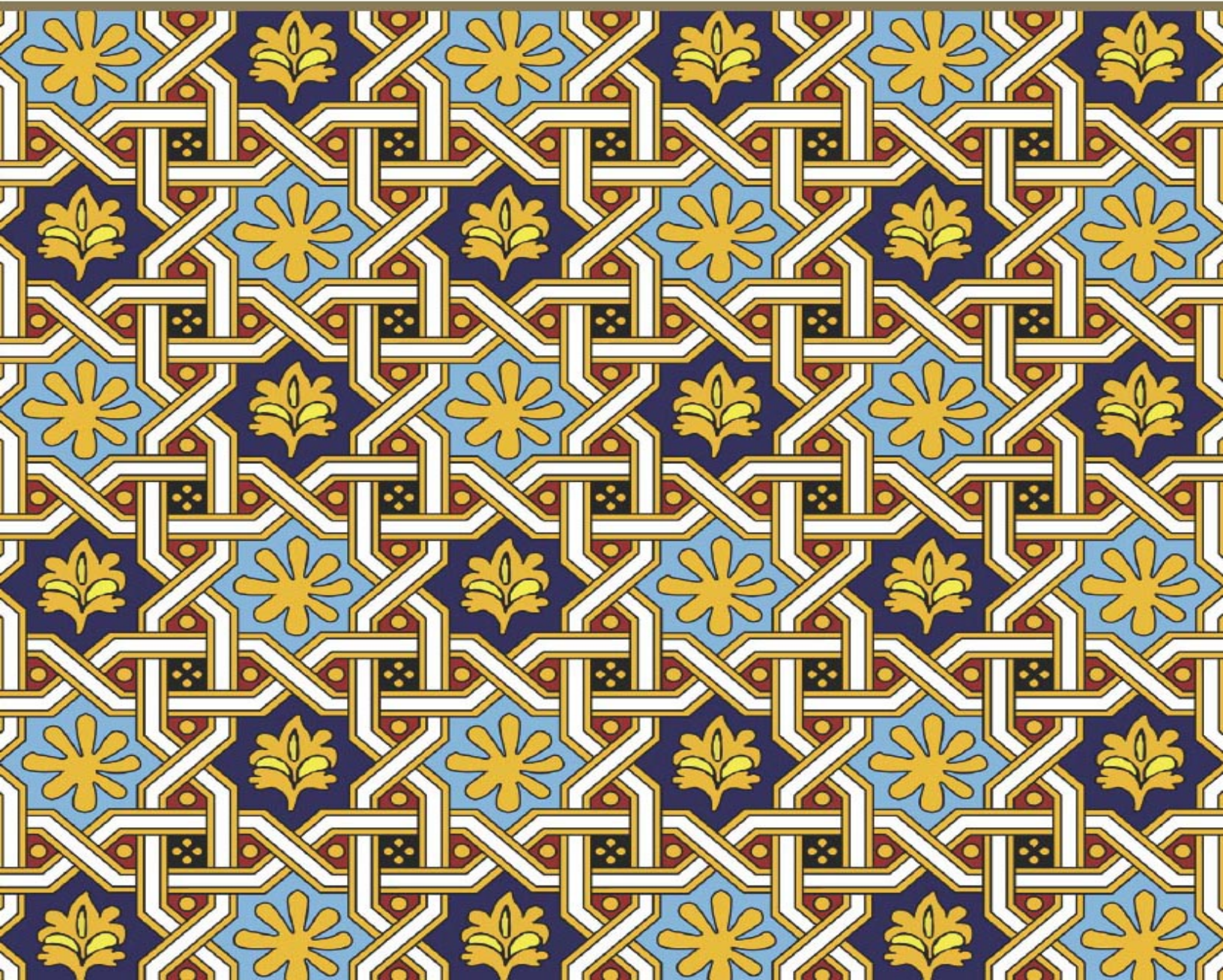


*A Thinking Person's  
Guide to the*  
**TRULY HAPPY LIFE**

H.R.H. PRINCE GHAZI BIN MUHAMMAD

Foreword by Professor Sir Iain Torrance



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## *Introduction*



### A THINKING PERSON'S GUIDES

By the grace of God, this is the third book of the series of *A Thinking Person's Guides*. This series is aimed to provide brief, clear philosophical primers about a number of important topics that concern every human being, based on the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The series also aims to be a sensitive guide to what other religions and philosophies have written on these topics, in order to present a complete picture of each topic. People do not have time to do all the reading themselves—and in fact it takes years to do, and usually require a professional academic guide to help them through the topic—so this series aims to do all the academic and historical work for them. All that the reader is required to do is to be willing to think objectively a bit. Finally, in order to be accessible to everyone, the work contains no footnotes or endnotes and as little technical jargon as possible.

### ISLAM AND THE HAPPY LIFE

From Socrates to Seneca; from St. Augustine of Hippo to Lord Bertrand Russell; and from David Hume to the Harvard Grant Study, various leading Classical, Christian and post-Christian

Western philosophers, thinkers, writers and researchers have thought and written about the questions of human life and happiness—and what it takes to lead a happy life. Indeed, since the 2012 UN High Level Meeting on Happiness and Well-being, the UN commissions an annual report on relative national happiness (as defined by them), and there is even now a ‘UN International Day of Happiness’ (March 20<sup>th</sup> of every year). Yet all this pondering seems to have had very little influence *from*—or *on*—the great civilization of Islam. This is surprising since, as is generally acknowledged, serious Western philosophy made a 500-year detour into the Islamic World during the so-called ‘Dark Ages’. It is more surprising considering that Islam is the second largest religion in history (after Christianity) with almost 2 billion adherents today. And it is even more surprising because Islam’s sacred ‘texts’—the Qur’an and the sayings (known as the ‘*hadith*’, pl.: ‘*ahadith*’) and customary actions (known as the ‘*sunnah*’) of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ—give very clear answers to these questions. As will later be seen and discussed, the Qur’an shows the truly happy life in Islam as being the same as the ‘good life’, the ‘spiritual life’, ‘eternal life’ and even ‘Beatitude’ itself. No doubt Islamic civilization’s basing its answers to these questions strictly on the Qur’an and *ahadith*, insulated it from the Western tradition (and *vice versa*). But perhaps for that very same reason, Islam’s view on what it takes to live a truly happy life is as startling and refreshing today as it was during the Revelation of the Qur’an, in seventh century Arabia.

## CONTENT AND STRUCTURE OF THIS WORK

Obviously in a short work like this one, Islam’s full view on what it takes to live a truly happy life cannot be fully covered here. Literally millions of texts and commentaries on the Qur’an and *ahadith* have been written over the course of Islamic history about Islamic life, true happiness and spirituality, and only their surface can be scratched here. Nevertheless, what follows is a basic sketch of life

and happiness and what they entail starting with their definitions from the Qur'an and the *ahadith*.

In philosophy, definitions are critical in order to understand things properly, and indeed, much of ancient and scholastic philosophy was about defining terms and ideas. Socrates says (in Plato's *Phaedrus*, 277b)—we need 'to learn how to define it as such . . . dividing it until [we] reach something indivisible'. Then it can be seen 'backwards and forwards simultaneously' (Plato, *Cratylus*, 428d). Or, in other words, as Albert Einstein supposedly said, 'If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough'.

As can be seen from the contents page, this work is divided into two halves that mirror and parallel each other, starting with the negations and then the definitions of life and happiness, respectively. Then it explains these definitions systematically starting from the other five circumstantial questions of the English language: 'why', 'when', 'where', 'how' and 'who'. These will deal with *existential*, *circumstantial*, *agential*, *affective* and *anthropological* aspects of life and happiness respectively. There are many citations in the text particularly from the Qur'an (presented in italics, with both the chapter names and numbers, and verse numbers, in brackets) and the *ahadith*—and occasionally from poetry; this is quite usual in Islamic writings—but references are placed in the text itself. After all, the truly happy life is, as will be seen God willing, itself accessible to everyone.



*Part One*



**LIFE**

## A. WHAT IS NOT LIFE?



### HUMAN LIFE

By ‘life’ in this work we mean ‘life lived by human beings’, and so ‘human life’. So even though the definition of life that we will later give applies to all forms of life, we are concerned here only with human life. But even with human life, there is a difference, in the Qur’an, between life *in* the world, and life *of* the world (i.e. life that is too ‘worldly’). Now obviously life *in* the world is immeasurably precious because it is a unique opportunity for goodness and righteous deeds (and these endure eternally), but the life *of* the world is in itself ultimately pointless. In the Qur’an, God gives the following parable of the two kinds of life:

*And strike for them the similitude of the life of this world as water which We send down out from the heaven, and the vegetation of the earth mingles with it, and it then becomes chaff, scattered by the winds. And God is Omnipotent over all things. / Wealth and children are an adornment of the life of this world. But the enduring things, the righteous deeds—[these] are better with your Lord for reward and better in [respect of] hope. (Al-Kahf, 18:45–46)*

### TRUE HUMAN LIFE

As regards ‘positive’ life, the word ‘True Life’ (*‘al-Hayyawan’*) is mentioned only once in the Qur’an, and it is in the context of paradise:

*And the life of this world is nothing but diversion and play. But surely the Abode of the Hereafter is indeed the [True] Life (‘al-Hayyawan’), if they only knew. (Al-‘Ankabut, 29:64)*

Evidently, however, the life in the world that leads to paradise can be seen as part of it.

### FALSE HUMAN LIFE

By contrast, the life of the world (*‘al-hayat al-dunya’*) is mentioned around 75 times in the Qur’an, at least 70 of them in a negative context. It is never seen as ‘real’ life, but rather as false and sub-human life, and a beastly existence. God says in the Qur’an (referring to religious hypocrites and disbelievers):

*Surely the worst of beasts in God’s sight are those who are deaf and dumb, those who do not understand. (Al-An‘am, 8:22)*

*Surely the worst of beasts in God’s sight are the ungrateful who will not believe, (Al-An‘am, 8:55)*

The reason they are subhuman is precisely because they do not use their human intellect (*‘aql*) or (spiritual) hearts (*‘qulub’*), these being—as will later be discussed—precisely what sets them apart from animals in the first place. God says in the Qur’an:

*. . . They have hearts, with which they do not understand, and they have eyes with which they do not perceive, and they have ears with which they do not hear. These, they are like cattle—*

*nay, rather they are further astray. These—they are the heedless.*  
(Al-A‘raf, 7:179)

Because they are heedless of God and their true selves, like animals they are led by their own caprices and desires—to the extent of effectively *worshipping* these desires. God says in the Qur’an:

*Have you seen him who has taken as his god his own desire? Will you be a guardian over him? / Or do you suppose that most of them listen or comprehend? They are but as the cattle—nay, but they are further astray from the way.* (Al-Furqan, 25:43–44)

Comparing heedless people following their own caprices and desires to cattle may sound harsh to modern people like us that are almost trained by consumer societies to immediately gratify our impulses, but in fact it is something common to many religions, and indeed to many ancient philosophies. It suffices here to quote Socrates’ speech before he is condemned to death:

‘For a human the unexamined life is actually not worth living’. (Plato, *Apology*, 38a)

Moreover, the subhuman existence of constant, blind, impulsive self-gratification naturally leads to perdition. God says in the Qur’an:

*. . . As for those who disbelieve, they take their enjoyment and eat as the cattle eat; and the Fire will be their habitation.*  
(Muhammad, 47:12)



THE CONTENT OF FALSE HUMAN LIFE

The futile content of worldly life is further specified in the following single but comprehensive verse in the Qur'an:

*Bear in mind that the life of this world is merely play, diversion, adornment, mutual boasting and rivalry in wealth and children. It is like plants that spring up after the rain: their growth at first delights the sowers, but then they wither away, and you see them turn yellow; then they become chaff. And in the next life there is severe punishment, and forgiveness from God—and Beatitude. The life of this world is only the pleasure of delusion. (Al-Hadid, 57:20)*

So worldly life has five (progressively worse) levels: (1) *play*; (2) *diversion*; (3) *adornment*; (4) *mutual boasting*; and (5) *rivalry in wealth and children*. These can be understood as follows:

1. 'Play' ('*la'ibun*' in Arabic) is necessary, natural and neutral. It is how children learn, and how adults relax. But when it interferes with something important and serious, it can become an obstacle.

2. 'Diversion' ('*lahwun*' in Arabic) is a momentary lapse in focus and concentration; it is a kind of unintended dereliction of duty.

3. 'Adornment' ('*zinatun*' in Arabic) implies a misplaced passion for something: loving something you should not really be loving or loving something for a wrong or superficial reason. In other words, it implies a 'lust' for external beauty and for worldly life at the expense of loving internal beauty (which is virtue and goodness of heart). Elsewhere in the Qur'an, God says:

*Adorned for mankind is love of lusts—of women, children, stored-up heaps of gold and silver, horses of mark, cattle, and tillage. That is the pleasure of the life of this world; but God—with Him is the most excellent abode. (Aal 'Imran, 3:14)*



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