

23rd June 2020

Chance

“Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard.”
“A throw of the dice will never eliminate chance.”

Stéphane Mallarmé, Title of poem

My grandson, Cameron, is teaching me to play *Yahtzee* – on-line! It’s a delight to be introduced to the subtleties of a strategy game by the wisdom and experience of an eight-year-old. I say strategy, because like many pastimes, from chess to *Monopoly*, whist to poker, there are elements in *Yahtzee* of choice and decisions. But because the game involves five dice, it’s based on chance. I won’t go into the rules and tactics here. Suffice to say, each player throws their dice and decides what to do with the scores they produce. But you can’t control the way the dice fall. To quote the title of Mallarmé’s poem, “A throw of the dice will never eliminate chance”. Indeed, exactly the opposite is true. The dice remind us that a game such as *Yahtzee* is built on random chance.

Through all our lives we live with both control and chance. We can control, for example, how to avoid the risk of Covid-19: face-masks; social-distancing; hand-washing; cleaning surfaces; isolating. But we’re not in control of everything. As with the beginnings of this pandemic, we are victims of chance happenings in our world all the time. And, painful though it is, we have no control over when a loved one will die. We like to *think* we’re in control of our own strategy, tactics and choices. But, again and again, we have to deal with random chance.

The deal, therefore, as Cameron is teaching me, is to work with the balance between chance and choice. We can gain experience – as he already knows with *Yahtzee* – and we can get better at it over time – as he knows too. But we must work on what’s important in order to make the best choices and cope with the outcomes when chance comes along.

Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have another game of *Yahtzee* to deal with and another opportunity to balance chance and choice with my increasingly experienced and ever-wise grandson.

A prayer for today

Lord, when I have control of my life, guide me to make the right decisions.

When I have to live with chance, help me to cope with the outcomes. Amen.

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