

Commentary

Language of Praise

By Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'

My uncle, who was considered academically mediocre by the rest of the family, was my biggest admirer. He was a kind man in every way, empathetic, generous and emotional. Maybe, he saw his own situation in me. Most of the time my teachers elicited a string of foolish answers from me and my parents sighed at my report cards. My peers would poke fun at my inanity.

"You are the smartest kid," my uncle would say to me, "you will shine." I used to see him two times in a year. He would visit me at my parents' place in the winter and I would go to stay with him in the village during the summer vacation. My uncle understood the prodding and humiliation that I had to go through. He also knew my strengths that no one cared to cultivate in me.

He would gather all the kids and ask them to explain the meaning of popular idioms and phrases such as "Rome was not built in one day" or "Slow and steady wins the race." My answers used to be heuristic and metaphoric instead of being contextual. He always marveled at my explanation, originality and creative expression. No wonder I was always the best and the brightest in his opinion. That made life easier for me and boosted my self-esteem to an extent. I admired myself because I thought that I was good instead of the other way round.

I remember my high school exam results. That was quite a drama. About fifteen of my cousins and friends (children of close family acquaintances) appeared at the board exam that year for the high school diploma. Those days (in the old country), the results of the high school board exams used to be published in the leading newspapers with students' names and their ranking based on the percentage of points scored in the exam.

Needless to say that all my cousins and friends were thought highly of by everyone and they were supposed to excel. I never occurred in anyone's thoughts except my uncle's. I was not supposed to be anywhere near them in intellect or performance and rightly so. After all, I had a poor academic track record.

As the day of declaration (of the exam results) neared, my uncle's confidence in me grew. "You will do better than them," he uttered in confidence. Those were the most treasured words. I was me, the rest were merely them. To make a long story short, my uncle was right and others were wrong. I looked in the mirror every

morning and found myself to be a very special person. My self-esteem leaped.

But most kids in my situation are not that lucky. Praise is not a pleasure we can arrange for ourselves. It really needs to be delivered by someone else like my uncle and much of its impact depends on the deliverer. Later in life, I was praised by others, but never to quite same effect. Many times, the compliment was wrung grudgingly, like squeezing juice from a dry apple. My uncle knew my worth.

Another sticking point is the value we place in certain attributes such as jumping grade levels in schools or scores obtained in certain standard tests. Yes, those students should be praised but not at the cost of lowering others' self-esteem or neglecting their areas of intelligence. There are many forms of intelligence such as verbal-linguistic, spatial, musical or interpersonal. We cannot neglect those intelligences at the cost of a standardized testing. My uncle recognized my intelligence as an independent thinker and he engraved that in my brain. I wallow in it thoroughly, roll around in it, install in my heart and whisper it over before I go to sleep. Yes, a genuine praise feels wonderful.

From: <http://childparenting.about.com>

The behavioral effect of praise is to reinforce your child's correct behavior and self-discipline. Praise increases the bond of affection between parent and child and builds self-esteem.

Here's How:

Look your child in the eye.

Move close to your child.

Smile.

Praise a specific behavior. "You did a great job cleaning up your room."

Speak with feeling and sincerity.

Touch your child affectionately, maybe a pat on the back.

Praise immediately, as soon as you notice commendable behavior.

Tips:

Praise should be honest and specific.

Don't dilute the effectiveness of praise by overdoing it or being insincere.