

*Soul Repair: After Moral Injury* is hosted by Dr. Susan Diamond and Dr. Rita Nakashima Brock. And is produced by [Studio D Podcast Production](#).

## **Episode 4 Show Notes: Moral Courage in the Face of War and Oppression**

Guests for this episode share how moral injury helped focus their understandings of family legacies of war and violence; how it gave them a way to speak of their own combat experience; and how it enabled them to understand their struggle with racist systems as part of recovery. They describe how identifying moral injury enabled them to see it as a call to moral courage for all who care about a just and peaceful world.

### **Hosts:**

Rev. Rita Nakashima Brock, Ph.D., is Senior Vice President for Moral Injury Programs at Volunteers of America (VOA) and a Commissioned Minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Capital Region. She is a former professor and academic administrator and co-author of *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury After War*. An online, one-hour moral distress-relief program at VOA is open to the public at [www.voa.org/rest](http://www.voa.org/rest).

Rev. Susan Ward Diamond, D.Min., is Lead Pastor of Florence Christian Church, Florence, KY, and was ordained as a pastor in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in 1990. She has served on a number of boards and leadership roles in the denomination, including moderator of the church. She is author of *The Daily Grind: GOD with Your Coffee*. Her daily blog, "Thoughts for the Day," can be found at [pastorsusantftd.wordpress.com](http://pastorsusantftd.wordpress.com).

### **Guests:**

Dr. Eyal Press is a journalist, sociologist, and author of *Dirty Work: Essential Jobs and the Hidden Toll of Inequality in America*

Dr. Yuri Yamamoto, is a healthcare chaplain, musician, and Christian minister and a former geneticist and church music director

Rev. Dr. Michael Yandell is a U.S. Army combat veteran, theologian, and senior minister of First Christian Church, Greensboro, NC

### **Resources:**

Eyal Press, *Dirty Work: Essential Jobs and the Hidden Toll of Inequality in America*, Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2021.

*Beautiful Souls: Saying No, Breaking Ranks, and Heeding the Voice of Conscience in Dark Times*, Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2012.

*Absolute Convictions: My Father, a City, and the Conflict That Divided America*, MacMillan 2006

Yuri Yamamoto, Chandra Snell & Tim Hanami, eds. *Unitarian Universalists of Color: Stories of Struggle, Courage, Love and Faith*, Lulu Publishing Services, 2017

Michael Yandell, *War and Negative Revelation: A Theoethical Reflection on Moral Injury*, Rowan and Littlefield, 2022.

For online Moral Distress Relief: [www.voa.org/rest](http://www.voa.org/rest).

## **SOUL REPAIR\_E4\_Transcript**

**Susan Diamond** [00:00:02] This is Soul Repair: After Moral Injury where we bring to light a misunderstood trauma.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [00:00:09] In each episode, we will walk together through the labyrinth that is moral injury, which is our human reaction to harm.

**Susan Diamond** [00:00:20] This wound to the soul is often experienced through feelings of grief, remorse, shame, outrage and despair.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [00:00:29] Whether you've experienced moral injury, hope to help someone who has it, or want to learn more and advocate for others, this is the place for all of us.

**Susan Diamond** [00:00:40] Join us as we seek pathways to bring light, healing and peace into the labyrinth journey of Soul Repair After Moral Injury. Good to be with you again, Rita, as we are on episode four of Soul Repair: After Moral Injury. I think today's episode is going to be very important as we are thinking about how we experience moral injury through systems.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [00:01:14] Absolutely. Susan, it's great to be back with you, too. This is a profound conversation I think we're going to have with three people whose personal lives have been affected by moral injury, intergenerationally. There is a legacy in their own existence that comes through to them as inheritors of certain forms of moral injury that they also had to process in their own lives, not only from their parents and earlier generations, but also their own struggles with anti-Semitism and racism and sexism and war, so there's a lot here. They're amazing people. They are careful to be inclusive of the systemic issues. So, they also offer us as a society things that I think we need to think about. So, I think it's valuable in a lot of ways this conversation, that their life experiences are going to bring to us. I look forward so much to hearing this.

**Susan Diamond** [00:02:22] We're in our fourth episode of Soul Repair: After Moral Injury. Rita, tell us what's on the agenda for today.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [00:02:29] Well, we have three wonderful guests, each one with their own history in relation to the concept of moral injury. And so, I'm going to be introducing them one at a time, and each one will tell us a little bit about how they learned about moral injury, and then we'll move into a conversation about it.

**Susan Diamond** [00:02:46] Fabulous.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [00:02:47] So the first person who will speak is Eyal Press. He's a writer and journalist who contributes to the New Yorker and the New York Times and other publications. He was born in Jerusalem but grew up in Buffalo, New York, and has a doctorate in sociology and is a recipient of the James Aronson Award for Social Justice Journalism. One of the most interesting things about him is the three books that he has written that explore the intersections of morality and courage are all suddenly again-- even though some of them were written a while ago-- in the forefront of a whole lot that's happening in the country right now. And they're all about moral issues. His first book was *Absolute Convictions: My Father, A City, and The Conflict That Divided America* in 2006. This is the story of his own father, whose life was threatened after an abortion service provider was killed in his city, and how his family dealt with death threats and the conflict in the United States around abortion. And now, of course, the government is actually talking about prosecuting doctors. I think that even though it's a book from 16 years ago, it now has a valence and importance that probably wasn't as even as important in those years as it is now. And a second book, *Beautiful Souls: The Courage and Conscience of Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times* looked at ordinary people who in difficult times did the right thing and risked their own lives in the process. Last night on PBS, Ken Burns's new documentary, *The U.S. and the Holocaust*, is about some of those people who tried in the U.S. to help Jews emigrate to the United States. He's done all of those works. And then his most recent book, which was published last year, is called *Dirty Work: Essential Jobs and the Hidden Toll of Inequality in America*. And it examines the morally troubling jobs, we might call them, that society tacitly condones and the hidden class of workers who are expected to do them. And so, as you can see, he writes on serious moral issues. Eyal, why don't you tell us a little about how you ran into the idea of moral injury?

**Eyal Press**[00:05:09] I was trying to remember the exact moment before we had this conversation, and I couldn't. And I think that the reason I couldn't is that in some ways, that idea has always seemed both obvious to me and elusive. I am the son of a Holocaust survivor. My mother was born in a camp. Half my family that was profoundly affected in some cases perished in the Holocaust. The other side of my family left and my grandfather on my father's side became a Zionist. And my father was born in Israel, as was I. I think that both of those historical backdrops have interested me in moral questions about both victims and perpetrators. Victims and the obvious, in the first case, Holocaust perpetrators in the case of the state of Israel, created amidst war and then carrying on an occupation that has led generations of Israelis to serve in the occupied territories restricting the rights of Palestinians. I got interested as a journalist in a group called Breaking the Silence, which is a group of Israeli soldiers who started basically just coming forward with testimonials, first person testimonials about what they'd seen when they were patrolling a village, what they saw when they stopped someone at a checkpoint who maybe had to go to a hospital or had a child who needed something. And those testimonials they're not explicitly about moral injury. I don't think the term ever came up, but they really are circling around the idea. Because quite central to breaking the silence, this whole mission is that there are two sets of injuries and victims here. There are those who are having their rights denied and curtailed. There are also those who are exercising power often in ways that go against their core values. That really stayed with me. Powerful idea. And then I'm not sure if it was through your conference on Moral Injury which I attended, where I met Michael, but that was a very seminal

event in my life because there was a whole conference devoted to this concept of moral injury, or if it was a reading or two. I know that I read Tyler Boudreau's essay, "The morally Injured" that affected me a lot. But what I'd always felt was that this conversation around PTSD was missing something huge. And I'm a big fan of Robert Jay Liston, the great historian and psychologist who's written about war and what war does, not just to the victims, but also to the perpetrators. And it seemed to me that when he and others were pushing for PTSD to be recognized as something other than just this trauma that soldiers went through was not just a sign of cowardice, that the moral questions were really central to what they were doing but that they kind of got erased or at least pushed to the background of it all.

[00:08:39] And then just again, reading books like Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, these are all works where these moral issues--what is it soldiers carry that is hardest for them after the fact? And over time it's these moral questions. It's what did I do and how will I live with myself and how will I look in the mirror? And those are the questions that interest me the most, whether it comes to soldiers or whether it comes to civilians. Because I think that one of the lessons of my book, *Dirty Work*, one of the things I've tried to do is to take this concept of moral injury outside of military context and to really see how moral injury occurs in so many different contexts. And there is, of course, growing discussion of this, whether it's medical workers and in my case people who work in the prison system who I think are in a war-like environment, for much of the time that they go to work and then they come home and they have to adjust to a non-war environment. And those transgressions, seeing things, participating in things, witnessing things that go against your core values, those things have been, I think, far more often and in far more context than just war. And so, this concept is one that has really shaped a lot of the writing I've done. I think the reason it's so powerful is that it forces us to ask fundamental questions that as a society maybe we're not that comfortable talking about. It's also a way I think the veterans have taken the lead in really saying-- and that really affected me whether it's Michael or Tyler Boudreau or others. It's veterans who took the lead to say this isn't just about brain injuries. This isn't just about what the 'enemy' did to me, this is about what I did and what I saw and what I was asked to do and ordered to do. And not only does it beyond the so-called enemy, the people on the other side, it implicates all of us because we are, after all, the people who have sent soldiers out to war. We have created the prison system with taxpayer dollars. We have another instance in my book I write about a roustabout on an oil rig who basically describes moral injury. He was actually on the Deepwater Horizon rig and nearly died on that rig and felt very lied to and felt very used by this industry that was so wealthy but didn't take basic safety precautions. I think once you familiarize yourself with the term and acclimate to it, you can see it replicating in so many different areas. So that's what draws me to it.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [00:11:44] Our next speaker is Yuri Yamamoto. Yuri grew up in Japan. She was born there and raised in what she calls an anti-religious family and studied classical piano from the age of three. So, she's an artist and pianist. She identifies her earliest spiritual roots in nature and Buddhism in the country of Japan. And after she married, she moved to the U.S. and pursued a doctorate in genetics, worked as a scientist for a while. But then in 2003 became a professional musician and served for 15 years as a pianist and music director for a Unitarian Universalist congregation, which is where she began to explore her own spiritual, cultural and racial roots. And so, in exploring her Asian-American experiences and struggles, she initiated and contributed to a book called *Unitarian Universalists of Color: Stories of Struggle*,

*Courage, Love and Faith*. She went on to pursue a master of divinity. She's an art therapist, and now she works as a resident chaplain at the Durham Veterans Affairs Medical Center and lives in Raleigh, North Carolina. She is commissioned and endorsed as a Christian minister by the Federation of Christian Ministries, and she also works for two years in America's moral injury programs as a facilitator and trainer of facilitators. So, Uri, how did you first learn about moral injury?

**Yuri Yamamoto**[00:13:13] Thank you. Actually, I should go ahead and update my bio since my residency has finished at the end of August, so currently I'm doing some contract chaplain work, but I don't have a full-time job right now.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [00:13:34] Thanks for the update.

**Yuri Yamamoto** [00:13:35] Yeah. And also, I'm not an art therapist. I have an expressive arts therapy training, but I'm not a therapist.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [00:13:48] Okay.

**Yuri Yamamoto**[00:13:50] But it's kind of complicated to explain all of that. I use expressive arts and all kinds of things. Let's see where to start. So, the actual term I learned from my ethics professor at Shaw University Divinity School, he ran one of my papers and he suggested that I join that Facebook group on moral injury. So that's where I saw the invitation to MIRAC [Moral Injury in the Aftermath of COVID course]. And because I was already a chaplain in a hospital setting, I thought that would be a good thing for me to participate. But like the previous speaker, I lived this because of my parents-- and I just didn't know the name or the term for it. I've been really digging around what their lives may have been in relationship to imperial colonialism in Japan. They were both born in the twenties and they were young adults when Japan was defeated. My father's family was a Shinto priest family-- his father wasn't a priest, but his uncle was a Shinto priest and he was one of the top priests in the National Shinto shrine in Korea. And my father had actually visited him in Korea, but really never told me what he had seen or how he felt about all this. And after the war, I think the defeat of Japan and the dismantling of Imperial Japan had been very, very traumatic for him. And he basically distanced himself from his family and became an atheist, communist, and all religions were of oppression. Basically, that's how he felt. And he also had trouble finding jobs. I think he was deeply depressed after the war. And probably during the war, too, he lost his mother in 1942 in the midst of the war, and he was drafted toward the end of the war. And apparently he practiced every day to die in a suicide mission. So, he didn't die. And then being told that all the reasons that they had to do those things were wrong, kind of overnight, so that is a huge moral injury. And my mother actually was working in China on the VJ day and she never told me anything about this experience. But after her death, I found a note in her accounting book on the VJ day, I think in the eighties, she said, "I still remember the blue, blue sky, and it was a hot day. And I can still see in my mind's eyes how the Chinese flags are raised and the beautifully dressed Koreans are marching for victory.".

[00:17:38] Both of them became atheists and activists against war, for women's rights. And they ran away from Japanese traditions. And a lot of Japanese people did that. Then they embraced

the more white, I guess, philosophical traditions. And so that really set me up for white supremacy, internalizing white supremacy. And I came to this country thinking, well, in Japan there were no jobs for women. I went to one of the best colleges in Japan, but all the jobs were only for men. And I heard that America was the country of women's lib, all of the free this, free that. And that's the way it was all rejected in Japan. After I came here and my professors very encouraging, I tried to become a real American, which I later realized, decades later, that was a white man. Highly educated and talked in a certain way, moved certain ways. But no matter what I tried to do, I wasn't seen as one. But until I actually saw a Taiwanese American Unitarian Universalist born and raised here, the highest degrees that she could attain, and when she was talking about the racism she experienced and how UU church and the General Assembly, I suddenly realized it wasn't my fault that I was treated the way I was. And suddenly I realized not only I was the victim, but I also perpetuated it. Also, toward the end of my church career, I was emotionally abused by a white male minister. And I was one of 10 people he abused in his career, so that was a huge moral injury as well. And going into VA [Veterans Affairs], moral injury is everywhere in the place. Plus, sometimes UU colleagues would discuss, okay, so we are making people feel better in our work, and then what? Are we sending them to do more harm or the work is needed? Perhaps we also have to work towards not perpetuating this kind of cycle of violence. So, in many ways, this term, moral injury, gave me the words that I could put in my own experiences.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [00:20:39] Thank you. Our third speaker is Michael Yandel from Union City, Tennessee, where he grew up in the Christian Church Disciples of Christ in his hometown. After he finished high school-- and he finished high school around the time of the 9/11 attacks-- he enlisted in the Army, as many in his generation did. And he was trained as an explosive ordnance disposal technician, what's called an EOD. And that led to him taking a tour in Iraq. And while he served there, he and his sergeant became the only two members of the U.S. military to survive exposure to sarin gas. His story was told many years later in The New York Times. And it was complicated because this wasn't the enemy's sarin gas. It was material that the U.S. had participated in giving to Saddam Hussein, who had then buried it in the ground, and our troops later found them there. So, it's a very complicated story. But he served four years in the U.S. Army before he got home and then went to college in West Tennessee. He earned his Bachelor of Music in Music education at the University of Tennessee at Martin. He has a master's of divinity degree from Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas, which is where I met him when I was there directing the Soul Repair Center. And he has a Ph.D. in religious studies with a concentration in theology, religion, conflict and peacebuilding from Emory University. He's the author of the 2022 book War and Negative Revelation: A Theo-ethical Reflection on Moral Injury, which is a combination of reflection on his own experience as a war veteran and a theological interrogation of false or distorted claims of goodness and justice, which disintegrate and become meaningless and become a kind of moral injury awareness. In October 2020, Michael became the senior minister of Greensboro First Christian Church in Greensboro, North Carolina. So, Michael, tell us how you encountered the term of moral injury.

**Michael** [00:22:58] Thanks, Rita. Well, I first encountered the term moral injury in your office at Brite Divinity School. So, I appreciate you letting me know what that was. I began my divinity school education in 2012, which coincidentally was the same year that Dr. Brock began her soul repair center there at Brite Divinity school. And also, the same year that the book she authored

with Gabriela Lettini on soul repair came out. So, it's kind of a perfect confluence for me to learn about that term. And I just have to echo what Eyal and Yuri both said in different ways about, really, the term named something that I didn't have a name for beforehand. So, while my experience didn't change when I encountered the term, the term changed the way I looked at my experience. It was very profound for me. And I just remember that time when I was sitting in Rita's office, when she asked me-- and I didn't know who she was, I didn't know she was this big time scholar, written these important books. I was like two weeks in the seminary education, but she had learned that I was a veteran somehow. So, the Soul Repair Center was doing a big launch event over the course of a couple of days, and she asked me to speak on the veterans panel, which I had never done before, especially as an EOD tech. Well, I think any military person was kind of discouraged from speaking to the press. As an EOD tech, I felt, like, doubly so. We just don't talk about what we do, especially not to the press. So, to be invited to speak publicly about my experience was just wild. And that was really what the term came to mean for me, is that I was no longer kind of shunted to the side as a psychiatric case, and I was no longer a mouthpiece for the U.S. war project. The term moral injury sort of opened up a space where I could have a voice. I didn't realize I didn't have one until then. I was like, oh, I can talk about this and people are interested in it. And I realized it's in some ways a very privileged thing to say and an interesting claim to make that as a soldier and veteran that I didn't have a voice, but I certainly didn't know quite how to utilize it in public. So, that was my first encounter with the term and what it meant for me.

**Susan Diamond** [00:25:59] I really appreciate all of you sharing. And it just is that reminder of the importance of naming our stories and having language around which we can talk about it. I think some of you've already kind of alluded to our second question, which is how does learning about moral injury impact your life and work? Because I think for every one of us that's become part of it. So, I'm just going to throw this out to anybody who wants to add anything that's already been said or lift out something again that you think is important for our listeners to know.

**Michael Yandell** [00:26:37] Learning about moral injury influenced eight years of my education and research and writing, and what it really did for my life and my work was it allowed me to grow outside of myself where I'd been kind of locked in this place as a bitter cynic and just sort of in a conversation in my own head. And then in seminary moral injury became a theological question for me, which at least got me a little further outside of my own conversation with myself. And then it really became a way for me to speak politically and critically of the U.S. government, which I don't think I would have arrived at in the same way if I didn't have that term and the people writing about it and talking about it. So that still impacts my life and work in that sense.

**Eyal Press** [00:27:37] I would say for me, as I was saying, I started out interested in this concept in the context of war, when war and the atrocities that are, I think, inherent in war when they happen that there are two sets of injured people. There are the victims of the atrocities, and then there are the folks who carried out or averted their eyes from the atrocities, including, of course, the entire public that distances itself. But as my interest in the term evolved, I became more and more interested in thinking about that as a social reality outside of war, as I was saying. And *Dirty Work* is really about that. A lot of the book and the journalism that I've continued doing,

including some things that haven't been published yet, continue to explore these ideas. But in a sense, I think that it's a very interesting prism and concept to apply to a society that is cleaved by so many inequities. I live in a city that is so profoundly segregated. It's so unequal along racial lines, along class lines. There are people who wield power and people who are on the receiving end of their orders in just about every aspect of daily life. And I don't think we have a good language for discussing the kinds of hidden injuries that happen when these exchanges occur, but I do think that those injuries happen. My hope is that this concept builds out a little bit so that it isn't just a conversation about individuals who have experienced moral injury, because I think that's a trap much the way that PTSD can be that way. You know, oh, there's an individual with PTSD, poor guy, or poor woman, poor individual, as opposed to what about the society and what about the social aspects? One of the points I try to make in *Dirty Work* is that moral injury is concentrated by race, by class, by all the inequities around us. A dramatic example of that is in this section of the book that's about undocumented people who work in the meat and poultry industry. And when reporters write about the lives of those workers, they tend to focus on wages and hours and physical injuries. This person experienced pain in their wrist and this person was fired and this person got exposed to COVID etc.

[00:30:40] But I spent time in Texas actually talking to these undocumented workers and most of them Mexican women who had worked in this plant run by Sanderson Farms, the third largest poultry company in the United States. And the thing they talked about was not that, it was just the violation of their dignity that was a daily experience. The fact that they used the metaphor of basically being treated like machines or treated like the animals themselves. There's a whole system there that is creating those injuries. And there are people who sit in nice offices watching the production quotas being met and averting their eyes from those workers. But if you look in their eyes, if you ask them what they go through, these were women who were denied bathroom breaks because the company wanted to produce more and to keep them on the lines. And so, if you took a break, that slowed things down. So, they started going to work with an extra pair of pants or sanitary napkins. And what does it mean that our food system is constructed along such lines? There's massive moral injury involved in all of that, I think. So, it's a really important concept to think about in relation to race and class and imperialism, as Yuri was saying. Just these larger questions should be informed by this term rather than it just being kind of bunkered off. Because I think if that happens, the power of the term will eventually dissipate.

**Yuri Yamamoto** [00:32:55] So the few things that I realized after I knew what this was, one thing was that ignoring it it's not going to go away. And also shame and the silence is not helpful. For my parents, they couldn't talk about their own experience. They became activists, but I don't want to say they were doing it to just to avoid what they had done or that tried to balance. But I think there was a sense that they wanted to run away from the reality that they either actively or at least passively took part in this, something that was labeled wrong. Now, there's also another part to this, because it's not black and white, and here is the bad party and here's the good party, and you are on which side? It's a lot more complicated and nuanced. But I feel the conversation is really hard to have, and so then it becomes either ignoring, avoiding or just keeping it to themselves and don't talk about it. So, if we don't talk about it, nobody sees it and it doesn't exist. But that's not true. And I think that's oftentimes what the people experience. Veterans, a number of them have told me that nobody wanted to listen to their stories. They had been harmed in a church. I've sometimes seen providers make some comments like, well, these people are



alienated all their families and communities, so now they don't have any support. Then I just have to look at them and say that's because of their experience. It's not the individual's fault. It's the system's failure. Well, I guess we support the system because we are part of the system, too. It's very complicated that way. And then those injuries become added injuries because if you are told, well, you need to re-establish a relationship with your family. I don't know if that's what they are telling veterans, but there's a sentiment, well, why did these people alienate everybody now that when they physically need support they can't have support? I guess we mean well, we want them to be supported so maybe that's the way we express this despair. But I can't really support all these people, but somehow they don't have any support. And for me too because they might ask, like, I'm still Christian, which church do you recommend? And we can't really recommend a church. I don't even know if there is a church where they would be welcomed. And this was true with the people who were in prison. I had done prison ministry for several years up to the pandemic. Oftentimes, they ask, "So you're from what church? Do you think your church would welcome me after I get out?" And I'm like, I don't know. I can't really say yes. They may be welcome if they behave in certain ways, if they hide the fact that they had been incarcerated and so on. But for me to be able to understand it and being able to listen to people's stories and affirm what I hear-- and also sometimes I also say I identify with that story, even though I may not have gone through the exact same thing. But I have been there and I'm with you.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [00:37:58] Yuri, it's interesting you say that about veterans cutting off all these relationships, because I've so many times when I've talked to a veteran and they realize they have moral injury and they begin to talk about their experiences. They're often reluctant to talk to the most important people in their lives because they feel like if the people actually knew what they'd done or how they felt about it, that they wouldn't love them anymore, or that what they had done was so awful that they didn't want that awful thing in the heads of the people they cared about. So, they didn't want to talk about it because it was bad enough that they felt terrible. They didn't want to pass that on. And I think that people who accuse veterans of cutting off their relationships with people don't understand how hard it is to maintain a relationship when something that deep in you that's so painful that you're afraid to share because you're afraid that it will break the relationship if you share it. I think that's just true of a lot of moral injury is that people feel contaminating or contaminated in ways that aren't good for other people, especially those they love.

**Yuri Yamamoto** [00:39:20] I can see my parents feeling that way, so they made sure I read all kinds of books, both Japanese as perpetrators as well as victims, but they couldn't talk about what they had done. But at the same time, how many of us can actually hold those stories? Even chaplains who are supposed to be trained to hear anything, we may become anxious and say things are not helpful. Either start trying to fix it or over theologizing it. I think it just is not that easy to hear it. And the people may not have words. So, for example, my father in law was a suicide bomber during World War Two. He didn't tell this to anybody but one of his brothers. At the time of her funeral the brother shared that story, that he actually went on a suicide mission and the target wasn't there so that's how he survived. But that's multiple layers of pain involved. And my father could never go to Okinawa, Hiroshima because he felt because those people died, he didn't have to die. He was supposed to be sent to Okinawa, but then it was defeated so he didn't have to. So, it's a lot of pain. And who wants to hear that?

**Eyal Press** [00:41:20] I want to second what Yuri said about the complexity of this idea because I think it's what makes it so interesting and attractive to me. Frankly, I think I went into journalism like a lot of young people do, seeing things in black and white. And as I've evolved and grown, gotten older, I'm much more interested in the gray areas and the ambiguities and the tensions, the paradoxes and ironies. Moral injury to me, it's all about those things. I think what makes it frightening for institutions as well as individuals going to family members is the idea that you will be judged if you talk about it. But I think that if you actually understand the term and what it's about, I think to take it seriously requires complicating judgment. It requires seeing how many layers of responsibility are involved in what you think is a simple thing like a soldier denying a child passage in a checkpoint. There're so many layers of responsibility beyond that individual soldier. And I think we're very comfortable as a society, not just here, I think in Israel, too, isolating the judgment to that individual person and saying, "Oh, look at this person, how inhumane of them that they did this." But the power of moral injury is that many of these injuries are incurred in the course of following and doing exactly what society has asked you to do, being exactly in the spot that other people with power and resources and votes have said they want you there. And so, I think the complexity of it is so much of its power. To me, it's there in the writings of Primo Levi. As I said, it's there in the writings of Tim O'Brien. Really all of the I think most powerful writing on this subject takes you to these gray areas and beyond easy judgment. If you're going to judge, think about who put those folks in these situations and how much of the responsibility is shared beyond the individual. Maybe that's a path to a more enlightened place.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [00:44:06] Michael, I think you had some reflections on that at one point in relation to what happened to you and your sergeant. The idea that U.S. troops are being injured, not by the military they were fighting, but things buried in the ground that have been sent there by your own government.

**Michael Yandell** [00:44:25] Yeah, I've been sitting here stewing on these excellent contributions from the other folks in this podcast. And now that you mention that, I can't remember my point, you know, I've said a lot of things, so who knows? But I will say as an OED one sees a lot of ordinances, munitions just all over the place, all over the world. And you don't commonly see ammunition built in Africa or ammunition built in Iraq. You see a lot of Soviet ammunition's technology and you see a lot of ammunitions built by the United States and then several in Western Europe. I mean, that's what you see. That's what's scattered around the world. There's weapons and explosives that have just remain as echoes of past wars that keep cycling back. Yes. I mean, in the eighties we were kind of helping Iraq in their conflict. None of this is like some secret or conspiracy, it's just the way these things kind of developed. Same thing with Afghanistan. And what we've left behind doesn't go away for the next war, it's still there and more dangerous. I did want to add a couple things if I've got a moment. Just as I was listening to Yuri and Eyal, one thing I've really been grateful for-- at least the way I experience the term as a moral injury has a home in the humanities rather than STEM. And it's a good thing for me because I happen to thrive better in the humanities. But like Eyal was mentioning Tim O'Brien and this great poetry and fiction and nonfiction, prose, for me has allowed this term to really encompass so much more than what it would have in other contexts. And I do appreciate the efforts of folks in medicine and other fields, but I want it to stay predominantly in the humanities. It's just how I feel about it because the conversation is important. Then Yuri said

something about the church that really struck me because I happened to work in a church now. So, I think more about that these days. But the question of will the church accept me? And the answer is, I'm not quite sure. I don't know. Can't say. And I think of that context of veterans in my church really, and I have to say I don't know because I'm always trying to push this threshold of patriotism. The kind folks even never acknowledge it. There's a certain expectation at some point that a veteran will behave in a way that's loyal or patriotic or something. There's a kind of performance expected, I think, and I'm constantly trying to push that threshold of patriotism. Like, okay, you're with me right now, but if I want to talk about get the flag out of here, how do you feel about that? You know, questions like that. And the last thing I'd say that Yuri talked about caregivers saying that these folks cut off their relationships or alienated themselves. And I just think veterans have peers and other people who've experienced various types of trauma and abuse, assault, and I'll just speak from my own experience. I don't really want my trauma to live in my household with me. It's like once I open up those floodgates to my spouse or to my friend, well, then it's in my space. It's in my home, and then it's just there. I can't take it out of there and I don't want it to live there with me. So, it's always been easier for me to speak to strangers, to speak at an event for a limited period of time. And I'll say it has been frustrating for my spouse to ask, like, how can you share things so intimate or so personal and be so vulnerable when you're speaking to people you don't even know, but not here at home? That's what I try to explain, is that that's intentional. I mean, that's precisely why I don't speak, because it can live out there and then other people can think about it. But I don't want it to live here with me.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [00:49:44] That is an amazing explanation of why it's hard to process moral injury if it isn't something you want to have live in your home space that it's, like, where do you take it that it can live without haunting you continually? And I think the final question here is what are ways that we can move as individuals and as a society to make it easier to process moral injury, to recover from it? If people don't want to relate to their most intimate others through this process, what other strategies are out there and what have you seen in terms of what's helpful?

**Eyal Press** [00:50:31] For me, the ceremony I saw in the Philadelphia, VA, that call where veterans got to talk about moral injury and members of the community were invited to participate in the ceremony, I described it in *Dirty Work* in my book. It's the passage that the book ends on and it's also central. And I think what's most important about that experience of witnessing that was the communal nature of it. Again, just to tap on the individual versus the community, if we're just going to send folks to go talk to a therapist and close the door, talk about how morally injured they feel, I don't think we're going to change much. But I think that the power of it is to talk about how the community is implicated. Just during the course of this conversation. And I've been thinking about how-- because Michael and Yuri both spoke about personal moral injury. But when I think about how I feel morally injured, it's maybe more subtle, but it's real. I mentioned I'm Israeli. Well, there is a shared responsibility any Israeli should feel for what Palestinians go through on a daily basis. It's not just the soldiers who are there. It's the entire infrastructure of support. It's the lobby. It's the, in my line of work, the framework of opinions and which opinions get credited and which don't. And I feel responsible for that. I think that there is an injury when just this year, a US citizen who was a journalist was shot and killed in the occupied territories. And the U.S. government really did not speak honestly about what had happened. And I can't imagine another theater of conflict where that would have happened.

A U.S. citizen as a journalist gets killed by a bullet, it's fired, hits them, they die. And it just sort of gets brushed over. I think that causes a moral injury to anyone who has any sense of feeling responsible for this. And in the same way, I think you can apply that to being a white person in the society or for that matter a male, that you share collectively and responsibility for gross inequities that implicate you, whether you like it or not. I don't like it, but I have benefited from it. So, what does that say? Just in thinking about it this way, we're all morally injured maybe in many ways we don't even recognize. And, again, just harping on that idea that it is a communal thing.

**Susan Diamond** [00:53:33] I was going to say that when I read your book *Dirty Work*, it was really convicting of me in my unknowing complicity with what's happening with immigrants. And just having the opportunity to hear other people's stories reveals that the stuff that's going on within each of us. And so, I really appreciate the opportunity to be exposed to that, even though it's very painful. But I do think that that's one of the things that Rita's always said is sharing stories. Our story's a way of not only our own healing, but the healing of the community ultimately.

**Eyal Press** [00:54:26] And that gets to Michael's point about the humanities, which I totally agree. I think that this is not a medical diagnosis as much as people want to make it one. It's a spiritual condition or a moral one.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [00:54:41] And I think it's an ancient one. It's not like modern society has a patent on moral injury. Jonathan Shay who was the first person to use the term, turned to the *Iliad*, which is a war epic of course, for insight into what veterans might be going through from modern warfare—sort of opened people's eyes to what it is. But it's also inspired more work on even religious texts, biblical texts and Buddhist stories and the *Bhagavad Gita*, which is a warrior asking about the meaning of life. So, it's not certainly new, but the development of the field of mental health in the ways that we see it is new. And the neurological research around that is relatively new. And yet even the people I know that are psychiatrists and mental health specialists are clear. Moral injury is not a disorder. It is an appropriate response of conscience and morality to life conditions that are immoral. If you aren't disturbed by some of the things that going on, there might be something actually wrong with you. There's no other way to think about it. But that doesn't mean that saying it's an appropriate response to things makes it feel any better. And I think that's a struggle we're all engaged in as wanting to come to terms with it so that we can live with it rather than it destroying our lives, which it can easily do. I was reading something recently about how from an Iraq veteran who was observing this, that PTSD in 1980 when it finally got into the diagnostic manual, was a godsend to the Vietnam era generation who were all told they were just crazy and their parents had raised them badly and that they were malingering or that their profound suffering after the Vietnam War was not a thing. It wasn't a real thing. So, for a lot of them, they struggled for years. To have some of their symptoms and say there are ways to help you fix those symptoms sort of lifted this national burden that had been placed on them as losers and people who are just malingerers because they lost this war.

[00:57:15] There was a lot of hostility, in fact, in the culture to Vietnam era veterans. I knew plenty of veterans who wouldn't say they were veterans because of that. So that helped in 1980 when the VA finally said, yes, you can come back. We will try to help you. But what this Iraq

veteran noted is that in medicalizing PTSD and creating a medicalized model of therapy for it and a diagnosis and of protocols, and some of which are quite good at helping people, it did actually help trauma survivors who weren't veterans who also had it. So, it did a lot of good. But what it did was erase the moral issues that pervaded the Vietnam War. And it sort of deracinated or took away the moral questions and turned it into a medical model. And that has been difficult for this generation of veterans because it's an all volunteer military. Even when they're sent to wars they disagree with, it's like they signed up for that. So, the return of the sense of moral culpability and the newer definitions for moral injury, that in other words, it wasn't just the military that sent you and you got terrible things happen to you, but that you volunteered to go, has been a return of these moral questions in relationship to the suffering of veterans that the medical community, the psychological community of the VA began to realize, you know, we're doing better treating PTSD. We have Cadillac treatments. We have things that actually we know work neurologically and yet people aren't getting better. What's wrong? That's when they realized that the moral questions were profound and important and had to be addressed. Because if you don't address the moral injury, the treatments don't work. That history I think is helpful in trying to see why moral injury has become in the last 15 years or so, especially part of the discourse that's challenged the medicalized PTSD model. Which is why the humanities, I think, are also profoundly important. Arts also because you see it in the arts as well.

**Susan Diamond** [00:59:35] I was just thinking about last summer when I was on sabbatical and had an opportunity to go to northern Ohio to be with an organization called Warrior's Journey Home and retired UCC minister who was a Vietnam veteran started it about 15 years ago. I wanted to go witness their healing circles they've been having for 15 years, and it just so happened it was at the end of the week that we had the withdrawal from Afghanistan. And so, the veterans who were there, who were from all the wars, Vietnam forward, representatives of all those wars were there and it was raw, but the people were able to share their pain, their memories. And what was fascinating to me were the two Vietnam veterans who had been in this group for years and years and how they had become the elders. To encourage and to say, you know what? We've had this pain. We know it. We've lived through it. We are continuing to face it. But there is hope. To be able to have those frank and honest conversations was very revealing to me. And Michael, as you were talking about having a safe place to do that, sometimes it is a group of people that you might not have shared a life experience with, but you feel safe to do so. I think that that's one of the things, as I was thinking about what can communities do to provide opportunities for people who are suffering to come together? We're trying to do a pilot project of that in my church and not necessarily with veterans at this point because as you brought up, this is widespread. It's gone beyond just the veteran community. But, of course, they teach us a lot about the injury that we're all feeling. I just wonder if you all also-- because our listeners are going to be primarily the spiritual leaders. And the question is what can we do as people who are caring for those who are suffering? What are some of the things that you all are seeing that you think might be valuable to share?

**Yuri Yamamoto** [01:02:03] My personal opinion is this is not about just the people 'suffering'. Maybe those of us who are suffering are the canary in the coal mine. It is actually really a humanity question. I mean, the sharing is important, but I want other people who don't see this to realize they're part of it. They are participating in it and struggle to wrestle with this. Maybe not the struggle in the sense of becoming so incapacitated, but to know that you're one of us. Don't

pretend like you don't have problems. And then we are the people who are unfortunately being hit by this. So, then I can begin to have conversations as opposed to, oh, I'm so sorry that happened to you. I mean, this never occurred to you.

**Susan Diamond** [01:03:35] Right.

**Yuri Yamamoto** [01:03:38] The system definitely doesn't want us to talk about issues, but it's here. One anecdote. A friend of mine has been actively engaged with the Veterans for Peace in the area. This was years ago, maybe seven or eight years ago, but on Veterans Day he actually built this mobile peace star from recycled materials. First he approached me to do some music at that event, but then he was telling me he wanted to honor all veterans, not just American veterans. I told him, well, my father and my father-in-law were both World War Two veterans in Japan. And then he told me about this World War Two veteran peace activist who lost his comrade in Okinawa-- he was also in Okinawa-- and he couldn't go near anything Japanese for a long time. But because of his peace activism he was invited to Hiroshima and he finally eventually went to Hiroshima. I guess there's an event, a Peace Day or something, on August six and. He talked about his story. So, I said, okay, I'm going to talk about my father and the father-in-law story and sing the Japanese song about losing his comrade in Manchuria. So, I did that. And this World War Two veteran came back on stage and gave me a hug and said when he went to Hiroshima, he really wanted to meet a Japanese World War Two veteran, but there was none around. So, I was able to say, well, both men on my side were already deceased, but if my father was around I'm sure he would really be happy to see you. And we rang the peace bell together, and that was really an amazing moment. I didn't realize I had some feelings about American soldiers because the relationship between Japan and America around World War Two and past World War Two were kind of complicated. So, I had this shame about Koreans and Taiwanese and Chinese, but Americans, I didn't know what to think of it. But because of this encounter, I felt something really melted inside of me. To create more moments like that where we can actually talk across these moral injuries-- because we still share the injury. And it was historically the time, yes, our government decided to make those decisions, but as humans perhaps we can cross that.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [01:07:13] One of the sentences from Michael's book on war, a negative revelation that sort of has haunted me since I read the manuscript, is the sentence that moral injury is knowing goodness in its absence. The agony of knowing goodness in its absence. There's something about bringing people together that restores some modicum of goodness in life, I think. Michael, did I quote you correctly?

**Michael Yandell** [01:07:47] Close enough, as far as I remember. That sounds good to me. I'll take credit for it anyway. Something Yuri just said struck me. That sort of stigma of you signed up for it with the volunteer force. And I think, again, that's one reason I really want this to stay in the humanities is because it's not pathological to raise the concern like, hey, I didn't just sign up for it, politicians couldn't get in line fast enough to support the Iraq war, especially once Colin Powell advocated for it in front of the United Nations. To be able to remind people, because we have a short memory, that this was very popular. This was not an unpopular war. I don't mean to say that there weren't people protesting it, but it's easy to look back and say George Bush was a bumbling idiot or Cheney was the master of puppets or whatever you want to say. But if that's

the case, then some smart people got fooled by a foolish guy. I'm not trying to defend the Bush administration, but people across the board signed up for it. So, that is not pathological to want to emphasize that point over and over again. And that's connected, to me, to the issue about what can people and communities do to support recovery. And it comes back to safe space for me over and over. And that, I guess, is what Yuri reminded me of earlier, and I think about it in the context of my church opening and affirming towards any identity marker. But there's folks that get tired of me saying they're tired of me kind of reiterating the point we not only welcome people, but we affirm who you are regardless of sexual orientation, race, class, gender. And it's a long list on our site and there's some discomfort, like, do I have to name this all the time? We've accepted that. I'll reiterate that not only do we welcome you, but you can be a leader in this church, a clergy in this church. I feel this like, oh, give it a break already. But the idea is people want to know, like, okay, you say you're a sex safe space. Are you really? And how often have we heard-- and I don't mean to make this to steal some other communities experience, but people hear over and over that your story is not welcome here. I don't want to hear about your problems. Your experience only matters to me if it's presented in a certain way, and I can take it in a little tidbit and if it kind of doesn't disrupt my own sort of handle on the world. I think we just have to have a safe space for people to be uncomfortable enough to allow someone else's experience to breathe.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [01:11:18] Which I think takes a lot of emotional courage, so maybe that's something we're thinking about encouraging in our communities is that kind of emotional courage to listen deeply.

**Yuri Yamamoto**[01:11:31] Maybe I'll come over to your church.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [01:11:36] You may have recruited a member, Michael.

[01:11:38] Please do. It's only a one hour and a half commute.

**Yuri Yamamoto** [01:11:43] I just preached in Hillsboro yesterday, so Greensboro is just right there.

**Michael Yandell** [01:11:49] Come on every time you are in town.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [01:11:50] Well, thank you all very much. This was a very rich conversation and we're hoping that people will get a lot out of it in terms of their own awareness of their relationships to moral injury, and ways that we can all support each other as we struggle through all of these profound questions.

**Susan Diamond** [01:12:16] Well, Rita, that was amazing. I am so profoundly struck by each one of these speakers who has life experiences that are troubling and yet have been pathways for them to do deep reflection and move forward in their lives.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [01:12:37] And do amazing work, right? I've been struck and mulling over Eyal's precious term, beautiful souls. I really kind of understood now that beautiful souls are not pure, innocent or good. Beautiful souls are people who have been honest and willing to

face into the horrors and things that they've experienced that make their lives so difficult and yet important, because instead of turning away from those experiences, they have stepped into the agony of embracing them in ways that give them moral courage. And without that struggle to find new meaning and to access that good part of ourselves that's struggling to come out, it's hard to sustain the work for peace and justice and a better society, and it's hard to improve the systems that also inflict so much harm from people and also that intergenerational trauma we're carrying. All of that requires beautiful souls.

**Susan Diamond** [01:13:42] I never thought about a beautiful soul like that. I love that definition. It makes me think about my own life and being honest rather than trying to focus on other things. Really do focus on where it is, where you are, so that you can find that pathway for life and use the things that have happened in your life as a way of making a difference in the world, which all three of these speakers absolutely are doing.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [01:14:12] And, of course, in our next episode, we're going to be focusing specifically on first responders, people who we depend on to protect and save us in emergency situations and who then see devastating things, even have to do devastating things and struggle themselves also. We're going to keep continuing this conversation around a whole other part of society that people sometimes don't even think about in terms of how much moral injury they maybe carry. I'm really looking forward to the next episode, episode five. And so, we want to invite you back. But in the meantime, if you yourself have been feeling as much of this profound work and beautiful soul work that I've been feeling in the last conversation, there is a resource. It's at [www.voa.org/rest](http://www.voa.org/rest)-- Volunteers of America. Voa.org/rest. It's a small group, one hour online process. You just go to that URL and register and you can find the schedule. There's groups for veterans and then there's groups for the general public. And, as I said, next week we're doing first responders and we have a special link for first responders that is simply [rest4firstresponders.com](http://rest4firstresponders.com). Those are places that you can go if you are becoming aware yourself of some things you need to process and you will find it's just people who are acquainted with moral injury and want to support each other.

**Susan Diamond** [01:15:53] Look forward to being with all of you again next episode.

[01:16:02] Soul Repair: After Moral Injury is hosted by me, Dr. Susan Diamond.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [01:16:07] And me, Dr. Rita Nakashima Brock.

**Susan Diamond** [01:16:10] And is produced by Studio D Podcast Production.

**Rita Nakashima Brock** [01:16:14] You can listen to Soul Repair anywhere you get your podcasts, and if you'd like to support the show, please subscribe, leave a review and tell everyone you know about soul repair.

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**Rita Nakashima Brock** [01:16:38] Thanks for listening. We hope you join us next time.

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