

So, uh, let me start today by, uh, being clear about one thing. I'm a 72-year-old, upper-middle-class, married Jewish professional.

Uh, as much as some progressives, uh, draw parallels to Germany in the 1930s, I—I don't believe I'm in danger of roving gangs of skinheads pulling me and my wife out of our home and sending us to camps. Although Donald Trump may yet wreck the economy, of course, and endanger my finances, I don't believe I'm at risk of being driven into poverty as many others are.

And maybe the most likely tangible impact I feel from Trump's authoritarian, uh, agenda will be worsening climate change and the resulting damage to what, uh, remains of my life. But, like so many of my peers, actually, I am acutely suffering under the yoke of this, uh, reactionary authoritarian regime.

And what I—and so many others—are suffering from is not necessarily, you see, less important than objective economic exploitation and political oppression, which is also, of course, happening every day. We're experiencing—I'm experiencing—extreme moral injury every day.

So, what do I mean by moral injury? Well, I mean this can happen, uh, uh, to a soldier who's ordered to torture or abuse or kill an enemy combatant or, um, even worse, uh, civilians. You know, a drone learns, a—after an attack, that his drone killed, uh, several children. Or, you know, nurses, uh, administer a painful treatment to a terminally ill patient, knowing that it's not likely that it would change the patient's prognosis or fate in any way.

Or remember when, during the COVID, uh, epidemic—pandemic—medical professionals were forced to make impossible choices due to resource, uh, shortages? You know, who gets ventilators, um, how to ration out protective equipment, or work in conditions they knew were unsafe for them and their patients.

These situations, and others like them, uh, I would say, uh, are classic examples of moral injury. The individual afflicted, uh, feels guilt, um, shame, anger, but ultimately—perhaps more important—feels, and is objectively, helpless to do anything about it.

The nurse, uh, or the soldier, in most situations like that, they—they're not directly being physically harmed. The harm is psychic and moral, reflecting, you know, a conflict between deeply held ethical beliefs and behaviors that violate these, um, beliefs—uh, behaviors over which one has little or no control.

This kind of suffering's real. It's been repeatedly, uh, documented in medical literature. Moral injury has been described by some as a betrayal of what's right, or a bruise on the soul.

Uh, just as physical injuries have complex long-term consequences, you know, moral injuries also produce harm experienced by the person as guilt and shame and fear and anger, which is often, unfortunately, directed at the self.

I think under Donald Trump, millions upon millions of people are enduring daily moral injuries that are very harmful to psychological, uh, well-being. You know, under Trump and his cabal, we're—we're living in a nation in which tremendous harm is being perpetrated against innocent people and groups—people and groups who can't defend themselves.

Each day we see various forms of, uh, persecution, exploitation, and oppression that violate our core values. The Trump administration sends innocent people to what amounts, uh, to concentration camps for no good reason. The systems that support and, um, guarantee our health are being undermined, uh, or defunded.

Institution after institution forced to bow to the corrupt authority of this administration in ways that are horrifying and degrading, and that viola—and—and that violate basic human dignity and decency.

We see a narcissistic individual in the White House who's complicit in the slaughter of Palestinians in the Middle East, um, all the while expressing skepticism about the evils of slavery and ordering the military occupation of multiple American cities.

Sometimes our moral torture seems, I think, uh, to come, uh, slowly, like one drop at a time. The Defense Department purges images and biographies and histories that reference, uh, the—Tuskegee Airmen or the Navajo, uh, code talkers, and even baseball legend Jackie Robinson.

And, in the same spirit, the administration, uh, ordered the removal of nearly 400 books from the U.S. Naval Academy's library—including works on the Holocaust, histories of feminism and civil rights, and even Maya Angelou's memoir, uh, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*—while copies of *Mein Kampf* were retained.

Well, these moral assaults can come at us, uh, more like a tidal wave, like the—Trump's decision to withdraw from the World Health Organization and the Paris Climate Accords, or the dramatic, uh, redistribution of wealth, uh, under the—the Big Beautiful Bill, with individuals who earn over a million bucks, uh, projected to get tax cuts of, um, averaging about \$97,000, while those earning \$40,000 gain just about what they say, uh, about \$393.

Whether it's the Department of Labor—a building draped with enormous, uh, Trump portraits, uh, with the labor secretary inviting the President during a Cabinet meeting to come see his quote, "big beautiful face"—or the saga of, uh, Kilmar Abrego Garcia, who was returned to the U.S. from a cruel prison in El Salvador, only to be threatened with arrest and a new plan to deport him to Uganda—one can't go a day without feeling still more shame and helpless outrage at all these ignominious, uh, horrible actions.

Yet those of us who aren't directly and immediately impacted, you see, those of us who have up to now believed that we lead, um, safe and comfortable middle-class lives—we go through our day reading and hearing about this huge spectrum of suffering imposed by Trump and his cronies.

The only slim ray of hope offered to us, in fact, is the possibility of maybe a better electoral, uh, outcome in 2026 or 2028. Moreover, we endure moral distress in relative isolation.

You see, an additional painful reality that makes everything worse—we sometimes s- speak to each other, you know, to our friends, and they sometimes hear our sentiments echoed or elaborated by reporters, uh, commentators, certain talking heads that—but in the end, we go through this spectacle relatively alone.

We're forced into a kind of surreal double life, aren't we? That part of us tracking each new assault on democracy, while another part maintaining the fiction that life goes on as usual. You know, we brush our teeth, drop our kids at school, attend Zoom calls, and make dinner plans—all while apocalyptic headlines scroll through our devices and our minds.

We share our horror in hushed tones, uh, with like-minded friends, or we find some momentary solidarity in a—a columnist's outrage, but mostly we're left to process these events on our own.

See, experiencing moral injury in isolation is a vital element of trauma. We compartmentalize the grief and outrage we feel into the corners of our private lives. You see, underneath that performance of normalcy lies a deeper heartache—a—a deeper injury—I believe that we, uh, keep carefully contained, sensing that, you know, if we, uh, let it fully surface, uh, it might just overwhelm us.

Above all, we experience a pervasive, what I would call, miasma of helplessness, as we're forced to watch this intolerable train wreck. And, you know, such helplessness is an ine—an inevitable result of moral injury, and accelerates it.

It's a highly toxic feeling, to which people respond—helplessness is—in one of three ways, often not even quite consciously. They find someone else they can make feel helpless—you know, think child abuse or certain forms of domestic violence. Or, two, they become depressed—think about, um, learned helplessness. Or, uh, third, they try to push back with feelings of outrage, anger. Okay. Think road rage.

As is true with most psychological suffering, you see, the solutions to the problem of helplessness, unfortunately, largely tend to lead to situations of greater pain and suffering. And such is the nature of the moral injury we're experiencing.

But, you know, isn't this like a first-world problem? A kind of privileged whining, or a self-indulgent, uh, bid, some might say, for tea and sympathy? Well, in some ways, yes—but, you know, only if we discount and delegitimize the lived experience and impact of psychological suffering.

When someone's depressed, or, I don't know, highly anxious, or is—is anorexic, or has OCD or ADHD, do we just dismiss these conditions as f—fraudulent excuses or as flights from responsibility?

See, if you're human and have a scintilla of emotional and social intelligence, then you know that psychological and emotional suffering—they are serious, and they lead to real-world personal and social dysfunction.

It's, in fact, our capacity, you know, for empathy and connectedness that provide, like, the channel—or the jet fuel, if you will—behind moral injury to begin with.

You know, we hear about a mother and a child being kidnapped by ICE agents and deported, and, you know, if we let ourselves, you know, we can identify and empathize with the terror of that mother and child and the pain and loss felt by that family.

Or, you know, we read about the deliberate starvation of millions of Palestinians, the intentional attacks on food lines and hospitals, or the huge number of child amputees in Gaza—and if we let ourselves wade into the waters of empathy, hey, we may become overwhelmed with all these voices of desperation and pain. These are whispers that grow into shouts—that is, if we don't change the channel in our heads.

At the end of the day, you know, we're all involved, we're all implicated, and we're all in pain—whether we're farm workers seeking a better life who are being rounded up and sent to detention camps, or middle-class professionals in the damn suburbs, cringing with guilt, shame, and helpless outrage.

The only experience that temporarily alleviated my own personal moral distress is when I found myself in demonstrations with thousands of like-minded people—all of us sharing both our outrage and our solidarity.

You see, anyone who's experienced and attempted to master trauma knows that being part of a group that shares your pain and still believes that there's a way through it—you see, a way to conquer it—is the single most healing experience we can have.

So, I think we need to get together on the streets, and anywhere and everywhere else we can—not just to protest the flood of cruelty, political danger facing others, but to defend ourselves from the psychic and moral assaults of this administration—and find ways to heal and fight back.

That may be the only—this may be the only—way we can survive the next few years, you see, by really just coming together.