

The Semantics and Ethics of *Sa'ādah* (Happiness) in the Qur'ān

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Abstract

A great deal of Arabic and English literature has been written on the Arabic term sa'ādah (happiness) from a philosophical perspective. However, this paper explores the semantic-statistical role of the term sa'ādah in the Qur'ān as a constituent of the Islamic ethical discourse that shapes the mentalities of Muslims, in order to establish successful communication with other communities through grasping the Muslim worldview. Ethical systems are rooted in particular worldviews. The ethical foundation of Islamic thought is based on the Qur'ānic ethical discourse, which is built upon fundamental concepts such as sa'ādah. The model of semantic analysis developed by Toshihiko Izutsu (d. 1993) has been adopted to analyze the concept sa'ādah in this paper. This model of semantic analysis aims at discovering the worldview conceptualized by the people who use that language through identifying its “basic meaning” (i.e., etymological meaning) and “relational meaning” (i.e., contextual and contextual meanings). The statistical analysis given in this paper is based on Kais Dukes' analysis.

Keywords

semantics, the Qur'ān, worldview, *sa'ādah*, happiness, ethics, discourse, conceptual linguistics.

Introduction

This paper semantically analyzes the Arabic term *sa'ādah* (happiness) in the Qur'ān as a component of the ethical discourse deeply rooted in the Muslim worldview. Thus, it seeks to establish successful communication between Muslims and non-Muslims. The paper explores the role this concept plays in moulding the Muslim worldview and Islamic ethical discourse. It starts from the hypothesis that the Arabic term *sa'ādah* in

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the Qur'ān is the core of the Muslim worldview and the pivot around which the Islamic ethical discourse revolves.

Much has been written in Arabic and English on the Qur'ānic concept of *sa'ādah* as an ethical philosophical concept. The term has also been dealt with lexicographically. However, adopting a semantic-statistical model in analyzing this concept or analyzing its “basic meaning” (i.e., etymological meaning) and “relational meaning” (i.e., contextual and contextual meanings) in order to identify—on concrete linguistic basis—the role it plays in the Islamic ethical discourse has not been the focus of previous literature, hence the need to fill this gap.

Words are communicative tools that form the lexicon of a language by which concepts are communicated. A lexical concept, as George Dunbar points out, is the “part of the information associated with a form that contributes to the interpretation of a text.”¹ In the same vein, Ray Jackendoff (b. 1945) defines a concept as “a mental representation that can serve as the meaning of a linguistic expression.”² The concept of “mental representation,” according to Jackendoff, is basic to “conceptual semantics,” which terms “mental representation” as “conceptual structure” that “is seen as the form in which speakers encode their construal of the world.”³ Concepts are coloured by the topic of the discourse in which they occur and their relation to other neighbouring words. John Lyons (d. 2020)⁴ and Toshihiko Izutsu (d. 1993),⁵ among other linguists, expressed this idea.

Ethical systems are rooted in particular worldviews. The ethical foundation of the Islamic thought is based on the Qur'ān and its ethical discourse is built on certain “key concepts.”⁶ Izutsu points out,

Each linguistic system—Arabic is one, and Qur'anic Arabic is another—represents a group of co-ordinated concepts which, together, reflect a particular *Weltanschauung* [worldview], commonly shared by, and peculiar to, the speakers of the language in question. Thus, Qur'anic Arabic corresponds, in its connotative aspect, to what we may rightly call the Qur'anic world-view, which in itself is simply a segment of that wider world-view mirrored by the classical Arabic language. In exactly the same

¹ George Dunbar, *The Cognitive Lexicon* (Tübingen: G. Narr, 1991), 5.

² Ray Jackendoff, *Semantic Structures* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 11–12.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ John Lyons, *Structural Semantics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963).

⁵ Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts in the Qur'ān* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

⁶ *Ibid.*

way, the ethical language of the Qur'ān represents only a segment of the whole Qur'anic world-view.⁷

Method

This paper explores the term *sa'ādah* (happiness) in the Qur'ān through its semantic analysis to identify its basic and relational meanings. The basic meaning is “the constant semantic element which remains attached to the word wherever it goes and wherever it is used.” The relational meaning of a word is “something connotative that comes to be attached and added to the former [the basic meaning] by the words having taken a particular position in a particular field, standing in diverse relations to all other important words in that system.”⁸ The semantic analysis of Qur'ānic terms must combine these two aspects of meaning, since the words in the Qur'ān do not exist independently of each other; rather, they are interconnected.

In the following sections, the etymological meaning of the term *sa'ādah* will be explored followed by its relational meaning (i.e., the contextual and contextual meanings), so as to reflect how Muslims perceive *sa'ādah* (happiness).

Conceptual Structure of the Word *Sa'ādah*: Basic Meaning

The verbal noun (*maṣḍar*) *sa'ādah* is derived from the verb *sa'ida*. The Qur'ānic lexicographer al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī (d. 502/1108) defines the noun *sa'ādah* as “divine help provided for man's welfare . . . the best of which is dwelling in Paradise.”⁹ For him, *sa'ādah* is of two types: worldly and otherworldly. The former is further divided into three types, psychological, physical, and external.¹⁰ According to Aḥmad b. Fāris (d. 395/1004) and Ismā'īl al-Jawharī (d. 393/1003), the trilateral root (s-'-d) signifies “welfare and happiness.” It also refers to “good fortune.”¹¹

⁷ Ibid., 250.

⁸ Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung* (Tokyo: Keio University, 1964), 19–20.

⁹ Al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Sayyid Kīlānī (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), 232, s.v. “s-'-d.”

¹⁰ Ibid., 264–65, s.v. “sh-q-w.”

¹¹ Aḥmad b. Fāris, *Maqāyīs al-Lughah* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1979), s.v. “s-'-d”; Ismā'īl al-Jawharī, *Tāj al-Lughah wa Siḥāḥ al-'Arabiyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li 'l-Malāyīn, 1990), s.v. “s-'-d.”

The Conceptual Structure of the Word *Sa'ādah*: Relational Meaning

In the Qur'ān, the verbal noun *sa'ādah* is not mentioned, but the passive form of the verb *su'idū* and the adjective *sa'id* are used. The passive verb form *su'idū* occurs in 11:108

وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ سُعِدُوا فَفِي الْجَنَّةِ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا مَا دَامَتِ السَّمَوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ رَبُّكَ عَطَاءٌ غَيْرَ مَجْدُودٍ ﴿١٠٨﴾

“And those who are blessed [with happiness] shall be in the Garden: They will dwell therein for all the time that the heavens and the earth endure, except as thy Lord willeth: a gift without break.”¹² It refers to otherworldly happiness. The adjective *sa'id* occurs in 11:105

يَوْمَ يَأْتِ لَا تَكَلِّمُ نَفْسٌ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ ۖ فَمِنْهُمْ شَقِيٌّ وَسَعِيدٌ ﴿١٠٥﴾

“The day it comes, no soul shall speak save by His leave; some of them shall be wretched and some happy.”¹³

As shown by the verses, the concept of the verbal noun *sa'ādah* and its cognates revolve around otherworldly happiness, welfare, and prosperity that stem from being divinely blessed with everlasting life in Paradise. Likewise, its antonym *shaqā'* (wretchedness and misery) and its cognates refer to the otherworldly misery that is manifested in being divinely sentenced to hellfire forever. According to 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Nāṣir al-Sa'dī (d. 1956), those who are “happy” are the pious believers, whereas those who are wretched are the sinful unbelievers.¹⁴

In the Islamic worldview, life in this world is ephemeral, a mere bridge, whereby man's behaviour ultimately leads him either to happiness or to wretchedness in the everlasting life of the Hereafter. Thus, if one believes in God and follows His code, he shall dwell

¹² A. Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Translation and Commentary* (Jeddah: Dar al-Qiblah, 1982). The italics in the translation of the Qur'ānic verses in this study are mine, unless specified otherwise. Moreover, the translation of the Qur'ānic verses has eclectically been quoted from A. Yusuf Ali (1982), Arthur J. Arberry (1964), Muhsin Khān and Taqī-ud-Dīn Al-Hilālī (1996), and Mohammed M. Pickthall (1930). The four Qur'ānic translations quoted in this research have been compared and the best translation, in my view, for each verse has respectively been selected. It is worthy to note that these four translations have been selected because of their widespread and frequent publication and reprinting. However, they excel each other in the translation of some verses. Therefore, I eclectically quoted translations from them.

¹³ Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).

¹⁴ 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sa'dī, *Taysīr al-Karīm al-Raḥmān fī Tafsīr Kalām al-Mannān* (Beirut: al-Risālah, 2002).

permanently in Paradise, blessed with happiness. If not, he shall dwell in Hell forever. Thereupon, true happiness exists in the Hereafter not in this temporal world, which is a journey either to Heaven or to Hell.

In the Qur'ān, the concepts of *sa'ādah* and *shaqā'* and their conceptual synonymous and antonymous lexical terms are mentioned in a number of contexts, mostly relevant to “the attributes of believers, unbelievers, hypocrites, devils and so forth.”¹⁵ In the following section, the lexical items that are co-textually and contextually synonymous or antonymous with *sa'ādah* and *shaqā'* will be discussed, so as to reveal the semantic structure of the term *sa'ādah*.

The concepts of the terms *sa'ādah* and its antonym *shaqā'* are expressed by a number of synonyms throughout the Qur'ān in different contexts. The words *fawz*, *falāḥ*, *farah*, *surūr*, *ḥubūr*, and *na'im* are all used in the Qur'ān associated with *Jannah* (Paradise) and are associated with *sa'ādah* in the sense of everlasting dwelling in Paradise. Likewise, the terms *khusrān*, *ḥuzn* or *ḥazan*, *thubūr*, *halāk*, and *Jaḥīm* are used in different Qur'ānic verses synonymously with *shaqā'* to mean dwelling in *Jahannam* (Hell). This dichotomy is based on man's preparation for the Hereafter by either obedience or disobedience to God in this life. The following is a discussion of each of these terms.

The Term *Fawz*

The trilateral root *f-w-z* is an auto-antonym. It refers either to obtaining good, fulfilling wishes, and avoiding evil or to death and doom.¹⁶

In the Qur'ān, the verbal noun *fawz* and its cognates such as *fā'izūn*, *mafāzah*, *mafāz*, and *fāza*, occur twenty-nine times. The noun, *fawz*, or *al-fawz*, occurs nineteen times modified by 'azīm (grand), kabīr (great), and *mubīn* (manifest) as follows: 4:13; 4:73; 5:119; 6:16; 9:72; 9:89; 9:100; 9:111; 10:64; 33:71; 37:60; 40:9; 44:57; 45:30; 48:5; 57:12; 61:12; 64:9; and 85:11).¹⁷

In most of these occurrences, the core concept of the cognates refers either to the triumph represented in a Muslim's being allowed to dwell in Paradise or in the safety and security represented by being rescued from torture in Hell, thereby being rewarded by God's mercy for their

¹⁵ Muhammad Abul Quasem, “al-Ġazālī's Conception of Happiness,” *Arabica* 22, no. 2 (1975): 153.

¹⁶ Muḥammad al-Zubaydī, *Tāj al-'Arūs min Jawāhir al-Qāmūs* (Kuwait: Wazārat al-Irshād wa 'l-Anbā', 2001), s.v. “*f-w-z*”; al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, *Kitāb al-'Ayn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2003), s.v. “*f-w-z*”; Ibn Fāris, *Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, s.v. “*f-w-z*”; Muḥammad b. Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), s.v. “*f-w-z*”; al-Aṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt*, s.v. “*f-w-z*.”

¹⁷ Kais Dukes, *corpus.Quran.com*, accessed June 17, 2014.

obedience to Him. The above-modifiers of the term *fawz* emphasize the fact that perfect triumph is related to the Hereafter not to this world. The contextual and co-textual meaning of the term is evident in the following verse 57:12

يَوْمَ تَرَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَسْعَى نُورُهُمْ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَبِأَيْمَانِهِمْ بُشْرَانُكُمْ الْيَوْمَ
جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرَى مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ ﴿١٢﴾

“On the day when thou (Muhammad) wilt see the believers, men and women, their light shining forth before them and on their right hands, (and wilt hear it said unto them): Glad news for you this day: Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein ye are immortal. That is the *supreme triumph*.”¹⁸

The Term *Surūr*

Another synonym to *sa'ādah* is *surūr* (happiness/joy). It is derived from the trilateral root *s-r-r*. Al-Aṣḥānī explains that this term in its true sense refers to otherworldly joy because it is endless in contrast to worldly joy.¹⁹ This etymon and its cognate adjective *masrūr* occur in the Qur'ān thrice in 76:11, 84:9, and 84:13.²⁰ In 76:11 and 84:9, the terms *surūr* and *masrūr* refer to the pious perpetual feeling of joy in the Hereafter because of their perseverant obedience to God in contrast to the sinful unbelievers' feeling of unhappiness.²¹

In 76:11, the term *surūr* is coordinated with another term showing physical joy: *naḍrah* (light of beauty). Al-Sa'dī notes that obtaining these two things *naḍrah* and *surūr* indicates that Allah has given them optimum happiness—both physical and spiritual.²² The meaning of the term *surūr* is co-textually explained by the previous and following verses as safety from the evil of the Last Day (dwelling in Hell) of which the believers were afraid in this life, rewarding them by letting them dwell in Paradise and shedding a light of beauty over them

¹⁸ Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation* (New York: American Library, 1930).

¹⁹ Al-Aṣḥānī, *al-Mufradāt*, s.v. “*s-r-r*.”

²⁰ Dukes, corpus.Quran.com, accessed June 17, 2014.

²¹ Abū 'l-Faḍl al-Ālūsī, *Tafsīr al-Ālūsī* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'ah al-Muniriyyah, 1985); al-Sa'dī, *Taysīr al-Karīm*.

²² Al-Sa'dī, *Taysīr al-Karīm*.

إِنَّا نَخَافُ مِنْ رَبِّنَا يَوْمًا عَبُوسًا قَمْطَرِيرًا ﴿١٠٥﴾ فَوَقَّعْنَاهُمُ اللَّهُ شَرَّ ذَٰلِكَ الْيَوْمِ وَلَقَّعْنَاهُمْ نَضْرَةً
 وَسُرُورًا ﴿١٠٦﴾ وَجَزَّئْنَاهُمْ بِمَا صَبَرُوا جَنَّةً وَحَرِيرًا ﴿١٠٧﴾

“Lo! we fear from our Lord a day of frowning and of fate. Therefore, Allah hath warded off from them the evil of that day, and hath made them find brightness and joy; and hath awarded them for all that they endured, a Garden and silk [attire].²³

The Term *Farah*

The term *farah*, which signifies happiness and rejoicing is another synonym for the term *sa'adah*. Derivatives of the trilateral root *f-r-h* occur, in two forms, twenty-two times in the Qur'ān; sixteen times as the form I verb *fariha*, and six times as the noun (quasi-active participle)²⁴ *fariḥ*.²⁵ According to al-Aṣḫānī, this term mostly refers to physical happiness.²⁶ The Qur'ān mentions that this is the feeling man should have in this life with respect to blessings, as in 10:58

قُلْ بِفَضْلِ اللَّهِ وَبِرَحْمَتِهِ فَبِذَٰلِكَ فَلْيَفْرَحُوا هُوَ خَيْرٌ مِّمَّا تَجْمَعُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

“Say: ‘In the bounty of God, and His mercy—in that let them *rejoice*’; it is better than that they amass.”²⁷

In 10:58, the third person masculine plural imperfect verb (*fa*)*yafrāḥū* is used to mean “let them rejoice.” The term is co-textually associated with “rejoicing in otherworldly favours, namely, the religion of Islam, the Qur'ān and guidance.”²⁸ As the verse declares, rejoicing in such otherworldly favours is better than any worldly riches people amass.

The Term *Ḥubūr*

The term *ḥubūr* is synonymous with the term *sa'adah*. Derivatives of the trilateral root *h-b-r* occur six times in the Qur'ān, in two forms: twice as the form I verb *yuhbarūn/tuḥbarūn* in (30:15) and (43:70) respectively,

²³ Pickthall, *Meaning of the Glorious Koran*.

²⁴ My explanation.

²⁵ Kais Dukes, corpus.Quran.com, accessed June 17, 2014.

²⁶ Al-Aṣḫānī, *al-Mufradāt*, s.v. “*f-r-h*.”

²⁷ Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*.

²⁸ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'ah al-Azhariyyah, 1926); Abū 'l-Fidā' Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth al-Islāmī, 2004); al-Sa'dī, *Taysīr al-Karīm*.

and four times as the noun *aḥbār*.²⁹ As a verb, *ḥabara* signifies “to make happy or delighted.”³⁰ In the two Qur’ānic verses, the verb is used in the masculine plural present passive form modifying the state of the believers in the Hereafter, “when Allah shall make them blissfully happy and delighted by letting them enter the Garden”³¹ as a reward for their belief and righteous deeds. The verse 30:15 is cited for illustration. It reads as follows:

فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَهُمْ فِي رَوْضَةٍ يُحْبَرُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

“As for those who believed and did good works, *they will be made happy* in a Garden.”³²

The Term *Falāḥ*

The term *falāḥ* is another synonym of the term *sa’ādah*. The trilateral root *f-l-ḥ* may refer to “prosperity, success, or attainment of what one desires or seeks to be permanently happy and/or in a good state, or to achieving everlasting enjoyment of the blessing of life either in this life or in the hereafter.”³³ It has another signification that is commonly used in the field of agriculture, namely, “ploughing.”³⁴ The former denotation occurs forty times in the Qur’ān, in two derived forms: twenty-seven times as the form IV verb *aflaḥa* in (2:189; 3:130; 3:200; 5:35; 5:90; 5:100; 6:21; 6:135; 7:69; 8:45; 10:17; 10:69; 10:77; 12:23; 16:116; 18:20; 20:64; 20:69; 22:77; 23:1:2; 23:117; 24:31; 28:37; 28:82; 62:10; 87:14; and 91:9) and thirteen times as the form IV active participle *mufliḥūn* in (2:5; 3:104; 7:8; 7:157; 9:88; 23:102; 24:51; 28:67; 30:38; 31:5; 58:22; 59:9; and 64:16).³⁵

In the above verses, the verb *aflaḥa* and its cognates are used either in the affirmative form after giving divine commandments to the believers, whereby it is preceded by the defective verb *la’alla*, or in the negative form preceded by *lā*. In the affirmative form, *aflaḥa* and its cognates are mostly used to inform the believers that if they observe Allah’s commandments they may succeed in this life and in the Hereafter by attaining the divine reward of entering Paradise. When used in the negative form it states that sinners or the unbelievers will succeed

²⁹ Dukes, corpus.Quran.com, accessed June 17, 2014.

³⁰ Al-Zubaydī, *Tāj al-‘Arūs*, s.v. “ḥ-b-r.”

³¹ Al-Sa’dī, *Taysīr al-Karīm*.

³² Pickthall, *Meaning of the Glorious Koran*.

³³ Edward Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1863), “f-l-ḥ”; al-Aṣḥānī, *al-Mufradāt*, s.v. “f-l-ḥ.”

³⁴ Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v. “f-l-ḥ.”

³⁵ Dukes, corpus.Quran.com, accessed June 17, 2014.

neither in this life nor in the Hereafter. Typical examples to illustrate these meanings are 22:77 and 10:17 respectively

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَرْكَعُوا وَاسْجُدُوا وَعَبُدُوا رَبَّكُمْ وَأَفْعَلُوا الْخَيْرَ لَعَلَّكُمْ
تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٧٧﴾

“O you who have believed! Bow down, and prostrate yourselves, and worship your Lord and do good that you *may be successful*.”³⁶

فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ افْتَرَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ كَذَّبَ بِآيَاتِهِ ۗ إِنَّهُ لَا يُفْلِحُ
الْمُجْرِمُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

“And who does greater evil than he who forges against God a lie, or cries lies to His signs? Surely the sinners *do not prosper*.”³⁷

Likewise, the form IV active participle *muflihūn* is used in the Qur'ānic verses to describe the state of those who believe in God and obey His commandments in this worldly life as being successful and prosperous, in the Hereafter by being allowed to enter Paradise and being saved from Hell.³⁸ A representative example is 28:67

فَأَمَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَعَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُفْلِحِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾

“But as for him who shall repent and believe and do right, he haply may be one of *the successful*.”³⁹

The Arabic defective verb ‘asā, which literally signifies “may,” means “shall” in the context of the verse, because it is pronounced by God.⁴⁰

The Term *Najāh*

The term *najāh* is another contextual synonym of *sa'ādah* in the Qur'ān. The denotation of the trilateral root *n-j-w* is “to be saved/escape from evil, harm, punishment or doom”; it may also signify “to cut, to remove or peel away, to hurry, to whisper, or to affect with an evil eye.”⁴¹

³⁶ Muhammad Muhsin Khān and Muhammad Taqī-ud-Dīn Al-Hilālī, *Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'ān*, 15th rev. ed. (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1996).

³⁷ Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*.

³⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*; Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī* (Cairo: Dār al-Sha‘b, n.d.).

³⁹ Pickthall, *Meaning of the Glorious Koran*.

⁴⁰ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*; Al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*.

⁴¹ Al-Aṣḥānī, *al-Mufradāt*, s.v. “*n-j-w*”; al-Zubaydī, *Tāj al-‘Arūs*, s.v. “*n-j-w*.”

Derivatives of the trilateral root occur eighty-four times in the Qur’ān, in ten forms⁴²

- twice as the form I verb *najā*
- thirty-seven times as the form II verb *najjā*
- once as the form III verb *nājā*
- twenty-three times as the form IV verb *anjā*
- four times as the form VI verb *tanājā*
- once as the noun *najāh*
- eleven times as the noun *najwā*
- twice as the noun *najīyy*
- once as the active participle *nājīn*
- twice as the form II active participle *munajjū*

Except for the verbal noun *najwā* and the form VI verb *tanājā*, which refer to “whispering” and “to whisper” respectively, the other cognates mostly refer to safety from Allah’s punishment or afflictions.⁴³ This latter meaning is synonymous with *sa’ādah* and its synonyms discussed above. A typical example is 39:61, in which the form II verb is used to refer to salvation in the Hereafter.⁴⁴

وَيُنَجِّي اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا بِمَفَازَتِهِمْ لَا يَمَسُّهُمُ السُّوءُ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

“But Allah will deliver the righteous to their place of salvation: no evil shall touch them, *nor shall they grieve*”⁴⁵

Another illustrative example is 40:41, in which the noun *najāh* is used to refer to salvation and safety from Hell as opposed to torture in Hell⁴⁶

وَيَقُولُ مَا لِيَ أُدْعُوكُمْ إِلَى النَّجْوَةِ وَتَدْعُونَنِي إِلَى النَّارِ ﴿٤١﴾

“And O my people! How is it that I call you to *salvation* while you call me to the Fire!”⁴⁷

⁴² Dukes, corpus.Quran.com, accessed June 17, 2014.

⁴³ Al-Aṣḥāhānī, *al-Mufradāt*, s.v. “n-j-w.”

⁴⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*; Abū Yaḥyā al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* (Cairo: al-Maṭba‘ah al-Yamaniyyah, 1321 AH).

⁴⁵ Ali, *The Holy Qur’an*.

⁴⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*.

⁴⁷ Khān and Al-Hilālī, *Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur’an*.

The Term *Na'im*

The term *na'im* is derived from the trilateral root *n-'-m*. It signifies welfare, bliss, and pleasure.⁴⁸ Derivatives of the trilateral root occur 140 times in the Qur'ān, in nine forms⁴⁹

- eighteen times as the form I verb *ni'ma*
- once as the form II verb *na'ama*
- seventeen times as the form IV verb *an'ama*
- thirty-three times as the noun *na'am* and its plural *an'am*
- once as the noun *na'mā'*
- twice as the noun *na'mah*
- fifty times as the noun *ni'mah*
- seventeen times as the noun *na'im*
- once as the active participle *nā'imah*

The term *na'im*, which signifies great bliss, occurs in seventeen verses. In most of these occurrences, it is either coordinated with or suffixed to the term *jannah* or *jannāt* (pl. of *jannah*) signifying pleasure, bliss, or delight foretelling the believers that they shall dwell in the gardens of pleasure or they shall dwell in the gardens and have pleasure. However, when not coordinated with the term *jannah* or *jannāt*, it can also refer to otherworldly bliss, delight, and pleasure. An illustrative example is 82:13, in which the term *na'im* refers to dwelling in Paradise.⁵⁰

إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ ﴿١٣﴾

“Surely the pious shall be in *bliss*.”⁵¹

Following are the antonyms of *sa'adah*, synonymous with its antithesis *shaqā'*:

The Term *Khusrān*

The term *khusrān* is antithetical to *sa'adah* and synonymous with *shaqā'*. The trilateral root *kh-s-r* signifies “to err, to lose, to go astray, to die, or to

⁴⁸ Ibn Fāris, *Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, s.v. “n-'-m.”

⁴⁹ Dukes, corpus.Quran.com, accessed June 17, 2014.

⁵⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*.

⁵¹ Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*.

be lost.”⁵² Derivatives of the trilateral root occur sixty-five times in the Qur’ān, in ten forms⁵³

- sixteen times as the form I verb *khasira*
- twice as the form IV verb *yukhsir*
- four times as the noun *akhsarīn*
- three times as the noun *khasār*
- twice as the noun *khusr*
- three times as the noun *khusrān*
- thirty-two times as the active participle *khāsirīn*
- once as the active participle *khāsirah*
- once as the form II verbal noun *takhsīr*
- once as the form IV active participle *mukhsirīn*

In most of these verses, the etymon *khāsir* and its cognates are contextually and contextually associated with loss on the Day of Judgement, as manifested in dwelling in Hell as a result of going astray in the worldly life, owing to disbelief in Allah or disobedience to Him. The following verses 23:103 and 39:15 are typical examples:

وَمَنْ حَفَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ خَسِرُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ فِي جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدُونَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

“And those whose scales (of good deeds) are light, they are those who lose their ownselves, in Hell will they abide.”⁵⁴

فَاعْبُدُوا مَا شِئْتُمْ مِّنْ دُونِهِ ۗ قُلْ إِنَّ الْخَاسِرِينَ الَّذِينَ خَسِرُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ وَأَهْلِيَهُمْ يَوْمَ
الْقِيَامَةِ ۗ أَلَا ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ الْخُسْرَانُ الْمُبِينُ ﴿١٥﴾

“So worship what you like besides Him. Say (O Muhammad ﷺ): “The losers are those who will lose themselves and their families on the Day of Resurrection. Verily, that will be a manifest loss!”⁵⁵

In 39:15, the trilateral verb *khasira* and its cognate *khusrān* in 39:15, respectively, foretell that the sinners, the disbelievers and/or the polytheists will lose themselves and their families on the Day of

⁵² Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v. “kh-s-r”; al-Aṣḥāhānī, *al-Mufradāt*, s.v. “kh-s-r”; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, s.v. “kh-s-r.”

⁵³ Dukes, corpus.Quran.com, accessed June 17, 2014.

⁵⁴ Khân and Al-Hilālī, *Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur’ān*.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Resurrection, being dwellers of Hell.⁵⁶

The Term *Ḥuzn* or *Ḥazan*

The term *ḥuzn* or *ḥazan* is also antonymous with *sa'ādah*. The trilateral root *ḥ-z-n* signifies harshness, grief, and sadness.⁵⁷ Derivatives of the trilateral root *ḥ-z-n* occur forty-two times in the Qur'ān, in three forms:⁵⁸

- thirty-seven times as the form I verb *yaḥzun/(lā) taḥzan*
- twice as the noun *ḥuzn*
- three times as the noun *ḥazan*

According to al-Aṣḥfahānī⁵⁹ and Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311),⁶⁰ it is antithetical to *farah*. In the Qur'ān, it is used in different contexts. In the context of belief and piety, the verb (*lā*) *taḥzanū* and its cognates are negated, signifying that the believers or the pious shall never grieve in the Hereafter having been allowed to enter Paradise. Excellent examples are 41:30 and 46:13

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَمُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا
وَأَبَشِرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

“Lo! Those who say: Our Lord is Allah, and afterward are upright, the angels descend upon them, saying: Fear not nor *grieve*, but hear good tidings of the paradise which ye are promised.”⁶¹

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَمُوا فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

“Verily those who say, ‘Our Lord is Allah,’ and remain firm (on that Path), on them shall be no fear, nor shall they *grieve*.⁶²”

The Term *Halāk*

The trilateral root *h-l-k* literally signifies breakage and collapse.⁶³ The term *halāk* signifies missing something, spoilage, and destruction or

⁵⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*; al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*.

⁵⁷ Al-Aṣḥfahānī, *al-Mufradāt*, s.v. “ḥ-z-n.”

⁵⁸ Dukes, corpus.Quran.com, accessed June 17, 2014.

⁵⁹ Al-Aṣḥfahānī, *al-Mufradāt*, s.v. “ḥ-z-n.”

⁶⁰ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, s.v. “ḥ-z-n.”

⁶¹ Pickthall, *Meaning of the Glorious Koran*.

⁶² Ali, *The Holy Qur’an*.

⁶³ Ibn Fāris, *Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, s.v. “h-l-k.”

doom and death. It is also used in the Qur'ān to refer to fear, poverty, divine punishment and torture, or committing a sin leading to divine punishment.⁶⁴ These latter meanings are antonymous with the term *najāh*, which is co-textually and contextually synonymous with *sa'ādah* in the Qur'ān. Derivatives of the trilateral root *h-l-k* occurs sixty-eight times in the Qur'ān, in eight forms⁶⁵

- five times as the form I verb *halaka*
- fifty-one times as the form IV verb *ahlaka*
- once as the noun *tahlukah*
- twice as the noun *mahlīk*
- once as the noun *muhlikī*
- twice as the active participle *hālik*
- five times as the form IV active participle *muhlik*
- once as the form IV passive participle *muhlakīn*

An example which illustrates the meaning of divine punishment, as opposed to safety from it, which is synonymous with *sa'ādah* is 21:9.

ثُمَّ صَدَقْنَاهُمُ الْوَعْدَ فَأَنْجَيْنَاهُمْ وَمَنْ نَشَاءُ وَأَهْلَكْنَا الْمُسْرِفِينَ ﴿٩﴾

“Then We fulfilled to them the promise, and We saved them and those whom We willed, but We *destroyed Al-Musrifun* (i.e., disbelievers in Allah, in His Messengers, extravagants, transgressors of Allah's limits by committing crimes, oppressions, polytheism and sins).”⁶⁶

The verse states that all the Prophets and those who believed in them received Allah's succor as promised by Him, while the transgressors who disbelieved in them were completely destroyed.⁶⁷

The Term *Jaḥīm*

The term *jaḥīm* occurs 26 times in the Quran. The trilateral root *j-ḥ-m* signifies “blazing heat” and/or “burning fire.” The noun *jaḥīm* signifies “a fire burning, or blazing or flaming vehemently.”⁶⁸ Out of the twenty-six occurrences in the Qur'ān, twenty-five occurrences refer to Hell. A prime example is 5:10

⁶⁴ Al-Aṣḥāhānī, *al-Mufradāt*, s.v. “*h-l-k*.”

⁶⁵ Dukes, *corpus.Quran.com*, accessed June 17, 2014.

⁶⁶ Khān and Al-Hilālī, *Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'ān*.

⁶⁷ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*; al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*.

⁶⁸ Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v. “*j-ḥ-m*.”

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَحِيمِ ﴿٦٩﴾

“They who disbelieve and deny our Ayat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) are those who will be the dwellers of the Hellfire.”⁶⁹

Ethical Discourse in the Qur'ān and the Concept of Happiness

From the above-discussion it becomes evident that the concept of *sa'ādah* in the Qur'ān is centred on otherworldly happiness, which is considered the true happiness. Thus, the worldly life is merely a means to achieve otherworldly happiness. From an Islamic perspective, otherworldly happiness is considered the true happiness, because it is endless and perfect. It is manifested in perpetual dwelling in Paradise and escaping Hell. As Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) explains, “The greatest achievement in God’s sight lies in achieving otherworldly happiness. . . . Man’s conduct will be considered good if it leads him to otherworldly happiness.”⁷⁰

Thus, the ethical discourse of the Qur'ān revolves around the pivot of prescribed upright worldly ethics conducive to otherworldly happiness, represented in dwelling in Heaven and salvation from Hell. This moral code, which embodies the Islamic worldview, shapes the mentalities of Muslims and should be translated into social action. As Izutsu puts it, “A moral code is part of an ideology” where “each vocabulary, or connotative system, represents and embodies a particular world-view (Weltanschauung) which transforms the raw material of experience into a meaningful, ‘interpreted’ world.”⁷¹

In addition to dwelling in Paradise in the Hereafter, Allah has promised the righteous a happy worldly life. This Islamic moral code is a motive force that encourages Muslims to do the good and refrain from the evil. Allah says in the Qur'ān 16:97

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيٰوةً طَيِّبَةً ۖ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٧﴾

“Whosoever doeth right, whether male or female, and is a believer, him verily we shall quicken with good life, and We shall pay them a

⁶⁹ Khān and Al-Hilālī, *Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'ān*.

⁷⁰ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1982), 1:12.

⁷¹ Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts in the Qur'ān*, 12.

recompense in proportion to the best of what they used to do.”⁷²

Therefore, the conduct of man in Islam is to be based on the ethical code elucidated by the Qur’ān, namely, to do the good and avoid the evil in order to be rewarded by God in this life as well as in the Hereafter. As Shukri Ahmad and Yusuf Owoyemi put it, “In Islam, the source of ethics is its religious institution, transmitting a divine revelation to mankind.”⁷³ The criterion to judge actions as good or evil is not relative but clearly defined by the Qur’ān; whatever leads to otherworldly happiness is good. In other words, whatever leads man to dwell in Paradise is good but whatever leads man to dwell in Hell is evil. This is, as Izutsu terms it, the “moral conscience” of man in this world.⁷⁴

This ethical code forms the personality of the believer and should be evident in his behaviour. It is noteworthy that Islam does not only ask the individual to be virtuous, but also asks the Muslim community as a whole to be virtuous, as verse 3:110 declares

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ
بِاللَّهِ وَلَوْ ءَامَنَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ مِّنْهُمْ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ
الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿١١٠﴾

“Ye are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah. If only the People of the Book had faith, it were best for them: among them are some who have faith, but most of them are perverted transgressors.”⁷⁵

Therefore, as John Kelsay (b. 1953) declares, “Islamic ethics, as a mode of discourse, finds its motive force in the notion that each human being, and all of humanity, are called to ‘command the good and forbid the evil,’ in every aspect of the created order.”⁷⁶

As the following section illustrates, prominent Muslim philosophers such as al-Ghazālī, Abū Nasr al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), and al-Aṣḫānī expressed this concept of ultimate otherworldly happiness in their

⁷² Pickthall, *Meaning of the Glorious Koran*.

⁷³ Shukri Ahmad and Yusuf Owoyemi, “The Concept of Islamic Work Ethic: An Analysis of Some Salient Points in the Prophetic Tradition,” *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 3, no. 20 (2012): 116–23.

⁷⁴ Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts in the Qur’ān*, 90.

⁷⁵ Ali, *The Holy Qur’an*.

⁷⁶ John Kelsay, “Islamic Ethics,” in *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed. Lawrence C. Becker and Charlotte B. Becker (London: Routledge, 1995), 889.

masterpieces *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, *Tahṣīl-al-Sa'ādah*, and *al-Dharī'ah ilā Makārim al-Sharī'ah* respectively.⁷⁷

The Concept of Sa'ādah in Islamic Philosophy

The concept of happiness is central to the Islamic ethics preached by Prophet Muḥammad, and revealed in the Qur'ān. Hence, Muslim philosophers believe that happiness is the ultimate goal of man and that true happiness is otherworldly. The abode of this happiness, as the above verses quoted from the Qur'ān reveal, is Heaven. If man fails to obtain it, he will be destined to misery and his abode will be Hell. Muslim philosophers such as al-Aṣfahānī, al-Ghazālī, and al-Fārābī express this concept of happiness.

Al-Aṣfahānī categorically declares that ultimate happiness is to have the best life in the Hereafter namely, “a life that has continuity without end, knowledge that is not followed by ignorance, ability that is not followed by disability, and richness that is not followed by poverty.”⁷⁸

Inspired by the Qur'ān and influenced by al-Aṣfahānī, al-Ghazālī views that true happiness is otherworldly, and is mainly derived from knowledge and doing virtuous deeds in this life. He believes that the utmost pleasure in this world lies in the knowledge of God and intimacy with Him that is gained by His remembrance (reflecting upon Him). According to him, other forms of physical and intellectual worldly pleasures do exist but should not be considered by man to be his ultimate aim because they are ephemeral and imperfect.⁷⁹

In the same vein, al-Fārābī believes that there are two types of happiness: worldly and otherworldly. Worldly happiness is the prerequisite for obtaining otherworldly happiness, which is the utmost happiness. Worldly happiness is contingent upon four types of virtues, namely, theoretical virtues, intellectual virtues, moral virtues, and applied sciences.⁸⁰ Man can achieve happiness, which should be the aim of his life, through self-struggle in this earthly life to practice these virtues.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*; Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* (Beirut: Dār wa Maktabat al-Hilāl, 1995); al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī, *al-Dharī'ah ilā Makārim al-Sharī'ah* (Cairo: Dār al-Ṣaḥwah, 2008).

⁷⁸ Al-Aṣfahānī, *al-Dharī'ah ilā Makārim al-Sharī'ah*, 109.

⁷⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, 4:99.

⁸⁰ Al-Fārābī, *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, 25.

⁸¹ Al-Fārābī, *Ārā' Ahl al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1968), 106–07.

A Comparison between al-Ghazālī and al-Fārābī's Views of Happiness

To al-Ghazālī⁸² and al-Fārābī⁸³, worldly and otherworldly happiness are gained through theoretical knowledge as well as practice. Being virtuous is indispensable for obtaining happiness. Al-Fārābī⁸⁴—as Elhajibrahim correctly states—believes that “virtues are sought only for the sake of happiness.”⁸⁵ Al-Ghazālī also has the same view regarding virtue and happiness.⁸⁶

Though al-Ghazālī agrees with al-Fārābī on the correlation between knowledge and happiness and holds that otherworldly happiness should be the aim of life, he believes that there are materialistic and spiritual worldly pleasures secondary to the ultimate otherworldly happiness.⁸⁷

In sum, according to Islam, happiness is represented in leading a virtuous life (wherein knowledge of God is the supreme virtue), observing worship acts, and being good to oneself and to other beings in the universe. Fulfilling one's goals and satisfying one's needs should be in accordance with the prescriptions of God, with a view to the ultimate otherworldly happiness that is manifested in dwelling in Heaven and being saved from Hell.

Hence, in Islam, the individual's worldly and otherworldly happiness are contingent upon observing the Islamic rules. These rules—as Izutsu rightly observes—include three relationships: namely, man to God, man to man, and man to nature.⁸⁸ According to this worldview, Muslims should seek to bring about happiness to all beings in this universe and be ethical in their social behaviour.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to semantically and statistically analyze the term *sa'ādah* (happiness) in the Qur'ān. The focus has been on the mental concept of *sa'ādah* (happiness) as a basic constituent of the Qur'ānic ethical discourse. The semantic analysis adopted in this paper is based on Izutsu's model of “basic meaning” and “relational meaning,” as

⁸² Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, 1:12.

⁸³ Al-Fārābī, *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, 25.

⁸⁴ Al-Fārābī, *Ārā' Ahl al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, 106.

⁸⁵ Samah Elhajibrahim, *Alfarabi's Concept of Happiness Sa'ada: Eudaimonia, the good and Jihad-un-nafs* (Philadelphia, PA: Texas Woman's University, 2006), 12.

⁸⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, 4:160.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 3:234–35.

⁸⁸ Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts in the Qur'ān*.

explained above. The statistical analysis is based on Dukes' analysis. The semantic-statistical analysis has proved that the term *sa'ādah* (happiness) is a key concept in the ethical Islamic discourse. It is communicated through the *sa'ādah*'s lexical derivatives, synonyms, and antonyms. The great number of *sa'ādah* synonyms and antonyms in addition to their frequent occurrences in many Qur'ānic verses manifest how crucial this concept is in the ethical Islamic discourse that shapes the mentality, behaviour and worldview of Muslims. The analysis shows that happiness includes all aspects of human life be it spiritual, physical, worldly, or otherworldly. Moreover, it is measured against strict divine universal objective standards.

The study has highlighted the importance of understanding the semantic and ethical structure of the term *sa'ādah* in establishing effective communication with practicing Muslims, as individuals and nations, through grasping their worldview.

It is hoped that this study will inspire researchers to investigate other major Qur'ānic concepts that constitute the Islamic ethical discourse and shape the mentalities of Muslims, thus leading Muslims and non-Muslims to enhance intercultural communication.

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