

The World as a Gym

How Does the World Help Us to Grow?

The World as a Gym: The Key to Our Development

Have you ever heard that the world is like a powerful gym? What is your opinion about the world? Do you accept the world as a gym and formally join it? We all have heard lots of interpretations of the world; for example, “The world is the farm of the hereafter,”¹ or the world is like a stopover or a caravanserai,² and we should not be attached to it. But considering the world as a gym is a strange and thought-provoking interpretation of the world. Perhaps many of us have not heard that before. How can the world be really like a gym that makes us grow stronger? What kind of growth does this gym foster in us? Although we examined this topic in the previous lesson, we intend to delve a little deeper into the idea of the world as a gym.

It is certain that the concept of the world as a gym has nothing to do with our body because there are different types of fitness clubs and bodybuilding gyms; anyone who is interested and physically able can join them. However, the world is a gym for everyone, regardless of their physical conditions, even for those who are seriously ill or are born with

¹ . Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

² . Caravanserais were roadside inns along major trade routes like ancient Silk Road

severe physical disabilities. But if the gym of the world does not train our bodies, what is it for?

Before discussing the topic of the world as a gym, let us first delve into the essence and dimensions of our own existence and then clarify what kind of growth this club is supposed to create in us. As we mentioned in previous lessons, [the human being has five existential dimensions](#). The human or [supra-rational dimension](#) of our existence is the divine Spirit that has been breathed into us; it is eternal and everlasting. Because God is always alive and never dies, this dimension of our existence will always be alive. This dimension is our true self, and it will return to God after our *wafat*.³ In fact, the world as a gym is also related to this dimension of our existence. It means the world makes our soul grow and develop.

Now the following questions arise: How can the world be a gym which grows our soul? Who is the coach of this gym? What will happen to us if we do not recognize this gym and its coach? We are going to answer these questions in this lesson.

The world, a Gym for Nurturing the Human Being

We have come to the world to acquire divine names and attributes in order to become God's deputy.⁴ Of course, our human dimension or our soul potentially possesses all the divine names and attributes, but we must face the challenges and contradictions of the world so that we can

³ . For more information on *wafat*, see "What Does *Wafat* Mean? Do We Experience *Wafat*, or Do We Die?"

⁴ . "I am about to place a deputy on earth," (Quran, 2:30)

actualize these divine names and attributes; in other words, it is only through facing hardships and tests of life in the gym of the world that we can actualize divine names. For example, we can become beneficent, patient, forgiving, grateful, *Sattar*,⁵ generous, and honorable. The number of the divine names we acquire and the degree of our similarity to God determine the level of our true assets.

Therefore, the idea of the world as a gym means that we acquire divine names, grow, gain spiritual strength, and reach our true status, i.e., being the deputy of God, by going through challenges and tests of life. In fact, we can say that the world is a gym for nurturing human beings.

Now another question arises: “Who is our coach in this gym?”

Our Coach in the Gym of the World

It is obvious that any gym needs to have a coach. One of the names of God is *Rabb*, which means the Lord and the Educator or Mentor. This name identifies our coach. God is the Coach in the gym of the world. According to the characteristics and conditions of our lives, He assigns some tests and exercises to make us grow and be trained.

In a sports gym, the goal of a trainee is to become similar to his coach and acquire his abilities. The students follow all the instructions of their coach to become similar to him, and the coach devises plans for what his trainees should do and even for their dead time. What would you do if

⁵ . The Concealer of defects

you join a gym whose coach gives you neither a special diet nor exercises beyond your ability? What would you think of this coach if he has you play against someone weaker in a practice game or playfully spars with you without being serious? You will never achieve your goal with such a coach if you aim to become an outstanding athlete because rigorous training, long-term training camps, and serious practice games all are inseparable parts of a person's plan to become a sports champion.

Our goal in the gym of the world is also to become similar to our Coach. Just like the members of a gym, we must obey our Coach in order to gain strength and become similar to Him; without following the instructions of our Coach, we will never become similar to Him. All our decisions, relationships, behaviors, and thoughts should be aligned with our Coach, and we must obey Him completely. Only in this way, can we achieve our goal and exit the world with success.

So all the hardships we experience in our lives are a practice to become similar to our Coach and acquire His attributes. These hardships are like the challenges, exercises, and practice games that a sports coach arranges for his students because it is impossible to become a champion without doing the hard work.

Being rich or poor, healthy or sick, superior or subordinate, married or single, having children or not, being beautiful or not all are trials and afflictions of life that provide the conditions for our growth. But whether we grow or not depends on the extent of our obedience to our Coach in the approach we take in dealing with these matters. A person may adopt

a wrong approach to wealth, while a poor person may become God's deputy, or vice versa. What matters is that each of us should be obedient to our Coach in our specific life circumstances.

Peace and Vitality: the Outcomes of Regarding the World as a Gym

A person who accepts the concept of the world as a gym patiently endures the hardships of life. He never loses his inner peace and happiness in any situation because he sees these hardships as practices which make him stronger and more similar to God day by day, just as we eagerly join a gym and patiently endure all the hard exercises given to us by our coach to acquire proficiency and become like our coach. It is interesting that even for joining the gym and enduring hardships, we pay enrollment fee because we believe that these hard exercises are to our own benefit.

In contrast, someone who does not know his human truth does not acknowledge the world as a gym; as a result, he does not believe that God is his Coach. Such a person cannot endure the hardships and challenges of life, and ups and downs of life make him anxious, sad, depressed, hateful, and angry. For example, he feels shattered when facing hardships like losing loved ones, financial bankruptcy, and serious illnesses because he sees no convincing reason to endure these them, and he considers them as obstacles that disturb his comfort. Such a person is like a fetus who considers the development of his organs and body parts painful, cumbersome, and unnecessary for his life in the

womb because he does not believe the world beyond the mother's womb.

In this article, we first discussed the human dimension or the human soul that is eternal and everlasting. We stated that the world is like a gym for the growth and development of our soul. We discussed that God is our coach in the world, and He trains and tests us according to the conditions of our lives. Through facing divine trials and afflictions in the gym of the world, we acquire divine names and attributes and become similar to our Coach, that is, God. Of course, this will happen if we act in accordance with His instructions and submit to Him. This way, no hardships or tragedies can take away our inner peace and happiness because we see all of them as the means for our growth in the womb of the world.

We would appreciate your thoughts and feedback on the concept of the world as a gym.