

A Game of Cards

by A Soule

It's often said that the key to success is knowing what to do and when; and if we are honest, we all struggle with that. Most of us go through life trying to make the best guesses, hoping those choices work out well in the end. And when we look back on what and when we did things, we often wish we knew then what we know now. But life is pretty much a one way street, you can't go back in time; you know what you know at a point in time and make decisions with that as best you can.

However, the desire to explain the why and how of life has always been there, and despite the plethora of philosophical explanations already out there, a new approach always arouses curiosity. An interesting approach doing its rounds lately is that of understanding life in terms of a game of poker - yes a game of cards.

Poker is seen as a close comparison with how people deal with life - in areas where we are in control and where we are not, and how we compromise with what we cannot control. Players need to make the best decision based on what they think the cards others hold and how they would play. You play with the understanding that you will never have complete information, and that however well you make your decisions, you could still lose. Whilst a lot depends on the cards you get, there also remains the chance element, that despite the cards you hold, you could still win as a result of others making bad decisions – circumstances can change and everything stacks up in your favour.

The chance element, coincidence or whatever you wish to call it is a well acknowledged factor in the way things happen in life. A lot of autobiographies of actors and directors talk about accidentally being in the right place or the right time, meeting someone by chance who put them in touch with someone, and the rest being history. Obviously this does not discount the fact that in most cases they were extremely talented and had an obsessive determination to make it big; but chance too played a vital part in where they ended up eventually. And quite often, people looking back on their lives also seem to see some kind of a plan in the way life went for them; chance happenings which resulted in one thing leading to another, and things had to happen in that way only to end up in a certain way.

If you were to think of life moving to a pre-set plan out there; the problem remains that you still need to make specific choices on the basis of incomplete information. Plato, the ancient Greek philosopher at one point in his writings mentions that the human condition is similar to prisoners in a cave who perceive mere shadows at play as reality; for that is all they can see from where they are.

It is difficult to understand what reality or truth is philosophically, but such an abstraction can hold the mind in its thrall. Incidentally, this was something which played on Pilate's mind too when he asked Jesus, 'what is truth?', little knowing that he stood before the embodiment of truth; 'I am the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14:6).

As a Christian, this in its concreteness is the point at which the quest for truth and reality ends – in the person of Jesus as God on earth, for what he taught and his love for humanity. The God who has always loved us, known us from when we were in our mother's womb. We don't know what lies ahead but God does and trust in His love and mercy is what gives us peace and assuredness.

There is though no getting away from the responsibility we bear for taking decisions as a consequence of the free will we have. One can't possibly go through life with eyes shut to the consequences of the decisions one takes. You would make those decisions as intelligibly as possible using your skills, talents and opportunities for acquiring knowledge as gifts of God. But it is in the assurance of God's love that we make our choices, asking Him to guide us in our decisions, trusting that He knows what's best for us, even if we think we want something completely different.