

do anything that will give you a feeling of loving and being loved.

- Make a specific effort to remove violent input from your life. The newspapers and news reports that attempt to titillate your curiosity about hostility and malignant hatred by filling you with endless reports take you away from your peace. Turn away from these sources and each time you hear these reports, remember that for every act of inhumanity to man, there are a thousand acts of kindness.
- Remember this ancient Chinese proverb: "The sage does not talk, the talented ones talk, and the stupid ones argue."



COMPARISON



SO THAT'S WHO I REMIND ME OF

When I consider men of golden talents,
I'm delighted, in my introverted way,
To discover, as I'm drawing up the balance,
How much we have in common, I and they.

Like Burns, I have a weakness for the bottle,
Like Shakespeare, little Latin and less Greek;
I bite my fingernails like Aristotle;
Like Thackeray, I have a snobbish streak.

I'm afflicted with the vanity of Byron,
I've inherited the spitefulness of Pope;
Like Petrarch, I'm a sucker for a siren,
Like Milton, I've a tendency to mope.

My spelling is suggestive of a Chaucer;
Like Johnson, well, I do not wish to die
(I also drink my coffee from the saucer);
And if Goldsmith was a parrot, so am I,

Like Villon, I have debits by the carload,
Like Swinburne, I'm afraid I need a nurse;
By my dicing is Christopher out-Marlowed,
And I dream as much as Coleridge, only worse.

In comparison with men of golden talents,
I am all a man of talent ought to be;
I resemble every genius in his vice, however heinous—
Yet I write so much like me.

OGDEN NASH
(1902-1971)

American writer of light verse, Ogden Nash is known for his sophisticated whimsy and satire.

Ogden Nash was known for his great sense of humor and his audacious verse, which was often ragged and highly varied, from one-word sentences to lines that meandered for a full paragraph. He won a large following during his lifetime, particularly for poetry that satirized everyday foibles. In this selection he pokes fun at himself by justifying his weaknesses as they line up with "men of golden talents," who are some of the world's best poets. While this poem was obviously written with tongue in cheek, nevertheless it highlights the tendency that many of us have to compare ourselves to others.

It seems easier to look at our behavior in comparison to others to judge where we stand in life. Virtually all our upbringing at home and in school used the comparison method, and most of us were groomed to fit somewhere in the middle, depending on how everyone else stacked up. For purposes of evaluation, the standardized curve was applied to determine just where we fit, be it in geography, mathematics, what to wear, and what curfew to obey. Whatever everyone else was doing was consistently used as a barometer to determine what we should be doing. There were school transcripts and social report cards as well. Comparison as a means of assessment was so prevalent that it is most likely the means you employ for assessing your adult life as well as managing the lives of your family members.

Yet comparing one person to another negates each person's uniqueness and is often insulting to each person individually, and comparisons will never lead you to self-knowledge. It is comfortable to search outside oneself for validation if that is what others do. And if approximately sixty-eight percent of the people are doing it, we might be tempted to interpret that as the right way. We repeat the conditioning of the past in a search out there somewhere, for that which resides in here, when we continually compare our lives with others. I like this statement by Lao-tzu, the founder of Taoism: "He who knows others is wise. He who knows himself is enlightened."

When we resort to comparisons of any kind the most we can hope for is some wisdom. But to become enlightened we must know and honor the unique creation that each of us is. This is the genius that is never found near the median.

Ceaselessly striving toward the highest and widest point on the "normal" curve, and avoiding the narrow ends representing the extremes, is, as I am sure you are aware, not the path I think anyone need follow. Why? Because the creative genius is found in those more distant positions away from the median.

Jean Piaget is a famous Swiss psychiatrist who researched the ways in which students could best achieve in school. He provided me with an important insight which I have never forgotten, when I was a young doctoral student many years ago. His experiments with school children confirmed that learning and levels of achievement are different for different individuals. In any classroom in which one method of instruction, say lecturing, was the sole means of presenting the material, after an exam was given at the end of the instruction period, the levels of achievement resemble a standardized curve with approximately two-thirds in the C or average range; one-fourth divided in half in the above and below average (D and B grades); six percent divided equally as failures and high achievers (F and A grades) with tiny fractions in what are called distant deviations from the center. That is, a tiny fraction are geniuses and a tiny fraction simply absorbed nothing.

But this is not what impressed me, nor is it what I always remembered. Piaget then said, if you were to change the method of delivery from, say lecturing, to drawings, then you get the same standardized distribution, a tiny fraction of geniuses and zeros, six percent A and F; twenty-five percent D and B; sixty-seven percent C+ to C-. But the startling thing is that you now have new people in the genius range and the zero ranges, and when you try another method of delivery, with the same group, say small group discussions, or video presentations, with each new method of instruction on the very same material, you find new geniuses, new zeros, and a whole new grouping of average.

For me, Piaget's profound conclusion was unforgettable. There is a genius in every single person, and all we as educators, or par-

ents, or directors of our own lives need to do, is find the method that will allow that genius to be revealed.

Ogden Nash's humorous and satirical poem "So That's Who I Remind Me Of" reminds you how absurd it is to compare yourself to anyone else at any time. His conclusion reveals the truth of this assertion, "Yet I write so much like me." And that is all he could ever do: be himself.

Often, in our efforts to fit in and be accepted, we ambush ourselves by looking to see how we compare to others. We have been conditioned since our first days in school and so it is easy to forget that our own individual genius may not have evolved. The idea of comparing yourself to anyone else seems absurd when you know you are a unique individual, and when you align yourself with the method, people, and circumstances that feel just right for you.

You know in your heart, as I do when I write, or speak, or run a marathon, or wash my car, or brush my teeth, I do not need to compare my actions with other people to decide how to do them. We are free when we can say, "This is my way, what is your way? *The way does not exist!*" I am free when I no longer need to see what I share in common with those men of golden talents. The conclusion is the same one that Ogden Nash reached: "Yet I write so much like me." Stop comparing and begin composing *your* life, *your* way.

To reduce the habit of comparing yourself with others begin to practice these suggestions:

- Use your own personal index for evaluating yourself and your performances. "Am I content with myself?" rather than "I'm not as good as my sister."
- When you find yourself in the old habit of comparison stop right in the moment and catch yourself. Becoming aware is the beginning of changing this habit. As you were about to say, "I guess I am about average in something," stop and rephrase to "This is how I perform and I'm fine with it."
- Don't use comparisons with your children unless you expect them in return. For every time you say, "All the other children

at school are expected to do some household chores," expect to hear something like, "No other parents make their kids go to bed this early." The habit becomes insidious and will pass from generation to generation unless you stop using comparison as a standard. Change your directions to: "I expect you to do your housework and your chores, and it has nothing to do with your friends."

- If you are not as talented or expert as you want to be at a particular thing, remind yourself that it is not because you are deficient. It is the result of your unique reaction to and experience of this event. Your genius may reside elsewhere or it may require you to be exposed to another way of learning. Respect your individuality and uniqueness and resist speculating on how you compare. Comparison always puts the controls of your life in the hands of those to whom you compare yourself.