
Reviewed by: Rev. Canon Tim Mercer, Retired Hospital Chaplain, Church of England Diocese of Rochester
Email: timmercer75@gmail.com

Dr. Lewis Jeffery Lee is a former US Navy SEAL with 25 years’ experience, who is now a Mental Health Chaplain in the VA San Diego Healthcare System and a licensed therapist in private practice.

The treatment of moral injury follows a model developed by Dr. Lee himself. Created verbatims illustrate the approach, such as one concerning a conversation with Robert, a fictional 70-year-old US Veteran Marine (pp. 161–162). Robert talks about how he might move forward concerning issues of betrayal, decisions made in combat, ways to forgive leaders and how to engage with a number of aspects of the treatment, which may assist him in living a different future.

The moral injury reconciliation model provides a methodology for a nine-week, three-phase spiritual care treatment programme aimed at veteran and family transformation. On pages 111–112, Dr. Lee provides a simple summary of the entire process, where the different elements become clearer. It is based on the following: a group therapy experience, certain theoretical perspectives and a conviction about the importance of faith identity, with values related to love (pp. 27–28, 202). In explaining his therapy, the three stages provide focus: understanding of the self (Movement I) leads on to relating to the world and the absolute necessity of relationships (Movement II) and journeying into the future with altruism (Movement III). It is argued that increased spiritual awareness and self-confidence help to accommodate stress and avoid isolation; internalizing and responding to the needs of others generates selflessness and life purpose out in the world of
relationships; and that both achieving small goals along the way and engaging in virtuous acts signify healing and spiritual transformation.

I found the book quite a wide-ranging read. Dr. Lee is concerned with our philosophy of life, professional perspectives, interdisciplinary working, statistics, diagrams and examples of effective treatment practice. He wishes to ensure that clients facing moral injury and related challenges are able to move forward in their lives and adopt approaches that will make life liveable again. Dr. Lee wishes to “counteract the spiritual imbalance that moral injury can cause” and uses “a trans-diagnostic approach featuring religious/spiritual foundations” (part of a comment by Harold G. Koenig on the back cover).

The author asserts that the spiritual nature of moral injury requires due regard to processes which are commonly found in literature and practice associated with spiritual formation, with reference to meaning-making (e.g. pp. 31–33). He himself refers to the Christian tradition and related world religions and their sacred texts, which he perceives as foundational to American and Western culture (p. 27). Dr. Lee engages with an important approach in healthcare, where counsellors and spiritual directors or companions or pastoral carers work in a cross-disciplinary way for the benefit of the client. The recognition of spiritual pain, distress, balance, discipline, joy and so forth arises from the integrated approach being observed – an approach that has proper regard for boundaries, referral and professional expertise.

I am reminded of other authors who have addressed inter-disciplinary approaches, such as Peter Madsen Gubi, on prayer and counselling as well as spiritual accompaniment and counselling (2007, 2015), and those who consider military chaplains, with a chapter by Andrew Totten in a book edited by Andrew Todd being particularly resonant (2013).¹ You may find that you are stimulated to relate Dr. Lee’s study to these texts or similar studies, so as to benefit fully from this practitioner’s guide aiming to address moral injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, grief and military sexual trauma.

¹ The Assistant Chaplain General and the British Army’s Anglican Director of Ordinands, Andrew Totten, addresses ‘Moral soldiering and soldiers’ morale’, and highlights the on-the-ground importance of both stout hearts and quiet minds (2013, p. 36 cf. p. 28). The texts by Peter Madsen Gubi (2007, 2015) recognize the practitioner’s and the client’s choices concerning prayer and spiritual traditions, using research and drawing upon a rich field of prayer in religious traditions.

© Equinox Publishing Ltd 2022


References

