

Prizes for All¹

Biman C. Prasad

The Principal, School Manager, Parents, Students and friends of the Rishikul Sanatan College, Ladies and Gentlemen. Thank you Mr. Sumer for the invitation. It is a privilege and honour to be here and to speak to you all on this occasion.

This occasion takes me back to 1985 when I was a student at USP completing my teacher training certificate. As part of that training, we had to go and teach for a few weeks. I chose Rishikul Sanatan College. Since then I have followed the progress of this school and I am extremely pleased to note its excellent progress over the last 25 years. Rishikul has grown to be one of the best secondary schools in the country and is indeed the pride of the people of Nasinu. All those who have led this school during this period deserve credit.

Prize giving is an occasion for celebration, reflection and inspiration for the future. I wish to congratulate all students who are going to receive prizes for various achievements today. However, for those who are not going to receive prizes let this celebration be an inspiration to all of you. It would be wrong to see prize giving events such as this as a celebration for ONLY those who are going to receive the awards. Today is equally for those who are not receiving the awards. It is a time to reflect about your work for the whole year, your attitude, your motivation. Each one of you has the potential to receive awards and prizes in the future - the prize of a good university education; the prize of a well paid, professionally, satisfying job, the prize of giving back to your family, your society and your country. Today you should think about the future while acknowledging the past. Most importantly, think about the power each one of you has to create new possibilities for the future.

Today, I want to speak on four issues which I believe we can reflect on.

¹ Address delivered on the occasion of the Rishikul Sanatan College Annual Prize Giving Ceremony, 27 November, 2012.

1. Celebrating others success and learning from it,
2. Making good choices,
3. Creating an identity of excellence in what we do, and
4. Adhering to the rules.

Recently, I read a book called *The Difficulty of Being Good: On the Subtle Art of Dharma* by Gurcharan Das. If you can get a copy, please do read it. The main idea in the book is related to the questions: Why should we be good? How should we be good? The author answers these questions using characters from the epic *Mahabharata*. Each major character in the *Mahabharata* symbolizes the moral failing or goodness. The struggles of those characters reflect our own familiar emotions of anxiety, courage, despair, remorse, envy, compassion, vengefulness, and duty. Gurcharan Das explores the *Mahabharata* from many perspectives and compares the successes and failures of the epic's characters to those of contemporary individuals, many of them highly visible players in the world of economics, business, and politics. He provides an excellent description of the characters in the *Mahabharata*, that is, Duryodhana's Envy, Draupadi's Courage, Yudhishtira's Duty, Arjuna's Despair, Bhishma's Selflessness, Karna's Status Anxiety, Krishna's Guile, Ashwatthama's Revenge, Yudhishtira's Remorse and finally summarising it all, in *Mahabharata's Dharma*. In every case, he finds striking parallels that carry lessons for everyone faced with ethical and moral dilemmas in today's complex world.

The simple message I got from reading this book is that we must appreciate and understand others' success, and also learn from it. I should stress here that success should not be seen only in terms of money and social status. Honesty, charity and commitment to family and society are the most important values in life.

Returning to the book, it also talks about emulative and destructive envy. Yes, we do become envious of others success. However, if we emulate others success and understand why they are successful, you could make a new beginning in your life. In economics, we talk about positive and negative externalities of our actions and activities. The negative externalities of someone not succeeding in his or her life would have negative consequences on those close to them. The positive externalities of success rub off on people close by. We can provide many examples. If your neighbour is a pleasant, well to do person, who keeps his compound clean and tidy with lots of beautiful flowers that you can enjoy from your compound that is the benefit to you. If on the other hand your neighbour is poor, rowdy drunkard, keeps his compound filthy, you will have nega-

tive impact on you and your family. So we need to learn to appreciate others' success and emulate and realise that others' success is eventually going to be good for us. The success of your friends, colleagues, neighbours, and relatives can only be good for you. Always think of others' success as your access; you can only benefit from others success and not lose anything.

This brings to my next point - making a good choice. Making a choice is not always easy. In our lives we don't have unlimited choices, some have more, some have less, but nobody has an unlimited number of choices. Many of our poor households, people who have lost their jobs, people who are sick have to make difficult choices and that too from a limited number. Many just do not have the 'luxury of unlimited choices'. And because we have limited choices we have to choose carefully. Making a choice always has a cost which we economists call 'opportunity cost'. If you have a choice on a Saturday to study for your exam or go to a movie with your friend what would you do? Whatever choice you make, there will an opportunity forgone— if you went to a movie, your opportunity to study would be lost. If you studied, you may lose the opportunity to spend time with a friend. Therefore, you need to choose carefully. It is always good to stop and think about choices in life. We all have to make choices all the time and those of us who are conscious of choices will be able to make an informed choice. Making a choice is in itself power for us. The choices in life that we make can take us closer to our dreams or further from it. Choice, therefore, is a powerful tool. It separates us from animals, it allows us to go beyond instinct, need and desire, and makes determination, striving and excelling available to each person. Clever students make clever choices. So think carefully about the choices you make and help others make, including your friends, parents and neighbours.

The third point I want to make is that we need to create an identity of excellence. There is always a tendency for people in many multicultural, multi-religious and multiracial societies to concentrate in on racial, religious and cultural identities and in the process compromise excellence and competence. Those countries, societies and individuals that are successful, more often than not, have promoted the identity of excellence, merit and competence. Fiji has suffered politically and economically in the last 25 years because we have compromised merit, excellence and competence in favour of ethnicity and religion. Our civil service today is a good example of that. Let me say that we need excellence in teaching and in teachers. Our students deserve the best teachers in schools; they should be appointed on merit alone. We should try and excel in what we

do. If you are a plumber, be the best, take pride in your work; if you are a teacher, be the best teacher for students. Excellence in what we do will lead to better and bigger benefits to our society through increased efficiency and productivity. As students, I would urge you to think about excellence in what you do.

The final point I want to make is about following rules. Whether it is the nation's constitution, or a rule in a ministry, university, or school, or a traffic rule or even rules that you and your parents make at home, none should be broken. Life is already chaotic. We don't want to make it more chaotic by not following rules. Following rules requires discipline on our nation's leaders, nation's police force, military, and administrators and above all by the people. When we make rules, we have to follow it, if we think the rule no longer serves the purpose then it should be changed by discussion and agreement, not by force. You are the future, you are the ones who will determine the destiny of your family, your communities and your country. Learning to adhere to the rules and laws is going to be extremely important.

I wish to congratulate you once again, the Principal, the teachers and the management, for bringing yet another successful year to a close. You do a great service to our communities by teaching our children, helping to build their lives and their future. You all deserve recognition and praise from everyone in the community. I wish all of you students' best of luck in your future. Those who will be leaving the school for further studies and other career opportunities, I wish you well. Those of you who are going to return to school next year- reflect carefully during your break about how you performed this year and what you would do next year. Enjoy your break, have a merry Christmas and have a happy new year.

Author

Biman C. Prasad, was Professor of Economics and Dean of the Faculty of Business and Economics, University of the South Pacific, at the time this address was delivered. email: bcprasad91@gmail.com