



# The Importance of Spirituality in Healing Returning Warriors/Veterans

*"Caring for Our Returning Combat Veterans"*

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# A Prayer for Veterans & Families

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- Objectives:
  - Provide an understanding of returning Service members spiritual despair, and recognition of spiritual questions.
  - Gain knowledge of key issues that can affect the spiritual health of a returning warrior/Veteran and their family.
  - Examine the spiritual reactions to trauma.



# Defining Abbreviations

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- **OEF/OIF** = Operation Enduring Freedom/ Operation Iraqi Freedom (Conflicts in Afghanistan & Iraq)
- **WIA**= Wounded In Action
- **IED**=Improvised Explosive Device
- **WTU**=Warrior Transition Unit
- **TBI**=Traumatic Brain Injury
- **PTSD**=Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
- **GWOT**=Global War on Terror



# Basic Overview

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- Military produces highly trained men and women.
- These individuals had HUGE responsibilities while deployed and return to no jobs or relatively trivial responsibilities in comparison.
- Service members are our family members, neighbors, **religious congregation members**, friends, co-workers, patients. Thousands upon thousands have served in the military.
- **All** who have served come home changed. For a few individuals these changes can be debilitating and life- altering



# Challenges in Returning Home

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- A returning soldier is not the person he or she was before leaving home for war.
- The return home is disorienting and can represent an absence of social community.
- This feeling is upsetting for friends and family who awaited the soldier's return.
- The enormity of the experience shatters the individual's basic sense of safety.
- Even the most well-adjusted will re-experience a total lack of safety when triggered.

# Spiritual Reactions to Trauma

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1. Confusion about God
2. Altered sense of meaning in/of life
3. Grief and loss issues
4. Questions of Theodicy



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5. Feelings of ineffectiveness, shame, despair, hopelessness

6. Feeling permanently damaged

7. Loss of previously sustained beliefs

8. Feelings of guilt

9. Confusion about core ethical beliefs.





# What is Spirituality?

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**Spirituality can be defined as the essence of our humanity.**

**Frankl**





# Spirituality

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**Spirituality is a capacity and tendency that is innate and unique to all persons.**

**Spiritual tends to move individuals toward knowledge, love, meaning, peace, hope, transcendence, connectedness, compassion, wellness, and wholeness.**

**Spirituality includes one 's capacity for creativity, growth, and the development of a value system.**

**Spirituality encompasses a variety of phenomena including experiences, beliefs, and practices. While spirituality is usually expressed through culture, it both precedes and transcends culture.**

*Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling*



**Spirit** is the animating life force. Spirituality is the drawing out and infusion of that spirit in one 's life.

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# Spirituality and Meaning

**Spirituality leads one to search for and discover meaning in life, a meaning that goes beyond a merely material experience. *May***





# Spirituality and Meaning

He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.

Nietzsche





# Spirituality and Meaning

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**The deeply personal search for meaning can bring a person to inner peace even in the presence of adverse circumstances.**





# Spirituality and Religion

**Spirituality is not the same thing as religion. While religion may be one way in which persons express or experience their spirituality, it is not the same as spirituality itself.**

**Religion can be thought of as the organization of belief which is common to a culture or subculture, "the codified, institutionalized, and ritualized expressions of peoples' communal connections to the Ultimate**



*Kelly*

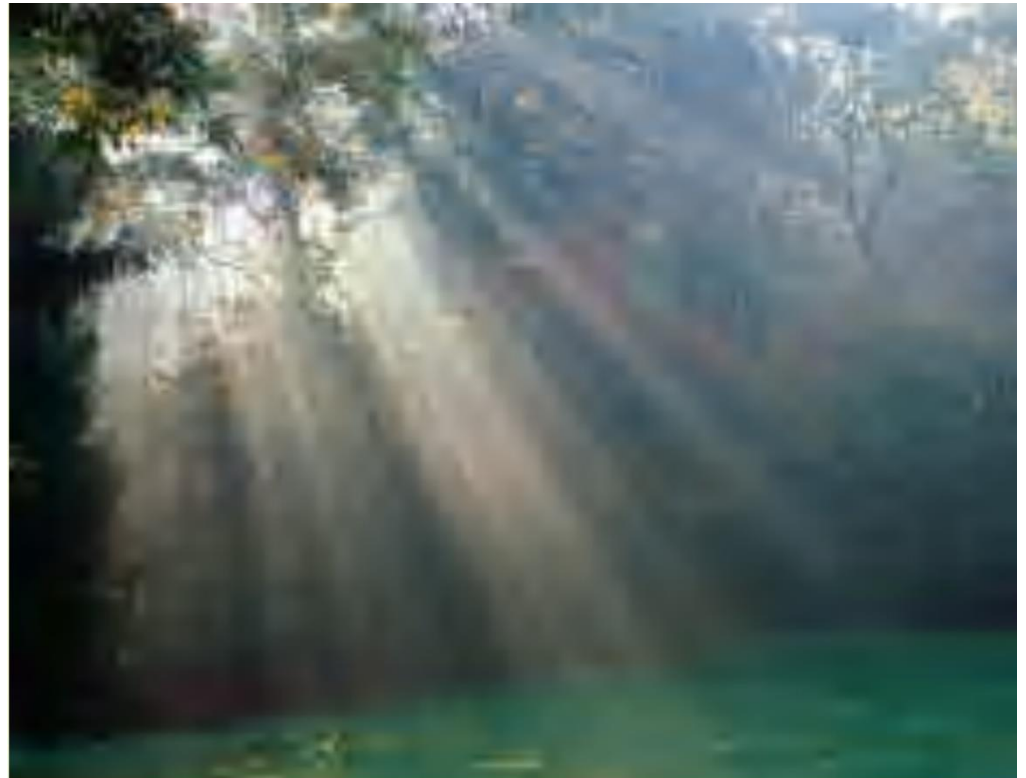


# Spirituality and Religion

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**Spirituality lights  
the way**

**Religion interprets  
the steps**





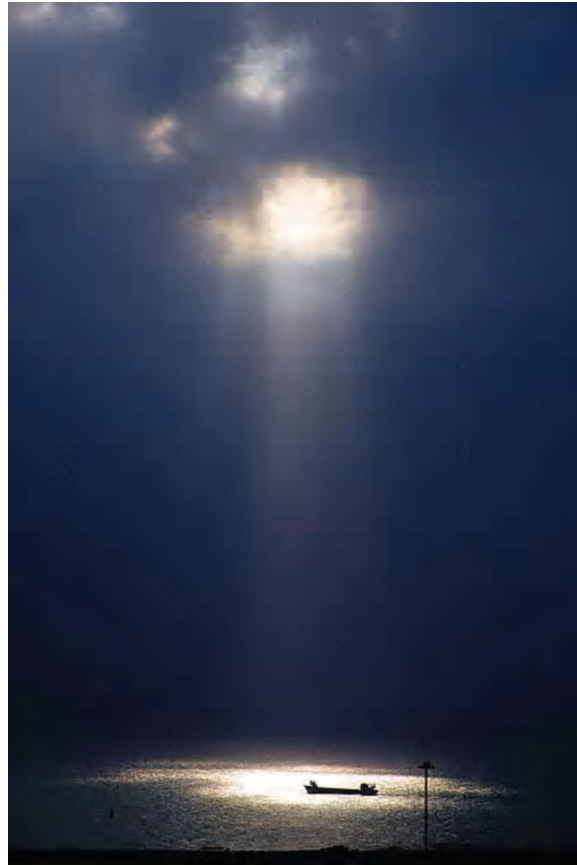


# Spirituality and Religion

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**Religion  
illuminates**

**Spirituality  
warms**





# Spirituality and Religion

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**Spirituality  
is the dance**

**Religion is  
the steps**





# Spirituality and Religion

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**Religion  
sets the  
table**

**Spirituality  
enjoys the  
feast**





# Spirituality and Suffering

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- **It is our responsibility to listen to people as they struggle with their life experiences.**
- **We need to be willing to listen to their anxieties, their fears, their unresolved conflicts, their hopes and their despair.**
- **If people are stuck in despair, they will suffer deeply.**
- **It is through spirituality that people become unstuck from despair.**
- **Viktor Frankl wrote that man is not destroyed by suffering; he is destroyed by suffering without meaning.**
- **Spirituality helps give meaning to people ' s suffering. It helps people find hope in the midst of despair.**
- **We as caregivers need to engage with our patients on the spiritual level.**

*Christina M. Puchalski*



# Spirituality and Suffering

**Suffering and trouble belong to life as much as fate and death.**

**None of these can be subtracted from life without destroying its meaning. . . . .**





# Spirituality and Suffering

**To subtract trouble, death, fate, and suffering from life would mean stripping life of its form and shape. . . .**



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# “Red Flag” Spiritual Issues

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## Spiritual struggle

- Punitive spiritual appraisals (God punishing), Anger at God
- Associations with worse PTSD/Depression(Witvilet, 2003)

## Loss of Faith


- Predictor of increased use of mental health services (Fontana & Rosenheck, 2004)

## Guilt/Shame & Un-forgiveness

- Guilt mediated by negative appraisals at time of trauma (Kubany, 2003)
- Un-forgiveness associate with worse PTSD/ Depression (Witvilet, 2003)

## Grief & Loss (Wortman & Park 2008)

- Complicated Grief-Trauma increases risk



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# Spirituality: Inspiring Hope in Healing



# We All Need Help Sometime in Life!

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# Veteran's Use of Clergy

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- Veterans feel more comfortable approaching their pastor than they do a mental health professional.
- Research shows that 4 of 10 individuals with mental health challenges seek counseling from clergy.
- Individuals seek council from ministers more than all other mental health providers combined.
- Often seeing a member of the clergy is less threatening and has less stigma attached. Is viewed as engaging a known community resource.
- Negative reasons. . . Magical thinking, avoiding truth of diagnosis, etc.



# Pastoral Care Approaches

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- Safe Haven
- Listening
- Grounding
- Accepting

# Coordination and Collaboration with Community Clergy

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- Chaplain Service Veteran's Community Outreach Initiative (VCOI)
  - Approximately 800,000 veterans have left military since January 2002 and are now readjusting to civilian life.
  - Community Clergy will be the first contact for many veterans and their spouses or family members when the veteran experiences distress related to combat experiences.
  - Local Chaplain Services sponsor **clergy educational day events** all around the country to help clergy to understand the needs of returning warriors and how to make referral to the VA when needed. (Education Packets)



***Mental Injury***

# Moral Injury Occurs...

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When actions in  
battle contradict  
moral beliefs



When individuals  
violate core moral  
beliefs



When your brain  
tells you to do what  
your heart tells you  
is wrong



When one feels  
betrayed

because others  
are violating  
core values

Death of  
friends and of  
innocents

Interrogating  
"correctly" by  
building trust  
then  
manipulating



## *Moral Codes in Conflict*

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What we were taught . . .

***"Thou shalt not kill."***

What we experienced in combat . . .

***"I killed a human being."***





## *Moral Codes in Conflict*

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What we were taught . . .

***"Love one another."***

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What we experienced in combat . . .

***"I no longer feel love."***



# *Moral Codes in Conflict*

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What we were taught . . .

***"God is Love."***

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What we experienced in combat .

. .

***"I have faced evil and  
been lessened by it."***



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Common  
Symptoms of  
Moral Injury

Guilt

Sha  
me

Grief



# Guilt & Shame

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***How we feel about ourselves affects:***



# NATIONAL CHAPLAIN CENTER HAMPTON, VIRGINIA

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# Resources

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1. [http://www.helpguide.org/mental/emotional\\_psychological\\_trauma.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/emotional_psychological_trauma.htm)
2. <http://www.hooah4health.com/mind/combatstress/default.htm>
3. [www.ncptsd.va.gov](http://www.ncptsd.va.gov)