

Dear friends,

Let me give you a little snapshot of the conversation that occurred in our last meeting after reading **A First Rate Madness: Uncovering the Links between Leadership and Mental Illness** by Nassir Ghaemi. I mentioned the premise of this book when I sent you the last e-mail: “When our world is in tumult, mentally ill leaders function best.” That’s a big claim, and I approached the concept warily. I thought to myself “show me the evidence!” I imagined that we would evaluate the author’s arguments at the same time we enjoyed the celebrity profiles and anecdotes. I expected we would weigh the idea of whether “psychological history” is a legitimate lens through which we want to assess historical figures. We didn’t answer that question. Didn’t even try. Instead our discussion turned on what quality would you (and each of us chimed in) value MOST in your leader. This is what we said, in no order of importance: *scientifically educated; demonstrable empathy for the common person; truthfulness; moral courage*. We tussled with these themes the entire time we spent together. It didn’t seem too important that we strayed from a close discussion of whether the author succeeded in making his case. What the author DID do was to spark a thoughtful dialogue. That was fun and satisfying and engaged us with each other. I think that’s what a book club is all about.

We’ve selected another book exploring a dysfunction of the brain for our October meeting. Our next book will be **Hallucinations** by Oliver Sacks, Vintage Books, 2013.

**Our next meeting will be on Wednesday, Oct. 23, 2013 at the First Christian Church in Bloomington in the Sanctuary/Gathering Room from 7:00-8:30 pm.**

Sacks is a writer, and a neurologist, who blends patient anecdote, scientific information, history, and the richness of his personal experience into a genre described as “medical literature”. **Hallucinations** is, like Ghaemi’s book, a big package of fascinating stories about real people. Sacks calls his book an anthology describing “the experiences and impact of hallucinations on those who have them.” He deliberately excludes the hallucinations that sometimes accompany schizophrenia. He chooses to explore what else, *besides* major mental illness, could possibly cause someone to perceive things that aren’t really there. Without consciously making a segue from our last book, we picked another facet of brain dysfunction to explore. One reviewer of **Hallucinations** pointed out that “machine metaphors”, - describing the brain in terms of hardware, wiring and processing, - capture some of the complexity of that organ’s functions but does not constitute a theory of the mind. What is the mind anyway? Do we learn anything about what it is by reading stories about what happens when it goes wrong? Something to talk about! Come to the next meeting, - we’ll chew on this idea and welcome you warmly.

With every good wish,  
Janet