Freeze

flight/fight + shutdown = freeze

Freeze is a mixed state combination of the sympathetic mobilization system along with the dorsal vagal shutdown system. Freeze is being immobilized while highly charged. It’s like using the brake and the accelerator at the same time.

The freeze mixed state is also possible when the individual is highly charged in sympathetic flight/fight energy and then forced into immobilization. This could be through various potentially traumatic events but could also be from more routine events like surgeries - anesthesia forces the individual into immobilization while they may be in a highly sympathetic state.

More commonly, someone may experience freeze as a panic attack. During a panic attack, the body has a high level of sympathetic energy but immobilizes. The muscles are tense, breathing is shallow and thoughts of danger race, yet the body is paralyzed.

Freeze energy may become frozen into the body. This is at the heart of PTSD, resulting in flashbacks, nightmares, being easily triggered, intense and prolonged distress, changes in thought and emotion and increased isolation. That frozen energy is either chronically present or easily triggered into overwhelm, panic or rage.

The frozen body has less access to the safety pathways. Building the strength of the safety system is important in thawing the freeze mixed state. This builds the individual’s window of tolerance.