

Al-Ghazali on The Method of Achieving Happiness

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Abstract: Happiness can give immunity to the individual's physical and psychological so that they become strong in facing pressure. In severe social and psychological conditions, happiness becomes essential and needed. This study aims to analyze al-Ghazali's concept of achieving happiness. The research uses the content analysis method with primary sources as the main reference. The research results show that achieving happiness in al-Ghazali consists of three stages. Namely, (1) recognizing one's nature and character, (2) placing the heart as a leader, (3) directing attention to God. This stage necessitates studies on self and psychology, essential for cleansing the soul. In management, al-Ghazali's concept of heart leadership is in harmony with al-Farabi's leadership theory, which states that leaders must be able to direct their subordinates to happiness. The implication of this concept is that there is a holistic approach to improving the quality of human life as a whole in the fields of psychology, education and spirituality. Ultimately, all potential and activity must be directed to God as the source of happiness to achieve true happiness.

Keywords: al-Ghazali; Happiness; Know Yourself; Leadership of the Heart



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Introduction

Several people with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) remain unemployed, and among those who are employed, many are assigned occupational roles that do not align with their abilities, credentials, and competencies (Davies et al., 2024). According to Harris (2018)'s Ozdemir and Koç (2023)'s and Mushambi et al.'s (2024) views, ASD is understood as a lifelong neurological condition that can negatively impact the employment options of those suffering from it. Researchers such as Nazeer et al. (2019) indicated that information about people with autism first emerged in 1943 through a study conducted by Leo Kanner and in 1944 through another study conducted by Hans Asperger in the United States of America (USA). The descriptions of Leo Kanner and Hans Asperger did not reveal sufficient information about the

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causes and potential treatments for ASD. Factors such as food, genetics, preterm birth, narcotics, alcohol, and birth problems may all contribute to the development of ASD (Harris, 2018; Ozdemir & Koç, 2023). Throughout history, people have been misled by myths and misconceptions regarding the causes and treatments for ASD (AlBatti et al., 2022); (Ghirardi et al., 2021). According to Kapp (2023), people believe that witchcraft, sorcery, bad spirits, and God's punishment for family sins are all causes of autism. Kapp (2023) and Morris-Rosendahl and Crocq (2020) showed that people with impairments, particularly those exhibiting symptoms of high-functioning autism (HFA), were taunted, ridiculed, and excluded from engaging with others in various aspects of society. This discrimination may have stemmed from the limited information available to all people about how individuals with ASD behave, interact, and socialize with others and among themselves in various societal settings (Ghirardi et al., 2021; Kapp, 2023; Porter et al., 2023).

A feeling of happiness can make individuals strong and comfortable. Happiness can provide physical and psychological immunity to a person so that they become strong in facing challenges and pressure, both from within and outside themselves. Johnson and Stapel stated that happiness can strengthen a person's resilience in facing pressure. (Johnson & Stapel, 2011) In difficult social conditions such as last year's COVID-19 pandemic, happiness becomes essential and needed. Guler's research shows that joy can reduce psychological stress caused by the pandemic. (Yıldırım & Güler, 2021). Apart from that, happiness can improve the quality of work. People who feel happy are more productive than those who feel unhappy. Vallina and Alegre's research shows that the work of happy people is better than that of those who are sad. Happy people are also healthier than unhappy people (Salas-Vallina & Alegre, 2021; Steptoe, 2019).

This description shows that happiness is something important (Byström, 2020; Kumar, 2020; West, 2019). Kumar, West, and Byström's research confirms that living a happy life is important for individuals. The problem is how to achieve happiness. The hedonism theory states that happiness can be achieved by pursuing pleasure or material enjoyment (Veenhoven, 2003). However, Veenhoven's research states that material pleasures do not always bring happiness. Material pleasures often give rise to despair. Meanwhile, another theory states that happiness does not come from outside but from within. Fan Yang and Robson's research shows that happiness comes from the heart (Robson, 2022; Yang et al., 2021). Al-Ghazali (1058-1111), the figure in this research, had his method for achieving happiness.

Several studies examine al-Ghazali's concept of happiness. First, Soleh and Yahya's research examines aspects of happiness from al-Ghazali's perspective. Soleh's research states that al-Ghazali's concept of happiness consists of three aspects, namely lust, reason, and heart. Meanwhile, Yahya's research states that al-Ghazali's concept of happiness consists of three aspects, namely knowledge, spirituality, and behavior. If there is no harmonious relationship between these three elements, unhappiness will arise (Soleh, 2022b; Yahya et al., 2020). Second, research by Mirsepassi and Lim, who wrote about the relationship between al-Ghazali's happiness and secularism. Mirsepassi shows that al-Ghazali's concept of happiness balances

the world and the hereafter, rational knowledge, and religious doctrine (Lim, 2015; Mirsepassi & Fernée, 2019). Third, Khismatulin's research is on the influence of al-Ghazali's concept of happiness on the teachings of the Naqsabadi order. Khismatulin stated that the principles of al-Ghazali's teachings in the *Alchemy of Happiness* have become the basis for the spiritual movement in the Naqsbandi order (Khismatulin, 2005). Fourth, research by Baig, Shah and Yahya compares al-Ghazali's (1058-1111) concept of happiness with Jalaludin al-Rumi (1207-1273), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and Maslow (1908-1970) (Baig, 2022; Shah, 2015; Yahya et al., 2018).

This description shows that previous research discussed al-Ghazali's concept of happiness and compared it with other figures. However, no research has explicitly described al-Ghazali's concept of methods for achieving happiness. This article fills this gap by analyzing the method of achieving happiness from al-Ghazali's perspective. This article provides at least two benefits. (1) It strengthens the statement that happiness is important because it can strengthen individuals' immunity to body and psychology and help them face heavy social and psychological pressure. (2) The study of al-Ghazali's method of achieving happiness can be an alternative psychological concept besides the developing study of Western psychology.

Methods

The focus of this research is the method of achieving happiness, according to al-Ghazali. Data sources are divided into three parts, namely primary, secondary, and general (Snyder, 2019). Primary sources are books by al-Ghazali which explain methods of achieving happiness, especially the *Alchemy of Happiness* (Kimyā al-Sa'ādah) and *Ihyā Ulūm al-Dīn*. Secondary sources are methods of achieving happiness written by other figures. General sources are related to theories related to the subject matter. This study uses primary sources as the main reference and secondary general sources as supporting data or confirmation material.

Al-Ghazali (1058-1111), the object of this research, was a great Muslim thinker considered a reformer of Islam (mujaddid) in the 11th century. His thoughts greatly influenced the Islamic world, earning him *hujjah al-Islām* (Islamic argumentation). Al-Ghazali left behind many written works that significantly influenced theology, philosophy, and Sufism. Carl Brockelman (1868-1956) recorded 404 works by al-Ghazali, while Abd Rahman Badawi (1917-2002) stated that al-Ghazali left behind 457 works (Soleh, 2022a).

Alchemy of Happiness (Kimyā al-Sa'ādah), the primary reference in this research, is the work of al-Ghazali, which explicitly explains the question of happiness and how to achieve it. The reference for this research is the Arabic edition of *Alchemy of Happiness*, with a thickness of 10 pages following the publication of Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, 1996 (Ghazali, 1996a). This book consists of five chapters, namely (1) Knowledge about Oneself, (2) Forces of the Heart, (3) Miracles of the Heart, (4) Enjoyment of knowledge of God, and (5) Humans as a miniature universe.

As the second primary reference for research, *Ihyā Ulūm al-Dīn* (Revival of Religious Science) is al-Ghazali's work in Sufism. This book consists of five volumes with a total thickness

of 2,488 pages following the publication of *Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah* (DKI), Beirut, 2008. However, this research only refers to the third volume of *Ihya* because this volume explains the soul and how to achieve happiness. This volume consists of ten chapters, namely (1) The Magic of the Heart, (2) Controlling Lust, (3) Subduing Lust, (4) Guarding One's speech, (5) controlling emotions, (6) guarding oneself against being stingy, (7) guard yourself against liking publicity, (8) guard yourself against being arrogant, (9) guard yourself against worldly deception, and (10) seek glory through worship.

Data from the two primary sources was then classified and analyzed using the content analysis method (Elo et al., 2014). This analysis explains al-Ghazali's concept of methods for achieving happiness. Researchers also cross-checked primary data with other secondary data. Cross-checking is carried out to anticipate possible misunderstandings of primary sources (Turner, 2003). The researcher then discussed the narrative described in the results section further. In the discussion section, researchers analyze al-Ghazali's method of achieving happiness by tracing his background, predicting logical consequences, or comparing it with other theories. Based on this, important conclusions are drawn.

Results

Al-Ghazali emphasized that happiness does not just come but must be cultivated. One has to do something to achieve happiness. Al-Ghazali taught three stages to achieve happiness, which are described below.

Know Your Character and Potentials

The first step to achieving happiness is knowing yourself. For al-Ghazali, knowing oneself is not physical but psychological and spiritual (Ghazali, 1996a). Who are you? Where are you from, and where are you going? Where do you live? The Javanese call it "*sangkan paraning dumadi*" (origin and purpose of life). These questions are the first way to get to know yourself.

Al-Ghazali explained that every self has three characteristics: the nature of animals, the nature of the devil, and the nature of angels. Animal behavior is eating, drinking, and sex. Satan's behavior is to incite evil, deceit, and lies. The behavior of angels is to spread goodness, develop knowledge, and express the great qualities of God. Al-Ghazali states that these three qualities are gathered in each individual. However, the nature of animals and demons is not human nature. Human nature is the nature of angels. The animal and the devil nature in oneself are not to be followed but a means of developing an angelic identity (Ghazali, 1996a). These three human characters are depicted in Figure 1.

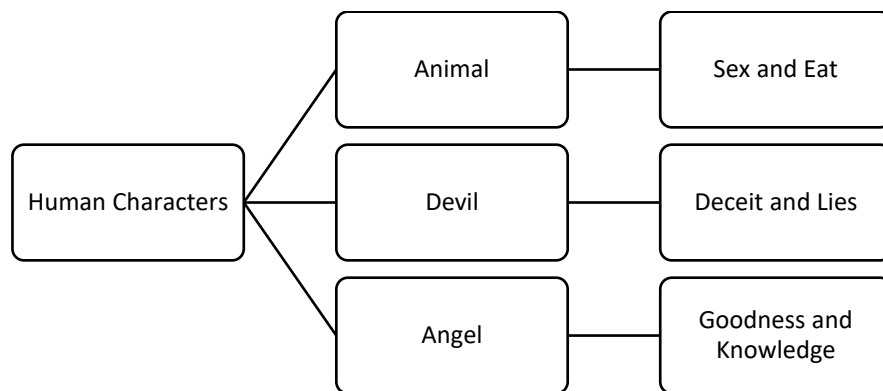


Figure 1 Human Characters

Each individual also has psychological potential that underlies all his activities. The potential in question is appetite (nafs), intellect (aql), and heart (qalb) (Ghazali, 2008). Lust is a psychological potential that serves to encourage activity. Al-Ghazali mentions two drives in the nafs: lust (shahwat) and outrage (ghadab). Enthusiasm is the urge to do something desired, usually bad or against God. Outrage is the urge to reject something you do not like loudly or harshly (Ghazali, 2008). However, al-Ghazali stated that lust is an important means, so it should not be eliminated or turned off. There is no happiness without the involvement of lust. Therefore, lust must be trained to be good. The individual must strive to subdue lust and direct it to goodness. The lust that has been trained but is not yet stable is called the lust of lawwamah. The lust that has turned good and stable is called lust mutmainnah (Ghazali, 2008).

Intellect (aql) is a psychological potential that functions for rational science. Al-Ghazali mentions four abilities in the intellect. (1) Imagination, namely the ability to coordinate various information that makes sense. This potential is located in the forebrain. (2) Memory, the ability to store various received information. This potential is like a secretary who records any data received. This potential place is in the midbrain (Ghazali, 1996a). (3) Analysis (fikir), namely the ability to find relationships between occurring phenomena. (4) Remembering (zikir), namely the ability to restore forgotten data (Ghazali, 2008).

The heart is a spiritual potential created by Allah to witness the greatness of Allah (mushāhadah) (Ghazali, 1996a). Al-Ghazali explained that besides mushāhadah to Allah, the heart has other abilities. (1) as a means of intuitive knowledge. Al-Ghazali distinguishes intuitive science from rational science. Rational science is knowledge based on empirical data with a ratio as the ingredient, while intuitive science is knowledge based on spiritual experience (kashf) with a heart as the ingredient. (2) As a place to believe in Allah. Faith is in the heart, expressed in words, and proven in deeds. (3) a place of love (mahabbah) (Ghazali, 2008).

Al-Ghazali emphasized that to achieve happiness, one must know one's nature and character (Ghazali, 1996a). The Sufis say that whoever knows himself will know his God. How

can someone achieve happiness if you don't know your nature and character? A description of self-potential is depicted in Figure 2.

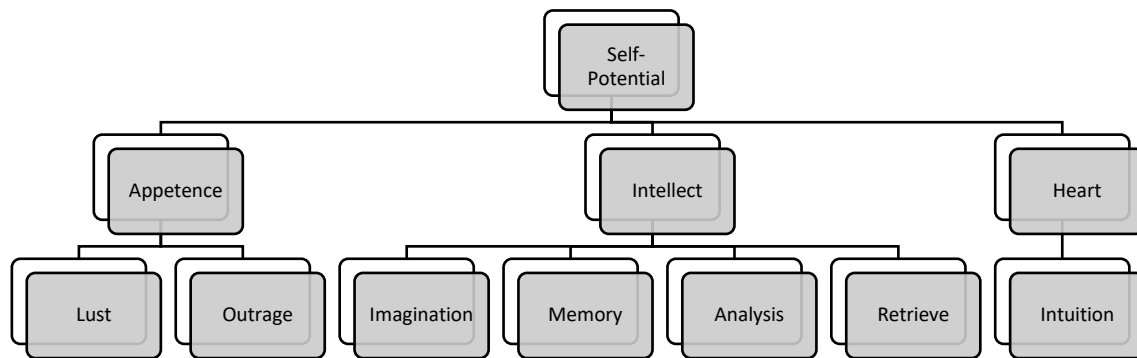


Figure 2 Potential in Self

Put Your Heart as a Leader

Al-Ghazali likens the human self to a system of government. This system has a structure of positions, from the king as head of government, ministers, and police to tax collectors. Al-Ghazali emphasized that the right potential must occupy each position; it cannot be wrong. Misplacement of certain potentials in a position can damage the government system (Ghazali, 1996a).

Potential lust consists of lust (shahwat) and outrage (ghadab). Al-Ghazali likens lust as a tax officer and ugly as a policeman. Both of these potentials are needed for the survival of the country. However, lust tends to corrupt, and anger often behaves harshly. Therefore, lust should not be a ruler because it will destroy the country. Al-Ghazali stated that lust should be placed at the bottom as a servant of reason and heart (Ghazali, 1996a).

The ratio is placed in the second position, above lust. Al-Ghazali describes the ratio as a minister in the government system. The ratio is in charge of supervising the work of the passions under it. His logical reasoning must be able to guide the lust to the right behavior, not even provide a rationalization for the deviation of lust. In addition, the ratio is in charge of giving logical considerations to the heart so that the decisions made by the heart become strong (Ghazali, 1996a).

On another occasion, al-Ghazali described the relation between ratio, lust, and anger, such as jockey, horse, and dog. The ratio is like a jockey, lust is like a horse, and an angry temperament is like a dog. Hunting will be successful if the dog is well trained, the horse is tame, and the jockey is a good horseman. On the other hand, if the jockey is inexperienced, the horse is still wild, and the dog is not trained, the hunt will not be successful. The jockey can be harmed more than that (Ghazali, 2008).

The heart is the supreme leader in the structure of self-government. All limbs, physical and psychological, are subjects and subordinates. Al-Ghazali classified the psychic servant of the heart into three forms. (1) desire (*irādah*), the potential that encourages the soul to achieve everything it likes. Lust falls into this category. (2) ability (*qudrah*), the forces that move the physical limbs so that an activity can produce something desired. (3) knowledge (*ilm*), cognitive understanding that gives reasoning consideration to the heart so that the heart can make the right decisions (Ghazali, 2008).

Al-Ghazali explained that as the supreme ruler, the heart has two tasks. (1) give decisions about all activities that must be carried out by the potentials based on logical considerations of the ratio. (2) directing all self-activity to the Creator to achieve happiness. Al-Ghazali stated that happiness could be achieved when character and potential can be positioned properly and directed to God (Ghazali, 1996a).

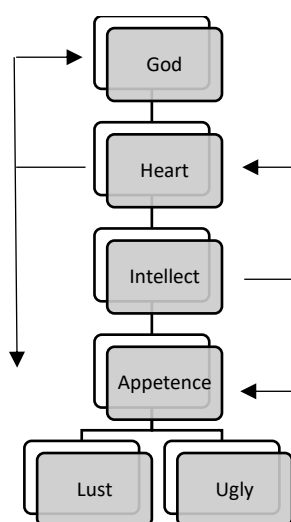


Figure 3 Potential Structure of Self

The heart must self-cleaning (*riyadlah*) to carry out its duties properly. Al-Ghazali stated that the heart must do two forms of *riyadlah*. (1) the heart cleanses itself from the influence of worldly passions and desires. (2) the heart always tries to be close to God. This self-cleaning process in the Sufism tradition is called stations (*maqāmāt*). There are at least seven stations known in Sufi behavior: repentance (*taubat*), devout (*warai*), ascetic (*zuhud*), poverty (*faqr*), patient (*sabar*), depend (*tawakkal*), and satisfy (*ridla*). If the heart does not do *riyadlah*, especially if it is influenced by lust and does not lead to God, the heart will not be able to bring happiness to the soul (Ghazali, 1996a).

In this second stage, a person must place his potential hierarchically and correctly according to religious teachings. The heart must be placed on the highest leadership, as the reigning king. The ratio is placed under the heart. Like the Minister, the ratio gives logical consideration to the heart and ensures that all elements under it carry out its decisions

properly. Lust is placed to serve reason and carry out the heart's decisions, not as a ruler. Al-Ghazali asserted that those who want to be happy must put God as the goal, the hereafter as the homeland, and the world as a shelter. He must also surrender leadership to the heart, control to reason, placing lust as a vehicle and the limbs as a servant. If passion deviates, he must be rebuked and punished but must not be paralyzed because leadership will not be effective without passion (Soleh, 2024). A description of the leadership hierarchy in humans is depicted in Figure 3.

Direct Attention to Allah

Al-Ghazali asserts that enjoyment and happiness are graded. The lowest happiness is pleasure related to lust and materialism. Food, drink, and sex are pleasures related to lust. This pleasure will be lost with death. Therefore, this pleasure is considered the lowest pleasure. *Higher pleasures* are pleasures related to reason or thought processes. Academics find happiness in discovering new theories or producing new work. Therefore, few academics do not marry because they are engrossed in their knowledge. This pleasure is lost with death but still benefits others even after death. The highest happiness is the happiness related to the heart. This happiness does not end with death; and it only gets stronger (Ghazali, 1996a).

Allah is an existence that never perishes; any existence other than Him must be corrupted. God is true beauty. Beauty other than Him is the radiance of the beauty of Allah. All material pleasures related to lust will disappear with death. The pleasure of ma`rifat to Allah related to the heart is not damaged by death. This pleasure continues even though the body has been buried (Ghazali, 1996b).

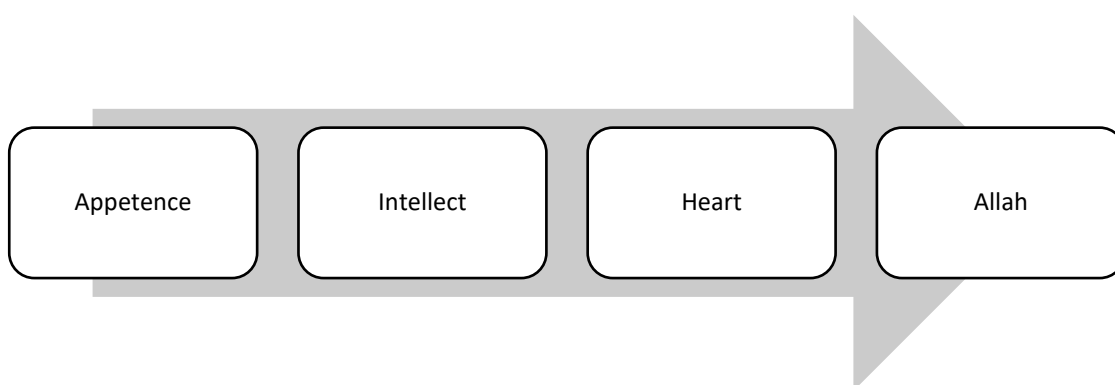


Figure 4 Directing Attention to Allah

Based on this, al-Ghazali stated that there is no way to achieve the highest happiness except to direct oneself to Allah as the Source of Happiness. The individual must cleanse the heart and direct it to Allah. Individuals must place their hearts as leaders to direct their whole body and soul to achieve happiness. The potential for lust that can be destructive must be placed under the control of the mind and heart (Ghazali, 1996a).

Furthermore, to lead to Allah, the individual must understand the attributes of divinity. Al-Ghazali asserted that every individual must understand three attributes of divinity. (1) knowing that the all-perfect God is the creator of all things. One of God's extraordinary creations is a man created from despicable water (Surah Al-Insan, 2). (2) knowing that Allah's knowledge covers everything. Nothing in the universe escapes His knowledge. (3) knowing that Allah's mercy, help, and mercy are limitless, reaching all things, plants, animals, and humans without distinction of race, color, nation, and descent (Ghazali, 1996a). The description of directing attention to Allah is described in Figure 4.

Discussion

Knowing your nature and potential is the first step to achieving happiness. Al-Ghazali based this concept on two reasons: (1) verses of the Koran and the teachings of Sufism. The Qur'an states that within humans, there are signs of God's greatness (QS. Fusilat, 53). The Sufis say that whoever knows himself will know his God. Based on the verses and statements of this Sufi expert, al-Ghazali emphasized that knowing oneself is important and is the first stage in knowing Allah. (2) based on the belief that the person who understands us best is ourselves. A person may not be able to understand others, let alone know God, before recognizing his nature (Ghazali, 1996a).

Al-Ghazali's thinking is similar to the concept of self-evaluation in management. Management teaches us to understand our potential through SWOT analysis before making future programs. That is, an analysis to see the strengths and strengths of oneself so that they can be used effectively (Strengths), to see the weaknesses or weaknesses of oneself so that one knows the areas that need to be improved (Weaknesses), to see opportunities that can be worked on (Opportunities), and possible obstacles or threats faced (Threats) (Benzaghta et al., 2021).

Knowing the nature and potential of the self requires several things. (1) Knowing oneself is meant to be more psychic and spiritual, not just knowing the body's physical anatomy. Al-Ghazali emphasized that knowing oneself relates to spiritual potential, not body anatomy (Ghazali, 1996a). (2) Academically, the discipline of psychology, which is the science of self-potential, becomes important and needed. Islamic Higher Education (PTAI) should have a psychology faculty or study program. Psychology is still considered a Western science and not important in religion. (3) Regarding religious experience, studying Sufism as a science of self-organization becomes important and needs each individual. The study of Sufism is still an exclusive study of certain circles, usually those aged 40 and over.

The second stage in al-Ghazali's achieving happiness is placing the heart as a leader in the self-power structure. Al-Ghazali based this method on two reasons. (1) the heart is the potential created by Allah to witness His greatness (*mushāhadah*). Putting the heart as a leader to achieve happiness means positioning something with its nature and competence. (2) some potentials have destructive properties that need supervision. Lust is in this position. Placing all potentials

in the hierarchical power system makes it possible to supervise the potentials that are not good (Soleh, 2022a).

Al-Ghazali's teachings are in line with the principles of human resource development. Human resource management teaches that placing potential according to competence is important for organizational success. The organization's goals will not be achieved if the potential does not support it under its position (Hirudayaraj & Baker, 2018). Al-Ghazali's concept that the heart of a leader must be able to direct his subordinates to Allah to achieve happiness is also in line with al-Farabi's leadership theory (870-950). Al-Farabi stated that the leader must be able to transform his people to be good and achieve happiness (Soleh, 2021). In the current context, al-Farabi and al-Ghazali's leadership model is known as transformational leadership (Lai et al., 2020).

The third stage is to direct attention to Allah. Al-Ghazali gives two reasons for this stage. (1) that happiness is when something meets its nature. The nature of the eyes is to see beautiful objects, the nature of the ears is to listen to harmonious sounds, the nature of the mind is to think, and the nature of the heart is to witness the greatness of Allah (mushāhadah). (2) that Allah is the essence and source of true happiness. To direct one's attention to Allah means to attain true happiness (Ghazali, 1996a).

Al-Ghazali's third stage requires two things. (1) All activities are not for personal gain, nor for the activity itself, but for a specific purpose. There is one direction that is the goal, namely God. This conclusion shows that nothing is value-free. (2) A person must commit all his activities to Allah to reach Allah. Abd Wahab al-Sha'rani (1492-1565) explained that individuals must direct all intentions to Allah to reach Him (Sya'rani & Soleh, 1997). The Sufism tradition calls for directing the intention to Allah with *ikhlash*. In *al-Qawā'id al-Ashr* al-Ghazali explains that one of the principles to get closer to Allah is directing all activities to Allah (Ghazali, 2009). This consequence ensures that sincerity or directing activities to Allah cannot be neglected to achieve happiness.

Conclusions

Based on the description above, the following conclusions are presented. According to al-Ghazali, the method of achieving happiness consists of three stages. (1) Recognizing the nature and potential of ourselves, that there are various traits and potentials within us. Human nature is angelic, and a human's best potential is his heart. (2) placing the heart as a self-leader who controls all life activities. (3) direct attention to Allah as the source of true happiness. These three stages are a unified method, not different methods.

This method of achieving happiness from al-Ghazali has two advantages. (1) al-Ghazali's concept of happiness is spiritual, so it can be an alternative to the hedonism model. (2) al-Ghazali's method involves the perspectives of psychology, management, and Sufism, so it is more comprehensive than other methods. The psychological perspective appears in the first stage, the management perspective in the second stage, and Sufism in the third stage.

Therefore, achieving al-Ghazali's happiness can make scientific contributions in these three fields.

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