



Azim Premji
Foundation

DIALOGUES

A NEWSLETTER FROM CONVERSATIONS -
CENTRE FOR POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH
AND WELLBEING

APRIL 2021 • ISSUE 2 • VOLUME 1



STORIES OF GRIT, RESILIENCE & RESOURCEFULNESS

A very warm welcome to all of you from the Conversations team! We are back with the second issue of our newsletter.

The theme for this issue is 'Stories of Grit, Resilience and Resourcefulness'. The past year has been challenging in various ways and we hear and see people around us sharing stories of persevering in the face of difficulties, bouncing back from challenges and finding ways to overcome struggles.

Members of our community, including students, alumni and the members of the counselling team, have shared similar stories and personal experiences in this issue through articles, poetry and artwork. Happy reading!

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CONTRIBUTIONS FROM STUDENTS & MEMBERS OF AZIM PREMJI FOUNDATION

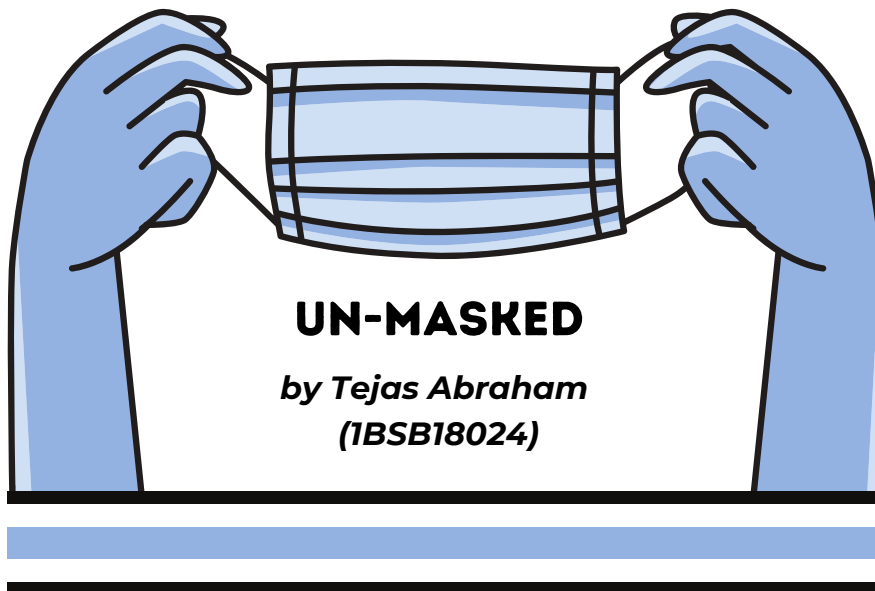
A HAND IN THE DARK

by Ramakrishnan M. N.
(LLM2020)

My dearest comrade,
The smiles and laughter
Go share with your other friends
Who surround you
Day and night
Those fortunate to win your presence,
All the time in your clock
Your moments of everyday
Without limits
Without restrictions
Without ticking of time
Without fear of prying eyes
Without worries of any sort.

My dearest comrade,
Give me what remains -
Your worries, sorrows and pain
The tears before they touch the ground
Let me share them with you
I will be happy and content with them
Let me have at least those moments of
your life,
Let me be part of them
Let me partner you through them
Let me find joy and meaning
By smoothening your frowns,
By wiping your tears
By recarving your smile
By recreating your laughter
Let me be your friend
In your moments of darkness
Let me be your shadow
And guide you
Lead you back to the light
To the other world of joy and laughter.





'A fresh beginning!' in a new city
Leaving turmoil behind
Little did I know at that point
That chaos would catch up in time

'Fear' had made its grand entrance
Oh! Was its presence felt!
Masks galore, not an open store
'Ma, should I pay this month's rent?'

'No', she said. 'Come home,
it's been long since we've had you here.
No one can foresee what will happen,
Don't get stranded alone.'

I gave this some thought, and reluctantly
started my journey back
one amongst thousands, all in a rush
flocking from the city's core.

I had gone there hoping to redeem myself,
yet chaos showed up at my door.
But looking back now, I think it's clear
I came back to what mattered the most.

So perhaps this 'fear', was a blessing in disguise
and I know some may think alike
A curse inflicted on the world we knew,
A 'curse' that brought me home.

तुम एक कमज़ोर औरत हो! ज़रा ठैरो, अभी बताती हूँ क्यों।

by Sariya Ali
(Azim Premji Foundation)

तुम एक कमज़ोर औरत हो जो पैदा होते ही अपने बाप की, अपने पूरे घर की इज़्ज़त बन जाती हो।
तुम्हारे साथ कोई “दुर्घटना” ना हो जाए, इसी डर में तुम्हारी ज़िंदगी का हर निर्णय कोई और लेता रहता है।
तुम एक कमज़ोर औरत हो क्योंकि तुम्हारे घर में आने- जाने के वक्त से लेके तुम्हारे दुपट्टे की नाप तक तुम्हारे लिए सब तय किया जाता है।
तुम बड़ी होती हो, दुनिया देखती हो और बदले में दुनिया तुम्हें भी देखती है।
तुम अपनी माँ को देखती हो, अपनी माँ की माँ को देखती हो, मासी, चाची, मामी को भी देखती हो।
सब कमज़ोर औरतों को देखती हो जिनकी ज़िंदगी अपने पती के कार्यस्थल के हिसाब से नाचती है।
जहाँ उसने तुम्हारा बस्ता जैसे बाँध दिया, तुम अपना धर्म मान के राज़ी हो जाति हो, चल पढ़ती हो; फिर एक घर बसाती हो।
तुम्हारी ज़िंदगी उस हर मकान को घर बनाने में निकल जाती है जहाँ तुम्हारा पती चाहता है।

लेकिन तुम एक कमज़ोर औरत हो, बहुत कमज़ोर।
जब तुम इन सब कमज़ोर औरतों को देखती हो तब सोचती हो, खयालों में ही सही की काश कोई ऐसी ज़िंदगी भी हो जहाँ सब मेरे हिसाब से हो।
जहाँ तुम्हारा अपना चुना हुआ कार्यस्थल हो, तुम्हारा ही मकान हो जिसे घर बनाया जा सके।
मगर ये सिर्फ़ तुम्हारी सोच तक ही सीमित रहेगा।
शायद एक दिन कोई ऐसा मिले भी जो तुम्हारे इर्द गिर्द अपने आप को ढालने की कल्पना बना रहा हो।
मगर तुम उसी क्रिस्मत के इंतज़ार में रहोगी जहाँ तुम नाचती रहो किसी मर्द के हिसाब से; क्योंकि तुम एक कमज़ोर औरत हो !
बहुत कमज़ोर।

English translation

YOU ARE A WEAK WOMAN

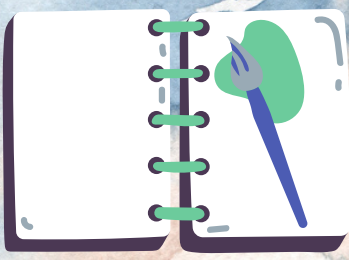
by Sariya Ali (Azim Premji Foundation)

Translated by Soumitra Saxena

You are a weak woman,
Just wait, I'll tell you why

You are a weak woman, who becomes the honour of
her father and the entire household,
the moment she's born
The fear of a 'mishap' happening with you keeps enabling
someone or the other to take your life decisions
You're a weak woman because everything, from time to the
length of your dupatta is decided for you
You grow up, you gaze at the world, and the world stares
back at you
You watch your mother, your mother's mother, and all your
aunts
You observe all the other weak women, the life of whom
twirl around their husbands' workplaces
Like a school bag arranged beforehand, you treat this lie
your duty, walk on that path, and then you build a home
Your life is spent on turning every building your husband
wants into a home

But you are a weak woman, very weak
When you see these weak women, you wish of a land
where everything happens as you like it, even if it is
imagined
Where you have chosen your workplace; where you own
the building to be made a home out of
Yet all of this would be limited to your imagination
One day, perhaps, you will meet someone who dreams of
molding themselves around who you are
Alas, you'll keep on waiting for your fate where you twirl
around the man's needs; because you're a weak woman
Very weak.



VEDA'S VISUAL VERSES

AS JULIA CAMERON ONCE SAID, "ART OPENS THE CLOSETS, AIRS OUT THE CELLARS AND ATTICS. IT BRINGS HEALING."
WELCOME TO A SPACE WHERE I EXPLORE MENTAL HEALTH THEMES AND CAPTURE EXPERIENCES THROUGH ART AND POETRY!

THE TAPESTRY OF TRYING TIMES



In the tapestry of a lifetime, rough river waters course through.
The rapids woven with satin stitches of cerulean and teal blues,
jutting with jagged rocks

Trials, tribulations and trying times captured in the knots of frayed thread.
Allow your eyes to follow their meandering, see how slowly they smoothen,
un-crinkling the dread.

You can see the strength of leaving a loveless relationship,
in the marmalade-tinged tulips.
The magic of tales spun like yarn to buoy a hopeless spirit
in the plum peninsula.
In the periwinkle waters,
the calm of relaxed shoulders after lifelong lessons of being on guard
etched into neural substrate.
And after years of trauma imbibed in the body, the boldness of just breathing
and simply being, in the snow whites.

And most of all, you will see the tapestry telling you
'times are hard, *but we are hardy.*'



KAVITHA'S KORNER

STUDENT EXPERIENCES

HUMAN CONNECTION: COMMUNICATION

The art of communication allows us to share emotionally and interact socially to put forth our ideas successfully and effectively. Communication is therefore an important interaction between human beings. The ultimate goal of communication is successful and effective dialogue with exchange of ideas.

Communication is complete when a person puts forth his/her idea and the other person understands that idea in the former person's perspective. Interestingly, we also communicate using nonverbal, signals, gestures, facial expressions, body language and even our appearance. Responding with understanding or providing feedback to the person putting forth the idea, is a crucial part of communication.

— “ —

***“You can have brilliant ideas,
but if you can’t get them
across, your ideas won’t get
you anywhere.....”***

-Lee Iacocca

” —

Nonverbal communication otherwise known as body language comes from the difference between the words that people speak and our understanding of what they are saying .By developing ones awareness of signs and signals of body language ,one can begin to understand what someone is talking about and understanding the meaning behind what is said.

GOOD COMMUNICATION STARTS WITH LISTENING

Communication is a two way process .Hearing is a physical ability While, listening is a skill that can be learned.

There are different styles of communication –Passive, Aggressive, Passive Aggressive and Assertive communication. In order to build healthy relationships, we must learn the art off Assertive communication –that is to be clear, direct and respectful is how we communicate. Being respectful of the feelings of other person is an important element of Assertive communication.

Finally, one of the most important communication is the one we have with ourselves. We constantly discover, rediscover, console and question ourselves. Healthy communication with oneself, which is filled with positivity and self-motivation, can help one grow.

It was not easy during the lockdown last year. After around one month, it started hitting me hard. I eventually got bored with cooking, reading and virtual interaction with friends, colleagues and family was not enough anymore.

Slowing down started to feel my life has stopped and I could see no escape out of it soon which was a bit scary. In a matter of few days I was dragging myself even to do the daily chores. The motivation to do anything was getting hard to keep. But the good thing was I was aware of the changes within me. I knew things can't go on acting on it was important the more I reflected on things. I got clarity that Self-care could add value in my current situation. I started to take one day at a time and starting the day with meditation. Once I could wake up early and do meditation, the day was better, I could sleep early too. What looked difficult then is a conscious process now. The days were tough, but those days did teach me planning, persistence, staying hopeful and what not. I am not saying I have become resilient to easily handle what next challenge is going to bring me, but I think that now I know that I have the skills to handle what next challenge is going to come my way. The takeaway for me was an internal dialogue.

Thus, a comprehensive process that helps convey thoughts, foster understanding and creates strong bonds with one's own self.





SWATI'S STORYBOARD

WAYS OF COPING FROM THE COMMUNITY

The community was invited to share intentions, hopes, dreams, beliefs or values that we hold onto that help us through our struggles. This was an invitation to share our stories, but also to create a document of resources for other people to use. Feel free to be influenced from these ways, and keep adding to your list! 😊

✨ Ideas, Hopes, Dreams, Beliefs, Values... ✨

I just look at how far I have come and whatever has happened till now I never anticipated that. And if I could get through that I am gonna do it now as well. I believe that being strong is the only option we have :)

Joyful strength

I held on to a promise. A promise that I would get up if I fell down. A promise that I would not let myself sink in so deep that I would not be able to see the hands that were reaching in to pull me out. And finally, this promise helped me regain sight of a dream. A dream that I could and would fly again.

A belief system ascertaining that I need not hold back on any opportunities due to the logistical hurdles of being a woman conducting solo field studies in hinterlands of northern Indian belt



I think it has helped me to constantly remember the many I'm extremely lucky to have and grateful for. That keeps me positive and also helps me stay away from feeling sorry for myself. It has also helped me to remember that people have gone through unimaginably difficult things and have come out strong and are doing better than I am so that is sort of a motivation to not feel helpless because knowing that other people have had the strength to come out of situations that I can only imagine shows me that people are really capable of a lot and that pushes me to not feel dejected, etc. And it also is a reminder to find ways to help myself and be stronger and keep trying until I find something that helps me figure out I can navigate a given situation. I also try to keep my expectations low so that I am not disappointed and do not have an unrealistic view or hope of/for something. None of this means that I don't pay attention to my emotions or just push away things that I find difficult, but that I try not to lose perspective and let how I'm feeling in a given moment have a disproportionate effect on me in how I see myself and others around me.



The biggest tools I have at my disposal during difficult times are rationality and kindness. Rationality, to understand that situation isn't as bad as it seems to be, that there is an impermanence in hard situations, and there have always been tough times that I have overcome in the past. Being kind to oneself is the biggest service that one can do, as it helps normalize the emotions and feelings that are being felt, and to give yourself hope that you are doing the best you can. The combination of these two things, for me, truly defines resilience.



What really helps me is knowing that I have been through worse, so that becomes a testimony to the fact that if I could do it then, I can do it now. That keeps me going. Also just being grateful for all that I have is also what helps me be more appreciative of the difficult times because I believe that I always learn from them and it helps me become a better person.



Resilience is a fundamental coping tool , especially during the times we are currently living through, but I've come to learn through years of practice that the ability to access resilience is based on one's privileges. Having something to land on when you bounce back is not always a given, and perhaps if our focus was on creating a more equitable and inclusive society, this privilege would be available to all.



One thing that helps me is to always look for openings of possibilities. I find if I am stuck about a certain conclusion, there is no space for chance and any other way a situation can play out. Especially in difficult situations, it helps me hold onto hope, that things don't necessarily have to end up as bad as they seem and that there is scope for it to be different.

Stories of what became possible when holding on... ✨



My aunt got diagnosed with breast cancer at the beginning of last year. She bravely accepted it and pacified us. Through the Corona lockdown, she went for her treatment, and despite all the side effects, pain, kept a smiling face, and her resolve to fight the disease. She is a professor in a college and now she has started going to college and takes zoom classes. Her determination to fight with joy and optimism, and put up a brave front is heart touching and inspirational.

There was a time when I wanted to achieve something so badly that I fought everyone and everything that came in my path towards accomplishing it. I did this for years, until I finally didn't achieve the goal and that broke me. I was lost, I felt like my life no longer had meaning and purpose. It was the only thing I had ever wanted (or so I thought at that time). I had to 'move on' but a part of me was just numb, going through one day after another without really feeling anything. Here is where my promise came into the picture. To remind me that falling down is okay but staying down is not an option. It's not as simple as it sounds and it's a fight that people fight every day of their lives but it is the only way they know to survive.

I say this with a lot of gratitude- I have been extremely lucky to have had very few real difficulties in my life. I suppose one challenging time was when my parents were on the brink of separation and the environment at home was not very pleasant. But even through this, I was very fortunate as the situation was much easier on me than I know similar situations have been for other people and it was not as though my parents treated me any differently. It was a bit tough to see and hear fights though, and it helped me to maintain a positive outlook and sort of mentally prepare for if the separation was to happen.

**WE WOULD REALLY LIKE
TO THANK THE
FOLLOWING PEOPLE AND
MORE, FOR THEIR
CONTRIBUTIONS:**

**ANUJA
TARA
MARZIA
PRARTHANA
LAKSHMI
SOUMITRA
AND OTHERS**





MAKE-BELIEF ILLNESSES AND THE MARTHA MITCHELL EFFECT

The concept of human rights and dissent have existed for thousands of years and had a salient role in the formation of democracy. We see brave Belarusians protesting against their totalitarian government, or people from Hong Kong fighting for their rights, and we feel a sense of solidarity, and an admiration for their grit and resilience, standing against their oppressors in the face of incarceration, or even possible death. States have used systemic methods to curb dissent, ranging from the direct, like military interventions, to the more indirect, subtle forms, such as using medical sciences, anthropological findings, and malpractices in the name of state reform. One such practice, which is not talked about as much, is

using psychiatry and mental health as a political tool.

In 1972, during the fall of Nixon's administration, owing to their corrupt practices and the Watergate burglary, one individual was at the centerfold, and she taught the world a very important lesson on how we view mental illness. Martha Mitchell was the wife of then US Attorney General John Mitchell, who was personally selected by Richard Nixon. She was by no means an ideal better half of an important political figure; she liked her evening drink, was well connected in social circles where gossip was commonplace, and had absolutely no qualms divulging information that could get her into trouble. As the campaign for Nixon's re-election was gathering pace, she started divulging the corrupt practices of Nixon's administration to reporters, whom she was very close with. As the Watergate news broke in, and officials having close ties with Nixon were arrested, she tried reaching out to reporters to report the Nixon connection, but she was abducted, held in captivity, and physically assaulted. A lot of what she said about the Nixon administration was dismissed as delusional and paranoid thinking, and psychiatrists at that time concluded that she suffered from a paranoid mental disorder. Over the years, everything that she said about the administration would turn out to be true. Her case, as well as her resilience and fearlessness in the entire ordeal would lead to her own personal legacy; a term called "Martha Mitchell Effect", where psychiatrists would misdiagnose a



person with having a mental disorder, when they're just telling facts, and the diagnosis comes from the practitioner's own bias and prejudice.

This is not a new form of discrimination by any means. Mid-19th century, black slaves who wanted to be free from captivity and expressed displeasure against their oppressors were diagnosed with a (made-up) condition called drapetomania, asserting that slaves are inherently supposed to be subservient, and anyone going in the contrary direction is, in fact, mentally ill. Hysteria, another made-up condition having its root in pseudo-scientific speculations put forth by Hippocrates and Plato, remained in texts for more than two millennia, and used to suppress women, notably in the beginning of 20th century, for demanding equal rights, in the face of the Suffrage movement, for 'wanting to abandon their femininity'. These 'diagnoses' also spilled over to practices such as doing 'manly' activities like

smoking, travelling, or having sexual agency. Hysteria literally means uterus in Ancient Greek language, attributing the supposed disorder to a person's natural biology.

It is hard to draw a line between these practices existing due to a lack of scientific framework, and the dominant group purposefully trying to actively suppress the other. 20th century nation states are filled with examples of the latter. Nazi Germany had mental asylums filled with dissidents, as well as normal public who did not fulfill the ideal Aryan image, and horrific experiments were carried out in these facilities, courtesy of a certain Dr. Josef Mengele, who liked to mix pseudo-scientific practices such as eugenics with his medical practices. USSR, in particular, had so many dissidents diagnosed with mental disorders, particularly 'sluggish schizophrenia', that one third of all political prisoners, especially during Leonid Brezhnev's rule (aptly called

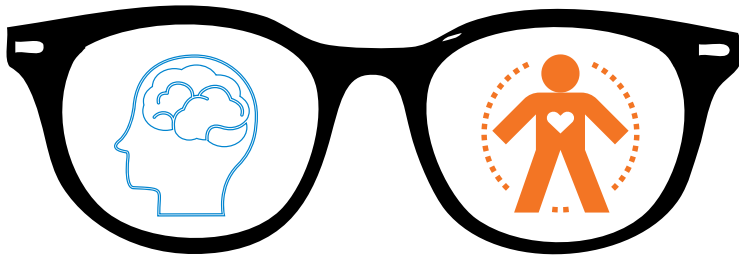
Brezhnev's Stagnation), were admitted to mental asylums, and constantly given doses of tranquilizers, electro-convulsive therapy (without the safety measures), and generally kept in inhumane conditions. The mixing of science (or rather, pseudoscience) with an ideology with a confirmation bias contributes to these ghastly systems being put to place. Hitler believed that there is only one pure race. Stalin believed that flora and fauna found in their natural state are inherently Communist. Pol Pot believed in ultra-traditional agrarian practices, and that intellectualism was inherently bad, leading to killing of not only doctors, academics, and scientists, but literally anyone wearing reading/seeing glasses. Similarly, China under Mao Ze Dong believed in the idea of people doing 'political harm' to the society (by not following the state ideology), and such people being inherently mentally ill, and thus, 'political maniacs' were arrested in hundreds and kept in sanitoriums. In the 1960s, black protesters of racism and segregation were singled out in the US, being diagnosed with schizophrenia, to an extent where it came to be known as a disease almost exclusively for black people. People from the LGBT community were discriminated for their gender identity and sexuality, by the same institution, like American Psychiatric Association, who classified them as having mental disorders, but continuous research proved them wrong time and again.

The lesson to be learnt, here, is that almost all forms of governments have used mental health as a tool of oppression, like other areas of research. The human spirit and resilience, at the end, is what helps defeat these regimes and practices. For every Richard Nixon, there will be a Martha Mitchell.

Rationality and dissent are two of the biggest tools that we have, especially in the face of crisis. Your identity and your opinions do not make you mentally ill. The personal is always political. While we talk about how having political prisoners is an abhorrence, we should also spare a thought for these heroes; feared and detested by the government, discriminated against due to their opinions. They not only exposed the flaws in the state machinery, but also ones in the human condition, and perception. We still have a long way to go, but we need to seize the tools for ourselves, and make the states that we, the people, have created, work for us, not the other way round.



LAKSHMI'S LENS



TAKING A LOOK AT THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION

**CAUTIOUSLY
OPTIMISTIC:
FINDING HOPE
IN A TIME OF
GLOBAL CRISIS**

The COVID-19 pandemic is still at large one year after we experienced our first lockdown across the globe. And the adverse impact that this long-term life-altering event has had on mental health is unprecedented. At times like this, it can feel especially hard to stay hopeful and optimistic about our future. In fact, a recent survey by WebMD that measured Global Mental Health across 8 countries, found that a disproportionate number (44%) of youth aged 18-24 were at risk of severe mental health issues which was the highest percentage across all age groups. The same study found that this age group was uniquely plagued by a sense of hopelessness, guilt, and obsessive unwanted thoughts.

If there is one thing that each one of us has learned this past year, it is that we cannot always predict or control what happens in our external environment, and not all of us feel emotionally capable of handling that uncertainty. This is where emotional resilience comes in, but how do we cultivate a resilient mind when the world around us feels so overwhelming?



1

SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

As Morgan Scott Peck says, "life is difficult" and "life is complex". The belief and therefore the expectation that life must be kind and easy will lead to distress and disappointment. Some amount of stress is essential for building resilience and resourcefulness. When we face challenges, we delve deep into our resources and become aware of our strengths, capabilities, and shortcomings. This makes us feel more confident and helps us grow mentally and spiritually.

2

EMBRACE CHANGE

We all want success and progress, but we also want comfort. We resist and don't really like change. Change is disruptive, and maybe painful as well, so we like maintaining a status quo. But, when we face sudden, drastic changes, we are forced to react. We need to be present in the experiences of life to react. Unfortunately, we are focused on our past or worried about the future and miss out on being in the present. This causes sadness and fear.



3

LET GO OF FEAR

We cannot run away from fear but, we need to understand and overcome the fear. By doing so fear becomes a fuel to move forward, rather than a hindrance or a barrier. This can be an empowering experience. Life forces us to learn and improvise. Learning skills to overcome fear and cope with adversities gives us the flexibility to adapt and improvise.

Through all this, it is important to constantly check in with yourself through self-reflection, journaling, meditating, or speaking with a trusted friend or therapist. Being aware of who we really are and aligned internally with ourselves will help in not betraying and letting ourselves down. Self-reflection and awareness make it easier to navigate life and open our minds to opportunities and a way out when faced with challenges.

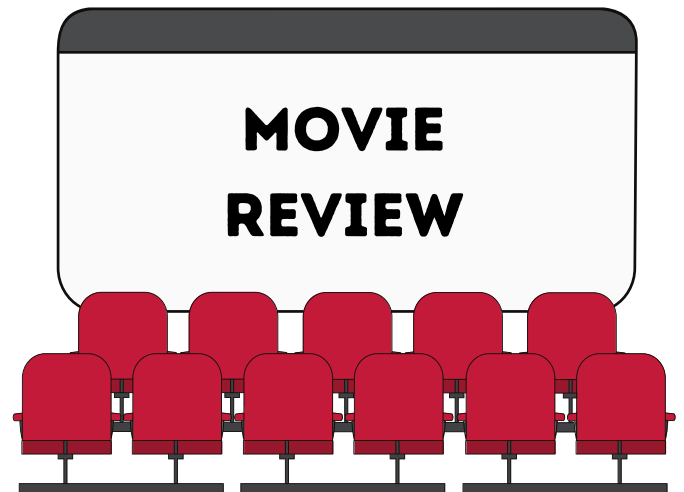
Beyond fear lies a world full of possibilities even in the bleakest moments. Trust that everything you need to navigate this difficult time, is already within you. Always remember, that even stars cannot shine without darkness.

**HAPPINESS CAN BE
FOUND IN THE
DARKEST OF TIMES, IF
ONE ONLY
REMEMBERS TO TURN
ON THE LIGHT.**

*Albus Dumbledore
(Harry Potter by
J.K Rowling)*



HELLO THERE! JOIN ME IN THIS JOURNEY OF UNRAVELING THE WONDROUS SPACE OF BOOKS/MOVIES THAT ARE LINKED TO MENTAL HEALTH 😊



— “ —

"I know what I have to do now. I got to keep breathing, because tomorrow the sun will rise. Who knows what the tide could bring?"

- Chuck Noland (Cast Away)

— ” —

Disclaimer: Spoilers ahead!

Castaway released in 2000 is a film about a man struggling to survive on a tropical island by himself for four years. The story is centered around the life of Chuck Noland played by Hollywood Actor - Tom Hanks. Undoubtedly one of Tom Hanks' best performances to date!

Except, it's more than that. Its visual story-

telling is its greatest strength, rarely ever presenting new information without it. So, what exactly makes this film so special?

Cast Away shows how Chuck Noland, an executive with FedEx, survives on a deserted island in the pacific. Noland, who prizes work above all else, even his relationship with his fiancé, leaves on Christmas to head to Asia for his job. On the flight, his plane travels out of its planned route to avoid a storm. While off-course, and in the storm, the plane goes down. Noland miraculously survives and washes ashore on an island, with some FedEx packages to keep him alive for an indefinite period of time.



This is an unimaginably difficult situation for anyone to be in and during this time, Chuck finds a companion in Wilson which is a volleyball that serves as his personified friend and only companion during the four years on a deserted island. Wilson was the only thing, aside from perhaps Kelly (fiancé) and the

mysterious package that kept him going and helped him survive. Another film as that highlights resilience is 'Life of Pi'. Yes, Richard Parker is indeed a living, breathing, tiger. However, the constant threat of being eaten gave Pi's life purpose. The fear of being eaten kept his sanity intact without him even realizing.

Similarly, with Wilson, Chuck had something to project his thoughts onto. Although not human, he still had someone to rely on in his darkest hours. Although symbolically Wilson is a representation of Chuck's past self it doesn't change the fact that Chuck still must let go. He became his best friend on that island. In his starved and weakened state Chuck finds himself physically unable to go after Wilson and save him. He has to choose over his chance of redeeming himself to live a self-fulfilling life and going down a path of self-destruction that is continuing to mourn and sit in his own sadness and self-pity. When he realizes that he has to move on he returns to his raft, and we see a broken man sobbing over the loss of Wilson.

The act of moving on is hard. We all want to hold onto hope that one day things will magically be like they used to be. We all want to believe that if we just keep pursuing what we lost we will eventually get it back. There comes a point perhaps where we realize that not everything is meant to be. For Chuck, this just means accepting his loss for what it is and moving on.

In a nutshell, Chuck showed

extraordinary resilience in surviving during his four-year trap in the uninhabited island. In fact, we may learn from him in the face of the pandemic. First, the need to embrace and accept the current situation as Chuck accepted his fate of being casted away in a plane crash. To understand that unusual things may happen in our lives suddenly without any warning.

Chuck also faced his situation with bravery and optimism. He left a FedEx box with wings printed on its surface as if he knew one day he might go back to Tennessee and be able to deliver the box to the owner. After being trapped for four years, he made a raft and sailed in the rough sea with hope and optimism that other ships or boats might find his raft and rescue him. Similarly, for us in the current context, not knowing when the pandemic will be settled, we could equip ourselves with myriad strategies to address our concerns and to seek help.

Quite evidently, the theme of being hopeful and resilient is what was my primary take away from this movie. Being hopeful can seem hard at times, however, it is this hope that helps us get by some of the most difficult times in our lives.

“Remember, Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies.”

— **Stephen King**

MY RATING:



THEMES, REFLECTIONS AND SHARING

by Veda Dandamudi

‘Conversations Connect’ is a space we started for students in our community to come together and share their experiences and feelings with one another, especially now during the second wave of the pandemic. We held the space for the first time on 29th April, 2021.

As we heard about members of our own community testing positive, being in quarantine, their loved ones and friends being affected, it looks like the virus is coming closer to home. It has been hard to deal with so much and members are facing various struggles: interference in daily routine, screen fatigue, challenges staying connected online, trying to keep up with academic work and looking for jobs in such unprecedented times. We all shared about feeling anxious, frustrated, helpless and a sense of loss of control.

Together, we found ourselves sitting with some difficult questions. *How do we help others and those we love from afar? Who do we reach out to when everyone we know is struggling in some way or the other? How do we take care of ourselves?* We shared a collective grief for our sense of safety, normalcy, social connection and, of course, the people we have lost to COVID. It was a pause for us in the middle of this pressure to carry on as usual in this crisis, and to acknowledge how we are feeling and what we are going through. We were reminded to be kind and compassionate to ourselves, that it is unfair to expect to be at our best, and that it is okay and valid for us to feel what we are feeling right now.

Yet, in the midst of listening to stories of struggle, we were also heartened to hear stories of support. Some of our members spoke about how they are taking care of others in need and how they have taken on the work of verifying leads for oxygen and hospital beds.

In the end, we were left reflecting on what it is that we are holding on to during these trying times. We shared with each other what we find helpful in the hopes that others in the group would benefit. We spoke about trying to cope by staying present and taking things one day at a time, focusing on what is within our control during such uncertainty, and taking care of our physical health.

A poignant reflection we were left with was how, especially right now, we have

a need to be heard, to share with others and for others to be there for us. As a team, we were thankful to everyone who joined us, opened up, listened and were there for each other in the group in the spirit of community and solidarity.

We will continue to hold this space for everyone every week so please do come and join us.

We are all in this together.

COMING SOON FROM THE CONVERSATIONS TEAM!

**CALLING FOR APPLICATIONS
FOR THE 6TH BATCH OF PEER
SUPPORT (OPEN TO BOTH
POSTGRADUATE AND
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS)**

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**WORKSHOPS FOR STUDENTS
ON TOPICS LIKE**

- **STRESS MANAGEMENT**
- **SELF CONFIDENCE**
- **RELATIONSHIPS**

**NEWSLETTER DESIGN AND LAYOUT
CREDIT: VEDA DANDAMUDI**