

Playing the Game of Life by Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda

Life is a series of experiences. If you make life a war, it will be you against the world. Therefore, make life a game, and play it well.

Let us take the game of cricket, a popular game in India, as an analogy for the game of Life. Cricket is played on a field with a pitch—the playing area between the bowler and the batsman—in the center and three stumps on both ends. The bowler bowls (throws) the balls, which the batsman tries to hit, and the fielders try to get the batsman out. Around the field and on bleachers there are many spectators—some who are encouraging and others who are hostile.

Under such circumstances, how can the batsman be successful in his goal of hitting the ball and obtaining a run?

- He must be fearless, and not get intimidated by the bowler and the fielders.
- He must know how to deal with all styles of bowling. If he knows how to handle only one type of throw, then he will easily be bowled “out.”
- He must be alert constantly.
- He must maintain his balance—physically and emotionally—and not get excited, especially at crucial moments or when he is about to score a century (100 runs).
- He must learn to face a hostile crowd with courage and not get overpowered by the tactics of the opposing team.
- His conduct must be impeccable because all the spectators around the field are watching. People are also viewing the game on television, listening to the commentary on the radio, or will be reading about the game in tomorrow’s headlines. When one man is making a play, the eyes of the entire nation are on him. With one act of misconduct, not only does he gain ill repute, but so does his entire team and nation.

If we were to look at our lives like a cricket match . . .

Our individual field may be limited to our home, school, or office. But in whatever field we play, we will be tested. There may be many people trying to pull us down and there be many trying to encourage us. Where we turn and how we respond will be determining factors in our win or loss.

We are confronted with several different bowling styles or types of problems in life—medical, professional, financial, familial, social, political, and so forth. If we specialize in one field, as in being a doctor who can solve medical problems, we might not know what to do when problems in other areas arise. Often a specialist in one field is able to deal with problems in his or her area only, and is stumped when situations arise in other areas.

Right Discrimination

Whether it is loss of health, wealth, or an emotional disturbance, we must know how to face all situations. The difficulty is that often we try to face the world with one limited, specialized batting technique in the form of our university degree. But what is the universal batting technique we should use to play all aspects of the game of life? It is the batting strategy of right discrimination. Limited, specialized knowledge we may have, but right discrimination or understanding is different. Our own knowledge fails us because the discrimination of how and where to use our knowledge is often absent.

Why is discrimination needed? Three friends went abroad for special studies and met after five years. The first one had learned how to piece a dead body together. The second one learned how to give life to the dead body. The third had studied about life in general. It so happens that the three friends came across a dead tiger that had been cut into pieces by a hunter. The first friend put the pieces together and asked the second friend to give the tiger life. The third friend cautioned them against it. When they refused to listen, he climbed up a tree for safety. As soon as the second friend gave life to the tiger, the tiger killed them both. In effect, they had been killed by their own knowledge. They had no discrimination as to where and when to use their knowledge even after being advised by their friend!

True discrimination is rare. Swami Vivekananda has said, "The most uncommon thing in the world is common sense." Therefore, we find that one particular, specialized university degree does not help us with the many complexities of the actual game of life. We must have that knowledge by which we can understand all types of situations and do our best when facing various types of problems. In the *Mahabharata*, Lord Krishna had to face many adversities, but he faced them all with a smile and knew exactly what to do each time.

A Sportsman's Spirit

Cricket is played with three stumps on both ends of the pitch. In the game of life, the three stumps are the body, mind, and intellect. These are different from the faculty of discrimination, which is the batting strategy. Often when we face a difficult situation, we become physically weakened, emotionally upset, intellectually confused. In such a case, if all the three stumps of body, mind, and intellect are down. And we, as batsmen, are out of the game, walking back to the benches in the pavilion. Accordingly, we need to learn to stand in the field fearlessly, bat with the proper discrimination, and protect our physical, mental, and intellectual stumps from any and all disturbing situations.

It doesn't matter if our game of life is short and we get out quickly. In next inning, the next lifetime, we can learn and play better so that we are never worried or anxious on the field of life. This, of course, doesn't mean that we can take anything for granted. We must be ever alert, just as an army is on alert even in peacetime.

In almost any game, there are situations when both the teams have to surrender to the umpire, referee, or judge for a decision. Both teams must have full faith in this umpire; otherwise his decision will not be accepted. In life, the ultimate umpire is God. We must have full faith in Him

and surrender to His decisions. We may have various other umpires—mothers, fathers, teachers—who advise and guide us through tough times.

Lakshmana did not agree with Bhagavān Ramachandra-ji on many occasions, but for him, the final umpire was always Bhagavān. Anything He said, Lakshmana would accept. Arjuna wanted to run away from the battlefield, but he first asked Lord Krishna what he should do. This was his sole saving grace, the best thing Arjuna could have done.

Many times in the game of life, events occur wherein we feel we have been cheated or that we are 100% right and everyone else is wrong. Pujya Swami Rama Tirtha once said, “In life we get what we deserve, and not what we desire.” If we desire it and we deserve it, only then will we get it. Therefore, always have full faith that we will get what we deserve, that the Lord is not partial. He does not play favorites. Faith is needed to accept that whatever happens is the right thing for us.

It is also said, he who serves, deserves. What comes to us will always be proper and just and by knowing this, “Whatever happens, we gain from it.” Although we may not immediately understand the gain, we have to learn from life’s myriad experiences and have faith in the results and in the goodness of God.

After a puja, we take without complaints whatever is distributed as prasād, big or small. Be it a flower, fruit, coconut, sandalwood, or sacred ash—we accept it with gratitude. In life also, whatever we get comes from the Lord, so we should accept it as prasād. Just take it—whether it seems to be good or bad at the time. Have faith that the Lord governs the entire creation. Strive to do your best and accept with joy whatever comes your way.

Thus, play the game of Life. Your life is yours alone to live. You have no choice but to live it. There is no running away. Therefore, no matter what you may experience, play with a sportsman’s spirit so that in the end, your life is a success.

The highest purpose in life is to serve others as service to God. The most intelligent method of performing such service provides maximum benefit to others and oneself. Live your life in such a way that you enjoy what has been given to you, that others derive inspiration from your way of life. In this is joy and joy alone. This is inspired living.