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SPIRITUALLY COMMANDING AN AIR FORCE SQUADRON IN
THE 21ST CENTURY

by

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Abstract

In 2004, the Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force penned a letter titled “Stressed Airmen – Who’s Your Wingman?” The letter deals with the increased stress and suicide rate among Airmen primarily attributed to longer deployments and higher operations tempo. General Jumper states that commanders are responsible for the total welfare of their Airmen. He outlines the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of life as the dimensions that comprise well-being. While the physical, emotional, and social aspects of well-being are generally well understood, spirituality is not. Additionally, Air Force guidance for commanders concerning spirituality is scarce. This paper was written to aide commanders in fulfilling their responsibility to ensure spiritual wellness by examining the *what*, *why*, and *how* of Air Force spirituality. The *what* portion of this paper compiles many thoughts on spirituality and ultimately defines what spirituality is. The importance of spirituality is explained by the *Why* section. Finally the *How* portion provides commanders with practical methods to ensure the spiritual wellness of their Airmen.

Spiritually Commanding an Air Force Squadron in the 21st Century

Major Charles D. Kuhl

I look upon the spiritual life of the soldier as even more important than his equipment....The soldier's heart, the soldier's spirit, the soldier's soul are everything. Unless the soldier's soul sustains him, he cannot be relied upon and will fail himself and his country in the end.

- General George C. Marshall¹

On October 21, 2004, the Air Force Chief of Staff, General John P. Jumper signed another Chief's Sight Picture titled "Stressed Airmen – Who's Your Wingman?", and distributed it to the Air Force. It deals with the serious subjects of stress and suicide, which are becoming an even greater problem due to the more frequent and longer deployments levied on Airmen. In this letter General Jumper states, "*Commanders - you bear the responsibility for the total welfare of our greatest asset - Airmen. You are responsible for their physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being.*"² General Jumper goes further, and pushes responsibility down another level when he says, "Supervisors -- you are our first line of defense. Like commanders, you are responsible for the well-being of the people you supervise."³ This declaration leaves many unanswered questions. Just what is spirituality? Why does spirituality help with stress control and enable mission accomplishment? How can commanders and supervisors be held responsible for the spiritual development of their Airmen when for so long the organizational norm has been to avoid the controversial issue of spirituality? With responsibility comes accountability, how will commanders be held accountable for the spiritual well-being of their troops? How can commanders and supervisors ensure their Airmen are prepared spiritually? And where and when is it acceptable to address spirituality? These and more are the questions that commanders face concerning the spirituality of the personnel for whom they are responsible.

Since the responsibility for spiritual well-being lies with the commander, the logical place to look for Air Force guidance is the Air University Press and their books on command and leadership. Books such as *Commanding an Air Force Squadron In The Twenty-First Century*, *AU-2 - Guidelines for Command, Sharing Success Owning Failure*, and *AU-24 - Concepts for Air Force Leadership* are all outstanding works dealing with leadership and command. However, these three books offer virtually no direction for commanders concerning spiritual wellness. To the defense of these books, they were all published at least one year prior to General Jumper's Wingman letter. Surprisingly, the Air Force and MAJCOM Chaplain's websites also provide very little direction for the sitting or aspiring commander to turn to for guidance.

This lack of available guidance led to this paper, "Spiritually Commanding an Air Force Squadron in the 21st Century". This paper seeks to define the what, why, and how of Air Force spirituality in terms that will enable commanders and supervisors to successfully fulfill their responsibility to ensure the spiritual well-being of their Airmen. *What* spirituality is will be answered by compiling many thoughts and attempting to define it. The importance of spirituality will be explained by the *Why*. Finally, the *How* portion of this paper will provide commanders and supervisors with practical tools and tips to serve as a spiritual leader.

What is Spirituality?

Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson⁴

In order for commanders to be successful, they must know the expectations of their leadership. At first glance General Jumper's direction to commanders and supervisors appears to

be a straightforward four-part task with the ultimate goal of preparing Airmen to serve their country in an expeditionary environment. While the first three parts of his directive, which include the physical, emotional, and social aspects of well-being, are easily defined, just what does he mean by spiritual well-being? Does the Chief of Staff intend for commanders to implement a spiritual fitness program much like a squadron physical fitness program, except instead of reporting to the gym three days each week the unit will report to the chapel to exercise their spirituality? Clearly, this is not the vision. Any attempt at a mandatory spirituality program at the chapel would likely not only overwhelm the chaplains and their facilities, but would surely be legally contested. A portion of Amendment I of the U.S. Constitution is often referred to as the Establishment Clause and states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.”⁵ Using this line of reasoning General Jumper cannot equate spiritual fitness with religious fitness. So if spirituality is not exclusively religion what is it?

Spirituality – The Definition Problem

Unfortunately defining exactly what spirituality is becomes an elusive task compared to defining the other three pillars of wellness outlined by General Jumper. It is clear that physical wellness deals with the body, social wellness concerns how individuals relate to others and society, and the emotional pillar pertains to the feelings. General Jumper’s challenge is daunting because spirituality “def[ies] the limitations of the spoken word. This is a powerful dimension of humanity that is sadly, and too often, disregarded or cast aside as sentimental; or of inferior importance to the rational mind.”⁶ In today’s Air Force, we are often asked to do the impossible and according to some articulating the definition of spirituality is just such an impossible task. “A rationalistic definition of spirit would not only be presumptuous but also a hopeless

undertaking. Such a definition would kill spirit or transmute it into object. Spirit defies conceptional interpretation, but nevertheless its attributes are apprehensible.”⁷ Therefore, according to the previous author, spirituality is incomprehensible and humans are unable to even conceptualize spirituality. The only way to recognize it is by the characteristics of individuals. “Among those attributes are freedom, meaning, creativity, integrity, love, value, an orientation towards the highest Divine world and union with it.”⁸

Spirituality – Who You Really Are

With most things, it is simpler to observe an outcome than to determine the cause, and spirituality is a prime example, but fortunately other authors do not believe defining it is impossible. While spirituality is difficult to describe in itself, it is not impossible. “Spirit is the essence of being. Spirit is the animating principle and people are the animated objects.”⁹ Spirituality is the driving force behind humanity that gives us our identity, and “spirit affirms its reality through man, who is a manifestation of spirit.”¹⁰ When this manifestation of spirituality is revealed, it shows who people really are and what they really believe.

“Spirituality is internalized beliefs and practices” and when people are pushed to their limits the walls to their innermost being come down and whom they truly are becomes outwardly evident.¹¹ During trials and tribulations an internalized spirituality is vital because it serves as a fallback mechanism or safety net. “The spiritual dimension is your core, your center, your commitment to your value system. It’s a very private area of your life and a supremely important one. It draws upon the sources that inspire and uplift you and tie you to the timeless truths of all humanity.”¹² It is up to the individual to find for themselves what inspires them. The difficulty that many have is grounding their inspiration in the “timeless truths”. It is analogous to the

parable about the wise man building his house upon rock, and the foolish man building his house upon sand.¹³ If someone's spirituality is based on a foundation of faulty "truths" and moral relativism, they are more likely to experience difficulties when their "truths" are challenged.

Spirituality - Providing the Meaning of Life

The previous analogy also lends itself to the fact that spirituality is not solely an end in itself but also means for individuals to improve their lives. The only way to truly define the "timeless truths" is to discover the underlying meaning to life. "Spirituality is a developmental process in which individuals learn to enhance the quality of their relationships with the sacred aspect of life, and with others."¹⁴ Spiritual wellness is the maturation process "of our higher consciousness developed through the integration of the following three facets: 1) relationship with oneself and others, 2) strong personal value system, and 3) meaningful purpose in one's life." While not explicit in his description, these three facets are in descending order of precedence. Without a meaningful purpose, it becomes difficult to develop strong values, and without values, relationship with others and oneself become conflicted and strained. Spirituality provides the key to the age-old quest to decipher the meaning of life. "Spirituality is the way you find meaning, hope, comfort, and inner peace in your life. Many find spirituality through religion. Some find it through music, art, or a connection with nature. Others find it in their values and principles."¹⁵

Spirituality - Not Religion

One mistake that is commonly made is to relate spirituality only with religion.¹⁶ The Westminster Dictionary of Spirituality describes spirituality as "those attitudes, beliefs, practices

which animate people's lives and help them to reach out towards super-sensible realities.”¹⁷

Many equate spirituality with religiosity, and religiosity as the way to achieve these super-sensible realities. It is useful to differentiate between these two terms in that:

Religiosity generally refers to participation in an organized religion. Spirituality, on the other hand, refers to the quality of the relationship that an individual experiences with the sacred aspect of life. As a consequence, an individual with a deeply internalized sense of spirituality will often participate in an organized religion. However, the fact that an individual participates in an organized religion is not equivalent to having a deeply internalized sense of spirituality. Further, some individuals with a deeply internalized sense of spirituality have not found a personally satisfying organized faith community.¹⁸

Therefore, it is possible for someone to be spiritual and not religious using the terms stated above. So if someone states they are spiritual and not religious it should not be taken as superficial and many times the person is in the early stages of an internalized form of spirituality. The two primary characteristics of an internalized spirituality are: “1) subjectively meaningful experiences that have demonstrated to an individual that the sacred aspect of life (God or higher power) exists, and 2) perceptions of closeness with the sacred aspect of life, in which God is experienced as a core aspect of the individual's self.”¹⁹ The difference between spirituality and religion may be distinguishable for some, but for many they are one-in-the-same.

Spirituality - Closely Tied to Religion

Although spirituality and religion are not the same, “religion is borne of the spiritual nature of human existence; there is a consequential relationship...and the virtues of the spirit are remarkably woven throughout religious thought.”²⁰ While there are historical incidents and individual experiences that highlight the fact that religious institutions and religious people do act unspiritual at times, these acts do not negate the spiritual ideals that are the founding principles of mainstream religions.²¹ “Even though some unhealthy religious practices *may*

impede spiritual growth, the likelihood of that being widespread has not been determined and is highly unlikely.”²² Additionally, religions provide a framework and support for people striving to develop a relationship with a higher power and discover the meaning of life.²³ Unfortunately, religious institutions are not divine, and religions are run and participated in by humans who may be striving to be spiritual, but are human nonetheless. Ultimately, religion points to the spiritual character of humanity, and “these spiritual virtues are properly overlaid upon our understanding of the human person because the [religious] evidence points to a consistent (over time and location) inclination of people to embrace and affirm them.”²⁴

Spirituality Defined

With all this said, it is important to ultimately provide commanders with a definition of spirituality. Spirituality is the essence of life based on the belief in and relationship with a greater reality (e.g. God) than one’s self, which provides meaning and purpose to life. Spirituality is internalized through beliefs that form our core and is expressed outwardly through practices and attitudes by the way individuals approach life and life’s challenges. Spirituality is not religion, but most religions are grounded in spirituality. Finally, spirituality is deeply personal and only the individual can truly gauge their own spirituality. The characteristics of spirituality are not concrete, and the ability for a commander to determine whether their Airmen are spiritually well cannot be quantified on a checklist. However, the difficulty in defining spirituality in no way deters from the benefits of spiritual wellness for the individual and the unit.

Why is Spirituality Important?

The soldier’s heart, the soldier’s spirit, the soldier’s soul, is everything. Unless the soldier’s soul sustains him, he cannot be relied on and will fail himself and his

commander and his country in the end. It is not enough to fight. It is the spirit, which we bring to the fight that decides the issue. With it all things are possible; without it everything else, planning, preparation, and production, count for naught.

- General George C. Marshall²⁵

In Wingman Day briefings across the Air Force, spirituality has been depicted as one of the four tie downs of human wellness along with the physical, emotional, and social dimensions. The slide in Figure 1 was shown on Wingman Day at Air Command and Staff College in November 2004. A very similar slide, the only variation being the aircraft, a T-37 vice an F/A-22, was shown in 2003 at Headquarters Air Education and Training Command, and an almost identical slide is included in the 2004 Air Force Suicide Prevention briefing.²⁶ So presumably a similar slide with only slight variations was presented across the Air Force between 2003 and 2004.



Figure 1. Wingman Day Tie Downs Slide²⁷

While this model is useful and brings spirituality to the forefront of Air Force conversation and thought, this slide may leave Airmen with the erroneous impression that spirituality is equivalent to the other dimensions of health. This perception may be somewhat shallow and dangerous. The problem with this view is that it may lead Airmen to the false conclusion that they can

neglect one dimension while other dimensions of wellness pick up the slack. This is not the case with any dimension, but it is particularly not so with spirituality because, “nothing can take the place of spiritual wellness. The physical realm offers many benefits in the present, but always falls short in the end. Pursuing the spiritual aspects of life may not seem important now; however, like brushing teeth, it prevents a lot of pain later.”²⁸ While the simplistic F/A-22 slide is probably on the right level simply to convey the idea of a wellness model that includes four dimensions, the true nature of spirituality and how it interacts with all dimensions of wellness requires a more in-depth discussion because:

Spirituality is a complex and multidimensional part of the human experience. It has cognitive, experiential and behavioral aspects. The cognitive or philosophic aspects include the search for meaning, purpose and truth in life and the beliefs and values which an individual lives. The experiential and emotional aspects involve feelings of hope, love, connection, inner peace, comfort and support. These are reflected in the quality of an individual’s inner resources, the ability to give and receive spiritual love, and the types of relationships and connections that exist with self, the community, the environment and nature, and the transcendent.²⁹

According to this thought spirituality encompasses all aspects of life and directly affects the other three dimensions. Spirituality is much more than simply the fourth pillar of wellness.

Spirituality – The Wellness Enabler

According to Air Force doctrinal terminology, spirituality would be considered an “enabler” of the other three dimensions of human wellness and even life itself. “Spirituality is the highest quality, a value, man’s highest achievement. Spirit is not another actuality, but it informs actuality with purpose. Spirit is, as it were, a Divine breath, penetrating human existence and endowing it with the highest dignity, with the highest quality of existence, with an inner independence and unity.”³⁰ Using this more in depth analysis of spirituality, a more

accurate model is needed to present the effect of spirituality on total human wellness, and the Unifying Model in Figure 2b provides this needed accuracy.

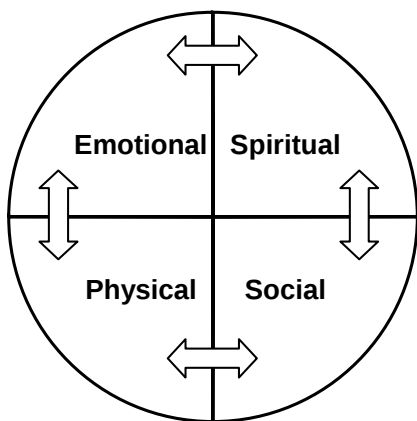


Figure 2a. Integrated Model³¹

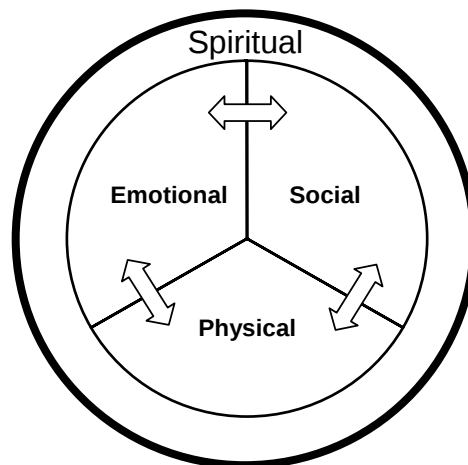


Fig 2b – Unifying Model³²

The unifying model “describes the spiritual dimension as the “overarching perspective” which unifies all components of the total person. This view considers the human as a spiritual-physical union, rather than an immaterial spirit in a physical body.”³³ The Unifying Model is contrasted by the Integrated Model in Figure 2a which is more in line with the Air Force model presented on Wingman Day. The Integrated Model depicts the spirit as simply one of the four dimensions; but this is not the case, it is the foundation in which the other dimensions are grounded.

This unifying model makes it much more readily apparent why spirituality is so important. Spirituality is the key to health, and thus the key to healthy Air Force personnel which ultimately leads to a more capable Air Force. Leaders must “understand spiritual health as being the key factor in understanding wellness. Research indicates that when a person’s spiritual life is without focus that person is prone to both physical and emotional illness.”³⁴ In today’s high

operations tempo environment, the contribution of every Airman is vital to mission success. Spirituality is the best preventative medicine we have to optimize Air Force performance because it provides hope that enables us to set challenging goals, persevere through difficulties, and successfully journey through life.

Hope. An often used military saying is “hope is not a course of action (COA)”, but with wellness, hope may very well be a valid COA. One of the definitions provided in Joint Publication 5-00.1, Joint Doctrine for Campaign Planning, states that a COA is “a possible plan open to an individual or commander that would accomplish, or is related to accomplishment of the mission.”³⁵ According to the Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality:

Hope as a universal human experience has two aspects that are relevant to spirituality. First, there is hope that a person feels for the future. It is a personal experience, an attitude of mind, a way of approaching life in expectation of some future goal. Secondly, there is the nature of the hope itself, the goal or the object that is hoped for and awaited in confidence. Both emphases are very closely linked because expectant hope in the mind and the experience of a believer depends for its ultimate credibility on some confidence that the goal anticipated and for which hope is felt can in fact be achieved.³⁶

So if hope is an outward manifestation of spirituality, and spirituality is related to mission accomplishment, then hope is indeed a COA for Air Force Wellness. Hope keeps our focus on things to come instead of dwelling on past events. Major General Perry Smith, USAF, Retired, obviously had hope when he said, “I am interested in the future because that’s where I plan to spend the rest of my life.”³⁷ When there is no hope, it is difficult to be interested in the future. Ultimately, “hope arises from a fully formed, completely integrated human person who has neglected neither spirit nor the mind. In this person, faith and rationality merge. The result is an ability to endure and accomplish – through hope – the most excellent results worthy of praise.”³⁸

Spiritually strong Airmen can more easily look toward the future because they have hope, and looking forward toward the future enables them to set challenging goals.

Goal Setting. Goal setting is one of the basic ways to improve performance and measure success. “Spiritual wellness must include developing a purpose in life, developing positive lifestyle habits, and examining one’s own life and death.”³⁹ Air Force Doctrine Document 1-1 states that when leading people and teams one must “set high expectations for performance and convey confidence in others’ ability to achieve challenging goals and overcome obstacles.”⁴⁰ This concept not only applies to people and teams, but also to individuals when setting goals. Spirituality plays a critical role in this process. Commanders should embrace and “notice the effects of spirituality because it effects how we pursue our life’s goals.”⁴¹ Spirituality provides the inner strength, confidence, and stick-to-itiveness needed in order to achieve challenging goals.

Perseverance. Spirituality enhances the ability to remain steadfast and endure through difficulty. It provides patience to resist the temptations of instant gratification and then gives the tenacity needed to relentlessly pursue objectives. “Further, if a person participates in wellness programs which emphasize only physical fitness, nutrition, stress reduction, etc. without addressing the spiritual aspects of life, the person is more prone to drop out of the program due to lack of purpose in life.”⁴² The belief that we are here for a reason, and that there is something bigger than ourselves that is found through spirituality allows those who have developed their spirituality to better persevere during life’s trials.

Positiveness. People who are spiritually fit are generally joy-filled, positive, and are more pleasant to be around. Those who are positive tend to rub off on others, and people are drawn to them. Additionally, those “with a high degree of positive spirituality are able to begin and maintain positive lifestyles which include a high degree of physical fitness, better nutrition, less stressful lives, positive relationships, and generally happier than those who do not have a positive spirituality.”⁴³ On the contrary, people who are negative can be like a virus in an organization. Their discontent spreads to others resulting in other members not wanting to be around them or to work with them. The likely result of a positive spirituality is a more efficient and effective force due to an overall positive outlook on life, better physical fitness, and more de-stressed, relaxed Airmen.

Tranquility. The positiveness that spirituality brings goes much deeper than being relaxed; it can provide a serene calmness that frees one from disturbances and agitation.⁴⁴ “Spirituality, or sensing the presence of a greater reality than one’s self, brings a sense of tranquility.”⁴⁵ Additionally, “spiritual resources can provide strength, inner-peace, security, and a sense of tranquility to the [Airman], thereby increasing the moral force of the unit.”⁴⁶ Tranquility is a trait that should be coveted by leaders and followers alike, since internalized spirituality has scientifically been proven to buffer the effects of stress.⁴⁷ Ultimately, spirituality provides those in harms way the internal resources to confidently face the potential reality of the ultimate sacrifice, death, because those who have an internalized peace with their faith in an “Almighty” can relinquish final control without fear of what is to come after death. When someone has not developed their spirituality, the individual still assumes responsibility for their

being and cannot ever be at ultimate peace because of the fear of the unknown after death.⁴⁸ Without spirituality, true tranquility is difficult to achieve.

Spirituality – More than the Fourth Tie Down

Spirituality is analogous to the Air and Space Power Function of Combat Support that “provides the foundation for and is the enabler of the Air Force core competencies. It includes the actions taken to ready, sustain, and protect personnel, assets, and capabilities through all peacetime and wartime military operations.”⁴⁹ Spirituality is much more than the fourth dimension to wellness. It is the foundation in which the emotional, physical, and social dimensions of wellness are anchored. Figure 3 provides a proposed concept of how spirituality should be presented to Airmen.



Figure 3. Proposed Tie Down Slide

In this modified version of the Wingman Day “Why are we here?” slide, spirituality, instead of a tie down, is represented as the concrete parking apron where the tie downs are anchored. This picture better depicts the criticality of the spiritual dimension of wellness. Much like the

unifying model presented in Figure 2b, spirituality is the key element that interacts with the other three dimensions and holds them in place. On the other hand, if the spirit is weak, then the emotional, physical, and social tie downs are much more susceptible to failure. Spirituality is important to commanders and Airmen because it is the key enabler of human wellness. Airmen with a strong spiritual foundation will benefit themselves and the Air Force because spirituality is an integral part of hope, goal setting, perseverance, positiveness, and tranquility.

How Does a Commander Ensure Spiritual Wellness?

I have developed almost an obsession as to the certainty with which you can judge a division, or any other large unit, merely by knowing its commander intimately. Of course, we have had pounded into us all through our school courses that the exact level of a commander's personality and ability is always reflected in his unit—but I did not realize, unit opportunity came for comparisons on a rather large scale, how infallibly the commander and unit are almost one and the same thing.

– General Dwight D. Eisenhower⁵⁰

General Eisenhower's words are daunting for commanders when taken in the context of General Jumper's tasking to ensure the spiritual well-being of Airmen. It is readily observed that a commander who is not physically fit has difficulty motivating the unit to embrace physical fitness. The same principle can be applied to spiritual fitness. A commander who is not spiritually fit will have difficulty ensuring the spiritual fitness of their unit. In the past the Air Force treated spirituality as something for the individual to deal with privately and personally, and if they needed assistance the commander or supervisor simply got the individual in touch with the unit chaplain. But does the Chief's Sight Picture now absolve the Air Force Chaplaincy of their service and place spiritual development entirely on the heads of commanders? The answer to this question is clearly no. Chaplains are still the subject matter experts when it comes to spirituality and religion, and should be leveraged to the maximum extent possible by

commanders. A commander can demonstrate commitment to the spiritual wellness of a unit simply by including the unit chaplain in squadron activities and interacting with the chaplain openly. Chaplains are specifically trained and provide an invaluable service for Airmen; however, as of March 2005 the Air Force Chaplain Service has not posted any guidance for commanders in regards to spirituality on their website. Since no official Air Force guidance is available the Air Force must make it a top priority to provide commanders with the resources needed to accomplish General Jumper's spirituality tasking. In the interim, commanders must draw on the information that is available from other sources to develop a spiritual wellness program for their units.

Spirituality Wellness Program Objectives

In order for commanders and supervisors to implement a wellness program it is essential to provide a vision for what the program should achieve. A comprehensive wellness program will include ways for people to discover purpose, meaning, and satisfaction in life. It should also involve introspection of one's own life and eventual death, developing positive lifestyle habits, understanding their value system, building self esteem, understanding their place in the world and relationships with others, organizations, the environment, and God.⁵¹ Achieving the above stated objectives takes an extensive amount of both time and effort. While the onus for spiritual wellness has been placed on commanders, it is still a deeply personal matter. Unfortunately, a squadron cannot be made spiritual during a down day or a mass briefing, although these may provide a good start, because "spirituality is a developmental process."⁵² A commander must make the unit aware of the importance of spirituality, set an example, and provide and encourage opportunities for spiritual development. The U.S. Army and the medical profession have made

strides in the spiritual arena and have provided the following resources for use in their own programs.

U. S. Army Spirituality Resources

The U. S. Army has an existing spirituality program that the Air Force can look to for guidance. The U. S. Army Center for Health Promotions and Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM) and the Hooah-4-Health websites have extensive information on spirituality. The USACHPPM website uses an in-depth Spiritual Fitness/Resiliency – Spirituality and Resilience Assessment, and the Hooah-4-Health provides numerous links to spiritual matters, quizzes, and assessments.

Spiritual Fitness/Resiliency – Spirituality and Resilience Assessment. The USACHPPM website provides an online Spirituality and Resilience Assessment (SRA).⁵³ The test “enables individuals to examine the strength of their own psychological resilience, the internalization depth of their own spirituality, and the degree to which their spirituality contributes to their psychological resilience.”⁵⁴ There are two tests in the SRA that are easy to use, can be accomplished quickly, and are self explanatory.

The first test, the Inventory of Positive Psychological Attitudes (IPPA), is designed “to help you strengthen important inner resources that will enable you to face a crisis or serious problem more effectively—either now or in the future”. The description continues, “whether the difficulty you face is medical, emotional, or circumstantial...your own inner resources strongly affect your ability to face a serious problem.”⁵⁵ The description in this resource used by the Army is significant because it also specifically addresses the other three tie downs used by the

Air Force: medical (physical), emotional, and circumstantial (social). The IPPA is comprised of two subtests; the first measures Life Purpose and Satisfaction (LPS) and the second measures Self-Confidence During Stress (SCDS). These questionnaires consist of seventeen and fifteen questions respectively, and the results of these questions are integrated to determine a Confidence in Life and Self (CLS) score. The significance of this score lies in the fact that CLS has shown to buffer stress and prevent stress related to physical and psychological disorders.⁵⁶

The second test is The Index of Core Spiritual Experiences (INSPIRIT) which is designed to measure elements of spirituality that are integral to a resilient outlook on life. The introduction to this test describes spirituality as, “a particularly effective way to build a resilient worldview. Spirituality, of course, is not the only way to develop resilient attitudes; however, for countless generations and in countless cultures, spirituality has been a primary source of resilience for individuals, families, and communities.”⁵⁷ The first part of the survey probes into whether or not the individual has had experiences that convince them that a higher power exists, and the second part examines whether the person has a relationship with a higher power. The INSPIRIT uses eighteen questions to appraise the individual’s relationship with God.

When these tests are completed the results are displayed numerically which correlate to high, medium-high, medium, medium-low, and low scores. The site then provides the following statements and thought provoking questions to ponder:

- Your score on each scale reflects how strongly you feel these resilient attitudes. Do these scores make sense to you—as you reflect on your life?
- Review the individual questions. Each answer shows you particular attitudes and areas of your life where your worldview is—or is not—resilient. Do you notice any patterns?
- If there is a large difference between your LPS and **SCDS scores**, one part of your worldview is more resilient than the other part. This difference identifies the part of your worldview that you most need to strengthen.
- If your combined score on both scales is low (or even medium low), don’t hide this fact from yourself or others. Seek support. Talk with a minister, counselor.⁵⁸

The most useful aspect of this simple survey is that when taken, it forces Airmen to take a look at their spirituality, provides areas for improvement, and suggests resources they can turn to for help.

The final output of the SRA is a summary of scores that combines the IPPA and INSPIRIT results. The combinations provide descriptions of how the individual likely views life and what they can do to make improvements. The SCA is an excellent tool to get people to reflect on their spirituality. It provides a quick, easily accessible means for commanders to get Airmen thinking about their spirituality. While this site provides depth to spirituality analysis, the Hooah-4-Health site provides broader information on spirituality.

Hooah-4-Health. The Hooah-4-Health website is the Army's one-stop shop that, "unlike other health-related web sites, this one is specifically designed to address the force health protection and readiness requirements of the Army."⁵⁹ The Army presents copious information on the body, mind, spirit, and environment. The spirit portion provides links to information on decision making skills, the Combat Medic Prayer, relaxation, spirituality and religion, and numerous other topics. This site also includes the SRA as presented in the previous section except with a simplified and less detailed output of the results.

The Army also includes the Goldberg Well Being Quiz. This twelve question quiz focuses on taking an "emotional pulse."⁶⁰ This assessment focuses on feelings and emotions as they relate to stress and ability of someone to perform over the previous two weeks of their life. The results are presented on a normalized scale that is an assessment for personal use, and "the scale normalizes the feelings contained in it, that is, it gives permission to a person to admit to him or herself that these are the kinds of feelings that people have when they consider their

personal well-being.”⁶¹ If the person’s level of well-being is low, then seeking professional help from a spiritual counselor is suggested as an option to improve their state of being. While the focus of the Goldberg Well Bing Quiz is the emotional dimension, the tie to spirituality as a means for improvement reinforces the fact that spirituality is indeed an overarching concept that effects the other dimensions of wellness. The U.S. Army is not the only organization that has embraced the concept of spirituality and its value in relation to wellness.

Medical Profession Spirituality Resources

The medical field is also investigating the value of spirituality and how it relates to the health and recovery of patients. The research being conducted by the medical profession appears to be adaptable for Air Force use. The evidence is mounting that spirituality should not and cannot be just another Chief of Staff focus area that quickly fades away when he retires. The research conducted by the medical community provides validity to the Air Force’s spirituality initiative because it has been undertaken by a respected institution like the medical field, and it is conducted using the sound research methodology of the scientific process. These medical studies “suggest that many patients believe spirituality plays an important role in their lives, that there is a positive correlation between a patient’s spirituality or religious commitment and health outcomes, and that patients would like physicians to consider these factors in medical care.”⁶² Of the three points outlined in the previous quotation, the first and third will be further examined for Air Force application since the correlation between spirituality and health has already been well established in the *Why* section of this paper.

What People Believe and Want. A vast majority of Americans believe in God and many would like health care professional to consider these beliefs when under their care. Studies concerning the link of spirituality and health show that ninety-five percent of Americans believe in God and seventy-four percent feel close to God.⁶³ These percentages demonstrate that the belief in a higher power, God, and spirituality are not foreign subjects at all to the vast majority of Americans. This overwhelming belief in God becomes even more applicable when coupled with research that shows seventy-seven percent believe physicians should consider spiritual needs, seventy-three percent think they should share religious beliefs with their physician, sixty-six percent desire physicians to inquire about religious and spiritual beliefs if very ill, and thirty-seven percent think that physicians should inquire about religious beliefs more.⁶⁴ If the desire to communicate spirituality in a sterile medical setting with a medical professional that they see only a hand full of times each year is this strong, how strong might this desire for spiritual matters be in a day-to-day work setting with a commander or supervisor? Although the desire for open communication concerning spirituality is present in most people, difficulties remain due to the historical baggage and misconceptions of spirituality in the work setting.

Timing. One of the difficulties of discussing spirituality is determining when and if the timing is right. This is where there must be a paradigm shift in the Air Force attitude towards spirituality. Commanders and supervisors have no difficulties or hesitation in discussing physical, emotional, or the social dimensions of wellness in any setting. The same must hold true for discussing spirituality. Why not include discussions of spirituality when providing feedback, during a commanders' call, at a staff meeting, or when someone is perceived to be coping with a difficult situation in life? Discussing spiritual matters "can flow naturally

following discussions of other support systems and may open the door for further discussion.”⁶⁵

The bottom line is that there is probably no wrong time to discuss spirituality if it is done with tact and respect.

The HOPE Model. What many commanders and supervisors need is a way to direct their spirituality discussions so they can become more comfortable with communicating this old, albeit, relatively new subject in the Air Force. One of the keys to spiritual matters is listening because most people “use symbolic and metaphoric language when expressing spiritual thoughts...themes such as the search for meaning, feelings of connection versus isolation, hope versus hopelessness, fear of the unknown are clues that [Airmen] may be struggling with spiritual issues.”⁶⁶ Commanders and supervisors must perceive these clues and follow up with open ended questions to evaluate their people’s spiritual wellness. HOPE is a mnemonic that is short for Hope, Organized religion, Personal spirituality, and Effects. The HOPE questions provide a useful framework to guide spiritual discussions.

The questions for HOPE were developed to help medical personnel begin the process of incorporating spirituality into their interactions with patients. It is a simple series of subjects and questions that logically flow and can be adapted for use within the Air Force. The “H” deals with spiritual resources and sources of hope while intentionally avoiding a direct focus on spirituality and religion. This indirect approach opens lines of communication with all personnel including those who utilize non-traditional forms for spirituality, others who have been alienated from their religion, and those who have internalized God and religion into their lives. The “O” focuses on organized religion, and the “P” on personal spirituality. Finally, the “E” delves into the effects that spirituality has in the individual’s life. The questions shown in Table 1 have been

modified from the Medical HOPE questions and are suggested for use as the Air Force HOPE Model.⁶⁷

H: Sources of Hope, Meaning, Comfort Strength, Peace, Love, and Connection
- What is there in your life that gives you internal support?
- What are your sources of hope, strength, comfort, and peace?
- What do you hold on to during difficult times?
- What sustains you and keeps you going?
- For some people, their religious or spiritual beliefs act as a source of comfort and strength, in dealing with life's ups and downs; is this true for you?
- If "Yes" , proceed to the O and P sections
- If "No" , consider asking: Was it ever? If "Yes" , ask: What changed?
O: Organized Religion
- Do you consider yourself part of an organized religion?
- How important is this to you?
- What aspects of your religion are helpful and not so helpful to you?
- Are you part of a religious or spiritual community? Does it help you and how?
P: Personal Spirituality & Practices
- Do you have personal spiritual beliefs that are independent of organized religion? What are they?
- Do you believe in God? What kind of relationship do you have with God?
- What aspects of your personal spirituality or spiritual practices do you find most helpful? (examples prayer, meditation, scripture reading, attending religious services, music, hiking, communing with nature)
- Are there any specific practices or restrictions I should know about as your commander / supervisor
E: Effects of Spirituality on Current and Difficult Issues
Has your current situation affected your ability to do things that usually help you spiritually (or affected your relationship with God)?
- As a commander/supervisor, is there anything that I can do to help you access the resources that usually help you?
- Are you worried about any conflicts between your beliefs and your situation and decisions?
- Would it be helpful for you to speak to a chaplain?

Table 1. Air Force HOPE Questions⁶⁸

The HOPE construct provides another useful tool to guide commanders and supervisors while addressing spirituality with Airmen. As with most communication, listening skills are vital, but when dealing with matters of spirituality it becomes even more crucial because most people are

not normally accustomed to openly discussing this deeply personal subject in the Air Force work environment.

Conclusion

Spirituality is the highest quality we can discern in our judgment of men. Every man has a soul—such is his nature—but his spirituality may remain undiscovered or suppressed. Spirit is the highest quality of the soul, a symbol of freedom from the power of the world.

- Nicolas Berdyaev⁶⁹

When General Jumper wrote his Sight Picture titled, “Stressed Airmen – Who’s Your Wingman”, he brought the vital subject of spiritual wellness to the forefront of conversation. His inclusion of spirituality as one of the four dimensions of wellness, as well as the responsibility for commanders to ensure this wellness, requires commanders to expand their thinking on leadership. The physical, social, and emotional dimensions of wellness are generally well understood, but the concept of spirituality as an integral and necessary part of the U.S. Air Force culture raises concerns and leads us into uncharted territory.

These concerns are rooted in a common misunderstanding of what spirituality is. Frequently, spirituality is equated with religion or religiosity, and this is not necessarily the case.⁷⁰ Spirituality is the belief in a higher power, an Almighty that provides identity with fundamental values, the meaning of life, and ultimately life itself. With that said, the vast majority of Americans recognize the higher power which fuels the spirituality of their lives as God.⁷¹ While the Air Force cannot advocate any specific type of spirituality, commanders should not fear the encouragement of mainstream religious beliefs and practices to ensure the spiritual wellness of their Airmen.⁷² Commanders must be mindful that while the Establishment Clause of the Bill of Rights prohibits declaring a specific religion to be followed, the Founding

Fathers also protected an individual's right to practice their religion with the Free Exercise Clause that states, "Congress shall make no law prohibiting the free exercise [of religion]."73

The value of commanders developing a culture of spirituality in the Air Force is incalculable. Spirituality is much more than a fourth dimension of wellness; it is the glue that binds all other aspects of life together. The physical, emotional, and social aspects of wellness are all directly affected by spirituality.⁷⁴ It provides defense against physical and emotional illness, a hope and confidence in the future, a positive and persevering attitude in setting and pursuing goals, and tranquility found in the belief that a higher power is ultimately in control of life itself. The challenge that commanders face is how to develop this culture of spirituality in their units.

The medical profession provides the HOPE Model which provides a line of questions that can help commanders when discussing spirituality; however, the greatest resource available at this time for commanders to seek guidance on spirituality is the U.S. Army. They provided numerous online assessments, writings, and resources that commanders can tap into. These resources not only serve as a benchmark for commanders, but also for the entire Air Force spirituality program. To say that the Air Force has no spirituality program is a gross overstatement and demeans the invaluable service the Air Force Chaplain Corps. However, there currently is no one-stop-shop for commanders to turn for Air Force guidance on spirituality. If the spiritual dimension of wellness is to be taken seriously in the Air Force, a lead agency must be identified and quickly work to consolidate the Air Force's positions and resources for commanders.

The most difficult facet of General Jumper's Sight Picture is making commanders responsible for their Airmen's spiritual wellness. Spirituality is something that is deeply

personal, private for many, and different for every person. This variability of spirituality for each Airman poses great challenge for commanders. One of the most time-tested, effective ways to influence and lead people is by example. Leading people to spiritual wellness is no different. Commanders must take the time to evaluate themselves, and get spiritually fit. Once they are spiritually fit, then commanders become role models for their Airmen to emulate. “Effective leadership starts on the inside” and a commander that has a strong spiritual health will permeate the spirituality of their Airmen.⁷⁵ As S.L.A. Marshal said, “the art of leading, in operations large or small, is the art of dealing with humanity, of working diligently on behalf of men, of being sympathetic with them, but equally, of insisting that they make a square facing of their own problem.”⁷⁶ The time has come to make a square facing of spirituality in the United States Air Force.

Notes

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- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," (EcoTopia, 1836).
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- ⁶ Ken J. Stavrevsky, "A Spiritual Foundation for Air Force Core Values," (1999), 2
- ⁷ Nicolas Berdyaev, *Spirit and Reality* (London: G. Bles, 1939), 33
- ⁸ Ibid., 33
- ⁹ Michael D. Slotnick, "Spiritual Leadership: How Does the Spirit Move You?" (Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College., 1992), 8
- ¹⁰ Berdyaev, *Spirit and Reality*, 18
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- ³² Ibid., 35
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- ³⁴ James C. Duncan, "Spiritual Wellness as an Issue in Navy Education and Training: A Literature Review," (Milton, Florida: Command Religious Program NAS Whiting Field, 1996), 5
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- ⁷² Congress, "The Bill of Rights.", Amendment I
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