

Introductory Questions

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 challenges 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

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 who fled to the United States as refugees when he was very young. Nhean's father had been killed in the civil unrest in his country, and all of his extended family frequently expressed gratitude for the American military's role in helping them escape from Cambodia. Nhean largely grew up without a father in his life, but several men assumed important roles in his spiritual and social development. These men included a local parish priest who often helped the family access food and other necessary resources and a teacher who was a retired Veteran and took special interest in Nhean's adaptation to immigration. When Nhean graduated from high school, he could imagine no higher calling than that of a Soldier, like the heroes who liberated his family and the teacher who cared so much for him. Nhean enlisted in the Army as soon as he was of age and was subsequently deployed to a combat unit in Iraq. He took tremendous pride in his vocation and service in combat. He also stayed in close touch with his unit chaplain and arranged to attend Mass whenever possible during his deployment.

One day, while 18-year-old Nhean was guarding a checkpoint, a large truck laden with crates came barreling toward the checkpoint without regard for signals to stop. Recognizing high potential that this vehicle may contain explosives, Nhean attempted to disable the vehicle by shooting the tires; when that did not stop the vehicle, he took aim for the engine and fuel tank. The resulting fire killed a chicken farmer, his two young boys, and about 20 chickens being taken to market. Follow up revealed no evidence that this family was involved in terrorist activities, and it was not clear why they had ignored signals to stop at the checkpoint.

Nhean became preoccupied with concern about the man's remaining family and children, whose fate in this country 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 correctly per military protocol; however, Nhean could not resolve a cloud of severe guilt. He tried without success to locate the man's family, so he could find some way to help them. 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 appropriate combat decisions quickly and effectively. He became convinced that 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 he was an effective Soldier and kept him in the unit through the end of his deployment.

Although Nhean had enlisted with a plan to pursue a long-term military career, he left

the military shortly after deployment and went to work in an Asian grocery owned by his uncle. He did not return to church despite substantial pressure from his extended 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 that he never spoke with his family about it, despite young nieces and nephews frequently asking 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 consult a physician to do something about his absenteeism.

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 doing something that violated his or her moral core?

3. Is there a limit to your compassion for those who do bad things they regret?
 - a. Can any moral breach be forgiven?

 - b. What about violence and killing?

What You Can Do

Directions: Consider the following questions. Write down your responses to the questions in the space provided.

Some support strategies are listed below:

- Being non-judgmental, patient, compassionate
- Giving small but consistent doses of loving and caring
- Making yourself available to talk about what is bothering the Service member or Veteran
- Getting in touch with branch or VA care providers who can advise you
- Fostering help-seeking by the Service member or Veteran

In general, what type of support do you prefer?

1. Having a support person present, not actively involved in problem-solving
2. Having a support person proactively involved in problem-solving
3. Having a support person 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, not actively involved in problem-solving
2. Being proactively involved in problem-solving
3. Being ready to be actively involved in problem-solving 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

- [National Center for PTSD website](http://www.ptsd.va.gov) at www.ptsd.va.gov
 - [Moral Injury in the Context of War](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/cooccurring/moral_injury.asp):
https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/cooccurring/moral_injury.asp
- [Where to Get Help for PTSD](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/gethelp/index.asp): <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/gethelp/index.asp>
[Veterans Crisis Line website](http://www.veteranscrisisline.net) at www.veteranscrisisline.net or call: 1-800-273-8255