The Story of Sam

Barak Water

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A Brief Dramatization of a Core Principle of the Transition: Allegory: Capitalism Comes To The Human Body

The Strange Case of Samuel – a Medical Socio-Economic Parable

Samuel was born a robust child. Early on, he had to struggle against some major obstacles; but he had a good head on his shoulders, a good heart, and better health than most of his peers.

Samuel had his growing pains. He made some poor choices in his adolescence but learned from both his successes and his failures and gained in wisdom faster than most. He became a leader among his fellows and was often a positive role model. He had a side of him that was kind of a bully but he also had a conscience and compassion, which prevailed in his speech and actions most of the time.

Like any human being, dog, cat, tree or other organism, Samuel – we'll call him Sam – was made up of a community of trillions of cells. These cells in turn formed rich and varied communities within Sam's body. There were the great metropolises of Heart, Brain, Liver, Lungs, Muscles. There were the smaller communities of specialized cells: Pituitary, the Islets of Langerhans, Adrenals, and many small towns such as Hair Follicles, Inner Ear, Retina and many more.

Each cell lived a fulfilling life doing what it was created to do: lung cells found their fulfillment grabbing oxygen molecules from the air and giving them to the Red Blood Cell Truckers while offloading carbon dioxide from them and releasing it into the air. Heart cells were drummers, laborers and dancers, pumping in a powerful dance that set the rhythm to which all the cells in the body pulsed. Liver cells were very detail-oriented characters who were adept at sorting through all the chemicals in the blood, separating and selecting some for disposal, others for storage or metabolism, and still others to be used in complex enzymatic processes that kept Sam healthy and robust.

Every cell did what was its nature to do and was fulfilled in doing it. The communities of cells, the organs, reflected the nature of the cells of which they were made, contributing in turn to the community as was their nature. And all together in their diversity, they were Sam, a conscious, growing, evolving, healthy human being.

Then one day something happened that would come to mystify doctors for quite a while.

One day the Lung Cells had their regular town hall meeting to discuss issues to do with their jobs in the world of Sam. Somehow a new idea came up, which got talked around and became a topic for official discussion. Nobody knew how this idea started, but most believe it was innocent in the beginning though somehow little by little it nearly became the undoing of Sam and the multitude of cells and communities keeping him whole.

A decision was made in Lungs. The next day a Notice went out to all the cells and communities in Sam: Henceforth the lungs will require two atoms of gold for every molecule of oxygen that they pass on to the Blood Truckers, and two atoms of gold for every molecule of carbon dioxide that they offload and return to the air. "This will henceforth be called our Price. If our Price is not met, then we will withhold oxygen and will not offload any carbon dioxide."

The reaction was immediate and strong. The rest of the organs and the cells in them thought at first that it was a joke. When Lungs got word of this, they withheld oxygen and declined to offload carbon dioxide for about a minute and a half. Brain struggled to maintain consciousness and began to shut down. Heart found it increasingly difficult to continue pumping. All of the community of organs and their cells became desperate and realized they had only seconds to act.

"Ok, we accept your terms. We will give you gold for oxygen and for carbon dioxide disposal. But give us a few days to figure out how to get it."

Lungs agreed to give the rest of the cells and organs two days to start bringing the gold, adding that in the meantime all cells and organs will be owing gold for oxygen delivered and carbon dioxide offloaded, and that interest will be charged. Lungs assured all organs and cells that they were keeping track of how many oxygen molecules they were delivering and how many carbon dioxide molecules they were removing. “All accounts will be paid in full within a week of this notice. Any cell or organ who fails to do so will not receive oxygen nor have their carbon dioxide removed until they do. In addition, they will have to pay an extra 3 gold atoms as a late fee plus another 5 gold atoms for reactivation of service.”

All the organs and cells scrambled frantically to find a way to come up with gold. Gold was not a normal or natural part of Samuel’s biological processes. It had no function or purpose. While it was not toxic in and of itself, there was no mechanism for digesting and distributing gold atoms within Sam’s body. The cells and organs urgently put their thoughts together to come up with a solution. Brain was as stumped as the rest of the organ communities, but among them they figured out a way.

Another major change began to ripple through Sam’s body. One by one, organs and cells began to give each other notice that from now on they well require gold atoms for their services. How else would they be able to gather the gold needed to satisfy Lungs’ price?

Very soon, inflation set in. “From now on, we will require ten gold atoms for every oxygen molecule delivered and every carbon dioxide molecule offloaded. Any who fail to meet the price will be excluded from service. Please see your in-boxes for a list of prices for other services including police and military defense (immune system) services, enzyme, hormone and other substance distribution and delivery, and all other Blood Corporation goods and services.” When asked why they got so expensive so quickly, Lungs replied with a press release saying: “We need to charge this price to meet our overhead operating costs. We have to pay the Blood Truckers their gold, pay Kidneys, Heart and Liver for their services, and of course make a profit. It’s not our fault that everybody else is so greedy.”

Pretty soon no cell or organ would perform any function without receiving gold atoms in return.

This was when Sam’s behavior began to change.

Normally good-natured most of the time and blessed with a strong work ethic, devotion to family and community, Sam’s behavior began to change. He became withdrawn, moody and distracted. His whole life and priorities changed. Every waking moment was devoted to gathering and consuming gold. He came up with an ingenious method of mixing a gold suspension that he could drink in order to allow Stomach, Intestines, Bowel and Gall Bladder to process the gold in an ionic state.

Sam had no idea why this was happening. He only knew that suddenly he had an insatiable craving for gold. Nothing else seemed to matter. He just couldn’t get enough gold to swallow. When he was preparing and drinking his gold suspension, he felt a sense of anticipation. As soon as he finished gulping it down, however, he felt a brief moment of well-being followed immediately by an ever greater craving for the metal. Pretty soon he only knew that he had to have more. As he consumed another glass, he was already thinking of how to get more. When he missed a dose of gold suspension, he felt sick, anxious, nervous, insecure, paranoid, grouchy.

As this process progressed, two things happened pretty much simultaneously:

One change was in Sam’s complexion. With the constant ingestion of gold, Sam’s skin took on a kind of golden glow. Everybody commented on how healthy and vibrant he looked, asked him what his secret was. He told them it was the gold suspension. And while his weight began to climb steadily due to gold weight, he looked thinner and thinner. For a while, he gave the impression of being in extraordinarily good health with his golden skin, thinning waistline, and apparently constant tireless energy.

The other change was that he became increasingly distant, moody, unpredictable, manic, and erratic. Valuable items began to go missing among his friends and family. At first nobody realized it was him doing it. His wedding ring disappeared, which he claimed was due to it slipping off and falling down the drain. He drained all of his resources and nobody knew

where they went. He became jumpy, secretive, and devious. He began to run little cons on strangers. His stealing got out of control. He gradually became a stranger to his closest friends and family. This once highly principled, trustworthy friend and devoted family man transformed into the first one suspected whenever something went missing, phony charges appeared on someone's account, or strange scary people knocked on the door in the wee hours of the morning.

His wife Liberty summed it up one day when, after he had verbally berated her for no apparent reason, she told him she believed that Sam had another love besides her, but she just couldn't figure out who or what it was. He denied it angrily as he prepared his latest brew of gold suspension and drank it. When she cried in anguish and tried to take the glass of golden brew out of his hand, he lashed out and threw her across the room, gulped down the liquid, then dropped to the floor where Liberty watched bewildered as he began licking up all of the liquid that had spilled.

"What's wrong?" she asked him as she checked herself for broken bones and rose from the kitchen floor, holding a paper towel over the gash in her forehead to stop the bleeding.

"I don't know! I don't know! I just know I have to have gold to drink! I can't be without it, and I don't know why! Just leave me alone will you?!?!? Just leave me be!"

Meanwhile inside Sam's body, the situation was steadily escalating. At the time of the incident in the kitchen, Lungs had raised their price to 70 atoms of gold for every oxygen molecule delivered and for every molecule of carbon dioxide eliminated. They claimed that the reason was because they now needed more gold to pay for the goods and services of Heart, Brain, Kidney, Liver, Blood and other Corporations while still remaining profitable. The word "inflation" began to be heard. Lungs blamed labor costs – Blood Truckers, Muscles, and other Unions demanded higher pay. Every organ and cell took every opportunity to raise its prices to keep up with the prices imposed by other organs and cells. The escalation was self-perpetuating.

Sam's biological processes became increasingly sluggish and fraught with breakages, slowdowns and breakdowns. What had once been a seamless choreography among all of the organs and cells, now had to stop at every exchange of energy or chemistry for cells and organs to process transactions. Before this new protocol, respiration had been a graceful dance of Blood Truckers pulling up to the Alveoli stations in Lungs, gracefully tossing their carbon dioxide out to the loading docks in the same motion as oxygen was tossed into the truck, with a Hi-Five and off to make the rounds. Now, a Blood Trucker would pull up to the station, pay the loading/offloading fees, pay the Alveoli Dock Workers, pay the Lung Offloading Fee, then wait for transaction confirmation, offload the carbon dioxide, then pay the Oxygen Fee, wait for transaction confirmation, then load the Oxygen under careful supervision lest any oxygen be stolen unpaid for. The whole process that used to take a few thousandths of a second now took nearly two seconds. It was this way throughout all of the complex interactions among organs, systems and cells in Sam's body.

In addition, tumors formed in Sam's body, structures whose only purpose was to process and keep track of the gold transactions and to shut off services for delinquent accounts. Still other tumors formed which took gold from cells and organs in exchange for covering their payments in the event that they fell behind, though charging high interest in the event of an actual claim. These structures took up space, crowding Sam's real organs and consuming resources, leaving less for all of the other organs. This caused anemia and chronic fatigue, among other issues.

Whenever an uninsured cell or organ couldn't make full payment for something, that good or service was withheld until payment was received. This became a more and more common occurrence as a few organs and cells managed to control more and more of the gold while more and more organs and cells were in debt to them. Cells began to die faster than they could reproduce. Necrosis set in at multiple sites throughout Sam's body as whole neighborhoods of cells died for lack of oxygen, glucose, or more complex enzymes, hormones and processes.

In addition, since gold had no real function in Sam's body and was not part of any metabolic or other processes, there was the question of where to put all of the gold steadily accumulating. While harmless in and of itself, there was just too much of it. Lungs, Kidneys, Intestines, Liver and Anus accumulated enormous quantities of gold and had no place to put it.

Why not Heart and Brain, you may ask? Well, cells in the city of Heart were working way too hard nonstop to be able to devote themselves to accumulating gold. Brain was too vulnerable to any fluctuation in oxygen, glucose and many other chemicals. It was too easy to threaten Brain with denial of service in so many ways. Brain was pretty easy for most organs to manipulate just by withholding oxygen, refusing to remove carbon dioxide, or crashing glucose, insulin or blood pressure. In the end, even though under protest, Brain acceded to the demands of the wealthy organs, for the greater good of the Body, its cells tried to tell themselves.

Why were Lungs, Kidneys, Intestines, Liver and Anus the ones ultimately calling the shots? Many doctors have written theses and papers on the subject. Ultimately, the consensus is that there was no particular reason. They just happened to be the ones who managed to leverage themselves and their functions in Sam's body to greatest advantage for the new overarching goal of acquiring and accumulating gold atoms. In someone else's body, it might have been different organs. But all researchers agree that the results would ultimately have been the same. Ultimately it was Anus who wielded the most power, since when it shut down, all organs and cells quickly began to drown and wallow in waste.

One more problem became increasingly painful for Sam. We mentioned that the constant influx of gold really did pose a storage problem. Wealthy cells and organs began to store the gold wherever they could find space: in the spaces between cells, in the joints, in the fluid of the eyes and inner ear, in the bone marrow, in the sweat glands, tear ducts and more. In a fit of opulence, Lungs and Kidneys decided to line all the blood vessels with gold. Of course this caused blood vessels to constrict and restricted blood flow while raising blood pressure to dangerous levels. Tissues and blood vessels become stiff. Sam's blood turned a metallic red-gold that was actually quite pretty until it dried when he was cut.

He began to get infections since his white blood cells couldn't get to the site of a viral or microbial breach in time to fight off the invaders. Gold was everywhere, blocking just about everything. Yet more kept coming in. In the intricate pathways and communication networks of Brain, gold began to interfere with normal functioning. Since gold is such a good conductor, its increasing presence precipitated numerous short circuits and even seizures. The cells of Brain found it increasingly difficult to maintain normal bodily functions and perform mental or cognitive activity. The neurons tried to find ways to use gold's conductive properties in some beneficial way, but there was just too much of it. It became increasingly hard for new synapses to form, which meant that memory and cognitive functions were more and more compromised.

In the macro world, Sam began to show signs of delirium, dementia, inflammation, fever, anemia, hypoxia, and a whole long list of autoimmune maladies.

By now, few cells or organs in Sam's body remembered how to function without the ingestion and exchange of gold atoms. None of them questioned it any more. The generations of cells that had lived before the Gilded Age had mostly died out and been replaced by generations who had known nothing else. All the organs and cells blamed each other for the high prices and steadily diminishing vitality and quality of life. Even Lungs, Liver, Anus and the other wealthy organs experienced a malaise that they mistakenly assumed was due to gold deficiency, spurring them to seek ever greater quantities of the metal.

As you can easily imagine, Sam began to experience pain, at first in his joints, muscles, and other places. His muscles got increasingly stiff and slow to respond. He felt constantly stuffy in his nose and sinuses. His reflexes began to slow and became erratic. He experienced fatigue, seizures, tremors, loss of coordination, and disorientation. He continued to gain weight but became emaciated to the point where he resembled a gold statue of a starving famine refugee. His vision became blurry and clouded. His hearing became muffled and everything sounded distant. He was constantly tired, swollen but gaunt, distracted, confused, and in increasing pain in more and more places in his body. He gave off a faint smell of rotting flesh.

All of Sam's friends and family urged him to see his doctor. In spite of his golden complexion, it was painfully clear that his health and sanity were in a downward spiral. His gold addiction utterly consumed him. It drove him to prey on family and friends as well as strangers. The cellular communities and organs of Sam's body became so clogged with gold that vital systems began to shut down, even as the wealthy cells and organs proclaimed that Sam was in the peak of health, based on the volume of gold in Sam's body, almost all of which was in their control.

When Sam went in for his physical at his wife Liberty's urging, after protesting that he was in excellent health, his doctor was stumped at the changes. At first she thought it was a form of cancer, then came up with a diagnosis of "idiopathic metastatic atypical auto-immune-mediated solid malignancies of unknown origin." That's medical speak for "This poor guy is fossilizing to gold more with every breath! Pretty soon there'll be no room for anything else! I have no idea what's going on!"

Sam began to give off a smell like gangrene, as more and more cells and cell communities began to slowly die due to lack of basic needs because of insufficient gold to pay for their life needs. There was more than enough gold in Sam's body to go around. All but a very small trickle of it was controlled by the wealthy organs.

One day a collection of cells from Heart, Brain, and various Endocrine cities traced the flow of gold in the body of Sam. They discovered that even within the wealthy organs of Lungs, Liver, Anus and the others, only a handful of cells, whom they dubbed King Cells, actually controlled and had access to the gold. The other cells in those communities – recast as Corporations - were paid by the King Cells. They in turn had to pay for the vital goods and services that kept them alive. These cells even had to pay the King Cells of their own organ communities for the privilege of residence in the community.

This loose coalition of cells from various organs gathered more data. Eventually they learned that out of the trillions of cells in Sam's body, a few hundred thousands of them controlled all but a few hundredths of a percent of the gold in Sam's Body. The Gold system was set up so that each time the King Cells paid out a gold molecule to an average cell for their contribution, they received between 5 and 20 gold atoms back from that same cell over time. At the rate things were going, it was only a matter of time before all the gold in Sam's body would be controlled by those few hundred thousand cells, at which point trillions of cells would have no gold to pay, and the wealthy organs would withhold services. In this deadlocked state, all of the organ communities and cells would quickly die. The King Cells in the wealthy organs would, of course, be the last to die. But they would most surely die a lonely, horrible death encased in gold in a lifeless wasteland of dead cells beyond the horizon decomposing around them.

The Gold System, or the Gold Sickness as it came to be remembered in popular lore, was indeed a fatal autoimmune condition. It resulted in the cells in Sam's body preying upon one another while bonding to gold ions rather than to the biological molecules that they needed to live. There had to be a cure.

The intrepid handful of cells, armed with this vital information, sounded the alarm and called for all of the cells in Sam's body to recognize the emergency and give highest priority to finding a cure. These cells simply referred to themselves as "Symbiotic Cells of Sam."

The King Cells immediately responded by mobilizing the military and police - the white blood cells - telling them that Symbiotic Cells of Sam were an invading virus-mutated cancer that they should attack and neutralize before they completely destroyed Sam. They also put out chemical messages for all cells to read, praising the value and indispensability of gold, calling for all cells to stand up for the Gold System without which Sam and all cells would perish, giving a clear message that the Symbiotic Cells of Sam were out to wreak havoc in the body.

Many Symbiotic Cells were destroyed by the misdirected white cells, while many more got smart really quickly and found ways to hide. The Symbiotic Cells put out chemical messages of their own from constantly-changing places in Sam's body, exposing the truth about the role of Gold and the dynamics of the King Cells. At first a few here and a few there realized that these messages were true. As the message spread, it no longer depended on the Symbiotic Cells to keep the message and the information alive. Cells in every organ community began to copy the chemical message and pass it around, tucking it in Blood Trucks where all cells of Sam's Body would encounter them.

At first the Blood Truckers were largely skeptical but gradually more and more of them made copies and distributed them wherever they traveled in Sam's body.

Eventually a day and time were agreed upon. All but the King Cells and their bodyguards agreed – Heart will pump out a certain rhythm that will be the signal. And then it was in motion.

The Blood Truckers pulled into the Alveoli Stations directly, crashing through the payment barriers to offload their carbon dioxide to Lung cells which quickly released them to the air and tossed in the oxygen. Hi-Five and off to make the rounds. Like in the old days before the Gold Sickness. The same game-change was replicated in all interactions in Sam's body. Payment officer cells were nowhere to be seen. Manager cells ordered the truckers to stop and pay, and were ignored

When the King Cells realized what was happening, they sent their bodyguards and enforcers to assert their control. They called upon the White Blood Cell soldiers to defend them. Some did come to their side, but even more soldiers had read the truth in the ubiquitous chemical messages and realized that as defenders of Sam's body, their duty lay in ending the Gold Sickness. King Cells and those loyal to them were corralled and contained in out-of-the-way places where they could not block the normal functioning of biological processes in Sam's body.

There was still the question of what to do with all of the gold that was blocking just about everything. In an unprecedented coordinated effort of all of the cells in Sam's body, the gold was eliminated via every safe channel. For several weeks, Sam's sweat and tears were gold-laced and iridescent. He had golden sleep crusts under his eyes in the morning. He peed pretty much the same gold suspension that he had consumed. He literally pooped little gold bricks. His breath on the bathroom mirror left a golden sheen behind.

Within a few weeks, the level of gold in Sam's body was barely over normal. The parasitic tumors had been dismantled and their cells re-integrated into life-sustaining roles in his body that they were born to fulfill. Sam was mostly pain-free and full of energy. His sight was clear again, his hearing was keen, his limber muscles and joints became those of a professional dancer.

He continued to have a craving for gold, which plagued him still. He checked into a rehab facility for rare addictions and was able to overcome the cravings and the mental patterns that had formed around the addiction through cognitive and behavioral therapy.

Within Sam's body, all of the cells and organ communities began to experience life uncluttered by gold and the quest for it. Some of the cells and organs wanted to punish the King Cells and especially Lungs for starting the whole catastrophe, but wiser cells prevailed. "We still need Lungs, and they need all of us. We have been given a second chance. Let's not waste it fighting among ourselves. After all, we all share the same genes. We are all Sam, as are the King Cells. We cannot allow them to create sickness but they do have a valid contribution to make."

King Cells and the wealthy organs pouted and moped for a while, but more and more Lung cells rediscovered the fulfilling dance of offloading carbon dioxide from the Blood Trucks and dutifully but playfully tossing in the oxygen. Most of the cells and organs of the body were immediately relieved to be able to be themselves and do what they were meant to do, to fulfill their purpose. Cells and organs, which had for a while been blaming each other for the Gold Sickness as it came to be called, became once again friends and comrades in performing the cellular dance of Life in the body of a human being. And Sam was renewed as though coming home from a war. Fortunately, he was saved in time to prevent Liberty from becoming a bereaved widow, or from wearing herself out with long, draining hours of extra work to support her husband's addiction.

Cells who had grown up believing that "Gold keeps the body whole" discovered to their surprise that Gold had actually been a burden, that things functioned infinitely better in its absence. The Gold Sickness was cured.

There is yet one more outcome that must be shared. Remember that when Sam was sporting a shrinking waistline and golden complexion, he recommended his gold suspension supplement to his friends and family?

Once Sam was free of the Gold Sickness and was his true self again, he looked around him and was horrified to see that many of his friends and family were deep into the Gold Sickness that he had unwittingly lured them into. His wife Liberty knew what to do. She advised him well.

Sam's cells brought to his consciousness a way to propagate the cure. The original chemical message that precipitated Sam's recovery was replicated in a form that would be compatible with any human organism. One by one Sam visited those who had contracted the Gold Sickness, told them what had happened to him, showed them his own recovery, and offered them

the cure openly: “Here is how I was cured, and here it is for you.” One by one, all of those in the fatal grip of the Gold Sickness were cured and restored.

What could have been an extinction-level pandemic was narrowly averted, and it has been noted that the generations since then have enjoyed an ever-increasing level of health and well-being.