



A Comparative Study of the Meaning of Life in the Teachings of Imam Reḍa (AS) and the Most Important Constructs of Positive Psychology

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Submitted: 2025.09.21 | Accepted: 2025.11.29

Abstract

Unlike animals, which do not question the what and why of life, the question of life's meaning has always been relevant for humans and has been among the most significant concerns of both humanistic and divine schools of thought. In recent times, positive psychology has attempted to introduce itself as responsible for giving meaning to human life by focusing on key elements such as purposefulness, faith, hope, satisfaction, happiness, and flourishing. On the other hand, Islamic teachings, particularly the illuminating instructions of Imam Reḍa (AS), have also introduced the most important pillars that give life meaning, such as freedom, contentment, faith, servitude, purposefulness, knowledge, the pure life (*ḥayāt al-ṭayyibah*), happiness, pleasure, and so forth, thereby outlining a clear path for progress and attainment of life's purpose. The research question is: what is the relationship between the elements introduced in positive psychology and the teachings of Imam Reḍa, and what are their commonalities and differences? This article, with a descriptive-analytical approach, revisits and compares the meaning of life from the perspective of positive psychology and the teachings of Imam Reḍa, demonstrating their points of convergence and divergence. The two perspectives share elements such as the necessity of seeking meaning, faith, purposefulness, contentment, hopefulness, value-centricity, and positive confrontation with tribulations, etc. At the same time, they differ in some foundations, such as reliance on humanism and empiricism, the introduction of the ultimate end, and the determination of the status of faith.

Keywords: positive psychology, meaning of life, teachings of Imam Reḍa

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1. Introduction

Considering his spiritual dimensions, in addition to material and physiological needs such as eating, drinking, sleeping, sexual activity, and procreation, man also needs answers to questions about the nature of the universe, the purpose of life, his own role in the world, the ultimate destination, and how to confront difficulties. Answers to questions such as: for what purpose were the world and man created? How did the universe begin, and what will its ultimate fate be? What is the best way to live? What should one do when faced with suffering, calamities, and the evils of the world? How can one attain the highest level of pleasure and satisfaction in life? These have always been considered by thinkers in their conceptualization of life's meaning.

In the contemporary world, with the proliferation of psychological disorders, increased anxiety, feelings of emptiness, the spread of despair, and rebellion against oneself and others, the meaning of life has garnered more attention than ever before, and the necessity for its re-evaluation is more acutely felt. Positive psychology, as one of the modern branches of psychology, focusing on components such as purposefulness, hope, faith, inner strength, and lasting satisfaction, has attempted to assist in imparting meaning to the life of modern man. Religious teachings, emphasizing transcending instinctive and biological matters and focusing on the spirit of life, have also played a vital role in giving meaning to life. In the valuable teachings of Imam Reḍa (peace be upon him), elements such as knowledge (*ma'rifah*), faith (*imān*), purposefulness (*hadafmandi*), contentment (*razāyat*), tranquility (*ārāmesh*), servitude (*'ubūdiyyat*), benefit (*bahrēmandi*), freedom (*āzādī*), hope (*omīd*) ... are presented, delineating the components of a meaningful life in a more comprehensive, profound, and precise manner.

Dialogue and interaction between modern approaches and religious knowledge lead to the revelation of their complementary capacities. Positive psychology, by proposing and examining the components of meaning, has helped address human psychological needs. The teachings of Imam Reḍa are also effective in deepening these discussions. Complementing the psychological approach with religious teaching provides more integrated and profound solutions in the fields of mental health, satisfaction, resilience, happiness, hope, and so forth.

This article, with a comparative approach, revisits these components in positive psychology and the teachings of Imam Reḍa (peace be upon him). To this end, after referring to the importance and background of the discussion and providing a brief introduction to positive psychology, it will conduct a comparative study of the most important commonalities and differences between these two approaches.

2. Research Background

The quest for the meaning of life has always been one of humanity's primary concerns. Today, explaining and understanding the meaning of life remains a significant topic in the fields of social sciences and psychology. Numerous studies have been conducted in this area, which can be categorized into several main themes based on their focus:

The first category includes research that delves into the nature, essence, and understanding of the meaning of life itself. Examples include: "The Meaning of the Meaning of Life" (ʿAlizamani 2015), "The Essence of the Meaning of Life" (Bolandqamatpour & Fathʿali 2022), "An Analysis of Meaning in the Meaning of Life" (Nasri 2016), and "The Meaning of Life" (Taylor 2015).

The second category encompasses studies and analyses of the meaning of life from the perspectives of Eastern and Western thinkers, as well as comparative analyses between them. Examples are: "The Meaning of Life from the Perspective of Ibn Arabi" (Kasaʿizadah 2013), "Evidence for the Discovery of the Meaning of Life in Tabatabai's View" (Amani 2017), "The Meaning of Life from the Perspective of William James" (Ruhani 2021), "The Meaning of Life from the Perspective of Allameh Mesbah Yazdi" (ʿĀrifī 2023), "A Comparative Study of the Meaning of Life in Kierkegaard and Mulla Sadra" (Khidānī 2024), "A Comparative Study of the Meaning of Life from the Perspectives of Søren Kierkegaard and Allameh Tabatabai" (Sajjadi 2023), and "A Comparative Study of the Relationship Between the Meaning of Life and Human Nature from the Perspectives of Allameh Tabatabai and Kierkegaard" (Najafi 2017).

The third category comprises research that examines the meaning of life from the viewpoint of religious texts and teachings. Examples include: "The Philosophy of the Meaning of Life from an Islamic Perspective" (Sharafi 2009), and "A Comparative Study in Evaluating the Islamic Approach to the Meaning of Life" (Bayat et al. 2025).

Regarding the specific topic of this article, some studies have explored the relationship between the meaning of life and psychology, particularly positive psychology. Examples are: "An Exploration of Positive Psychology Constructs: Predicting Academic Vitality Based on the Meaning of Life" (Sultani Banawardi et al. 2017), "The Existential Philosophy of the Meaning of Life from the Perspectives of Psychology and the Quran" (Fadlʿali & Asadi 2022), and "Modeling the Relationship Between Religiosity and Psychological Well-being with the Mediation of Self-efficacy, Perceived Social Support, and Meaning of Life" (Moradi Dihnavi et al. 2023).

However, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no comparative study has yet been conducted between the core components of positive psychology and the views and teachings of Imam Reḍa (AS). This gap constitutes the distinguishing feature and

novel contribution of the present article.

3. An Introduction to Positive Psychology and the Central Place of Meaning

Positive psychology is a modern branch of psychology. This orientation was introduced at the beginning of the 21st century by Western thinkers such as Martin Seligman, and its formal structure and general content were gradually developed (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi 2000, 14-15). Unlike the traditional approach of psychology, which focuses more on analyzing human faculties, psychopathology, and treating mental disorders, positive psychology emphasizes strengthening human foundations, capabilities, virtues, and factors that shape success and sustainable well-being. According to this perspective, just as analyzing and treating disorders is essential, discovering and nurturing hidden talents and positive psychological dimensions are also necessary for achieving an elevated and purposeful life.

The main objectives of positive psychology can be outlined along several axes: improving the quality of individual and social life by increasing feelings of happiness, contentment, and life satisfaction; preventing the onset of mental disorders by negating predisposing factors and strengthening resilience and coping skills such as mutual understanding and reliance on faith and spirituality; promoting mental health by fostering hope, instilling meaning, and defining life goals; and finally, helping individuals to maximize the realization of their unique potential and achieve self-actualization (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi 2000, 14-15).

One of the main models proposed in positive psychology to explain the elements of a meaningful life is the well-known PERMA model, suggested by Seligman. Seligman believes that authentic well-being is not found in fleeting pleasures but is formed through five fundamental components: (1) Positive Emotions, (2) Engagement (involvement in meaningful activities), (3) Positive Relationships, (4) Meaning and Purpose in life, and (5) Accomplishment (achieving valuable successes) (Seligman 2014, 15) These five components help individuals experience a life full of growth, motivation, and inner satisfaction. Positive psychology, relying on the components of a good life, strives to address contemporary human needs for meaning, purpose, and transcendence, offering a scientific model that does not shy away from pain and crisis, but rather views them as a ground for manifesting inner virtues and capabilities.

The meaning of life, as one of the key elements in achieving a flourishing and satisfying life, is a focus of positive psychology. According to prominent psychologists such as Martin Seligman and Viktor Frankl, meaning plays a determining role in mental health, resilience, and life satisfaction. Martin Seligman considers meaning one

of the most important components in his proposed model (Seligman 2014, 15). Viktor Frankl also sees meaning as the primary motivational force in human life, achieved through an authentic confrontation with life (Frankl 2006, 50-51). Furthermore, under the concept of meaningfulness, he introduces the element of "tragic optimism," wherein a person can search for meaning even in difficult circumstances, such as suffering, poverty, or the death of loved ones, and experience a kind of psychological growth and human fulfillment within crises.

Among the components considered in positive psychology, understanding the meaning of life holds a central role. In modern psychological studies, three fundamental components of "meaning in life" are emphasized: Purpose (having long-term perspectives that guide one's efforts), Coherence (the ability to understand and logically interpret life events), and Significance (a feeling of being useful, important, and cherished) (George & Park 2016). The meaning of life is also related to other positive psychological indicators such as hope, satisfaction, faith, tranquility, benefit, confrontation with adversity, resilience, and so on. Individuals who experience life with an understanding of its meaning exhibit lower levels of depression, stress, anxiety, and frustration (Steger et al 2006). Also, individuals who possess an understanding of life's meaning during crises, such as pandemics, benefit from greater resilience and tranquility in facing them (Schnell & Krampe 2020).

The perception of meaning affects not only individuals but also social behaviors such as cooperation, empathy, mutual understanding, trust, sacrifice, and altruism. Societies where individuals have a high level of meaning perception exhibit deeper collective cooperation and interaction, greater social cohesion, higher levels of interpersonal trust, and more widespread civic responsibility (Pratt & Ashforth 2003).

4. Meaning and Its Most Important Source from the Perspective of Imam Reḍa (AS)

Given the emphasis on the meaning of life in positive psychology, we now turn to the source of this component and its related elements within the teachings of Imam Reḍa (AS).

As we have seen, purposefulness, satisfaction, and coherence are important elements of a meaningful life in psychology. Emphasis on these elements is necessary for securing life's meaning, but it appears insufficient. This is because these elements cannot be fully realized unless a person's place within the cosmic order and their relationship with its other components, including the Origin of the universe, are clarified, and unless the individual possesses a deep knowledge and understanding of these relationships. Proponents of positive psychology have overlooked this crucial

point. In fact, these components are branches of cognition and achieving them without this root knowledge is impossible.

Therefore, in the teachings of Imam Reḍa (AS), the meaning of life is intertwined with knowledge of the cosmic order, understanding the position of God and humanity within this system, and emphasizes the relationship between humans and God, and servitude to Him. Thus, the main pillar of life's meaning is the knowledge of God, His Oneness, and the relationship of human servitude to Him. A necessary consequence of knowing Divine Oneness is for a person to recognize that the powers and potentials of the universe are under the management of the One God, who has no equal or partner (Ibn Babawayh 1983, 2: 107). Other elements of meaningfulness such as assurance and tranquility, contentment, purposefulness, hope, happiness, bliss, optimism, benefiting from divine guidance, a sense of responsibility, performing one's duty, sacrifice, altruism, cooperation, and compassion—all pillars of meaning in the individual and social spheres—are arranged within this very framework. The path to transcendence, flourishing, and attaining tranquility, which psychologists emphasize, is also knowledge of Divine Oneness and constant remembrance of it. As the Quran states, the heart's assurance and tranquility are dependent on understanding and remembering this truth: *"Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured"* (Qur'an, 13:28).

The axis of all components of meaningfulness is the knowledge of the Almighty Truth and His attributes, which ultimately leads to assurance, trust in God, submission, entrusting affairs to Him, and a feeling of true tranquility: *"The beginning of knowledge is the recognition of the Almighty, and the end of knowledge is the entrusting of affairs to Him."* (Ghazali 2004, 2: 404) Therefore, in the teachings of Imam Reḍa (AS), meaning is intricately linked with knowledge of the cosmic order, the reality of Divine Oneness, and its requisites such as servitude, obedience, contentment, etc. Its ultimate goal is to emulate the Divine attributes and qualities.

Thus, in the words of Imam Reḍa (AS), seeking knowledge—and its highest level, which is the knowledge of Divine Oneness—is not only valuable but is considered a form of worship. Teaching it to others revitalizes religion and secures divine mercy (al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī 1993, 18: 17). *"He learns our knowledge and teaches it to the people, for if people knew the merits of our speech, they would follow us"* (Ibn Babawayh 1983, 2: 275). Knowledge and cognition are not merely tools for worldly progress but are strategic elements in human spiritual life. Belief in Divine power plays a role in giving meaning to life, building self-confidence, and stimulating and encouraging movement.

In prayers transmitted from Imam Reḍa, emphasis is placed on knowledge of the levels of Divine Oneness and its role in pure servitude and following divine commands (Boroujerdi 1415, 14: 224). Prayer is the highest level of connection and trust in the Origin and receiving support in difficulties and tribulations, which are among the most important components of a meaningful life.

Imam Reḍa (AS), in contrast to some human schools of thought that, citing the existence of pains and tribulations, present a dark picture of the world filled with despair, anxiety, ignorance, and confusion, introduces suffering, calamities, and patience in enduring them as opportunities for transcendence, growth, and finding meaning in life. In his statements, he introduces patience as a fundamental factor for opening the path of servitude and proximity to God (Ibid.). In the perspective of Imam Reḍa (AS) on suffering and hardships, the meaning of life is realized within difficult experiences, and the patient person is guided from that ground towards spiritual perfection.

Therefore, the teachings of Imam Reḍa (AS) present a profound horizon of meaning and purposefulness for contemporary humanity through knowledge, servitude, contentment, connection with the Truth, and attaining proximity to God and emulation of His names and attributes. This horizon is not reliant merely on the mind or individual experience but is supported by revelatory knowledge and genuine commitment to its requisites (al-Harrānī 1404, 448). It is in this direction that it completes the components proposed in positive psychology.

5. Convergence of the Most Important Components of Positive Psychology with the Teachings of Imam Reḍa (AS)

Upon reflection on the meaning of life from the perspective of positive psychology and the teachings of Imam Reḍa (AS), several points of convergence can be identified. These include: the necessity of seeking meaning, purposefulness, faith, resilience in facing problems, the truth of the world and humanity, inner flourishing, contentment, gratitude, and more.

5.1. The Necessity of Meaning for Mental Health and a Flourishing Life

Positive psychology considers meaning to be the most fundamental psychological need of humans and posits that failure to attain it is the source of feelings of existential emptiness, meaninglessness, and depression (Frankl 2006, 104). According to this view, if a person knows the *why* of their life, they can bear almost any *how*. Conversely, being unaware of one's purpose leads to despair, hopelessness, and confusion. From the perspective of positive psychology, this search for meaning is

essential for living a meaningful life. It increases feelings of worth, inner satisfaction, and resilience in the face of problems. Such living paves the way for growth, social tranquility, and the achievement of lofty goals without anxiety and confusion.

In religious knowledge and the teachings of Imam Reḍa (AS), understanding the meaning and spirit of life, and knowledge of the origin and the end, are also introduced as the foundation of human existence. The Holy Quran likes superficial people who are heedless of life's meaning to animals: *"They have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear. Those are like livestock; rather, they are more astray. It is they who are the heedless"* (Qur'an, 7:179). It is frequently mentioned in religious texts: *"May God have mercy on the one who knows where he came from, what he is doing, and where he is going"*. The Quran highlights birth, death, and resurrection as three crucial phases in human life: *"And peace be upon him the day he was born, the day he dies, and the day he is raised alive"* (Qur'an, 19:15). This meaning-centric perspective and the necessity of seeking meaning can be considered a common point between positive psychology and religious, particularly Raḍawi knowledge.

5.2. Purpose, Hope, and Faith as Pillars of Meaning

Another common axis in religious and Raḍawi teachings, which is also emphasized in positive psychology, is the focus on purposefulness, hope, and faith as pillars of a meaningful life. In positive psychology, hope is the driving force of life and its tribulations, and the belief in a higher purpose prevents humans from falling into the abyss of despair (Frankl 2006, 111). This same theme is found in the teachings of Imam Reḍa (AS). In narrations from him, faith in God, trust in Him (*tawakkul*), and hope in divine mercy place a person within the scope of God's grace and patiently assist them on the path of a meaningful life. When asked about the best of servants, he said: *"Those who, when they do good, are joyful; and when they err, seek forgiveness; and when given, are grateful; and when afflicted, are patient; and when angered, forgive."* (Boroujerdi 1415, 14: 224).

This narration contains signs of three vital dimensions—purposefulness, hope, and faith—in the life of a believer, which give it meaning. Purposefulness means that a person has a goal higher than mere living and daily activities. Otherwise, they remain, like other animals, on the plane of material concerns and will not comprehend life's meaning.

Furthermore, in a meaningful life, a person's actions are purposeful and conscious. They choose good deeds and feel satisfaction and joy from the success of performing them: *"When they do good, they are joyful."* (Boroujerdi 1415, 14: 224) This happiness

and satisfaction, however, is an intermediate goal in life, serving the ultimate aim of attaining God's pleasure and proximity to Him.

Hope is secured through belief in the Divine Origin and reliance on Him. Hope for a bright future is the anchor for a person in hardships, preventing them from ever succumbing to despair, depression, and hopelessness in the face of problems. Instead, in all circumstances, they have hope in divine mercy. They see natural and self-chosen tribulations as means to polish, purify, and refine the soul, leading to transcendence and perfection. They do not lose themselves when facing problems but see them as opportunities for spiritual growth, welcoming trials and divine tests with open arms: "*And when afflicted, they are patient.*" (Boroujerdi 1415, 14: 224).

Faith is a firm and steadfast conviction in the heart that leads to practical commitment and gives direction to a person's actions, behavior, and speech. Heartfelt belief plays a regulating role for other dimensions of human existence, controlling their appetitive and irascible faculties. A faithful person, at the peak of anger, refrains from revenge and chooses forgiveness: "*And when angered, they forgive*" (Boroujerdi 1415, 14: 224).

These components of a meaningful life from the perspective of Imam Reḍa (AS) themselves yield countless other results in creating favorable conditions for a believer's life. Resilience, contentment, planning, deriving joy from the smallest spaces and available opportunities, appreciating what one has without lamenting what one lacks, avoiding comparing one's own reality to the apparent lives of others, striving to acquire virtues—the absence of which are among the most significant causes of human meaninglessness and frustration today—are all results of these components introduced in religious knowledge and Raḍawi teachings.

Imam Reḍa (AS) said: "A servant does not attain the reality of faith until three qualities are present in him: profound understanding in religion (*tafaqquh fi al-din*), good management in livelihood (*ḥusn al-taqdir fi al-ma'isha*), and patience in calamities (*al-ṣabr 'ala al-razaia*)" (Ḥarranī 1404, 448).

Complete faith is not realized except through three characteristics: deep understanding of religion, proper management in life, and patience in hardships. These three characteristics are also emphasized in positive psychology. Profound and conscious understanding of religious beliefs makes life meaningful and protects a person from meaninglessness and confusion. Good management in livelihood—planning and organizing life—is a sign of purposefulness. Patience in hardships creates the ability to overcome crises.

Therefore, clear understanding (*tafaqquh*), purposeful action (*tadbir*), and hopeful

perseverance (*ṣabr*) are three common pillars in both religion and positive psychology for building a meaningful, stable, and truly human life.

5.3. Confronting Suffering Through Meaning

As mentioned, positive psychology seeks to cultivate feelings of satisfaction and well-being within both pleasant and unpleasant life events and circumstances. Frankl, emphasizing the experience of captivity among some individuals, demonstrates that even a lack of external freedoms does not halt or limit a person. Even under such conditions, a person possesses internal freedom and can achieve a form of transcendence through a meaning-centered interpretation of suffering (Frankl 2006, 110).

This viewpoint aligns significantly with the teachings of Imam Reḍa (AS). In religious and Raḍawi knowledge, sufferings and tribulations are also considered a form of spiritual training and a divine gift bestowed by God upon His chosen servants for their growth and elevation. Therefore, in both perspectives, hardships are not obstacles on the path but rather catalysts for nurturing meaning, spiritual transformation, and accelerating the evolutionary journey of individuals.

Imam Reḍa (AS), in dealing with his followers who were caught in political and religious hardships, introduced patience (*ṣabr*), steadfastness (*istiḳāmah*), and trust in God (*tawakkul*) as ways to overcome crises, and even considered suffering a means of purification and spiritual advancement (Ibn Babawayh 1983, 1: 238). In this view, suffering is not an endpoint but a gateway to meaning, growth, and proximity to God. As stated in another narration: *"Illness for a believer is purification and mercy, and for a disbeliever it is punishment and curse. Indeed, illness continually purifies the believer until no sin remains upon him"* (al-Majlisī 1983, 81: 183).

From Imam Reḍa's perspective, suffering is not an impediment to perfection, a cause for despair and hopelessness, or merely a sign of punishment. Rather, it purifies and cleanses the soul of impurities, fostering growth, flourishing, and the refinement of one's inner essence in the crucible of fiery trials, thereby daily increasing one's intrinsic worth and value. This perspective imparts a calming and purposeful meaning to suffering. Just as observed in the discourse of positive psychologists, if suffering is placed in the service of meaning, it can lead to "post-traumatic growth."

Imam Reḍa (AS) said: *"A believer is not truly a believer until three characteristics are present in him: ... Patience in poverty and hardship."* (al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī 1993, 11: 151) This expression indicates that patience is not a passive, forced submission, a sense of frustration in the face of problems, or feelings of despair and hopelessness. Rather, it is an active resistance, conscious spiritual discipline, and voluntary cultivation of body

and soul. Patience enables a person to strengthen their faith and willpower amidst the crucible of suffering and to contribute to the flourishing of their inner potential. In the view of positive psychology as well, "our chosen attitude towards suffering" determines the quality of confronting it. Patience is one of the practical manifestations of choosing this meaning-centered attitude.

He also said: "*Whomever God loves; He afflicts with trial. If he is patient, God selects him (iğtabāhu), and if he is content, God chooses him (iṣṭafāhu).*" (al-Majlisī 1983, 78: 100) Based on these expressions, suffering and tribulation are considered a special distinction and a unique reward, indicative of being chosen (*iğtabā*) and specially selected (*iṣṭafā*). This elevated perspective on suffering and tribulation is also seen in the teachings of positive psychology, according to which calamities should be regarded as exceptional and valuable opportunities for growth and perfection—much like how prisoners transformed their confinement and suffering into an opportunity for growth and transcendence.

6. Divergence in the Foundations of Raḍawi Teachings and Positive Psychology

Although positive psychology aligns with religious and Raḍawi teachings in some components, this does not signify a complete congruence between the two perspectives. Psychology is based on certain foundations that differ from those of Raḍawi teachings. Below, we outline some of the fundamental differences between these two viewpoints.

6.1. Humanism and Empiricism versus the Primacy of Revelation and Intellect

Positive psychology originates from the Western scientific and humanistic tradition and, like many schools influenced by empiricism, organizes its discourse based on sensory perception, individual experience, and empirical data (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi 2000, 14-5). Therefore, meaning in this approach is something felt and discovered by the individual, dependent on personal experience, free choice, and inner guidance (Frankl 2006, 161). In this view, the human being is placed at the center of theoretical and practical issues, and all other matters—including meaning, religion, and divinity—are made to revolve around humans and operate in response to human desires and needs. Issues such as human expectations from religion, religious experience, various interpretations of religion, religious pluralism, etc., which have become prevalent in recent centuries, stem from placing humans and their experience at the center of theory and practice.

Contrary to this trend, religious and Raḍawi teachings emphasize the primacy of revelation and intellect (*'aql*). In religious knowledge, humans are the very embodiment of neediness and dependence on the Origin and possess no independence or centrality of their own: "O mankind, you are those in need of Allah, while Allah is the Free of need, the Praiseworthy" (Qur'an, 35:15). Happiness, contentment, purposefulness, and other mentioned components of life's meaning all take shape in the light of the Truth (*Haqq*), based on divine revelation, prophetic guidance, and connection with the Almighty. Meaning in this framework is not an individual perception or human discovery but a connection and attachment to a sacred reality. The meaning of life is something bestowed upon humans under the shadow of knowledge (*ma'rifah*), servitude (*'ubudiyyah*), proximity to God, and living based on the divine program (Ibn Babawayh 1404, 1: 238).

In Raḍawi teachings, meaning is achieved through knowledge of the cosmic order, understanding the positions of God and humanity, recognizing the inherent poverty and neediness of servants, reliance and trust (*tawakkul*) in the infinite power of the Truth, seeing one's own contentment in God's contentment, and moving with servitude towards divine goals... Therefore, human satisfaction, pleasure, and happiness are defined not around humans and personal experience but in relation to God and the acceptance of divine command. Such meaning is not relative and person-centric but sacred, God-centric, and based on a monotheistic ontology. It is through servitude and worship that humans attain the level of managing life (*tadbir*) and life becomes meaningful. Imam Reḍa (AS) said: "*Servitude ('ubudiyyah) is a jewel, the core of which is divinity (rububiyyah)*" (Ibn Babawayh 1983, 2: 27).

In positive psychology, meaning is evaluated through empirical reason, data analysis, and individual feelings. However, in the Raḍawi framework, revelation is the axis, and other perceptual and practical faculties attain functionality under the guidance of revelation. The perfection of theoretical intellect is achieved through contemplation and reflection in divine realms, and the perfection of practical intellect is attained through adherence to the revelatory program and observance of religious benefits and harms (*maṣālih wa mafāsīd šar'iyyah*): "*The intellect of a Muslim is not complete until ten characteristics are present in him: Good is expected from him and evil is safe from him.*" (al-Ḥarrānī 1404, 443) Furthermore, in the view of Raḍawi teachings, intellect (*'aql*) serves as a lamp and guide on the path towards the sacred truth. Theoretical and practical faculties, when employed under the light of servitude and divine guidance, lead humans to the intended purpose of life.

This approach stands in contrast to the prevalent humanism in Western

psychology, which defines humans as independent from the divine realm and oriented towards personal interests, benefits, pleasure, satisfaction, and goals. In positive psychology, finding meaning equates to experiencing pleasant feelings, individual purposefulness, and life satisfaction. However, in the Islamic perspective, meaning relates to self-knowledge, knowledge of God, and divine satisfaction. Meaning is realized not in experiential and sensory comfort but in inner growth, piety (*taqwā*), self-discovery, and connection to the divine purpose. This achievement, even if accompanied by suffering, hardship, and spiritual discipline, brings a spiritual pleasure that leads to the individual's ultimate contentment. This meaning differs profoundly from what is proposed in contemporary psychology concerning the attainment of individual pleasure.

6.2. Belief in the Hereafter and Eschatology

Another of the most significant differences between Raḍawi teachings and the concept of positive psychology is revealed in the realm of teleology (the study of ends or purposes). Positive psychology, in its component of satisfaction, primarily emphasizes worldly well-being and contentment, paying little attention to transcendental concepts such as divine satisfaction (*riḍā al-Ilāhī*), pleasure in the intermediary realm (*Barzah*) and the Resurrection (*Qiyāmah*), or ultimate felicity. The main end and goal in positive psychology is to enhance the quality of worldly life, increase feelings of satisfaction and pleasure, and reduce psychological suffering in this very world (Peterson & Seligman 2004, 3-4).

In contrast, in Raḍawi thought, true satisfaction and felicity (*sa'ādah*) are realized in the Hereafter. This world, with all its joys and sorrows in their entirety, is extremely trivial and insignificant compared to the grandeur and expanse of the Hereafter and the Resurrection. Suffering and difficulties of worldly life, within this framework, are minor in comparison to otherworldly loss and detriment. Imam Reḍa (AS) said: "O people! Know that the world is an abode of perishability (*fanā*'), and the Hereafter is an abode of permanence (*baqā*). So, take provision from your passageway for your permanent abode" (Ibn Babawayh 1983, 2: 267).

The world and all its effects and manifestations, from a religious perspective, are a temporary, transitory stage that must be used as an opportunity to prepare for eternal life in the Hereafter. Focusing on worldly pleasure and satisfaction as a goal, as proposed in positive psychology, distances a person from the primary objective and eternal felicity and blinds them to the truth. As stated in *Nahj al-Balagha*: "Whoever looks at it (the world) with an insightful eye, it enlightens him, and whoever looks towards it (as a goal), it blinds him" (Sermon 82).

Of course, lack of focus on the world does not mean abandoning or neglecting it. Rather, it means using the world for otherworldly objectives. The world, from the perspective of religious teachings, holds importance as a ground for preparing for felicity in the Hereafter. In the narrations of Imam Reḍa (AS), a deep connection between the material and spiritual worlds is also observed: "*He is not from us who abandons his world for his religion or his religion for his world.*" (al-Majlisī 1983, 78: 346) This indicates the importance of both aspects in life. "*Work for your worldly life as if you will live forever, and work for your Hereafter as if you will die tomorrow*" (al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī 1993, 12: 49).

However, in positive psychology, the primary focus is on worldly goals, presenting worldly satisfaction as an objective, improving well-being and happiness in the moment, and viewing the world as the destination. This school seeks to increase satisfaction with daily life and the flourishing of individual talents by focusing on current, worldly life.

6.3. Difference in the Status of Faith in Meaningfulness

Although positive psychology relies on faith as one of the components of meaningfulness, within positive psychology, meaning is examined as the outcome of positive experiences, personal choices, and subjective orientations (Frankl 2006, 161) Following this approach, faith is also reduced to a general concept, and its ultimate mission is to guide individuals towards a sense of well-being. As we observe, in this view, faith does not carry a specific ontological or sacred weight; it is not formed in connection with the Transcendent and does not transcend the level of personal life and experience.

In contrast, the teachings of Imam Reḍa (AS) interpret faith not only within the personal existential realm but as connected to a much vaster and more extensive transcendent reality. In Raḍawi teachings, faith is introduced as the spirit and essence of a meaningful life. Faith is not the outcome of a personal experience; rather, it is formed in connection with a sense of belonging to the Origin of existence and belief in His knowledge, power, lordship (*rububiyyah*), and other infinite attributes. Such heartfelt belief also secures and strengthens other components of meaningfulness, such as trust (*i'timād*), assurance (*iṭmi'nān*), reliance on God (*tawakkul*), contentment (*riḍā*), purposefulness, and so on, leading to cardiac tranquility (*sakīnah*) and the individual's connection with the Supreme Truth (*Ḥaqīqah 'Ulyā*). Meaning, tranquility (*sakīnah*), peace of heart (*tma'nīnah*), and even happiness is realized contingent upon faith in God and righteous action. The relationship between faith and action is reciprocal. Righteous action, based on this belief, strengthens faith, and strong faith

encourages the individual to perform more righteous deeds. From this perspective, a meaningful life without a creedal and ethical connection with the Creator of existence would be incomplete and superficial.

Imam Reḍa (AS) said: "*Faith (īmān) is recognition (ma'rifah) with the heart, affirmation (iqrār) with the tongue, and action ('amal) with the limbs.*" (al-Ḥarrānī 1404, 444) He also said: "*Faith has four pillars: Reliance on God (tawakkul 'alā Allah), acceptance of God's decree (riḍā bi-qaḍā' Allah), submission to God's command (taslīm li-amr Allah), and entrusting affairs to God (tafwīḍ ilā Allah).*" (al-Ḥarrānī 1404, 469) These pillars help an individual not only to preserve themselves in the face of life's challenges but also to grasp a deeper meaning of life.

Therefore, faith and righteous action are recognized in the Raḍawi perspective as necessary components for building a meaningful life, full of peace (*ṭuma'nīnah*) and contentment. Accordingly, a life without a connection to the Creator and without acting upon divine commands is considered incomplete and superficial. This approach emphasizes that true happiness and meaningfulness are attained when an individual lives with faith and righteous action, transcending purely worldly perspectives.

Contrary to positive psychology, which emphasizes the individual's inner power for meaning-making, Raḍawi teachings consider meaning not merely as the result of individual effort but as a divine bestowal (*mawhibah ilāhiyyah*) achieved under the shadow of faith, revelation, and servitude.

7. Conclusion

Today, positive psychology, by proposing certain components and emphasizing their innovation, has gained many adherents. By tracing these components in the teachings of Imam Reḍa (AS), we have demonstrated that this school aligns with and follows the very axes emphasized in religious teachings, particularly those of Imam Reḍa (AS). Key points of convergence include:

1. **The Necessity of Seeking Meaning:** The pursuit of meaning in life is considered crucial and essential, forming the spirit of human life and playing a vital role in preserving and enhancing the mental health of individuals and society. In religious and Raḍawi teachings, living without attention to life's meaning, its purpose, and ultimate destiny is considered animalistic and outside the human horizon. Positive psychology also emphasizes the importance and necessity of seeking meaning and the link between meaning and the physical and spiritual health of individuals and society.

2. **Centrality of Meaningfulness:** Meaningfulness, more than other components of happiness, is emphasized in positive psychology, with purposefulness, hope, and faith being its foundational elements. As we have seen, in Raḍawi teachings, knowledge of

the cosmic order, recognition of Divine Oneness, and faith are the sources of other components of meaningfulness and happiness, attained by following divine sources such as the prophets and Imams.

3. Suffering as Opportunity: Sufferings, tribulations, and calamities, which for many are sources of despair, frustration, and depression, are viewed in religious teachings as divine gifts and valuable opportunities for growth and perfection, granted only to certain chosen servants of God. In the meaning-centered perspective of positive psychology, sufferings are also seen as grounds for spiritual growth and the elevation of human personality.

However, serious differences also exist between the approach of positive psychology and religious/Raḍawi teachings:

1. Differing Foundations: Positive psychology originates from the Western scientific and humanistic tradition, influenced by empiricism, and organizes its discourse based on individual sensation and empirical data. Meaning in this approach is felt and discovered by the individual, dependent on personal experience, free choice, and inner guidance. In contrast, Raḍawi teachings emphasize the primacy of revelation and intellect. Happiness, contentment, purposefulness, and other components of life's meaning all take shape in the light of the Truth (*Haqq*), based on divine revelation, prophetic guidance, and through connection and attachment to the Almighty.

2. Differing Teleology (Ultimate Ends): From a teleological perspective, positive psychology, in its component of satisfaction, primarily emphasizes worldly well-being and contentment, paying little attention to transcendental concepts such as divine satisfaction, pleasure in the intermediary realm (*Barzah*) and Resurrection, or ultimate felicity. In Raḍawi thought, however, true satisfaction, pleasure, and felicity are realized in the Hereafter.

3. Differing Conceptions of Faith: In positive psychology, faith is reduced to a general concept, and its ultimate mission is to guide individuals towards a sense of well-being. In this view, faith lacks a specific ontological and sacred weight. Conversely, Raḍawi teachings interpret faith not only within the personal existential realm but as connected to a much vaster transcendent reality. Faith is formed in connection with a sense of belonging to the Origin of existence and belief in His knowledge, power, lordship, and other infinite attributes. This heartfelt belief secures and strengthens other components of meaningfulness such as trust, assurance, reliance on God, contentment, and purposefulness.

In summary, while positive psychology offers valuable insights into fostering well-being and meaning from a secular, experiential framework, the teachings of Imam

Reḍa (AS) present a comprehensive, transcendent, and divinely oriented paradigm. The latter provides a deeper ontological foundation, an eternal perspective, and a sacred conception of faith that frames life's meaning within the ultimate context of servitude to God and the everlasting Hereafter. Recognizing both the convergences and the fundamental divergences allows for a more nuanced understanding of human flourishing, where contemporary psychological insights can be enriched and completed by the profound depths of revealed wisdom.

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