

No Bad Parts

What's in it for me? Learn to engage with all your inner voices and allow them to flourish.

Have you ever felt so conflicted about a decision that you became completely stuck? Internal conflicts happen when different voices in your head try to run the show. You don't have one unified mind, nobody has. Instead, you have a cacophony of parts, with different personalities and perspectives. That might sound alarming, but it's actually a gift. Your different parts are what make you a multifaceted, compassionate human being. But if these parts experience trauma as you grow up, they can start behaving destructively. Even though they're just trying to protect you, your parts can end up limiting you with damaging beliefs and coping mechanisms. So how can you stop that from happening, and harness the power of your different parts for good? You're about to find out. In these blinks, you'll learn

why the idea of the mono-mind is so pervasive; how to reparent your inner children; and why too much meditation can be bad for you.

We're all made up of multiple parts - different, sometimes contradictory personalities.

Think of the last time you struggled to make up your mind about something. Perhaps you wanted to quit your job and went back and forth about whether it was a good idea. Or you tried to force yourself to give a speech at a wedding, despite being terrified of public speaking. These internal debates are conversations between different parts of you: different personalities that together form who you are. If the idea of having different parts sounds strange, it's because we've all grown up absorbing the idea that we have a mono-mind – a mind that sees the world in a single, unified way. But the truth is, any internal dilemma reveals that our minds contain multiple voices and urges. The key message here is: We're all made up of multiple parts – different, sometimes contradictory personalities. These different voices aren't valued in our culture. In fact, according to the mono-mind theory, this multiplicity might be the result of sick, disordered thinking, and we need to eliminate these voices because they don't represent who we really are. Mono-mind theory has become entrenched over centuries of religious and spiritual doctrine. Christian scriptures preach that we must always suppress the sinful urges inside us that will lead us astray. Buddhism talks about the “monkey mind” that needs to be controlled. And the field of psychology offers a plethora of diagnoses that pathologize conflicting parts. Patients are given tools to try and control multiple voices through the use of willpower and control, or even mindfulness. Medication muffles painful emotions and stops us from being in tune with our bodies. The author, Dr. Richard Schwartz, used to believe in mono-mind theory too. In his family therapy practice, he tried to get clients to deal with disorders like bulimia by suppressing the urges inside them that would lead them to binge and purge. But the more his clients tried to eliminate these urges, the stronger the urges became. Then he had a revelation. Instead of trying to eliminate his clients' destructive urges, he could

engage with them. He started encouraging his patients to share the thoughts and sensations occupying their minds. They told him about the critical inner voices inside them that caused so much pain and shame that bingeing and purging felt like the only reprieve. When the author and his patients started working with, instead of against, these critical voices, something remarkable happened: they began to heal.

We have no bad parts, but our parts can become stuck in destructive roles.

Our parts are inner beings who bring rich variety to our lives. They have different personalities, preferences, and resources. For example, an angry part can help us develop boundaries, and discern when we're uncomfortable. An intellectual part can help us analyze and make sense of the world around us. None of our parts are intrinsically bad. They all want to protect and enrich us. But, sometimes, trauma can damage some parts so badly that they become trapped in unhealthy roles. Strategies they developed to protect us as children follow us into adulthood, and can become counterproductive. The key message here is: We have no bad parts, but our parts can become stuck in destructive roles. Children are naturally joyful – and sensitive. And when they experience bullying or abuse, they become chronically wounded. These early experiences of rejection create beliefs like “I’m worthless” or “No one loves me.” Even though these beliefs are childish, they remain parts of our internal landscape as we grow up. But – because we don’t know how to deal with the pain these parts cause – they become exiles inside us. Exquisitely sensitive, these exiles could be triggered at any moment. So, other parts of ourselves are commandeered into service as protectors. One type of protector, managers, can have mean, critical voices, mimicking parents and teachers, trying to keep us out of trouble. Or they can be ingratiating people-pleasers, training us to avoid the threat of loneliness, or overly intellectual analysts, trying to keep us stuck in our heads. The managers mean well, but their impact is deadening. They don’t just stop us from feeling pain, but also joy. Alongside managers, the other category of protector parts is the firefighters. These parts spring into action when – despite the managers’ efforts – the exiles are triggered, causing us to feel pain. Firefighters make us reach for drugs, alcohol, sex, or Netflix. Sometimes, they can even drive people to suicide. Despite their destructive nature, their aims are noble: to numb the pain. So many people spend decades living with these parts, with no real knowledge of who they are, where they came from, or what they want. They control how we think about ourselves, how we form relationships, and how we react to the world. Repressing them or shouting at them doesn’t work. But they can be healed. You can help them release their burdens, and stop being stuck in the past.

We all possess a core Self – even though it’s not always visible.

As a family therapist, the author was used to people fighting in his consulting room. He was trained to see families as part of a system: a set of relationships operating in a specific context. He’s seen how, for example, a mother and daughter would sling insults at each other, causing the father to withdraw and the other siblings to act out. Families are like delicate ecosystems: changes in one area will always have an effect on other parts. What he hadn’t realized, though, is that our inner parts have their own family

dynamic, too. They might be feuding or protecting each other, allies, or frenemies. Most importantly, they're always working in relation to our Self. The key message here is: We all possess a core Self – even though it's not always visible. The Self is a wise, compassionate, and calm voice that underlies all our different parts. It can't be hurt, like the other parts, and it doesn't need to grow. It can be thought of as our core, our primal essence. It's able to mediate between the different parts and set loving boundaries. The Self is always there, but it isn't always visible. Sometimes, we become so identified with our exiled and manager parts that we start to believe that's who we are. For example, if you get furious every time someone cuts you off in traffic, or start crying when you feel rejected, you may think you're just a very angry and sensitive person. But these behaviors aren't the essence of who you are. They're just ways your protectors are trying to keep you from harm. Children who experience trauma can't protect themselves. So their parts step into protector roles, helping the child survive. The problem is, they don't realize that when a child grows up, they don't need the same protection. And then, their protective strategies can cause more harm than good. In order to begin healing these parts, we need to let them know that they aren't responsible for protection anymore: that we're now adults, and our Self is capable of providing loving leadership. They no longer need to play the bouncer role in our inner family systems. In other words, the Self needs to start reparenting the parts that have experienced trauma and earning their trust. And in the next blink, you'll find out how to make that happen.

In order to heal, we need to reparent our inner children.

Children who have a secure attachment to their parents have the stability to flourish. But children with emotionally unavailable parents lack a solid foundation. Many of our inner parts are like these children, burdened with maladaptive coping mechanisms. The job of the Self is to start reparenting those parts with love and compassion: to act like the parents we might have missed growing up. One of the patients the author worked with was an environmental activist. He did inspiring work, teaching people how to live off the grid – but he was also angry and abrasive. He alienated people with his self-righteousness, and was mean to his family. But when he started working with his injured inner child, he was able to heal himself and create positive relationships. The key message here is: In order to heal, we need to reparent our inner children. The author invited the activist to visualize having a conversation with the part that was angry and abrasive, a part the activist named the “destroyer of injustice.” The destroyer revealed that he was furious about the climate crisis. The two of them acknowledged the destroyer's distress, and thanked him for the work he was doing. Then they asked if he was protecting another part, inside the activist. The destroyer revealed that he was protecting a young boy, curled up in a ball and weeping. They asked if they could speak to the boy directly. The destroyer agreed, but said he'd be standing by. The activist asked the boy to share his pain at losing his father at a young age. Then he promised the boy that he would look after him – that he didn't have to be alone in his sadness anymore. He visualized picking the boy up, and taking him to swim in a beautiful ocean. The boy released his pain into the water, and started feeling lighter, even joyful. The boy's transformation had a big impact on the destroyer. He was able to let go of the burden of protecting the boy. He could see that the Self had stepped up to care for the boy, like a loving parent. Following the session, there was a big change in the activist's life. He was still a fiery environmental justice advocate, but he no longer got into fights

with the people around him. He was able to channel his energy positively, and forge connections instead of alienating people.

When we create internal harmony, the outside world becomes more peaceful as well.

Imagine seeing someone who really irritates or upsets you – someone who really knows how to press your buttons. Notice what happens in your body as you look at them. Do some parts tense up? Does your breathing change? You can feel your inner protectors start to spring to your defense as these responses are triggered. Are they filling your mind with angry arguments? Or making you shut down and become quiet and sulky? When you have lots of protectors looking after fragile exiles, it changes how you relate to other people. You're only able to see their protectors, and behave defensively or aggressively around them. But once you start to heal your parts, you'll notice something remarkable: you'll start seeing those same people with loving understanding. The key message here is: When we create internal harmony, the outside world becomes more peaceful as well. Once you've become connected to your Self, you'll also be able to see other people for who they really are. It's as if you're a tuning fork, emitting an invisible vibration that draws out other people's Selves. Where once you attracted chaos and conflict, now you attract harmony. You also see other people's vulnerabilities and fears, and you respond with compassionate clarity. The author witnessed the same characteristics coming up again and again when people described their Selves. He calls these characteristics the eight Cs – which are curiosity, courage, connectedness, compassion, confidence, calm, and clarity. If you want to know whether you're in tune with your Self, think about how many of these qualities you experience as you go through your day. Do you respond with curiosity to your inner fears, or are you immediately critical and scared? Do you feel mentally clear and focused? And what do your connections with other people look like? Doing intense inner work can seem self-absorbed, like being engaged in continuous navel-gazing. But, in fact, the more you work with your parts and connect with your core Self, the more you'll be able to engage positively with the outside world. You'll be able to see others for who they are, free from your own projections. And, when you have internal harmony and a strong foundation, you'll have much more capacity to help right the wrongs in the world.

Healing is about learning to be in our bodies and experiencing pain.

The author's father could be a warm, kind man – but when he was angry, he would lose control and fly into rages. He beat the author frequently, and once yelled that he was “good for nothing.” The author dealt with the anger he felt at his father by playing American football. Fired up with rage, he would take enormous physical risks, crashing into other players. Playing the game filled him with adrenaline, which numbed all his painful feelings. By playing football, the author was disembodimenting to numb his feelings. And he was doing it so well, that even years after he stopped playing, he still couldn't truly connect with his bodily sensations. The key message here is: Healing is about learning to be in our bodies and experiencing pain. The author's protectors were doing

everything they could to keep him from feeling too much. They were scared that if he felt bodily sensations he'd also feel the pain of his exiles. This caused his body to suffer: he started getting chronic migraines and asthma. When we ignore our parts, it's common to suffer physically as well as emotionally. One woman experienced chronic back pain from an accident for 17 years. Only after she'd confronted the rage and helplessness of the accident did the pain subside. Some spiritual teachings argue that our bodily signals should be suppressed or tamed in order to achieve enlightenment. The body is seen as being full of primitive forces which can lead us astray. But in Internal Family Systems therapy, the body is just as important for healing as our minds – after all, they're intimately connected. When we're harmonious with our inner parts, we're more receptive to our bodies' signals. That naturally allows us to take better care of ourselves. For example, we're able to follow our own intuitions about what kind of food we need, instead of being influenced by toxic diet culture or body shame. How do you feel in your body right now? Are you numbing sensation through taking medication, overeating, or compulsively exercising? What messages have you absorbed about your body and how to treat it? Ask your protectors why they're scared of letting you be fully present in your body. What would happen if you felt every bodily sensation? If you listened to what your body was trying to tell you? Connecting with your parts will set you on the path to health – both emotional and physical.

Connect with your inner parts through daily practice.

Connecting with your inner parts takes practice. It's something you work at continuously, rather than a destination you arrive at. Through doing daily exercises and visualizations, you'll develop trusting relationships with your exiles and protectors. Consistency is key – if they see that you keep showing up, they'll learn to trust you. To begin, set up as if you're about to meditate. Sit somewhere you feel relaxed, and do some deep breathing to ground yourself before starting. Then do a scan of your body and mind, and notice any emotions, sensations, or impulses that emerge. The key message here is: Connect with your inner parts through daily practice. As you sit there, check if there's a particular feeling or thought clamoring for your attention. Observe it as closely as possible. Where is the feeling located in your body? And how do you react to it: are you scared, or disgusted? Ask any parts of yourself with strong reactions if they'd be prepared to step back for a moment, so you can get to know the sensation better. If your parts give you the space, address the sensation directly. Ask if there's something it wants you to know. As a follow-up, ask it what it's afraid would happen to you if it weren't there. You can then express honest appreciation for the work it does in protecting you. Ask if there's something it needs from you in the future, and listen to what it says. You've just made contact with one protector part. The first sensation you noticed when you sat down was a trailhead, leading you on a journey into your own mind and how it works. A powerful follow-up exercise is to create a personal map of your different parts. Grab a piece of paper and a pen, and repeat the beginning of the exercise where you scan your body and mind for sensations and emotions. But this time, instead of engaging deeply with one part, sketch a representation of each part that appears to you. Once you've got them all down, examine their relationships and how they interact with each other. You've just completed a mapping of your internal family. Like in any family, you may fight or let each other down sometimes. But if you keep taking the time to engage and connect, you'll find that trust will grow, allowing even the most injured members to heal. And your internal family will become harmonious and

grounded, enriching every aspect of your life.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks is that: You contain multiple inner parts. They have distinct personalities and valuable resources to contribute to your life. But if they become traumatized, they'll become stuck in rigid roles, which can be destructive. You can heal yourself by engaging with all these parts with love and compassion and rediscovering your core Self. And here's some more actionable advice: When in doubt, observe your thoughts. When you're having an internal dilemma, don't try and rush into a decision. Instead, take time to observe your thoughts. Listen to what your different parts are saying on both sides of the argument. Then address each part individually, getting curious and taking the time to find out what they want to say. Once you've taken the time to hear all the perspectives, you'll be in a much better position to make a decision.