

The Clutch - Part 2

A game changer...

The human memory is short-lived. Good and bad times pass, and we move on. Two weeks ago, I was in darkness. I couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel. Today, on my birthday, I am on the path to recovery, but the past few days are still fresh in my mind. It is a good time to share my experience before the dust settles. It's astounding how much impact a mere week can have on your outlook towards life.

May, 2019: I had been feeling uneasy in my lower abdomen. There was no pain. It was a feeling of discomfort. Not compelling enough to go to a doctor, but enough to play on my mind. I had lost a precious piece of my heart to stomach cancer a decade ago. I started researching articles on the web that correlated with my symptoms.

Then, one morning I woke up with a slight fever and uneasiness. Restlessness, as you grow older, is not a good sign. Ritu insisted we go to Ruby Hall for a check-up. Heart tests showed optimal functioning. I took advantage of my presence in the hospital for a full-body check-up to comprehend my abdomen issues. All the tests turned out to be normal with only a slight increase in the white blood cell (WBC) count, indicating a minor infection. But, over the next several hours, the fever kept rising, higher in intensity and faster in frequency. Since the cause was not known, there was a reason to worry, hence the hospitalization.

The first night in the hospital was rough, I kept staring at the ceiling. My WBC count rose overnight. Our primary physician was leaving for a vacation. She wanted to play it extra safe and sent me for a full-body positron emission tomography (PET) scan to isolate the source of infection. Radioactive dyes were pumped in and there—simmering in high fever—I laid still in the claustrophobic machine for 30 minutes. When I came out, the technician queried if I had been facing issues with my stomach. He had discovered some swelling on the colon along with a big lesion on the liver. I instinctively asked him if it was a tumor. He said it was unlikely but gave no affirmation. He said he would talk to our doctor directly.

That afternoon, my mind raced to succession planning—at family and business

levels. But, my ideas were incoherent. The body had turned toxic within hours. There was a war within me—between the disease itself and an exceptionally strong antibiotic, Metrogyl. I was becoming delirious. Non-stop nausea had taken over. I felt like I was sitting in the backseat of an ST bus, suffering from severe motion sickness while passing through a never-ending winding road through the mountains. My attempts to throw up didn't yield relief. My thoughts kept bouncing around, ill sequenced. Images would flash one after the other. All negative. I no longer cared for the colonoscopy test on the following day. All I wished for was normalcy to prevail. I wondered which clutch should I hold on to?

When Rajat Gupta went to prison for two years, he found his clutch in the teachings of the holy scripture—the Gita. Bhagavad Gita is what had kept Rajat sane in prison, allowed him to come to terms with his fate, and the people who had turned against him. The Gita helped him realize the value of karmas. The teachings of Gita are prefixed at the beginning of each chapter in his book.

I tried to visualize Lord Krishna delivering the Gita. About our worldly body being inconsequential and there being a higher purpose. But, my mind found itself in a strange territory. I thought of calling an old friend from the Vedanta Academy to read me a few chapters from the holy scripture. Then, gave up the idea as it had a desperate ring to it. Crying was too much of an effort. Money, power, relationships—everything felt meaningless. I felt a poor man sleeping on the road is luckier than the likes of me getting non-stop drips in an elite hospital.

It had been three days now without food. I felt as if my whole body along with the organs were packing up. This is what end-of-the-road must feel like. Top doctors of the hospital were summoned. As was our family doctor. They confirmed my line of treatment. Strong medications were needed to be continued with full force for at least a week more.

How will I survive this long, I asked Ritu. I don't remember her words, but they were comforting. She, with her medical background had taken full charge. She was my pillar of support and had not left my side from the beginning. My daughter, family and friends now surrounded me. They didn't care whether I didn't want visitors. They would laugh, crack jokes, take turns to give me a head massage to divert my mind, while sneakily trying to feed me a bite of an apple. My sister and brother-in-law flew in from Ahmedabad. My son arrived from the U.S. My WhatsApp was flooded with wishes and prayers from family and friends

who were out-of-town. I realized I am not alone in this battle.

Why did Rajat dedicate his book to his grandchildren? Why did he become a globetrotter to share his side of the story? Why did he feel shortchanged at not being vindicated during my interview? It's because he doesn't want to be alone in his journey. He wants acceptance from his family, friends, and followers. His social ecosystem is the second clutch.

While my physical condition stayed precarious over the next few days, mentally I was in a better place. The antibiotics finally started doing their job. Colonoscopy was performed. All the biopsy tests came negative—there was no lesion or growth—nothing to worry. Instead, it was an acute attack of amoebiasis that had found its way to the liver. The large abscess on my liver was aspirated with an invasive procedure. With the pus surgically drained, I felt a lot better.

Now I am home, slowly regaining my strength and five kgs of weight. The heavy medications will last for a week more before I can get back into my routine, which hopefully will include some time for spiritual pursuits, and more investment into relationships.

I feel there are two clutches that humans seek when faced with a calamity. One is astral and one is worldly. While spirituality gives us a higher purpose beyond this life, our earthly bonds allow us to make meaning out of our existing life. They serve the purpose of not letting us feel lonely in our struggle—one clutch is god; one clutch is man. Both clutches need time, investment and practice. I learnt that just-in-time invocations don't work!