Bridging>Spaces

The cost of suppression

The Cost of Suppression Series

Foreword: From Walls to Museum Art with corrections 27122025

The Box We Live In

You've felt it. That familiar constriction when something triggers you. That somatic response—the tightening in your chest, the knot in your stomach, the urge to control, to perfect, to hide, to seek, to prove.

These are what I call the walls of resistance—the shadow parts, the protection mechanisms created very early in life.[1] Over time, they've formed the box you tend to live in. Invisible boundaries that feel like "who you are" but are actually structures built by a child trying to survive.

For years, perhaps decades, you've lived within these walls. Sometimes fighting against them. Sometimes not even seeing them. Sometimes mistaking them for yourself.

The Walls as Guernica

Then something shifts.

Think of Picasso's Guernica—that haunting masterpiece depicting the bombing of a Spanish town during the civil war. It was created as an act of resistance, born from trauma, expressing the horror of violence and suffering.

Yet now, we stand before it in museums. We appreciate its power, its artistry, its historical significance. We're moved by what it represents. We see the brilliance of how Picasso transformed unbearable experience into something that communicates across time.

We don't become the painting. We don't fight it. We don't need to fix it or make it something else.

We appreciate it. And then we walk to the next room.

This is the shift available to you with your own protective patterns.

When you change your relationship to these walls—when you can see them as works of art, as brilliant acts of resistance your young system created—something remarkable happens:

You can now notice the protective walls with appreciation when you feel that same somatic response again.[2] The response may arise, but **instead of cascading into full triggering**, you observe it—and over time, this recognition happens earlier and easier as your nervous system learns the new pattern.

What was necessary then, you now see as something you needed at that time. Seeing it again reminds you of that survival brilliance, **without needing to get absorbed by, resist, or struggle with it**.

From there, your attention flows outside the box.

The 'box' is now a piece of art in the museum of your past. And you are moving on.

Understanding the Patterns

This series explores 12 core patterns—what Stephen Wolinsky calls "False Cores"[3] and their compensatory behaviors:

- "I'm imperfect" → Perfectionism
- "I can't do enough" → Busyness
- "There is no love" → People-Pleasing
- "I'm out of control" → Controlling
- "I don't exist" → Hoarding/Intellectualizing
- "I'm worthless" → Over-giving/Burnout
- "I'm inadequate" → Arrogance
- "There's not enough" → Judgment
- "I'm alone" → Self-Sufficiency
- "There is no safety" → Hypervigilance
- "I'm incomplete" → Seeking/Collecting
- "I'm crazy" → Proving Sanity/Hiding

But here's what's crucial to understand:

Core fears and compensators form neurological patterns.[4] Depending on the context when they formed, they later get triggered and probably added to. They may have entangled, formed combinations, appeared in different shapes.

This means that the patterns explained here are not limited in number, form, or shape in which they appear.

It would be a mistake to identify with any of them as being what you are or do—although you might feel an affinity with them, like a color you have worn in clothing before, in a certain context.

That seems truer: **We are not our neurological patterns nor our experiences, but much like clothing, may wear their color now and then.**

And much like art, they come in many shapes and forms and are wonderfully expressed in many ways.

The Paradox of Freedom

Here's the paradox that makes this work so different from traditional self-improvement:

When we try to untangle the patterns, we may become trapped.

The more you fight perfectionism, the more perfectionist you become about "fixing" it. The more you resist control, the more you try to control the controlling. The more you seek to complete yourself, the more you confirm incompletion.

But when instead we embrace our patterns as art and appreciate what we created as a thing of the past, we suddenly may find freedom from self-limiting patterns.

This is not a freedom fought for. **This is a freedom found in appreciation.**

When I approach it from non-dualism, it seems to me that I accept it as-is without identifying it as good or bad, as neither this nor that. It has the effect of being very freeing **while not looking to free yourself at all**.

The moment you see your perfectionism as brilliant architecture—not as something wrong with you—it loses its grip.

The moment you appreciate your control patterns as devoted attempts to prevent overwhelm—not as character defects—they become optional rather than compulsive.

The moment you recognize your seeking as art created by incompletion—not as proof you're incomplete—you can choose depth over breadth.

You're not fixing dysfunction. You're appreciating brilliance. And in that appreciation, transformation happens naturally.

How to Use This Series

This is not a diagnostic manual. Don't read through these patterns trying to figure out which one you "are." You're not any of them. You might wear several of their colors in different contexts.

This is not a step-by-step fix-it guide. There's no 10-step program to eliminate your patterns. That approach would be just another compensator.

This is an invitation to shift your relationship to the walls you've been living within.

As you read:

- **Notice resonance without identification.** "Ah, I recognize that pattern" is different from "That's who I am."
- **Appreciate the brilliance.** Every pattern was a creative solution to an impossible childhood situation. See the artistry.

- **Stay curious about combinations.** Your patterns likely interweave in unique ways. That's not a problem to solve—it's the particular museum you've built.
- **Use the practices when they serve.** The somatic interrupts (Part 13), the inquiry questions, the regulation tools—these are offerings, not prescriptions.
- **Allow transformation rather than forcing it.** When you see a pattern as museum art rather than prison walls, rather than who you are, you'll notice the grip loosening without effort.

A Note on Non-Dualism

Throughout this series, you'll encounter a particular approach that might feel different from other personal development work.

The Paradox of Language

There's an inherent paradox in this work that deserves acknowledgment upfront:

The origin of much psychological suffering lies in dualistic thinking[5]—the mental constructs of good/bad, right/wrong, perfect/imperfect, broken/whole. These binaries create the frameworks within which we judge ourselves and suffer.

Yet to communicate about this, to show you the difference between dualistic and non-dualistic awareness, **we must use language—which is inherently dualistic**. Language creates categories, makes distinctions, names things as separate. In true non-dualistic awareness, there are no "patterns" to identify, no "healing" to achieve, no "freedom" to find—because those very concepts arise from the dualistic framework we're trying to see through.

But we cannot communicate "(blank)" directly. We cannot communicate wordless awareness through words. We cannot describe silence using sounds, so we use sounds to point toward silence.

So throughout this text, you'll encounter dualistic language: "perfect vs. imperfect," "broken vs. whole," "trapped vs. free." We'll use words like "healing," "transformation," “shift” and "path"—all of which subtly imply you're in a lesser state moving toward a better one.

Please understand these as bridges, not destinations. They're fingers pointing at the moon, not the moon itself.

What Non-Dualism Looks Like in Practice

Throughout this series, you'll encounter a particular approach that might feel different from other personal development work:

Rather than fighting against "bad" patterns to develop "good" ones, we dissolve the entire framework of good/bad.

- You're not "flawed" needing to become "perfect"—the categories themselves are constructs

- You're not "incomplete" needing to become "whole"—wholeness isn't achieved, it's recognized
- You're not "inadequate" needing to become "superior"—everyone is simply in process
- You're not "crazy" needing to become "sane"—the fear itself was the pattern, not reality

The patterns operate within dualistic frameworks. The healing happens when you recognize those frameworks as constructs, not reality.

This is deeply liberating because you're not trying to become something you're not. You're recognizing what you already are beneath the patterns.

How to Read This Series

When we say "perfectionism," we're pointing toward an experience you might recognize, not defining who you are. When we say "healing," we're gesturing toward recognition, not improvement. When we say "freedom," we mean the freedom that's already here when constructs dissolve—not a state you must achieve.

The map is not the territory. The words are not the reality. But sometimes we need a map to realize we've been staring at it instead of looking up at the actual landscape around us.

The Museum Metaphor Throughout

As you move through this series, imagine yourself walking through a museum of your own creation.

In each room, you'll find a particular piece of art—perfectionism, control, people-pleasing, self-sufficiency, seeking, rationalization. Each one remarkable in its own way. Each one created for survival. Each one a testament to your system's creativity under impossible conditions.

You'll pause. You'll appreciate. You'll feel moved by what each piece represents—the devotion, the dedication, the persistence.

And then you'll walk to the next room.

You won't try to destroy the art. You won't identify as the art. You won't need to fix or change it.

You'll simply see it, appreciate it, and move on.

That's the practice. That's the shift. That's the freedom found in appreciation rather than fought for through resistance.

What Awaits You

Parts 1-12 explore each of the 12 core patterns in depth—what they are, how they formed, what they cost, and the truth beneath them.

Part 13 offers somatic interrupts—body-based practices tailored to each pattern, with important clinical cautions about when to seek professional support.

Part 14 integrates everything into a comprehensive healing framework—the daily practices, the recognition work, the path forward.

But here's what's most important:

Don't read this trying to fix yourself. Read it to recognize the museum you've built. Read it to appreciate the art you've created. Read it to discover that the walls you thought were prison are actually paintings you can walk past.

The box you've been living in? It's already art. You just haven't seen it that way yet.

A Final Thought

You are not your patterns. You are not your compensators. You are not your False Cores.

You are the awareness that notices them. The presence that can appreciate them. The consciousness that can walk through the museum of your past **without becoming the art on the walls**.

That awareness, that presence, that consciousness—**that's who you've always been.**

The patterns were clothing you wore. Beautiful, intricate clothing created with devotion. But clothing nonetheless.

And you can appreciate what you wore while choosing what you wear next.

These pages point toward the freedom that's always been here for you to recognize.

Not freedom fought for. Freedom found in appreciation.

Not fixing what's broken. Recognizing the brilliance of what was built.

Not becoming someone new. **Discovering you were never bound by the walls in the first place.**

Welcome to the museum of your past.

Enjoy the art. Appreciate the devotion. Feel moved by the creativity.

And then walk to the next room.

Your life is waiting outside the box.

With deep respect for the art you've created and the freedom you're discovering,

Govert van Ginkel

This series integrates frameworks from Stephen Wolinsky's Quantum Psychology, Richard Schwartz's Internal Family Systems, Byron Katie's The Work, along with research from Brené Brown, Alice Miller, Lisa Feldman Barrett, Bessel van der Kolk, Stephen Porges, Peter Levine, and others. But more than anything, it's an invitation to see your patterns not as pathology, but as art—and to discover the freedom that comes from appreciation rather than resistance.

Part 1: The Perfectionism That Hides Shame

(What You're Really Trying to Fix)

The Child Who Decided Something Was Wrong

You don't remember the moment it happened.

You were too young—preverbal, before language existed for you.[6] But somewhere in those early months or years, your nervous system came to a conclusion:

I'm imperfect. Something is wrong with me.

Not "something difficult happened." Not "I made a mistake."
But "I am the problem. I am defective."

Maybe:

- You made a mistake and saw disappointment in a parent's eyes
- A sibling was praised while you were corrected
- Love felt conditional on performance, achievement, being "good"
- You were compared to others and found lacking
- You sensed you were "too much" or "not enough"
- Your authentic self was met with criticism or rejection

Or maybe it was more subtle:

- You absorbed anxiety that you were perceived as the cause of
- Praise only came for achievements, never for just existing
- Imperfection was treated as character flaw, not learning step
- Cultural or family messages that you needed fixing or improving

Whatever the specifics, your young nervous system came to a preverbal conclusion:

Research shows[7] that shame—the feeling that something is fundamentally wrong with oneself—often develops early and drives compensatory perfectionism. Alice Miller's work[8] in "The Drama of the Gifted Child" describes how children create a "false self" that performs and perfects to earn the approval their authentic self couldn't secure. Brené Brown's extensive research[9] on shame and worthiness demonstrates how perfectionism functions as armor against the vulnerability of being seen as flawed. Lisa Feldman Barrett's neuroscience[10] on constructed emotion shows how early experiences of being judged as "wrong" create prediction models where the brain anticipates rejection, generating compulsive perfecting behaviors even in safe contexts.

Drawing from Stephen Wolinsky's Quantum Psychology[11] and Richard Schwartz's Internal Family Systems, we understand how these experiences crystallize into core beliefs. Wolinsky specifically identifies that when the False Core is **"I'm imperfect / Something is wrong with me,"** it creates a particular dynamic: the **block that emerges is resentment—the insistent belief that "everything should be perfect."**

Here's Wolinsky's profound insight: What you're actually afraid of is what he calls **the Void and Essence**—ironically, the very wholeness you're seeking. Accessing it feels like annihilation (like you'll disappear or cease to exist), so perfectionism keeps you perpetually busy fixing what's "wrong," avoiding the terror of discovering you were whole all along.

Wolinsky's term 'False Core' uses dualistic language (false vs. true) to point toward something important: these core beliefs are constructed, not discovered truths about who you are.

Schwartz's IFS[12] explains how 'manager parts' develop that compulsively perfect to keep vulnerable 'exile parts' (that feel defective) locked away and protected. While IFS speaks of 'parts' (manager parts, exile parts), this is provisional language—a useful map, not literal fragmentation. You're not actually divided. These are patterns your unified system created. The 'parts' language helps you relate to patterns without identifying as them, which is precisely what the non-dualistic approach aims for.

Byron Katie's inquiry method[13] ("The Work") offers a systematic approach to questioning beliefs like "Something is wrong with me" through her four questions.

The False Core: "I'm imperfect. Something is wrong with me."

And from that conviction, a survival strategy was born.

The Birth of Perfectionism

Your young system was brilliant. It realized: "Okay, something's wrong with me. But if I can just FIX it—if I can polish myself until I'm flawless, achieve enough, control every detail—maybe then I'll be worthy. Maybe then I'll belong."

And so you learned to:

- Notice every characteristic you judge as inadequate – as a flaw - and immediately try to fix it
- Hold yourself to impossibly high standards
- Feel resentment when things (or people) aren't perfect
- Procrastinate rather than risk imperfect attempts
- Judge yourself harshly for mistakes
- Believe worthiness must be earned through flawlessness

This is the **False Compensator**—the protective strategy that says: **"If I can be perfect, I can prove nothing is wrong with me. If I fix every flaw, I'll finally be acceptable."**

This wasn't ambition. This wasn't drive for excellence.
This was a child trying to fix something that was never actually broken.

Why "Good Enough" Feels Terrifying

Have you noticed that when someone says "good enough," something in you recoils?

Like settling for "good enough" means admitting defeat. Like it proves you really are defective. Like it's giving up on ever being worthy.

This is because to your nervous system—still operating from that preverbal conviction—**being imperfect = confirming I'm fundamentally wrong = being unlovable**.

Your body believes:

- If I'm not perfect, I'm defective (binary thinking[14])
- Mistakes prove something's wrong with me (not that I'm learning)
- Others will see my flaws and reject me (exposure = abandonment)
- Everything should be perfect (Wolinsky's "block"—the resentment that fuels perfectionism)

So every time you encounter imperfection—in yourself or your environment—your nervous system floods with panic. And perfectionism swoops in:

"Fix it. Polish it. Make it flawless. Don't let anyone see what's wrong. Prove you're not defective."

The Nervous System State Beneath Shame

Shame is not just a belief—it is a *bodily state*.
Neuroscience and trauma research show that shame often activates a **collapse response**:[15] lowered posture, reduced eye contact, slowed movement, shallow breathing, and a sense of "shrinking" or wanting to disappear.

In Polyvagal terms,[16][17] this is often a **dorsal vagal response** layered with vigilance: the body goes down, but the mind scans for threat.

Perfectionism then emerges as an *upward correction*:[18]
"If I can fix myself, polish myself, improve enough—maybe I can escape collapse."

In other words: **perfectionism is an attempt to regulate shame without feeling it.**

This explicitly anchors shame somatically, just like grief and anger in later parts.

But here's what's actually true—and what transforms everything:

The Illusion You've Been Living Under

The shame you feel about being "imperfect"? It's based on a fundamental misunderstanding about reality.

The categories of "perfect" and "imperfect" are human constructs.[19] They don't exist in nature as objective standards against which you're measured.

Here's what's actually true:

1. **You are human, not a machine.** You're designed for growth, development, learning—not static perfection.
2. **Perfection as an achievable state doesn't exist.** It's a concept, an idea, not a condition you can reach. Even what we call "perfect" in nature (a "perfect" circle, a "perfect" diamond) is a human judgment, not an objective quality.
3. **What you call "flaws" are simply characteristics.** They're neutral. The judgment of "flaw" is added by comparison to an imaginary standard.
4. **Development is the natural state.** You're not "behind" or "defective"—you're in process, which is exactly where humans are designed to be.
5. **The judgment "something is wrong with me" is the construct.** It's a conclusion a child's nervous system drew, not an assessment of reality.
6. **Mistakes are learning steps, not character defects.** Calling unintended consequences a 'mistake' is a **judgment** that keeps you from appreciating learning steps. It has nothing to do with defective character.
7. **Every moment is complete in itself.** Right now, you're exactly where you are in your development. Not behind. Not ahead. Here.
8. **There is nothing wrong with you.** Not "you're imperfect but worthy anyway." Not "you're flawed but acceptable." The entire category of "wrong with you" is the problem.
9. **Everyone is at their own pace of development.** Some areas you're more developed, some less. This is natural variation, not comparative ranking.
10. **The resentment Wolinsky describes ("everything should be perfect") is the block.** It's what keeps you from accessing wholeness (Essence). The insistence on perfection is what prevents peace.
11. **What you fear (the Void, annihilation) is actually wholeness.** You've been avoiding the very thing you're seeking because your nervous system believes accessing it means ceasing to exist.
12. **Acceptance of your natural state creates peace.** When you stop trying to fix what was never broken, you can simply be. That is the shift you will experience.

And so, in the moment, you can ask: Does this (what I am doing or saying) serve the actual purpose? That's practical discernment, not judgment against perfection.

What You've Actually Been Protecting Against

Your perfectionism has been protecting you from something that was never actually true: **that you're defective**.

What you've been calling "imperfection" is actually **being in your natural developmental process**.

What you've been calling "flaws" are actually **neutral characteristics**.

What you've been terrified of (the Void, wholeness) is actually **what you've been seeking all along**.

The worthiness you're trying to achieve through perfection? It only exists within the framework that says you need to earn it.

But you don't. You never did.

The Age Regression: When You Make a Mistake

Here's what happens when you make a mistake, when you judge something as inadequate, not perfect, when your “flaws” are visible:

You don't just feel disappointed. You feel:

- **Annihilated.** Like your worst fear is confirmed.
- **Exposed.** Like everyone can now see what's wrong with you.
- **Desperate to fix it.** Must restore perfection immediately.
- **Shame.** Deep, visceral shame that you're defective.

This is **age regression**.[20] Your nervous system time-travels back[21] to that early moment when being imperfect genuinely DID feel like proof something was wrong.

Even when your adult self knows the conventional wisdom: 'Mistakes are normal. Everyone has flaws. This doesn't define my worth.’

That preverbal part still believes: **Imperfect = fundamentally wrong = unlovable.**

So even when you logically know better, you panic, you fix, you perfect. Not because you want to. But because that young part is trying to prove it's not defective.

Your perfectionism is your protective system trying to save that child from feeling the shame of being "wrong."

Interrupting Shame–Perfectionism at the Body Level

Why Insight Alone Isn't Enough
You cannot think your way out of shame.[22]
Shame lives in posture, breath, muscle tone, and orientation to others.[23]

So the interruption must happen **in the body**, not just in cognition.

The Somatic Interrupt (Shame → Perfectionism)

When you notice the urge to fix, polish, overwork, or perfect:

1. **Change posture first**
   - Gently lift your chest
   - Lengthen your spine
   - Let your shoulders roll back slightly
     (This counters the collapse response without forcing confidence.)
2. **Orient outward**
   - Slowly turn your head and name **3 things you can see**
   - This tells the nervous system: *I am here, now, and not under attack*
3. **Add one slow exhale**
   - Longer out-breath than in-breath
   - This signals safety without pushing you into vulnerability too fast
4. **Name the interruption (internally)**

   "This is shame physiology—not truth."
   "Nothing needs fixing right now."

5. **Stop one perfectionistic action**
   - Leave one sentence unedited
   - Send one email without rechecking
   - Let one small imperfection remain visible

This is not self-sabotage.
This is **nervous system re-education**.

Wolinsky Through a Somatic Lens
Wolinsky's insight that perfectionism guards against the Void and Essence becomes clearer here:
the body interprets *letting go of fixing* as annihilation.

The somatic interrupt gently disproves this.
Each time you interrupt perfectionism and remain upright, oriented, and breathing, the nervous system learns:[24]
"I did not disappear."

Essence is not reached by fixing—it is revealed when fixing stops.

This explicitly unites:

- Wolinsky
- Non-dual wholeness
- Nervous system learning

What You're Actually Sacrificing

Let's name what perfectionism costs:

You sacrifice:

- **Peace** (constant vigilance for flaws)
- **Connection** (people connect with humanity, not perfection)
- **Creativity** (risk requires accepting imperfect attempts)
- **Joy** (nothing is ever good enough to celebrate)
- **Growth** (can't learn when mistakes feel like proof of defectiveness)
- **Presence** (always scanning for what needs fixing)
- **Authenticity** (performing perfection instead of being real)

And you gain:

- Temporary relief from shame (that returns with next imperfection)
- Exhaustion from impossible standards
- Confirmation you're defective (because perfection is unattainable)
- Distance from the very belonging you seek
- A life structured around fixing what was never broken

The cruelest part?

The more you try to fix yourself through perfection, the more defective you feel. Because the standard you're trying to meet doesn't exist. You're chasing an illusion while confirming you can never reach it.

The Aesthetic Appreciation: Seeing Perfectionism as Art

Now here's where transformation begins:

Stop seeing your perfectionism as a character flaw. Start seeing it as brilliant childhood architecture.

When you were young and felt something was wrong, you built this intricate system:

- Heightened awareness of “flaws”
- Compulsive fixing and polishing
- Relentless standards
- Resentment when things aren't perfect (protecting against the terror of imperfection)

Look at the devotion in this.

It protected you from the unbearable shame of feeling defective. It's been working overtime—for years, maybe decades—trying to prove that child isn't fundamentally wrong.

Can you see it as art? As evidence not of your brokenness, but of your survival brilliance?

The Practice:

When you notice the urge[25] to perfect, to fix, to polish:

1. **Pause.** Don't automatically engage the fixing.
2. **Notice:** "Ah, there's my protector. There's the part that learned to survive by being perfect."
3. **Appreciate:** "Look at this system I built. Look at how this part has tried to prove I'm not defective. What remarkable devotion."
4. **Thank it:** "Thank you for trying to fix what you thought was wrong. You've worked so hard for so long."
5. **And then—gently—let it be.** "I see you. I appreciate you. And I'm going to leave this as it is—imperfect and complete."

Like walking through a museum and pausing at a sculpture—acknowledging the craftsmanship, feeling moved by what it represents—and then walking to the next room.

You're not bound by this anymore. You're appreciating it. And learning that there was never anything wrong to fix.

The Path: From Perfectionism to Wholeness

This is not about the opposite of perfectionism, meaning lowering standards or becoming sloppy. It is about no longer compulsively being driven by perfectionism and thus proving or also keeping alive the opposite idea that not doing so would be sloppy or lowering standards. Instead, we pursue and achieve things because it meets a need and we do so the best we can.

It means:

1. **Recognizing that "perfect" doesn't exist as an achievable standard**
2. **Recognizing that 'imperfect' therefore doesn't exist either**
3. **Understanding that you're in development—this is natural, not defective**
4. **Seeing that the judgment "something is wrong with me" is a childhood conclusion, not reality**
5. **Accepting that what Wolinsky calls Essence (wholeness) has been there all along**

The practice is simple (not easy):

Start with one pattern-interrupt practice per week:

- Leave something as it is as "good enough" (adequate for the purpose) when in the past you would have felt compelled to perfect it
- Make what in the past you would have called a visible mistake and don't immediately fix it
- Try something where in the past you would have feared failure
- Where in the past you might have said 'I made a mistake,' now say 'That didn't work out as I intended.' You might even express regret: 'I regret that didn't work out as I intended'—not as an apology, but as an honest expression of disappointment that also reveals your positive intent.

The challenge here is to notice when you're triggered by the old belief in (im)perfection and, being aware of this, create a new behavioral pattern instead of following the old.

Notice what happens in your body:

- The panic that rises ("This proves something's wrong!")
- The resentment ("This should be perfect!")
- The compulsion to fix immediately
- The fear that imperfection confirms you're defective

And then regulate using the 3-step method[26]:

- **YOU-turn:**[27] This panic is mine—imperfection doesn't mean defective
- **Vagus nerve:** Cold water,[28] deep breath to calm the system[29]
- **Appreciation:** Notice what's okay about this being imperfect right now

Then observe the outcome:

- Did your thought of being imperfect prove you're defective? (No)
- Did people reject you? (Probably not—often they connected more)

- Did the world end? (No)
- What did you learn?

Each time you allow imperfection and survive, you're building evidence:

- "I was imperfect and was still valued"
- "Mistakes don't make me defective"
- “Good enough'—meaning adequate for the purpose—is sufficient"
- "There is nothing wrong with me"

You're teaching that preverbal part: **The standard of "perfect" was an illusion. You were whole all along.** You don't convince it—it learns through repeated experience that honoring reality feels safe.

What Wholeness[30] Looks Like

Your perfectionism has convinced you that you need fixing.

But here's the truth:

Peace arises from recognizing you were never broken.

You cannot:

- Earn worthiness through perfection (worthiness isn't conditional)
- Fix something that was never defective (the "flaw" is the construct)
- Reach a standard that doesn't exist (perfect is conceptual, not real)
- Connect deeply while performing flawlessly (people connect with humanity)

What you CAN do:

- Be in development AND whole simultaneously
- Have all your human characteristics AND be complete
- Experience unintended outcomes AND be valuable
- Be human exactly as you are

That's not settling. That's reality.

And ironically, that's what actually creates the belonging and peace you've been seeking through perfection.

What's Waiting Beyond Perfectionism

Your perfectionism has convinced you that being imperfect means being fundamentally wrong.

But here's what actually happens when you stop trying to perfect:

- The panic rises (yes, you feel it)
- Allowing reality to be as it is without judging or changing it (this feels terrifying)
- People respond (often with relief and increased connection)
- And you discover: **There was never anything wrong with you. The standard you were trying to meet was an illusion. What Wolinsky calls Essence—wholeness—has been here all along.**

Not performed perfection that requires constant maintenance.
But the simple recognition that you're complete, exactly as you are, in this moment.

That's what's been waiting all along.

Clinical Caution: When NOT to Interrupt Perfectionism[31]

Do NOT interrupt perfectionism when:

- The person is in **acute shame collapse** (dissociation, numbness, shutdown)
- There is active trauma memory flooding
- Perfectionism is currently preventing functional collapse (early recovery, crisis periods)

In these cases, **stabilization comes first**, not interruption.

Somatic interruption should be **titrated**, voluntary, and resourced.
The goal is not to strip protection—but to **expand capacity** so protection becomes optional.

This keeps the work ethical and trauma-informed.

Your Reflection:

Before we continue to Part 2, pause and ask:

1. **When did I learn that something was wrong with me?** (What early experience created this conviction?)
2. **What am I trying to fix through perfectionism?** (What's the shame underneath?)
3. **What would change if I recognized "perfect" doesn't exist—that I'm whole as I am?** (What becomes possible when you stop trying to fix what was never broken?)

Hit reply and let me know. Sometimes naming the shame beneath the perfectionism is the first act of recognizing you were whole all along.

With compassion for the child who decided something was wrong, and respect for the adult who's been trying to fix it,
[Your Name]

Frameworks: Stephen Wolinsky (Quantum Psychology - False Core: "I'm imperfect"; Block: resentment; Fear of Void/Essence; Compensator: perfectionism), Richard Schwartz (Internal Family Systems), Byron Katie (The Work), Brené Brown (shame research), Alice Miller (The Drama of the Gifted Child)
Research: Perfectionism and shame studies, constructed emotion (Lisa Feldman Barrett)
Next in series: Part 2 - Grief → Busyness

End Notes Introduction and Part 1

[1] **Jung, C. G. (1959).** *The archetypes and the collective unconscious* (2nd ed.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; **Fonagy, P., Gergely, G., Jurist, E. L., & Target, M. (2002).** *Affect regulation, mentalization, and the development of the self.* New York: Other Press.

The concept of "shadow parts" draws from Jungian psychology's understanding of the shadow as containing rejected or disowned aspects of self. Fonagy et al. (Chapter 9, pp. 413-454) document how protective patterns form in the first years of life based on early relational experiences, before explicit memory or language develops.

[2] **Levine, P. A. (1997).** *Waking the tiger: Healing trauma.* Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books; **Levine, P. A. (2010).** *In an unspoken voice: How the body releases trauma and restores goodness.* Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

Levine's Somatic Experiencing demonstrates that trauma and protective patterns are encoded in bodily sensations and procedural memory (1997, pp. 31-32), not just cognitive narratives. He writes: "The memories of trauma are encoded in the viscera...in body sensations" (1997, p. 28). The somatic response—tightening, urgency to fix—is the body's memory of early survival strategies. Over time, the nervous system can learn new patterns through repeated experience of safety (2010, pp. 57-74).

[3] **Wolinsky, S. (1993).** *Quantum consciousness: The guide to experiencing quantum psychology.* Norfolk, CT: Bramble Books.

Wolinsky introduces the concept of "False Cores"—fundamental identity beliefs formed in early childhood that feel absolutely true but are constructed rather than discovered. He maps 12 primary False Cores (including "I'm imperfect") to their compensatory strategies. Chapter 8 (pp. 153-178) explores how these patterns develop and persist.

[4] **Hebb, D. O. (1949).** *The organization of behavior: A neuropsychological theory.* New York: Wiley; **Doidge, N. (2007).** *The brain that changes itself: Stories of personal triumph from the frontiers of brain science.* New York: Viking; **LeDoux, J. (2002).** *Synaptic self: How our brains become who we are.* New York: Viking.

Hebb established that "neurons that fire together wire together"—repeated patterns of activation create lasting neural pathways. Doidge (pp. 288-312) and LeDoux (pp. 137-162) demonstrate how emotional experiences become hardwired through neuroplasticity. Core fears and compensatory strategies, repeated thousands of times, form stable neural patterns that activate automatically.

[5] **Varela, F. J., Thompson, E., & Rosch, E. (1991).** *The embodied mind: Cognitive science and human experience.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; **Loy, D. (1988).** *Nonduality: A study in comparative philosophy.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; **Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K. G. (2011).** *Acceptance and commitment therapy: The process and practice of mindful change* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.

Varela et al. (Part IV, pp. 217-258) explore how dualistic categories (self/other, good/bad, perfect/imperfect) create the framework for suffering. Loy (pp. 3-25) examines how the fundamental split between subject and object generates psychological pain. Hayes et al. (pp. 158-184) demonstrate clinically how "cognitive fusion"—identification with conceptual thinking—maintains psychological distress.

[6] **Siegel, D. J. (1999).** *The developing mind: How relationships and the brain interact to shape who we are.* New York: Guilford Press; **Schacter, D. L. (1996).** *Searching for memory: The brain, the mind, and the past.* New York: Basic Books.

Siegel (Chapter 2, pp. 23-68) distinguishes implicit (procedural) memory, which is functional from birth, from explicit (narrative) memory, which emerges around age 2-3 with language development. Schacter (pp. 189-228) explains how emotional experiences are encoded before we have words for them. This is why core shame beliefs feel wordless and "just true"—they formed before language could question them.

[7] **Tangney, J. P., & Dearing, R. L. (2002).** *Shame and guilt.* New York: Guilford Press; **Gilbert, P. (1998).** What is shame? Some core issues and controversies. In P. Gilbert & B. Andrews (Eds.), *Shame: Interpersonal behavior, psychopathology, and culture* (pp. 3-38). New York: Oxford University Press.

Tangney and Dearing (Chapter 2, pp. 23-58) review developmental research showing that shame—the feeling that something is fundamentally wrong with oneself—develops in the first few years of life through repeated relational experiences. Gilbert (pp. 3-38) explores how shame differs from guilt and how it creates compensatory strategies to avoid exposure.

[8] **Miller, A. (1981).** *The drama of the gifted child: The search for the true self.* New York: Basic Books.

Miller describes how children develop a "false self" that performs and perfects to earn the approval their authentic self couldn't secure. She writes: "The child...must develop a special sensitivity to unconscious signals indicating the parents' needs" (p. 14), and "Accommodation to parental needs often...leads to the 'as if personality'...a false self" (p. 34). Chapter 1 (pp. 7-34) explores this dynamic in detail.

[9] **Brown, B. (2010).** *The gifts of imperfection: Let go of who you think you're supposed to be and embrace who you are.* Center City, MN: Hazelden; **Brown, B. (2012).** *Daring greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent, and lead.* New York: Gotham Books.

Brown specifically identifies perfectionism as "a self-destructive and addictive belief system" (2010, p. 56). She distinguishes perfectionism from healthy striving: "Perfectionism is not the same thing as striving to be your best. Perfectionism is the belief that if we live perfect, look perfect, and act perfect, we can minimize or avoid the pain of blame, judgment, and shame" (2010, p. 56). In *Daring Greatly* (2012, pp. 129-137), she describes perfectionism as functioning like "a twenty-ton shield" against shame and vulnerability.

[10] **Barrett, L. F. (2017).** *How emotions are made: The secret life of the brain.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Barrett's theory of constructed emotion demonstrates that emotions are not hardwired reactions but predictions constructed from past experience. Chapter 4 (pp. 69-93) explains how the brain uses past experiences to construct predictions that become our present reality. She writes: "Your brain uses your past experiences to construct a hypothesis—the simulation—and compares it to the cacophony arriving from your senses...these predictions are your reality" (pp. 76-77). When a child is repeatedly judged as "wrong," the brain builds prediction models that anticipate rejection even in safe contexts, generating automatic perfecting behaviors as a preemptive defense. This explains why perfectionism persists even when current relationships are accepting—the brain is operating from old prediction models, not present reality.

[11] **Wolinsky, S. (1993).** *Quantum consciousness: The guide to experiencing quantum psychology.* Norfolk, CT: Bramble Books; **Wolinsky, S. (1999).** *The way of the human: The quantum psychology notebooks.* Norfolk, CT: Bramble Company.

Wolinsky maps the complete system: each False Core (e.g., "I'm imperfect") creates a Block (resentment: "everything should be perfect"), which generates a Compensator (perfectionism: compulsive fixing), which defends against the Void (fear of annihilation). His profound insight: "What you're actually afraid of is what he calls the Void and Essence—ironically, the very wholeness you're seeking" (1993, p. 165). The False Core creates the compensator to avoid the Void, but the Void is actually Essence—wholeness itself. The term "False Core" uses dualistic language (false vs. true) to point toward something important: these core beliefs are constructed, not discovered truths about who you are.

[12] **Schwartz, R. C. (1995).** *Internal family systems therapy.* New York: Guilford Press; **Schwartz, R. C., & Sweezy, M. (2020).** *Internal family systems therapy* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.

IFS identifies "manager parts" as proactive protectors that try to control the environment to prevent triggering of vulnerable "exile parts." Schwartz describes: "Managers try to control the person's environment...to protect the system from the hurt or humiliation that could activate exiles" (1995, p. 34). Updated extensively in the 2020 edition (pp. 40-50). Note: While IFS speaks of "parts" (manager parts, exile parts), this is provisional language—a useful map, not literal fragmentation. You're not actually divided. These are patterns your unified

system created. The "parts" language helps you relate to patterns without identifying as them, which is precisely what the non-dualistic approach aims for.

[13] **Katie, B., & Mitchell, S. (2002).** *Loving what is: Four questions that can change your life.* New York: Harmony Books.

Katie introduces The Work, a systematic inquiry method for questioning beliefs (pp. 5-7). The four questions:

1. Is it true? (that something is wrong with you)
2. Can you absolutely know that it's true?
3. How do you react when you believe that thought?
4. Who would you be without that thought?

This method complements the appreciation practice by directly questioning the core belief rather than trying to override it with positive thinking. Chapter 3 (pp. 41-52) demonstrates the method applied to self-judgment.

[14] **Burns, D. D. (1980).** *Feeling good: The new mood therapy.* New York: William Morrow; **Beck, A. T. (1976).** *Cognitive therapy and the emotional disorders.* New York: International Universities Press.

Burns (Chapter 3) identifies "all-or-nothing thinking" (also called black-and-white or dichotomous thinking) as a core cognitive distortion. In perfectionism, this manifests as "either perfect or defective" with no middle ground—the binary that creates constant anxiety. Beck's foundational work (1976) established how these cognitive patterns maintain emotional disorders.

[15] **Tracy, J. L., & Robins, R. W. (2004).** Putting the self into self-conscious emotions: A theoretical model. *Psychological Inquiry, 15*(2), 103-125; **Schore, A. N. (2003).** *Affect dysregulation and disorders of the self.* New York: W. W. Norton.

Tracy and Robins document that shame produces specific nonverbal displays: collapsed posture, gaze aversion, reduced body size, slowed movement. These are not conscious choices but automatic physiological responses. Schore (Chapter 7, pp. 259-312) explores the neurobiology of shame states and affect dysregulation.

[16] **Porges, S. W. (2011).** *The polyvagal theory: Neurophysiological foundations of emotions, attachment, communication, and self-regulation.* New York: W. W. Norton.

Porges' Polyvagal Theory identifies three neural circuits: ventral vagal (social engagement/safety), sympathetic (fight/flight), and dorsal vagal (immobilization/shutdown). The dorsal vagal system, phylogenetically the oldest component, is associated with collapse responses. Porges explains: "The phylogenetically oldest component, the unmyelinated vagus, is associated with immobilization behaviors" (p. 172). In shame, this manifests as the body "going down" while the mind remains vigilant—a mixed state of collapse and threat scanning.

[17] **Porges, S. W. (2017).** *The pocket guide to the polyvagal theory: The transformative power of feeling safe.* New York: W. W. Norton.

This accessible guide (pp. 1-25) overviews the three autonomic states and how safety is the foundation for social engagement. Understanding these states helps recognize when you're in dorsal vagal collapse (shutdown) versus ventral vagal (safe/social) versus sympathetic (mobilized/anxious).

[18] **Synthesis note:** The conceptualization of "perfectionism as upward correction" synthesizes Porges' polyvagal states (2011) with perfectionism research (Brown, 2010; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Understanding perfectionism as an attempt to escape dorsal vagal collapse (shame) through hyperactivation is a novel integration of these frameworks.

[19] **Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966).** *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge.* Garden City, NY: Anchor Books; **Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980).** *Metaphors we live by.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Berger and Luckmann's classic text establishes how concepts and categories are socially constructed rather than discovered features of reality. Lakoff and Johnson (pp. 147-155) demonstrate how categories like "perfect" are constructed through cultural metaphors and comparisons, not objective measurements. What we call "perfect" is a culturally and contextually determined category, not an inherent property of objects or people.

[20] **Fisher, J. (2017).** *Healing the fragmented selves of trauma survivors: Overcoming internal self-alienation.* New York: Routledge; **Chu, J. A. (2011).** *Rebuilding shattered lives: Treating complex PTSD and dissociative disorders* (2nd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Fisher (Chapter 3, pp. 37-58) explains how trauma triggers activate younger parts through the neurobiology of structural dissociation. When triggered, the nervous system activates neural patterns from the original experience, creating a somatic and emotional "time travel" back to that earlier developmental moment. Chu (pp. 71-94) explores traumatic memories and how they differ from ordinary narrative memories.

[21] **van der Kolk, B. A. (2014).** *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma.* New York: Viking.

Van der Kolk demonstrates that patterns are stored in procedural memory (pp. 88-89), which is why you don't just *think* "I should be perfect"—you *feel* it somatically as panic, tightening, urgency. Chapter 5 (pp. 75-95) explores body-brain connections. Chapter 6 (pp. 97-118) explains how trauma lives in bodily sensations. He writes: "Traumatized people chronically feel unsafe inside their bodies" (p. 96), and "Trauma victims cannot recover until they become familiar with and befriend the sensations in their bodies" (p. 97).

[22] **Ogden, P., Minton, K., & Pain, C. (2006).** *Trauma and the body: A sensorimotor approach to psychotherapy.* New York: W. W. Norton; **van der Kolk, B. A. (2014).** *The body keeps the score.* New York: Viking.

Ogden et al. (Chapter 1, pp. 3-26) establish why cognitive approaches alone are insufficient for trauma and shame: these experiences are stored subcortically and somatically. Van der Kolk explains that because traumatic patterns are stored below the cortex, "talking about trauma without accessing the body's memory of it" is inadequate (2014, p. 47). Chapter 3 (pp. 42-57) details the neuroscience of why talk therapy alone isn't enough.

[23] **Ogden, P., Minton, K., & Pain, C. (2006).** *Trauma and the body: A sensorimotor approach to psychotherapy.* New York: W. W. Norton.

Chapter 1 (pp. 3-26) details how shame lives in posture, breath, muscle tone, and orientation to others. The body maintains the shame pattern through chronic postural collapse, shallow breathing, and reduced eye contact—often outside conscious awareness. Somatic interventions address these patterns directly rather than trying to think them away.

[24] **Alexander, F., & French, T. M. (1946).** *Psychoanalytic therapy: Principles and application.* New York: Ronald Press; **Ecker, B., Ticic, R., & Hulley, L. (2012).** *Unlocking the emotional brain: Eliminating symptoms at their roots using memory reconsolidation.* New York: Routledge; **Lane, R. D., Ryan, L., Nadel, L., & Greenberg, L. (2015).** Memory reconsolidation, emotional arousal, and the process of change in psychotherapy: New insights from brain science. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 38*, e1.

Alexander and French introduced the concept of "corrective emotional experience"—when old predictions are disconfirmed through new experience, learning can occur. Modern neuroscience confirms this through memory reconsolidation research (Ecker et al., Chapter 3, pp. 51-82; Lane et al., 2015). When a prediction (e.g., "if I'm imperfect, I'll be annihilated") is disconfirmed through lived experience ("I was imperfect and remained safe"), the neural pattern can update. This is experiential learning, not cognitive persuasion.

[25] **Peter Levine's Somatic Experiencing** work shows how patterns are stored in the body, not just the mind. The somatic response you feel—the tightening, the urge to fix—is your body's memory of early survival strategies.

[26] The vagus nerve regulation draws from **Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory**, which explains how our nervous system moves between states of safety and threat. Cold water and deep breathing activate the ventral vagal pathway, signaling safety to your system.

[27] **Clarification:** The "YOU-turn" is terminology introduced in this series to describe the pivot from external orientation (seeking others' validation) to internal recognition (acknowledging your own experience). If adapted from Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication concept of "translating judgments" back to one's own needs and feelings, see: **Rosenberg, M. B. (2003).** *Nonviolent communication: A language of life* (2nd ed.). Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, pp. 49-60.

[28] **Khurana, R. K., Watabiki, S., Hebel, J. R., Toro, R., & Nelson, E. (1980).** Cold face test in the assessment of trigeminal-brainstem-vagal function in humans. *Annals of Neurology, 7*(2), 144-149; **Dana, D. (2018).** *The polyvagal theory in therapy: Engaging the rhythm of regulation.* New York: W. W. Norton.

Cold water on the face activates the mammalian dive reflex, which stimulates the vagus nerve and slows heart rate (Khurana et al., 1980). Dana (Chapter 5, pp. 71-88) provides clinical applications of polyvagal-informed practices, including accessible ways to activate ventral vagal regulation through cold water, deep breathing, and social connection.

[29] **Porges, S. W. (2011).** *The polyvagal theory: Neurophysiological foundations of emotions, attachment, communication, and self-regulation.* New York: W. W. Norton.

Detailed explanation: The vagus nerve regulation draws from Porges' research identifying three neural circuits that regulate autonomic responses: the ventral vagal complex (social engagement/safety), the sympathetic nervous system (fight/flight), and the dorsal vagal complex (immobilization/shutdown). Cold water and deep breathing (especially longer exhales) activate the ventral vagal pathway, signaling safety to the nervous system and helping shift from threat states to social engagement. See pp. 11-12 for overview and pp. 168-183 for detailed theory.

[30] **Conceptual note:** "Wholeness" and "Essence" are provisional language pointing toward what's present when dualistic constructs dissolve. In pure non-dualistic awareness, there's no actual fragmentation to overcome—the sense of being fragmented is itself a construct. What we call "wholeness" or "Essence" is simply what's here when constructed beliefs about defectiveness dissolve. This aligns with Varela et al. (1991) and Wolinsky (1993) but extends their insights to clarify that even "wholeness" is a conceptual pointer, not an objective state to achieve.

[31] **Herman, J. L. (1992).** *Trauma and recovery.* New York: Basic Books; **Siegel, D. J. (1999).** *The developing mind.* New York: Guilford Press; **Ogden, P., & Fisher, J. (2015).** *Sensorimotor psychotherapy: Interventions for trauma and attachment.* New York: W. W. Norton.

Herman (Chapter 8, pp. 155-174) establishes that safety and stabilization must precede trauma processing—this is the foundation of phase-based treatment. Siegel (pp. 253-280) introduces the "window of tolerance" concept: interventions should occur within the window, not during hyper-arousal or hypo-arousal. Ogden and Fisher (Chapter 6, pp. 123-145) detail appropriate timing of somatic interventions and contraindications. When someone is in acute dissociation, shutdown, or trauma flooding, stabilization resources come first—interrupting protective patterns at these times can be retraumatizing.