

## AFFIRMING THE SOLDIER'S SPIRIT THROUGH INTENTIONAL DIALOGUE

BY

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**AFFIRMING THE SOLDIER'S SPIRIT THROUGH INTENTIONAL DIALOGUE**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

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This research paper confronts the present silence regarding the Soldier's spirit in the dialogue about war's trauma and effective combat recovery opportunities. It is the argument of this author that acknowledgement of the Soldier's spirit through a spirit-centric dialogue with senior Army leaders is the initial step toward enlarging the issue of emotional and spiritual recovery from combat trauma. The Army's senior leadership needs to participate in the dialogue with physicians, educators, mental health care providers, and chaplains, regarding the Soldier's spirit. The author cites leading psychiatrists, psychologists, pastoral counselors, educators and military historians on the recognition of the Soldier's spirit. This paper proposes the Soldier's spirit is a metaphysical reality and requires a voice on its behalf outside the confines of the military chaplaincy. Supportive and documented research reveals if the Soldier's spirit is neglected it will be at the expense of the Soldier's recovery, resiliency, mission and ultimately the Nation's mission.



## AFFIRMING THE SOLDIER'S SPIRIT THROUGH INTENTIONAL DIALOGUE

It is the hypothesis of this study that the Soldiers' *spirit* is a reality. The present Army community is pluralistic and recognizes the value of the Soldier's *spirit*. The Soldier's *spirit* may be defined through a religious or formal theological understanding; however, such definitions are not inclusive. An additional hypothesis is that the Soldier's *spirit* is stressed or wounded through the experience of combat. To address issues of response the Army must enter into proper and open dialogue regarding the Soldier's *spirit* and combat's wounding effects. As the Soldier's personal framework consists of physical, mental, spiritual, and professional aspects, it is imperative to address the existence of the Soldier's spiritual dimension (spirit) when dialoging about combat trauma and post-combat care and recovery. This research project intentionally addresses the requirement for affirming the Soldier's *spirit* as the Army addresses the reality of post-combat Soldier fatigue and trauma. This intentional spirit-centric dialogue supports the Army Chief of Chaplains' mandated role and responsibility in supporting the Commander's responsibility to provide spiritual frameworks, opportunities, and care for Soldiers.<sup>1</sup>

This research project is the initial phase of a four phase concept plan which will be furthered through the Army's Center for Spiritual Leadership. This Center, located at the United States Army Chaplain School and Center (Fort Jackson, SC), is an initiative by Chaplain (MG) Douglas Carver. Chaplain (MG) Carver presently serves as the Army's Chief of Chaplains. As mentioned, the Center's concept plan concentrates on four distinct phases. The first phase is to affirm the Soldier's spirit through professional and collegial dialogue among chaplains, physicians, mental health care providers,

educators, and the Army senior leadership. The second phase focuses on healing interventions for the wounded Soldier's spirit in addition to the physical, mental, and psychological wounds which our Soldiers are experiencing. The third phase addresses possible benefits of a spirit-centric dialogue. The fourth phase is the implementation of a Chaplain-led project affirming the Soldier's spirit while providing a holistic response to assist the holistic recovery of our combat traumatized Soldiers. The Center for Spiritual Leadership will initiate the fourth phase through facilitating a pilot study at the United States Army Chaplain Center and School with returning combat veteran chaplains.

This research provides a historic understanding of the Soldier's spirit then subsequently addresses the required need for a spirit-centric approach for Soldiers recovering from combat trauma. This author argues that a definitive recognition of the Soldier's spirit will credibly assist the holistic approach to Soldier care and recovery, thus facilitating wellness while assisting in the development of resiliency. Such resiliency is imperative for our Soldiers to meet the ongoing and future missions in support of our Nation's security and defense.

The Army Well-Being Strategic Plan of 2001, produced by the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, defines Soldier well-being as "the personal – physical, material, mental, and spiritual – state of Soldiers" which contributes to mission preparedness.<sup>2</sup> According to this Plan, the Soldier's spiritual state "centers on a person's religious/philosophical needs and may provide powerful support for values, morals, strength of character, and endurance in difficult and dangerous situations."<sup>3</sup> In addition to the Soldier's physical and mental recovery, it is vital for the Soldier to have the way and means to assist him/her in their spiritual expression and recovery.

Joint Publication 1-05 affirms it is the Department of Defense's "moral, ethical and pragmatic responsibility to provide reasonable remedies and resources" regarding the service member's spirituality.<sup>4</sup> One of the means in which such responsibilities are met is through military chaplains being uniquely positioned throughout the Armed Services to assist service members in the development and maintenance of "spiritual, moral, and ethical maturity and resiliency."<sup>5</sup> Our Nation continues to affirm the reality of the service member's spirit through the legal recognition and opportunity for the expression of the freedom of religion established by the First Amendment. I propose a second means in meeting the demand for reasonable remedies and resources is to expand the present dialogue concerning the Soldier's spirit. In turn, this dialogue expansion will provide the basis for the future development of a spirit-centric recovery program to assist in the holistic care of Soldiers returning from combat.

Presently, the Army Chaplaincy trains approximately 20 chaplains per year in the area of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). Such training is conducted through the United States Army Medical Command in cooperation with the Chaplaincy. These chaplains receive an additional clinical skill-set to provide hospital ministry and frontline combat ministry when assigned to the Combat Army Surgical Hospitals. The utility of the CPE training is vital when providing care to combat returning Soldiers with their traumatic experiences. This is only one of the many approaches the Army takes to provide post-combat trauma assistance, recovery, and intervention. Still, this minimal number of annually trained chaplains cannot address the demand posed by the large number of returning combat veterans. The number of Soldiers who continue to seek help from all assigned chaplains may be indicative of the reality of spiritual trauma.

Military history affirms the spiritual engagement and expression of our Soldiers and militaries. Contemporary Soldiers and military historians continue to add to the immense collection of literature regarding a Soldier's faith and spirituality. A formal study by Dr. Andrew Newberg published in 2001 affirms that research on the human brain reveals specific stimulation in a specific area of the brain when the individual participated in prayer and meditation. These findings led some interpreters of the research to conclude humans are wired for God. Such research may appear to support Abraham Maslow's theory that all human beings are potentially motivated by metaneeds.<sup>6</sup>

Stephen Mansfield in *The Faith of the American Soldier* confirms it is the battlefield's horror and hardships that pushes Soldiers to reach for the spiritual with increased vigor. It is in the face of battle when the Soldier considers the transcendent, making "the battlefield as much a test of faith as it is a test of arms."<sup>7</sup> It is the Soldier who, by his/her individual and collective actions in combat, establish an experiential spirituality. This experiential spirituality cannot be ignored as the Army continues to address the reality of combat trauma.

In a postmodern environment and a pluralistic community, the basic understanding of the spirit from a classical Judeo-Christian religious worldview may be dismissed, ridiculed, or seen as the formal establishment of religion. In the middle of this pluralistic community and postmodern worldview, Dr. Don Snider, former professor at the United States Military Academy, maintains that the American society has an increasing interest in human spirituality both individually and institutionally.<sup>8</sup> This increasing interest in human spirituality was foundational for the Academy to redesign

the Cadet Leader Development System (CLDS) and the inclusion of the spiritual domain.<sup>9</sup>

Dr. Snider in further collaboration with Patrick Sweeney and Sean Hannah, describes this human spirituality as “the domain of the human spirit.”<sup>10</sup> They collectively define spirit as “the vital animating force within living beings; the part of a human being associated with mind, will, and feelings; and the essential nature of the person.”<sup>11</sup> This interior aspect of ‘the domain of the human spirit’ is arguably the avenue in which our Cadets and Soldiers continually search for meaning and purpose in life. Further development of this domain of the human spirit concludes that the individual (Cadet/Soldier) is searching for truth regarding themselves, life’s purpose, the world in which they live, their relationships, and personal potential.<sup>12</sup>

The Cadet Leadership Development System at the United States Military Academy reveals a dialogue regarding the spirit is not always synonymous with a specific religion. However, if the Soldier seeking healing addresses spirituality from a religious-based framework, then such framework may be beneficial, embraced by the caregiver. The Soldier has both the responsibility and constitutional freedom to determine the lens through which matters of the spirit are defined, developed, and displayed. Today’s Soldier may not be religious; yet, they are spiritual. It is this non-religious spirituality that Abraham Maslow believed existed and argued that such spiritual aspirations of the human personality was the result of a natural phenomenon and should not be restricted to a theological construct.<sup>13</sup>

The etymology of the word *spirit* reveals its foundation in the classical Latin form *spiritus*, meaning soul, courage, vigor, and breath as it related to *spirare* (to breathe).

Around 1250 A.D. the Old French form of *spirit* describes the “animating or vital principle in man and animals.” Its original usage in English is mainly translated from the Latin Vulgate which further translates the Greek *pneuma* and the Hebrew *ruah* as spirit. The first distinction between *soul* and *spirit*, regarding the seat of emotions, became common in the earliest Christian writings and terminology.<sup>14</sup> The expression *esprit de corps* is initially used around 1780. Translated from the French as *group spirit*, it is synonymous in meaning to morale, comradeship, and purpose.<sup>15</sup> It is arguable that *esprit de corps* could not be possible if the Soldier’s spirit was non-existent.

University of California – Los Angeles (UCLA) recently completed an extended study regarding the spirituality of university students. Their findings assist in the difficult challenge of defining human spirituality. They conclude that spirituality points to our interior and subjective life. Spirituality also embraces those hard to define aspects of the experiential life, “the mysterious, the sacred, and the mystical.” Overall, they conclude that spirituality “is a universal impulse and reality.”<sup>16</sup>

One can argue through associative demographics that the same spiritual questions and issues university students are confronting would be similar to those of our young Soldiers. A major difference between Soldiers and university students is that America’s Soldiers are engaged in close combat, not walking around on safe campuses. The American Soldier in combat faces the reality of life and death from a violent enemy on a continual basis. The American Soldier continually seeks assistance from chaplains, counselors, and the Department of Veterans Affairs for relief from combat trauma, in contrast to the university student seeking career counseling or academic guidance.

Dr. John Brinsfield, former Army War College instructor and esteemed historian on the Army chaplaincy, cites several senior Army leaders on their perspective of the Soldier's soul or spirit. He records General George C. Marshall as saying, "True, physical weapons are indispensable, but in the final analysis it is the human spirit, the spiritual balance, the religious fervor, that wins the victory. . . The Soldier's heart, the Soldier's spirit, the Soldier's soul, are everything."<sup>17</sup> Additionally, Brinsfield cites General Gordon Sullivan in recognizing the value of a deep spiritual faith among Soldiers, as recorded in Field Manual 100-1, *The Army*, published in December 1991. "There is an aspect of courage which comes from a deep spiritual faith, which, when prevalent in an Army unit, can result in uncommon toughness and tenacity in combat."<sup>18</sup>

This metaphysical aspect defining the Soldier's spirit has historically been recognized as the Soldier's soul.

The soul is at the center of human consciousness and experience. Yet we cannot see or measure soul directly. Rather, we "see it feelingly," to use Shakespeare's words from *King Lear*; we know soul through our experiences of its functions and traits. It is "the vaporization out of which everything derives," said Heraclitus. It is not the body, explained Aristotle, but its originative principle. It is through soul that we experience our human uniqueness and spiritual depth.<sup>19</sup>

The inability to scientifically measure the soul (spirit) cannot dismiss the historical and experiential reality of the Soldier's spirit. Though the topic of spirituality is immensely broad, research shows that the presence of 'spirit' or 'soul' is what separates a living from a non-living person.

Spiritual director and pastoral care provider Dalene Fuller Rogers affirms the challenge in defining spirituality is due to its diversity and one's inability to fully describe what is meant by spirituality. She writes, "Speaking in general terms, spirituality is the

part of a person that searches for meaning, purpose, and relationship with others and with the transcendent, the divine, or the higher power.”<sup>20</sup>

The reality of adversity and suffering experienced while in combat opens the Soldier to a spiritual domain. Existing studies with resilient individuals document the power of spirituality in overcoming life’s challenges while assisting in transcending traumatic experiences.<sup>21</sup> This author challenges the Army to expand the dialogue regarding spirituality outside established chaplain channels. The Army needs to formally recognize through dialogue expansion the Soldier’s spirit and the power of spirituality in preparing Soldiers for combat and assist them in the post-combat recovery process. This dialogue expansion must include senior Army leaders as they remain responsible for Soldier combat preparation and recovery.

#### Combat Wounding of the Soldier’s Spirit

“The soul at war is characteristically distorted along all its essential functions” and requires recovery of the Soldier’s moral and spiritual principles.<sup>22</sup> “War stamps the soul with an indelible imprint and makes it its own. The soul that once went to war is forever transformed.”<sup>23</sup>

The same challenge that first confronted treating veteran’s psychological symptoms also faces any spiritual dialogue, intervention and treatment design. The lack of consistent terminology outside a religious context may be the first hurdle to overcome. Initial dealings with combat stress syndrome found it a daunting exercise to work through at least eighty different names since its recognition.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, I propose those involved in this spiritual dialogue consider the term “spirit-centric.”

The key to generating spirit-centric dialogue is in the understanding of how combat touches the Soldier's spirit. Dr. Edward Tick, a leading psychologist and regarded expert on the topic of war trauma argues that war's overwhelming violence forces the true self to flee and can become lost for life without the proper intervention and care. Returning to a previous innocence is no longer an option, for the Soldier has experienced a psychospiritual death. "Though conventional medicine and psychotherapy strive to be value neutral, in these healing efforts we must deal with our moral and spiritual dimensions."<sup>25</sup>

This author's premise is that American Soldiers are returning from our Nation's wars degraded by the direct and indirect rigors and stresses of long-term deployments, separation, and combative action with experiential induced trauma. The Department of Veterans Affairs provides a clinical guide which states, "War can be traumatizing not only because of specific terrorizing or grotesque war-zone experiences but also due to dashed or painfully shattered expectations and beliefs about perceived coping capabilities, military identity, and so forth."<sup>26</sup> Recently, Columbia University's Joseph Stiglitz and Harvard University's Linda Bilmes concluded, if left unchecked, the projected cost of providing disability benefits and compensations to Iraq and Afghanistan veterans over the course of their lives will cost the government between \$350 billion and \$700 billion dollars.<sup>27</sup> Their projected cost findings suggest the present attempts at treating combat veterans is not sufficient. Ben Shephard, writing about combat trauma and its effects seen through the veteran's emotional response, argues for Soldier caregivers to take a "much wider look at what happened in the past" as one provides treatment for the aftermath of war.<sup>28</sup>

Tick writes, “We can access spiritual energies to sustain and guide us. We can embrace the life-affirming and protective capacities of the warrior spirit and practice a living spirituality.”<sup>29</sup> He believes hostile experiences attribute to the fundamental reshaping of the soul. “Though the affliction that today we call post-traumatic stress disorder has had many names over the centuries, it is always the result of the way war invades, wounds, and transforms our spirit.”<sup>30</sup>

Historical events and research identify the reality of combat wounding. Whether it has been called ‘shell shock’, ‘battleshock’, ‘battle fatigue’, ‘combat fatigue’, ‘*maladie du pays* (French for “disease of the country”)', *estar roto* (Spanish for “to be broken”), or ‘post-traumatic stress’, the reality is that many Soldiers return from combat with an undiagnosible, invisible wound. This invisible wound negatively impacts their ability to restabilize intimate and social relationships, recover from specific traumatic experiences, and develop resiliency in order to be ready to meet future missions. “Their wounds are emotional and spiritual, and they have left deep scars.”<sup>31</sup>

The Army is presently proactive as it addresses Soldier care and wellness through the post-combat assessment via the Defense Knowledge Online portal. As of this date the Army now provides every Soldier returning from combat opportunity to take the post-combat assessment. This assessment signals symptomatic indicators to the Army’s mental health providers in order for the health community to offer treatment and track Soldiers with combat related traumas. The portal assessment primarily focuses upon recognizable physical or psychological traumas.

At the present time the Army lacks an intentional spiritual intervention or spirit-centric assessment for Soldiers. An optimal opportunity for spiritual assessment is

during the mental health care provider's screening when the Soldier may be asked, "Do you want to see a Chaplain?" It is necessary to assist the Soldier in the process of spiritual refinement orientation through spiritual awareness, the cultivation of spiritual accountability, and faith development as it is to address physical or psychological concerns. An intentional spirit-centric dialogue will assist the Soldier in developing spiritual or faith-based actions, which reinforces the professional Army ethos and opens the door toward Soldier resiliency resultant from the damage incurred within the spiritual domain.

Contemporary mental health professionals place little importance on the spiritual and moral domain when factoring reasons for psychological symptoms. "Most conventional therapies teach healers to avoid talk of morality. War is inherently a moral enterprise, and veterans in search of healing are on a profound moral journey."<sup>32</sup> This is in essence the reason why spiritual damage is discussed and why direct intervention is recommended. The concept of intentional spiritual intervention is a means to assist in this moral journey. Research among Vietnam veterans reveal when overwhelmed with fear, grief, and guilt, the response was to control their vulnerability by hardening themselves to the point of becoming "conscience-less."<sup>33</sup> This hardening compartmentalizes the trauma but provides nothing for healing. Moral and spiritual problems cannot be ignored when there are an estimated 800,000 Vietnam veterans who continue "to suffer from guilt-ridden memories and festering emotional wounds that have never healed."<sup>34</sup> To conclude that combat during Vietnam created greater combat trauma is to dismiss the realities and unchangeable aspects of war. The establishment

of the Army's Warrior Transition Units provides daily evidence the present war in Iraq and Afghanistan creates similar combat wounds.

One aspect of combat trauma is internal alienation or what Edward Tick describes as soul loss. Internal alienation (soul loss) is the result of personality fragmentation. The combat experience cannot be integrated by the total person through cognitive, emotional, spiritual, or physical means. "No one has ever seen war in all of its dimensions – physical, moral, and spiritual – because each participant sees the event from his or her own narrow, partial perspective."<sup>35</sup> The result is a wounding and personal suffering in one or a combination of these areas.

Research among Vietnam veterans describes veterans experiencing an unexpected deadening of the soul, numbing of the spirit, the reservoirs of moral and spiritual resources drying up, or a terrible bleakness overwhelming the soul. The combat experience sowed 'seeds of doubt' undermining the very foundations of faith.<sup>36</sup>

To distinguish the dialogue about this unexpected deadening of the soul or the numbing of the spirit it is useful to use the term spirit-centric. It is important to recognize the spirit-centric dialogue may not be synonymous to religious dialogue. Individual Soldiers who have a religious faith may interpret such dialogue as religious but it is not important for the soldier without religious interest to do so. It is the Soldier's freedom of interpreting the interaction which constitutes whether or not the dialogue is religious. As the caregiver remains intentional on focusing on the Soldier's spirit, which is defined as that which is metaphysical, the perceived absence of a formal religious framework should not hinder the dialogue. Yet, Soldiers are well informed that the chaplain is a vital and present resource to assist them in their journey via formal religion should they

wish to approach spirituality from that perspective. A pre-existent faith allows for a predisposition to address the issue with spiritual language and/or vocabulary.

For those with a faith base, Dr. Jonathan Shay, a staff psychiatrist in the Department of Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic in Boston, argues that medical-psychological therapies may be incomplete when confronting the reality of moral pain as a result of combat. "Religious and cultural therapies are not only possible, but may well be superior to what mental health professionals conventionally offer."<sup>37</sup> He affirms it is the power of the biblical writings from King David's war-fighting perspective which provides a common theme regarding Divine interaction. Both the biblical Psalms and the Christian scriptures support a common religious tenet, "that awareness of God's love reduces fear."<sup>38</sup>

Dalene Fuller Rogers, cited earlier, supports Dr. Shay's observation through the application of contemplative prayer. Such prayer "is a time of quietness with the anticipation of one's relationship with God as a beloved child. The potential to heal shame and other spiritual wounds is infinite. By resting in God's presence and affirming God's love, burdens may be unloaded."<sup>39</sup> She insists that all forms of trauma effect one's spirituality.<sup>40</sup> She writes, "Those who are healing from trauma and the resulting side effects, such as PTSD, may benefit from the use of some demonstrative and symbolic means of acknowledging the harm and celebrating the process of recovery."<sup>41</sup> It is the Soldier's religious background and spirituality that may help shape the symbolic process. The chaplain is present to help the Soldier discover the limitless possibilities in creating a healing and celebrative desired process.<sup>42</sup>

The value of a spirit-centric dialogue is it assists the Soldier in finding meaning of their combat ordeal compatible with the themes of help and hope. Research shows “the resilient reports that their spirituality or religion was significant in helping them discover a purpose of their suffering and pain, or that they discovered a spirituality through the process of their pain.”<sup>43</sup>

Frederic Flach in *Resilience: Discovering a New Strength at Times of Stress* proposes “critical to healing is to help the traumatized individual find some kind of coherence in the face of an event that seems completely chaotic.”<sup>44</sup> “Those who are best able to deal with their feelings and begin the process of healing seem to be those who share their experiences verbally with each other and with understanding professionals.”<sup>45</sup> He describes the benefits of faith, a philosophical and spiritual framework, as an inner strength and attribute of resilience. Such a spiritual framework assists the individual in understanding the traumatic event with meaning and hope.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to enabling the Soldier to find meaning and hope, the purpose of spirit-centric dialogue is to assist the traumatized Soldier in what Tick describes as enlarging the soul. Dr. Tick believes residual combat trauma symptoms and PTSD will evaporate through enlarging and developing the soul. “The formula for healing the war-wounded soul is simple: surround trauma with soul.”<sup>47</sup> This enlargement is not synonymous with childhood religious and secular education for they simply awaken the soul. Soul enlargement must surround and dominate the wound called trauma.<sup>48</sup>

John Keegan’s book *The Face of Battle* is a reflection of war as seen through the eyes of the British and American forces. After dealing with combat exhaustion and its effects on the unit’s effectiveness and morale he describes four critical elements which

allowed British troops to successfully deal with prolonged exposure to combat. One of the four critical elements is described as spiritual or religious fortification before battle, usually in the form of prayer, worship, community, etc.<sup>49</sup> This spiritual or religious fortification prior to experiencing combat is just as vital when assisting Soldiers to recover from combat.

Stephen Mansfield credits President Theodore Roosevelt as being the genitor of what became known as the Micah Mandate. President Roosevelt, after leaving office, penned a few words which the New York Bible Society inserted into copies of pocket New Testaments given to Soldiers upon their departure for Europe (World War I). His words were based on a particular verse from the book of Micah (6:8).<sup>50</sup> In his written insert President Roosevelt reminded the Soldiers that victory could not be attained if “our spiritual sense was atrophied.”<sup>51</sup> Mansfield argues that Roosevelt’s words put the war in a spiritual perspective and assured them that victory was dependent upon “honoring the God who rules men’s destinies.”<sup>52</sup> Again, our history affirms the spiritual aspect of Soldiers which requires a spirit-centric dialogue.

Soldiers continue to return from combat with invisible wounds. They may not have burn scars, gunshot wounds or missing appendages, however, they carry in their spirit irreversible damage resulting in possible debilitation if left untreated. The Restoration and Resilience Center at Fort Bliss, Texas, is the home for the Army’s experimental Warrior Resilience Program (WARP). This program “is designed to help combat-stress sufferers who would otherwise have no alternative to a medical discharge.”<sup>53</sup> The length of this volunteer program may be as long as nine months. It

combines medication, yoga, and other techniques to reduce stress along with therapy sessions. The therapy sessions consist of both group and individual opportunities.

The Institute of Medicine, which is part of the National Academy of Sciences recently completed a study to determine a proven therapy or technique in dealing with post-traumatic stress. Their findings show that the only proven “effective treatment for post-traumatic stress is exposure therapy, which allows patients to relive the original experience of trauma in a therapeutic setting.”<sup>54</sup> The American Psychological Association affirms, since 1980, the effectiveness of exposure therapy with Vietnam veterans. The war veteran exposed to combat trauma receives help by mentally returning to the trauma in a controlled environment.<sup>55</sup> Additional findings show there is no significant scientific evidence which affirms the success of antidepressants.<sup>56</sup> These findings support the hypothesis for the need to provide spirit-centric dialogue regarding the Soldier’s spirit in response to combat trauma.

The reality of war eats away at the Soldier’s spirit. War creates a religious and spiritual vacuum in the Soldier. A spirit-centric dialogue is realistic about the invisible brokenness encountered in combat. It is vital for those engaging in spirit-centric dialogue to recognize such symptoms as “distrust and fear, rejection and betrayal, futility, alienation and estrangement, loss and grief, guilt and shame, and isolation and withdrawal.”<sup>57</sup> The goal of a spirit-centric dialogue is not only to educate the Army’s senior leaders, but to support traumatized Soldiers in their journey toward healing. A viable spirit-centric dialogue outside chaplain channels will affirm the reality of the Soldier’s spirit and can pave the way toward open dialogue about combat’s ability to

effect the spirit. It is the responsibility of the Army's senior leaders to acknowledge and care for the Soldier's spirit.

### Immediate Benefits of a Spirit-Centric Dialogue

The immediate benefits concerning a spirit-centric dialogue are twofold. The first benefit is official recognition of the Soldier's spirit among our senior Army leaders. Thus, expanding the dialogue concerning the Soldier's spirit. The obvious obstacle in officially recognizing the Soldier's spirit is avoiding the perceived establishment of a formal religious understanding of spirit. Recognizing spirit to be metaphysical, not restricted to religion; yet, distinct from mind and body, allows dialogue to be open among senior Army leaders, physicians, mental health care providers, educators, and chaplains. This required dialogue cannot be confined to psychology's therapeutic community. It cannot be limited to formal religion and theology. Spirit-centric dialogue affirms the Soldier as being more than mind and body in a social context. The Soldier is a psychosocial, spiritual being, constrained by the limitations of a physical body. The Army constantly affirms the Soldier as a multifaceted individual through providing and caring for the psychological, social, physical, and spiritual needs. However, in formal and institutional dialogue, outside the chaplaincy, the Soldier's spirit continues to remain the elephant in the room.

For example, the United States Army War College describes the strategic leader's environment to consist of the physical, mental, spiritual, and professional. Upon arrival at the College new students (mostly colonels and senior lieutenant colonels) are provided detailed ways and means for developing the physical, mental, and professional aspects. It is this author's personal assessment that the College

remains overtly silent in developing the spiritual aspect. The only resource to specifically contemplate the spirit as a distinct aspect of spirituality is the post chapel. This must change in order for the Soldier's spirit to be seen as a viable reality affected by the trauma of combat. The Army must expand its recognition of the Soldier's spirit beyond chaplain channels and chapel activities.

The second immediate benefit of recognizing the Soldier's spirit is addressing the possibility of implementing ancient post-battle purification ceremonies. The implementation of post-battle purification ceremonies, founded on a spirit-centric dialogue, will shape the Army environment for creative and renewing opportunities to mend the brokenness and reduce the symptoms of combat trauma. Dr. Jonathan Shay continues to appeal to our military institutions to accept the seriousness of protecting Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, and those serving in the Coast Guard from psychological and moral injury. He writes,

As a society we have found ourselves unable to offer purification to those who do the terrible acts of war on our behalf. I believe this is something to be done jointly by the people of all our religions, from the arts, from the mental health professions, and from the ranks of combat veterans – not from the government. What I have in mind is a communal ritual with religious force that recognizes that everyone who has shed blood, no matter how blamelessly, is in need of purification.<sup>58</sup>

History records it was from the Athenian tragedy theaters that the returning Greek warriors were able to experience post-combat catharsis. The theater's players were combat veterans participating in the cathartic process for newly returning combat veterans. During this time Aristotle used catharsis in three distinct ways. The first was as a religious purification. The second signified the need for a medicinal purging of something unhealthy in the body. The third called for the act of mental clarification which was the psychological equivalent of removing obstacles to understanding.<sup>59</sup>

History of recent accounts testify that participation in war creates a gulf between the Soldier and his former community. The Soldier's spirit becomes a joint-participant along with his mind and body as the possessor of combat's trauma. The Army recognizes that we currently treat predominantly the mind and body; yet, remains silent in offering the returning Soldier a spirit-centric purification ceremony. There are many cultures who respond to their returning warriors with purification ceremonies. "Our culture today denies the need for purification and provides none, even though in the past it has done so."<sup>60</sup>

The manner in which our military communities respond to the veteran at homecoming will either assist or diminish the recovery process. An improper response, including the denial of the Soldier's spirit, may result in the veteran's inability to depend on others. This lack of dependence may add to a Soldier's feelings of loneliness, perceptions of their community being less benevolent, irresponsible, and partially to blame for his/her wounding.<sup>61</sup> Declaring the existence of the Soldier's spirit and providing spirit-centric rituals for the returning combat veteran can only enhance the rate of recovery from war's wounding experiences.

## Conclusion

From the beginning of this research this author argued the Soldier's personal framework consists of a spiritual aspect in addition to the physical, mental, and professional aspects. The Soldier's spirit is metaphysical and continues to be recognized by the individual Soldier and military historians as they discuss and record the effects of combat. Historically, prominent military leaders spoke freely about the Soldier's spirit in order to define the person of the Soldier while affirming that which is

other than mental and physical. Unequivocal reference to the Soldier's spirit is now less apparent.

Multiple studies conclude that caregivers need to affirm and provide a spirit-centric approach toward recovery. It is this author's hypothesis that the Army's senior leaders must accept the responsibility to openly dialogue about the Soldier's spirit. The Army readily speaks to the Soldier's spirit in the context of chapel community and through its chaplain's voices. Maintaining the present dialogue of the Soldier's spirit within the confines of the chaplaincy provides a religious perspective regarding the Soldier's spirit. This is necessary for the religious faith-based Soldier but remains inadequate for the Soldier who is spiritual but not religious.

The reshaping of the Cadet Leadership Development System at the United States Military Academy to include the domain of the human spirit reveals how spirit is a viable consideration for the development of tomorrow's Army leaders. This reshaping, coupled with the studies conducted at UCLA provides substantial proof that our Soldiers, between the ages of 18-25, are highly interested in and open to spiritual issues. To deny the spiritual reality of today's Soldier is to disregard probably the most personal and intimate aspect of the combat experience.

Accepting and maintaining an open spirit-centric dialogue among the Army's senior leaders, educators, physicians, mental health care providers, and chaplains will only enhance the care, recovery, and renewal of our Nation's greatest asset, the young men and women serving in the Armed Services. Prominent psychiatrists, psychologists, and pastoral counselors agree the military as an institution must deal with the Soldier's spirit, especially, in responding to the wounding of our Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.

To disregard, turn a blind eye toward, and ignore an open dialogue about the Soldier's spirit may be perceived as inconsiderate leadership, if not immoral.

It is vital for the emotional and spiritual recovery of our combat veterans to express through open dialogue a proper recognition of the Soldier's spirit. This spirit-centric dialogue is the basis for recovering from the spiritual wounds experienced through the horrors of war. It is also the basis for providing a necessary purification ritual to our contemporary veterans returning back home. Such a ritual can offer both the community and the Soldier an avenue for recovery from the guilt, shame, injustice, alienation, estrangement, loss, grief, and brokenness encountered in both combat and during the times of separation.

The Army's Chief of Chaplains is committed to the spiritual recovery of our Soldiers, to include our chaplains as they return from combat. The Center for Spiritual Leadership will direct and oversee an initial pilot study with chaplains in FY 2009-2010. This pilot study will focus on developing a spirit-centric dialogue as a means of providing care and recovery for combat veteran chaplains. The next step of the study will be to stimulate a spirit-centric dialogue with chaplain assistants followed by volunteer Soldiers.

As the Army's senior leaders accept the challenges of engaging in a spirit-centric dialogue regarding the Soldier's spirit the expected benefits are multiple. First, the Soldier will be supported in affirming their spiritual identity. Second, leaders and fellow Soldiers will enlarge the understanding of the spirit beyond the confines of religion. Third, Soldiers will maintain the opportunity to deal with the spiritual trauma of combat.

And fourth, our Soldiers will experience a holistic recovery that better equips them with resilience for tomorrow's mission.

## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> Cited in John W. Brinsfield and Peter A. Baktis, "The Human, Spiritual, and Ethical Dimensions of Leadership in Preparation for Combat," in *The Future of the Army Profession*, Second Edition, Lloyd J. Matthews, ed, (Boston: Custom Publishing, 2005), 470.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Religious Support Operations, in Joint Publication 1-05 (2008 Draft), emailed to author by Chaplain (LTC) Matt Woodberry on 5 December 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Brinsfield and Baktis, *The Human*, 471.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Mansfield, *The Faith of the American Soldier* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 9.

<sup>8</sup> Don M. Snider, "Developing Leaders of Character at West Point," in *Forging the Warrior's Character: Moral Precepts from the Cadet's Prayer*, Lloyd J. Matthews, ed, (Sisters, OR: Jerico, 2007), 40.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>10</sup> Patrick J. Sweeney, Sean T. Hannah and Don M. Snider, "The Domain of the Human Spirit," in *Forging the Warrior's Character: Moral Precepts from the Cadet's Prayer*, Lloyd J. Matthews, ed, (Sisters, OR: Jerico, 2007), 55.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>13</sup> Abraham H. Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences* (London: Penguin Books, 1970), 4.

<sup>14</sup> Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed 14 December 2008 at <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=spirit>.

<sup>15</sup> Online search of 'esprit de corps' by author. Accessed 14 December 2008 at <http://www.wisegEEK.com/what-is-esprit-de-corps.htm>.

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<sup>17</sup> Brinsfield and Baktis, *The Human*, 477.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 476.

<sup>19</sup> Edward Tick, *War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation's Veterans from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder* (Wheaton, IL: The Theocophical Publishing House, 2005), 16-17.

<sup>20</sup> Dalene Fuller Rogers, *Pastoral Care for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Healing the Shattered Soul* (New York: The Haworth Pastoral Press, 2002), 31.

<sup>21</sup> Froma Walsh, ed, *Spiritual Resources in Family Therapy* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), x.

<sup>22</sup> Tick, *War and the Soul*, 285.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Ilona Meagher, *Moving A Nation to Care: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and America's Returning Troops* (Brooklyn: Ig Publishing, 2007), 20.

<sup>25</sup> Tick, *War and the Soul*, 6.

<sup>26</sup> The Department of Veterans Affairs Iraq War Clinician Guide, accessed on 20 Sep 2008 at [http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/ncmain/ncdocs/manuals/nc\\_manual\\_iwcguide.html](http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/ncmain/ncdocs/manuals/nc_manual_iwcguide.html).

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<sup>28</sup> Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), xxi.

<sup>29</sup> Tick, *War and the Soul*, 286.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

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<sup>32</sup> Edward Tick, "Sharing War's Burden," *Utne* 149 (Sep/Oct 2008): 9.

<sup>33</sup> Joel Brende and Elmer McDonald, "Post-Traumatic Spiritual Alienation and Recovery in Vietnam Combat Veterans," *Spirituality Today* 41, no. 3 (Winter 1989): 319-340.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Brinsfield and Baktis, *The Human*, 485.

<sup>36</sup> Brende and McDonald, "Spiritual Alienation," 319-340.

<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Shay, *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming* (New York: Scribner, 2002), 152.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Rogers, *Pastoral Care*, 40.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Polly Young-Eisendrath, *The Resilient Spirit: Transforming Suffering into Insight and Renewal* (DaCapo Press, 1996), 86.

<sup>44</sup> Frederic Flach, *Resilience: Discovering a New Strength at Times of Stress* (London: Hatherleigh press, 1997), 47.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>47</sup> Tick, *War and the Soul*, 286.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 333.

<sup>50</sup> Micah 6:8, "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (New International Version, 1987)

<sup>51</sup> Mansfield, *The Faith*, 113.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Gretel C. Kovach, "Combat's Inner Cost," *Newsweek*, November 5, 2007, 10.

<sup>54</sup> McKelvey, "Combat Fatigue," A7-A8.

<sup>55</sup> "Exposure Therapy Helps PTSD Victims Overcome Trauma's Debilitating Effects," APA Online, 2008, accessed on 6 December 2008 at <http://www.psychologymatters.org/keane.html>.

<sup>56</sup> McKelvey, "Combat Fatigue," A8.

<sup>57</sup> Melvin R. Jacob, "A Pastoral Response to the Troubled Vietnam Veteran," in *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders: A Handbook for Clinicians*, Tom Williams, ed, (Cincinnati, Ohio: Disabled American Veterans, 1987), 72.

<sup>58</sup> Shay, *Odysseus*, 244-245.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Rachel Dekel, Zahava Solomon, Ask Elkit and Karni Ginzburg, "World Assumptions and combat-Related Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 144, no. 4, (Aug 2004): 416.

