

Introductory Questions

Handout available for download on the [YRRP website](https://www.yellowribbon.mil/cms/event-handout) at:
<https://www.yellowribbon.mil/cms/event-handout>

This exercise is for your reflection only and will not be shared with others.

1. Have you ever done something that you felt was morally right but also felt that it challenged you emotionally, psychologically, or spiritually?
2. Have you ever done something that is at odds with your core code of ethics and values? How?
3. Have you ever witnessed an act that challenged your ethical beliefs or values?
4. Have you ever been affected by these experiences for a long time afterward?
5. How has your sense of self and your outlook on life been shaped by your own or others' moral choices?

Moral Injury Scenario

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Directions: Read the scenario, and consider the questions that follow. Write down your responses to the questions in the space provided.

Nhean was raised in a large, Cambodian, Roman Catholic family. His family fled to the United States as refugees when Nhean was just a boy and not long after his father had been killed in the Cambodian-Vietnamese war in the late 1980s. The family was extremely thankful for the U.S. humanitarian aid during their time as refugees, and, after coming to the U.S., the family frequently expressed their gratitude.

As Nhean grew up, he had no father, but several men assumed important roles in his spiritual and social development. One was a local parish priest who helped the family access food and other resources. Another was a teacher and veteran, who took special interest in Nhean's assimilation into the American culture.

During his senior year of high school, Nhean could imagine no higher calling than that of a Soldier. Inspired by his teacher and the wave of patriotism following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, he enlisted in the Army right after graduation. After completing his training, he was assigned to an infantry unit that soon deployed to Iraq. He took tremendous pride in his job and service in combat. He stayed in close touch with his unit chaplain and attended Mass whenever possible during his deployment.

One day, while 18-year-old Nhean was on checkpoint duty, a large truck loaded with crates came barreling toward his checkpoint. It disregarded all signs and signals to stop. Recognizing the likelihood this was a suicide attack, Nhean attempted to disable the vehicle by shooting the tires. When that did not work, he shot into the engine, which caused the truck to start burning. The resulting fire killed the driver, his two young sons, and the livestock being taken to market. Follow up revealed no evidence the family was involved in terrorist activities, and it was not clear why they had ignored warning signs and signals to stop at the checkpoint.

After the incident, Nhean became preoccupied about the well-being of the driver's surviving family members, whose fate in Iraq was likely similar to his family's fate had they stayed in Cambodia. He was reassured by his commander, the investigating intelligence officer, and the chaplain that he had acted within the rules for use of force; however, Nhean could not shake the cloud of enormous guilt that he felt. He tried to locate the man's family to see if there was anything he could do, but he was unsuccessful.

Because he no longer felt that he could accept the Eucharist (Holy Communion), he stopped attending Mass. He withdrew from friends in his unit and tried to deal with growing doubts about his ability to make rapid decisions under duress. He became convinced he was putting others in his unit at risk and asked for transfer to a different type of duty. His

commander simply reassured him that he had acted appropriately and was an effective Soldier, and he kept Nhean on checkpoint duty through the end of his unit's deployment.

Although Nhean had joined the military with a plan to pursue a long-term career, he left the Army at the end of his enlistment and went to work in an Asian grocery owned by his uncle. He did not go back to church despite pressure from his family to do so.

His family also expected him to marry and father children, but Nhean felt so worthless he did not feel that he could commit to a marriage. He was so ashamed of the incident in Iraq. He never spoke with his family about it, even though his young nieces and nephews would often tell him what it was like to be a Soldier. Nhean became increasingly withdrawn and began missing work because of frequent headaches. His uncle threatened to fire him if he did not get help and do something about his absenteeism.

Questions

1. What would you recommend to a friend to heal and recover from something that strongly violated his or her moral core?
2. What do you think a person needs from friends and family after seeing or doing something that violated his or her moral core?
3. Is there a limit to your compassion for those who struggle with what they have witnessed or done?
 - a. Can any moral breach be forgiven?
 - b. What about violence and killing?

The scenario in this handout was adapted from the following source:

Harris, J. I., Park, C. L., Currier, J. M., Usset, T. J., & Voeks, C. D. (2015). Moral injury and psychospiritual development: Considering the developmental context. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, 2(4), 256-266. <https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000045>

Moral Injury Medical Scenario

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Directions: Read the scenario, and consider the questions that follow. Write down your responses to the questions in the space provided.

Mason is a medical professional who is currently activated from the Army Reserve in support of the military response to coronavirus (COVID-19). This is Mason's third deployment but his first CONUS mission. His unit is part of an Urban Augmentation Medical Task Force that has been sent to the East Coast to support the COVID-19 relief effort and to curb the spread of the disease.

Before being activated, he was not providing services to his local community to fight COVID-19 as his local community was barely affected at that time. However, things have changed on the home front after he deployed, and his hometown has experienced a significant increase in cases.

At the hospital where he is placed, he and his colleagues know that some of their patients will die. He is involved in testing patients who may be infected with COVID-19. He also comes in contact with patients who have already tested positive for COVID-19. Although, he is wearing personal protective equipment at the hospital, the thought that he may be infecting others with a disease that could kill them occurs to him frequently.

The worst part of the experience for Mason is seeing medical decisions shift from a focus on the patient to a focus on public health. In particular, one situation stays with him: he overheard his colleague's debriefing after another case in which an older patient died without any medical staff using significant medical intervention attempts because there were several younger individuals who needed support at the time.

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Moral Injury RPA Scenario

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Directions: Read the scenario, and consider the questions that follow. Write down your responses to the questions in the space provided.

Jeff is an Air National Guard sensor operator; he controls the MQ-1B Predator's cameras and lasers and guides missiles to their targets when necessary. This is Jeff's second CONUS deployment. His unit is part of the Wing's Operations Group and provides support to ground force commanders in the Middle East. Jeff's most recent combat mission involves flights in Iraq, where his unit supports ISR.

Jeff hasn't yet fired a Hellfire, but he's witnessed a good deal of brutality from ISIS fighters. Jeff remembers during one flight over Mosul he watched an ISIS suicide bomber drive a car packed with explosives toward an Iraqi unit. An Iraqi soldier driving a bulldozer rammed the car. The bomb detonated and killed the ISIS driver, but the soldier miraculously survived.

Another scene particularly sticks with Jeff. In early spring 2017, Jeff was providing overwatch for an Iraqi Army patrol in Mosul. Jeff witnessed a brief flash and knew immediately that the patrol had been struck by an IED. As a result, a Soldier was killed. There was nothing Jeff could do, and he knew this.

Jeff is stationed a short driving distance from his house. He can go from combat to coaching soccer in about 30 minutes. The day he witnessed the IED explosion he felt off as he drove home. It didn't matter that Jeff didn't cause any harm or that he had only been tracking the patrol for a few minutes or that it was outside his power to stop it. Somehow it was difficult for Jeff to think that a combat zone like Mosul could exist in the same world as the one in which Jeff and his family live. And, even more striking for Jeff was the fact that he had to operate in both worlds on any given day.

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What You Can Do

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Directions: Consider the following questions.

Some support strategies are listed below:

- Be non-judgmental, patient, compassionate
- Give small, but consistent, doses of loving and caring
- Make yourself available to talk about what is bothering the Service member or veteran
- Get in touch with branch or VA care providers who can advise you
- Foster help-seeking by the Service member or veteran

In general, what type of support do you prefer?

1. Having a support person present who is not actively involved in problem-solving
2. Having a support person who is proactively involved in problem-solving
3. Having a support person who is ready to be actively involved in problem-solving only when asked

In general, what type of support do you prefer to provide to others?

1. Being present and not actively involved in problem-solving
2. Being proactively involved in problem-solving
3. Being ready to be actively involved in problem-solving but only when asked

Can you be flexible in the support you provide, depending on the type of support the other person wants? (Yes/No)

Are you able to talk with members of your social support network about what you need? (Yes/No)

Are you able to recognize when your attempts at support are not working for the person you are trying to support? (Yes/No)

Resources

- Visit the [National Center for PTSD website](http://www.ptsd.va.gov) at <http://www.ptsd.va.gov>
 - For information on moral injury, visit the [Moral Injury webpage](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/cooccurring/moral_injury.asp) at http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/cooccurring/moral_injury.asp
 - For information on where to get help, visit the [Get Help webpage](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/gethelp/index.asp) at <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/gethelp/index.asp>
- To access the Veterans Crisis Line, visit the [Veterans Crisis Line website](http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/) at <http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/> or call 1-800-273-8255