

Ritom Sen

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Ritom (Re-tum) vs Ritom (Ree-thumb)

Gemini. I don't believe in astrological sign stuff, but weirdly enough my zodiac sign explains my life to a tee. I can't help but be intrigued by the sometimes vague or specific predictions of my future dictated by a theory of predestination. I am a Gemini, and at the very core of this word, it is a constellation that represents a pair of twins, implying a two faced personality. Impeccably, I have wrestled with two versions of myself my whole life. Struggling between two identities. Growing up in Cedar Rapids, Iowa with parents who immigrated from India, I had to learn a lot of things myself: specifically I didn't know how to introduce myself to others. It caused me to feel different than everyone else, I felt not normal. My life was shrouded in an everlasting duality that I could never escape; to my Indian community I was known as Ree-Thumb, and to the rest of the world, Ri-tum.

So when I moved to Michigan in 5th grade, I had a fresh start. I was dealt with the decision, how should I introduce myself? The problem is I didn't understand my choices. The issue stemmed from the spelling of my name, the uneducated youth, and crazy enough, attendance. I was always taught to respect teachers to the highest degree. So, on the first day of 5th grade, when my teacher Mrs. Polidori called my name 'Ri-tum', the thoughts that crossed my mind were abnormal. "Is it respectable to correct my teacher?", "What would be easier for my future friends to say", "Would they think my actual name is weird?". As a result of my stubbornness, I conceded and the whole class got to know my name in a way that is pronounced

wrong. But as a kid, I didn't understand the future repercussions and how I was representing my culture wrong, and somehow I didn't care. Even after I told my 5th-grade teacher that my name was actually pronounced Ree-thumb, at the end of the year, I still didn't tell anyone else other than my closest friends, because I wanted them to know Ri-tum. I wanted to keep my globes separate, and hide them away from each other.

Flash forward 7 years and there I am, a senior in high school. At this point, because of my rather social personality, or at least Ri-tum's social personality, I had a lot of people I could call friends. I had developed quite the network, but everyone knew me as someone that I may have not truly been, Ri-tum. Because of this rather small moment in 5th grade, the butterfly effect spiraled into all my friends, teachers, and coaches knowing me as Ri-tum. But I didn't quite notice the problem, or conflict created from this misunderstanding. In the back of my mind I always felt an itch every time I heard the name Ri-tum, but I convinced myself that it was just like a nickname. But how can it be a nickname when the nickname is the name itself? This overwhelming question caused me to introspect and comprehend the repercussions of my independent identities.

As I grew through school, I could sense my two selves starting to separate and conform around these two worlds, starting to differentiate into what you could call as "two twins", and all this was created because of how my name was pronounced. The duality of my identity is construed between my side that is seen by others of my ethnicity and then my side seen by everyone outside of that. Because of cultural pressures and how I was raised, Ri-thum has always been a well mannered, hardworking, soft spoken, and sweet kid. He is the one that makes sure there isn't a flaw in his image, as this is something that is very important in the Indian community. Ri-thum's personality is essentially an adaptation around a toxic, fake, and

competitive Indian community. On the contrary, Ri-tum is a bit of a daredevil. Ri-tum is more outgoing, more bold, more unafraid of mistakes, and more willing to take risks. My parents rarely saw this side of me as I kept it hidden, but it helped me balance my life. Balance my perfect side with blemishes. I balanced every innocent success with a fun celebration. Split my rose into different petals. Split my piano into separate keys that when played together form a beautiful harmony.

So after such introspection, I was summoned to another opportunity. They say in life, things come in 3s, and here I was with my third opportunity to fix my perhaps wrongs in my past. Other than my roommate (who is my best friend from 5th grade), and the 40 other people from my high school who happened to come to Michigan, no one else knew me. I was (almost) independent of my past. I could reinvent myself, and combine my two halves into a whole, turn my notes into a chord. I could introduce my true name, my true self. However, it seemed doomed from the beginning. I sat there as I was approached by my future best friends in my hallway, and for some reason, perhaps influenced by my roommate, I kept my name as Ri-tum.

I felt coerced from my past to keep myself a Gemini. I lost my chance to fix my previous blunder. I had a wide open goal in front of me and somehow still missed. I couldn't help but think how this would affect my future. I didn't want to be known as Ri-tum my whole life, I needed to hear my true name. I wanted to conjoin my two selves but this felt impossible without hearing my name pronounced correctly.

But, as I took my first step into a business frat rush, I knew this could be my different world. My world where I can try something new, try meeting people with my genuine name. I theorized the possibility of a social circle where I would be able to be myself while hearing Ri-thum. It was an environment where I didn't know an absolute soul. I had the power to

introduce myself to a new group of people where no one else knows me any other way. As I went around the room meeting random strangers with confidence, I felt like a new person, I felt like I was finally myself.

I gained confidence at every round throughout the process. I loosened up and started to learn more and more about my future “brothers”. Even through the intimidating interviews, and stressful pitches, I was able to get into this business fraternity. But little did they know, unlike most, although I wanted to join because of intellectual growth and the business connections, I wanted to join primarily because I knew this was my opportunity to be known as Ri-thum around people I considered my best friends. Now that I have grasped this moment, I can finally observe my true identity. I can be my bold, outgoing side combined with my responsible, intellectual side. I can finally live feeling proud of my identity and culture while living a life free from care of outside perception. I don’t have to think of my environment before making decisions, I can live subconsciously. I don’t need to think about the extra question, I can be in a diverse and creative friend group while enjoying myself. In the past, I believed I was abnormal for having a “weird” name and perspective, but because of this experience I realized that I was unique because of this. I felt comfortable representing my culture and I felt that what set me apart from everyone made me great.

The duality of my name, the dichotomy of my personalities, and the ambivalence of my identities, all resemble a gemini. I had separate faces, each conformed to their respective worlds. I finally was a part of a social circle, but was known as Ri-thum. I conjoined my two halves. I felt myself get torn more and more apart for years and now I finally pulled myself back together. I matured and realized my desire to keep my life separated was irrational and combining my worlds created a better future. I now reminisce, and confirm that I don’t believe in all that

astrology stuff as I am nothing like a Gemini. I used to be split into two twins, but now I am only one person, I am Ritom Sen.