

## **SPIRITUAL DIMENSION**

### **Introduction Teaser**

What is the human spirit?

It's the essential core of a person. The deepest part of who we are.

It's that which we value most deeply or hold sacred.

As Soldiers, we experience situations that can test our human spirit. But these struggles can be a sign of strength and courage...

An opportunity to re-examine our beliefs... to re-define our lives.

That's why CSF can help you strengthen your set of beliefs, principles, or values that sustain you beyond family, institutional, and societal sources of strength.

So you can become more spiritually fit and resilient during times that challenge you most.

Whatever "enemy" you may be fighting... a combatant, a bad memory, or a problem back at home... your human spirit can sustain you.

Let CSF show you how.

## **SPIRITUAL DIMENSION**

### **Spiritual Support**

#### **SLIDE 1: OVERVIEW**

Being in the Army has special meaning for all of us. We understand our role and why we're here... taking an oath to serve and protect... being part of something greater than ourselves. But for many of us, we don't necessarily understand what "spirituality" has to do with our role in the Army.

You probably have a preconceived notion for what this module... and this dimension... is about. And that's to be expected. The word spiritual or spirituality can mean many things to many people... but in our case here today, it's all about the human spirit.

As Soldiers, we experience situations on the battlefield, in training, and at home that may test our human spirit. The human spirit is the essential core of a person, the deepest part of who we are. So in this dimension, we'll be discussing spirituality as that which you value most deeply or hold sacred, as well as spiritual struggles, the tension or conflict within yourself, with others, or with a higher power about your deepest values or what you hold sacred.

Struggles of the human spirit can be a sign of **STRENGTH** and **COURAGE** because you are facing difficult questions that do not always have easy answers.

These struggles can present an opportunity to examine your beliefs and re-define your life. This can lead to a deeper commitment to your values, stronger connection to your spirit and other people in your life, patience and forgiveness, and spiritual growth, depth, and richness. All of these things build your spiritual fitness, and make you a more resilient Soldier.

Specifically, in this module, we'll...

[Kaufman]: Hmm...hmmm... (humming/singing under his

breath and to himself, looks up) Oh hey, how ya doing?

[Host]: Hey Kaufman, whatcha got there?

[Kaufman]: Well, I got my laptop, my letters, book, journal, photo, and iPod... yep, it's all here.

[Host]: Oh, I see you're getting ready for our module on Spiritual Support.

[Kaufman]: (Smiles) Yep. (sits on bunk and puts on his headphones or opens journal)

[Host]: Excellent. (Do you know what each of these items has in common? Well, they are all an integral part in building spiritual resilience.

Surprised? I thought you might be.

Like I was saying, in this module we'll talk about various forms of Spiritual Support and yes, you'll even find out how these simple items right here can be an integral part in building your own spiritual resilience. I'll see you again in a few more slides to talk about it.

## **SLIDE 2: SPIRITUAL SUPPORT**

Think about ways you have supported your human spirit in the past, especially during difficult and uncertain times. ... When you feel stressed or question your core values, how do you seek spiritual support? What do you draw on for resilience and strength, meaning, and comfort? ... Think about 3 things you do now. Are these means of support available to you wherever you are - wherever you may serve as a Soldier?

These spiritual struggles don't just take a toll on your mind, they can potentially impact your health and well-being. It is important to turn to spiritual resources available to you and facilitate spiritual resilience when encountering struggles.

In this module, we will focus on the many tools available for seeking spiritual support. The first half addresses ways you can seek support on your own. The second half provides details on how you can seek support from others. The tools

we suggest may be available to you during any point in your life, including during your service in the Army.

This module is designed to help you learn about multiple ways to support your human spirit. These pathways are not tied to any specific spiritual tradition, and can be integrated into your own set of core beliefs in a way that works for you.

This module is also intended to broaden your understanding of how spiritual support may help you develop and build resilience. We will review some benefits of spiritual resilience found in research, as well.

You will be able to identify new ways to seek spiritual support on your own and with others.

Discovering new types of spiritual support is important for you to persevere and grow, especially as you face potentially stressful and uncertain experiences during your service in the Army that can lead to spiritual struggles.

Spiritual struggles vary in intensity. Some problems are really BIG, and you REALLY need spiritual support, like if a family member has cancer or if you are captured by the enemy. Other times, problems are smaller and spiritual support is just modestly needed, like having to move to another state, or having to pull call for someone else unexpectedly.

[Fast Fact]

Studies show that seeking the types of spiritual support discussed here link to many forms of resilience. This includes stress-related growth, better adjustment, improved aspects of mental health, increased social support and cohesiveness, and better self-esteem.

### **SLIDE 3: TYPES OF SPIRITUAL SUPPORT**

We first explore ways you can support, develop, and strengthen your human spirit which do not require the participation of others. Although you could engage in these activities with others, it is not necessary. There are likely to

be times in your life when others are not available to participate with you, or you may just want solitude and privacy. Here are some different ways you can support and encourage your human spirit. All of the activities are small, simple, non time consuming ways you can support your core values and beliefs throughout your daily life. Please click on whichever topics seem the most interesting or relevant to you.

#### [Popup Reading]

Reading is a way humans have learned and expanded their knowledge for thousands of years. There are many books available on topics which could help you support your human spirit. By spending a few minutes a day reading a book related to beliefs, values, philosophies, and worldviews, your own core beliefs and core self can be encouraged, solidified, or transformed.

#### [Popup Reading Examples]

For example, Soldiers throughout history have written letters as a way to communicate with loved ones and express their experiences during war time. For three years, journalist Andrew Carroll traveled the globe in an effort to collect letters written by American and foreign Soldiers from all of the major American wars.

In these letters, he found strong inspirational and profound messages brought on by war and the tribulations of being a Soldier. In two of his books, he incorporates letters, emails, and photos documenting Soldiers' experiences from the American Revolutionary War to the current War on Terrorism. Behind the Lines contains a variety of letters which display a full range of human emotions experienced during war, such as excitement, fear, courage, despair, homesickness, patriotism, anger, and humor.

Grace Under Fire includes letters and emails which were more focused on issues of beliefs, values, philosophy of life, and spirituality and how they played a role in the Soldiers' lives.

Another example is the well-known poem, called "Soldier" by George L. Skyeck:

I was that which others did not want to be. □I went where others feared to go, and did what others failed to do. □I asked nothing from those who gave nothing, and reluctantly accepted the thought of eternal loneliness ... should I fail. □I have seen the face of terror; felt the stinging cold of fear; and enjoyed the sweet taste of a moment's love. □I have cried, pained, and hoped ... but most of all, I have lived times others would say were best forgotten. □At least someday I will be able to say that I was proud of what I was□... a soldier.

[Popup Reading How to Incorporate]

There are a variety of materials to read that can support the human spirit. Find a book that explicitly discusses morals, values, beliefs, and philosophical worldviews. You could also read self-help books focused on spiritual development.

Reading a biography of an influential leader from history can help you learn how their core beliefs and values shaped their lives. More specifically, reading biographies of Soldiers, Army officers, and Army chaplains can help you discover more about your human spirit in relation to serving in the U.S. Army. You might also read texts from specific spiritual traditions, as they all have many important things to say about values and philosophies of living. A list of books that may help inform your human spirit are available to print. Explore further by finding something that looks exciting and interesting to you.

[Popup Writing]

Writing is another way to support your core self. All it takes is you, a pen or pencil, and a piece of paper. Writing can be a great way to reflect upon and record your experiences, and express your thoughts and feelings.

[Popup Writing Examples]

For example, SGT Charles King wrote in a journal for his infant son Jordan. SGT King wrote in this journal every

night while serving in Iraq. Not only did writing in his journal give him time to reflect on his experiences as a Soldier, but he also used it to pass along wisdom and guidance he had gained from his entire life to his son. SGT. King died while serving his country, but he was able to leave a precious gift behind – words from a father to son. The following are two excerpts from Sergeant King's journal.

"Enlisting in the army was one of the best decisions I had ever made in my life. God blessed me above all I could imagine. Like anything, you have some challenging days, but when I look back I have no regrets. The army even recognized my artistic abilities. I also met a lot of great people. It's been an awesome experience. Thanks, God."

"Listen to your first thought. You will figure this out on your own. Never second-guess yourself. When your heart is in the right place, always go with your first thought. Work hard at things and follow your instinct. Since you were born, you have always been alert. That means you will be very perceptive about things. Believe God and trust yourself. Keep the faith, Jordan. You will be fine."

Although you might not share the same beliefs as Sgt. King, you probably find strength from something outside of your self - your commitment to your country, the goodness in others, the beauty of nature - these are all ways to build your resilience and gain spiritual support.

[Popup Writing How To Incorporate]

Writing can be done in a variety of ways. You may find it helpful to keep a journal or write letters to loved ones, whether or not you send them. You could use writing as a way to record your daily thoughts and experiences, reflect about your values and beliefs, and what you are learning about yourself by interacting with others. Writing can help you explore how your views of yourself, others, or the world may be changing because of your experiences in the military or through new experiences overseas. You might

also write poetry or stories that focus on your core self and beliefs, or you could write letters or prayers to a greater power if you believe in one. Writing often helps you adjust to the major changes in life. This process can even serve to honor your losses and explore how your values may have changed. You can also identify goals for your future growth and how you would like your human spirit to evolve. Just getting your feelings, beliefs or experiences down in writing can help you work through the tough times and might even help you identify goals for future growth of your human spirit.

#### [Popup Music]

Music may be one of the most powerful resources among all cultures. Music is not only a way to express creativity, but is used in many if not all cultures for celebrations, funerals, rituals, and just coping with daily life. You might find lyrics from certain songs that you relate to or that help you through a tough time. Feeling a connection to the lyrics or melody of a song can help you make meaning of a difficult situation you may be facing, which we'll discuss in another module. Music can be a great way to encourage your spirit, help you focus, have a little fun, or help you relax.

#### [Popup Music Examples]

One author noted, in his book on the role of music in the Iraq war, that there are a lot of messages of survival, chaos, and power found in heavy metal and hip hop music which Soldiers might be able to relate to. You may know of other favorite bands or music genres which display messages you can relate to. Additionally, there are volunteer efforts on the home front to send musical instruments to Soldiers serving overseas. Playing and listening to music can have great strengthening and healing power.

#### [Popup Music How to Incorporate]

Ways to incorporate music include playing instruments for fun, singing, or performing in an Army band. Perhaps the

easiest way to incorporate music into your life is simply by listening to it on your down time or going to a concert. To support your spirit with music, find music which not only fits your style, but has messages which can relate to your experience, values, and beliefs. Listen to music that encourages or inspires you, or has a special meaning to you because of loved ones or significant events in your life. You can also listen to music for relaxation or to remind you of your mission as an Army Soldier.

#### [Popup Prayer]

When people think of prayer, they are likely to think of someone sitting in a church, kneeling or folding their hands, and reciting a memorized prayer to whichever greater power they believe in. While prayer could look this way, it does not have to. Prayer is for all individuals, does not have to be said to a specific spiritual being or religious figure, and does not have to be tied to religion, and does not have to be formal. Prayer can support your human spirit by allowing you time to sit and be with your thoughts, experiences, beliefs, values, and emotions. Prayer can be a certain amount of time you set aside to be quiet with your thoughts, reaching out to or a connecting with something greater than yourself or it can be something you do spontaneously. It all depends on whichever circumstance you find yourself in.

#### [Popup Prayer Examples]

Although prayers do not have to be written or memorized, they can be. Here is a prayer which is said to have been found in the pocket of a deceased confederate Soldier during the American Civil War.

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve; □ I was made weak, that I might learn to humbly obey. □ I asked for health, that I might do greater things; □ I was given infirmity, that I might do better things. □ I asked for riches, that I might be happy; □ I was given poverty, that I might be wise. □ I asked for power, that I might have the praise of

men;□I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.□I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;□I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.□I got nothing I asked for but everything I had hoped for.□Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.□I am, among men, most richly blessed.

[Popup Prayer How to Incorporate]

There are a variety of ways prayer can support your human spirit. You can use prayer to express emotion such as thanks and gratitude, or ask for protection and strength. You could pray for the safety and health of loved ones, or use prayer as a way to find meaning and cope with a difficult struggle. You can also use prayer to sit with your thoughts regarding your core self and values. Prayer might also be used to cope with stress, by just sitting quietly and finding rest.

[Popup Nature]

The human spirit can also be supported through spending time in your natural surroundings. Many people are reminded of something bigger than themselves when they are in nature. It can bring a sense of awe and wonder, and being in nature may be a good environment for you to sort out your thoughts and feelings.

[Popup How to Incorporate]

There are a variety of ways for you to connect with your natural surroundings. You could simply enjoy a sun rise or sun set, or look up at the stars at night. You could go on a walk or hike while you observe the setting around you. Your time in the Army may give you opportunities to experience a variety of different environments. Take advantage of exploring and appreciating your surroundings no matter where in the world you may serve during your time in the Army.

[Popup Personally Meaningful Objects]

In times of stress, it is very easy for us to lose sight of who

we are and what we believe in. By carrying and keeping small mementos and tokens with you, you can easily remind yourself who you are, where you come from, what you believe in, and what you stand for.

[Popup Personally Meaningful Objects Examples]

For example, one man kept a dog tag with a photo of him and his wife on it to remind him of a special person in his life, and to remind him of his role of being a husband and a best friend.

Another Soldier carried a piece of his family and good fortune with him after his uncle gave him the lucky two-dollar bill that he had always carried on deer hunting trips.

[Popup Personally Meaningful Objects How to Incorporate]

You know how there are just some things that remind you of someone special in your life or of a great memory that can give you the pick-me-up in tough times? Let's look at how these personally meaningful objects can be incorporated into your spiritual life. There is no limit as to what you can take with you that reminds you of who you are and what you believe in. You can take something with you given to you by a family member or a friend, or bring an object that reminds you of a special place or a significant experience in your life. You could also keep a symbol of your specific spiritual tradition. Pictures are also a great way to remind you of where you come from. You can bring a small photo album to keep pictures of family, friends, religious or spiritual figures, people you admire, or places that have special significance or meaning to you.

#### **SLIDE 4: OTHER PEOPLE AS SPIRITUAL SUPPORT**

[Host]: Oh, hey again. I was just reading this great book, very inspirational, and I'm using one of my favorite photos as the bookmark. It's one of the tangible ways that I use to support my spirit.

But what about what about non-tangible ways to support your spirit?

Spiritual support in the form of talking with others is an excellent way to develop and strengthen your core values, receive help and comfort, and reach out to others.

Perhaps you already do this... turn to your fellow Soldiers or battle buddies, family members, friends, other loved ones, and those from your spiritual community for support during difficult and uncertain times.

[Kaufman]: Hey man, you ready to go?

[Host]: Yeah...

We're about to go spend some time with friends who need a little cheering up.

[Kaufman]: Let's go.

[Kaufman]: Right behind you.

## **SLIDE 5: SPIRITUAL SUPPORT FROM OTHER SOLDIERS**

See, we had a guy get killed in our unit last week, and we are really relying on each other to get through it...

You might need to turn to your fellow Soldiers for spiritual support, at some point also.

As you look around your unit, you might see others who share your beliefs and philosophy of life. You will also see those who may come from very different worldviews and spiritual backgrounds. The time that you serve is a chance to build resilience, and strengthen or even modify your own beliefs. You may also find this is a key time in your life when you learn from others and expand your understanding of meaning and purpose in life.

Here are several ways you can receive support and offer support to your fellow Soldiers.

## **SLIDE 6: SUPPORT FROM HOME**

There are additional ways to seek support from others. To highlight, individuals from your spiritual community back home may encourage spiritual fitness and help you prevail even while you are away on duty. What may this include?

Listed here are some suggestions, which include ways to stay in touch with significant others and any role models at home.

### **SLIDE 7: MYTH BUSTER**

Earlier, we mentioned that you have the option of meeting with a chaplain as a way to get spiritual support. People have many different opinions about meeting with a chaplain. So before we start the next section, what do you think? Find out your perceptions by taking this quick self-check. Are these statements true or false?

[True/False Popup 1]

The chaplain will make me change my beliefs or try to convert me?

The answer is false. Many are concerned that chaplains will try to convert those they meet. Recall that the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees every American the right to free exercise of religion. A chaplain's duty is to honor and protect this right. Army chaplains may share aspects of their specific tradition with you if you are interested. However, they are not allowed to try and change your beliefs. Let's move on to another statement about chaplains.

[True/False Popup 2]

My conversation with the chaplain won't be private?

This is false. In fact, all one-on-one conversations with a chaplain are kept private. Chaplains strive to create a safe and trusting environment where you can talk with them about personal matters. Still, it is important to know there are some exceptions to this rule.

The chaplain will need to report to your Commander if there is a threat of harm to yourself or someone else, such as the intention to commit suicide or cases of abuse (e.g., child abuse). These are some exceptions to confidentiality in order to ensure your safety and the safety of others.

[True/False Popup 3]

I can only see a chaplain if I need serious help or am really sick?

This is also false. People see chaplains for many reasons, and not just in emergencies. Think of any concern or question you have, and an Army chaplain can talk about it with you, and give you counsel and moral support. Still not sure what this means? Take a look at this list, which provides just a few examples of the range of reasons for wanting to meet with a chaplain during various points of your service.

[True/False Popup 4]

I'm weak if I seek help. Real Soldiers don't need help in building resilience. I should just suck it up.

This is also false. In fact, it takes great strength, courage, and maturity to seek guidance for anything from combat-related trauma, to the stress of being away from home, to concerns about the human spirit and your core values. No one is perfect. As human beings, we are sometimes stretched to our limits and would benefit from the help of others. Think of seeking spiritual support as your armor or battle gear that builds your strength and resilience even in the toughest of battles.

[True/False Popup 4 Fast Fact]

In 2008, Dr. S Ward Casscells, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, delivered an address to the U.S. Army Chaplains in Kansas City.

He spoke about this very point: 'the Army emphasized to Soldiers that it takes strength to ask for help and doing so is a sign of leadership, just as facing a problem takes courage, and working through it takes insight and determination.' Seeking support is just another way you may demonstrate your leadership and development.

[True/False Popup 5]

I have to identify with the same religion as the chaplain.

This last statement is also false. You DO NOT have to have

any spiritual belief or affiliation to meet with a chaplain. Consider the diversity around you. Over 100 affiliations are represented in the U.S. Army, including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Wicca. Others do not affiliate with any specific set of beliefs. The majority of chaplains represent Christian, Jewish, and Muslim traditions. Though it may not be possible to find a chaplain who matches your core beliefs, chaplains act as an advocate for every kind of background. While they perform services within their specific tradition, they provide support to anyone who comes to them. If a chaplain cannot give you the support you want, you are free to seek out other resources. You are free to attend a range of worship services, including Jewish, Catholic, Lutheran, Protestant, Muslim, pagan, and Greek Orthodox services.

### **SLIDE 8: CHAPLAINS**

The statements you read are common misperceptions about the chaplaincy, and often prevent Soldiers from seeking help.

Chaplains are major advocates for spiritual fitness in the Army, and can be key members of your spiritual community during your service. A chaplain's mission is to nurture the living, care for the sick or wounded, and honor the dead.

Remember that chaplains are advocates for everyone, regardless of where you stand on your core beliefs.

[Popup Meeting With Your Chaplain]

At some point in your service, you may want to meet with a chaplain. But how does this work? Tell your immediate supervisor that you would like to set up a meeting with your chaplain. Each unit has an assigned chaplain, however you could meet with a chaplain from a different unit if you would like. If you would like more information about chaplains – who they are and what they do – click on the links provided here.

[Popup About Chaplains]

You may still have additional questions about chaplains. Listed here are some more details about their identity and professional duties.

A chaplain is an officer who is trained by the U.S. Army. They are involved in all stages of war, from mobilization and deployment to reunion. Chaplains are everywhere – some travel with a unit overseas on missions OR are located on Army bases OR hospitals. They perform religious rites and ceremonies, and provide pastoral care and counseling.

Chaplains conduct moral leadership training and assist Army personnel as well as families and other civilians on moral, ethical, social, and personal issues. A Unit Ministry Team, also known as UMT, includes at least one chaplain and chaplain's assistant.

A chaplain's assistant is an enlisted Soldier and acts as a link between the chaplain and fellow Soldiers. UMTs help Soldiers, families, and civilians alike. How can you identify a chaplain?

Chaplains wear insignia specific to their branch. Click on these links to learn more what this looks like for chaplains and chaplain assistants.

### **SLIDE 9: TESTIMONIALS**

[U.S. Army Soldier] [How has seeking spiritual helped you build your resilience?]

I ended up getting divorced and that was very difficult for me and uh I believe that I kinda sorta went down on two knees spiritually speaking uh hard for me but I was for some, some reason I was still able to function. But at night, it seems like the night was so long and I remember not wanting to live.

At a point, there was a couple weeks there I knew that I was not motivated. I think I was depressed uh and so my commander noticed that too and he didn't know. I mean the Army, I don't know if we were dealing with that time. He was like hey you need to bring your performance up, but I

don't think he knew the magnitude of what I was suffering at that time. So I had my family there and after about 2-3 weeks I started coming around and using the church as the foundation and just believing that it's gonna get better and it started to get better.

[U.S. Army Soldier] [Why is it important to seek spiritual support while deployed?]

You could do deployment alone, but it would be so much easier with a good support system.

If you have to do it alone, I guess you should have spiritual guidance. It would be so much better to go with a higher power, if you are doing it alone. And, if you're with a battle buddy that just helps.

That's all the support you could ever want. It's always there. It's in the hummer with you when you're on a mission. It's in Iraq with you at night. That can be very comforting, a higher power.

[Close window](#)

## **SPIRITUAL DIMENSION**

### **Rituals**

#### **SLIDE 1: OVERVIEW**

[Barber]: Here you go.

[Soldier]: (rubbing scalp) Oh, man...

[Host]: Its official, Bro, you're one of us now.

[Host]: As Soldiers, we go through a lot of situations that can cause spiritual struggles. We may have to do or see things that don't fit with our core values, and we experience long periods of time away from our loved ones and close friends.

And those are just a couple of the things that can weigh on our minds and challenge our spirits. Sometimes these struggles are so tough on us that it can even impact our physical health and well-being. Luckily, there are resources available to us that can help build our spiritual resilience.

In this module, we'll explore many ways that rituals play a role in our lives and may even influence it for the better. We'll talk about what rituals are and how they can help you. You'll also have a chance to create a ritual that works best for you.

#### **SLIDE 2: WHAT ARE RITUALS?**

So what actually is a ritual? It's simple, really... A ritual is a concrete action with meaning. It's something you do that means more than just the action itself, and usually it's something you do more than once. Repeating this action often brings you back to center, or reminds you of something you care about.

Sort of like family traditions, or rites of passage, rituals help you stop and think, remember, and appreciate. Rituals can also be a tool to help you recognize your core self and aspirations.

Think of some rituals that you or someone you know has...

now take a second to write these down here.

### **SLIDE 3: WHY DO WE NEED RITUALS**

Having rituals in your life gives you insight about yourself and makes you more able to consistently act on your values. This is important for every Soldier because it helps you to stay true to your values during split second decisions. It keeps you strong and centered even while you are away from home dealing with stressful situations.

Health care professionals believe that rituals are a valuable resource and can help people transition, connect with others, and deal with stress.

Many veterans and their families believe that rituals and ceremonies are an important part of treating combat operational stress.

Rituals are valuable because they help you reflect on and connect with your deeper purpose and human spirit, making you a stronger, focused, and more adaptable Soldier.

### **SLIDE 4: MYTHS ABOUT RITUALS**

As you can probably imagine, there are quite a few myths out there about rituals. Many people believe that rituals are too old fashioned to help modern day Soldiers... or that rituals are only for big occasions... or that they require lots of people and formal training about what to do.

In reality, rituals can be personally meaningful, done as often as every day, and require nothing more than YOU.

### **SLIDE 5: RITUALS IN THE ARMY**

Rituals can bring Army values to your life on a regular basis, making you an even stronger member of your unit.

Rituals remind us of who we are and what we stand for... and are a significant part of the Army. For example, the three volleys of rifle fire point to the deeper meaning of the value of life.

Press the play button and take a moment to watch this short video.

Posted by collaboration of the Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers,  
www.maaf.info and American Atheists, www.atheists.org

Just as generations before us have done, we fold the flag reverently because it represents our nation's freedom - what we serve to protect. Rituals like swearing an oath are a symbolic demonstration of the value of surrendering your individual liberty for the greater liberty of our nation. It can be something as simple as saluting others.

Click the link to learn more about the ritual of folding the flag...

[Popup Folding the Flag]

While the following unofficial script for flag folding doesn't appear in the Flag Code and has religious references, it is very popular among many patriots...

#### UNITED STATES FLAG (STARS AND STRIPES) FOLDING CEREMONY

The flag-folding ceremony represents the same religious principles on which our country was originally founded. The portion of the flag denoting honor is the canton of blue containing the stars representing the states our veterans served in uniform. The canton field of blue dresses from left to right and is inverted when draped as a pall on a casket of a veteran who has served our country in uniform.

In the Armed Forces of the United States, at the ceremony of retreat the flag is lowered, folded in a triangle fold and kept under watch throughout the night as a tribute to our nation's honored dead. The next morning it is brought out and, at the ceremony of reveille, run aloft as a symbol of our belief in the resurrection of the body.

(Wait for the Honor Guard or Flag Detail to unravel and fold the flag into a quarter fold-resume reading when Honor Guard is standing ready)

We fold from the stripes towards the stars, for whereas the strips represent the thirteen original colonies that founded our republic and they are now embodied in the fifty sovereign states represented by the stars so that the stars cover the stripes.

The first fold of our Flag is a symbol of life. The second fold is a symbol of our belief in eternal life. The third fold is made in honor and remembrances of the Veteran departing our ranks who gave a portion of his life for the defense of our country to attain peace throughout the world not to have been in vain and shall never be forgotten.

The fourth represents our weaker nature, for as American citizens trusting in God, for it is to Him we turn in times of peace as well as in times of war for His divine guidance.

The fifth fold is a tribute to our country, for in the words of the immortal Stephen Decatur, "Our country, in dealing with other countries, may She always be right, but it is still our country, right or wrong."

The sixth fold -- for this is where our hearts lie -- and it is with our hearts that we pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The seventh fold is a tribute to our Armed Forces, for it is through these same armed forces that we protect our country and our Flag against all her enemies, whether they be found within our without the boundaries of our republic.

The eighth fold is a tribute to the one who entered into the Valley of the Shadow of Death that we might see the light of day, and this fold is made to honor Mother, for whom it flies on Mother's Day.

The ninth fold is a tribute to our womanhood, for it has been through their faith, love, loyalty, and devotion that the characters of men who have made this country great have been molded.

The tenth fold is a tribute to Father, for he too has given his sons for the defense of our country, since he was first born.

The eleventh fold, for in the eyes of a Hebrew citizen, this represents the lower portion of the seal of King David and King Solomon, and glorifies in their eyes the God of

Abraham, the God of Isaac, and God of Jacob.

The twelfth fold, for in the eyes of a Christian citizen, this represents an emblem of eternity and glorifies in their eyes God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

When the flag is completely folded, the stars are uppermost, which reminds us of our national motto, "In God We Trust".

After the flag is completely folded and tucked in, it takes on the appearance of a cocked hat, ever reminding us of the soldiers who served under General George Washington and the sailors and marines who served under Captain John Paul Jones who were followed by their comrades and shipmates in the Armed Forces of the United States, preserving for us the rights, privileges, and freedoms we enjoy today.

#### **SLIDE 6: RITUALS AND THE ARMY CORE VALUES**

Rituals don't have to be reserved for a big event... you can use them any time. They can help you bring Army Values to life every day.

Click the Army Values to see how rituals apply to each one.

[Loyalty Popup]

Rolling up the colors and casing the colors of your division or unit is a ritual that can remind you of your commitment to do your best for your fellow Soldiers and country.

[Duty Popup]

As you know, duty means being able to accomplish tasks as part of a team. Rituals such as celebrating birthdays, anniversaries, and other special events of those in your unit may help to strengthen and bond your team. Helping each other recognize these events can play a positive role in keeping spirits up.

[Respect Popup]

Saluting, honoring fallen Soldiers, and celebrating Veteran's Day are all rituals that bring respect into your life.

[Selfless Service Popup]

Take a moment before you start each day to look at the flag that is on your uniform to remind you to put the welfare of the Nation, the Army, and your subordinates before your own.

[Honor Popup]

You become an honorable Soldier by living the Army values each day. Participating in some of these rituals can help engage you in these values.

[Integrity Popup]

At the end of the day you can think about what you did that day that was morally sound and good natured, and recommit yourself to continue acting with integrity.

[Personal Courage Popup]

You can strengthen your own courage by building a strong sense of your human spirit and your purpose. You can do this by reflecting on why you are here, your strengths, the support you have from loved ones and, if you so believe, a greater power.

## **SLIDE 7: TYPES OF RITUALS**

There are many different types of rituals. Take a moment to discover each of the ones shown here.

[Popup Transition Rituals]

In the Army, you experience many significant transitions. For example, transitioning from being a Soldier to a civilian, and going from non-combative situations into active combat.

These transitions can be challenging. They can lead to spiritual struggles. But rituals can help you through these times of change and help you prepare for your next role.

During the Individual Entry Training Soldier graduation, Soldiers put on their beret for the first time, symbolizing a change of identity and increased responsibility.

This graduation is the transition from all your basic and job training, to receiving your first permanent duty assignment.

At this graduation, you become a Soldier, responsible for living by the Army values.

Whether you deploy with your unit or on your own, you can practice the ritual of putting the deployment patch on your right sleeve to show the world that you are a Soldier and to remind yourself that you are officially back in this role.

[Popup Rituals with Water]

Combat situations as well as other tough life experiences that might not align with our values or core beliefs can leave us feeling unclean. Think of a conversation you've had that was such a negative experience you wanted to take a shower afterward... it can sometimes feel as if the hot water will wash away the stress and negativity of the bad experience from our body.

Water can help 'cleanse you.' Water has been used for centuries as a physical and symbolic cleansing agent and part of rituals. You can use it in everyday life to 'wash away' the effects of events that don't align with your core values. You can begin with the intention to purify yourself and try one of the rituals listed here.

[Popup Connection Rituals]

In the Army, you will experience being away from loved ones and rituals can help you maintain a connection with them. Let's consider some of those.

There are many rituals that can help you stay connected with loved ones. You can write regular letters to those you miss, catch up with friends and family by setting up times to Skype or talk on the phone, look at photographs of loved ones before going to bed, hold an item that reminds you of a great memory, like a ticket stub from your first date with your wife.

Additionally, there are rituals to help you connect with your unit, creating stronger bonds and adding a sense of community and camaraderie. Making an effort to celebrate each other's birthdays, congratulate a buddy on his

anniversary, or throwing a party for the whole unit before deploying are all ways to use rituals and strengthen bonds in your unit.

You may already be doing some of these rituals without even knowing it. Maybe you're joking with and encouraging your battle buddies while heading to a mission or huddling up to motivate the group before entering a potentially dangerous situation. These are ways that rituals might already be a healthy part of your routine.

[Popup Coping Rituals]

Now let's look at how rituals can help you cope with stress.

As a Soldier, you've probably experienced the stressors of seeing death and injury, and of being afraid for your safety and the safety of others. Here are a few rituals that might help you get through these hard times: Set an empty place at the table for a fallen friend when sitting down to a meal and take a moment to remember good times spent with them. Say a prayer or listen to a song that puts your mind in a good place before heading into a mission. Play practical jokes and use humor to keep your own, and those around you, spirits up.

Being in the Army can also involve a lot of moving, from one rank or job to another, as well as moving your home and family around the country or world.

We often associate moving from a house where you created many meaningful memories, with leaving those memories behind when you relocate. There are some rituals that can help you acknowledge these memories and also help you look forward to making equally great memories in our new home. Before moving out of your home, take time to reflect on the good times you had there. Upon moving into your new home, take a moment to think of the possibilities and new adventures you'll have in this new place.

### **SLIDE 8: MODULE ACTIVITY**

Now that you've learned about many different types of

rituals, what rituals would you like to add to your life to increase your connection to yourself, others, and, if you so believe, a greater power?

In this activity, you'll create your own ritual that can add meaning to your life and help you stay centered.

First, a meaningful ritual should be symbolic of your values. Next, it should involve your full attention as you perform it.

Also, the ritual you create or adopt might include an object. Look at the list here. Are there any objects that you can think of that would be meaningful for your rituals?

And saving the best for last... when designing your rituals, ask yourself, what is the purpose of this ritual?

How do you want this ritual to help you? Such as with a transition, connect you to others, live out Army values, cleanse, or cope with loss.

Remember, whatever rituals you decide to bring into your life, just remember to make it meaningful and helpful to YOU.

Take a moment to work through this activity. When you are done, you can click the 'print' button to take this list with you and have a reminder to practice these rituals and develop more as you need them.

### **SLIDE 9: MODULE QUIZ**

Complete this brief quiz.

### **SLIDE 10: TAKE AWAY**

To sum up this module...

- A ritual is:
- A concrete action with meaning
- A tool to help you act from your values and core self
- Symbolic of your values, involve your full attention and an action, and may include meaningful objects

Rituals help you to:

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www.maaf.info and American Atheists, www.atheists.org

- Make informed 'split second' decisions
- Remain a strong, centered person under stress
- Bring Army values to life both on and off duty
- Reflect on and connect with your deeper purpose and human spirit

Remember, rituals can help you identify your core self and aspirations, reminding you of who you are and what you stand for. Incorporating rituals in your life will open you up to be more in touch with yourself and better able to act on your values time after time.

[Close window](#)

## **SPIRITUAL DIMENSION**

### **Making Meaning**

#### **SLIDE 1: OVERVIEW**

[Host]: Kaufman? Are you in here? Where is that guy?

[Kaufman]: Yeah, I'm here.

[Host]: Man, what are you doing in here in the dark?

[Kaufman]: (sadly) Nothin'.

[Host]: Snap out of it, man... we're all going to miss him.

[Kaufman]: Yeah, I know, it's just...

[Host]: ... it's just what?

[Kaufman]: This is gonna sound stupid, but I just feel lost. Nothing makes any sense to me anymore. He didn't deserve that...he didn't do anything wrong.

[Host]: It was nobody's fault, man. I know it's hard for us to understand why it happened, and it doesn't seem fair... but if you ever need to talk or vent, I'm here.

[Host]: Look familiar? You may have found yourself in similar situations that challenge how you make sense of life. It's hard to understand why bad things happen, why life is often unfair, and what the purpose of life is. These challenges can take different shapes and may leave you confused, feeling alone in the dark... emotionally and spiritually.

You do, however, have the power to 'make positive meaning' of the challenges in your life, such as marriage and childbirth, changes in roles, close friendships, conflicts with others, personal weaknesses and failures, unfair treatment by others, and devastating human error.

'Making positive meaning' helps us to shed some light on difficult situations.

[Kaufman]: Thanks, man.

[Host]: You bet.

[Host]:

During this module, we are going to learn many ways of dealing with difficult situations that cause us to struggle spiritually and how we can come out a stronger person by utilizing different methods of coping and "making meaning."

It's about how we can become an even stronger Soldier and individual by going through these events and dealing with them in a way that works best for each one of us.

It is also about managing expectations as we go through these trying situations so that we don't blame ourselves for things that are out of our control; and so that we don't set impossibly high standards for ourselves.

That's why in this module, we'll review some ways we can stay spiritually resilient in the face of adversity or when transitioning through some pretty major life changes.

### **SLIDE 2 MEANING WHEN CHALLENGED**

Soldiers experience a lot of circumstances that can cause spiritual struggles. We see disturbing situations and are sometimes faced with moral dilemmas we aren't as likely to face in civilian life. These spiritual struggles can also include the weight that comes with not being close to your family and friends for long periods during deployment or relocation.

Because of the unique nature of military life, it is particularly important to have ways to make sense of situations that are difficult to understand. This module is designed to give you the tools to find meaning when you are confronted with hard situations. Like tools that you might use to fix a car, the more tools you have to develop your system of meaning, the easier it will be to fix when problems come up.

### **SLIDE 3: PROBLEMS RELATED TO LOST MEANING**

Now let's discuss how not dealing with our spiritual struggles can affect our life and cause us to lose meaning

and face possible negative effects.

Experts suggest that it is especially important to be able to make sense of problems that affect one's core self, beliefs, and values because people who cannot find meaning in these situations often develop poorer mental health.

Ignoring problems may only make them worse. Struggles of the human spirit that are not solved can lead to hopelessness and even more serious problems, such as losing touch with your core self, lack of discipline, trouble with superiors, combat fatigue, alcoholism or drug abuse, and thoughts of suicide.

#### **SLIDE 4: SUICIDE**

One sign of struggles of the human spirit is loss of hope, which can sometimes lead you to thoughts of suicide. Thoughts about suicide can happen when Soldiers feel as though they have lost their sense of meaning and purpose in life. Soldiers need resources to help them regain a sense of meaning when they experience struggles. The process of making meaning out of the most difficult circumstances can transform struggles into something positive - or protect you from losing hope.

If you find yourself or a fellow Soldier losing touch, struggling spiritually, abusing alcohol or drugs, showing a lack of discipline, having trouble with a superior, experiencing combat fatigue, or thinking of suicide, it is extremely important to turn to your battle buddy or Commander for help.

#### **SLIDE 5 POSITIVE MEANING MAKING**

As an Army Soldier, there will be times that are difficult, that seemingly push you to the end of your resources. Even so, any Soldier can find positive ways to understand even the most troubling situations. By increasing your meaning making resources, you can find strength to hang on until the problem passes, learn how to benefit from your experiences, reinforce your core beliefs and values, and develop your human spirit. Research shows that meaning-

making resources can help you to face and overcome stressful experiences.

You may already be doing this in your life. Maybe you've already found positive experiences from struggles or challenges. This is adaptive, healthy, and an important part of resilience. However, there may be times when it is harder to build meaning from difficult times. That's why this module provides training on how to increase your ability to make meaning when it matters most.

### **SLIDE 6 POSITIVE MEANING MAKING**

[Host]: Hey Kaufman, whatcha doing? I see you still have the lights on.

[Kaufman]: I'm thinking about a question that Johnso just asked me.

[Host]: Yeah? What's that?

[Kaufman]: He asked me "What's the difference between finding the meaning of life, and making my life meaningful?"

[Host]: That's an interesting question. How did you answer?

[Kaufman]: Well, finding the meaning or purpose of life itself is sort of a hard question, and everyone might answer it differently depending on their perspective. But, making my life meaningful is something I can do something about everyday. So, Johnson told me to list what I meant by that.

[Host]: Ok, did you list them yet?

[Kaufman]: No, I don't have any paper. Let me go get some.

[Host]: I can help with that... So tell me, how would you start your list?

[Kaufman]: Well, I really like having a mission, first of all. I feel like I have a footing, and know what to expect of myself. It motivates me to determine the first steps of my mission, and get others involved.

HOST: Excellent, keep going.

[Kaufman]: I feel that everything happens for a reason. I'm not sure how to explain the bad stuff, but I feel that I can grow from anything that happens. The challenge is figuring out how.

[Host]: Got it. Next?

[Kaufman]: When I get lost in myself, I have to step back and get the big picture. When I do, I realize that I'm part of something bigger than me, and that maybe my purpose is part of a bigger purpose.

[Host]: You are doing really well, man. What else?

[Kaufman]: Humm... Sometimes it helps me to focus on what I'm grateful for like remembering the good times we had together.

[Host]: Yeah, I get you, totally relate.

[Kaufman]: OK, I'm tapped out of ideas. You got any ideas?

[Host]: Actually, hold that thought.

[Host]: Kaufman has done a great job with his list, but I do have something to add see, he got the first 4 of 8. Let's keep adding to this list.

There are many ways to make sense of challenges. The next few slides provide some positive meaning making strategies that you can use in your Army career and hopefully far beyond that as well. Some strategies may fit for you, but others may not. Also, you might need to adapt the strategies to make them work for you.

Think about a time when you encountered a really difficult situation. Maybe you suffered an injury and were forced to go through intense physical therapy to get back into fighting shape. Or maybe your relationship with your significant other had hit a rough patch. It could even be that your best friend got deployed to the most dangerous combat zone again. There are many life situations that leave us wondering 'why'? Why is this happening to me? Or why is such a good person having such bad things happen to them? We'll explore different ways you could handle these

situations and how during rough times positive meaning-making can help you adjust to such stressful experiences.

These are some of the tactics you might use to try and make positive meaning. Some strategies will apply to certain situations better than others: You can hang on until the problem passes, grow from challenging experiences, strengthen core beliefs and values, or develop a strong human spirit.

[Popup Sense of Mission]

Meaning can also be found by remembering that there is a mission, a reason for why you are where you are now. When there is an important mission to accomplish, it can help the Soldier feel better about his or her circumstances. The Army may have given you a deep sense of mission in your career and in your life.

You may also have other missions outside of the Army. Maybe you imagine how happy your kids will be when you arrive safely back home and can hug them again after months of separation. Concentrate on that end goal for yourself as it can help you get through the immediate challenges at hand by giving it deep impact to you personally. When you are challenged most, you can rely on both your personal motivation to complete the mission as well as the importance of the current Army mission you are tasked with to help you push forward.

[Popup Time of Testing]

Challenges can be seen as opportunities to show the Soldier's human spirit, or core self. It isn't until Soldiers pass through the fire that they know what they are made of. In your own life, you can probably think of times when you have been tested. How has overcoming those challenges prepared you for the testing that you may experience in the Army? These challenges may be chances to show yourself and others that you have a well developed human spirit.

Understanding these challenges can motivate you to

become your best self.

Trials test the Soldier's commitment to the seven Army values: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. You might also have other values that are important to you. Think of one time you stayed true to your core values despite a challenge, and describe it in the space provided.

[Popup Human Destructiveness]

Sometimes there's nothing more to explain negative experiences than to simply recognize human destructiveness. One way to make sense of seeing or experiencing suffering is to accept that sometimes people really do want to hurt others. All people are tempted by their dark side at times, but giving in to these feelings can cause harm to others and the world around us.

Although this is not a pleasant fact, it can help to recognize that some seemingly unexplainable events are created by human decisions. A Soldier can't hold himself accountable for someone else's actions.

A Soldier with integrity wants to build a better world. A Soldier does not want to cause harm unless it is necessary to make the world a better place.

[Popup Imperfect World]

Another way to understand difficulties is to recognize that we live in an imperfect world where seemingly random things happen. People make mistakes. Our best plans cannot foresee all possible problems.

Even nature, something we often turn to for its calming effects, can contain unpredictable, destructive forces. It is important for Soldiers to have realistic expectations so that they do not blame themselves for things they cannot control or hold themselves to impossible standards. Because our world is not perfect, we can accept the fact that we will inevitably make mistakes at some point in our lives. Even when we do our best, unknown possibilities might get in the

way our efforts, but we can't let that stop us from striving toward our goals.

[Popup Ultimate Justice]

Some Soldiers believe that all suffering will eventually be made right. They may trust in legal authorities to punish destructive actions, while society might work to help innocent victims.

Some Soldiers might also believe that a greater power restores justice by punishing bad deeds and providing relief to victims, either in life or after this life. Many people believe that karma has a way of paying people back for their good or bad deeds. Believing that justice will ultimately be served can help Soldiers cope with injustice around them right now.

What are your beliefs about if and how justice is achieved when bad things happen? Type your thoughts in the space provided.

[Popup Growth of Experience]

Let's discuss how we grow mentally and spiritually strong and resilient. Soldiers can find meaning in challenges by turning them into opportunities to develop their human spirit. Challenges teach Soldiers important lessons, such as how to overcome fear. Each challenge is also a chance to learn strategies for avoiding or handling similar situations in the future. So you can see that facing struggle is necessary for development – it can make you a better, stronger person. Further, according to researchers, viewing struggle as a means of personal growth is tied to better mental health.

When you have faced challenges before, did you learn any important lessons or strategies? How have you grown as a result of learning these lessons?

Think of two values – either Army values or personal values - where you would like to grow and type them in the space provided.

### [Popup Developing Gratitude]

Gratitude is another meaning-making strategy. It can be very easy to take what we have for granted and not recognize that people in other parts of the world go without many of the privileges that we have as Americans.

As a Soldier, you'll see and sometimes experience firsthand some of the tough living conditions experienced by others around the world. The hard times can help Soldiers better appreciate what they have to be grateful for and learn what is truly important in life.

When Soldiers think about all that they have in life, their gratitude can put current troubles in perspective.

This strategy could also be very beneficial even outside of your Army career as you may feel gratitude for all that you have been given and have earned.

### [Popup Greater Purpose]

Some Soldiers believe in a greater power or purpose in the universe. These Soldiers may have faith that even their struggles have a larger meaning. It can be reassuring to think that there is a good reason for the challenges that a person faces. Now, I don't mean you must be extremely religious or believe in a particular deity. It can be as simple as the belief in something larger than yourself in the universe... some might call it believing in fate. Also, Soldiers who believe in a greater power might feel confident that their situation is under control.

A study of U.S. Soldiers in Kosovo suggested that making sense of challenges by relying on beliefs about a greater power is related to better mental health. Many other studies have reported similar findings.

What are your beliefs about the existence of a greater purpose in the universe? How do you think about your challenges in light of your beliefs? Type your response in the space provided. If these questions are not relevant for you or you would prefer not to answer, go to the next slide.

## **SLIDE 7: MODULE ACTIVITY**

OK, in this activity, you'll consider some examples of how people can make meaning.

Read the following examples of problems that people might face in the Army. For each example, come up with at least two different ways to make sense of the situation. Decide which meaning-making strategies would work best for you if you had to deal with similar circumstances.

[Scenario 1]

Private Locke has found his training to be more difficult than he expected. In fact, he has even failed some of his evaluations. He cannot understand why he is having such a hard time because he has always thought of himself as a strong, capable person.

What are two ways that Private Locke could make sense of his struggle to do well in the Army?

Type them in the space provided. Be sure to explain specific ways that he could use the strategies.

[Scenario 1 Feedback]

Here are three possible ways that Private Locke could make sense of his challenge. Did you think of the same strategies or different ones?

One way Private Locke could make sense of his challenge is to remind himself why he is in training. This strategy is called "Remembering the Mission." Private Locke's mission might be to serve his country or to make his family and friends proud.

Another strategy Private Locke could use is the "Time of Testing" strategy. This strategy involves viewing challenges as opportunities to stay true to core beliefs and values. Private Locke could stay true to his values of hard work and achievement.

A third possible strategy is for Private Locke to think of his situation as a "Growth Experience." He could believe that he

will become a better Soldier as a result of his training.

[Scenario 2]

During her deployment, Sergeant Chen has not had as much contact with her husband and children as she would like. She often feels very distant from them and wonders if they miss her. It doesn't seem fair that she has to be separated from her family.

Think of at least two ways Sergeant Chen could make sense of her loneliness and type them in the space provided. Be sure to explain specific ways that she could use the strategies.

[Scenario 2 Feedback]

Here are three ways we thought of that Sergeant Chen could make sense of her situation. Did you think of the same strategies or different ones?

Sergeant Chen could use the "Developing Gratitude" strategy. She might spend time thinking about her gratitude for having a family and for having memories of them.

A second option might be for Sergeant Chen to use the "Greater Purpose" strategy if she believes in a greater power or purpose in the universe. She might have faith that a greater power will bring something good out of her experience.

Sergeant Chen could also think of this situation as a "Time of Testing." She might focus on showing her emotional strength in spite of being separated from her family.

[Scenario 3]

During a firefight with an enemy combatant who took cover in a civilian neighborhood, Lieutenant Martinez accidentally killed a civilian. He is feeling guilty because he has violated his own belief that killing innocent people is wrong.

What are two ways that Lieutenant Martinez could make sense of this tragedy? Type them in the space provided. Be sure to explain specific ways that he could use the

strategies.

[Scenario 3 Feedback]

One way Lieutenant Martinez could respond to the civilian casualty is to remind himself that he lives in an "Imperfect World." Recognizing that the casualty was a mistake that occurred because of circumstances beyond his control might help him understand what happened.

Lieutenant Martinez could also use the "Sense of Mission" strategy. He could focus on the importance of the war being fought by thinking about all the people's lives this war could actually save.

[Scenario 4]

Dixon has seen a lot of suffering and death on the battlefield. She sometimes thinks the world is an unfair, cruel place, but she wants to believe that this is not true.

Pick two ways that General Dixon could think about her experiences and type them in the space provided. Be sure to explain specific ways that she could use the strategies

[Scenario 4 Feedback]

General Dixon could take this opportunity for "Developing Gratitude." Her difficult experiences can help her appreciate the good things in life. On the other hand, General Dixon may need to accept the human causes of suffering.

Following the "Human Destructiveness" strategy, she might acknowledge that the ability to cause suffering is part of being human.

Finally, General Dixon might believe in "Ultimate Justice." That is, those who do wrong will be punished and victims will be repaid for their suffering. Such a belief could restore General Dixon's hope that the world is fair.

[Activity Wrap-up]

You can come up with more strategies.

Think and talk about the challenges you face.

You will grow as a Soldier who can handle even the most

intense challenges.

Always remember to look for meaningful ways to understand your experiences.

You can print your answers if you like here, or spend a little time making some additional notes about what you've learned. When you are finished, you can print your comments, if you like.

### **SLIDE 8 TESTIMONIALS**

[U.S. ARMY SOLDIER] [WHAT DO YOU DO THAT HELPS YOU DEAL WITH THE LONELINESS THAT COMES WITH BEING SEPARATED FROM YOUR FAMILY DURING LONG DEPLOYMENTS?]

WELL I BELIEVE THAT IT DOESN'T NECESSARILY HAVE BE GOD OR A DEITY LIKE THAT I THINK THAT IT GOES BACK TO WHAT YOU SAID IN YOUR QUESTION, IT GOES BACK TO HAVING SOMETHING TO BELIEVE IN, YOU KNOW HAVING PURPOSE, BEING DRIVEN. AND IF YOU HAVE PURPOSE AND YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO BELIEVE IN...LIKE YOU'RE 12 MONTHS IN TO A 15 MONTH DEPLOYMENT....I WILL SEE MY FAMILY, I WILL SEE MY FAMILY AGAIN. THAT IS PURPOSE, THAT MOTIVATES, THAT GIVES PEOPLE THAT DRIVE TO ACCOMPLISH THEIR MISSION AND DO WHAT THEY NEED TO DO TO THEIR FULLEST CAPABILITIES.

[U.S. ARMY SOLDIER] [WHAT DO YOU DO TO MAKE MEANING OUT OF DIFFICULT EXPERIENCES?]

I THINK SPIRITUALITY AND FAITH ON A BROAD SCALE IS BELIEF IN SOMETHING BIGGER THAN YOURSELF.

WHETHER IT'S FAITH THAT THE UNITED STATES IS THE GREATEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD AND THAT NO MATTER WHAT WE'RE GONNA OVERCOME TERRORISM OR COMMUNISM OR WHATEVER.

I BELIEVE THAT IS THE AMERICAN PEOPLE HADN'T HAD FAITH IN THE UNITED STATES WE WOULD'VE NEVER BEEN THE PEOPLE THAT CAME OUT ON TOP OF THE COLD WAR.

IN MY LIFE, SPIRITUALITY IS BELIEF IN MY GOD, AND

DESPITE ALL THE HARDSHIPS AND TROUBLE AND EVERYTHING THAT I'VE EXPERIENCED IN MY LIFE, ONE DAY I'VE BEEN PROMISED A HOME WITH GOD IN HEAVEN.

SO FOR ME, AND I'M A REALLY SPIRITUAL GUY, FOR ME GOING THROUGH THIS IS ONLY TEMPORARY. I BELIEVE ONE DAY ALL THIS WILL PASS AWAY, AND ALL WILL BE BEAUTIFUL AND PERFECT FOREVER.

AND FOR PEOPLE THAT HAVE THAT FAITH AND THAT ONE DAY SUFFERING WILL END AND BAD THINGS WILL END, THEY'RE ABLE TO DEAL WITH HARD THINGS THAT COME UP IN THEIR LIFE AND SEE IT MORE AS TEMPORARY.

YOU KNOW IT'S REALLY HARD WHEN YOU'RE GOING THROUGH HARD TIMES TO SEE THAT. I MEAN I'VE DISCONNECTED FROM THAT HOPE AND THAT PEACE THAT YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO GET FROM YOUR FAITH A LOT OF TIME, AND IT'S HARD TO RECONNECT WITH THAT.

BUT PEOPLE THAT ARE CONNECTED WITH THEIR SPIRITUALITY AND WITH THEIR FAITH GENERALLY HAVE AN INNER PEACE THAT SURPASSES THE DIFFICULT SITUATION. THEY'LL ADMIT TO YOU THAT THEY'RE MISERABLE; THIS IS TERRIBLE; THIS IS HOT; I'M COLD, WHATEVER.

BUT THEY KNOW THIS IS ONLY TEMPORARY AND AT WORST THIS MIGHT LAST LONGER AND...OR WE MIGHT DIE, BUT IF I DIE I'M GOING TO A BETTER PLACE AND THAT GIVES THEM STRENGTH TO CONTINUE FIGHTING OR TO CONTINUE SUFFERING THROUGH WHATEVER IT IS.

[U.S. ARMY SOLDIER] [HOW HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO REMAIN SPIRITUALLY STRONG AS A SOLDIER DURING WARTIME?]

THE SPIRITUAL PORTION, WHETHER, WHATEVER YOUR GOD MAY BE. OR IF THERE'S A...WHATEVER YOUR HIGHER POWER MAY BE IT GIVES YOU A SENSE OF HOPE. IF YOU'VE GOT ROUNDS FLYING AT YOU, AND YOU'RE FIRING BACK ROUNDS, IN THE BACK OF YOUR MIND AND IN THE FRONT OF YOUR MIND, YOU'VE GOT THAT HOPE. MY

Posted by collaboration of the Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers,  
www.maaf.info and American Atheists, www.atheists.org

HIGHER BEING IS GONNA BE THERE TO HELP ME GET THROUGH THIS. AND IF SOMETHING DOES HAPPEN TO ME, MY HIGHER POWER WILL TAKE CARE OF ME. IF YOUR CHOICE IS GOD, YOU KNOW, GOD WILL BE THERE TO WELCOME ME INTO HEAVEN AND HE WILL MAKE SURE, HELP ME LOOK OVER MY FAMILY IN THAT ASPECT OR WHICHEVER SPIRITUAL IS YOUR CHOICE.

### **SLIDE 9 MODULE QUIZ**

Take a few moments to complete this quiz.

### **SLIDE 10 TAKE AWAY**

In this module, we've discussed a number of strategies for making meaning in difficult situations, but you can probably come up with more.

Spend time thinking about the challenges you face on your own and talk about them with other Soldiers. If you think about those situations and what ways you can make meaning to get through the rough patches in life, you will grow as a Soldier and be able to make it through even the most intense challenges.

Always remember to look for positive ways to understand your experiences.

[Close window](#)

## **SPIRITUAL DIMENSION**

### **Meditation**

#### **SLIDE 1: OVERVIEW**

[Kaufman]: Hey, man... (HOST concentrating, no answer)  
Yo, dude?

[Host]: Oh, sorry... I was in the zone.

[Kaufman]: Ha, I know what you mean. I came in to work off some stress.

[Host]: Yeah, I missed my workout yesterday. I felt off all day... I don't know what I'd do without this gym.

[Host]: Whew. There's nothing like a good workout to help us feel centered, well balanced, and in tune with our thoughts. It helps us to decompress and find an internal calm... and that's always a good place to be.

There are other things besides a good workout that can also help us achieve this state of well being. For the sake of this module, we are going to call these things meditation.

We've been learning about the importance spiritual fitness in the Army and how it can help your life as a Soldier. In this module, you will learn how meditation can help you develop your human spirit and build resiliency, learn about different types of meditation, and hopefully dispel any hesitation you have about trying meditation for yourself.

#### **SLIDE 2: THE ROLE OF CONTEMPLATION AND MEDITATION IN THE MILITARY**

As a Soldier in the Army, you are charged with the great responsibility of protecting and defending the United States of America. You have put all of yourself into your training and service, and this can put you in many difficult and stressful situations. These stresses can include being away from home and family, living in a foreign country, undergoing intensive physical and mental training, experiencing conflict with commanding officers or

subordinates, being deployed to combat situations, or seeing a buddy get hurt or killed in action.

When faced with difficult stressors, even the best warriors can have trouble keeping the motivation and responsibility necessary to accomplish their mission. For example, what happens if your character, intentions, or work ethic are questioned? How can you maintain your connection with your human spirit and your deepest values in the midst of the many stresses and responsibilities of military life? You need some way to re-connect to core aspects of yourself in order to maintain the motivation, discipline, and courage necessary to serve your country.

### **SLIDE 3: WHAT IS CONTEMPLATION?**

Contemplation is one way to maintain these connections to your human spirit and your core values.

Many people have questions about what contemplation is – it can take many forms. At its most basic, contemplation means “to consider something with attention.” This can refer to thinking, journaling, reading, writing, or whatever allows you to focus your attention on one aspect of your environment or life.

Contemplation is a way of getting in touch with and strengthening our human spirit.

In contemplation, we focus our attention in a specific way instead of being distracted by things around us.

Contemplation helps us draw on our strengths and remember our highest values in everyday life, as well as during times of stress.

Contemplation allows us to shift gears and get in touch with greater meaning and purpose in ourselves and in the world.

Contemplation can focus inward or outward.

There are many forms of contemplation.

One of the most common is meditation.

### **SLIDE 4: COMMON QUESTIONS AND**

## **MISCONCEPTIONS**

Before we dive into discovering more about meditation, let's address any concerns or hesitations you may have. Believe me, I was skeptical at first too. I didn't see how or why meditation should be a part of my daily life as a Soldier. But it turns out I was just holding on to some stereotypes and had been misperceiving meditation all along.

Maybe you still have concerns about meditation in your life. Let's talk about some common concerns and myths regarding meditation.

[Popup Concern 1]

Many people worry that because meditation is not part of their formal belief system or practices, they should not or cannot meditate. However, the fact of the matter is that people from many different traditions and philosophies meditate. Although many Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, and Christians meditate, meditation itself is not a religious practice or affiliated with any specific religious group.

As we have seen, meditation is useful for many types of people in dealing with stress and improving well-being. This is why many resiliency and fitness centers offer meditative training. Meditation helps strengthen the human spirit and regardless of your belief system, it could be of benefit to you.

[Popup Concern 2]

Some people wonder why they should just "sit around," especially when they are busy and stressed. But meditation is about much more than "sitting around." Meditation helps you understand yourself better the more you pay attention. How long can you stay focused? What thoughts keep popping into your head? What emotions do you experience? You learn that your thoughts and feelings are constantly changing. You gradually get better at responding in positive ways to life events as well as to your own thoughts and emotions.

### [Popup Concern 3]

Some people think meditation is weird or new age-y and that you have to be some kind of hippie to meditate. Although it's true that meditation first became popular in the United States in the 1960's and 1970's, it has been around for centuries and has been practiced by all different kinds of people, including Soldiers. Many different types of groups encourage meditation because it can strengthen the human mind and spirit. Doctors and therapists recommend meditation for people from all walks of life, of all ages, ethnicities, and belief systems.

### **SLIDE 5: WHY MEDITATE**

There are many definitions of meditation. We'll explore a couple here.

The simplest version of meditation is to engage in contemplation or reflection. This can be just you alone with your thoughts. Another version of meditation is to perform mental exercises. For example, concentrating on your breathing or repeating a mantra over and over for the purpose of reaching a heightened level of spiritual awareness.

Many people wonder why they should learn to meditate. Maybe you do too? Under the pressures and demands of being a Soldier, it can be easy to lose touch with important aspects of your core self, why you are there, and your most basic values. Meditation can provide a resource to get you back in touch with what matters. It can renew and invigorate you and help eliminate distractions so you can focus on your mission.

There are many benefits to meditation, including gaining a new perspective on stressful situations, building skills to manage your stress, increasing self-awareness, focusing on the present, and reducing negative emotions. When you practice meditation regularly, you may become more aware of subtle aspects of your environment that you never noticed before. You may begin to feel that your mind is

more calm and clear.

These effects can be very beneficial to Soldiers. For example, gaining new perspective can help you appreciate the values your service stands for and defends. Increasing your ability to handle stress can allow you to enjoy the positive aspects of your job and the people you work with. Other benefits from meditation can help you become more resilient when facing difficult situations.

Due to these positive effects, the U.S. military has started teaching meditation in recent years. The Navy, the Marines, and the Army incorporate meditation into their training to help recruits deal with combat stress. VA hospitals increasingly offer programs including yoga and meditation for Soldier rehabilitation.

One West Point graduate, a Black Hawk helicopter pilot in the Iraq war learned meditation during his military training and continued to meditate throughout his deployment there. He said that despite the difficulties of military culture, he found meditation to be an invaluable tool during crises, especially as an officer who needs to maintain composure before his Soldiers in times of intense stress. He reported camouflaging his meditation by wearing headphones while sitting on his cot. Others assumed he was listening to music, but his headphones were silent. He was simply being in the moment, repeating the words "here, now, here, now."

In recent years, articles about meditation have appeared in magazines such as Time and Newsweek, talking about the many positive benefits. In a recent Time article, Soldiers report a variety of benefits, such as improved aim at the shooting range, increased ability to deal with combat stress, smoother transitions to life at home, greater ability to deal with stressful situations, improved self-control and confidence, and an easier time setting goals. You can read more at the link provided.

Even scientists and doctors have begun to research the

effects of meditation. Many studies have shown that meditation is beneficial to a number of different types of people. For example, meditation has been shown to have positive outcomes with regard to both physical and mental well-being. It has been shown to reduce distress and increase positive mental health and to help cope with difficulties in mood and behavior. Meditation has also been shown to help cope with medical conditions such as pain, heart disease, and cancer and even to help increase immunity.

For example, recent research has shown meditation to be beneficial for decreasing negative aspects related to stress, such as anger, hostility, depression and anxiety. Meditation has also been shown to help increase positive characteristics such as performance in athletic, academic, and work environments, as well as improved sleep quality and duration.

### **SLIDE 6: HOW TO MEDITATE**

[Host]: What's up, man?

[Kaufman]: I'm trying out this whole meditation thing. But I'm not so sure I'm doing it right.

[Host]: Dude, yoga is a good start, but you know, meditation can be very simple. You might be making this harder than it really is. See, meditation is about simplifying. You don't need much other than the ability to find some time to tune out the world.

The main things you will need are a special place; a quiet state of mind, and a meditation practice that works for you.

Depending on the kind of meditation you choose, you may also want other items like a special cushion or mat, audio or video, or loose, comfortable clothing.

### **SLIDE 7: TYPES OF MEDITATION**

There are many different kinds of meditation. Each uses a different object of attention. Hover your cursor over each of the types of meditation below to learn how attention is

focused for that type of meditation. Then, click the types of meditation to learn more. Not every type of meditation will seem like a good fit for you, but with the many choices you will probably find at least one that works for your lifestyle.

### [Breathing Meditation]

In breathing meditation, the normal breath is often the object of attention. Simply pay attention to each inhale and exhale. Closing your eyes can help prevent distractions. Notice sensations in your nose, chest or belly. You might want to count each inhale. It's harder than you think...your mind will wander!

Sometimes, breathing meditations control the breath by inhaling and exhaling slowly or rapidly. Additionally, breathing meditation may have you hold the breath between inhales and exhales. Breathing meditations are common in some types of yoga, for example.

### [Breathing Activity]

Begin by sitting or standing in a comfortable position with your eyes closed. If there are noises in the background, just try to incorporate them into your meditation. Perfect silence isn't necessary; what matters is where you place your attention in the foreground. For this meditation, we will focus on natural breathing.

Before we begin, it is helpful to uncross your arms and legs. Then, take a moment to check that each part of your body is completely comfortable – your feet and legs, your buttocks and pelvis, your lower back, abdomen, and chest, your shoulders and neck, and your arms and hands. Try also to relax your facial muscles and your scalp muscles as much as possible.

Gently bring your awareness to your breath, noticing each inhale and each exhale. Don't control or change your breathing; simply observe.

Pay attention to whether your breathing is shallow or deep. Notice if it is quick or slow.

Are you breathing through your mouth or through your nose? If your mouth is open, close it gently and begin to breathe in and out through your nose, still in your own rhythm. Can you feel the air anywhere in the area around your nose or mouth? How cool or warm is it as it passes in and out of your nostrils?

Feel the rise and fall of your chest as you inhale and exhale, but do not alter your breathing in any way. Simply observe.

Now let's try a classic meditation, the 10-count meditation. On each out-breath, simply count your breath, starting at one and ending at ten. When you get to ten...start again at one.

Your mind will wander. Gently bring it back to the breath and continue counting.

Just watch your breath... counting each breath.

Slowly, you will find that your body starts to relax a little and as it does so, your mind will very gradually, perhaps reluctantly, follow. Your mind will start to untangle and you will begin to feel calm and clear.

When you are ready, open your eyes and bring your attention back to your surroundings. Notice if you feel different in any way.

What was this breathing meditation like for you? Was it difficult or easy? Did you notice any thoughts or feelings during the exercise? Write down three things you noticed during the exercise in the space provided. Click the button to print a script of this meditation if you would like to practice on your own. You can record your own voice and play it back or have a friend read it for you. Once you learn the meditation, you won't need the script anymore, but it can still be a helpful refresher.

[Active Walking Meditation]

Although meditation is often practiced while sitting, you can also practice walking meditation. Active meditations are "meditation in action." They use the physical, mental, and

emotional experience of movement to increase awareness. In active meditation we notice the parts of our body that touch the ground and subtle aspects of body movement. Common active meditations include yoga and martial arts (especially tai chi and chi gong).

To practice walking meditation, a spot with few distractions is ideal: perhaps a park or field, a running track, or a room where you can walk back and forth or in a circle. As you become more skillful, you can practice walking meditation anywhere, but it's easier to start in a quiet, open place. You might want to play a meditation track on your iPod or set a clock or timer to help you know when it's time to stop. Ten minutes is a good amount of time to start with, but see what works for you.

Active meditations are usually done more slowly than normal activities to increase awareness of body sensations. Sometimes it can be helpful to walk slower than feels comfortable. The more slowly you walk, the more you can notice subtle aspects of walking, such as changes in your balance and movements in your body. If you have a limited amount of space, a very slow walking meditation may work better since you won't cover much ground very quickly. However, you can also practice walking meditation at a normal pace. What's important is where you place your awareness. Be sure to notice the many aspects of your actual experience rather than paying attention to the train of thoughts in your head or to distractions in your environment. Learn the steps to a walking meditation by clicking here.

[Active Walking Meditation Activity]

Before starting a walking meditation, it's good to stand silently for a few moments. Allow your arms to rest gently at your sides and feel where your feet touch the ground. Notice your balance and your breathing.

Allow your chin to drop just a little, allow the back of your neck to elongate, and feel the top of your head reaching

toward the ceiling, as if stretched lightly by a string.

After a moment, gently clasp your hands in front of or behind your body, taking care to relax your arms, neck, and shoulders.

Keep your eyes focused in front of you to avoid distractions.

Since you probably don't have much space, we will walk very slowly today and pay careful attention to the many stages of each step of the walking process that we normally take for granted. First, shift your weight toward your left foot and slowly raise your right heel off the ground, continue to lift the entire right foot, noticing any shift in your balance or in the way your weight is distributed, gradually move your right foot forward, paying attention to any muscles you may be tensing or engaging as you do so, allow your foot to drop back to the ground, noticing which part touches first, and then press your foot into the ground as you shift your weight from your left foot to your right foot so you can begin the next step. Take care to notice the ways your balance readjusts as you prepare for the next step.

Next, raise your left heel off the ground, [pause briefly] then allow the entire left foot to lift from the ground, slowly push your left foot forward, allow the foot to return to the ground, and then press into the ground as you shift your weight from the right to the left foot to begin the next step.

Again notice the changes in your balance, and continue walking slowly in this way, paying attention to which parts of your body move with each step and in between steps. You might even notice your inhales and exhales with each stage of walking, taking several breaths to complete an entire step.

After a few steps, you may need to turn around. Do this slowly and in stages as well, noticing which parts of your body need to move to make the transition. This may take some practice. Then continue walking slowly in the direction from which you came, breaking each step into stages and

being aware of the subtle aspects of your movements.

After you are done, stop again and take a few silent moments to feel your balance and where your feet are pressing into the ground.

Feel any subtle sensations in your body before returning to your daily activities.

What was this walking meditation like for you? Was it difficult or easy? Did you notice any thoughts or feelings during the exercise? Write down three things you noticed during the exercise in the space provided.

Click the button to print a script of this meditation if you would like to practice on your own. You can record your own voice and play it back or have a friend read it for you. Once you learn the meditation, you won't need the script anymore, but it can still be a helpful refresher.

[Visualization Meditation]

Visualizations take many forms, but generally involve imagining detailed scenes in the mind. Guided meditations are often led by a soothing, calming voice. Some visualization is used to achieve goals; however, meditative visualization is intended to calm and quiet the body and mind.

Scenes from nature are often used in guided meditations. This may include forests, mountains, gardens, rivers, or any personal space that is calming. Click below to experience a meditation using the waves of the ocean as the focus of awareness:

[Visualization Meditation Activity]

Begin your visualization meditation by getting comfortable in a seated or reclining position, with your arms and legs uncrossed. Slowly move your attention down your body, releasing any areas of tension along the way [read slowly], starting with your head, moving to your neck and shoulders, your chest and upper back, your arms and hands, your abdomen and lower back, your hips and pelvis,

and finally your legs and feet. Feel any tight muscles release and allow your body and mind to relax.

Breathe deeply into your diaphragm, drawing air fully into your lungs and feeling your chest and belly expand. Pause for just a moment and then slowly exhale, feeling your chest and belly relax. Breathe in again, slowly.... pause for a moment.... and breathe out..... Continue breathing deeply in... and out.... becoming more and more relaxed with each breath.... Feel a wave of relaxation flow from the top of your head to the soles of your feet. Once you feel relaxed, you can begin the visualization.

Imagine you are walking along the beach, strolling slowly across the sand toward the ocean.... You can hear the waves.... and smell the ocean spray.... the air is moist and warm.... Feel a pleasant, cool breeze blowing through the trees nearby.... You can see the brilliant aqua color of the ocean... and the long white stretch of sand reaching gently toward it... The sand is very soft powder.... imagine taking off your shoes, and walking through the hot sand toward the water.... Feel the sand under your feet and between your toes as you walk... Hear the waves crashing to the shore.... Smell the clean salt water.... Feel the mist from the ocean on your skin... See the waves washing up onto the sand..... and receding back toward the ocean.... washing up.... and flowing back down again..... Enjoy the ever-repeating rhythm of the waves...

As you get closer to the water, you can feel the sand becoming wetter and firmer beneath your feet... A wave washes over the sand toward you.... and touches your toes before receding... As you continue to approach the shore, more waves wash over your feet... Feel the cool water provide relief from the heat.... As you walk further into the clear, clean water.... you can see the white sand under the water.... The sand is a pleasant, relaxing temperature... cool but not cold.... Enjoy the ocean for a few moments and feel yourself become more and more calm and refreshed..... Then slowly allow yourself to move back out of the water

and onto the beach... Feel the sun... and the breeze... Smell the ocean... and hear the waves.

Gradually bring yourself back from the visualization... coming slowly to your usual level of alertness and awareness... ready to return to your day... calm and clear. Open your eyes when you are ready... stretch your muscles... and notice how you feel.

What was this visualization meditation like for you? Was it difficult or easy? Did you notice any thoughts or feelings during the exercise? Write down three things you noticed during the exercise in the space provided. Click the button to print a script of this meditation if you would like to practice on your own. You can record your own voice and play it back or have a friend read it for you. Once you learn the meditation, you may not need the script anymore. However, a recording can be especially helpful for guided meditations like this one.

To attain free guided meditation resources go to the following link or in iTunes search for "meditation podcast" and many free guided meditations will be available for download.

[Positive Emotion Meditation] Some meditations are practiced to develop more positive emotions and states of mind. One example is loving-kindness meditation, which is used to help us respond more positively to ourselves and other people. You can practice this on the next slide. Another example of a meditation for positive states of mind is called "giving and taking" meditation, which involves thinking about breathing in the suffering of someone you care about and breathing out happiness or joy. This is a way to practice building the habit of transforming negativity into positivity.

Meditations for cultivating positive emotions are used to develop qualities such as compassion in place of more negative emotions like anger, hatred, and jealousy. Practicing these meditations can help us remain more

positive toward ourselves and others. They can also help us be calmer and kinder when things are difficult and can lessen irritation and anger. You can hear a loving-kindness meditation by clicking below.

[Positive Emotion Meditation Activity]

Prepare yourself for the loving-kindness meditation by sitting in a quiet and comfortable position and closing your eyes. Breathe naturally for a few moments, noticing the quality of your breath. Is it long or short, deep or shallow? Are you breathing through your mouth or your nose? Notice the breath as it comes in... and as it goes out.

Don't change your breathing in any way... just observe. Next, place your attention on the middle of your chest and around your heart, observing any sensations in that area. If you feel tension there, try to relax and open the heart area before beginning the meditation.

When you are ready, bring to mind someone who is important to you, someone you like and respect. Picture their face in your mind and send them good wishes: "May you be well... May you be happy... May you be safe and secure... May you be free from suffering..."

As your breath continues to rise and fall, bring yourself to mind. See your own face as you send the same good wishes to yourself: "May I be well... May I be happy... May I be safe and secure... May I be free from suffering..."

Maintaining your attention in the chest area, bring to mind a stranger or acquaintance, someone you see on a regular basis, but who you barely know. This might be a person who helps you in a service or administrative role, or someone you see often, but do not talk to. Picture their face in your mind and send them good wishes: "May you be well... May you be happy... May you be safe and secure... May you be free from suffering..."

As you continue to breathe, bring to mind someone you do not like, someone you experience conflict with, or someone you have negative feelings toward. Picture their face in your

mind and send them the same good wishes: "May you be well... May you be happy... May you be safe and secure... May you be free from suffering..."

Finally, picture all of these people together in the same room - someone you care about, yourself, the neutral person, and the "difficult" person. Send them all good wishes, equally. Try to genuinely feel an equal wish for all of these human beings to experience the joy and happiness they desire. "May we all be well... May we all be happy... May we all be safe and secure... May we all be free from suffering..."

Slowly bring your attention back to your body, noticing any sensations, especially in the area around your heart. Notice your breath again. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes.

Positive emotion meditations can be difficult, but get easier with practice. Did you have any struggles sending good wishes to yourself or other people? Write down three things you noticed that were hard or easy for you in this exercise.

Click [here](#) to print a script of this meditation so you can practice on your own. You can either record your own voice reading the script to play back later or have a friend read it to you while you do the exercise. You can extend the meditation to be as long as you want, spending 1-10 minutes on each section of the meditation.

[Meditation to a Word or Phrase]

Now let's learn a different kind of meditation! Meditation to a phrase or sound is a nice place to start because you can do it anywhere. Although some mantras are spoken out loud, you can also practice silently in your own head.

Meditation to a phrase or sound is one common type of meditation that uses words, or phrases for concentration. Meditation to a phrase or sound is sometimes called mantra meditation. The sounds, words, or phrases are repeated over and over again to clear and calm the mind. Many different types of sounds and phrases can be used for

meditation; they may or may not have spiritual or personal meaning.

Maybe there have been times you have enjoyed certain song lyrics or poetry? Or maybe you have gotten a word or phrase stuck in your head? This might have been something like a sound meditation for you. Everyone will learn more about this type of meditation later in the module.

First you need a special word or phrase that you will repeat throughout the meditation. Can you think of something that has special meaning for you? It's better to choose a word or phrase that does not remind you of any particular person – this might distract you from your meditation.

Some common meditation phrases include: □"I am" □"Love" □"Peace to all" □"Om" □"Shalom"/"Salaam" □"Ahhhhh"

If you are religious, you might want to use a phrase like "God is good," "Thy will be done," or a short phrase from a meaningful prayer.

Once you have chosen a word or phrase, it's time to get comfortable. Two common positions for meditation are in a chair or cross-legged on the floor. Click the link below to start the instructions for meditation to a word or phrase:

[Meditation to a Word or Phrase Activity]

Meditation to a word or phrase follows the breath, because everyone breathes and your breath is always with you. Your meditation to a word or phrase should accompany your breathing. If you have a short word, simply say that word silently each time you exhale. If your word or phrase is longer, break it into two parts - for example: "peace...to all." As you inhale, say the first part of the word or phrase silently: "Peace," then say the second part as you exhale: "to all." You will continue to repeat the word or phrase silently with each breath.

This recording will assist you in breathing rhythmically and help you to concentrate. You will hear two chimes repeated

over and over again for approximately 5 minutes. Each time you hear the higher pitched chime, inhale, and each time you hear the lower pitched chime, exhale. The chimes may be somewhat slower than your normal rate of breathing. This is because deeper, slower breathing is useful for meditation. Try not to force your breathing, just allow it to slow down or speed up a little, if necessary. Pause briefly between the inhales and exhales, but don't hold your breath.

Start by moving your body into a seated position that you can maintain comfortably for at least 5 minutes. Close your eyes and relax your entire body: your feet and legs, your buttocks and pelvis, your lower back, abdomen, and chest, your shoulders and neck, and your arms and hands. Try to relax your facial muscles and your scalp muscles as much as possible. Allow yourself to sink more deeply into the floor or chair, noticing where your body touches it. Begin to observe your breath, noticing whether it is short or long, shallow or deep and allowing it to come into rhythm with the chimes that will begin in a few moments.

Bring your meditation word or phrase to mind. Allow the sounds to silently repeat in your mind without speaking them aloud. Remember, each time you hear the higher pitched chime, inhale, saying the first part of your word or phrase and each time you hear the lower pitched chime, exhale, saying the second part of your word or phrase. If the word you have chosen is short, you may choose to just repeat it when you exhale.

If you notice that your mind wanders, gently bring it back to your word or phrase. The chimes will help remind you. Inhale [higher pitched chime] with the higher pitched sound and exhale [lower pitched chime] with the lower pitched sound. (Pause for 2 more seconds). Inhale... [high pitch chime, 4 second pause] . . . exhale [low pitch chime, 4 second pause]. [chimes continue for 5 minutes].

Try not to force your breathing or hold your breath...just

breathe continuously to match the speed of the chimes. If you notice that your mind has wandered, gently bring it back to your word or phrase. If you notice that your mind has wandered, gently bring it back to your word or phrase.

Keeping your eyes closed, slowly become aware of your body and your breath again. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes and bring your attention to the room around you. Meditation is a concentrative technique, so you may notice that your mind feels clear and that you are more attentive to what is happening around you after you have finished the exercise.

### **SLIDE 8: BARRIERS TO MEDITATION**

At this point, you might want to try some of these meditation activities, but if you are like most people, you might find yourself facing some common barriers. Take a moment to explore each one.

[Barrier 1]

Many people feel like they are too stressed to meditate or that life is too complicated or chaotic to meditate. Although it's normal to feel this way, remember that you don't need any special equipment for most kinds of meditation, only your own mind, breath, or body. Thus, you can meditate almost anywhere, anytime. And, as we have discussed, even though life as a Soldier can be stressful, many Soldiers benefit from contemplation practices like meditation. In fact, meditation is particularly helpful for dealing with stress. You may benefit the most from meditation when you are under stress!

[Barrier 2]

People worry that they don't have a good time or place to meditate. But as we've discussed, you can meditate almost anytime, anywhere and you are free to choose how long you meditate. Even a few minutes can be helpful. In fact, much of your time in the Army can be spent waiting: "hurry up and wait!" Times like these are perfect opportunities to meditate. Perhaps while you're waiting in line for

transportation, food, computers, or other services, just take a few minutes to notice your natural breathing, walk slowly back and forth, visualize your favorite relaxing place, repeat your special word or phrase, or practice loving-kindness. If you don't want to meditate in public, perhaps you can find times and places that are more private, such as in the bathroom or in your barracks before going to sleep. Even if people wonder what you are doing, perhaps you can take the opportunity to tell them more about what you are doing and why. Who knows, they may already meditate too or want to learn more after hearing how it's helping your life.

[Barrier 3]

Many people get discouraged and think they are not good at meditation because they have trouble focusing their attention or because they encounter negative thoughts and emotions when they are trying to meditate. That is completely normal. Everyone struggles with meditation and it is definitely not as easy as it looks. Meditation allows you to observe and slowly discipline your mind. Like most other skills, this takes time, practice, and patience. Even though it looks like someone who is meditating is "just sitting there", they are probably working very hard. Start slowly – even 5 or 10 minutes daily can help. Gradually, you will learn to meditate for longer periods of time and you will find that meditation becomes easier and more beneficial to you.

### **SLIDE 9: MEDITATION RESOURCES**

If you want to learn more about meditation, you have a number of options. There is a lot of information about meditation available on the Internet. You can learn more about the different kinds of meditation covered in this module, as well as others, online. There are also many other resources available to you to learn about meditation. Books and videos can provide an introduction to different types of meditation - check one out from the library or buy it to try to find what you like. In addition, there are a growing number of meditation centers in the U.S. and

abroad. Maybe you want to go for a visit and learn from expert teachers? Finally, you may already know someone who meditates or practices an active meditation like yoga or tai chi – ask around! If one type of meditation does not seem to work for you, there many other kinds that may fit better with your personality, strengths, or values. Just as not everyone likes all different kinds of foods, there is no universal style of meditation for everyone. You have to find your own taste!

You might want to check out some of these resources, including online meditations, books and videos, and listings of meditation centers around the world. This is just a sampling – many other resources are available.

### **SLIDE 10: MODULE QUIZ**

Take a moment to complete this quiz.

### **SLIDE 11: TAKE AWAY**

Here are some key points from this module...

Meditation can strengthen your human spirit and help you stay in touch with your values and mission, but you will need to find ways to fit it into your life. Seek out buddies who are interested in learning to meditate and practice with them. Set a goal for yourself. For example, make a commitment to practice a certain amount each day or week - maybe 5 minutes a day or half an hour 3 times a week – whatever works for you. Don't give up. Like any skill, meditation may be hard at first. But many people have gotten benefits. You can too!

Keep practicing and good luck!! May you be successful in your meditation... may you experience increased clarity, energy, joy, purpose, peace, and kindness in your life.

[Close window](#)

## **SPIRITUAL DIMENSION**

### **Hunt The Good Stuff**

#### **SLIDE 1: HUNT THE GOOD STUFF**

Imagine you are lying in bed at the end of the day, thinking about the day's events... It was a great day, the training exercise was perfect; in fact, everything went well... but that one thing the drill sergeant said is still stuck in your mind, "Pick up the pace, you're lagging behind!" No big deal, but it just keeps bugging you... can you relate to this situation?

No matter who you are or how you were brought up, you are probably like the rest of us. We can have 99 positive things happen but it's that one bad thing that sticks with us...and we can't seem to let it go.

Every Soldier has both good and bad things happen daily, and positive and negative experiences. But for some reason, we have a tendency to ignore or pay less attention to the positive things, and really dwell on the negative. Some of us are taught that cheerfulness is irritating, or that no one likes a bragger. Most of us have an imbalanced view of reality, one that ignores beauty and blessings and diminishes hope. In fact, we actually need to teach ourselves to look for the positive, to "hunt the good stuff."

In this module, we are going to see why this makes a difference in our lives, how it helps us to bounce back from adversity, and how we can actively pursue the "good stuff".

Ready? Let's get started...

#### **SLIDE 2: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "HUNT THE GOOD STUFF"?**

We're Soldiers, we find what's wrong and fix it. We are taught to predict consequences, mitigate risk, and protect one another. That's sewn into our boots. Most of us spend far more time thinking about how we can correct something that has gone wrong, worrying about something that is

about to go wrong, or simply replaying a failure or setback, than we do noticing and enjoying what has gone right.

If we didn't learn from our mistakes and take corrective actions, many of us wouldn't even be here right now. That's true both in and out of the Army. Our instinct to survive almost forces us to remember failures more than successes. We are forced into crisis situations, fight or flight, swim or drown. We learn to analyze bad events more thoroughly than good events; and when we fail, we tend to think particularly hard about it. That's natural, and it can be good as part of our lessons-learned process. But here's the downside... we are less optimistic, and less satisfied with life, in general, when we only focus on the negative and ignore the positive.

As Soldiers, we are particularly vulnerable to this because we often see the harsh reality that we work so hard to protect our country from. Most civilians don't have a clue what we witness and experience on a daily basis. So maybe we think that its easier for them to be "positive" about life. And that may be true, but what about us? Our quality of life? Our joy and desires? That's not just fluff. When we ignore the good stuff, not only does our quality of life suffer, but our total fitness is decreased."

### **SLIDE 3: HOW DO WE HUNT THE GOOD STUFF**

So, how do we hunt the good stuff? By taking the time to recognize the positive experiences we have, and not allowing them to pass by us unnoticed. When we do, we enhance our gratitude and positivity. We intentionally think about why events go well, what the positive events means to us, and how we can create circumstances that enable more good things to occur. As a result, we become conscious of positive experiences or what some people refer to as blessings. We teach ourselves to be optimistic about the future. We remember that we are not alone and that life has real meaning.

So, what qualifies as a good thing?

It can be a really big event or milestone or something as simple as breathing in the morning air. It can be in any area of your life, home or work, driving the car, at the store, playing with the kids, at PT... wherever...

It can be something that happened to you personally, or something that you observed about another person... in your family, your unit, or maybe a total stranger. It can even be about nature: the full moon in the night sky, a bird soaring above you, a cool breeze.

Here's the point, anything qualifies if it is something you appreciate. The soldier next to you might not appreciate the same things as you, but that's okay. We all value different things; a good thing for you may be different than a good thing for your buddy.

### **FAST FACT**

Did you know that people who practice gratitude have been shown to sleep better, have greater life satisfaction, and have stronger relationships? To learn more you can read "Thanks" by Dr. Robert Emmons.

### **SLIDE 4: WHY WE HUNT THE GOOD STUFF**

Research has been clear that "hunting the good stuff" and developing an attitude of gratitude have very real benefits for us physically and mentally.

It builds positive emotions. It counteracts negativity bias. And it leads to better overall health, better sleep, and feeling calm.

Hunting the Good Stuff also helps us to build our connection to others which is critical for resilience. One big myth about resilience is that a resilient person goes it alone, he has complete autonomy and control over life; that no matter what life puts in his path he is able to cope with it as an individual. But we know better, we understand that our unit is counting on us, and when we are completely self-oriented we lose readiness to protect and support our buddies. See, hunting the good stuff actually forces us to focus on the

world and our relationship to it. While it is important to develop confident independence and self-sustaining strength, we will always be interconnected with our community and surroundings. Feeling part of something larger than ourselves and having a deep connection to others are critical to resilience. Feeling part of something larger than ourselves gives us a sense of meaning and purpose and strong connections keep our support network strong.

### **SLIDE 5: WHEN WE DON'T FEEL GRATITUDE**

So, let's focus on one of those benefits for a second. Gratitude. What does that actually mean?

Gratitude is the experience of noticing and appreciating something we have received and expressing thanks for that thing. Many people like to think of that thing as a "blessing". It is an emotion and an attitude that begins with recognition. Many times when we don't take the time to notice the good things around us, we forget that they are there. We lose perspective; we feel disconnected and become discouraged. So, actively hunting for those good things realigns our perception, helps us to look up and out, reminds us that the world does not revolve around our most pressing problem. It helps us "zoom out" to see the bigger picture.

We can actually say "thank you" if we want to... be it to our families, our friends, our fellow soldiers, our God, or the stranger on the street... How you say "Thank you" is up to you... The point of this module is practicing the noticing part. So, let's give that a try next...

### **SLIDE 6: GOOD STUFF ACTIVITY**

The purpose of the Good Stuff Activity is to overcome the negativity bias, and build gratitude and life satisfaction, by noticing and analyzing what goes well in our lives. Noticing and writing about three good things builds gratitude. By analyzing why events go well, what the positive events mean to us, and how we can create circumstances that

enable more good things to occur, we heighten our optimism and overall well-being.

### **SLIDE 7: GOOD STUFF ACTIVITY**

Here are some examples:

I maxed my PT Test! What I really appreciated though is that my friend, Sam, helped me get through it. He said that we were in it together, and that he wouldn't let me fail. He ran with me every day, and stuck with me. I've never had that before.

The moon was huge tonight. Almost looked orange – it was beautiful. When I saw it I thought about my family and was hoping the moon looked beautiful to them too. Thinking about them looking at the same moon made me feel close to them even though we are so far apart.

Our chaplain asked for volunteers to go and help out at the local orphanage. I decided to try it out and I'm really glad I did. We had volunteers from the chapel and volunteers from the unit. It was really nice to see this newly formed group work together. And then to see the smiles on those kids faces... (sigh) it was just amazing. All I did was play some basketball with them, but it made their day... and sure made my week - a lasting memory.

### **SLIDE 8: GOOD STUFF ACTIVITY**

In the box on the right, type three good things from the day.

They can be small or large, things that happened to you or that you witnessed in others, or in nature. Next to each positive event that you list, write a reflection (at least one sentence) on any of the topics below:

- Why this good thing happened
- What this good thing means to you
- What you can do tomorrow to enable more of this good thing
- Ways others contribute to this good thing

You might find that you'd like some time to think about this, and that's okay. You can start keeping track of the good things that happen to you. Some people prefer to write these down on a 3x5 card to file through them from time to time. Others would rather just tell their spouse or buddy, or write them in a letter to someone. However you choose to do it, research indicates that many people who write these good things down notice a difference in their lives. You've already got your first day done, so print it out. You can also print blank pages so that you can try it for the next week or so.

### **SLIDE 9: GOOD STUFF REFLECTIONS**

After you have completed the Good Stuff Activity, take a moment to reflect on these questions:

- How did recording your good things affect your emotions, how engaged you felt, and your sense of meaning?
- How did recording your good things affect how you interacted with others? How you treated yourself?
- What did you learn by writing about the good things?
- How much do you think you will share or discuss the good things you wrote about with others? In the next few weeks, notice what you chose to share, with whom you share, and how it feels for you to share your good things with others?
- How would you apply this exercise in the Army? With individuals? With groups?

### **SLIDE 10: TAKE AWAY**

We know that even the word Spirituality means many things to many people. This module is just one of the tools that CSF will be offering you in the future to help you develop your fitness in this area.

Your take away from this module is 3 fold.

First, people tend to over-emphasize the negative.

Posted by collaboration of the Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers,  
www.maaf.info and American Atheists, www.atheists.org

Next, take the time to notice the good things around you.  
And third, write down the Good Stuff that happens to you 3  
times a week for at least 2 weeks.

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