



AFRICA-FRIDAY REFLECTIONS

"AFROCENTRIC THOUGHT"



ON YOUR MARKS, GET SET, GO! THE SHOW MUST GO ON..

TIEGO NWOKORO.

The Tokyo Games finally got off the blocks after a four-hour opening ceremony extravaganza, with an audience of mostly empty seats. Outside of the stadium though, spectators were taking pictures of the fireworks lighting up the sky. Eyeballs all over the world are guaranteed to be glued to this event as the magic unfolds day after day. What a way to take a break from all the heaviness we have been experiencing in recent times.

Rough times have hit countries the world over and life as we have come to know it may never be our reality again.

An event such as the Olympic Games opening ceremony looks nothing like we have witnessed in the past. One would never have imagined an opening ceremony playing out to an empty stadium and masked-out athletes, but this is our reality amidst the worst pandemic in the history of humanity.

Japan is however demonstrating that in the midst of challenges, the human spirit can rise above circumstances and face the music, notwithstanding there is a thin line between courage and folly.

Without a doubt, COVID-19 is a major threat to the successful hosting of the games, and public sentiment in Japan is largely for the games to be cancelled, given the rising numbers in cases and subsequent deaths. Alas the final decision rests with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) whether the show must go on or not. And “go on” they elected. If you follow the money, it is easy to understand why the IOC marched on with the Tokyo Olympics despite Japan being plunged into another hard lockdown. The fans are at home glued to their televisions already and the sale of broadcast rights for the Olympic Games alone rake in billions in revenue for the organisers.

As a former school athlete and all round sporting enthusiast, I have always loved the spectacle of the Olympic Games and appreciated the incredible athleticism, competition and passion displayed by athletes and teams from a pure sports perspective. For sure this year's games are quite muted, and apart from incredible performances displayed by individual

athletes and teams, many aspects of the Olympic Games can teach, remind and inspire us on our own personal and spiritual journeys. In these tough times, we were even treated to a funny, yet shallow representation of competing countries. A little laugh can have unimaginable healing power.

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A South Korean broadcaster has had to apologise after using offensive images to depict several countries during the opening ceremony of the Olympics in Tokyo. These representations include photos and facts about each country as athletes walked out during the parade of nations. Most of the images varied from inane to downright odd: Great Britain's athletes were accompanied by a photo of the Queen; and El Salvador, where the cryptocurrency is legal tender, was summed up by a bitcoin symbol. Other representations offered basic stereotypes such as the use of a photo of Dracula for Romania; pizza for Italy; and salmon for Norway.

South Africa did not need a foreign broadcaster to depict as they see fit. Instead Mr. Price kitted our boys and girls in legendary black and white striped shirts that resembled zebras,

coupled with khaki shorts and masks to match, and veldskoene completed the look! Even Lesotho's tiny delegation outshined Mzansi with their blankets. The bizarre fashion sure dampened the "gees" for some South Africans, however, we are still looking forward to a magical couple of weeks to come.

Let us dive into some of the ways in which the Olympic Games can touch our lives and enrich our development.

Ceremony.

The opening ceremonies of the past few decades have been breath-taking and spectacular. Artistry and creative use of technology are commonplace with Olympic Games' ceremonies, but these ceremonies display a deeper commitment to beauty, ritual and reverence. There are ceremonies throughout the games – from medals to closing ceremonies, and everything in between. On a personal level, living life in a ceremonious way, honouring ourselves and others, gives life meaning and purpose.

Excellence.

Sporting events are all about excellence. The intense preparation, including rigorous training, tight competition and exceptional pressure of having to focus a lifetime's worth of experience into one single performance, can be nerve-wrecking,

but also incredibly exciting. Excellence, whether in Olympic Games or endeavours in life is often associated with winning. While our culture puts a high value on winning, (and quite truly there is nothing wrong with winning), there is much more to real excellence than simply winning. One can bet that the average athlete at the Games has made a commitment to excellence - even though the vast majority of them will not win medals and we may never even know their names. On our own path, it is important for us to make a commitment to excellence; to take the leap and go for it; dig deep down and give everything that we do our best shot - whether or not we end up winning.

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Passion.

Many a times we hold back our passion, waiting to see how things will turn out. However, to live life with depth, purpose and aliveness, we have to tap into our passion in an authentic way and use it as inspiration, regardless of the outcomes.

The Olympic Games are filled with passion -from the athletes; the host city; fans; spectators; and well-wishers around the world. There is the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat on display each and every day. The emotions experienced and expressed during the Olympic Games are nothing short of intense and passionate.

It is this passion that makes the Olympic Games so intriguing. In our own lives and on our own journeys, passion is a key component to growth, success and fulfilment.

Play.

Is it not great that the Olympics are called "games"? This is a wonderful metaphor that reminds us that while sports, (and life in general), can be intense and filled with pressure, they are really just games we are playing. The games played at the Olympic Games, not unlike in many aspects of our own lives, are played at a pretty high level and with a lot to lose. But at the end of the day, a game is still just a game. As a child, I looked to sport for fun, and my mind was not on winning Olympic gold medals at the time, or gracing international television screens, or landing big endorsement deals. This is a great reminder for all of us. We often get so serious in the game of life that we forget to play. Spiritually, play is essential. Scientific studies have shown that the same brain waves are generated in a high state of play, as in a high state of prayer or meditation.

Unity.

The athletes at the Olympic Games come together to represent their countries and to compete for something bigger than themselves.

It is one of the greatest honours of life and such a profound experience. Even though the Olympic Games have a big focus on individual performances, as well as country competition when it comes to medal counting, at the deepest level, the Olympic Games are about a greater sense of unity among all nations. This can be an opportunity to show solidarity and address pertinent issues of the times. Perhaps one of the best examples of athletes standing together for racial and social justice was when African athletes boycotted the 1976 Montreal Games. Thirty-three countries pulled out from the games to show solidarity with black South Africa at the height of Apartheid after the June 16 student uprisings.

There is a sense of mutual respect, admiration and appreciation that exists at the Olympic Games - both with athletes and fans. Although a soccer World Cup is much smaller in scale, we could still feel a different kind of vibe in the air when "Phillip was here" in 2010. These sporting spectacles provide a stage for the world to engage, compete and interact with one another in a beautiful way. One of the most important elements of our personal and spiritual journeys is to recognize that we have more similarities than differences.

Our competition, or those we have conflict with and want to "beat", are just people like us who have similar hopes, fears and dreams.

At the most basic and yet profound level, we are all one. Anything and everything we can do to see, remember and remind ourselves and others of this innate unity, gives us access to deeper connection and spiritual truth.

Going back.

In antiquity, the races (now Olympics) had nothing to do with “sportsmanship” or “the spirit of fairness” which the institution has claimed ever since Europeans reinvented it just over a century ago. The foot race was run to select girls with enough fleet of foot to be of effective service to the goddess, a practice which began in the Great Lakes of East Africa, in what is now Uganda, Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo, with its nucleus probably in the Ruwenzori-Lake Victoria complex. Later, the races turned into deadly combats for the privilege of becoming the consort of the matriarch, the Goddess’ Alter Ego on earth. That is why Kenyan runners Catherine Ndereba and Lucy Kabuu, who belong to the Bantu group, would also have qualified as prophetesses of the Triple Moon Goddess. Yet, even with the representation of the African continent on the official Olympic Rings, the continent is still to host this magnificent sporting event.

With the reinvention of the games, females were no longer allowed to compete or be spectators! Today, the balance of gender is being restored at the Tokyo Olympics and the International Olympic Committee declared it as the “first gender-balanced Games ever”, with 49% of those competing identifying as female, and 51% male. Originally scheduled to take place from 24 July to 9 August 2020, the Games have been postponed to 23 July to 8 August 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I love the Olympic Games! Not only do we get to watch extraordinary athletes compete at the highest level, but we get to tap into something profound and magical that can remind us of our true power, passion and oneness. And who knows, even you on your couch with remote in hand, can in the future be a contender in the Olympics if you believe the tongue-in-cheek assertion made by the dry-humoured Savannah marketing team that “pass the remote is also a sport”. After all, new sporting codes are constantly added to the programme!



Tiego Nwokoro.