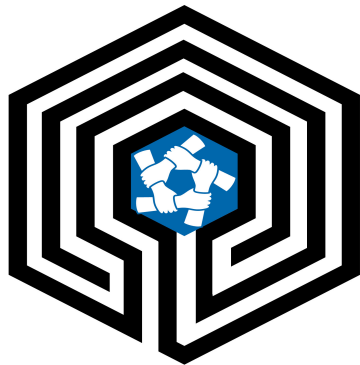


Plenary: Gender and Sexuality Oppression and Spiritual Healing for Moral Injury Trauma

Religious Educators Association



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Assumptions:

- ▶ The human condition is to be born moral.
- ▶ Reality is chaotic and unsafe. We manage it collectively with meaning systems and rituals.
- ▶ Moral injury is a devastating and ordinary human experience of moral/spiritual suffering, not a mental health disorder.
- ▶ Moral injury is related to clinical ideas of trauma and PTSD, but is not the same as either.
- ▶ Moral injury is ancient in religion and new in psychology.
- ▶ Causes of it differ, but the feelings are similar.

Prevailing Definitions of Moral Injury:

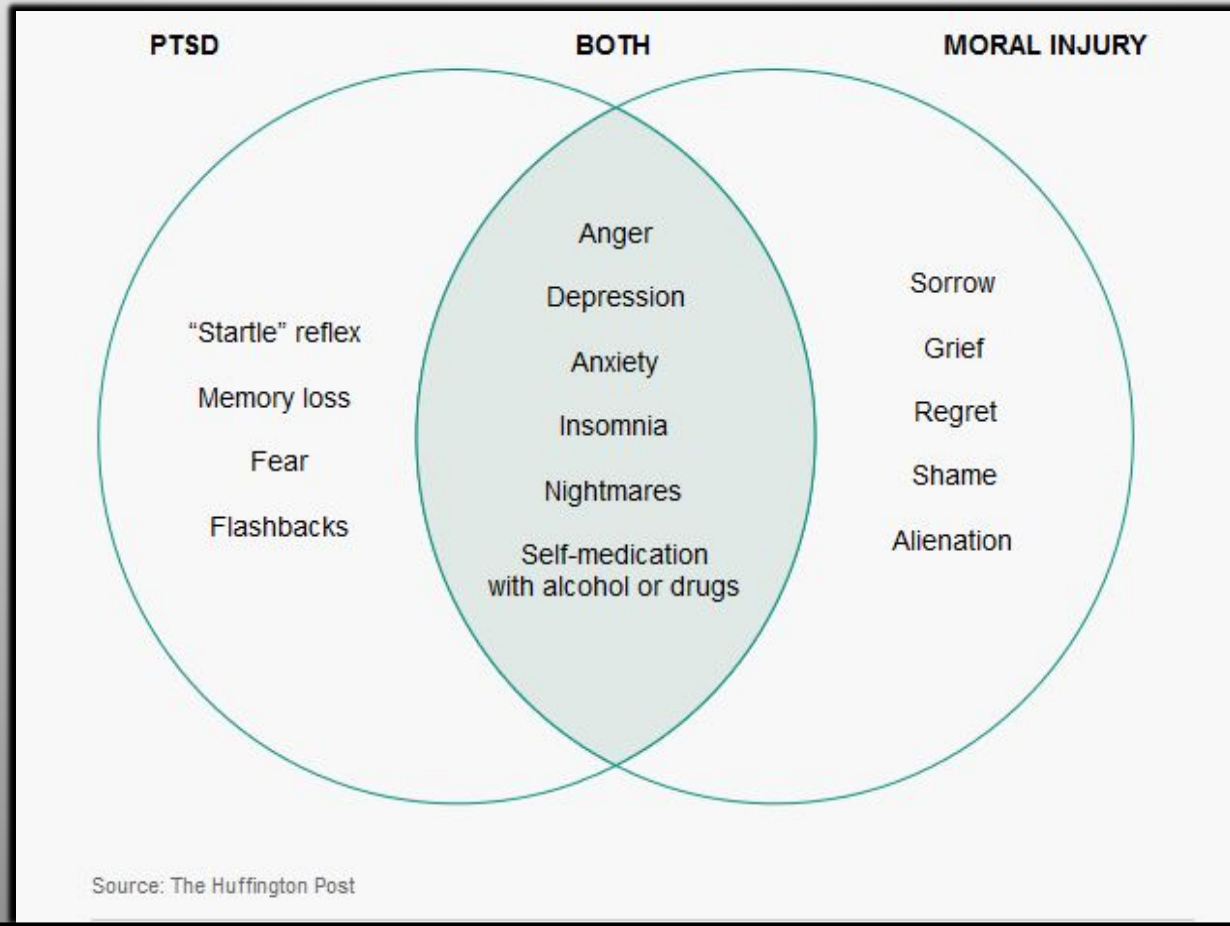
Jonathan Shay (1994 *Achilles in Vietnam* and 2014):

A betrayal of what's right, by someone who holds legitimate authority (e.g., a leader, decision-maker), in a high stakes situation. All three. (Trauma and PTSD Associated)

Psychology: Litz, B. T., et al. (2009, 2016) paraphrased:

Moral Injury' is a syndrome of shame, self-handicapping, anger, and demoralization that occurs when deeply held beliefs and expectations about moral and ethical conduct are transgressed. It is distinct from a life threat as it is not inherently fear-based; it can arise from killing, perpetration of violence, witnessing depraved behavior, or failing to prevent serious unethical acts. Also includes betrayals of trust in leaders.

Relation of PTSD to Moral Injury



Moral Emotions:

Sorrow
Remorse/Regret
Guilt/Shame
Embarrassment
Alienation/Isolation/Mistrust
Humiliation
Anxiety/Dread
Despair

Outrage/Fury/Aggression
Frustration
Disgust
Mistrust
Contempt
Bitterness
Cynicism

Trauma-Informed Work (Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE))

- ▶ Physical, emotional, sexual abuse and violence
- ▶ Physical, emotional neglect
- ▶ Household dysfunction due to substance misuse, mental illness, divorce, death, incarcerated parent(s), abuse of mother or primary caretaker
- ▶ External factors such as poverty, oppression, racism, bullying, etc.

However, even stable adults have a breaking point.

Religious/Spiritual/Philosophical Terms Related to Moral Injury

Monotheistic:

Sin=Soul-endangering transgressions committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent of people that lead to their separation from God's life-sustaining presence in their life and heart or to fear of divine retribution and eternal punishment. (Commission: Apostasy, Shedding Blood, Adultery; and Omission: failing to prevent irreversible harm.)

Cultural/Theological:

Han (Korean), or the loss of identity due to being a victim of others' sins. Also can include social-political, economic, and cultural oppression and repression, i.e. *systemic harm without an individual actor*.

Indigenous:

Lakota= Living as someone who has no relations. *Mitakuye Oyasin*=All my relations. *Inipi*= "to live again" Sweatlodge Ceremonial.

Navaho=Enemyway Ceremonial, part of Blessingway Ceremonial system.

Monistic (Hindu/Buddhist):

Karma=every action has a consequence that comes to fruition in either this life or a future life; thus, morally good acts have positive consequences, and bad acts generate negative results. Karma is not itself 'reward and punishment', but a universal moral law of causality that produces inevitable consequences.

Duḥkha=“bad” space in which things are dislocated and cause pain, living an out-of-joint life

- The experience and inevitability of physical and mental suffering; distress from what is not desirable.
- Awareness of change - Causes and conditions that produce pleasant experiences cease and they become unpleasant.
- All-pervasive suffering – awareness that things never measure up to our expectations; misery, demoralization, unhappiness because all life changes, is impermanent and has no fixed, inner core or substance.

Moral Injury Is Both Personal and Collective

Moral injury is the trauma of a moral conscience that has lost its grounding in meaning that is the basis of relationships. It is experienced as emotional pain, self-condemnation, and social isolation.

Moral injury is a change in character resulting from harmful experiences or life conditions that persons or groups are unable to justify, process, and integrate into a reliable identity and meaning system that sustains relationships and supports human flourishing.

Like a missing limb, it is not a reversible injury, so recovery is a process of learning to live with an experience that cannot be forgotten.

Moral Injury Disrupts “Moral Orienting Systems”* that are culturally-linguistically specific:

- ▶ Cosmology (what is reality and where do humans fit in it?)
- ▶ Relationships (self, body-perception, others, nature, cosmos)
- ▶ Behavior (language, actions, ethics)
- ▶ Ideas (faith, belief, philosophy, ethics)

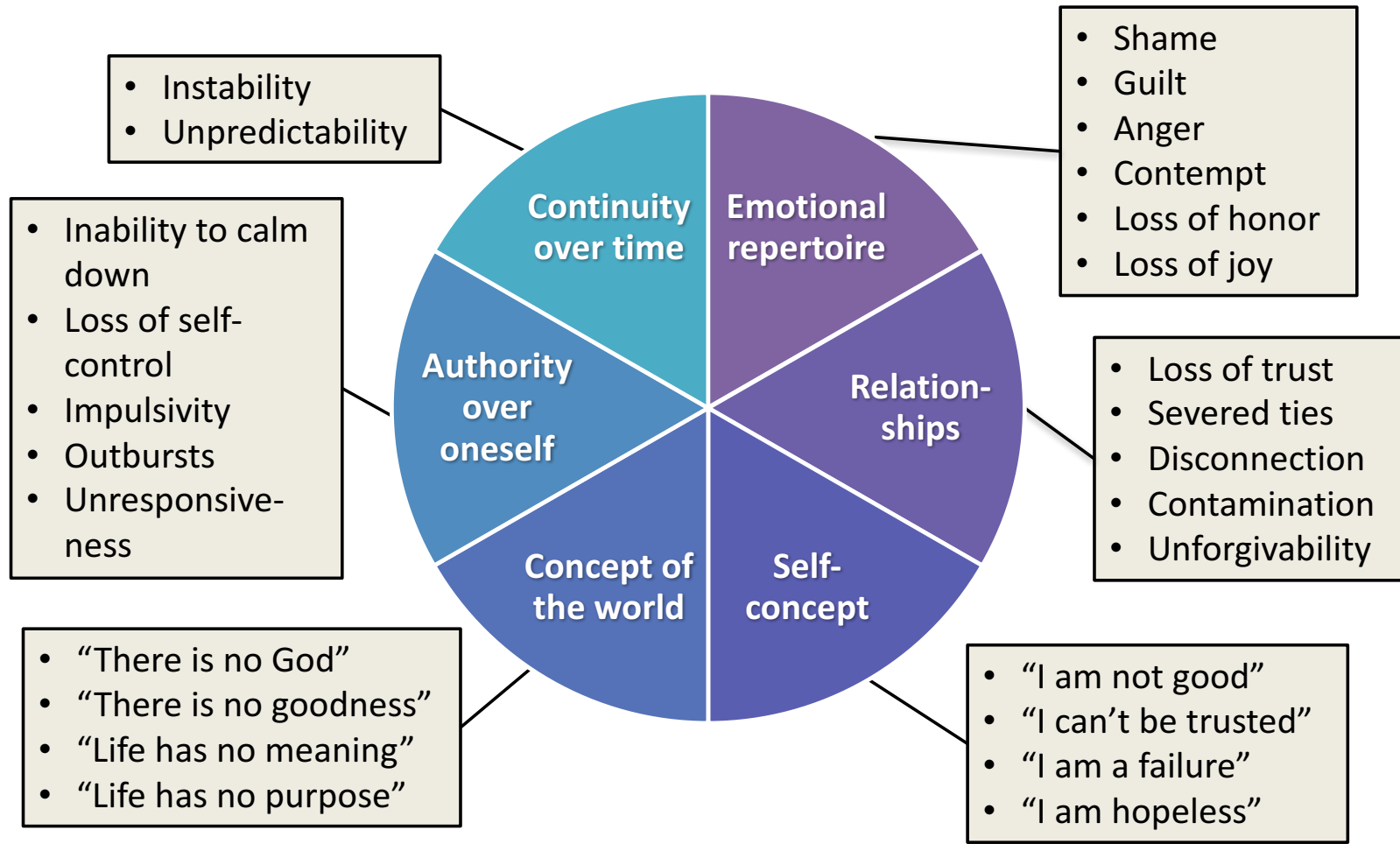
*Zachary Moon, *Warriors Between Worlds*.

Experiences of Harm = reality+ meaning:

chaotic,
disastrous,
tragic,
traumatic

They must be integrated to maintain a stable, resilient
identity.

Facets of Moral Injury



Multi-Dimensional Models of Recovery from Moral Injury

Peer Specialist Support with Small Groups

(Should always be backed up by mental health specialist or CPE-trained pastoral counselor.)

1. Establishes low bar for trust without fear of moral judgment or evaluation
2. Creates context for mutual vulnerability and sharing
3. Validates people's experiences without need to adjudicate truth or evaluate experiences
4. Is person-focused and restores or enhances capacities for empathy toward others
5. Utilizes people's negative experiences for positive outcomes for others
6. Encourages strengths-based esteem and self-worth in participants
7. Encourages agency and responsibility in others who help each other
8. Enables personal reflection on experiences and meaning without someone else "fixing" them or giving them answers
9. Easy to scale
10. Avoids stigma of asymmetrical, transactional, and medicalized models of mental health diagnosis and treatment

Strategy: Writing

- To externalize and process traumatic experiences.
- To releasing inner pain and memories.
- To share while allowing participants to choose level of emotional exposure.

Types of Writing

Free Writing

Journaling

Poetry

Stories

Memoir

Theological/Philosophical

Commentary on Texts or Stories

Naikan: Buddhist Therapy Practice

1. *What did you receive from the person?*
2. *What did you give to the person?*
3. *What problems did you cause the person?*
4. *How do you feel about the person now?*

Identifying New Values and Meaning for Integrating Moral Injury

I used to believe _____,

but now I believe _____.

Strategy: Meditation, Movement, Music

- Shift attention from thoughts to sensory awareness
- Free the breath and engage the body in focused attention
- Lift and join emotions collectively
- Calm or energize



Strategy: Visual Art

- Visualize internal memories, feelings
- Bypass mental censor of inner experiences
- Release visual, sensual aspects of trauma
- Connect non-verbal memories of trauma with ways to process verbally
- Lift spirit with agency of creativity

Strategy: Rituals*

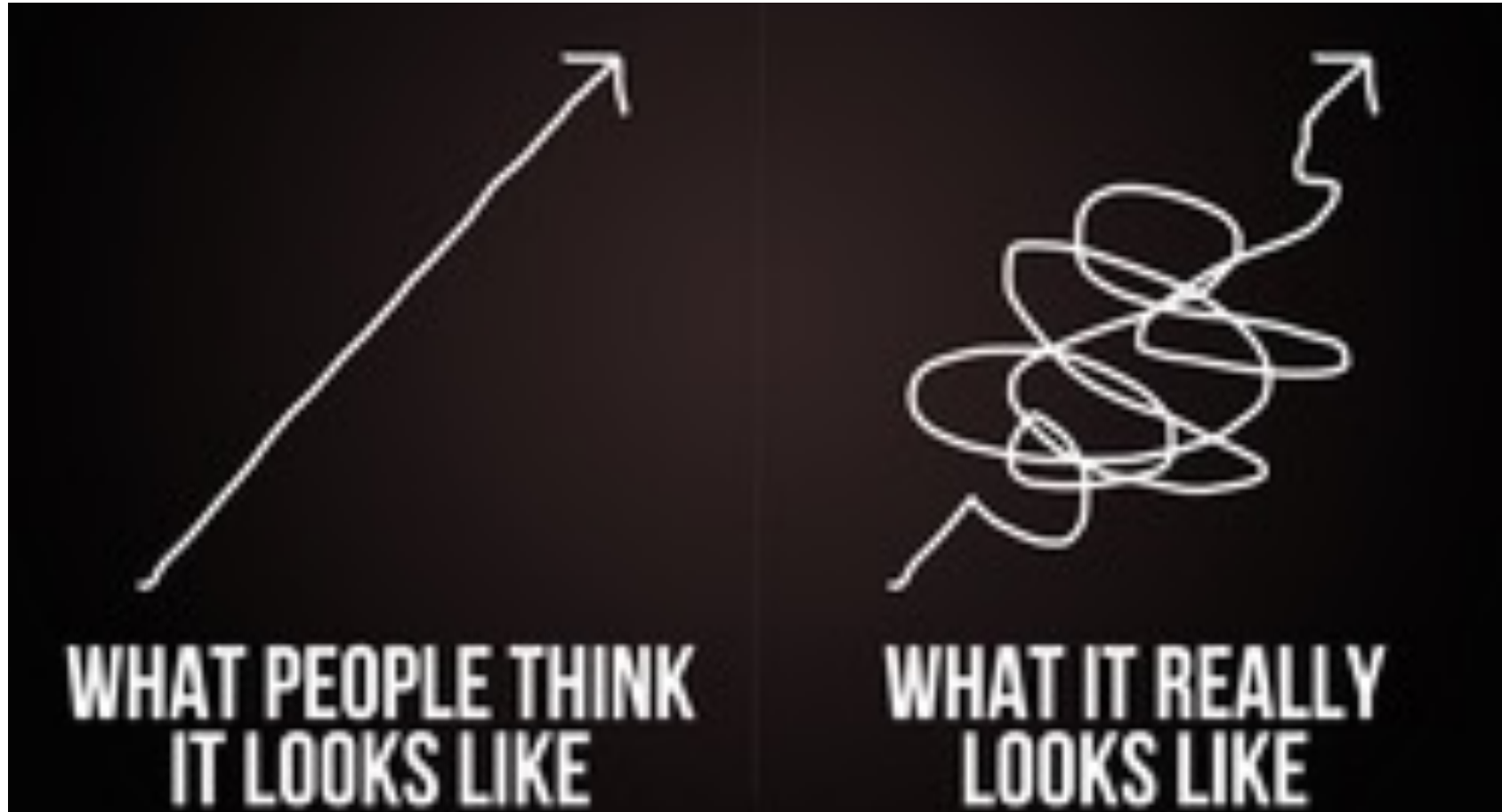
- Are the basis of significant personal and collective change
- Integrate chaotic forces into a confined emotional process with profound sensory-sensual power (death-loss, strangers, sickness, sex, gender, birth, moral failure, violence)
- Occur in liminal space within a flow of time; not *mundane* time, but special space time set aside for imagination and empathy
- Are permeable to ambiguity and differences, while guiding creative changes in life stages
- Override personal sincerity for collective relationships
- Enable imagined reality—subjunctive mood—“as if” performances to enact change.

*See Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael Puett, and Bennett Simon, *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity*, Oxford: 2008.

Using Rituals

- Create safe containers for difficult processes
- Can be self-created by a group
- Integrate various arts and spiritual practices
- Provide collective narrative structure to a process
- Enable living imaginatively into hope

Recovery as Integration and Resilience



VOAReST (Resilience Strength Time)

<https://www.voa.org/rest>

For processing feelings of moral distress.

- ▶ Confidential, free, open to the public
- ▶ Peer Facilitated
- ▶ Groups of up to 10
- ▶ One Hour online via Zoom
- ▶ Multiple Times a Week
- ▶ Based on MIRAC strategies of mindful breathing, guided meditation, sharing with deep listening, affirmations.

Upcoming Moral Injury Recovery in the Aftermath of COVID (MIRAC) Course Sessions

▶ Oct. 20

▶ Nov. 9

▶ Dec. 13

**Join the private Facebook group:
Moral Injury a Community of Practice.**

MORAL INJURY RESOURCES

(Visit <https://www.voa.org/moralinjury-resources> for a comprehensive list of resources, including webinars, films, videos, blogs, and news articles. Sign up to receive Shay Center emails and newsletter. Join the Facebook Moral Injury a Community of Practice private group.)

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