

Healthy Competition

When Is Comparing Ourselves to Others Appropriate?

Comparing Ourselves to Others and Its Impact on the Health of the Soul

Comparing ourselves to others is an inevitable occurrence that affects us at different stages of life, occupying a significant part of our hearts and minds. We all know that part of our eternal journey takes place on this earthly planet—a physical world with unique characteristics and events. It is entirely natural that during our stay in this world, we have to strive to obtain the necessities and tools for life. However, what often happens and can disrupt this natural process is that we forget these possessions are merely tools for passing through this temporary life.

Another issue is that the finery and appeal of these possessions captivate our hearts and souls and, in simple words, become our preoccupation, to the extent that we begin to categorize these possessions into excellent, good, and bad, etc., considering superior possessions a source of pride and honor, while ordinary ones fail to satisfy us. This is where the inclination toward comparing ourselves to others and competing over worldly possessions gradually takes shape, influencing our decisions, relationships, thoughts, and behaviors. The idea that someone else may be benefiting more from this world becomes painful and intolerable. In this case, we begin to measure our self-worth by the quantity of our material possessions. The more dazzling these possessions are, the more we perceive ourselves as special and deserving of respect.

Regarding worldly competition and comparing ourselves to others, several important questions arise. The first question is: What causes these temporary worldly tools to captivate our hearts and minds to such an extent? The second question is: When does positive and healthy competition occur? Is there a situation in which competition and comparing ourselves to others can be considered constructive and admirable? The last question is, how can one free their soul from the captivity of worldly temptations and its limited perfections?

In this lesson, we will address these questions.

The Reason for Our Inclination toward Comparing Ourselves to Others and the Definition of Healthy Competition

The reason behind our inclination toward comparing ourselves to others and strive for attaining worldly perfection lies in the dominance of our animal dimension over our human dimension and being afflicted with the dangerous disease of self-forgetting. As soon as our hearts turn away from our True Beloved and we forget “There is no deity but Allah,” false and animal beloveds take over and capture our hearts.

One of the consequences of being trapped in material and animal attachments is the disruption of our ability to perceive the truth. A person entrapped by these worldly perfections is like someone suffering from double vision, unable to distinguish between the real and the counterfeit. In such a state, one loses the ability to comprehend the true meaning of honor and disgrace, seeing their dignity solely in achieving material possessions. From this perspective, the more one indulges in worldly attractions, the more they believe they have attained the peak

of honor. Conversely, being deprived of these things is seen as humiliation and disgrace. These incorrect perceptions and weak, baseless evaluations cause matters that inherently lack value to appear crucial, while truly important and meaningful matters lose their significance. The outward manifestation of these incorrect evaluations can be seen in our tendency toward comparing ourselves to others and engaging in false striving for superiority. This kind of greed and competition reduce our level to the level of superficial and animal perfections, such as the brand of a mobile phone, the price of household items, the model of a car, the size of a house, social status, level of education, etc., enslaving our soul to the physical body.

However, there are also pious and unpretentious individuals who know their true self and, instead of becoming trapped in illusional honor and disgrace, they chose a human lifestyle and true honor. Such individuals have aligned their lives and disposition based on their eternal and afterlife honor, striving and competing for acquisition of true assets [1] —namely, divine names (*Asma' Allah*).

We previously discussed the significance of acquiring the names and attributes of Allah in detail. Human beings are considered the noblest creation of God, and this status is not merely due to superficial advantages like our ability to speak or our intellectual power, but rather because of the divine Spirit within us. We came into this world to be the perfect manifestation of Allah's attributes. Let us reflect deeply on this: Allah is the sole power of the universe, and every single one of His wills comes to pass! This is just a glimpse of the perfections that humans can attain through *ubudiyyah* (servitude and true submission) to Allah. The divine attributes of Allah hold indescribable greatness, understanding the true meaning of which is

indeed beyond the comprehension of many in this worldly life. If a person truly knows their own worth at this level, they would feel ashamed to compete over trivial worldly matters.

Material and worldly superiorities, if not aligned with the maturity of the supra-rational faculty and acquisition of human perfections, lead only to humiliation and degradation. Of course, this humiliation may not always be evident in this world; however, it will become clear once the veil of matter is removed and the truth of the universe is revealed. As a result, God, as our mentor, warns humanity against competing in worldly matters and considers competition healthy and permissible only under one condition: the quest for acquiring divine names and human perfections. In these cases, God not only does not forbid competition but actively encourages it, using words like "*Sāri'ū*" (hasten) [2] and "*Sābiqū*" (race) [3] to urge people to move quickly and strive to surpass one another in this path. Of course, using two terms of hastening and racing carries deeper implications related to the mathematical structure of the soul and its movement during the spiritual journey, which we will explore in future discussions.

How Can One Escape the Trap of Worldly Comparisons and Competitions?

Given what we discussed, the most effective way to avoid falling into the trap of comparing ourselves to others over worthless matters is to never forget the purpose of creation and to constantly remind ourselves and others of it through reflection. Reflection and reasoning are among God's greatest gifts to humans, to the extent that the intellect is often referred to as the "inner prophet."

If we reflect on the womb-like essence of the world, we will understand that this world is merely a tool for our spiritual growth and preparation for moving toward our eternal life, and our worldly possessions must serve this purpose. In other words, we must see the world as it truly is: a gym for the perfection of the soul and a means to achieve the purpose of creation.

The world is not the ultimate goal, and no one will live in it forever. Thus, God advises us not to be deceived by its contemporary finery and not to become obsessed with its illusory pleasures and possessions. Furthermore, we should not feel sorrow over what we lack, nor should we be overly joyous for and proud of what we gain in this world [4] since neither pleasure nor pain is permanent. Of course, reaching this level of understanding is not easy and requires continuous *talqin* (constant and gradual effort and practice to gain mastery over something). *Talqin* is the most powerful tools for engraving the results of reflection on the heart without which no one acquires any high status. In future discussions, we will explore the profound impact of *talqin* on spiritual growth and acquiring a sound heart.

What other strategies do you know for avoiding envy and comparing ourselves to others? Share your experiences and insights with us.

References

[1]. “Whose seal is musk—this is what competitors should compete for.” (Quran, 83:26)

[2]. “And race towards forgiveness from your Lord, and a Garden as wide as the heavens and the earth, prepared for the righteous.” (Quran, 3:133)

[3]. “Race towards forgiveness from your Lord; and a Garden as vast as the heavens and the earth, prepared for those who believe in God and His messengers...” (Quran, 57:21)

[4]. “That you may not sorrow over what eludes you, nor exult over what He has given you. God does not love the proud snob.” (Quran, 57:23)