

Inspiring the Next Generation

~ Saheli Sheth (Peoria, USA)

Has someone ever compared you or wanted you to be more like someone else?

For example, someone may comment on your looks, skin color, or weight in relation to society's beauty standards.

Or there might've been a family member who used to tell you to study harder and be more like your bright classmate – the teacher's favorite.

Or you may even compare *yourself* to another person - for instance, a person with a happy family, an ever-tidy home, or a personality trait or skill that you wish you had. How did you feel when compared?

Now, I invite you to reflect on whether you've ever compared your kid (or spouse, family member, loved one, etc.) to someone else. I imagine most of us sometimes compare our kids to others, with good intentions to encourage our kids to change and “be better.”

While the intent is often positive, what is the actual impact? Over the years, I've had quite a few individuals confide in me that they felt compared to their siblings - that if their parents had to pick their favorite child, it wouldn't be them. They felt like they were a disappointment to their family. This same effect of low self-esteem happens to our kids whether they are compared to a sibling, classmate, or friend.

It's worth exploring how our kids can grow freely without the weight of comparison. I remember growing up with my mom's encouragement before each exam: “Just try your best. The grade doesn't matter - what matters is that you tried your best.” This encouragement led my sister and me to fall in love with the joy of learning, rather than crumbled by the pressure of achieving. Without my parents ever telling my sister to “get good grades” or “be more like your studious friend,” my sister graduated high school with one of the highest grades. It took me years to realize that by encouraging us to “try our best,” rather than comparing us to others,

my parents taught us the lifelong skill of enjoying learning.

Similarly, I remember my dad saying, “Wow, this person is a strong youth leader in *satsang* - you should connect with them, because I see you as a leader in the future too.” Years later, I really appreciate how his wording wasn't “*You should be more like them*” or “*Why aren't you like them?*” Instead, his wording was so positive: “You can use this leader as a role model and be inspired by them.” I think he figured out the solution to comparison! Instead of wishing for our kids to be different, we can give them a positive role model and uplift them to be inspired.

My dad may have learned this beautiful idea from Sant Bhagwant Sahebada. Sahebada has also guided me to stay connected with specific youth and to be inspired by them as role models. In my spiritual journey, I've never felt that Sahebada has compared me to anyone else. As I've heard multiple times in *satsang*: “There is no room for competition and comparison in our spiritual journeys.”

Sahebada says that everyone has a strength that they are good at. That's the purpose of camps and *samaiyas* - to inspire our kids to learn what their God-given talent is and showcase it. Our kids and loved ones have their own strengths too, and encouraging them will inspire them to grow into happy, healthy adults who feel confident in their abilities.

As the monk Gaur Gopal Das shared, “London is 5 hours ahead of New York. That doesn't mean London is ahead. That doesn't mean New York is behind. They are both going at exactly the right time for them. Your time, too, will come.” May we have the patience to believe in the unique strengths our kids bring to this world, knowing that their time to succeed will come. And may we firmly believe that because God handcrafted each of us, we are all irreplaceable and absolutely incomparable. ◆