



The Conceptual Metaphors and Frames of Happiness in *Kimiya al-Sa'adah*: A Cognitive-Linguistic Study

Nur Khofifah Saadiyah¹, Sailal Arimi²

^{1,2,3}Magister Linguistik, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta

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Corresponding Author:

Nur Khofifah Saadiyah

nurkhofihasaadiyah23@gmail.com

Magister Linguistik, Universitas
Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta

Abstract

The study examines the conceptual metaphors and frames found in a work by Imam al-Ghazali, Kimiya al-Sa'adah. The analysis employs Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and frame analysis, using a qualitative descriptive method. The purpose of this study is to identify the conceptualization of "happiness" in the Islamic classical text and to contribute to cognitive linguistics. Based on the findings, the study identifies at least eight conceptual metaphors: HAPPINESS IS PURIFICATION, HAPPINESS IS CLOSENESS TO GOD, HAPPINESS IS SPIRITUAL GROWTH, HAPPINESS IS DEVOTIONAL INTIMACY, HAPPINESS IS DIVINE LOVE THAT GROWS, HAPPINESS IS REUNITING WITH GOD, HAPPINESS IS SELF-DISCIPLINE, and HAPPINESS IS AN ETERNAL SPIRITUAL JOURNEY. These conceptual metaphors form four frames through their underlying cognitive structures: self-purification, divine proximity, spiritual ascent, and eschatological reunion. From these findings, the researchers conclude that Imam al-Ghazali does not define happiness as worldly pleasure alone, but as the culmination of spiritual purification that leads a person back to God.

1. Introduction

Life is usually related to happiness. Happiness is a condition that humans strive to achieve. Until now, people have continued to seek happiness in order to achieve this state. However, as early as the 12th century, Imam Al-Ghazali had already authored a significant work entitled *Kimiya al-Sa'adah* (*The Alchemy of Happiness*). His book *Kimiya al-Sa'adah* discusses the concept of happiness through various discourses, such as Sufism, ethics, and the education of the soul (Auda, 2017; Nasr, 2006).

Other Muslim philosophers, al-Farabi, defined happiness as the ability of the human rational soul to recognize God. Meanwhile, Ibn Miskawayh added that the path to happiness can be achieved through the purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) (Nasr, 2006; Izutsu, 2002). Happiness in *Kimiya al-Sa'adah* is also depicted through symbolic language and various metaphors (Auda, 2017; Muliadi, 2022). Therefore, happiness in Islam is a composite concept that integrates ethical, spiritual, and epistemological elements, as well as an orientation toward both worldly life and the hereafter.

The Islamic notion of happiness (*sa'adah*) is intrinsically linked to the ultimate purpose of human life: attaining the pleasure of God and salvation in the hereafter. Moreover, humans are endowed by God with reason and desire, making them dynamic and complex beings (Kholik et al, 2025). Classical Islamic literature generally views happiness not in materialistic terms, but as a form of spiritual perfection achieved through closeness to God, purification of the soul, and the attainment of divine knowledge or *ma'rifah* (Faruqi, 1982).

Imam al-Ghazali defines happiness differently from other approaches, such as those found in modern psychology (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Muliadi (2022) adds that in this work, Imam al-Ghazali describes happiness as a spiritual process involving the purification of the soul, the control of desires, and closeness to God. The discussions in the book form underlying conceptual metaphors.

This study adopts Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010) to examine how abstract concepts are structured through metaphor in religious discourse. The use of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) is highly relevant for examining classical religious texts such as al-Ghazali's works.

Many researchers in the fields of social and linguistic studies (such as Diener, 2004; Dickins, 2005; Mihas, 2005; Murray, Parry, Robinson, & Goddard, 2008) have recognized that Islamic discourse is highly diverse. This diversity is reflected in the range of perspectives from extreme to moderate to liberal and its connection to various contemporary ideological views.

Studies on happiness have been conducted by several researchers, including El-Zeini (2020) and others. El-Zeini examined the concept of happiness in the Qur'an using Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic approach and statistical data from Kais Dukes. Zahari (2024) explored the concept of happiness found in several works by

the *mutakallimūn*. Previous studies have examined metaphors in Islamic discourse (e.g., El-Sharif, 2011; Charteris-Black, 2005), but these studies have not focused on the cognitive-linguistic analysis of happiness in al-Ghazali's *Kimiya al-Sa'adah*. Furthermore, Najib (2023) investigated the concept of happiness in Imam al-Ghazali's *Kimiya al-Sa'adah* from religious and educational perspectives.

From these previous studies, the researcher identifies a gap in research examining the concept of happiness through a cognitive linguistic approach. This study bridges Islamic studies and cognitive linguistics by applying Conceptual Metaphor Theory and frame analysis to al-Ghazali's *Kimiya al-Sa'adah*. Therefore, this study aims to:

- (1) To identify the conceptual metaphors of happiness in *Kimiya al-Sa'adah*.
- (2) To analyze the frames constructed through these metaphors.
- (3) To examine how al-Ghazali's concept of happiness is cognitively and linguistically structured.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method within a cognitive linguistics approach. The data source is the Indonesian translation of *Kimiya al-Sa'adah (The Alchemy of Happiness)*, translated by Dedi Slamet Riyadi and Fauzi Bahreisy and published by Penerbit Zaman, based on N. Murray's English edition and referring to the Arabic edition *Kīmiyā' al-Sa'ādah* published by Dar al-Fikr. This translation was selected because it is widely circulated and provides a systematic rendering of key theological and ethical concepts, making it methodologically suitable for cognitive-linguistic analysis.

The researchers apply Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010) to analyze the conceptual metaphors identified in the data. This involves examining the source and target domains and mapping the conceptual correspondences between them. Arimi (2015) explains that conceptual metaphor can be understood through understanding a concept by another concept. From a cognitive linguistic perspective, metaphors are shaped by cultural, biological, and motivational grounding; accordingly, this study interprets metaphorical relationships through conceptual similarity instead of empirical correlation (Musyayyab, 2022; 2025).

For a deeper investigation, frame analysis was conducted to examine how individual conceptual metaphors cluster into broader cognitive frames. The study follows the frame-based approach proposed by Fillmore (1982) and Evans and Green (2006) to identify the underlying cognitive structures organizing al-Ghazali's conceptualization of happiness.

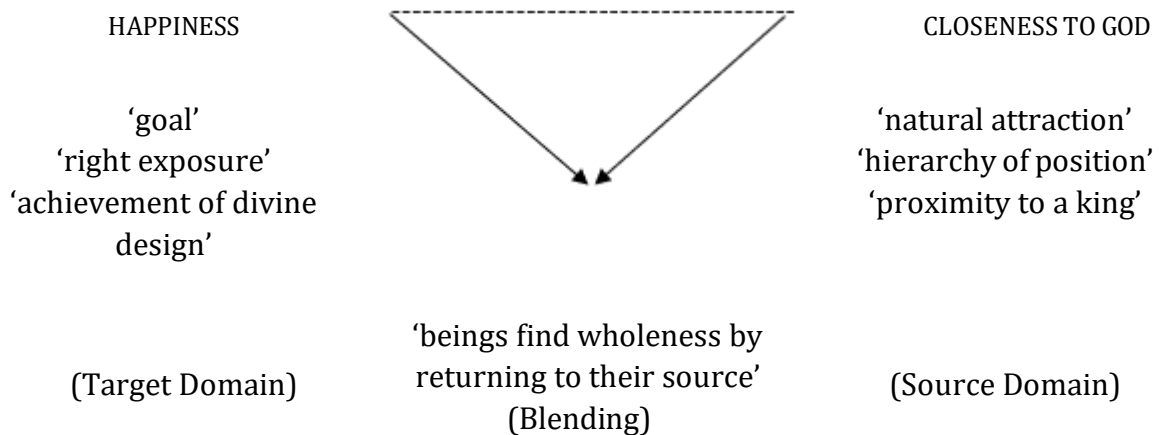
To strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis, metaphor identification and frame categorization were performed through iterative close reading and based on established criteria from both Conceptual Metaphor Theory and frame semantics. The combined use of CMT and frame analysis provides theoretical triangulation to support the consistency of interpretations.

from other happiness metaphors by emphasizing process and moral refinement, rather than attainment, possession, or emotional fulfillment.

[Data 2]

Anyone who studies this matter will see that true happiness cannot be separated from ma‘rifah—knowing God. Every faculty within a person is naturally drawn to what it was created for: desire seeks to fulfill lust, anger delights in revenge, the eyes enjoy beautiful sights, and the ears find pleasure in melodious sounds. The human soul was created with the purpose of perceiving truth; therefore, it finds joy and peace in that pursuit. Even in trivial matters, such as playing chess, people experience pleasure. And the higher the level of knowledge attained, the greater the joy it brings. A person may feel pleased to be entrusted with the role of prime minister, but he will feel far greater joy if he is brought closer to the king—who may reveal many secrets to him. (Kimiya al-Sa‘adah page 22)

Based on [Data 2], the researcher will classify the source domain and target domain below. Here is the scheme based on the source domain and target domain.

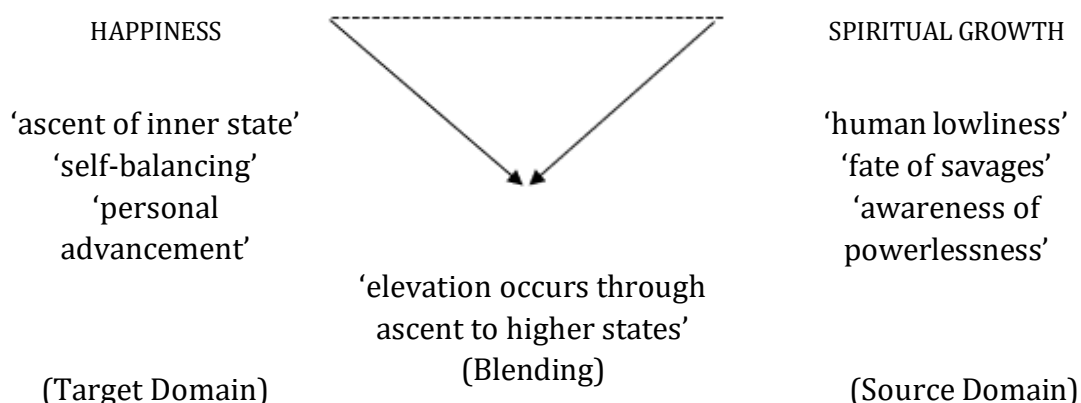


The conceptual metaphor can be used here is HAPPINESS IS CLOSENESS TO GOD. This passage uses a metaphor to describe happiness as the natural outcome when each human faculty fulfills its intended role. Faculties such as desire, anger, sight, and hearing naturally gravitate toward what they are meant to pursue, suggesting that the soul itself is drawn toward gaining divine knowledge. Therefore, true happiness is not found in fleeting worldly pleasures, but in the soul’s growth through knowledge and closeness to God, which is a central idea in al-Ghazali’s philosophy. This metaphor uniquely emphasizes hierarchical advancement and access to divine knowledge, positioning happiness as a function of spiritual rank rather than inner moral refinement.

[Data 3]

Humans are actually creatures who are extremely weak and lowly in this world. Their dignity and excellence will only be realized in the hereafter. Through self-discipline with the means of the “Chemistry of Happiness,” they will ascend from the level of animals to the level of angels. Without the Chemistry of Happiness, their condition will become worse than that of savages who are destined to perish and turn to dust. Therefore, accompanied by the awareness of being the best and most superior creatures, they must strive to recognize their own powerlessness, because that knowledge becomes one of the keys to unlocking knowledge about God. (Kimiya al-Sa’adah page 26-27)

Based on [Data 3], the researcher will classify the source domain and target domain. This metaphor differs from others by framing happiness as vertical elevation from lower to higher spiritual states, rather than as purification or relational closeness. Below is the scheme based on source domain and target domain:



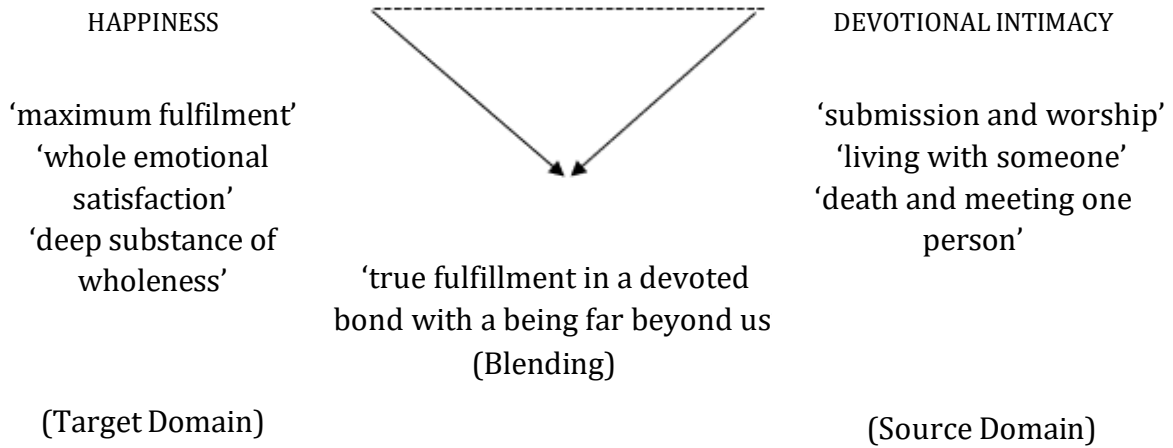
The conceptual metaphor can be used here is HAPPINESS IS SPIRITUAL GROWTH. The passage conveys a metaphor in which true happiness is portrayed as a spiritual ascent—from a base, animal-like condition to a noble, angelic state. Without undergoing spiritual discipline, a person may slip into a lowly state before God. This metaphor emphasizes that worldly weakness does not determine a person’s ultimate worth; rather, true value lies in one’s final state in the hereafter, achieved through the fullest pursuit of the spiritual path. Therefore, through the process of self-recognition, a person is guided toward understanding divine knowledge, which in turn leads to the emergence of true happiness.

[Data 4]

Thus, the call “Allāhu akbar” means that His greatness is far beyond the limits of our understanding. Moreover, our imperfect knowledge of God—as much as we are capable of attaining it—is not merely speculative knowledge, but must be accompanied by submission and worship. When a person dies, they will only be

dealing with God. And if we must live with someone, our happiness entirely depends on how much we love them. (Kimiya al-Sa’adah page 40)

Here is the target domain and source domains.



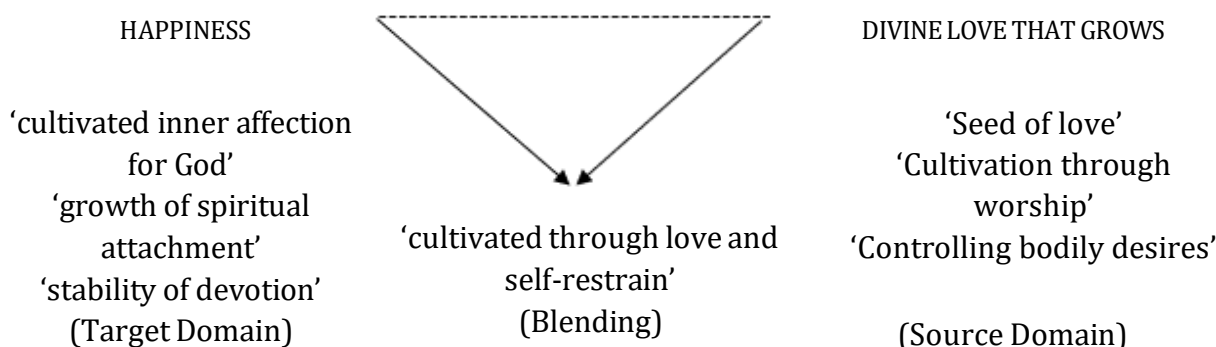
Based on [Data 4], the researcher identifies the conceptual metaphor HAPPINESS IS DEVOTIONAL INTIMACY. The excerpt from Imam al-Ghazali implies that intellectual knowledge of God’s essence is not the true source of happiness; rather, happiness arises from deepening one’s relationship with God. The expression “*Allāhu Akbar*” reinforces an attitude of humility and submission, emphasizing the act of exalting God above all else.

This conceptual metaphor further highlights that happiness is attained through one’s harmonious relationship with God, expressed through intimate devotion and sincere worship. This reflects al-Ghazali’s perspective that true knowledge of God is experiential and rooted in love and devotion—not just abstract thought.

[Data 5]

Love is the seed of happiness, and love for God can be cultivated and developed through worship. Endless worship and remembrance (dhikr) reflect a level of self-awareness and restraint over bodily desires. This does not mean that bodily desires must be eliminated entirely, for if that were the case, the human race would vanish. However, physical desires must be tightly controlled. And because humans are not the best judges to discipline themselves, they must consult spiritual guides—the prophets—for setting those boundaries. (Kimiya al-Sa’adah page 40-41).

Here is the scheme based on target domain and source domain.



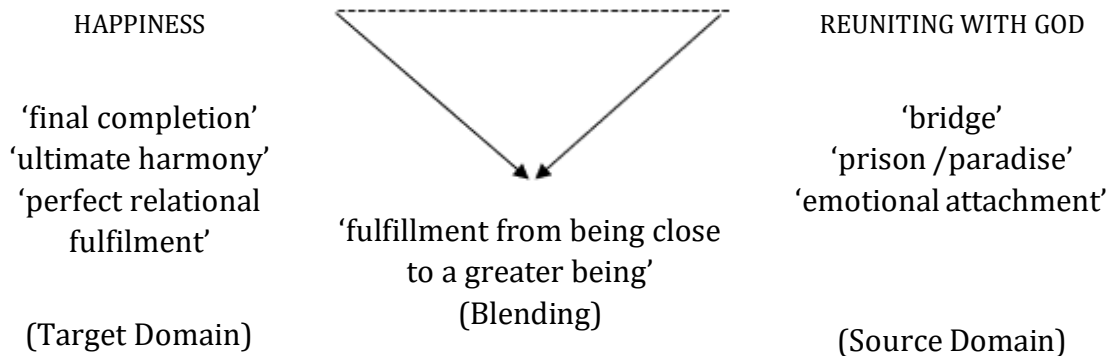
The conceptual metaphor can be used here is HAPPINESS IS DIVINE LOVE THAT GROWS. Based on the excerpt in [Data 5], the concept of happiness is understood as originating from love. This love is likened to a seed that must be nurtured, protected, and cultivated through continuous remembrance (dhikr) and acts of worship. Worship is therefore not viewed merely as an obligation, but as a means of shaping a pious and disciplined self. Furthermore, the excerpt highlights the importance of self-control as well as the need for external spiritual guidance from the prophets.

[Data 6]

It is narrated that some Sufis saw paradise and hell when they entered a state of ecstasy. Upon returning to ordinary consciousness, their faces reflected what they had witnessed—full of signs of immense joy or deep fear. However, such visions of the unseen world are no longer necessary for those who use their reason. For someone who spends life constantly satisfying worldly desires, when death finally shuts down all sensory faculties and everything perishes except the soul, he will suffer due to being separated from everything he was deeply attached to in the world—such as his wife, children, wealth, land, and servants.

*In contrast, a person who has avoided worldly attachments and firmly anchored his love in God will welcome death as a release from the noise of worldly life and as a reunion with the One he loves. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) truly spoke when he said, "Death is the bridge that unites the beloved with the Beloved." And in another hadith, he said, "This world is a paradise for the disbeliever and a prison for the believer. (*Kimiya al-Sa'adah*, page 66)*

Here is the scheme based on target domain and source domain.



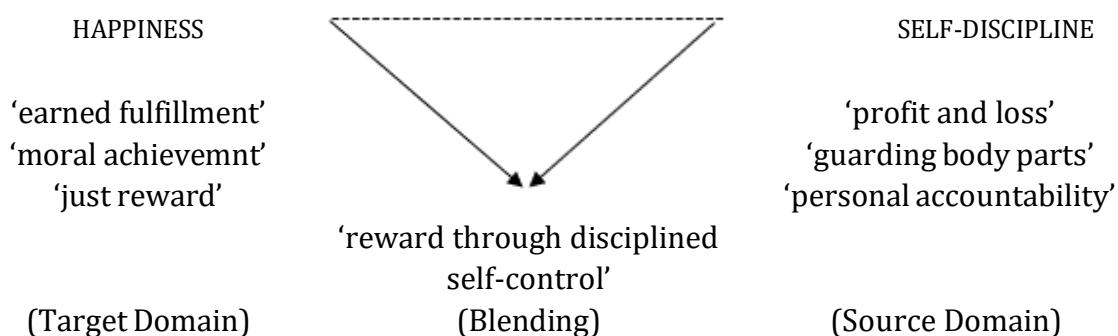
Based on the mapping of the target and source domains in the excerpt presented in [Data 6], the conceptual metaphor that emerges is HAPPINESS IS REUNITING WITH GOD. The passage shows that death is no longer perceived as something frightening when a person is able to detach from worldly attachments and direct all love toward God. The Prophet’s saying, “*Death is the bridge that unites the beloved with the One he loves,*” metaphorically portrays death as a bridge—a connecting path that leads a person back to their Lord.

The mapping between the target and source domains reveals that happiness is derived from closeness to God. Unlike metaphors that conceptualize happiness as gradual development, this mapping constructs happiness as a liminal transition across death toward final divine reunion. Therefore, reuniting with God represents the ultimate peak of a person’s happiness.

[Data 7]

The saints (awliya) said, “Even if God forgives you after you’ve wasted your life, you will never reach the rank of the righteous, and in the end, you will regret your loss. Therefore, guard your tongue, your eyes, and all your limbs strictly, for they may lead you to hellfire. Say to your body, ‘If you rebel, I will surely punish you.’ Though naturally stubborn, the body will submit and can be tamed through ascetic discipline (zuhd). That is the purpose of self-accounting (muhasabah). The Prophet (peace be upon him) once said, “True happiness is only for those who do what benefits them in the afterlife. (Kimiya al-Sa’dah, page 100)

Here is the scheme based on the target domain and source domain.



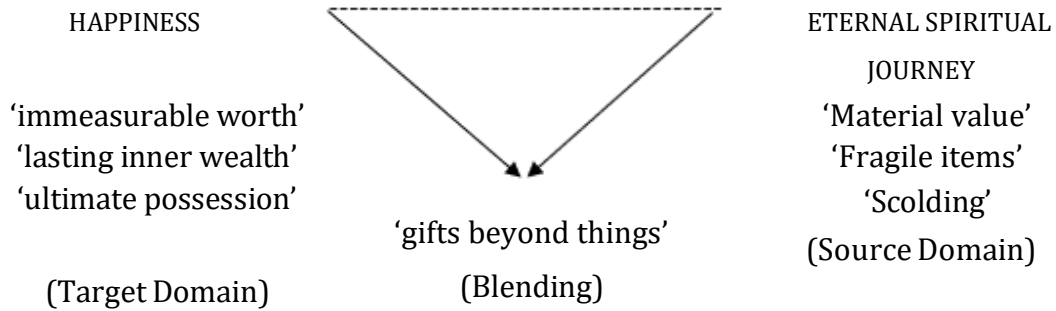
The conceptual metaphor that emerges from the mapping of the target and source domains based on the quotation in [Data 7] is HAPPINESS IS SELF-DISCIPLINE. The quotation emphasizes that happiness does not arise on its own; rather, it is the result of sustained spiritual discipline. The human body is depicted as something that tends to follow comfort and negative temptations, thus requiring a process of self-disciplining. One of the paths that can be taken is *zuhd* (distancing oneself from excessive attachment to worldly pleasures).

This is then followed by *mahasabbah* (a process of self-introspection), which cultivates the ability to gain self-control. Further explanation is provided through the Prophet's saying, which clarifies that happiness cannot be found in fleeting worldly pleasures. Therefore, happiness is attained through a process of self-control supported by commitment to spiritual goals.

[Data 8]

Woe to you, O self, for your excessive love of the world! If you do not believe in paradise and hell, how can you believe in death, which will strip away all worldly pleasures and leave you in far greater suffering than when you were attached to them? What use is the world you have accumulated? Even if everything in the world, from east to west, were yours and all of it served you, in the end it will turn to dust along with you, and your name will vanish just like the kings of old. So reflect, O self: what you possess of this world is nothing but a small, dirty portion—will you be so foolish as to trade eternal happiness (the afterlife) for your worldly share, a precious jewel for a shattered clay cup, and make yourself the laughingstock of others? (Kimiya al-Sa'adah page 115)

Below is the classification of target domain and source domain. Here is the scheme based on the target domain and source domain.



The conceptual metaphor can be used here is HAPPINESS IS AN ETERNAL SPIRITUAL JOURNEY. This passage uses strong images and metaphors to show how wrong it is to be too attached to worldly life. Happiness is likened to a precious jewel, not to a clay cup that easily breaks. This context explains that happiness is neither cheap nor temporary. Death is portrayed not as something fleeting, but as something eternal—an inevitable process that every person will experience. Those who devote their lives solely to worldly matters will gain nothing in the afterlife.

Through this mapping, happiness is framed as the outcome of moral evaluation, rather than as a result of spiritual transformation. Therefore, based on the passage, it can be concluded that happiness does not arise from material things, but from the development of spiritual awareness and preparation for the life to come.

Frame Analysis

The researcher further deepens the analysis through frame analysis. A person initially thinks about something before it has meaning. They get the idea from the things they go through (Musyayyab, 2020). This approach helps uncover the background knowledge and cognitive structures involved. The researcher applies frame analysis based on the theories of Fillmore (1982) and Evans & Green (2006), focusing on Islamic spirituality and epistemology. This stands in contrast to Western philosophical perspectives, which discuss the process of self-purification merely as a form of morality.

In Western philosophical thought, morality is understood as something objective and external to human experience—either as divine commandments or as universal principles discoverable through human reason (Zhong and House 2014). In contrast, the Islamic perspective presented in *Kimiya al-Sa'adah* emphasizes the ultimate purpose of human life. Below, the researcher presents the frame analysis in the form of selected quotations, schematic diagrams, and explanatory descriptions.

Frame 1 – Frame of Self-Purification

Excerpt

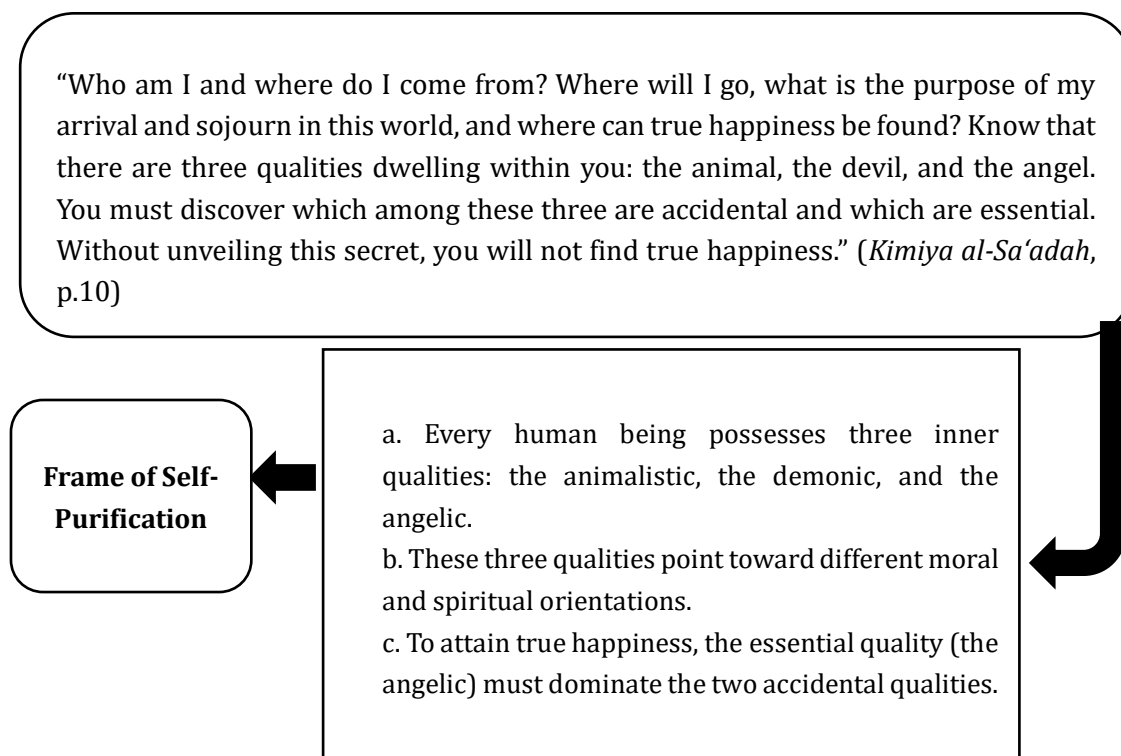
“Who am I and where do I come from? Where will I go, what is the purpose of my arrival and sojourn in this world, and where can true happiness be found? Know that there are three qualities dwelling within you: the animal, the devil, and the angel. You must discover which among these three are accidental and which are essential. Without unveiling this secret, you will not find true happiness.” (Kimiya al-Sa’adah, p.10)

Background of Knowledge

- a. The animalistic, demonic, and angelic qualities are inherent traits within every human being.
- b. These three qualities each point toward spiritual orientations.
- c. To attain true happiness, the essential quality (the angelic) must dominate the two accidental qualities.

Based on these five points, it can be stated that attaining happiness is possible through the process of soul purification. By regulating one’s inner qualities distinguishing what is essential from what is accidental, a person can undergo a proper process of inner purification. Through self-recognition and avoidance of ignorance, one is better able to achieve happiness. Cognitively, this Self-Purification Frame structures the understanding of happiness as a process of moral reasoning and spiritual cleansing.

Scheme 1. Self-Purification



The researcher traces Imam al-Ghazali’s thought based on quotations that reflect the background knowledge as outlined in points (a) through (c). The data indicate that happiness in this context cannot be separated from moral purification. Thus, the process of self-purification forms a cognitive frame in Imam al-Ghazali’s understanding of happiness, which can be attained through self-control, spiritual awareness, and the development of essential qualities.

Frame 2 – Frame of Divine Proximity

Excerpt 2

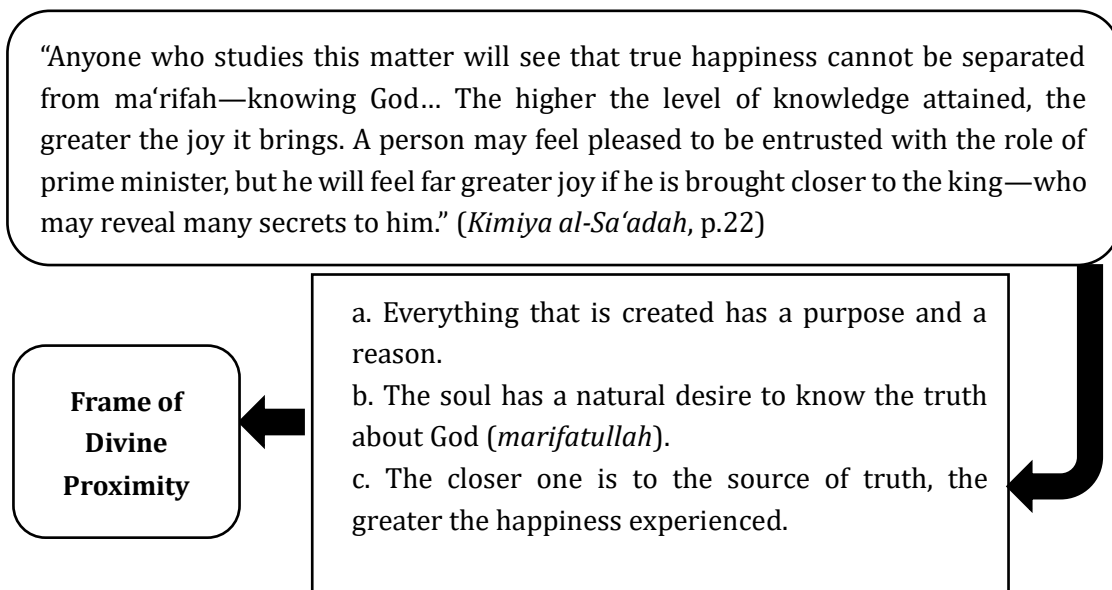
“Anyone who studies this matter will see that true happiness cannot be separated from ma’rifah—knowing God... The higher the level of knowledge attained, the greater the joy it brings. A person may feel pleased to be entrusted with the role of prime minister, but he will feel far greater joy if he is brought closer to the king—who may reveal many secrets to him.” (Kimiya al-Sa’adah, p.22)

Background of Knowledge

- a. Everything that is created has a purpose and a reason.
- b. The soul has a natural desire to know the truth about God (*marifatullah*).
- c. The closer one is to the source of truth, the greater the happiness experienced.

Based on the points above, happiness is not derived merely from emotional pleasure, but from the process of attaining closeness to God. Proximity to God surpasses all worldly pleasures. In other words, the text equates knowledge (*marifatullah*) with intimacy and spiritual ascent. Within this frame, happiness is defined as the soul’s closeness to God (the Divine). The relationship between happiness and *marifatullah* becomes the axis through which true happiness is conceptualized.

Scheme 2. Divine Proximity



The researcher traces Imam al-Ghazali's thought based on quotations that reflect the background knowledge as outlined in points (a) through (c). The data indicate that, in this context, happiness cannot be separated from closeness to God, which is achieved through knowing God with intimacy balanced by spiritual ascent. Therefore, Imam al-Ghazali emphasizes that happiness is attained through the process self_purification, namely by drawing oneself ever closer to God.

Frame 3 – Frame of Spiritual Ascent

Excerpt

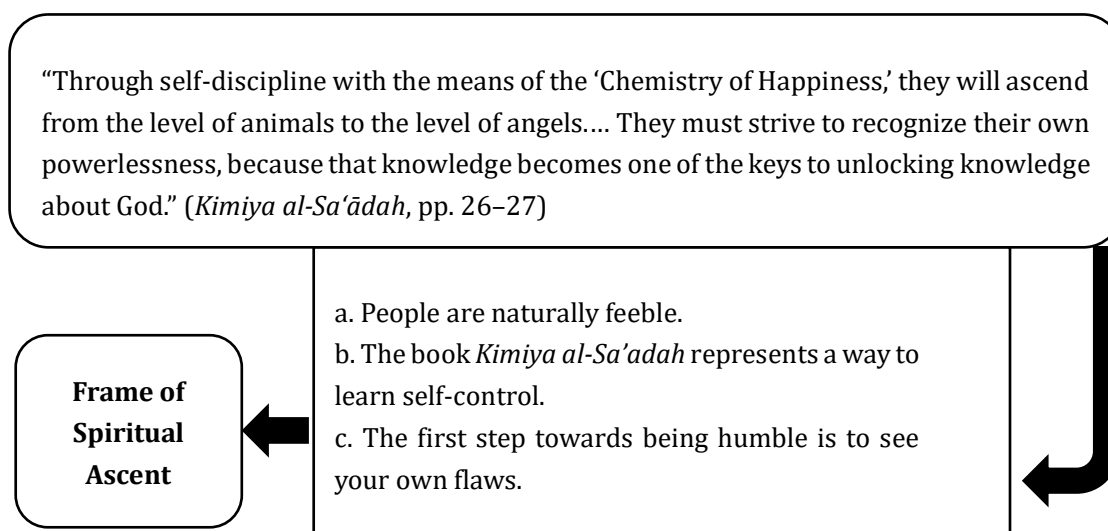
“Through self-discipline with the means of the ‘Chemistry of Happiness,’ they will ascend from the level of animals to the level of angels.... They must strive to recognize their own powerlessness, because that knowledge becomes one of the keys to unlocking knowledge about God.” (Kimiya al-Sa’adah, pp. 26–27)

Background Knowledge

- a. People are naturally feeble.
- b. The book *Kimiya al-Sa'adah* represents a way to learn self-control.
- c. The first step towards being humble is to see your own flaws.

The text describes happiness as a shift from a lower to higher state. The metaphor of ascent reflects a process of purification and humility. According to Imam al-Ghazali, happiness is attained through a disciplined moral process, namely by removing harmful traits and cultivating humility. Al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of the afterlife. This frame views happiness as a journey toward a higher state through humility, self-control, and knowledge of God.

Scheme 3. Spiritual Ascent



The researcher follows Imam al-Ghazali's ideas by using quotes that show what he already knew, as seen in points (a) through (c). The statistics suggest that, within this setting, happiness is derived from the acknowledgement of one's own vulnerabilities. In Imam al-Ghazali's view of happiness, the act of self-purification creates a mental framework that can be achieved by finding a balance between self-discipline, humility, and divine knowledge.

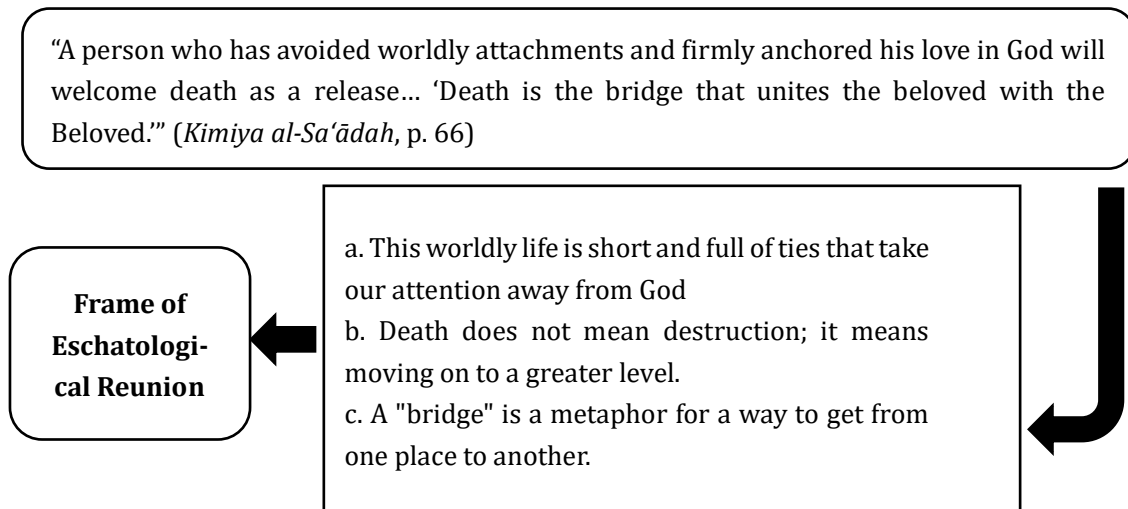
Frame 4– Frame of Eschatological Reunion

Background Knowledge:

- a. This worldly life is short and full of ties that take our attention away from God
- b. Death does not mean destruction; it means moving on to a greater level.
- c. A "bridge" is a metaphor for a way to get from one place to another.

Not something to be afraid of, this shot shows death as a moment of pure joy. The idea of union after separation is at the heart of this way of thinking. This means that when the soul leaves the world, it can go back to its real home. The image of a "bridge" shows how relationships can move from the physical world to the eternal world. According to the Frame of Eschatological Reunion, happiness is the soul's last meeting with God. In this view, death is seen as the end of the spiritual path that starts with cleansing oneself.

Scheme 4. Eschatological Reunion



The researcher follows Imam al-Ghazali's ideas by using quotes that show what he knew about the subjects listed in points (a) through (c). The statistics suggest that, in this situation, happiness emanates from the conviction that death should not be dreaded. In Imam al-Ghazali's view of happiness, the act of self-

purification creates a cognitive frame. Happiness is seen as the soul's last reunion with the Divine.

4. Conclusion

This study explores the construction of the concept of happiness (*al-sa'adah*) in the Indonesian translation of *Kimiya al-Sa'adah* by Imam al-Ghazali through Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and cognitive frame analysis. Employing a qualitative descriptive methodology, it delineates eight conceptual metaphors: HAPPINESS IS PURIFICATION, HAPPINESS IS CLOSENESS TO GOD, HAPPINESS IS SPIRITUAL GROWTH, HAPPINESS IS DEVOTIONAL INTIMACY, HAPPINESS IS REUNITING WITH GOD, HAPPINESS IS SELF-DISCIPLINE, and HAPPINESS IS ETERNAL SPIRITUAL MOVEMENT.

These metaphors serve as cognitive frameworks that encapsulate al-Ghazali's Sufi epistemology and ethical perspective, conceptualising happiness as a transformational spiritual journey rather than a superficial emotional or material goal. This study emphasizes the importance of incorporating texts grounded in cultural and theological contexts into conceptual metaphor and frame analysis, and affirms that the concept of happiness can be cognitively interpreted as a spiritually teleological process, rather than merely as a psychological state.

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