

## Leadership, spiritual enlightenment and absence of rancour

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I have always advocated to colleagues the importance of physical health, and in my own experience I have found that being healthy gives you the capacity to push yourself beyond the brink. Unfortunately, this time I have overdone things, and am suffering the consequences of that. My regret is not that I am down with dengue fever, but that I have lost an entire week's productive time. I do not recall any stage in my life when I lost an entire week of work for any reason. But, I will not dwell on my own current problem but convey a few other items of news and analysis for the information of colleagues.

I was on travel during the period September 22nd to 30th, and after a long period of perfect health despite physical strain, came down with high fever during the trip, which is a terrible condition to be in when one is away from home. This was a particularly strenuous trip, because I flew from here to New York to attend an event on Saturday the 22nd, during the course of which I met the legendary Aung San Suu Kyi at a small lunch and then heard her speak to the student community of Columbia University. It is wonderful to meet leaders of her calibre who refuse to be suppressed despite long years under imprisonment. She clearly is an individual with superior spiritual strength, and during the course of her speech and questions and answers she was asked whether she meditated during the period of house arrest. She was candid in saying that she would often lose patience and not meditate at all till she had a religious leader tell her that she really had no choice and that she must meditate whether she likes it or not. She was also asked on who really influenced her life the most and gave her encouragement to continue maintaining her sense of determination. She answered that it was Pandit Nehru who influenced her a great deal largely because her own background and that of Pandit Nehru were very similar, given the kind of education that they had both had. She was asked about Gandhi's influence and she felt that Gandhi was clearly someone that she looked up to, but found his actions and beliefs so very superhuman that she found it difficult to reach his standards and code of behavior. She did, however, advise the students present on the occasion that Gandhi was a must read, because the inspiration that he provided was far above that of any other human being.

What is unique about Aung San Suu Kyi is the quality that she obviously shares with someone like Nelson Mandela who spent 27 years in prison, but only experienced a strengthening of his resolve and spiritual strength while he was interned. I found a remarkable similarity between her and Nelson Mandela who rose above hatred, animosity or blame for what he had been through, and actually showed the enlightenment of bringing his rainbow nation together in a manner that no other leader could have succeeded in doing. Perhaps, if and when Suu Kyi becomes the leader of Myanmar we would see a similar level of enlightenment and the ability to forgive on her part as well. H.H. the Dalai Lama is another leader who harbours no rancour, bitterness or hatred against those who compelled him to flee Tibet.

As a footnote, I might mention that I received a *Honoris Causa* degree at Reims University in France and was pleased to learn that "this *Honoris Causa* degree is a mark of honorary distinction given to an outstanding scientist outside Reims University. It honours not only the scientific excellence but also the commitment to humanism and the contribution to the evolution of society as a whole. So far, only 5 persons received this honour at Reims University in the last 50 years. The purpose, in a context of an internationalization of knowledge, is also to encourage borderless cooperation between researchers throughout the world."

One receives a number of honorary doctorates, but I was particularly pleased to receive this honour for what it represents.

*Source: TERI Intranet*