The Process of Spiritual Integration

Carrie Doehring, PhD

Stress

Where do you experience stress in your body?
Religious & Spiritual Struggles & Moral Stress

Being a good son or daughter, partner, parent

Religious struggles, Moral stress

Doing a good job

SHAME

GUILT

FEAR

Shame/Guilt/Fear Narrow Our Horizons
Spirituality: Experiencing goodness

- SELF
- OTHERS
- WORLD
- TRANSCENDENT
Self-compassion

The ability to hold one’s feelings of suffering with a sense of warmth, connection and concern

(Neff, 2003)
Self-compassion

1. Self-kindness
2. Common humanity
3. Mindfulness

Spiritual self-care

- Body scan/relaxation
- Welcoming our emotions
- Attention to breath
- Recall connection to goodness
HOW does pastoral/spiritual care help people change?

1. PRESENCE: Respect & trust helps care seekers find spiritual practices that foster embodied experiences of self compassion.

2. LIFE-GIVING MEANINGS (Intentional theologies/orienting systems) integrate compassion/care, counteracting life-limiting embedded oppressive fear & shame-based theologies/orienting systems.

OUTCOMES: Theological & Spiritual Integration

PSYCHOLOGICAL

RELATIONAL

COMMUNAL
Religious & Spiritual Struggles & Moral Stress

CORE VALUES

Racism
Classism
Sexism
Ageism

SHAME
GUILT
FEAR

Spiritual Orienting System

Spiritual Orienting System

Core Values are
- Intrinsically meaningful principles
- Qualities/aspects of life (e.g., responsibility, achievement, and belonging)

Ultimate beliefs are convictions or worldviews about
- life/death
- one’s purpose
- the meaning of suffering
- whether there is a God or a transcendent dimension of life

Practices are ways of Coping and Connecting with a sense of the sacred

Values
Beliefs
Emotions
Ways of Coping/
Self Care Practices

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Emotions: The energy of Spiritual Orienting Systems

Beliefs

Ways of Coping/
Self Care Practices

Values

Emotions

Fear?

Shame?

Compassion?

Happiness?

Moral Stress: Fear/shame/guilt related to causing harm

Beliefs:
God/ church will judge us

Values:
Being responsible

Coping Practices: Fight/
Flight/ Avoidance

FEAR, GUILT & SHAME

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**Automatic/unconscious reactions**

- Fear
- Shame
- Guilt

Emotionally-charged dynamics set off an automatic stress response

Choosing life: identifying life-giving practices & beliefs that foster compassion

Choosing ‘death’: numbing, avoidance, quick relief that becomes compulsive

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**Moral and spiritual struggles**

- “Many people experience religious and spiritual struggles, which affect their mental health and well-being.”
  
  *(Exline, Pargament, et al., 2014, p. 208)*

- Religious struggles are common, especially concerning ultimate meanings and moral struggles.

- Such struggles are privatized and chronic: religious and spiritual struggles do not go away over time and people may be reluctant to seek help or may be unable to find help.
Identifying and evaluating underlying conflicts in values (personal and organizational) that give rise to moral stress

Sources of moral stress

**Within us**
Embedded spiritual orienting systems formed in childhood or overwhelming experiences of loss/trauma

**Systemic**
Unjust family, organizational and cultural systems (intersecting sexism, racism, rigid religious systems, etc.)

**Finitude & limits of life**
Inevitable tensions and losses of having multiple commitments within relational webs
Identifying sources of moral stress

Conflicts in values generate stress

- Physical Stress
- Emotional Stress
- Relational Stress
- Work Stress
- Spiritual Stress

Internal moral stress

Feeling responsible for monitoring a family member’s health; knowing when to intervene and how to get help

Fear about further harm that could result from family member’s deteriorating health

Guilt about not getting the right kind of help soon enough, guilt about tragic irrevocable losses

Shame from not feeling good enough (in both family and professional roles)
My embedded spiritual orienting system

**STRESS** Traumatic stress reactions from caring for family member

**EMOTIONS**
- Shame about the nature of the health crisis
- Guilt about not being good enough in family/work roles
- Fear/guilt about causing further harm by not monitoring health

**Embedded/automatic BELIEFS/VALUES**
- I need to be responsible and self reliant
- Suffering is a consequence of personal wrong-doing/sinfulness

**Automatic ways of COPING**
- Work harder at job/family responsibilities, monitoring crisis
- Provide whatever stability is possible for the family (be the emotional anchor for everyone)
- Defer to health professionals, even when care is inadequate

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Spiritual “Pollution” Blocks & Distorts Goodness/God

Spiritual and religious struggles are exacerbated by spiritual “pollution”, that blocks love within us, in our relationships from God.

Examples:
- Family/ cultural beliefs that
  - We suffer because we are bad, there is something wrong with us.
  - We suffer because God is punishing us for our wrong-doing
  - If we just worked harder and/or took better care of ourselves we/those we love would not suffer
Moral stress: Fear/shame/guilt related to causing harm

VALUES
- Responsibility
- Self reliance
- Privacy

BELIEFS
- God/church will judge

FEAR, GUILT, & SHAME

COPING
- Work to defer authority
- Work harder

Spiritual Practices Counteract Spiritual “Pollution”

God’s love, Goodness

Spiritual practices help us identify, understand, and resist spiritual pollution
Understanding Sources of Spiritual Pollution that Distort Our Experience of Love, Goodness, God

We are bad, there is something wrong with us, we deserve suffering

Suffering, pain, hardship

Cultural/False Religious Beliefs:

- Sexism: It’s our fault if we suffer because we are not good enough as daughters, partners, mothers, friends
- Racism: There is something ‘wrong’ with us because of our skin tone/hair/facial features
- Classism: It’s our fault if we suffer/are not successful because we are not smart enough/do not work hard enough
- Ableism: It’s our fault if we experience bodily limits, pain, & health problems because we are not eating right/exercising.

Spiritual Practices Help Us Protest False Beliefs

We are beloved, beautiful, and good; we do not deserve to suffer

Suffering, pain, hardship come from injustice and the limits of life

- Sexism: We protest that we are good enough as daughters, partners, mothers
- Racism: We protest that we are beautiful as we are
- Classism: We protest that we are smart and work hard enough
- Ableism: We protest that our bodies have limits but culture ought not to limit us because of our limits.
The Transformative Power of Knowing We Are Beloved

Suffering, pain, hardship come from injustice and the limits of life

We are beloved, beautiful, and good; we do not deserve to suffer

Life-Giving Meanings:
When we experience God/this goodness in our bodies, relationships, and life, then we are able to shift out of life-limiting values/beliefs/ways of coping with suffering and put into practice life-giving values/beliefs/ways of coping.

Energized by compassion

Values of interdependence, shared responsibility, increased belonging, creativity, achievement, social justice

Values of interdependence, shared responsibility, increased belonging, creativity, achievement, social justice

Beliefs arising out of compassion, interconnected accountability, and lament: e.g., that hope, compassion & justice supersede fear & shame about tragic suffering; that new life comes out of sharing the collective burden of caring for family members with chronic health issues.

Coping/Spiritual practices fostering self-compassion that connect us with goodness, enhance self-agency and collective social justice, allow room for lament and foster realistic hope.
Four Markers of Spiritual Integration

1. Spiritual practices (communal/personal) help care seekers experience love or goodness or benevolence from God (in theistic traditions) and others, especially in one’s body
2. Experiencing goodness reveals the life-limiting embedded orienting systems shaped by intersecting social oppressions, prompting care seekers to co-create complex intentional meanings about suffering (differentiated meanings)
3. Experiencing goodness and complex meanings make care seekers use more flexible coping that counteracts consumerism
4. Integrating spiritual practices and intentional meanings in our daily life has spiritually integrative liberative ripple effects (Doehring, 2015)

CARITAS

Compassion comes from spiritual practices
Awareness and Acceptance of what is going on in our bodies and emotions
Reflecting on our values and beliefs
Intentionally Identifying what we truly value and believe
Trying out life-giving spiritual practices to foster self-compassion
Accountability for living out our intentional values and beliefs
Spiritual renewal ripples out
Sources of moral stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Within us</th>
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<th>Finitude &amp; limits of life</th>
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Systemic moral stress

Unjust family, organizational and cultural systems (intersecting sexism, racism, rigid religious systems, etc.)

Attitudes towards disabilities?
Religious sexism?

Classism? Shaped by Germanic-American ethnic values of independence, self-reliance, emotional containment, avoidance of relational conflict, hard work=succes; relational failure=not working hard enough
CARITAS

1. **Compassion** comes from spiritual practices
2. **Awareness and Acceptance** of what is going on in our bodies and our emotions
3. **Spiritual Reflexivity**: Reflecting on our values and beliefs (identifying our embedded theologies from childhood/culture)
4. **Intentional** (identifying what we truly value and believe, and spiritual practices that are life-giving)
5. **Trying out** new routines and spiritual practices to foster self-compassion and change
6. **Accountability** for living out our intentional theology
7. **Spiritual renewal** ripples out: care of persons interconnects with care of world; personal justice=social justice

Seeking Care and Justice

1. Seek relational and community support, especially through ongoing meaning-making, rituals, liturgies that hold us and help us lament loss
2. Use CARITAS process to accept and understand the ways we react, lament loss, and to live out intentional
3. Seek spiritual care and counseling when relational and community support isn’t enough
4. When there is injustice, protest and seek justice with others
Spiritually Integration

PRESENCE: Experiences of compassion

Theological reflexivity and co-creation of new meanings and intentional theologies

How Pastoral Care Helps

Flexible
Integrated
Capable of complex meanings
Connected to life-giving webs of relationships

Connect with God/the sacred through compassion-based practices
Identify embedded theologies and intersecting social systems
Co-create spiritually integrated theologies
Concluding Thoughts on the Process of Pastoral Care

1. Building trust
2. Empathically understanding religious and spiritual struggles and moral stress
3. Helping care seekers explore spiritual coping that enhances a sense of safety, goodness, & self-compassion
4. Helping care seekers identify fear- & shame-based values/beliefs/ways of coping, and shift from fear/shame to compassion in ways that increases integration, flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity, and the experience of goodness