



Naresh Agarwal

Never compare with those around you

In the April and May issues, we discussed the first two of my 7 commandments in life: 1) Be happy always, no matter what! Don't let events (good or bad) disturb your state of bliss and 2) Have 0 expectations from every other person in the world, and 100% from yourself. When you don't expect, you'll never be unhappy and everything you get is a bonus. I'd like to share my third commandment today: "Never compare with those around you. Just give in your 100% and don't worry about the results."

The problem with comparison is that it forces us to look at what we don't have rather than be grateful for what we have. This brings about lack of contentment, which has a negative effect on our happiness. Often, when we compare, we look at a specific attribute or a talent or possession someone has, without looking at that person's life in its entirety. If we ask ourselves if we'd want to exchange our entire selves (along with the way we look, our knowledge level, things we possess and the people who love us) with the one we are comparing with, we will find that we are better off being ourselves. We just need to be grateful for who we are and what we have.

When I was in high school, I often did well in Mathematics and scored 100 out of 100. If I would lose a mark, my sisters would ask me where I lost that one mark. Once, I started competing with a classmate. In one of the tests, the classmate scored 85 or 86. I scored one mark more and was very happy. That's when I thought what had happened to me. Earlier, I'd feel bad if I didn't score 100%. Now, I was happy just because I'd scored more than my classmate. This is what comparison does to us. If we have to compare, we should compare with perfection and with what we really want to do within our lifetimes, as opposed to what anyone else has done or achieved.

I've often found that reading the autobiographies of great people – those who achieved a lot against great odds during their lifetimes – inspires me to a large extent. These were people who rose above comparison to live a life of great meaning. I remember when I first read the autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi *The Story of my Experiments with Truth*, I realized that the first 25 years of my life were perhaps not very different from the first 25 years of his life, and you might have a similar feeling. With a sense of responsibility for the greater good and a simple resolve of sticking to the truth, Gandhi the ordinary man was able to do extraordinary deeds and Mohandas journeyed into the life of a Mahatma. During Gandhi's early

career, there were other lawyers who were doing well, many of whom were smarter and more renowned than he was. How many of those do we hear about and know today? Had Gandhi lived his life comparing himself to what others had or what they were doing, he could never have achieved the great feats that he was able to. Look at the life of every other great person, and you'll find the same traits of perseverance and hard work and being different from the crowd.

A dangerous phenomenon is happening in India right now. With the sustained 8+ percent growth rate, a section of the people has gotten rich. Many others are left with a huge sense of discontent. There is this huge longing to get rich quickly – sometimes by hook or by crook. You also see many people spending and living much beyond their means, just to match the lifestyle of a neighbour, friend or relative. Everyone wants to take flights all the time and buy houses or diamonds one cannot afford. Parents want to show off by holding grand weddings for their children. Sometimes, the showing-off stretches to huge religious ceremonies. This has given rise to people taking easy bank loans and credit card debts and getting into huge debt traps from an early age. If we are able to withstand this urge to compare and live life without succumbing to herd mentality and peer pressure, we will be much more independent within and be able to achieve our greater life goals and purpose.

We must realize that our life experiences and life purpose are very different from anyone else's. Look within and you'll find your purpose in life and ensure that we don't live a life of regrets. Just give in your 100% to all that you do and don't worry about the results. As the Bhagavad Gita says 'karmaṇy evādhikāras te mā phaleṣu kadācana mā karma-phala-hetur bhūr mā te saṅgo 'stv akarmaṇi' 'You have a right to your duty, but not to the fruits of action. Never think of yourself as the cause of the results and never be attached to inaction' (2.47). Therefore, stop comparing and find yourself. You are extremely beautiful for who you are! A rose would be incomplete without its thorns. Mother Teresa wouldn't be half as beautiful without the wrinkles. Let us celebrate our imperfections. That is what makes us perfect.

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