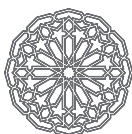




*A Thinking Person's Guide to*  
**OUR TIMES**



H. R. H. PRINCE  
GHAZI BIN MUHAMMAD



*White Thread*  
P R E S S



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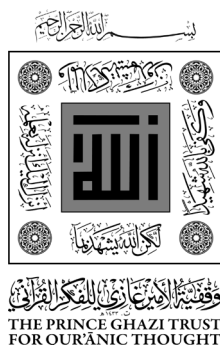
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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ  
وَالصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَى خَاتَمِ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ وَالْمُرْسَلِينَ

## *A Thinking Person's Guides*



By the grace of God, this is the fourth book in the *A Thinking Person's Guides* and *A Tentative Guides* series. This series aims to provide brief, clear philosophical primers about a number of important topics that concern every human being, based on the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The difference between the two series titles is that *A Thinking Person's Guides* are based on general topics of philosophy, whereas the *A Tentative Guides* have to do with particular topics of Qur'an, *hadith*, doctrine and theology. As these topics require greater caution—because they have more direct applications, being more devotional and contemplative—the word '*tentative*' has been adopted in order to claim no decisive authority in writing them. The whole 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 so, 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 works contain no footnotes or endnotes and as little technical jargon as possible.

## *About the Author*



H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal of Jordan (b. 1966 CE) was educated at Harrow School, UK; received his BA summa cum laude from Princeton University, NJ, USA; his first PhD from Trinity College, Cambridge University, UK, and his second PhD from Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt. He is a professor of Islamic Philosophy and his book *Love in the Holy Qur'an* has been widely acclaimed, has gone into eight editions and has been translated into a number of languages. He also serves as Chief Advisor for Religious and Cultural Affairs to H.M. King Abdullah II ibn Al-Hussein of Jordan.



# Foreword



BY HAMZA YUSUF HANSON

We live in an age of accelerated change and global upheavals, including myriad revolutions, uprisings, and uncivil wars across the world, all of which have produced immense human suffering and political instability. Our recent history has been littered with the failed attempts of communists, fascists, neo-conservatives, and Islamists to remake the world in their idealized images. Much of this was driven by the efforts of people who believe that we must change the conditions of the world in order to improve our own conditions as individuals. This, they posit, will make us happy and save our souls. That view, however delectable and however well-intentioned, is hubristic in nature and appeals to our vanity, and it comes directly from the devil: “For God knows that when you eat from [the tree], your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis, 3:5). That demonic lie—that by changing the conditions of our world we will finally be happy and in control of our lives—veils the reality that happiness is only attainable once we reject the devil and rule our own souls, which then enables us to submit fully to God, in Whom alone we find peace and tranquility.

Thankfully, Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, an accomplished and erudite philosopher and author, has written this guidebook which starts at the right place: the individual self. While chronicling the troubles of our times—which have reached the current level of trial and tribulation from what our “own hands have wrought” (*Al-Shura*,



42:30)—this book points to a pathway out of the morass, not collectively but individually, through a regimen of self-discipline. Too many people want to change the world, yet those very people are often completely incapable of self-maintenance, of resisting temptations—whether it be a caloric cake, a cancer-causing cigarette, or the alluring prattle of most human conversation. History’s most dangerous characters have been those literally hell-bent on changing the world even as they neglected their own souls. Such characters should serve as cautionary tales.

The Qur’an asks us to look inward at ourselves, to be introspective, both individually and collectively. The Qur’an states, “Surely God does not change the conditions of a people until they change what is in themselves” (*Al-Ra’d*, 13:11). In another verse, we are reminded, “God will not remove a blessing among a people until they change [from better to worse]” (*Al-Anfal*, 8:53). The current zeitgeist, on the other hand, leans towards extroversion, towards outrage over injustice and oppression—much of it driven by a sincere desire to alleviate suffering among the less fortunate and the downtrodden—and towards a relentless charge up the hill against the powers that be as a way to improve our conditions. The Qur’an, however, is clear that changing the world’s conditions remains God’s domain; our concerns should primarily focus on our own selves and on those near and dear to us. The Qur’an states, “O you who believe, save yourselves and your family from a Fire whose fuel is men and stones” (*Al-Tahrim*, 66:6). A prophetic tradition reminds us, “Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you is responsible only for his own flock” (*Bukhari; Muslim*). And perhaps most importantly, “From the beauty of a man’s submission to God: minding one’s own business.”



In this book, Prince Ghazi reveals to us how bad things are—and they are bad enough that future generations may be reduced to eating jellyfish and crickets for sustenance—and he calls us to not despair or get depressed, which are, as Heidegger astutely pointed out, expres-

sions of profound self-indulgence. Prince Ghazi points us instead to actual practices that can make a difference in our lives. We must begin by confronting questions about ourselves: Why do we find it so difficult to deal with reality, especially tragedies and tribulations, big and small, which are bound to inflict us? Why are we so quick to critique others but not ourselves? Why do we constantly crave distractions and frivolities? Why do we strive to acquire and possess the stuff of the world that we know will eventually come to naught?

The great subject of our most brilliant minds was never the material world, despite our modern obsession with materiality—the great subject always hides in plain sight; it reveals itself in every instant. It is found in the story of the older fish passing by two young fish and asking them, “How’s the water?” After swimming past the older fish, one of the two says to the other, “What is water?” In the same way, God remains hidden in plain sight, with every moment revealing acts and attributes that dazzle, bewilder, and excite with an ineffable ecstasy those who live in the wonder of being, in the presence of the Divine. If we can restrain our baser appetites, discipline our desires, keep our self-obsessions and ego in check, we might begin to cultivate the sense of wonder and awe, to see clearly the signs of the Divine all around us.

Diving deeply into tradition—*real* tradition—reveals to the diver pearls and coral of immense beauty and worth. Over time, one comes to understand, through study of the countless experiences of the greatest minds of human history—Chinese, European, Indian, African, or Arab; Jew or Gentile; Muslim or Christian—that the world has certain features permanently imbedded in its DNA. History gives us a crystal ball that can show us the future by revealing the repeated patterns of the past; classical literature and poetry have much wisdom to impart to us about the world. In reading Shakespeare, one finds every archetype and human quality, whether noble or base: the contented Duke Senior, exiled to the Forest of Arden, finds “tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything,” while the ambitious and murder-