MORAL COURAGE

FairShake REENTRY RESOURCE CENTER

What is the definition of *moral*?

Oxford English Dictionary: Adj: 1.a.) Of or relating to human character or behavior considered as good or bad; of or relating to the distinction between right and wrong, in relation to the actions, desires, or character of responsible human beings; ethical.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A code of conduct. Morality and religion are not the same thing, morality is only a guide to conduct.

What is *moral courage*?

Rushworth Kidder: "Moral courage is the bridge between talking ethics and doing ethics." He goes on to say it is " a readiness to endure danger for the sake of principle, he explains that the courage to act is found at the intersection of three elements: action based on core values, awareness of the risks, and a willingness to endure necessary perceived hardship."

Irshad Manji: "Moral courage equips you to do the right thing in the face of your fear." She also says " Most people who show moral courage do so because the intimate voice of individual conscience drowns out the groupthink that produces passivity."

"In order for things to get better, we're going to have to be a little more virtuous."

- Anonymous

ALL AROUND US, we see increasing polarization, fakeness, gaming, and desire for control. It's happening in groups, political parties, schools (including higher education), the medical industry, prisons, and work places. Rather than increasing listening skills, understanding, care or knowledge, we have been willing to accept more laws, rules, restrictions and authoritarian measures, hoping to shape and manage behavior.

MORAL COURAGE offers a different approach to increasing safety, cooperation and social engagement. Moral courage offers us the opportunity to demonstrate our most deeply held values: equality, freedom, authenticity, autonomy, democracy, ownership and more…as we willingly offer them; each of us in our unique ways. Moral courage offers us the chance to offer understanding, rather than demand acquiescence; to listen and care, rather than enforce conformity. It provides us the opportunity to be ourselves, and also to be citizens-of-the-world.

But, as the quotes above show us, moral courage is not easy, especially since we have not been encouraged to be courageous or moral. Courage requires risk, and we are powerfully discouraged from taking any risks. Morality requires thinking about right and wrong, and we are strongly encouraged to just 'follow rules' and not worry about moral issues. We have to be morally courageous simply to talk about morality! Yet we all have our own perspectives of the thick complexity surrounding 'right and wrong' and 'good and bad'. As with many cases of the Fundamental Attribution Error (please look for the page dedicated to this topic), however, the 'good and bad' is easily defined regarding others, and only gets complex when we need to apply them to ourselves.

Moral Courage is the willingness to give to others these things that we all want ourselves:
Care * Attention * Consideration * Respect * A fair shake * Opportunity * Honesty

According to Rushworth Kidder, author of the 2006 book Moral Courage, three components must be present for moral courage to occur:

1. **Principles:** Convictions, core values, foundation for beliefs

2. **Danger:** Possibility of suffering physical or emotional harm or injury

3. **Endurance:** Fortitude; ability to last

If two of the elements are present, the result will be:

Danger + Principles = Timidity: Lack of self-confidence, boldness, or determination

Principles + Endurance = Foolhardiness: Rashness, incautious, recklessness

**Endurance + Danger = Physical Courage:** Bravery in the face of pain, hardship, even death
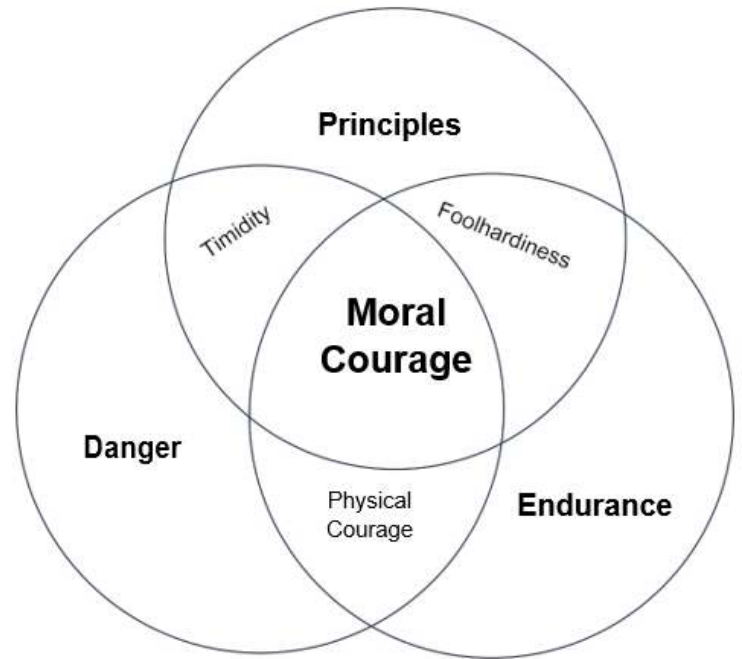
Moral Courage often requires us to take action to defend someone else, such as protecting a child, pushing back on bullies and questioning people who lie. Sometimes moral courage requires us to be honest with ourselves - which becomes increasingly difficult with age. (Yes, the words of experience.) In our current climate of polarization, sometimes it can be incredibly difficult to simply ask "why?" (Americans are becoming increasingly threatened by that small question, which is at the heart of the scientific method!) Moral courage is necessary when we are required to declare our boundaries, protecting our values and care for humanity.

Values Prism

"Sound values raise tough choices."

- Rushworth Kidder

Moral Courage... ...is the courage to be...

honest
fair
respectful
responsible
compassionate
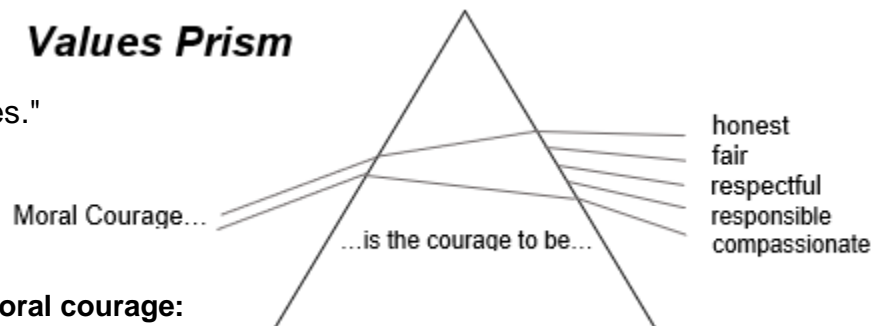
Questions that may bolster our moral courage:

- Motives: why do I feel like I need to take a stand?
- Inhibitions: what might stop me? what are some deep fears I have about taking a stand? These fears might include: nor wanting to accept ownership, indecisiveness, lack of commitment to the principle, sensitivity, desire for acceptance and many more…
- Risk challenges could include: disapproval, lack of support, suffering, shocking conventional opinion, shame, humiliation, ostracism, loss of status, loss of job and more.

Recommended Reading:

Haidt, Jonathan (2012). The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion. Pantheon

Kidder, Rushworth M. (2005). Moral Courage. Wm. Morrow

Manji, Irshad (2020). Don't Label Me: How to Do Diversity Without Inflaming the Culture Wars. St. Martin's Griffin (also visit Manji's Moral Courage website: www.moralcourage.com)