

RITUALS OF RETURN

Healing the Wounds of War



“Any man who would prefer great wealth or power to love,
the love of friends, is sick to the core of his soul.”

Euripides, *Herakles*

STORIES OF WAR AND RETURN: FROM TROY TO IRAQ

RITUALS OF RETURN *Healing the Wounds of War*

A ONE-DAY WORKSHOP
FOR COUNSELORS, RELIGIOUS CAREGIVERS,
VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES.

On Saturday April 22, 2006, Christ Church Cathedral in Springfield will host a one-day workshop entitled “Rituals of War and Return: Healing the Wounds of War.” Psychiatrist and veterans’ advocate Jonathan Shay, M.D., Ph.D.,—author of the internationally acclaimed book on healing war trauma, *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and The Trials of Homecoming*—will be among the distinguished guests making opening remarks and addressing the conference throughout the day. The event is intended for those most closely involved in the return and healing of soldiers from combat: secular care-givers (psychiatrists, therapists, counselors), religious caregivers (military chaplains and local clergy), veterans, and their families. During the workshop, breakout groups representative of these constituencies will be guided by Dr. Shay and others experienced and skilled in confronting and healing the wounds of war.

The workshop is part of the NOSTOI PROJECT, an extensive program of community events sponsored and coordinated by Hampshire College, the Veterans Education Project and the American Friends Service Committee. This project represents the collaborative efforts of a broad consortium of educational institutions, state, civic, and grass-roots organizations in the Pioneer Valley, and is aimed at creating a community of understanding and support for veterans returning from service in Afghanistan and Iraq and for their families. For additional information, as well as a full, detailed calendar of event, go to: <http://nostoi.hampshire.edu>.

Rather than merely presenting a series of lectures, the Nostoi workshop on return and healing will focus on shared stories and understanding. It will be a day of personal searching and discussion by the participants, facilitated by experts who have worked extensively with veterans and their families. The primary goal is to consider and to understand, in an inclusive, holistic manner, the many kinds of inner wounds inflicted by war, and to learn about proven paths and therapies of healing. The workshop leaders will go beyond the boundaries of psychology and therapy to address and discuss the spiritual and communal injuries that war inflicts, not only on veterans, but on their families and their communities.

FEATURED SPEAKERS AND FACILITATORS

Kristin Henderson

Author • U.S. Navy Spouse

Kristin Henderson is a frequent contributor to the *Washington Post Magazine*. As the wife of a Navy chaplain who served with the Marines in Afghanistan and Iraq, Henderson, a Quaker, is active in the Marine Corps' Key Volunteer family support program and Compass, the Navy's spouse mentoring program. She often writes about the military spouse's perspective on deployment and homecoming issues. Kristin is the author of the critically praised memoir, *Driving by Moonlight: A Journey Through Love, War, and Infertility*, which details her experience during her husband's deployment to Afghanistan following 9/11. Her latest book, *While They're at War: The True Story of American Families on the Homefront*, takes a broader look at the experiences of military families in wartime. Kristin recently returned from a month in Iraq from where she wrote a series of dispatches.

Rev. William P. Mahedy

Veteran • Chaplain • Therapist • Author

Rev. William P. Mahedy has taught college and high school, served as an army chaplain with a tour in Vietnam, worked for the Veterans Administration and served as a university chaplain. During his time with the VA, he helped write the program design for the VA's nationwide Vet Center program. He worked as a Vet Center "team leader" and helped establish a rehabilitation center for drug and alcohol addicted veterans. His last assignment before retiring was working as a chaplain in a VA clinic for veterans with combat related posttraumatic stress disorder. Through the VA, he has worked with veterans of every American war since the Spanish American War. He is the author of several books, including *Out of the Night: The Spiritual Journey of Vietnam Vets*. He has written and lectured extensively on the ethical, moral and religious issues of war and about war's impact on veterans.

Very Rev. James G. Munroe

Vietnam Veteran • Dean, Christ Church Cathedral, Springfield

In the late 60's, after breaking his back working on a cattle ranch and undergoing a spinal fusion, Jim Munroe took a two-year leave from Williams College and enlisted in the Marines. In 1969 he found himself in Vietnam at the age of twenty-two. In country for two months, he awoke to explosions and was soon hit by two grenades. His injuries included a fractured skull, punctured eardrums, and multiple shrapnel wounds. After completing Williams College, he studied for the priesthood and was ordained in 1975. Since his ordination, Jim's churches have been known for their open doors to those in need, the hungry of stomach and the hungry of soul. He is a long-time member of the Veterans Education Project.

FEATURED SPEAKERS AND FACILITATORS *CONTINUED*

Rev. Philip G. Salois

Vietnam Veteran • Chaplain • Counselor

Father Phil, as he is known and cherished by countless veterans, is currently Chief of the Chaplain Service for the VA Boston Healthcare System. After graduating from high school, giving college a try, and going to work as a workman's compensation claims adjuster, Philip Salois was drafted into the U.S. Army and trained as an infantryman. In March 1969 he found himself in Vietnam, where, leading a rescue mission, he won the Silver Star. Several years later he entered the seminary and was ordained a Catholic priest in 1984. Fr. Salois was the first person to be named National Chaplain of the Vietnam Veterans of America, a title that he holds to this day. In 1989, he founded the National Conference of Viet Nam Veteran Ministers, an organization for those who served in Vietnam as enlisted men and women and later answered the call to ordained ministry. The founding purpose of this organization was to share personal trauma stories with one another on the level of faith and spirituality. Since then, the National Conference of Viet Nam Veteran Ministers has developed a Spiritual Healing Weekend Retreat Program for combat veterans and their spouses or significant others and continues to serve as a clinic for wounded PTSD-ridden ministers.

Jonathan Shay, M.D., Ph.D.

Psychiatrist • Classical Scholar • Veterans' Advocate

Dr. Jonathan Shay, a singularly eminent and influential advocate of U.S. combat veterans, has worked with PTSD patients for nearly two decades as a staff psychiatrist for the Boston VA Outpatient Clinic. He is the author of *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* and *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming*. Dr. Shay has been a visiting scholar-at-large at the U.S. Naval War College, presented a Secretary of the Navy's Guest Lecture at the Pentagon, and until recently held the Chair of Ethics in the U.S. Army. He is currently at work on a book concerning trust and breach of trust in the military. Robert B. Rhealt, Colonel, U.S. Army, Ret., Founder and Director of Outward Bound for Veterans suffering from PTSD, has written of him: "Jonathan Shay has made an important and valuable contribution not only to the clinical body of work regarding PTSD and its treatment, but to the literature of the Vietnam war." Dr. Shay—psychiatrist and classical scholar—has changed the way classicists read the epics of ancient Greece and at the same time uncovered within those same pages a path of recognition and healing for contemporary veterans haunted by war and still finding their way home.

SYMPOSIUM NOTES

The starting-point for this day's deliberations will be that war inflicts on all those who suffer it, whether as soldiers or civilians, a range of injuries: physical, psychological, and spiritual. Not even all physical injuries are visible. An alarming number of veterans returning from Iraq today suffer from TBI, traumatic brain injury, invisible to the eye and often undetected for months after return; and yet it can be altogether disabling. The same is obviously true of psychological trauma, PTSD, often delayed and hidden to the naked eye. Less manifest and far less often acknowledged is the moral or spiritual damage done by war.

War has been described by William P. Mahedy—veteran, chaplain, therapist—as “a moral sewer... total immersion in evil”. There is no avoiding its pollution, whether one is discharging weapons in combat or merely paying taxes on the homefront. The spilling of blood, the taking of lives, uniformed or not, regardless of the cause or justification, leaves lesions in the human psyche, soul, and society. Purification after battle—shared by those who went to war and those who sent them there—is a universal requirement, overlooked only at a great personal and communal price. “The Vietnam warriors,” writes Mahedy,

like their ancient predecessors, were conscious of having performed in war acts unacceptable within their society. Like the fighting men of antiquity, they required a ritual of cleansing that entailed both a welcome home and the acceptance of some responsibility by the people for acts they had committed. But this was not to be, for we Americans view war much differently than did our ancient ancestors. In America, the notion of cleansing has been lost from the rites of reentry, supplanted by the idea that the justice of our national cause renders all acts of war moral.

Psychiatrist and veterans' advocate Jonathan Shay concurs with this assessment, pointing out that:

“Acts of war generate a profound gulf between the combatant and the community he left behind. The veteran carries the taint of a killer, of blood pollution... that many cultures respond to with purification rituals. Our culture today denies the need for purification and provides none, even though in the past it has done so.... In the medieval Christian church, everyone who shed blood in war had to do penance. If you committed atrocities, you had to do more penance, but even if you wore a white hat and were a perfect model of proper conduct, you had to do penance. Most warrior societies, as well as many not dominated by warfare, have historically had communal rites of purification of the returning fighter after battle...

SYMPOSIUM NOTES *CONTINUED*

In writing about and discussing the need for moral/spiritual purification from war, Shay has stressed that this requisite ritual neither implies personal iniquity nor confers legal impunity. Beyond the crime or sin of war itself that is shared by warriors and the society that sent them off to war, there are atrocities which we label war crimes and which, as such, must be defined, prosecuted and punished elsewhere.

In the past, some medical healers have been slow to acknowledge unseen trauma to the psyche and have attended only to torn flesh, broken bones, and eyes no longer affected by light. Similarly, some psychiatrists and counselors have pursued the healing of inner trauma with therapies oblivious of and neutral to moral evil and spiritual darkness. The challenge of our workshop on “Rituals of War and Return: Healing the Wounds of War” will be to recognize the full range of war’s injuries and to try to imagine all the ways we might possess to heal them.

It should make you shake and sweat,
nightmare you, strand you in a desert
of irrevocable desolation, the consequences
seared into the vein, no matter what adrenaline
feeds the muscle its courage, no matter
what crackling pain and anger
you carry in your fists, my friend,
it should break your heart to kill.

Sergeant Brian Turner, “Sadiq” from *Here, Bullet*

Healing, then, is also about mending the broken heart.



TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

9:00–9:30

Gather • Informal Introductions

9:30–11:00

Presentations by Featured Speakers
Q&A

11:00–12:00

Breakdown Group Discussions
Grouped according to Constituency

12:00–1:00

Breakdown Group Reports
Lunch

1:00–2:00

Breakdown Group Discussions
Mixed Constituencies

2:00–3:30

Breakdown Group Reports
Closing Discussion and Remarks



While there is no fee for participation in the symposium, donations for morning refreshments and lunch are requested.

*Directions to Christ Church Cathedral
and detailed parking instructions may be found at:
<http://www.christchurchcathedralspringfield.org/directions.html>*

*Christ Church Cathedral is located in downtown Springfield
in the Quadrangle at 35 Chestnut Street.*

SYMPOSIUM REGISTRATION FORM

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

TELEPHONE _____ OR EMAIL _____

VETERAN? _____ MILITARY FAMILY MEMBER? _____

IF MILITARY FAMILY MEMBER, WHAT RELATION TO VETERAN? _____

CHAPLAIN/CLERGY/SPIRITUAL COUNSELLOR? _____ WHICH? _____

PSYCHIATRIST/PSYCHOLOGIST/SOCIAL WORKER? _____ WHICH? _____

IN THE SPACE BELOW PLEASE SAY SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR SPECIAL INTEREST IN THIS SYMPOSIUM:

*Please send your completed registration form to NOSTOI c/o HACU
Hampshire College, 893 West Street, Amherst, MA 01002
or email the requested information to: rmeagher@hampshire.edu*