

Chapter 3. Integrity

--from *Standing at the Edge: Finding Freedom where Fear and Courage Meet*

Roshi Joan Halifax

Two days before my father died, a flood of stories poured out of him. My sister and I had never heard about his experiences in the Second World War; it was a subject carefully avoided in our family. But suddenly, like some kind of poison he needed to purge, the stories surfaced and our father began to speak.

As commander of the LST naval vessel 393, my father took part in significant WWII events, including the Sicilian occupation and the Salerno landings. He and his 140 men also transported Italian and German POWs across the Mediterranean to prison camps in North Africa. On his deathbed, he recounted how, after landing on Italian soil, his Gurkhas soldiers would drop behind enemy lines, kill Italian soldiers, and cut off their ears. As he told it, the Gurkhas were paid for each ear they brought back to the boat, a grisly currency indeed.

A Christian Southerner, my father had been raised by his family to care about the dignity of life—all of life, including that of his “enemies.” But some of what took place under his command violated the basic sense of integrity that was part of his upbringing. A few days before he died, he blurted out the story of an infamous friendly fire incident that happened during the Sicilian operation. A command ship got the word that unidentified aircraft were in the area. Jumpy and exhausted, my father’s men mistook the Allied planes for Axis warplanes. All the Allied naval vessels in the area started firing on the Allied planes, which apparently didn’t have the code to identify themselves as friends. My father, not convinced that the planes were enemy aircraft, tried to hold back his trigger-happy crew, but to no avail. A total of 164 Allied men were killed and 383 injured.

As our father spoke, I realized that he had experienced great moral suffering during the war and for decades afterward. Moral suffering is an emotional complex that my friend and colleague Dr. Cynda Rushton, endowed professor of clinical ethics and nursing at Johns Hopkins University, defines

as “the distress or anguish experienced in response to moral harms, wrongs or failures.” We suffer morally because we have integrity and a conscience; it hurts when integrity and conscience are violated by others or ourselves.

Sadly, my father had never addressed this suffering during the course of his life. He had served nobly, endeavoring to live by his values under difficult circumstances. Only as he was actively dying did he express the anguish and shame that had lain hidden in his heart, a terrible fuel that had secretly fed his depression and despair as a middle-aged man.

Integrity was a value that my father held dear, one that encompasses honesty and adherence to moral and ethical principles. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as “the state of being whole and undivided.” When our integrity is compromised, we feel divided inside and separated from our values, as I’m sure my father did.

If we can stand on the high ridge of integrity, keeping our words and actions in alignment with our values, we can escape harm. But when we are not able to act in a way that is congruent with our deepest values, we fall over the edge into moral suffering. There, the feelings of futility, dread, anger, and disgust can make us sick—emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

Listening to our father’s deathbed stories, my sister and I gained a greater understanding of his long and quiet torment. The disinhibition that dying provides activated deep levels of his psyche, and, even though his disclosures were emotionally charged, he seemed not to be afraid of his imminent death. Part of completing his life was sharing with us the assault on his conscience experienced during the war. I felt he was trying to teach us something about the human values of courage, dignity, and restraint—restraint of himself and his gunners.

At the conclusion of these episodes of sharing, after a period of physical flailing, our father dropped into a peaceful place. My sister and I had borne witness to his suffering and held his truth so he could let go of it. In the end, he was free to die blameless and without shame, which was a gift to all of us.

I. STANDING AT THE HIGH EDGE OF INTEGRITY

I am not a moral philosopher. Even so, investigating the nature of integrity and morality has been an important part of my practice and my life. In my

work as an anthropologist, I discovered that there are many moral platforms and that notions of what is right and wrong vary from culture to culture, even from person to person. Yet Buddhism gave me a new way to understand integrity—one that looks through the lens of suffering. When we cause suffering to others or ourselves, our integrity is violated. When we alleviate the suffering of others, our integrity is affirmed.

To have integrity is to have a conscious commitment to honor strong moral and ethical principles. The words morality and ethics have various definitions. Throughout this exploration of integrity, however, morality will refer to our personal values related to dignity, honor, respect, and care. Ethics will refer to the codified sets of beneficial and constructive principles that guide society and institutions and to which we are held accountable.

Our values are reflected in our character and are what affirm or destroy our integrity. Without integrity, our freedom is compromised. I have seen that integrity can have a fragile edge—perhaps more fragile than that of the other Edge States. By this I mean that it often takes an experience of moral anguish, a push, a slip, or a tumble over the edge into the chasm of suffering, to affirm or reveal integrity. That's why most of the stories I share about integrity include a component of suffering. These stories emphasize moral sensitivity (our ability to detect moral conflicts and dilemmas) and moral discernment (our ability to assess which actions are morally justifiable). They also include large doses of moral nerve, a term used by the author Joan Didion to describe someone who has nonnegotiable virtue when standing above the abyss of harm.

Moral Nerve and Radical Realism

The life of Civil Rights Movement leader Fannie Lou Hamer offers a powerful and poignant illustration of how integrity is an Edge State and how courage, wisdom, and compassion play a role in helping us thrive on the high edge of integrity. I was fortunate to learn about Fannie Lou Hamer during the Mississippi Freedom Summer voting registration initiative in 1964. We were both members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In 1965, the physicist David Finkelstein and I organized a fund-raiser for SNCC in New York City, and we asked Fannie Lou to keynote this gathering.

That night in Greenwich Village, we all drew close to our honored speaker to hear her vision of racial justice and to listen to her powerful singing voice.

She also shared her life story. Born in 1917 as the daughter of sharecroppers and the youngest of twenty kids, she had worked as a cotton picker on a plantation from the time she was six years old. She told us that by age thirteen, she was able to pick two to three hundred pounds of cotton daily. Life was hard—worse than hard for her and her family, who often went hungry. She married, and though she and her husband had no children of their own, they raised two kids from impoverished families. In 1961, when she was forty-four years old, she had a surgical procedure for the removal of a tumor. Her white doctor sterilized her without her consent as part of Mississippi's draconian plan to decrease the number of poor blacks in the state.

In 1962, against the orders of her plantation employer, Fannie Lou registered to vote and lost her sharecropping job as a result. She then began working with SNCC on voter registration and literacy. She famously said: "I guess if I'd had any sense, I'd have been a little scared—but what was the point of being scared? The only thing they could do was kill me, and it kinda seemed like they'd been trying to do that a little bit at a time since I could remember." Jailed on a false charge in 1963, Fannie Lou recounted the story of being beaten, nearly fatally, with a blackjack by inmates and then by police. That injury could have ended her life—but it seemed to have only fueled her determination and primed principled moral outrage.

As I listened to Fannie Lou speak, I was electrified. It was clear that her strong sense of integrity, her moral nerve, and her faith more than kept her going through the challenges she encountered. Her actions were aligned with her convictions. Although she didn't put it this way, I am also sure she experienced no small amount of moral suffering—what person in her situation would not as she watched members of her community being disparaged, beaten, and killed in the rural South?

Although Fannie Lou herself was subjected to horrific abuse, she never gave up. In fact, she used her suffering for the benefit of humanity, working courageously with people from both sides of the racial divide even though her life was threatened. That evening in Greenwich Village, she emphasized that she kept her commitment alive by regarding the Civil Rights Movement as a spiritual path. I heard her loud and clear: Show up ... this is the practice of radical realism combined with rehumanization and the tireless exercise of moral imagination. Fannie Lou Hamer became a role model for me and one

of the most influential people in my life. I often reflect on her enormous courage and integrity.

A compatriot of Fannie Lou's was the social activist, historian, and advisor to SNCC, Dr. Howard Zinn. He had enormous respect for Fannie Lou's moral authority as well as her strength in the midst of so much uncertainty and violence. I am sure he was influenced by her spirit when he wrote:

To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness.

What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places—and there are so many—where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction.

And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory.

Fannie Lou's life was a victory indeed, a formidable example of moral nerve, integrity, and radical realism.

Living by Vow

Central to our integrity is "living by vow," our ability to be guided by our deepest values, to be conscientious, and to connect to who we really are. Living by vow also points to our moral sensitivity, our capacity to identify morally relevant features in our interaction with others and in the organizations in which we work, and to have the insight and courage to deal with issues of harm.

Integrity can be lived in big ways, as in Fannie Lou's life, and it also shines through the decisions that we ordinary people make every day. Telling the cashier that she has handed us too much change. Standing up for the woman in hijab who is being bullied. Asking our racist uncle not to air his views in the presence of our children.

We might be afraid to take a stand and choose to ignore these situations. We might be in denial or willfully ignorant over the harm experienced by others when transgressive situations arise. We might be morally apathetic or living in a bubble of privilege. But if we aren't trapped by any of these defenses, we will step forward and meet harm with the determination to end suffering.

What keeps us upright is our moral nerve, the courage to stand in principles of goodness. What keeps our integrity on track is our moral sensitivity. We need both a strong back and a soft front, lived equanimity and compassion, to keep us aligned with our values. We also need to have the kind of heart that is wide enough to accept rejection, criticism, disparagement, anger, and blame if our views are against the mainstream. We might even lose our lives, as we uphold our principles.

Your uncle might never speak to you again. Your house might be tagged because you protected a Muslim woman. Or much worse ... But this is called "living by vow."

Yet many of us have an aversion toward vows. For us, they feel like rules that constrain us. Some of us are rule breakers by nature. Others feel that vows are too religious, and we are hearty secularists. Others simply don't care. We see no reason to make promises or honor commitments. Yet we live in a time of rapid psychosocial change, a time of the normalization of disrespect, lying, violence, and worse. It is important to remember that our vows help us to stay aligned with our deepest values and remind us of who we really are.

The vows we take are a grammar of values reflected in our attitudes, in our thoughts, and in how we are in the world. Our promises and commitments are fundamentally about how we are with each other and ourselves, how we connect and serve, and how we meet the world. Practicing them, embodying them, they reflect our integrity and help give us ballast and meaning as we confront the inner and outer storms of being human.

Vows can be practiced in a literal way, like following the Ten Commandments or the Buddhist precepts. They can also be compassion based, more fluid, and context sensitive. Or they can be based on a wisdom perspective of non-separateness and non-duality. The bottom line is that our vows are a bigger landscape than most of us realize, and they support integrity in our lives and protect our world.

There are the vows that are personal, the internal promises that we have to keep in order to give our lives strength of character. For example, a powerful influence for me has been my mother's life of service. Since I was very young, my personal vow has been not to abandon those who are vulnerable and to always work to end the suffering of others.

Then there are vows that we receive through our religious training. "Do unto others..." the Golden Rule, or the Three Pure Precepts of Buddhism of not harming, doing good, doing good for others. These are vows that we share with others and which ground us in the sacredness of all of life.

There are also practical precepts that help us to live in our world. These are the customs and norms that nourish civility and social cooperation. Treating others with respect. Speaking kindly to others and about others. Being grateful for the gift of our life.

Special vows are those that can transform our selfishness. These vows require that we are strict with ourselves, because they focus on the ego and are related to our destructive emotions. Ego-taming vows teach us that being selfish is simply not practical. Period! Most of us would agree that it is not in anyone's best interest to be greedy, to hate, or to be deluded. Yet, inevitably, we have times of waywardness. Ego-taming vows help us dissolve our self-centeredness, like harsh salt dissolved into the great ocean.

At Upaya, every morning during our intensive practice periods, we chant the Verse of Atonement, an ego-taming vow that invites us to not separate from the harm we cause others and ourselves. The verse reminds us to atone. It goes: "All my ancient twisted karma, from beginningless greed, hate, and delusion, born of body, speech, and mind, I now fully atone." The word atone is a good one. Atonement means "at-onement," not separating from the truth of the whole of our lives and bringing the fractured pieces together in an act of brave and honest reconciliation.

The most powerful vows are those that point us toward living a larger identity, of being Buddha. These vows support us in recognizing impermanence, interdependence, unselfishness, and compassion. For a Buddhist, this means taking refuge in the Buddha, who exemplifies wisdom and compassion. Taking refuge means we practice "being Buddha." We also take refuge in the Dharma, the teachings and values that guide us to not harm, to serve unselfishly, and to wake up. This means that we embody the teachings

to the best of our ability. And, finally, we take refuge in the Sangha, our companions in awakening, even the ones who give us trouble, like our local politician, our father-in-law, our disrespectful employer. This means that we are able to see that we are not separate from any being or thing, and we live accordingly.

For a Christian, this also might mean taking refuge in the Lord Jesus Christ and bringing forth the beatitudes as a lived experience of love and humility. For an indigenous person, it might mean taking refuge in the great earth and the vast sky above, and respecting and cherishing all living beings. No matter our source of vows, I believe that vows are essential practices that support integrity and the development of moral character. Thus, I often say to my students, “Why not be a Buddha now?”

How do we do this? One way is to turn toward those very places that we most resist. We can go to that place we are most scared of and test the strength of our relationship to our vows and values. Fannie Lou Hamer, Malala Yousafzai, and Jane Goodall have stood on the high edge of integrity and faced the hard reality of systemic suffering caused by racism, sexism, environmental destruction, and the disastrous economic disparities of our world. In the midst of radical uncertainty, these women lived their vows to end suffering: continuous vow, continuous practice! Their moral nerve and moral sensitivity have given them the strong back and soft front to meet suffering with what we call in Zen “an appropriate response,” which is courage and integrity mediated by wisdom. This is what I believe to be living by vow.

II. FALLING OVER THE EDGE OF INTEGRITY: MORAL SUFFERING

Moral suffering is the harm we experience in relation to actions that transgress our tenets of basic human goodness. It manifests in at least four main forms. Moral distress arises when we are aware of a moral problem and we determine a remedy, but are unable to act on it because of internal or external constraints. Moral injury is a psychological wound resulting from witnessing or participating in a morally transgressive act; it’s a toxic, festering mix of dread, guilt, and shame.

By contrast, *moral outrage* is an externalized expression of indignation toward others who have violated social norms. A reaction involving both anger and disgust, moral outrage at unethical actions can drive us to take

action and demand justice and accountability. *Moral apathy* occurs when we simply don't care to know, or when we are in denial about situations that cause harm.

All four forms of moral suffering are present in the story of Hugh Thompson Jr., who was a helicopter pilot and a soldier from Georgia like my father. In South Vietnam on March 16, 1968, Thompson flew over a horrendous scene of U.S. soldiers wantonly raping, mutilating, and killing Vietnamese men, women, children, and infants in what came to be known as the My Lai Massacre. In an incredible display of integrity and courage, Thompson and his two crew members intervened, blocking the American perpetrators and threatening to turn their weapons on them if they didn't stop. Thompson then personally escorted a number of civilians to safety. His moral outrage upon witnessing this out-of-control violence wreaked upon innocent villagers probably gave Thompson the strength to save the lives of some of these men, women, and children and to hold the perpetrators accountable.

The general commanding U.S. forces in Vietnam was William C. Westmoreland. He congratulated the American perpetrators for their "outstanding action," writing that they had "dealt (the) enemy (a) heavy blow." But years later, in his memoir, Westmoreland described that incident as "the conscious massacre of defenseless babies, children, mothers, and old men in a kind of diabolical slow-motion nightmare that went on for the better part of a day, with a cold-blooded break for lunch."

Soon after the incident, Thompson received the Distinguished Flying Cross, which he threw away. The citation praised his heroism "in the face of hostile enemy fire," omitting the fact that the hostile fire was from the American side. Thompson was convinced that his commanding officers were trying to buy his silence, yet another ethical violation. In 1969, he testified against the officers who had ordered the massacre, all of whom were either eventually pardoned or acquitted.

For years, Thompson was vilified by many in the U.S. military, government, and public for his role in the My Lai investigation and trials. Even though he had acted heroically, his suffering related to the massacre and its subsequent cover-up never left him. Deeply wounded by moral injury, Thompson suffered from PTSD, divorce, severe nightmares, and alcoholism. He was only sixty-two when he died.

Thompson experienced moral distress when he realized he had to defy the orders of his superiors in order to preserve his integrity and save civilian lives. His moral outrage spurred him to do the right thing, even though he suffered moral injury that haunted him for much of his life and probably fed his alcoholism (an illness that involves denial and numbness and therefore some measure of moral apathy).

Yet toward the end of his life, Thompson was finally recognized as a hero. He and his crew were publicly awarded the Soldier's Medal for their courage in doing what few could have under the circumstances.

I learned about Hugh Thompson from a student of mine who had served as a Navy SEAL and had attended a talk Thompson gave about ethics in the military. Thompson told the audience that he had returned to My Lai ten days after receiving the Soldier's Medal, thirty years after the massacre. In My Lai, Thompson met a Vietnamese woman who had survived the massacre. She said she had prayed that the soldiers who had shot at them would return with Thompson so they could be forgiven. This woman had undoubtedly suffered moral injury as well, when she saw her villagers being raped, tortured, and killed—but she was able to transform that injury into forgiveness.

It would be helpful to know how the perpetrators of the massacre have lived with their actions. Unless they are morally apathetic, they must have suffered too. In 2010, a squad leader who was part of the debacle said that he did what he did because he feared execution. "If I go into a combat situation and I tell them, 'No, I'm not going. I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to follow that order,' well, they'd put me up against the wall and shoot me."

The squad leader's fears may have been well-founded, and people caught in these kill-or-be-killed scenarios deserve our compassion. Still, it is Hugh Thompson who stood on the high ground of integrity; his moral injury and outrage gave him the courage and energy to take action when faced with unconscionable acts.

Moral Distress

Throughout my decades of work in end-of-life care, many clinicians have confided in me about the moral dilemmas they have faced when the burden of prolonging a patient's life begins to outweigh its benefit. Some have been required to perform CPR—a painful and often futile procedure—on a patient with only a few days to live. One clinician told me a story about withholding

blood products from a patient who needed them only because of insufficient supplies in their institution. Many have shared that they have argued with their teams about what intervention would really serve, and were unable to pursue the best path because of hospital policy or patient expectations. Some have fallen into moral apathy because of burnout and lost their capacity to care.

My experience over decades has focused on working with clinicians, some of whom experience moral distress daily. Years ago, a colleague and I were asked to consult with a team of nurses who served on a cardiac intensive care unit (CICU). The team was demoralized and close to breaking apart. For nine months, they had cared for a cardiac transplant patient. The donor's heart had turned out to be defective, and the health of the patient, Roy, was in steep decline.

Understandably, Roy and his wife were desperate and willing to do anything to prolong his life. His cardiac surgeon had painted an optimistic picture, suggesting that Roy would do well with the interventions he was recommending.

But this was not what happened. Over the months, Roy had endured agonizing amputations from gangrene, bedsores, frequent cleaning and changing of the dressings on his raw wounds, recurrent pneumonia, drug-resistant infections, and dependence on mechanical ventilation. Roy's pain became uncontrollable, and he sank into mute despair.

The nurses shared that they had become increasingly distressed as they tried to tend to Roy's physical and mental wounds. A few told us they couldn't bear going into Roy's room, as they felt their care of him was causing him even more pain. One confided that dealing with Roy's gangrene and its putrid odor had caused her to vomit when she left his room. Others kept performing their duties but felt alarmed at the anguish of their patient. Some shared that they felt numb and just simply went about their tasks as though in a trance. As for Roy, he had lapsed into dark silence. After nine months of agony for Roy and increasing moral distress for the nurses, Roy passed away while still in the CICU.

Listening to the nurses, I recalled that Hippocrates recommended three goals of medicine: "cure, relief of suffering, and refusal to treat those who are overmastered by their diseases." These experienced nurses felt that Roy had

indeed been overmastered by his disease, and the care they were being asked to provide was not only futile but also seemed harmful to their patient. To make matters worse, the surgeon seemed to have discounted their concerns, and they felt overmastered by him and by hospital policy.

Some of the nurses felt guilty and ashamed for avoiding their patient. Some were totally shut down and morally apathetic. And some were morally outraged, blaming the surgeon for what they felt was behavior that verged on unethical. All of them suffered from moral distress.

During their meeting with us, the nurses asked what they could have done in a medical system that is dedicated to extending life at any cost. They also wanted advice about how, under these conditions, they could shift out of the emotional reactivity of wanting to abandon the patient or of falling into moral apathy or outrage. They felt that their integrity had been seriously compromised in the course of caring for this patient and that they had violated their values and principles of compassionate care. Further, they had lost their moral nerve, and asked us how they could restore self-respect and integrity.

We listened. We supported them listening to each other. We shared with them how they might reframe their experience. We explored alternative scenarios. And then we suggested that they explore forgiveness: self-forgiveness, forgiveness of each other, and forgiveness of the surgeon and the institution.

The story did not end with our consultation. Over a two-year period, my colleague continued to work with this team and assisted them in cultivating moral resilience. The team explored meditation practices to enhance mental flexibility, grounding, and insight while in high-intensity situations. The team also examined their personal values and the principles that guided their institution. They saw that their own principles were not always in alignment with institutional expectations. They also explored the concept of *moral remainder*, the painful emotional residue that lingers following actions that violate one's sense of integrity. They began to realize that moral remainder is to be expected in the aftermath of most ethical dilemmas and that accepting moral remainder was an important part of building resilience.

But for the staff on this team, this process was not just a matter of healing. Learning to be morally resilient led to their empowerment. This team took the

initiative to change policy so that cardiac patients who are declining can receive appropriate palliative care. As of this writing, most of the team continue to work together on this cardiac intensive care unit.

The Pain of Moral Injury

Whereas moral distress may be short-lived, moral injury is damage that can take a long time to heal, if it ever does. Moral injury is a complex psychospiritual and social wound resulting from a violation of our integrity when we witness or participate in unconscionable acts. It often affects those in the military, for obvious reasons. Like the My Lai squad leader, many soldiers feel powerless to assert their individual beliefs and values in opposition to institutional imperatives. During such situations, the edifice of our integrity can collapse, and we might follow orders we feel are wrong—or we might fail to intervene in the midst of grave harm, even though our conscience calls us to do otherwise.

The term *moral injury* refers not just to the wound sustained but also to the long-term psychological damage it causes. Sufferers are haunted by feelings of dissonance that may last a lifetime and can include depression, shame, guilt, withdrawal, and self-loathing. The feelings associated with moral injury can also prompt the anger and disgust that prime moral outrage and feed the addictive behaviors that are linked to moral apathy.

Alienation is another hallmark of moral injury. Upon their return to civilian life, those returning from military deployment can feel disconnected from their peers, friends, and family. Because most civilians don't know what it's like to serve in the military, they have a hard time relating to the experience of vets, who can fear being viewed negatively for what they were compelled to do. They also may dread being lauded as a hero if some of their actions were morally ambiguous or transgressive.

Of course, moral injury is experienced not only by military personnel. It is a wound sustained by the politician who lies to gain votes and realizes he is compromising his integrity; by the employee of an oil and gas company who is demoralized by the environmental destruction she is complicit with; by the educator who pushes his students to pass tests at any cost and feels guilty for harming them; and even those who try to prevent this harm, simply by witnessing the harm. I believe we need to recognize the extent to which moral injury is found in our society, so that we can better address it.

I experienced moral injury on the night of November 6, 2001, when Terry Clark was put to death by lethal injection inside the Penitentiary of New Mexico. Capital punishment—killing as punishment for killing—is a practice that causes moral injury to many of those involved, even those who try to prevent it. I got a disturbing view into this practice, which is still retained in thirty-one of our states. It touched my life forever.

Terry Clark had been convicted in early 1986 of kidnapping and raping a six-year-old girl. While out on bond that summer, he raped and murdered a nine-year-old girl, confessing to his crime days later. Although New Mexico had not executed a prisoner since 1960, a jury sentenced Clark to death.

Incarcerated, Clark went through the appeals process until 1999, when he dropped further appeals and began waiting to die. I was part of a team that tried to convince Clark to reverse his decision and reinstate the appeals process so he would not be executed. Obviously, we were unsuccessful.

Clark seemed to be a tormented man. A colleague and I would sit on the concrete floor outside of his cell and converse with him through the small food port in the imposing metal door separating him from us. He barely spoke above a whisper, and his cell was always filled with gray cigarette smoke.

On the evening of his execution, around fifty of my students and friends gathered outside the Pen, located along a rural highway near Santa Fe. In protest, we sat silently on the bare ground in the cold dark night. We were not alone. Near us, the family and neighbors of the murdered girl were chanting, “Kill him! Kill him!” After a while, perhaps influenced by our stillness, they grew calmer and began to sing “Jesus Loves Me, This I Know.” We all waited.

At 7:30 P.M., a correctional officer came outside to inform us that Terry Clark had been put to death. Our group fell into even deeper silence. I felt sick. Sicker when I heard the cheers from those who had supported his execution. I knew that Clark had committed these terrible crimes. Still, I could not come close to reconciling using murder as punishment for murder. The Buddha taught nonviolence. He worked to reform killers rather than punish them. Following his teachings, most Buddhists feel that capital punishment is unethical, that killing for killing does not absolve anyone. Most of us also object to the concept of “justifiable homicide” because it serves to normalize non-justifiable homicide (i.e., murder).

As it had not executed a prisoner for more than forty years, the New Mexico Corrections Department was not prepared to carry out the execution. They had to bring in a team from Texas. Many of the Pen staff spoke to me privately about their moral concerns in having this execution take place on their watch.

On the day Clark was put to death, I was told that he was so frightened that he asked to be tranquilized. As the execution was taking place, one of the psychologists in the death house wept as Clark, terrified, gazed into her eyes. My associates who were in the death house with Terry Clark were forever changed and ultimately left the corrections department.

We don't hear their stories often enough, but many team members performing executions suffer long-lasting anguish. "When the switch was thrown that first time, and I realized I had just killed a man, that was pretty traumatic," Dr. Allen Ault told *The Guardian*. In the mid-nineties, as then commissioner of the Georgia Department of Corrections, Ault gave the order for five executions by electric chair. "Then to have to do it again and again and again, it got so that I absolutely could not go through with it," he said.

These premeditated killings made Ault feel degraded to a level "lower than the most despicable person." After the fifth execution, Ault's distress was so strong that he resigned from his post. To this day, he still feels haunted by the men whose lives he ended. "I don't remember their names, but I still see them in my nightmares," he said.

Several of his team members sought therapy for handling their trauma. Ault said he personally knows three people who have participated in executions and who later committed suicide. They were not able to integrate the moral remainder, and moral injury and then death were the outcome.

When moral remainder keeps us awake and populates our nightmares with demons, we suffer. Ault quit; others have taken their own lives. Just as physical pain tells us that something is wrong in our bodies, moral suffering tells us that our integrity is being violated, and this information can help us guide our actions back into alignment with our values. Like Ault and my associates who left, we can remove ourselves from the situation while simultaneously working to change the system's institutional violence.

Moral Outrage and the Stickiness of Anger and Disgust

Then there is moral outrage. One summer evening in the sixties, I stepped out of the building where I lived in New York City and came upon the startling scene of a man yelling at a woman. Suddenly, the man ripped off a radio antenna from the car he was standing next to and began to whip the woman with it. Without thinking, I put my body between them and shouted at him to stop. Morally outraged, I had no thought for my own safety. The scene of a man abusing a woman set me afire, and I reacted accordingly.

Moral outrage has been defined as a response of anger and disgust in relation to a perceived moral violation. In that street scene, I was not only witnessing physical violence but gender violence as well. Fifty years later, the sensation in my body of encountering that violence is still present for me. It was the shock of outrage and revulsion, and nothing could have stopped me from moving between the two of them.

As I stood there, heart pounding, the woman hurriedly thanked me and fled from the scene. The man threw the antenna on the street, snarled at me, and walked away. In retrospect, I am pretty sure I was not acting from egoic motivations when I tried to stop the violence; I wasn't out to gain the approval from others or boost my self-esteem. I had no time for a self-centered thought—I simply could not slip by this horrifying scene without intervening. What motivated my action was a quick and deep surge of moral outrage combined with compassion.

Over the years, I've witnessed moral outrage manifesting in healthy and unhealthy forms in the worlds of politics, activism, journalism, medicine, and in my own personal experience. Attempting to dig below the surface, I've seen that moral outrage, like pathological altruism, can sometimes reflect an unacknowledged need to be perceived as a "good" person, and we may believe that our superior moral stance makes us appear more trustworthy and honorable in the eyes of others. Our righteous indignation can give us a lot of ego satisfaction and may relieve us of guilt about our own culpability: "We're right, others are wrong; we are morally superior, others are morally corrupt."

The social critic Rebecca Solnit further unmasks the self-serving dimension of moral outrage in her Guardian essay "We Could Be Heroes: An Election-Year Letter." She notes that some on the far left often engage in "recreational bitterness," turning moral outrage into a competitive sport by making the perfect the enemy of the good, finding fault with advances, improvements,

and even outright victories. Solnit notes that this stance does not advance any causes, and it actually undermines alliance building. Ultimately, I wonder how much recreational bitterness played into the outcome of the 2016 U.S. election by widening the divide between liberals and the far left.

Recreational bitterness and other forms of moral outrage can be contagious, addictive, and ungrounding, and they can make us sick. A small dose can get us going. Binging on it will do us in, and that's what our adversaries want. When we are angry and emotionally overaroused, we begin to lose our balance and our ability to see things clearly, and we are prone to falling over the edge into moral suffering.

However, many of us feel that we violate our own integrity if we don't hold others accountable for the harm they cause. In the face of moral violations, we cannot be bystanders or protect ourselves through denial. To preserve our integrity, we must speak truth to power. This is what I call principled moral outrage.

Principled moral outrage involves elements of the other Edge States: altruism, empathy, integrity, and respect. In 1981, the neuroscientist Francisco Varela, along with Harry Woolf, the director of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, and I visited a primate laboratory. The basement lab housed dozens of small cages with rhesus monkeys inside. Harry and I approached one cage. We saw that the top of the monkey's skull was sawed off and his brain was exposed. Electrodes were making direct contact with this little monkey's brain. The poor monkey was cuffed and held immobile, but his eyes said it all—they were filled with pain and horror. Harry sagged at my side and knelt on the floor in front of the monkey. He seemed to be asking for forgiveness. Shaken, I stood and gazed into the monkey's eyes. I took in what I felt was his pain, and sent mercy to this little one.

Later, I told Francisco that I thought it was thoroughly immoral to do this kind of research. Animals were often sacrificed in the course of neuroscience research. Facing that monkey, I experienced more than a touch of moral outrage. Something had broken open in me. I decided to use my anger and disgust as a way to drop deeper into my commitment to end suffering. I resolved to never let experiments with animals off my radar. As for Francisco, it was not long thereafter that he gave up animal research as well. I don't

know what Harry did; I lost track of him soon after. But I did not lose track of that monkey. He lives inside of me nearly forty years later.

I experienced profound compassion for that monkey. And wrenching disgust was also part of the complex of emotions I felt in that lab—disgust at the cruelty that humans are capable of toward their fellow sentient beings. An important quality of moral outrage is that it involves feelings of revulsion in response to a perceived breach of ethics. Social psychologists have studied the effect of disgust on moral discernment. In one study, when jurors in mock trials were exposed to a disgusting smell, they meted out harsher verdicts against the defendant. Disgust seemed to amplify their experience of moral outrage, leading to stricter judgments. Another study found that people who tend toward stronger feelings of disgust find people in their in-group more attractive and have more negative attitudes toward people in out-groups. This might be a reason why moral outrage can be so polarizing—it widens the divide between self and other.

Internally, we may have conflicting responses to our own moral outrage. Whereas anger can excite aggression, disgust can produce withdrawal—which can mean hiding within our ingroup and objectifying and avoiding the out-group. Martha Nussbaum, an ethicist and jurist, uses the phrase "the politics of disgust" to critique laws that discriminate against the LGBT community on the basis of disgust, such as bans on same-sex marriage and anti-transgender "bathroom bills." She notes that such politics support bigotry, intolerance, and oppression.

As the ethicist Dr. Cynda Rushton writes, "Moral outrage can become the glue that holds a group together in a sense of solidarity against those who threaten their personal or professional identities, values, beliefs, or integrity. The sense of moral outrage can become contagious and, if unexamined, can exacerbate differences and fuel separation rather than connection and cooperation."

In working with various social profits over the years, I have learned that our fondnesses and fears can easily predispose us to respond in certain ways to moral dramas. When I felt that I had to disclose my concerns about the mismanagement of an organization I was involved with, I struggled. I was a longtime friend of the CEO, and I cared about him. I had expressed my concerns directly to him, yet the pattern of abuse continued. Finally, I felt morally obligated to report directly to the board of directors my concerns

about the CEO mishandling staff, projects, and funds. I knew that my affection for the CEO had delayed me in taking a stand, but finally I felt I had no choice. I felt disgust about the situation and was disappointed with myself in not speaking out.

Rational thinking plays an important role, of course, but often a subordinate one. "What makes moral thinking moral thinking is the function that it plays in society, not the mechanical processes that are taking place in the brain," says Harvard psychology professor Joshua Greene. What finally pushed me to disclose my concerns to the board was my conscience, not my conceptual mind.

A chaplain wrote about problems in his workplace, a prison for young adults. "I found that I was actually embarrassed to say that I hurt as a result of seeing what constituted 'care' in the system. How the system itself was set up to be violent, to provoke violence. To witness such suffering in young people, I was upset, frustrated, outraged, and deeply ashamed." This chaplain was suffering from empathic distress, moral outrage, and guilt.

In some ways, outrage is a justifiable response to an action that is morally transgressive, such as the torture of monkeys in a lab or the neglect of young people in prison. But even less serious moral issues, like mismanagement of an institution, can cause us anger, disgust, and principled moral outrage. When moral outrage is episodic and regulated, it can be a useful instigator of ethical action. There is plenty to be outraged about in the world, and our anger can give us the energy we need to confront injustice. Strong emotions can help us recognize an immoral situation and can motivate us to intervene, take a stand, even risk our lives to benefit others.

However, when moral outrage is self-serving, chronic, or unregulated—when it becomes the very lens through which we view the world—it can be addictive and divisive. Shaming blaming, and self-righteousness also put us in a superior power position, which can feel satisfying in the short term but which isolates us from others in the long term. And constant overarousal can have serious effects on the body, mind, and spirit—from ulcers to depression and everything in between. It can also have serious effects on how others perceive us. In the final analysis, I have learned that moral outrage can have beneficial or harmful consequences not only for ourselves but for our relationships and even our society. Our discernment, insight into our

intentions, and our ability to regulate our emotions are what make the difference as to whether or not moral outrage serves us or others.

Moral Apathy and the Death of the Heart

We live in a world with extremes of direct violence and systemic oppression, giving us plenty of opportunities for moral suffering. How do we respond to corporate and political corruption, the abuse of women and children, the refugee crisis, racism, economic injustice, environmental exploitation, homelessness? The list goes on. Part of working with moral violations is to recognize and transform the psychosocial values and behaviors that make avoidance of suffering a norm.

I feel it is essential to not let ourselves be trapped by the need to be perceived as a "decent" person per se. More often than not, we must risk rejection or worse to stay aligned with our deepest values. Author Sarah Schulman notes that instead of confronting the moral transgressions of our society, too many of us have opted for "mental gentrification" by letting our common sense and decency be colonized by privilege. We don't want to be uncomfortable or make others uncomfortable, we are conflict averse, so we avoid the reality of suffering-and systems of violence grow stronger. Many in our world today have opted for mental gentrification instead of dealing with moral transgressions. "The revelation of truth is tremendously dangerous to supremacy," Schulman writes. "We have a society in which the happiness of the privileged is based on never starting the process towards becoming accountable."

This fourth form of moral suffering is moral apathy, when our denial, lack of caring, or willful ignorance make it possible for us to ignore or wall ourselves off from the suffering of others. "I'm terrified at the moral apathy," wrote James Baldwin in *Remember This House*, "the death of the heart, which is happening in my country. These people have deluded themselves for so long that they really don't think I'm human."

I grew up in a place nicknamed "White Town," a "restricted" community in southern Florida where neither Jews nor African Americans were allowed to live. Our family and our community lived in a bubble. The counterpart of "White Town" was "Colored Town," literally on the other side of the railroad tracks.

Every workday, my father would get into his Ford Thunderbird or Lincoln Continental and cross the tracks to drive to Colored Town's not-so-Grand Avenue to pick up Lila Robinson. My family had hired Lila in 1946, when I was felled by a serious illness at the age of four. Her roots were Bahamian, and her deep roots were African. She worked for us as a housekeeper and cook, and over the years she became a force of loving influence and strength in our family.

When Lila first came to us, I had no idea that in Coral Gables (White Town's real name) we lived in a community of exclusion. Like fish who are not aware that they are swimming in water, our family swam in waters of racism, classism, privilege, and the belief that our religion was "the" religion. We were ignorant of—or we chose not to look at—the reality of the racism that permeated our lives. We suffered from the worst kind of apathy—the apathy that is born out of objectifying the other and denial born out of living in a bubble of privilege.

When my health began to improve, I would ride with my father into West Coconut Grove (Colored Town's real name) to pick up Lila. I still remember the smell of fried food, the understocked mom-and-pop stores, the tired automobiles, the good music, the warmth of the community. West Coconut Grove was another world from my all-white grammar school and our country club, with its golfing, bridge, and bullbat hour. I could not help but see the stark differences between these worlds, and yet I was not entirely convinced I was living in the "better" one.

I didn't know what Lila was paid, but when I saw where she lived with her three daughters, I knew it must have been a pittance. Her apartment was inside a "concrete monster," the moniker for the wretched semi-high-rises built in West Coconut Grove as some kind of misguided version of urban renewal. These mold-filled, roach-infested concrete boxes baked their residents in the heat, and I was worried for this person who was so kind to me and whom I loved.

When Lila told me that her grandmother had been a slave, I was stunned. Merrick Demonstration School didn't teach us about slavery, but I knew what it was and that it was a really bad thing. Still, we didn't speak about slavery in our household. I heard about golf, Brownie scouts, and business deals.

Lila and I seemed to live in two different universes. Yet our universes intersected. The universe my family occupied exploited Lila's and was substantiated by "othering." Without knowing it, Lila, through her humanity, opened my eyes to the white privilege that had protected our family from the harsh reality of racism. And this made me who I am today, with a deepening awareness of how moral apathy continues to poison our world.

There are other bubbles of apathy. One is the bubble of isolation. Years ago, a student of mine who was in the Special Forces wrote me about choosing isolation to avoid facing his suffering around the moral injury he had sustained as a combatant. In an email communication to me, he wrote that as a veteran of combat he had taken refuge in the bubble of solitude to deal with the trauma of war but his isolation transformed into apathy.

I have been ordered into situations created by entitled men who deferred their way out of such experiences. I have seen that war creates nothing but victims. To date, the United States has still not officially recognized the actual number of dead civilians in the Iraqi war, nor will it adequately respond to war's debilitating effects on its own soldiers and their families. In a sense, I, too, was one of the invisible, and to cope I retreated to the mountains in order to be alone. In my isolation, meditation, reading, and reflecting on the dharma helped a great deal, but I was without community or purpose. My isolation eventually moved beyond healing and became a crutch: I became apathetic and safe.

This man had the courage to step out of his apathy and enter Upaya's Buddhist Chaplaincy Training Program as a way to explore how to serve others. He had a lot of healing to do. When he spoke about the missions he served in, I could see that he was deeply wounded by war. His story gave me a more nuanced understanding about what it was to be morally injured and to take refuge in apathy. Guilt, shame, and self-loathing were part of his experience of moral injury, as was denial. And, in the end, he rediscovered his courage and compassion. I had to admire his will to heal.

James Baldwin identified the antidote to apathy: "Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing will change if it is not faced." My Special Forces student came into Upaya's Buddhist Chaplaincy Training Program as a way to abandon his protective isolation and face his suffering.

In my own way, I resisted the lure of moral apathy by participating in the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties, as it compelled me to face the horrors of racial injustice. It also showed me the necessity of entering various charnel grounds of suffering in order to better understand them. My experiences volunteering in a hospital psych ward in New Orleans in my early twenties, protesting the war in Vietnam and later other wars, sitting with dying people, teaching meditation in prison, and bearing witness at Los Alamos and Auschwitz all have probably thinned the skin of the privilege that I was born into.

Roshi Bernie Glassman calls such journeys "taking a plunge." By taking plunges, we can transform ourselves—and, ideally, we can also help to transform the institutions and cultures that engage in harm. But to take a plunge and be in a charnel ground—like Syria, a prison, or illness—we need will, determination, staying power, and finally love and wisdom. These environments are where moral character is shaped and where real integrity can be born.

III. INTEGRITY AND THE OTHER EDGE STATES

Moral suffering is an ecosystem that can feed into the toxic side of all the Edge States: pathological altruism, empathic distress, disrespect, and burnout.

In the summer of 2016, Kosho Durel, a Upaya resident, and Joshin Byrnes, who developed a project on homelessness for Upaya, led a Street Retreat with nine practitioners in San Francisco, a city where about 6,700 people live on the streets. As I have described, Street Retreats were developed by Roshi Bernie as a way for practitioners to take a plunge into the reality of homelessness and better understand the systemic forces that keep people subject to oppression. Retreat participants sleep on the street, beg for money and food, eat at soup kitchens, walk and talk with whomever they meet, bear witness to drug deals and thefts and hunger, and touch into the vulnerability they feel in this situation. Most participants experience moral suffering as they gain an intimate view of our society's classism, racism, and moral apathy. They are compelled to practice Not-Knowing and Bearing Witness and are often inspired toward Compassionate Action.

For the 2016 San Francisco Street Retreat, Kosho and Joshin arrived early to scout out the soup kitchens and safe places on the streets where they could sleep. Kosho wrote that walking through the Tenderloin District, he "was shocked by the number of people living on the street, the drug use, the litter and pollution, the crumbling buildings, the crumbling bodies of people."

Kosho and Joshin decided to visit the soup kitchen run by Glide Memorial Church, a historically progressive Methodist church engaged with race, class, and LGBTQ rights. The soup kitchen was not what they expected. Kosho describes its basement cafeteria as a room with concrete floors, metal furniture, and thirty-foot-high walls "painted a sanitizing yet unclean pale blue like a waterless swimming pool." He wrote that between fifty and one hundred people were eating on their meal ticket shift; they ate silently with their heads down and then were pushed along so that the next shift could eat.

He and Joshin "emerged shaken" from their experience, with probably a significant dose of empathic distress and moral outrage. They then made their way to the United Nations Plaza in the Civic Center area. "There, people smoked crack by the fountain, disabled people moved along in wheelchairs or took rest, and disabled people with mental illnesses wandered aimlessly, others just sat on the concrete chatting."

Kosho noticed a pillar in the plaza that is engraved with the UN's Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world, / Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts [and so on]."

The contrast of these words with the reality of the San Francisco streets was a big wake-up call for Kosho. "Young professionals, mostly men, walked by with headphones plugged into ears, plugged into smartphones without the slightest recognition of another person, and I thought, 'This is it, we're doomed. This is chaos. This is so, so sad! The tech firms have headquarters literally right across the railroad tracks from the Tenderloin.... I imagine that these young men are making six and seven figures. To the south, block after block is being redeveloped with new glassy, plastic, metal, and blandly modernist apartment buildings to house the privileged. The people on the street in the Tenderloin have witnessed housing costs skyrocket. To have

shelter in this unwanted neighborhood, people have to pay \$1,500 per month for an efficiency apartment or be fortunate enough to have government assistance." Then Kosho remarked, "Maybe you're feeling a bit of my moral outrage."

He went on to say, "And yet, in the ethical sphere of my spirituality there's a vow not to hold on to resentment or rage. There's a vow to be aware of all the feelings, thoughts, and sensations that come up. There's trust that allowing all experience—the whole plaza—to penetrate me will transform me. This is the work of uncovering and releasing my biases and prejudices."

I think for Kosho, and really for most of us, this is not so easy. His words remind me of the painful issue that finally became visible for me as a teen: that class and race divide us and are the source of deep suffering. Yet the worlds of privilege and poverty inter-are, as those who are privileged directly and indirectly exploit those who are poor; those who have less means often serve those who are privileged. When I saw the truth of this, I felt angry, disgusted, and helpless—but this was also a turning point that woke me up to the necessity of service to those who are subjected to structural and institutional oppression, as well as to transforming the beliefs and the institutions that engender structural violence. It also showed me that we are all accountable to the ugly truth of racism and the harm it begets. Yet I'm not sure we whites can ever escape our privilege, because it's something that society unconsciously gives us whether we want it or not. Rather, we can learn how to leverage it to help others who are less privileged. I also had to be wary of not falling into pathological altruism, which easily could have happened.

I believe that Kosho had a similar experience. "You see, I have this class trigger that gets pulled," he said. "And then I want to keep firing. It's a manifestation of anger reinforced by what I've seen and how I've seen throughout my three decades of life. Maybe it's fear that narrowed my sight. Seeing everything as 'us versus them' can be a way of coping with pain and feeling safe, but it's in the avoiding of feeling the pain of privilege and oppression that grasping (suffering) emerges."

Kosho discovered that transforming moral outrage doesn't mean fixing the situation. "With many people who participate in Street Retreats there is an impulse to help and to fix, to be the savior for the victims." Kosho recognized the temptation to use pathologically altruistic strategies to alleviate the pain

of moral outrage and empathic distress. He wrote: "Participants might try to give money that we have begged for to feed ourselves to someone else who is begging, which reifies the identity of the helper and the helped. So, there's suffering. Less often, I see participants with the revolutionary desire to attack the young professionals, a mythic narrative that under certain conditions possesses me.... [B]oth the fixing and fighting modes of behavior arose when I made my home on the streets. I can make strangers by means of unreflective, reactive helping just as much as I can from waging war-even when I don't act, divisions are drawn in my mind. My mind and my body can be and have been complicit in setting up boundaries and breaking down neighborhoods. I don't believe it has to be this way." Here, respect becomes an important factor: respect for the principles and vows that are essential guiding forces in this situation; respect for others, whether of poverty or privilege; and self-respect, which could easily crumble in this fraught environment.

Kosho explained, "On Street Retreat we are encouraged to suspend action, to drop our formulaic opinions about right and wrong, and to let the need to know fall away. There's a great opportunity that arises from this process. We see things just as they are without the filters of guilt and blame. And so I've felt that underneath the anger is grief for the pain of sickness, old age, and death, and underneath that is sadness, and encompassing all of these emotions is a deep sense of being connected, of being one body. Then Compassionate Action arises out of the pure motivation to befriend all of my neighbors, whether they experience affluence or poverty, giving and receiving what is needed. This is a deep relationship, action to heal each other and ourselves."

From our reaction of moral suffering, we can so easily harm ourselves and those whom we wish to serve. Kosho learned that moral injury and outrage, which are often sourced in empathic distress, can lead to pathological altruism. Moral injury and outrage can lead to behaviors that are unintentionally disrespectful and destructive. They can also lead to burnout, when we feel we can't help yet one more suffering being. Kosho's wise approach to being with homeless people gives us some sense of how we can nourish healthy Edge States while courageously sitting in the fires of inner and outer charnel grounds.

IV. PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT INTEGRITY

We face moral dilemmas every day—some truly confounding, some minor. How do we stand grounded on the tenuous edge of integrity without falling off? And when we do slide into the swamp of moral suffering, how do we make our way back to compassion's shore? When your heart breaks and your conscience leaks through the cracks, you'd better look deeply not only into your own heart but also into the hearts of those who suffer, and into the hearts of those who harm. This is how we can acknowledge the truth of suffering and commit to standing on the high edge of integrity, where we can see both difficulty and dignity.

Expanding the Circle of Inquiry

Our meditation practice can help us learn to be alert to transgressions of conscience and to calibrate our moral compass. When we are confronted with a moral issue that threatens our integrity, it's good to ground ourselves by noticing what the body is telling us. We can begin by taking an in-breath and, on the out-breath, allowing our attention to settle into the body. If we feel tightness in our shoulders, chest, or gut, we should pay attention to that information. Often the body knows before the conceptual mind does that we are in the grip of danger.

Next, we shift our attention to the heart, touch into our intention, and be aware of any emotions that are arising in this moment. Our emotions can influence how we perceive moral dilemmas, so we try to notice what we are feeling without being swamped by our emotions. As the poet Rainer Maria Rilke said in his poem "Go to the Limits of Your Longing": No feeling is final.

From tuning into our feelings, we turn our attention to whatever thoughts are arising. Being aware of our thoughts in this moment might help us become more consciously aware of how we are conceptualizing our experience. Our views, biases, and opinions often motivate us to act, and action arising from opinions might not serve. (Roshi Bernie always says: It's just my opinion!) So bring awareness to our thoughts—but maybe don't jump to conclusions or move too fast. We can use the process of inquiry to recognize our tendency to react or withdraw, and to regulate our feelings before they spur us to unwise action.

Once we have a sense of our own situation, we can explore expanding our awareness to include the experience of others. What might their perspectives be? Attuning to their bodies and hearts, seeing the situation through their eyes, we can ask: What's at stake for them?

We can then expand our circle of inquiry into the wider context in which a moral conflict is occurring. We must look deeply into the systems that are feeding the conflict. What might the system need of us and others so that a constructive outcome might be possible? And how can we the system need of us and others so that a constructive outcome might be possible? And how can we also sit with "not knowing" and learn from uncertainty?

Wisdom tells us that there is no perfect solution and often no easy way through. We probably will have to live with at least a little moral remainder. But we can commit to learn from our experience and develop a more contoured relationship with our own integrity.

Vows to Live By

I took my first Buddhist precepts more than forty years ago, not knowing how much I needed them. As a young person, I was curious about everything. I was also experimental, pretty fearless, and socially engaged—and I didn't mind taking risks and testing boundaries. Somehow, I knew I needed a set of practices that would support opening my heart, opening my life to others, and expanding my potential to serve. I also needed guidelines on how not to harm. I needed a way to wake up, to love, and to care more bravely for others. In retrospect, I'm sure that following the precepts decreased the harm I might have caused others. They also served as a path for testing and growing my integrity toward another kind of freedom.

We can see vows as promises, guidelines, practices, and values. In Buddhism, they are the pivot that turns us toward stability and wisdom. They also reflect our commitment to live a life of integrity: to treat others and ourselves with consideration, to care for others, to cultivate a steady and inclusive mind and heart, to meet the world with giving hands. They reflect what we care about, what our priorities are, what choices we make, and what we need to let go of.

When I am not clear about what road to take, I might ask myself: What would Buddha do? This is not about asking the impossible of myself. Rather, it is a reminder that the seeds of freedom are already in me. My vows water those

seeds, and this seemingly innocent question has helped me avoid quite a bit of harm.

To make it easy to remember the Five Precepts of Buddhism, I crafted this version, which is greatly simplified from the original Five Precepts of Buddhism but still covers a lot of ground. Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine, I vow:

1. To not harm and to revere all of life
2. To not steal and to practice generosity
3. To avoid sexual misconduct and to practice respect, love, and commitment
4. To avoid harmful speech and to speak truthfully and constructively
5. To avoid intoxicants and to cultivate a sober and clear mind

Those five vows provide enough material to fuel a lifetime of practice. They can serve as a moral compass that shows us the way and tells us when we are going astray. When we follow them, we can usually stand strong at the edge and avoid falling into moral suffering. This isn't a fail-safe formula, of course. We are human and cannot keep the precepts perfectly nor always live by our values. But I have learned over many years that we need to maintain the intention to practice them. We must do the best we can, no matter what. When we fall short, we can be strengthened by humility, which helps us be more compassionate toward those who harm others.

No matter what, it's not a bad thing to nourish our humility so that we don't get caught in the trap of judgment and moral outrage toward those whose behavior appears to be less ethical than ours. Living by vow is an invitation for us to take responsibility for our own suffering and our own awakening, and it often entails difficult choices. Sometimes we have to do the thing that is hardest for us to do.

Practicing Gratefulness

There is one more vow that I feel is essential to integrity: the vow to practice gratefulness. We know that integrity is about wholeness of spirit and great kindness to the world. The Buddha also was clear that gratitude is an expression of integrity: "Now what is the level of a person of no integrity? A person of no integrity is ungrateful and unthankful. This ingratitude, this lack

of thankfulness, is advocated by rude people. It is entirely on the level of people of no integrity. A person of integrity is grateful and thankful. This gratitude, this thankfulness, is advocated by civil people. It is entirely on the level of people of integrity."

I have come to realize that our capacity to feel grateful does not necessarily depend on our life circumstances. In my work with materially impoverished communities and with dying people, I have seen that gratitude is a state of mind and heart that is fundamentally generous and open and that is not weighed down (at least in the moment) with wishing things were different.

During our Nomads Clinics in Nepal, our Nepali friends and patients express their gratitude so freely, embodying the civility and integrity the Buddha spoke of. Receiving this gratitude is an experience that is rooted in mutual trust and tastes of joy.

I'm also grateful for the gifts I have received from my dying patients. A wedding ring. A Pablo Neruda poem. A red knitted cap. A small statue of the Buddha. A folded napkin in the shape of a crane. A pack of gum. The gentle squeeze of the hand. A soft smile of thanks. I have felt the blessing of each one of these treasures, as they reflected the integrity, humor, generosity, and trust of the giver. They inspire my gratitude as well.

Sometimes, though, our ability to give or receive gratitude is blocked by "the mind of poverty," a state of mind and heart that has nothing to do with material poverty. When we are caught in the mind of poverty, we focus on what we are lacking; we feel we don't deserve love, or feel alienated from love, and we ignore all that we have been given. The conscious practice of gratitude is the way out of the poverty mentality that erodes the heart and with it, our integrity.

In order to counter any discouragement I might feel at the end of a day, I take time to recall with gratitude all that has been given to me. Sometimes I recall the sunset I just witnessed, or an email from a student whom I have not seen in years, or the light in a student's eyes that tells me they are doing well, or even a difficult moment that taught me a good lesson. Gathering up these moments at the end of the day is a practice of gratitude that gives me a sense of the value of life and of relationship. It is a kind of counting of blessings. But I can't hoard those blessings. In my heart or directly, I share them with someone who could use the goodness or learning from my day.

I also try to write at least one person every day to thank them for the good work they are doing, the blessings they have contributed to my life, or the love they have given to others. As the abbot of Upaya Zen Center, some days I have the joy of writing several emails or cards of thanks for the support of our center. I believe that, like compassion, the practice of gratitude benefits both giver and receiver and enriches the experience of connection.

Meditation also nourishes gratitude, as it can make us more aware and appreciative of the present moment. Meditation enhances our ability to view moral dilemmas with greater clarity and gives us a level of emotional equanimity that supports gratefulness. It also offers us the opportunity to recall our values and intentions and to remember our vow to benefit others. And it makes us aware of impermanence, which helps us let go of complaining; if the present moment is not a pleasant one, we remember that it will shift, and we can ask: What can I learn here?

Our vows and commitments, including the practice of gratefulness, are about living a life of conscience, courage, and non-harming. They are a way for us to open our lives to the deeper truth that we are not separate from each other—that we share a common body, a common life, and a common aspiration for well-being for all. As we come to know this, live this, practice this, an alchemy of gratitude ignites our hearts into the warmth and honor of integrity.

V. DISCOVERY AT THE EDGE OF INTEGRITY

In these complicated times, we have plenty of opportunities to transform moral suffering into *moral resilience*, what ethicist Cynda Rushton defines as "the capacity of an individual to sustain or restore their integrity in response to moral complexity, confusion, distress, or setbacks." When we have moral resilience, we are able to stand strong in our integrity, even in the midst of moral adversity.

There is a Japanese practice called *kintsukuroi*, meaning "golden repair." Kintsukuroi is the art of repairing broken pottery with powdered gold or platinum mixed with lacquer, so that the repair reflects the history of breakage. The "repaired" object mirrors the fragility and imperfection of life—and also its beauty and strength. The object returns to wholeness, to integrity. I am not suggesting that we should seek brokenness as a way of

strengthening integrity, although some cultures do pursue crisis in their rites of passage as a way to develop character and open the heart. Rather, I am proposing that the wounds and harms that arise from falling over the edge into moral suffering can have positive value under the right circumstances. Moral distress, the pain of moral injury and outrage, and even the numbness of moral apathy can be the means for the "golden repair," for developing a greater capacity to stand firm in our integrity without being swayed by the wind.

Over my years of traveling to Japan, I have held several of these exquisitely restored vessels in my hands. I have seen that the "golden repair" is not a hidden repair. It shows clearly a vessel's undisguised damage. It combines ordinary stuff and precious metals to repair the crack but not hide it. This, I believe, is how moral transformation happens and integrity opens-not by rejecting suffering but by incorporating the suffering into a stronger material, the material of goodness, so that the broken parts of our nature, our society, and our world can meet in the gold of wholeness.

© 2018 by Joan Halifax