

Dear friends,

Greetings on a cool fall evening. Hope this message finds you in good health and cheer. I last wrote to you two months ago as a hurricane was approaching. Since then things have calmed down a little bit. Except for a freak but benign snowfall in October we have generally had beautiful fall weather. Fall and spring are the calmest and most pleasant times in DC, when you can enjoy a nice walk admiring the colorful splendor of nature. In the past month I have had the good fortune of hiking in the mountains of western Maryland that provide spectacular vistas of the valleys below. See pictures at [meetup.com/nature-lovers](http://meetup.com/nature-lovers)

But certainly the highlight was the opportunity to be at a talk by Thich Nhat Hanh, Vietnamese monk, scholar and Buddhist teacher. Being in the presence of the enlightened soul was an indescribably moving experience. One is immediately lifted from all mundane concerns and brought in touch with the true nature of life and one's self. Certainly it helped me to regain a balanced perspective on life and continue on without getting too caught up in unnecessary worries. I hope your life is also full of peace and joy. Please do stay in touch!

Sankar

Random Thoughts 85

11/12/2011

1. (9/2/2011) America will never have a messiah. This country is too individualistic to follow one leader, no matter how great. Washington comes close, and he may deserve the title "Father of the Nation," but I don't see anyone else emerging of that stature in the future. Washington was a formidable man, of course, but his role in the birth of the nation merits his stature more than anything else. People wanted Obama to be the Great Leader, and in retrospect I think people will realize that he is indeed a great leader. He is right now just the Chief Executive and has to make the decisions that are best for the country, and is limited by the political system we have, and his persuasive powers will go only so far. But impressive as he is, I don't think people are going to listen to him any more than any other leader. For each American the greatest leader is his or her own self, and I hope that remains so. That is one of the things I love about this country.

2. (9/4) Today in Washington Post I saw an article saying that Obama's tactic are confounding both allies and adversaries. I have written about this before. Pundits are constantly trying to figure out Obama and scratching their heads. This is because they want to categorize him based on what THEY think are the best decisions for the country. They also want to categorize him as left, right or middle. But here is what I suggest to the intellectual people. Why not start with an assumption that he is a good man trying to make the right call on each decision that he faces based on what is good for the country? All your other hypotheses have failed. Why not try to see if the facts fit this strange new hypothesis? Let us take this new ozone rule. People are wondering, does he not care about the environment? Is he now in the pockets of the business? Businessmen are saying, he just did it because this is the easiest one for him to give in. He still has lots of other regulations planned that are tougher. Politicians will say he is a canny politician trying to get the independent vote. Okay, so how will you deal with this if you were the President? You have 9% unemployment. You are faced with a Congress that is blocking your every move. An election coming up where shadow

groups are going to be putting up millions, perhaps billions of attack ads. You want to create jobs. It is possible, as Paul Krugman argues in his blog, regulations will help, rather than hinder job growth. Perhaps Obama is wrong to conclude that many jobs could disappear in the near future because of these regulations. But perhaps he concluded that in the current atmosphere this was the lesser of the evils that could bring the business groups to his side. Those on the right say he is an enemy of business. Those on the left say he is in the pockets of business. Both cannot be right. Here is a great article for progressives who are frustrated with Obama:<http://www.progressive.org/mag/nichols0109.html>

I have no delusions about Obama. I know he is a politician. He is also the chief executive trying to make the best decisions for the country. He cannot be a Mandela or Gandhi. And with the benefit of hindsight there are definitely many things he could have done differently. But it is not fair to judge a man by one's expectations of him. What I liked about Obama was his calmness, his amazing intelligence, careful and thoughtful decision making and most of all his refusal to stop trying to see the good in everyone and to appeal to our better angels. On those counts he is still the same as he ever was.

3. (9/4) Yesterday along with 250 others I got arrested for doing a sit-in in front of the White House. We were protesting the environmentally calamitous project to pipe oil from Canadian tar sands to Texas. Although I have doubts about the strategy to force Obama's hand on this (as opposed to protesting with the industry or the Canadian government), I felt that as someone who wants to do everything to stop or slow down climate change it was my moral duty to protest. Perhaps if enough people protest it will strengthen Obama's hand in case he decides not to approve it. I did, however, try to tell as many people as possible that we should be focusing on creating green jobs because jobs are all that people care about, right now. I said that to a group of precocious College students from Swarthmore. They agreed about it but one of them told me he wanted to make Obama do the right thing. Although I agree with him that the right thing would be to not approve the pipeline I must say I am disappointed by how people sometimes talk about Obama as if he were a wayward child and he must be shown the right way. Moreover, no one should be convinced that they have all the answers and they know what is right. I said that to Bill McKibben also, as he mingled with the people lined up to get arrested. He was a more humble person than I had imagined. He agreed that green jobs were absolutely the way to go and that he will be pushing for them every day. While we were waiting in front of the White House, chanting and talking to each other (it took park police more than 3 hours to finish arresting everyone) I managed to lead chants of "More green jobs, more solar panels ..." but most of the chanting was about stopping the pipeline. A group of protesters from Puerto Rico were the most animated, and they added chants of "no Via Verde" to protest a natural gas pipeline planned to go right across Puerto Rico, coast to coast.

More on the protest: About half of the arrestees were women, but a good number were young men, many of them boisterous college kids, although I wouldn't call them rowdy. The police were very nice. A metro police officer chatted with us while we were waiting on the bus. He seemed to agree with the environmental concerns. I was impressed with his knowledge and overall good judgment. People like that make me feel better about America. I also met a minister, an older man, from Pasadena, CA and someone who works with transportation unions. Another man, a nature photographer from York, PA said he got his start on the environmental movement when he saw photos from Gary Braasch that showed how global warming is changing the planet. I met with a Nebraska man who said he was a fourth generation Republican that lost his construction business when he went bankrupt following an

illness. There were many from Nebraska, and other Middle American states that would be affected by the pipeline. Six of us were stuffed inside what they call a “paddy wagon” in a very narrow space that made it hard to breathe and was very sweaty. The handcuffs made it even more uncomfortable. Such experiences create a strong bond. [We learned from a friendly police officer that “paddy wagons” were so named after the Irish cops and drunks who drove or were driven in such wagons].

This was my first experience of this kind. I have always been wary of the police and tried to stay away from them. I never thought I would have an arrest record (although this is not a criminal record). They assure me that it will not impact anything and I hope they are right. But this was so well organized that no one had any serious issues. Spending that hour and half inside the wagon and a total of 7 hours without food or bathroom breaks was uncomfortable but a small price to pay and really nothing compared to the struggles people went through in the freedom struggle in India or the civil rights struggle here in the U.S.

4. I feel that over the past two years I have gotten smarter. I mean that as a fact. I can solve problems now that I would have struggled with before. I am pretty sure love has got something to do with it but I don't know how. Another reason could be that I am getting older. Yet another could be that I am developing my analytic and conceptual thinking skills, instead of depending solely on intuition and synthetic thinking.

5. One day while we were returning from a trip we were walking through the upscale Woodley Park area. In front of one of the restaurants I saw a well dressed black man get into a fight with a burly middle eastern guy. Probably the black man had been to the restaurant owned by the middle eastern guy and something happened there. They were literally butting heads and jawing each other. It was getting pretty heated but luckily there were people holding them back. The sight of two otherwise upstanding citizens going at each other like wild rams gave me pause. I know I have within me the same tendencies as any other man to get into fights but this experience left such a bad taste in my mind that I think I will try harder than ever to control my emotions and deal with my fellow men peacefully.

6. This is a rather frightening thought. It occurred to me that the right wing powers that dominate the US are finding that complete domination of thought by propaganda is possible. Given the increasing penetration of people's lives by technology all they need to do is to fund enough advertisements with their message. As long as people are slaves to their desires and needs, they can be manipulated. Truth really does not seem to matter to them anymore. It is all about the right marketing tools. Demagoguery has always had a place in politics but Republicans and the so called conservatives are taking it to new heights, throwing allegations around like dust in the wind, twisting facts to suit their agenda. Some corporate types think it is okay to do anything to expand one's business and they use the politicians to further their aims.

7. Certain men —of any race----can't admit they were wrong; Obama has to get along with both liberal and conservative men who think they know better. They will never understand that his biggest achievement and best quality is bringing people together, seeing the best in everyone.

8. We were watching Jack Hanna's animal show on TV. It was about elephant seals. These

are truly elephant like in their size! The host was saying that the males, all they do is to sleep and to show off other males and fight. Nicole joked that males of all species are doing only that. [I believe she was not including me in that]. I told her that is just part of Darwinian evolution, that the alpha males keep the weaker males from the females and most of the offspring have their superior genes thus keeping the population stronger. Studies have shown the negative effects of killing off alpha males in a population, such as the alpha deer that have the trophy horns. But thinking about it later, I feel that we as humans we are evolving away from that kind of model. It is true that in many ways the Darwinian process still goes on in human beings. But as we evolve higher, we put more emphasis on co-operation and peaceful coexistence over domination by the strongest. Our evolution then takes us more in the direction of reaching higher consciousness than mere survival and material success. In other words, enlightenment is considered more worthy as the goal of our society.