

# **A Twelve Step Recovery Program for survivors of war with post traumatic spiritual alienation**

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I have great respect for the military personnel in our Armed Services. While I was never a member of the military myself, I've come as close to being in active duty as a civilian can. I once worked as a psychiatrist for the Veterans Administration for 18 years and treated Vietnam veterans with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Several years after leaving the VA I spent two years providing the same professional service for personnel and their families in a military base at Fort Benning, Georgia. As a result, I learned a great deal about PTSD so that it was not difficult to predict that GI's returning from Afghanistan and Iraq would suffer from post-traumatic symptoms. And the research has found that among those sent to Afghanistan and Iraq, the incidence of psychiatric disorders (Major Depression, Generalized Anxiety, and PTSD) has been found to be 15.6 to 17.1 % after duty in Iraq and 11.2% after duty in Afghanistan .

One thing I learned during my years in the VA was that combatants rarely show their emotions because it's a sign of 'weakness'. Given a choice, warriors prefer the Adrenalin-charged 'high' that enables them to suppress emotion and become clear-minded, hyperalert, and instinctively ready to react to any kind of threat. But what about later, after the war is over? It takes a long time before they no longer 'over-react' to sudden noises or unexpected movements. They may never sleep well again, tempers easily flare and emotional intimacy is difficult.

## **DOES WAR CHANGE THE WARRIOR?**

*"War changes men's natures. The barbarities of war are seldom committed by abnormal men. The tragedy of war is that these horrors are committed by normal men in situations in which the ebb and flow of everyday life have departed and been replaced by a constant round of fear and anger and blood and death. Soldiers at war are not to be judged by civilian rules. The damage to soldiers who have killed and seen others killed may take several forms. Some will choose to become mercenaries after they've been discharged from active duty because they have become accustomed to the edgy thrill of war and grow numb to the qualities and skills that are needed to succeed in family and community life. Others may become emotionally and physically disabled. In both cases, there is often a protracted sense of personal guilt and alienation from God that is generally not talked about. "*

Historically, warrior nations have known that soldiers, whose minds, bodies, and spirits are forged by the intensity of combat, cannot be expected to suddenly return to 'normality'. Primitive societies have long recognized that war changes those who fight in it. For that reason they've always provided purification rituals for combatants who return from war in the form of washing or other type of ceremonial cleansing to enable warriors to rid themselves of guilt feelings and emotional distress. The United States of America has a moral obligation to provide similar means whereby young soldiers, who kill during war, are assured that their actions were right and necessary.

There have been many anti-war protesters who believe that the war in Iraq parallels the one that was fought in Vietnam. Those who are too young to remember must know that there are many differences. For example, American GI's in Vietnam fought battles where the only measurement of victory was the number of people killed (body counts). American soldiers felt they had failed when the U.S. government gave up the fight and abandoned millions of vulnerable South Vietnamese to retribution at the hands of the Communists in 1975.

## **DOES WAR DEADEN MEN'S SOULS?**

When I finally left the VA in 1987, I felt like a Vietnam veteran, 'burned out' from spending 10 years listening to disturbing stories and angry accusations about being betrayed by the federal government. I had begun to identify with Vietnam veterans who found it easier to express rage towards God, country, military leaders, friends, society, and the V.A. system than express guilt and grief about their losses - of jobs, marriages, close friends, and hopes of ever being called American heroes. But the years of listening and

talking to those veterans brought considerable empathy for these veterans because they were depressed, sleep disturbed, physically ill, suicidal, addicted, and sometimes anti-social (Nearly a half-million Vietnam veterans had been arrested one or more times, placed on probation, convicted of assaults and homicides, served sentences, or placed on parole). The most difficult part of my work was to find how difficult it was for those veterans who said, "I lost my soul in Vietnam" and did not respond well to psychiatric treatment. They were unable to resolve guilt-ridden memories of surviving when their friends died, civilians who were killed, a war that was lost, jobs that failed, and damaged marriages.

I investigated, and found a long list of reasons for their feelings of guilt and shameful memories: 1) accidentally killing other Americans 2) seeing close friends killed 3) seeing Americans killed 4) placing Americans in body bags 5) seeing atrocities committed 6) holding wounded comrades who died 6) taking human life 7) losing prior moral values and religious faith 8) committing atrocities 9) becoming emotionally and morally hardened 10) taking God-like powers of life and death into their own hands 11) enjoying the 'adrenalin-rush' of killing 12) being unable to control violent thoughts and self-destructive urges 13) making spoken or unspoken pacts with the devil to bolster feelings of omnipotence 14) turning themselves against God, cursing God, and becoming spiritually hardened 15) being part of a morally bankrupt system that measured success by body counts.

I became convinced that the spiritual dimension of 'Nam vets' protracted emotional and behavioral problems had been completely overlooked although I was not the first person to believe this. Psychiatrists Robert Lifton and Chaim Shatan and their colleagues, who established 'rap groups' for Vietnam Veterans against the War during the early 1960's, had become aware that the veterans who spoke out during the early 1970's could not escape the guilt they felt while fighting in a war they could not justify.

Former army chaplain, William Mahedy, has written about the deadening of the soul caused by many factors, particularly the 'body count' system. *"The war of attrition strategy required that everyone play the numbers game. Body counts became a necessity. The troops in the field knew that enemy body counts were inflated, and they also suspected that American casualty reports were not accurate. They also knew from terrible experience that some aggressive commanders were willing to get their career tickets punched by leading troops into the right kind of combat action, even if this entailed a needless expenditure of their own men's lives. Many of the troops believed body counts, the military careers of their leaders, and big bucks for big corporations back home was what the war was about."*

As a result, *"soldiers who felt victimized by the enemy, by the system, and by God were "victims of an unprecedented and totally unexpected deadening of the soul. The spirit went numb. The reservoir of moral resources went dry. The 'juice and joy' feeling that Americans believed to be the essence of religion and spirituality was no longer possible .... A terrible bleakness had overwhelmed the soul. Moreover, combat sowed seeds of doubt about the foundations of faith. Not only the American religious experience but also authentic Biblical faith was called into serious question.*

*Where indeed was God in Vietnam? Why did God do nothing about the slaughter? Is religious faith still possible? Can life ever have meaning again?"*

## **IS IT POSSIBLE TO RELIEVE GUILT & DEADENING OF THE SOUL?**

When I listened to combat veterans talk about spiritual alienation, many of them told me that they had sought out ministers, priests, or rabbis shortly after they returned from Vietnam but didn't find resolution and often felt abandoned by the Church and by God. Furthermore, it became clear that traditional psychiatric interventions provided only partial help and could not touch the guilt that so deeply penetrated their souls. Because of these personal encounters with Vietnam veterans I became interested in learning whether or not there were any others who had resolved their spiritual alienation and 'soul death' through Christian teachings. A very dramatic self-report came from John Steer, a Marine combat veteran in Vietnam, who wrote an autobiography in 1982 wherein he described his traumatic childhood and combat experiences. After his discharge from military service he developed Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and alcoholism for which he sought psychiatric help with little or no benefit. Seven years later, he had a Christian conversion experience which brought about a remarkable change in his life. His nearly broken marriage was restored and his recurring traumatic dreams, rage attacks, and alcoholism ceased to be problems. Furthermore, his sense of pervasive meaninglessness was replaced by a desire to help others. Since then he has maintained a normal family

life and developed a self-supporting Christian ministry for helping people in need, particularly other combat veterans.

A combat veteran patient whom I had treated in a VA Stress Recovery Program suffered from the typical symptoms of combat-related PTSD but also believed that evil spirits possessed his body. He did not benefit from traditional treatment and was asked to leave the treatment program after assaulting another patient. Nine months later he came to my office and told me about the Christian conversion experience he had a month previously that changed his life: *"I couldn't go to sleep that night because I felt that if I went to sleep, the Devil would get hold of me and I'd wake up in hell. So I called out to my wife, who was a Christian, and asked her to pray for me. She did, and I asked Jesus to take over my life. I began to get a sense of peace and self-control that I never had before."*

Other Vietnam veterans' lives have been transformed after encountering Jesus Christ in their lives. One of these men, Bill Landreth, founded a Christian outreach organization for Vietnam veterans called Point Man Ministries. After Landreth's death, Vietnam veteran, Chuck Dean, took over leadership of the Washington state based organization which eventually became international in its scope. Dean has continued to be actively involved in leading combat veterans toward spiritual renewal and has written an inspiring and popular book about how a veteran can find resolution of PTSD through a belief in Jesus Christ. He has also co-authored another book for families of Iraqi veterans.

Realizing the importance of utilizing the spiritual dimension in recovery, I developed a recovery program that utilized 12 themes and spiritual steps, in collaboration with a VA hospital chaplain trained in Christian counseling. As with other 12 step recovery programs, this 12-step trauma recovery program for combat veterans with PTSD encouraged participants to focus either outwardly or inwardly on spirituality and to believe and to 'surrender' themselves and their problems to their higher power. The steps were patterned in a small way after the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) Twelve Step Program. Since it was founded in 1935, AA and similar 12 step programs have helped many thousands, perhaps millions, of persons addicted to drugs, food, sex, gambling, and other self-destructive activities. The principles of these programs include anonymity of participants, recovery is life-long, education helps participants learn to understand and cope, participants should help others with similar problems, and recovery begins when participants acknowledge their powerlessness and need to depend on a Higher Power.

## HIGHER POWER

The admonition 'surrender to a higher power' when used in 12 step programs is not synonymous with 'surrender to the enemy', which is unacceptable for combat veterans. Rather, surrender, in this context, means to 'let go' of attempts to control addictions and to cede control to one's higher power, or God, as individually understood. This is an effective first step to alter undesirable behavior - addictions, bad habits, and self-destructive ways of living and receive help to replace these with new and better ways of living. The principle of surrender did not originate with the founders of 12 step programs. Surrender to the will of God is a major teaching within the three monotheistic religions - Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. The concept of surrender is widely accepted as a key ingredient of religious faith. For example, Muhammad, who founded Islam in 610 A.D., preached a message of submission and surrender to the will of God (Allah). In fact the meaning of the word Islam is 'surrender' or submission.'

Abraham, considered to be the father of both Islam and Judaism, demonstrated his willingness to surrender to God who requested that Abraham sacrifice his firstborn son. Only after Abraham demonstrated his obedience did God honor Abraham's act of surrender and provide a substitute lamb for a burnt offering. Submission to God's will, according to the Torah, does not include sacrificing an individual for the sake of society as a suicide bombing would entail. Rather, the individual is considered to be of infinite value and would not be sacrificed to an enemy that demanded the community surrender one of their own. In such a situation the community would choose death rather than surrender one of their own.

Christians believe that individuals are loved by God and everyone can be redeemed to eternal life by believing in Jesus Christ, who submitted himself to the painful death of crucifixion according to the will of God, His father. Individuals can seek a personal relationship with Jesus, who willingly shares their pain and suffering, receive His power to break the bonds of illness and addictions, receive a purpose for living on this earth, and be transformed to eternal life. As the Bible proclaims: **"I am the resurrection and the life.**

**He who believes in me, though he die, yet he shall live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” (John 11:25)**

It is not my intention to define Higher Power, or God, in a way that excludes nonbelievers or members of differing faiths. Instead, I encourage participants to select one of a variety of options:

- \* Choosing to not believe in a personal God but preferring to define Higher Power either as an internal spiritual strength or as the power of the therapist or group which supports, protects, and provides guidance.
- \* Believing in God as defined in a more formal or mysterious fashion, according to the language of specific religious faiths or denominations.
- \* Identifying God in a specific gender - either He or She, or as the object of worship of a specific ethnic group or race.
- \* Believing that one can have a relationship with God in a personal way.
- \* Believing in Jesus Christ as Savior and provider of power to transform personal difficulties into opportunities for growth.

Twelve step group meetings emphasize the following factors:

- 1) Education
- 2) Sharing of experiences
- 3) Sharing of coping mechanisms
- 4) Sharing of hopes and beliefs
- 5) Structured group prayer and meditation.

We encourage participants to think of and communicate with God in a personal way, using language which is most comfortable and meaningful. Group members are not required, but are encouraged to share their beliefs with other members at appropriate times, raise questions or objections, but not to criticize, demean, or pressure others about their specific beliefs or lack of the same.

The following 12 theme and spiritual step program provides the structure for group meetings and meditation.

## **TWELVE THEMES AND SPIRITUAL STEPS FOR VETERANS OF WAR**

### **ONE: SEEKING POSITIVE POWER**

Combat veterans may feel powerless to cope with new forces which they have not learned to control - their post-traumatic symptoms.

**Self Appraisal:** Even though we had the power to survive against the worst combat conditions, we must admit we have become powerless to win the battle against a new enemy-our memories, flashbacks, and combat instincts. Some of us have become powerless over the continuing wish to gain revenge over those sudden impulses to hurt those who cross us or unsuspectingly annoy us. We even hurt those who try to love us, making it impossible to love and care for our friends and family. So we isolate ourselves and cause others to avoid, dislike, or even hate us. Our attempts to live meaningful lives and fight this psychological and emotional hell which imprisons us seems to be in vain. We now find ourselves powerless to change it.

**Spiritual Step One:** We acknowledge that we have become essentially powerless to live meaningful lives. Hence we hope to discover the presence of a 'Good Higher Power' who can help.

### **TWO: SEEKING MEANING IN SURVIVAL**

Recovery means something more than just barely surviving one crisis after another; it means, among other things, gaining an understanding of painful post-traumatic symptoms and seeking a meaning for having survived.

**Self Appraisal:** We are uncertain why we have survived. We would like to be free from nagging thoughts telling us we should never have left the battlefield alive-the place where our comrades gave their lives in war. We want to believe our lives will serve a better purpose if we are alive rather than dead. Thus, even though we often doubt that living is better than dying, we seek to find meaning in life rather than death, and hope to find life a privilege rather than a burden.

**Spiritual Step Two:** We recognize that our lives have had little or no meaning; hence we seek a purpose in having survived and open our minds to a 'Good Higher Power' to show us that purpose.

### **THREE: SEEKING TRUST**

Combat veterans have often lost their capacity to trust anyone except themselves. They have also lost the capacity to trust their own feelings and behaviors. To break the cycle of alienation and distrust meant to build trust -- with friends, therapists, and God. One way to begin to establish a relationship with God is to call Him Father, as Jesus did. 'Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy Name.' After focusing on God in the Lord's Prayer, we ask that His kingdom should come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Finally we pray for daily bread and deliverance from evil.

**Self Appraisal:** It has been difficult for us to trust but we must admit that if we are to find relief, we need to seek a source of help from persons whom we can learn to trust. Many of us also would like to trust God, as individually understood, and ask Him to show us the way out of our mental prisons, renew our sensitivities to human emotions, and discover spiritual qualities we fear we have lost.

**Spiritual Step Three:** We seek the capacity to trust, not only friends and professionals who wish to help us, but God, as individually understood, who seeks our well-being.

### **FOUR: SELF-INVENTORY**

Recovery for the combat veteran is an ongoing process, requiring repeated self-examination, being open to feedback of both positive and negative qualities, and being willing to change. It is important for combat veterans to do a moral inventory about the violence that may still be lurking in their souls. This may mean acknowledging the 'warrior' inside who still rages. It may mean a willingness to seek therapy, if necessary, and 'let go' of those qualities we don't like in ourselves. It may mean being willing to 'hand over' painful memories to God.

**Self Appraisal:** After taking the step of seeking to trust, we can begin to allow ourselves to be aware of things we would like to change in ourselves. This also means a willingness to reveal short-comings and disturbing memories to someone we trust, although that may not be easy. We may also be unaware of qualities within ourselves that only others can point out - both positive and negative. Thus, we ask a person we trust, and God, as we understand Him, to help us evaluate the presence of both desirable and undesirable qualities within us.

**Spiritual Step Four:** We will make a searching self-inventory of both negative and positive traits, acknowledge those traits to someone we trust and God as individually understood, accept those which are positive, and ask for help to change those which are negative.

### **FIVE: ANGER**

It has not been easy for combat veterans to let go of deep-rooted anger that dates back to basic training, as one soldier described: "We were intentionally pushed to our limits to boil the killer instinct to the surface of our personalities ... and conditioned into frenzied rage in order for us to ... [be able to kill] other human beings. Soon we were molded to do that... We worked ourselves into explosive machines that wouldn't stop until all was dead. It took rage to carry us through all of it. Now we react in a similar way when we get 'ticked off, and it comes across as overkill when we attempt to stamp out the disturbance or problem".

**Self Appraisal:** We may believe that our angry feelings, intensified by combat into violence, is beyond our capacity to control. We know that it is very important to understand the reason for our continuing rage. We may discover that our anger, which began as a defense against potential attack, has become a defense against experiencing other emotions. We should recognize that anger is not just negative but it can have a positive purpose. Thus, to recover means learning to express anger in ways that aren't destructive. But first we must honestly acknowledge its presence because bottled-up anger has self-destructive consequences. Then we must learn to express our angry feelings. It can be very helpful to first try this out by expressing anger openly toward God. And then to express it with someone whom we trust. Once expressed, it is very likely that other feelings will also emerge, particularly tears. Thus if we can learn to express our angry feelings to a person we trust and God, this will help us open the door to other painful memories and emotions.

**Spiritual Step Five:** We acknowledge our rage toward God and those we believe abandoned or betrayed us and hope to understand the other sources of our continuing anger. We seek, with the help of those we trust and a 'Good Higher Power,' to control destructive rage and channel anger constructively.

## SIX: FEAR

Combat veterans faced overwhelming terror so frequently that they had to learn to suppress their feelings in order to maintain control. Nonetheless, their exposure to extreme stress can alter brain chemistry for decades and even kill brain cells that are crucial for memory. They suffer almost unbearable hypersensitivity to internal and external stimuli so that a sudden unexpected sound or movement can trigger a physiological and emotional tripwire and cause a continuous state of readiness that has long-term physiological consequences including panic attacks, sleep disorders, aggressive outbursts, hypertension, heart problems, migraines and cardiovascular symptoms .

**Self Appraisal:** We have been trained to believe that uncontrolled fear might get us killed. We've managed to survive by not feeling fear and we're reluctant to let down the walls we've erected to suppress fear. Letting down walls means opening the doors to the past and reliving terrifying memories that we have not remembered for years. But if we want to recover we'll need to accept the fact that fear is normal and relief may be found by facing it. Recovery means gaining an understanding of the sources of fear, the relationship of various symptoms to fear, accepting fear as a normal emotion, and finding ways to control it when it's self-destructive.

**Spiritual Step Six:** We seek to relinquish the 'wall' around our feelings and our hidden fears. We seek help from God and those we trust to face their fears and withstand the terrifying moments we might feel during the day or during the night.

## SEVEN: GUILT

Combat veterans suffer from the destructive consequences of guilt, including horrifying and guilt-ridden thoughts, dreams, and images. However, guilt is also a normal and important emotion -- something that soldiers learned to suppress as they turned off their consciences to fight a war. Recovery means understanding how destructive guilt causes a variety of self-destructive symptoms. It also means that we should learn to accept healthy guilt feelings as normal, as long as it can lead to finding a source of forgiveness from God, others, and one's self.

**Self Appraisal:** We may have committed, participated in, or knew about acts committed by others which were unacceptable and which have caused suffering and grief. We may feel guilt and self-condemnation and may feel that we are beyond forgiveness. On the other hand, we may have asked forgiveness from God but feel unsure if He has answered us. There is also the possibility that we have condemned ourselves, sentenced ourselves to a severe punishment, and don't know how to secure a pardon. If we want to get relief from persistent feelings of guilt we should consider the following:

- 1) Express our feelings to someone we trust
- 2) Express our feelings to God
- 3) Ask forgiveness from God
- 4) Ask forgiveness from the person we've wronged, if possible.

In summary, seeking relief from guilt includes acknowledging it to God and to another person(s) we trust, asking forgiveness from God and the person we've wronged, and then forgiving ourselves.

**Spiritual Step Seven:** We seek relief from our guilty secrets and persistent guilty feelings by revealing them to someone we trust and to God from whom we seek and accept forgiveness; and we ask God's help to forgive ourselves.

## **EIGHT: GRIEF**

Combat veterans have lost friends and significant parts of their own lives. Being unable to complete their 'grief work', they tend to put a 'lid' over their feelings but that only causes them to lose the capacity for tenderness and intimacy with others. They may experience 'impacted grief' as emotional numbing, persistent anguish, or anger.

**Self Appraisal:** The ravages of war can cause considerable grief and completing the 'work' of grieving can be a complicated process. We may still be blocked from completing the grieving process and feel trapped by impacted grief. We may not be able to cry without the fear of drowning in an ocean of tears, or we may be burdened down with guilt. Unresolved grief is accompanied by other feelings such as anger and guilt about the loss of innocence, surviving while others were killed, remorse for not being able to save those who died, and yearnings to join those whose bodies have already been buried. If we are to complete the grieving process we need to find ways to remove those blocks, say good-bye to loved ones, seek healing from God, and find new and meaningful relationships again.

**Spiritual Step Eight:** We will face our painful memories, ask God for the strength to grieve the deaths of friends and loved ones and the deaths of parts of ourselves - joy and innocence. We seek the comfort of God and those we trust and ask Him to bless our tears - that they may heal our sorrows.

## **NINE: DEATH VS. LIFE**

Combat veterans often remain depressed, frequently think more of death than life, and often believe they would be better off to have died with the friends they left behind than to attempt to live lives they may consider to be failures. Their attempts to cope with the after-effects of war may be directly suicidal or chronically self-destructive. For example, they may be abusing their bodies or abusing alcohol or drugs, or doing other things that cause serious consequences to themselves and others. Combat veterans have often found that alcohol or drugs will temporarily reduce stress, improve socializing, suppress haunting memories, and induce sleep. Unfortunately, the negative consequences are much worse than the temporary, seemingly good ones.

**Self Appraisal:** There are self-destructive forces residing within us which we have not been able to control. For that reason we may continue to be depressed, self-destructive, have addictive behaviors, or even be suicidal. We would like to expose and purge those negative forces within us which cause serious consequences and prevent us from making a complete commitment to life. We want to understand the consequences of our self-destructiveness and believe that those who love and care for us want us to stay alive and be healthy. We would like to 'let-go-of' all suicide plans we might be harboring in the backs of our minds and embrace life fully.

**Spiritual Step Nine:** We reveal to ourselves, to God, and those whom we trust, all remaining bad habits, addictions, self-destructive behaviors, and suicidal thoughts and replace these with a commitment to life.

## **TEN: REVENGE VS. FORGIVENESS**

Hate empowered warriors to kill without remorse, survive under the worst of combat conditions, and provide a meaning for existence. Warriors may continue to believe they are weak and vulnerable if they stop hating and this may become the source of a post-war identity and purpose. Hatred, when it extends beyond combat, can also become revenge-seeking behavior. Combatants may make frequent trips to the source of energy that fuels their bitterness by inciting others so that they can justify rage and reventfulness. The truth is, however, that warriors who cannot 'let go' of hatred after the war is over will become victims of it.

**Self Appraisal:** We recognize that destructive forces, bitterness, and revengeful thoughts can linger within our minds and memories. We may find it very hard to let go of wishes for revenge toward the enemies who hurt us and injured or killed our friends. It may be particularly difficult to let go of hatred if it makes us feel more alive. But lingering bitterness has serious consequences - health problems, depression, and explosive anger. Perhaps we have not been aware of the hatred that lurks within us. If so, we should make a list of those who have wronged us. As we do this, the list will get longer and we will be able to see on paper the names of those whom we have hated. The next step is to be willing to seek God's strength to give up our destructive wishes because this is the only way to become free from the enslaving power of bitterness. We may be afraid to do that for fear that letting go of hatred means that justice will never be served. The truth is, however, that justice will only truly be carried out if we turn our expectations for justice as well as our unforgiving natures over to God. In this way true justice will be accomplished and forgiveness can become a possibility.

**Spiritual Step Ten:** We acknowledge to ourselves, to another person, and to God all those whom we continue to hate and seek God's justice to be accomplished. We also seek to relinquish our revengeful wishes and be a channel for forgiveness - flowing from a forgiving God to those we have hated.

## ELEVEN: FINDING A PURPOSE

We may have read about persons who have clearly found a purpose for living. The following two Biblical characters provide examples of this. First, Job, whose ten children were murdered, whose property was destroyed, and who lost his health, was overwhelmed with grief. He had lost nearly everything that was important to him including his sense of purpose. He eventually discovered his true purpose when he put himself completely in the hands of his God. Second, Jesus, who was the object of hatred and violence, placed everything into the hands of God, His Father, as he was about to be crucified: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit". To be able to make this most difficult of all transitions -- from despair to trust in God -- is our model. It was through Jesus' death and His resurrection from the dead three days later, that His purpose on this earth was fulfilled. The lesson He taught us is that discovering our purpose begins with making a full surrender to God, being willing to suffer whatever pain might be placed before us, and looking ahead to what will follow - the resurrection.

**Self Appraisal:** We recognize that we have failed in our attempt to find meaningful and purposeful lives. But, although we have been prisoners of rage, guilty memories, impacted grief, and destructive forces, there is a path to find freedom from old burdens. But we must ask God for the roadmap. Are we willing to ask His help for knowledge, direction, and the power to live? Are we willing to ask for His help to maintain freedom from old burdens? Are we willing to ask for His direction to face confusing problems? Are we willing to ask Him to teach us to pray and turn our wills over to Him each day?

**Spiritual Step Eleven:** We seek to discover who we are and why we are here, not only from those who wish to help us, but from God, so that we may find a personal relationship with Him and seek His direction for our lives.

## TWELVE: LOVE AND RELATIONSHIPS

Mahedy has described love as the "penultimate step in the journey out of night. It is not enough to walk away from monstrous evil. Its power is too strong. It pursues us into the corners of our soul. Love is a positive virtue demanding its own kind of action in the face of pervasive hatred and its multiple offspring. The raw material for action of this kind is abundant among [combat] vets. Men who previously could not



admit love into lives have become loving husbands and fathers. Women who went to the limits of their capacities for healing as nurses continue on as healers in the society at large.

**Self Appraisal:** We must confess that we have been unable to freely give our love, to express affection to those who love us, or to reach out in love to those who need it. Now that we have completed the first eleven steps and had a spiritual awakening as a result, our final step is to learn to give and receive love. Thus, we seek God's strength to love others and to help those who suffer as we have and we seek to carry this message and to help all those who suffered as we have suffered.

**Spiritual Step Twelve:** We ask for God's help to love those whose love we have taken for granted, to help those who have suffered as we have suffered, and for His power to love those we have not been able to love.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Severe and intractable symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder in combat veterans are related to entrenched guilt and shame. These symptoms include changes in self-identity, destructive and self-destructive behaviors, and a deadening of the soul. Surveys of hospitalized combat veterans reveal many sources of guilt, including survival guilt, guilt from taking human life, guilt about losing the war, shame about losing prior moral values and enjoying destructive powers, guilt about being instruments of evil and being part of a morally corrupt system, and guilt about causing pain and suffering in their families after returning home.

For warriors who have experienced changes in self-identity, destructive and self-destructive behaviors, and a deadening of the soul, recovery is unlikely or even impossible without spiritual change. Many are reluctant to become involved in any program that mentions God or incorporates Christian concepts. But I have found that combatants are much more likely to sustain their recovery when involved in a spiritual based recovery program that encourages a belief in God as exemplified by Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection. This 12 step program has principles similar to those found in other 12 step programs but includes many other concepts uniquely applicable to survivors of war. Therefore, we encourage participants to pursue this 12 step program and to seek additional spiritual counseling if desired.

## APPENDIX

### MEDITATION ON THE TWELVE SPIRITUAL STEPS WITH ACCOMPANYING SCRIPTURE

Chaplains and pastoral counselors have often used Judeo-Christian principles including readings from Scripture to help interested Veterans resolve guilt and spiritual alienation. The following scriptures are organized according to the twelve themes and spiritual steps which are used in the recovery program:

#### ONE: SEEKING POSITIVE POWER

**I acknowledge to You, God, that I am powerless to gain control over my post-traumatic symptoms and I seek Your help, God, as a source of positive power.**

"My eyes are ever looking to the Lord for help for He alone can rescue me. Come Lord and show me your mercy for I am helpless, overwhelmed, in deep distress - Save Me!" (Psalm 25: 15) "He gives power to the weak and to those who have no might, He increases strength ... But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:29-31 ).

#### TWO: SEEKING MEANING

**I seek to find meaning in my traumatic experience and survival and open my mind to You, God, so that I can find meaning.**

"Show me the path where I should go, Oh Lord. Point out the right road for me to walk. Lead me. Teach me. For you are the God who gives me salvation. I have no hope except in you" (Psalm 25:4); "Lord, I lift my hands to heaven and implore your help. Oh, listen to my cry" (Psalm 28:2); "Jesus said unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes unto the father but by me" (John 14:6); "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved" (John 10:9).

### **THREE: SEEKING TO TRUST**

**I seek Your presence, God, for healing of mind, spirit, and emotions that I may become free of distrust, shame, and doubt.**

"Trust the Lord completely. Don't trust yourself. In everything you do, put God first. He will direct you and crown your efforts with success" (Proverbs 3:56); "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You [God] because he trusts in You. Trust in the Lord forever. For.. the Lord is everlasting strength" (Isaiah 26:3-4).

### **FOUR: SEEKING TRUTH**

**I will make a searching self-inventory of both negative and positive traits, acknowledge them to You, God, and someone I trust. I seek Your help to accept those which are positive and change those which are negative.**

"Whoever has no rule over his own spirit and has lost self-control is like a city broken down without walls." (Proverbs 25:28); "Create in me a clean heart Oh God and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51: 10-19); "Cross examine me Oh Lord and see that I have kept your laws. Test my motives and affections" (Psalm 26:2); "Cleanse me from these hidden faults, and keep me from deliberate wrongs" (Psalm 19:12-13); "Therefore each of you speak truth with your neighbor ... (Ephesians 4:25); "For though once your heart was full of darkness, now it is full of light from the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8).

### **FIVE: ANGER**

**I acknowledge my rage toward those I feel abandoned or betrayed me. I seek God's Power to help me understand the sources of my continuing anger, to control its destructive effects, and to learn to express it constructively.**

"Listen much, speak little, and don't become angry" (James 1:19); "Be angry, and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath (Ephesians 4:26); "For God sent Christ Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to end all God's anger against us. He used Christ's blood and our faith as the means of saving us from His wrath" (Romans 3:25).

### **SIX: FEAR**

**I seek Your help, God, to relinquish 'the wall' around my feelings, to withstand moments of terror, and courage to take risks in constructive ways.**

"Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4); "God is our refuge and strength. He is a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, waters roar, and the mountains shake with its swelling" (Psalm 46: 1-3). "I will pray to the Father and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever" (John 14:16).

### **SEVEN: GUILT**

**I face my guilty secrets and am willing to reveal them to someone I trust. I ask and accept forgiveness from You, God, and ask Your help to forgive myself.**

"But Jesus the Son of God is our great High Priest who ...understands our weaknesses, since He had the same temptations we do... So let us come boldly to the very throne of God and stay there to receive His mercy and to find grace to help us in our times of need" (Hebrews 4: 15-16); "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John I :9); "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8: I).

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