation of Pleasure and Imagination*

Pleasure is inherently subjective and varies based on individual perception and imagination. For instance, something that one person finds highly pleasurable might hold no appeal for another. If pleasure were inherent in the object itself, it would produce the same effect on everyone, like how pepper makes every mouth hot. However, since pleasure is closely linked to imagination, different individuals may derive varying degrees of enjoyment from the same experience. Thus, when imagination is impaired or distracted, the perception of pleasure changes accordingly. For example, if a particular food is considered the most pleasurable in the world, but the individual receives bad news just before consuming it, the focus of the imagination shifts from the food to the bad news, diminishing or eliminating the anticipated pleasure

of the food. Similarly, someone who has recently suffered a profound loss, such as the death of a child, may not derive any pleasure from even the most exquisite food due to the impact on their imagination. The key point is that as one's imagination develops and strengthens, their capacity for experiencing pleasure also increases. The reverse is also true; fears are rooted in the imagination as well. If one's imagination is weak, they may be trapped in constant fear and anxiety. An anecdote illustrates this. A man was weeping over the loss of one hundred dollars. When a passerby gave him one hundred dollars to console him, he began crying again, lamenting that if he hadn't lost the original amount, he would now have two hundred dollars. Such individuals approach life negatively, always anticipating danger or loss, and thus fail to find joy. Some people find solitude enjoyable, while others fear it, depending on whether their imagination finds it intriguing or frightening.

However, a developed and disciplined imagination can transform one's experience of pleasure. The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have prayed to Allah, saying: "My body (metaphorically referred to as darkness) and my imagination both prostrate before You, and my heart is faithful to You" (Kulaynī 1986: III/324). In another supplication, he mentioned: "Oh Allah, my body, my imagination, and my intellect (referred to as whiteness) prostrate before You" (Majlisi 2002: 58). This illustrates that a spiritually developed person can control and direct their imagination towards a state of constant remembrance of Allah, leading to a sense of enduring peace and happiness. Conversely, those who lack such spiritual discipline may lose control of their imagination, even during acts of worship. Thus, spiritual education and training are essential for developing and controlling one's imagination, allowing it to dwell in a state of peace and fulfillment.

2. 5. *Happiness as a Criterion of Faithfulness*

As already referred to, enjoying humane perfection, a defining characteristic of a true believer is a state of continuous happiness. A person cannot be a believer while also experiencing worry and anxiety; these are viewed as signs of weak faith. This notion serves as a criterion to evaluate the strength of one's belief. Human beings are inherently created to endure difficulties, as difficulty is a fundamental aspect of this world that cannot be changed. However, individuals can transform themselves. Allah describes His friends by stating: "Indeed, the friends of Allah will have no fear, nor will they grieve" (*The Qur'an* 10: 62).

Conversely, actions that prevent one from attaining happiness are considered sins. By committing sins, people lose their sense of happiness, which is why God disapproves of sins. *The Qur'an* frequently uses phrases like "they

have wronged themselves” (*The Qur’an* 2: 57; 3: 117; 7: 160, 177; 9: 70; 10: 44; 16: 33, 118; 29: 40; 30: 9. etc.) to describe those who sin. Therefore, sins are not prohibited because they harm Allah; rather, they are forbidden because they cause harm to the individual and deprive them of greater joys.

3. Conclusion

Human beings seek pleasure and happiness in this world, but the key question is how each person defines happiness. The worldview and anthropology of an individual significantly influence their understanding and perception of happiness and pleasure. To attain maximum happiness, one must balance long-term and short-term pleasures, which are profoundly shaped by one’s conception of human nature and purpose in life. Human happiness is fundamentally linked to human perfection—the ultimate purpose for which humanity was created, which is the attainment of absolute good.

While individuals may define various forms of perfection for themselves, careful reflection reveals that many of these perfections are shared with inanimate objects, plants, or animals and may vary in degree. True happiness, however, comes from achieving that form of perfection unique to human nature. If a person settles for a lesser form of perfection, they will remain unsatisfied even after attaining it. The supreme perfection of a human being is found in filling the heart with divine love. When this infinite love permeates the human heart, it brings a joy so profound that worldly sorrows and problems fade, and the individual experiences enduring joy and happiness.

Therefore, in the framework of Islamic anthropology, a “true” human being is defined by a heart that is spiritually sound, filled with love for God and His Messenger above all worldly attachments. This orientation towards Divine love and purpose provides a fulfillment that surpasses transient material pleasures. Conversely, when an individual places worldly desires and attachments above this Divine connection, they stray from their authentic human nature, resulting in dissatisfaction and spiritual disquiet. Islamic teachings maintain that humans are inherently driven towards perfection, perpetually seeking the infinite, and are never truly satisfied with finite achievements or material gains. The heart’s deepest fulfillment is found in the pursuit of the absolute good, manifest in the love and worship of Allah. Thus, understanding human nature from an Islamic perspective requires recognizing that the path to true happiness is rooted in spiritual development and adherence to moral principles, as guided by *the Qur’an* and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.

The Qur’an frequently conveys that wealth, social status, or personal relationships do not constitute the essence of true happiness; rather, it is attained by cultivating a heart aligned with the Divine will and aspiring to be close to

God. As expressed in *the Qur'an*: “The Day when neither wealth nor children will be of benefit, except one who comes to Allah with a sound heart” (*The Qur'an* 26: 88–89). This underscores the centrality of anthropology in Islamic teachings: understanding the essence of being human is fundamentally linked to spiritual well-being and devotion to God.

In essence, the Islamic perspective on anthropology argues that happiness is not merely an emotional state but a condition of being in harmony with one's divine purpose. It is achieved through conscious effort to align one's life with the will of Allah, practicing piety (*Taqwa*), exercising self-discipline, and striving for spiritual excellence. In this manner, anthropology, from an Islamic viewpoint, offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the attainment and maintenance of true happiness.

Received: October 3rd, 2023

Accepted: November 23rd, 2023

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