



Change: One Heart At a Time

Part 2

Guldeniz Yucelen

*All human beings are my own.
In a single thread all hearts are stringed,
for, all have the same objective.
I cry in sorrow, I smile in joy and,
with a loving face, love my beloved ones.
I enjoy food when I am hungry
and drink when I am thirsty
and so do all human beings.
This earth, the stars, the moon in the sky and the
forests
are loved by all.
I dance and sing in one rhythm only
and call the Supreme single-mindedly.
Prabhat Samgiita #1090, translated from the
original Bengali.¹*

THE LYRICS OF this beautiful song describe how our inner experience, feelings, and sentiments are so similar to one another; what moves us, what we long for, the joy of being in harmony with one another. As infants, our experience of the world is intersubjective and does not include an awareness of self as distinct from other. Max Scheler² describes an infant's felt sense as 'an immediate flow of experiences undifferentiated as between mine and thine, which actually contains both our own and others' experiences intermingled and without distinction from one another,' which has been validated by

¹The first part of this two-part series, published in *Neohumanist Review 4*, March 2025, looked at current societal dynamics that perpetuate mental complexes.



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decades of research since the early 20th century. We can feel this contagious bliss in the presence of an infant through the instant joy and affection aroused in our hearts. As the infant grows up, the feeling of "I know that I exist" develops in the mind, and the blissful sense of unity slowly dissipates. The goal of human life is to overcome the illusion of separateness and to return to that blissful state of the eternal flow of Cosmic Consciousness.

A newborn doesn't carry any sense of inferiority or superiority.³ These complexes are acquired

through experiences that imply an individual's place in the hierarchy of wealth, status, education, cast, skin color, beauty, etc.⁴ In time, internalized and unrecognizable to our thinking mind, they may feel like part of who we are, dominate our lives, and hold us back from utilizing our full potential in all spheres, even in the spiritual sphere, as depicted in this humorous story by Shrii Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar titled *Inferiority Complex*:⁵

Rama's coronation ceremony was drawing to an end. The kings and dignitaries, the friends and relatives, had bid farewell to Rama and were returning to their distant lands. The monkeys also sought Rama's permission to begin their long journey to Kāśkindhyā. Rama whispered in Vashīsthā's ear, "These monkeys have done a lot for us. How can we repay them?"

"Perhaps you could grant them a special boon," Vashīsthā suggested.

"I could grant them a boon to be reborn as humans in their next life," said Rama.

"That's a generous offer," mused Vashīsthā, "but they have such a deep inferiority complex that I doubt if they'll accept."

"Let's see," said Rama, turning to address the monkeys. "Brother monkeys, you have served me well. Today I wish to grant you the boon that you be reborn as humans in Kali Yuga."

The monkeys were hesitant. After a short deliberation they replied, "Your Majesty, we thank you for your generous offer. However, the world of humans is too formal and artificial for us. We would suffer terribly in such an artificial world. Thank you, Your Majesty, but we don't desire a human form."

"But as humans you can also lead honest unsophisticated lives. You can easily avoid unnecessary complications," Rama said.

"We've heard humans pretend to be hungry even when their stomachs are full. They say, 'Oh, we haven't eaten yet because we weren't hungry.' Sometimes they don't touch water for many days, and say, 'We just had a bath even though we are suffering from the flu'."

"But you don't have to tell lies," said Rama. "You'll clearly tell people whether you are hungry or not, or whether you have bathed or not."

The monkeys continued, "Humans keep filing lawsuits against each other. We don't understand the complexities of a court case. What shall we do, Your Majesty? Even after swearing an oath in court humans continue to tell lies. We couldn't possibly do that."

Bringing mindful awareness to the building blocks of our present moment experience can help us explore which level of processing – cognitive, emotional or somatic – can best support our wellbeing at any given moment.

"But you'll only file a case for a just cause," persisted Rama. "You won't implicate innocent people, nor will you tell lies after swearing an oath."

The monkeys fell into deep thought. Rama glanced at Vashīsthā, who said, "Didn't I tell you this would happen, Your Majesty?"

After a while the monkeys asked, "Your Majesty, if we become humans, what will happen to our beloved tail?"

"That's nothing to be worried about," said Rama. "In place of your monkey tail we'll give you a pigtail at the back of your head. The whole world will be enchanted by its beauty as it swings across your necks."

The monkeys were still hesitant. "See, I told you so," said Vashīsthā.

Finally, the monkeys said, "Your Majesty, we like your offer of a pigtail, but there is still a major problem. We really don't want clean-shaven, handsome faces; we prefer to keep our own charcoal-coloured faces."

Rama was lost for words. "This is what I meant by inferiority complex, Your Majesty," whispered Vashīsthā.

"Well, what a terrible thing," said Rama. "Humans must protect themselves from this inferiority complex."

"I couldn't agree with you more," said Vashīsthā.

Inferiority and superiority complexes are often unbeknownst to the beholder. Our thinking mind often justifies our choices as logical and the best options under the circumstances, failing to recognize the influence of these complexes. For instance, someone who has had multigenerational wealth and family pride may always expect to be served by others, which may get in the way of forming caring and meaningful relationships based on reciprocity and empathy. On the other hand, someone who comes from multigenerational poverty may feel undeserving and may not be able to stand up for themselves when they are treated unfairly, even when it is safe to do so. Fear complex is different from the

other two complexes, although they often go hand in hand. For instance, the likelihood of trauma increases with poverty.

Do you have an inferiority or superiority complex?

If we can't recognize these complexes with our thinking mind, how can we know whether we are affected by them? To access these complexes, we need to go beyond the conscious or thinking mind by tuning into the information from bodily sensations, impulses, five-sense perception, posture, and emotions. I invite you to do the following practice in order to have an experiential understanding of how these complexes may show up in your everyday life. Here are three suggestions that would help you get the most out of this practice:

- Have someone read this practice to you with a calm, slow, and steady voice, with pauses long enough to allow time for the visualizations. In this way, you can close your eyes and fully engage.
- Don't skip or skim this exercise, as this assessment can only be done by an experiential approach. It cannot be done with an analytical approach, which would engage only the thinking mind. An experiential approach would give you new information; an analytic approach would be listening to your thoughts and believing in what you already believe in.
- Suspend all judgment, if you can. Do the practice with openness and curiosity.

Practice

Sit quietly and comfortably for a few moments, breathing normally. Notice your breath as it enters through your nostrils, down the back of your throat, your lungs. For a few breaths, simply follow the movement of air in your body.

Then bring your awareness to the bottom of your feet. Sense the ground beneath your feet, supporting you. Remain here for a few breaths. Shift your attention to the parts of your back against your seat, and sense the seat supporting you.

Now visualize yourself entering a mansion and sitting down to wait for the owner. The owner is expecting you, and you know it is safe to be there. Take a few moments to immerse yourself in this moment, in your mind's eye, look around you,

notice the smells and sounds.

Visualize the owner walking slowly in your direction. Pay attention to what your body experiences. Does it relax, expand, or constrict? Does it want to move backward or forward? Does it want to reach out, or to protect itself, or move in any other way?

How does your back feel? Hunched over or upright? How does eye contact feel? Do you look into the owner's eyes, or is there an impulse to look down or away?

Stay with the experience for a few more moments. Notice what other sensations, images, thoughts, emotions, impulses, arise in you. Do you feel expansive, confident, neutral, or self-doubt? Simply take a note of them.

Now, clear your mind. Breath in and out a few times.

Now visualize yourself entering a house in a shantytown and sitting down to wait for the owner. The owner is expecting you, and you know it is safe to be there. Take a few moments to immerse yourself in this moment, in your mind's eye, look around you, notice the smells and sounds.

Visualize the owner walking slowly in your direction. The same man in different clothes. Now again, check in with your body. Does it relax, expand, or constrict? Does it want to move backward or forward? Does it want to reach out, or to protect itself, or move in any other way?

How does your back feel? Hunched over or upright? How is it to maintain eye contact? Do you look into the owner's eyes, or is there an impulse to look down or away?

Stay with the experience for a few more moments. Notice what other sensations, images, thoughts, emotions, and impulses arise in you. Do you feel confident, or do you have self-doubt? Simply take a note of them.

Take a moment to explore what was different in your felt experience in these two scenarios. Did you notice any difference in how your body felt, what your body wanted to do or wanted to avoid, your posture, impulses, thoughts, or feelings?

If your answer is 'yes':

- Congratulations! You sincerely engaged in this practice, and the traces of your real-life experiences came alive.
- You have allowed yourself to be vulnerable and honest despite the unpleasant possibility of finding out that you are affected by these



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complexes.

- You brought mindful awareness to the components of your felt experience in these two scenarios, with the help of the questions in this practice. This allowed you to access a wide range of information from your body that would have been at least partially unavailable if you were to use your thinking mind alone.

If your answer is ‘no’:

- Either you are a saint who has achieved a state of constant mental equilibrium,
- Or you did not engage in the exercise fully.

My 14-year-old daughter, Pramila, agreed to do this practice with me. She closed her eyes as I read the practice. When we were done, I asked her about her experience. Here is what she said with an expression of new insight on her face:

“This is exactly how life works. When I was in the mansion, I didn’t want to be there; I wanted to leave, and my body felt tense. When he was walking towards me, I felt that I was being judged. It didn’t make sense for me to be there. There was no character; it was cold, like a painting. When I was in the other house, it smelled like good food, it was loud and crowded, and it was a warm feeling. I imagined

an Ethiopian woman who was wearing bright clothes, like bright orange, and a welcoming smile. It is a good representation of how life works. It shows a lot about yourself, too. For instance, if I were rich, if I owned my mansion, I would feel the exact opposite.”

Of course, Pramila’s experience cannot be explained with an inferiority or superiority complex alone. She is a confident teenager who is passionate about equality, and she doesn’t seem to be affected by these complexes too much. Nevertheless, I believe her experience is at least partially shaped by these complexes, similar to most of us, given that we are bombarded with overt and covert messages about our “worth” every day. I do hope that this practice gave you an idea about how inferiority and superiority complex may show up in practice and helped you bridge the gap between the concept and the experience of inferiority and superiority complexes. In this practice, we used mindful awareness, an important human capacity that is often underutilized in our externalized, fast-paced, consumption-oriented lives.

Mindful Awareness and The Three Brains

Mindful awareness is the practice of bringing attention to the present moment experience, including one’s thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations. Used in spiritual and religious practices, including in Buddhism, Tantra, and Sufism, for thousands of years, mindfulness practices has been increasingly incorporated into the medical treatment approaches since the introduction of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program by Jon Kabatt-Zinn⁶ based on the premise to “use the wisdom of the body and mind to face stress, pain and illness.” Mindfulness has also been incorporated into various psychotherapy approaches over the last few decades. Commonly described as a solitary activity, that is silent and internal, mindfulness has been utilized in body-centered psychotherapy approaches as a collaborative curiosity.^{7,8} For instance, in Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, bringing mindful awareness to the five building blocks of the present moment experience, including thoughts, emotions, perceptions (internally generated images, tastes, smells, touch, and sounds), body movements and posture, and body sensations (physical feelings), allows the client to describe their experience as it unfolds, rather than describing it after the immediacy of the moment passes.⁸ Just like in

Pramila’s experience in the practice, talking or thinking about, or visualizing an event brings up the felt experience of that event in the here-and-now, as if the experience is happening right now. This allows somatic information, such as sensations and impulses, from the reptilian or survival brain to be recognized and explored, in addition to the thoughts from the frontal cortex, and the emotions from the mammalian brain or limbic brain. The obtained information from these three brains unveils various pathways to healing that evolve organically in the session, with the inner wisdom of the client as the driver, and the power of the body to heal itself physically and emotionally as the driving force.

For instance, in Pramila’s experience, she noticed an urge/impulse to leave the mansion (reptilian brain’s safety warning), a thought “I don’t want to be here” (frontal cortex of neocortex) and sensation of tension (reptilian brain) which perhaps goes along with an emotion, such as anxiety or fear (mammalian brain or limbic brain). “There was no character, it was cold, like a painting” may involve sight/visual perception of depth and temperature (5-sense perception, reptilian brain), maybe numbing of emotions or another unexpressed emotion in “it was cold.” In the first scenario, Pramila noticed that she wanted to move away from the interaction with the owner of the mansion. In the second scenario, her relational tendency was to move towards the owner of the house. “Smelled like good food, it was loud and crowded (five-sense perception, reptilian brain), and it was a warm feeling (emotion, limbic brain).” Perhaps she would have described a sense of comfort/relaxation in her body and a thought/conclusion, if prompted. She also expressed awareness related to how her past experiences and current circumstances shaped her felt experience in these two scenarios, and that they would have been different for someone else.

Bringing mindful awareness to the building blocks of our present moment experience can help us explore which level of processing – cognitive, emotional or somatic – can best support our wellbeing at any given moment.⁸ Becoming aware of our inner experience is the first step to changing how we feel in a particular moment.

Many people have had to live like slaves in society, suffering from a strong inferiority complex – their heads remain forever bowed – while others inherit vast wealth and family pride from their ancestors, keeping their heads held so high that at times it seems as if they might fall backward. Using

Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, by bringing awareness to “bowing down,” perhaps an adaptive coping strategy that was developed to keep oneself safe in unsafe circumstances—we can use a bottom-up approach and use somatic resources, such as lengthening the spine, taking a few deep breaths and opening up the chest, or keeping the head up and looking ahead, and explore how it feels. We can also use a top-down process of identifying thoughts or beliefs that go along with bowing down, such as “I am less than,” or “I am worthless,” and we can use cognitive resources, such as a thought “Everyone is created equal.” On the other hand, by noticing “heads held so high that at times it appears as if it will fall backwards,” we can access somatic resources, such as relaxing the back muscles or bringing the chin closer to the chest or taking less space at a dining table or on a couch. Somatic or sensorimotor interventions can be especially helpful when the three brains are not working in synch or when your brains are responding as if what happened in the past is still occurring in the present.⁸ Ron Kurtz explains, “If we can help enough of the right type of information to come forward, the system can reorganize itself towards more health and a better quality of life.”⁷ Kurtz brings in a much needed spiritual outlook, a belief in the inner wisdom and the inherent healing power of each person, that is often missing in therapy approaches built on the brain-disease model.

Bessel Van der Kolk recognizes that the brain-disease model overlooks four fundamental truths:⁹

- Our capacity to destroy one another is matched by our capacity to heal one another. Restoring relationships and community is central to restoring well-being.
- Language gives us the power to change ourselves and others by communicating our experiences, helping us to define what we know, and finding a common sense of meaning;
- We can regulate our own physiology, including some of the so-called involuntary functions of the body and brain, through such basic activities as breathing, moving, and touching;
- We can change social conditions to create environments in which children and adults can feel safe and where they can thrive. Safe connections are fundamental to meaningful and satisfying lives.

Inferiority and superiority complexes are products of a defective social order. We have to ensure a safe, equitable and meaningful society.

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Maintaining a Balanced Mind

“Most people suffer from either a superiority complex or an inferiority complex. A balanced state of mind is one of the most essential qualities that one should possess. It is that state in which a person does not suffer from any complex, that is, neither from superiority complex nor from inferiority complex, neither from fear complex nor from hate complex. People should be free from each and every kind of complex, they should not suffer from any of these.”⁴

What is important is that the tendency of seeing people as unequal is eliminated from one’s mind. Eliminating a psychic tendency—as opposed to coping with, managing or challenging it—requires a bottom-up approach that starts with the body—as opposed to a top-down approach that begins with the thinking mind. This is only possible with the practice of spiritual *sādhana* by which one can bring about certain changes in their nervous system, nerve cells and nerve fibres, control the secretions of the hormones from different glands and sub-glands.

Yogic literature describes the human body as a biological machine goaded by propensities or “propensive propulsion of the psyche.” Acclaimed author and yoga teacher Dr. Eyal Shifroni writes: “Asana practice is intended primarily to experience ... the mind-body complex and explore ... the deep connections that exist between body postures, breathing, blood and lymph circulation, nervous system, and so on, and the mental state that accompanies them.”¹⁰

Cakra, or *plexus* in Latin, are locations in the body where there are main nerve centres, as well as endocrine glands and sub-glands that influence and control the propensities attached to each *cakra*.¹¹ Besides the exceptions due to certain biological anomalies, human beings are goaded by a common psychology based on the same or similar biological structures, with the same wonts, the same psychic merits and demerits. Shrii Sarkar further explains:

Suppose an old man and a young man are arguing, and the young one says tauntingly to the old one, “You are a number one fool. You have no wits. You are a worthless, useless chap!” The old man replies, “What! What did you say? Is it so? Is it so? Have you no manners? Are you now about to teach me manners?” The young one responds, “Yes, yes, sure!” This is an example of common human psychology, of natural human reaction

Now, suppose certain sub-glands in the elder man’s chest around the anáhata cakra are activated. Then, instead of arguing, his response will become calmer, and less serious and grave. He will become quieter and not so irritated. In this case, in the attached nerve cells and nerve fibres, certain changes will have been brought about in the glands and sub-glands of the chest portion of the body. By properly activating the controlling point of a human sentiment, the response has changed... Thus, due to biological change, the psychological reaction or reflection will change. For this biological transformation, one should practise a spiritual cult [meditation] which changes the human nerve cells and nerve fibres attached to those portions, and brings about changes in the hormonal secretions, causing psychological changes. So, through the practice of a spiritual cult, changes come about in the nerve cells and nerve fibres.¹²

Neuroplasticity is the brain’s ability to grow new neural networks in response to novel experience, which also impacts the glands and sub-glands in the endocrine system.¹¹ Through spiritual practice (*sadhana*), neural changes will take place in the glands and sub-glands, balancing the propensities and achieving a balanced mind (see the illustration on page 17 and Dr. Richard Maxwell’s relevant article on the biopsychological basis of propensities).

As for the benefits of yoga postures, Shifroni notes: “In forward bends, the torso (or trunk) moves forward and rests on the legs (or leg). ... This seems to have physiological effects that include a decrease in blood pressure and heart rate, calming of the nervous system and the brain, stimulation of the digestive system and the adrenal glands, and increased supply of blood to the pelvis, legs and gonad glands ... Forward bends bring about an experience of tranquility, relaxation, surrender, devotion, renunciation, humility, and internalization.”¹⁰

The regular performance of *ásanas* also profoundly impacts the glands and sub-glands and thereby our entire bio-psychological system. How? All *ásanas* have either a pressurizing or

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depressurizing effect on the glands and sub-glands. For example, *mayúrášana*, peacock posture, has a pressurizing effect on the *mañipura cakra*. The secretions of the glands and sub-glands of the *mañipura cakra* and the propensities associated with them will become more balanced if this *ásana* is practiced regularly. If someone has a great fear of public speaking, it means their *mañipura cakra* is weak. Through the regular practice of *mayúrášana*, this propensity will be controlled, and fear will be eliminated. Other *ásanas* may have a depressurizing effect on the *mañipura cakra*, and if these *ásanas* are performed regularly the glands and sub-glands associated with the *cakra* will become less active. Increased glandular secretions generally make the propensities more active and vice versa. By practising *ásanas* regularly, one can control the propensities and either increase or decrease their activity.¹³

According to yogic science, by proper biopsychological approach the eight fetters—hatred/revulsion, doubt, fear, shyness/shame, dissemblance, vanity of lineage, cultural superiority complex and egotism—and the six enemies of the mind—physical desire, anger, avarice, vanity, blind attachment and jealousy—may be constructively controlled. Among other main vices are excessive sleep, absentmindedness, lethargy, and procrastination.⁴

Summary and Future Directions

Each of us has an inherent capacity to achieve mental equilibrium and to be free from complexes.

Psychotherapy is the process of getting rid of what gets in the way of living fully. Elimination of all complexes and unhelpful tendencies requires a spiritual outlook and spiritual practices. In my professional experience, as psychological issues start to ease or resolve, it becomes easier to reach out or to explore spirituality.

We all have the moral responsibility to take good care of our bodies or our “biological machines,” so that we can utilize this human body for sadhana, service and sacrifice.

We also have a collective responsibility towards each other to create safe and supportive connections and communities. Support groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Weight Watchers, community programs where children can be mentored and supported by older youth, and systems such as mental health consultation with community agencies and schools can counteract the development of complexes and lessen the impact of social inequality for individuals and groups. Other initiatives where members can learn from and share (i.e, knitting or book clubs, makerspaces, etc.) or work together for a common cause (i.e., nature conservancy or climate change) provide opportunities for meaningful and uplifting connections. Building strong communities where people can get to know and value each other is a remedy against exploitation, which feeds on dividing people and pitting them against each other with divisive ideas.

We should cherish local cultures and languages as a celebration of colorful variations in the expression of humanity, dispelling the suppression imposed by the dominant groups to exploit people psychologically by attempting to paralyze them with an inferiority complex about their native language and culture.

Inferiority and superiority complexes are products of a defective social order. We have to ensure a safe, equitable, and meaningful society.

We have to identify the psychic propensities and sentiments of individuals and groups that disturb the peace of the human society, which is particularly important since humanity appears to be at a critical junction between progress and degradation.

The way forward is to goad and guide physical urge towards psychic and spiritual urge, thereby paving the way for all-round liberation, starting with universal socio-economic liberation. All over the world, people suffer physically, psychologically, and spiritually due to socio-economic want and disparities. The root cause of problems lies in unbalanced psychic urges. Both exploiters and the exploited suffer from imbalances, each in their ways. Unless the socio-economic system takes the physico-psycho-spiritual makeup of human beings properly into account, this suffering will continue to disturb and destroy not only human beings but the entire

living world and its environment.

Last, but not least, we all come from the same source and will return to the same source, and there is no place for complexes in the spiritual sphere:

*“In the existential sphere, too, there should not be any complex because every one is the child of the Cosmic Father. If there is any superiority complex, it should be the common one that one is the child of the Cosmic Father who is so great, so potent. One may only have this superiority complex. Whatever people possess is given by the Cosmic Father and therefore no individual has the right to have a superiority complex. So in the existential sphere there is no reason for any complex to remain. In other words it can be said that there will be a common complex that all are the children of the Cosmic Father, no one being inferior and no one being superior.”*⁴

May we all be free from complexes and help others break free, also!

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